

glossary

of

COMMON

knowledge

Vol.2

Beyond the conventional usage of the language in contemporary art.

Terms associated with referential fields, as proposed by narrators in the course of seminars,
to negotiate various positions, contexts and local narratives about contemporary art.

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Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2022

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On Making the Glossary

In the Curatorial Statement to the first edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (GCK), the curators of the glossary wrote: “Unlike an encyclopaedia, makes no attempt to unite all the world’s knowledge in a single totalising system, or to assemble a variety of viewpoints under the roof of tolerance and inclusion. What makes the glossary different from similar efforts is that it does not make just one list of terms but is instead concerned with multiple lists. Each of its terms is always associated in different ways with terms from other lists and other contexts. Families of terms are thus created, and these families are the core of the glossary. Every term in the GCK has its own story, and every story has a narrator(s)¹, a narrator who is uttering their own situated knowledge. Many contributions are written with an engaging personal undertone and subjective assertions of a life lived, creating oral histories and sometimes speaking with the voice of a collective. Their international accent is pronounced in the written form, informed by the lived experience of their work in the field of contemporary art – from artistic practices, curatorial research, socio-political analysis, etc. that address nonconventional or even deviant ideas. Their living voices are central to the GCK and the choice of the terms is entirely left to their deliberation as “authentic gestures – subjective positions within a world of international languages. [...] The point is not that we believe in the factual truth of oral histories, but rather that, with the help of such narratives, we try to change the existing order of things. Here oral histories interest us not primarily as alternative forms of historicising that are privileged over writing, but as a way to introduce multiple histories and truths, including the kind of psychological truths expressed in the imagination, symbols, and desire. [...] Our glossary relies on the differential credibility of memory, and shows more transparently the relationship between histories and their protagonists. [...] It stands in opposition to the institutions, classes, and elite practices that have dominated writing. Or, to put it better, it tries to create a model that offers greater possibilities for dialogue with those whose collective memories are yet to be written.”²

The over fifty terms by more than fifty narrators presented in this volume were discussed and written between 2019 and 2022. They seek to find common knowledge to speak about less visible stories in contemporary art and to address systems that govern our ways of thinking in art and beyond. The project has been ongoing since 2014, and it was conceived and curated by Zdenka Badovinac, Bojana Piškur and Jesús Carrillo in the context of L’Internationale confederation of museums as a method of addressing the so-called referential fields during seminar meetings to bring together diverse knowledges from the museums as well as the so-called global family of artists, thinkers, curators and so on. The first series of discussions was published in 2018 and contained six referential fields and over eighty terms. For this second edition, we repeated the same referential fields to re-examine how the conditions in our cultural landscape have changed in the drastic raptures of pandemic, war, climate catastrophes, a conservative turn and political upheavals. For this volume, we choose four fields of discussion: Geopolitics, Commons, Subjectivisation and Constituencies, each unpacked by narrators invited by the

1 *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, ed. Ida Hiršfelder, curated by Zdenka Badovinac, Jesús Carrillo and Bojana Piškur (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2018).

2 *Ibid.*, 6.

curators as members of the global family as well as by members of the L’Internationale Confederation. Both the structures and semantics of these referential fields are subject to certain deformations. Each term may be connected to any other in an unpredictable manner, often surpassing cultural and geopolitical borders in order to form new contexts, which nevertheless include, and depend on, the very function these fields have within the structure of the dominant art world. One of the more significant processes undertaken by the method proposed by the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* is a shift from the act of selection to the act of combination, resulting in an intratextual crossing of cultural boundaries. This may be especially visible in acts of translation and the propositions of neologisms and indigenous concepts that introduce a radically new cultural perspectives such as *mOther(ness)*, *Ruåttvuõttåd*, *In/vested*, *Şkl*, or *Translation* with the call for greater *Epistemic diversity*, *Negotiated imagination*, and the need for *Re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning*.

One of the most obvious shifts in this volume compared to the previous edition is a clear need to address the growing urgency of climate change – with terms such as *Air travel*, *Being ecological*, *Earth*, *Ecofeminism*, *New extractivism*, and *Rewilding*, and to stress the anthropogenic colonial origin of the cataclysmic events, moreover, to entangle this continuous crisis through troubled thinking, for example in *Disappointment*, *Choice*, *Shipwrecks*, *Southern constellation*, *The crowd of the dead* or *After*, and propose not to resign but to *Raise fists*, *Revolt*, use *Emancipatory propaganda* and make a firm *Anti-fascist* stand. This volume is also signified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications it had on escalating power struggles and injustices. Many speak of fragility while pointing to the structural violence of the existing social, political and economic contest in terms such as *Care is conflictual*, *Direct action*, *Decommodification*, *Empathy*, *Hapticality*, *Interdependence*, *Lucid interval*, *Performance of care*, *Solidarity* and *Vulnerability* and so on. The clusters of words that are interconnected, whether they are words with surpassed meanings or semantic demarcations transgressed by the narrative, are inseparably linked. They inscribe themselves into one another, every word becomes dialogic, and every intratextual semantic field is doubled by another sketching out the contours of our reality. Through this multi-voiced discourse, every utterance carries something else in its wake, and thus the acts of combination unfold a space between them. What is said ceases to mean itself, so that what is not said can thus gain presence. The multiple meanings of words that depend on the cultural, social and temporal environments they emerge from and are used within are thus joined together in an unfamiliar way, and related through the different influences they have upon one another.

Note: The compilation of the terms in this book resulted from discussions in four seminars: Geopolitics 2 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, +MSUM in Ljubljana; Commons / Solidarity which took place online and was co-organised with the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana and other members of the L’Internationale confederation³; Subjectivisation 2 which also took place online and was co-organised with the Valand Academy, and last but not least Constituencies 2 co-organised with the Van Abbemuseum, bringing us all together again in a physical space for the final chapter of discussions in Eindhoven.

3 The confederation is presented on page 276.

Geopolitics

We are repeating the Geopolitics referential field from the previous edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge*. With the repetition of this overarching yet contested method, we stress the importance of rearticulating international relations and global justice in the face of challenges such as migration, climate change, or right-wing radicalisation. The first edition of Geopolitics took place in 2015. With this second edition, a new group of international narrators address their current research and artistic projects and propose terms signified by specific local environments and contexts that go beyond the dominant epistemological models in contemporary art. They produce a multitude of voices that explore alternative ways of making global alliances, either by drawing from historical case studies or addressing urgent socio-political issues.

The seminar took place at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, +MSUM, Ljubljana, Slovenia from 29 to 30 May 2019.

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On Repetition

Zdenka Badovinac

Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, February 2020

After the first volume of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* was published in a book, we were faced with the question of how to continue adding terms to the glossary and decided to repeat some of the referential fields from the first edition, namely Geopolitics, Commons, Subjectivisation and Constituencies.

Those who are familiar with the work of the Moderna galerija and its new unit, the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, will immediately recognise that the notion of repetition is one of our core philosophies. In the conditions of a limited budget, repeating an exhibition was thus some kind of recycling in a crisis, a revamping of an existing product. It aims to maximise the potential of the preceding exhibition, to re-examine the contents and, basically, fashion a new product. This recycling builds on the foundations of past work (including a few other exhibitions staged by the Moderna galerija), bringing to the fore at the same time the potential of the conditions of crisis. In our case, recycling has become the only way we can work, “→ ecology” for a reason rather than under the pressures of the market, a critical reaction to the existing (local and global) conditions.

We live in a time when culture and art are succumbing to the dictates of capital, which keeps driving consumers to always crave new things. The market is flooded with content that has to rapidly become obsolete and be replaced by new content. Repeating what already exists is boring, and if something old does get repeated it is done just for effect, as a fad, and not to articulate some complex relations. Our repetition, on the other hand, aims to draw critical attention to the excessively fast and superficial consumption of intellectual content and underscore the significance of rereading.

Repetition is one of the fundamental features of contemporary art and of the time and place we live in. For example, the usual method of showing video art in a gallery is the video loop – repetition *par excellence*. Apart from this, what we are largely dealing with in contemporary art exhibitions is the documentation of a particular art → process, which is in itself a kind of repetition, and which can also serve as the basis for possible later repetitions. Moreover, one of the popular art genres today is a re-enactment, in which, in most cases, artists are repeating important historic performances. International curatorial jargon is full of such words as *redefine*, *rethink*, and *revisit*. Particularly in spaces that have recently undergone great historic change, local history is something that needs to be revisited. Everybody does this – from politicians, for whom history is an instrument in their games of power; to historians, who must constantly redefine it; to contemporary artists, who seek in it the points of trauma that are important for an understanding of their own practices.

Repetition is one of the crucial principles by which history is created. There is far too little emphasis placed on the key role repetition plays in the construction of narratives. As Hal Foster has noted, no work becomes historic at the moment of its creation but only later, through the “retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings”.⁴ For this kind of repetition to even be possible, a developed art system must exist, which enables continual reference to art practices through research, publications, collections,

⁴ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde and the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 8.

and, not least of all, the art market. Today, for spaces outside the dominant system, it is important to analyse the traumas of local histories in this light as well.

Repetition is driven by trauma, the same kind of trauma that had led the Moderna galerija to found, in 2000, its collection Artest 2000+, now one of the conceptual cornerstones of the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova. Here our interest rests principally with two traumas associated with the → territory of Eastern European art: the trauma of the absence of a developed art system and the trauma of the unrealised → emancipatory ideals of communism. Many of the key thinkers who shaped today’s understanding of the world, from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Freud to Lacan and Deleuze, have seen the repeating of some unrealised past potential as a way for the subject to be free. Repetition, as Mladen Dolar writes, “concerns some piece of the past which troubles us and drives us to act it out (*Agieren*, says Freud), to re-enact it, to perform it.”⁵

The exhibition *The Present and Presence – Repetition 1* at the +MSUM presented mainly Eastern European artworks from the Artest 2000+ collection, seeking to underscore how very important collections are in constructing histories. Collections are the traditional trophies of the victors and, at first glance, it hardly seems possible they could be anything else. Each object is placed in a collection as a way of repeating the victorious view of history. And, it seems, the only way to challenge the dominant view is through objects that testify to other, different, past events. But simply adding testimonies about a different past is not enough to change the existing system. What can challenge it is for the process of historicisation to be taken over by the defeated. To put it another way, for the museological work on the East to be done by the East itself – for the East itself to trigger the initiating event of its own historicisation. With regard to our exhibition, we can say that one such initiating event was the creation of the Artest 2000+ Collection, which was, essentially, the first collection of Eastern European post-war avant-garde art.

The exhibition centred on various ideas of time (Lived Time, Future Time, No Future, War Time, Ideological Time, Dominant Time, Quantitative Time, Creative Time, Time of the Absent Museum, Retro Time, Time of Passage), marked the opening of the new Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova. A few months later, the first installation of the exhibition was partly changed and expanded, following a special concept of *repetition*. Complementing the repeated exhibition, which primarily presented works from the Artest 2000+ and Moderna galerija’s national collections, were five special projects: *The Body and the East Archive*, *The Bosnia Archive*, *NETRAF: Portable Intelligence Increase Museum*, *An Archive of Performance Art*, and *An Archive-in-becoming*. An underlying principle uniting these projects is repetition. Repetition is here conceived as yet another dimension or form of time, added to our original “list” of times.

And how, in concrete terms, were we repeating the exhibition *The Present and Presence*? In its original installation, the exhibition occupied one of the floors of the new museum. In the *Repetition*, we were focusing on certain sections of the exhibition, to which we were adding new elements. The exhibition was extended by an entire floor, where we have expanded one of its eleven “times”: namely, *Lived Time*. This section presented various time- and site-specific works, which develop in real time. We have decided to repeat *Lived Time* because the *Repetition* also looks more closely at the material conditions under which art is made. Special emphasis was laid on performance art: in performances, artists deliberately relive the patterns in which social circumstances determine

⁵ Mladen Dolar, “Automatism of Repetition: Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Lacan”, unpublished manuscript.

an individual's conduct. The American anthropologist Katherine Verdey recognised a "social schizophrenia" in socialist Romania, which she described as an ability to experience "a real meaningful and coherent self *only* in relation to the enemy party".⁶ In his films, the Romanian artist Ion Grigorescu thus fights a double of his own body. (Figure 1) Verdey's observation can be applied also to other Eastern European performance and body artists, not just Romanian. The Serbian artist Marina Abramović tests the limits of her physical and mental endurance in performances in which she tortures herself, or invites others to do it. The Czech artist Petr Štembera treats his body as if it were his enemy, exploring himself under impossible conditions.



Figure 1: Ion Grigorescu, *Boxing*, 1977, performance for 8 mm film, 2'26". Courtesy of Moderna galerija (Arteast 2000+ Collection).

Alongside the performative nature of the kinds of art presented in *Lived Time*, in the *Repetition* we are also emphasising the performative nature of historicisation. This finds expression in the section *Time of the Absent Museum*, which relates to the trauma of the absent art system.

The *Time of the Absent Museum* section has had new elements added to it, most importantly, the *Questionnaires* about the presence of artists from our collection in other public and private collections in Slovenia and abroad – in the West and elsewhere.⁷ We sent these *Questionnaires* to the artists represented in our collection

with the aim of having the best possible view of the presence of their works in various collections from the 1960s to today. In our exhibition, the *Questionnaires* are presented as wallpaper, a method by which we hope to convey the fact that the art system is an important element in the production of art. And indeed, the art system, or rather its absence, is precisely what concerns the artists exhibited in this group. This concern brings them close to what is generally known under the label *institutional critique*. But instead of this term, we decided on the designation *Time of the Absent Museum*, mainly because we wanted to problematise universal terms. We deliberately chose not to use the label *Eastern institutional critique*, since this modifier would have emphasised the subordinate role of such practices to the canonised Western institutional critique, which determines all other particular institutional critiques. Rastko Močnik writes about the hierarchy of such designations:

As a consequence, the opposition [between "West" and "East"] does not so much indicate a distinction (and there are solid grounds for one to be made), as it points to a hierarchy. And again, not so much to the hierarchy between its own terms (for this is now trivial and almost folkloristic) than to a taxonomic hierarchical order: for even before a piece, or a practice or a current from "the East" can be spoken of in the usual terms of art (such as conceptualist, neo-avant-garde, media art, and the like), it has to be affected by the qualifier "Eastern". By this device, what is prefixed in this way will always remain specific, over-determined, locally defined and local

⁶ Kristine Stiles, "Inside/Outside: Balancing between a Dusthole and Eternity", *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija Ljubljana/Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 28.

⁷ The questionnaires were made especially for the exhibition *Parallel Narratives*, at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art in 2011, which presented a selection of works from the Arteast 2000+ Collection and the national collection of the Moderna galerija.

*as opposed to what is thus promoted to the status of the general, the canonical, the over-determining – although it is, in fact, only "Western".*⁸

Time of the Absent Museum neither proposes a new terminology nor completely rejects the old one, but rather points to what stands behind the different labels associated with these and similar practices: namely, the material conditions. Thus, the *Questionnaires*, as individual works, are tied specifically to these conditions. Let's examine this a little more closely.

Time of the Absent Museum is in fact a time of absent history. Artists from different generations – such as the members of the Croatian group Gorgona from the first half of the 1960s, the members of the Slovene group OHO from the second half of the same decade, and the movement Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) from the 1980s – were all trying through their works to organise the field in which they operated. In a way, their activities substitute for the work of institutions. The artists were trying, in different ways, to do the work of mostly absent institutions and the non-existent art market, and in this sense we can say they were changing the real conditions of their work. They were not so much critiquing institutions and the market, as Western artists were doing, but were trying, at least to a certain symbolic extent, to substitute for them. This, they believed, was crucial for the contextualisation of their own work and, to some degree, for their own survival as well. Over the past fifty years artists have been joining together as groups in order to create, through a genuine collectivity, an alternative to the absent art system and, also, to the compulsory socialist collectivity. Through their self-organised forms of work, artists – not only in the socialist period but also, to a large extent, today – have been creating their own economies, opening galleries, organising international networks, and addressing collectors. The artists from *Time of the Absent Museum* are reacting to the absence of a network for interpretation, representation, and distribution that enables the repetition that is a key → process in the creation of history. And one of the conditions for such repetition is, in fact, the presence of works in art collections. The statistical data gathered through the *Questionnaires* shows us just how poorly works by Eastern European post-war avant-garde artists are represented in public and private collections locally and internationally. Despite the fact that the disastrous results for the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s have improved slightly over the past twenty years, the arithmetic of the results gathered by the *Questionnaires* remains somewhere around zero. These merciless statistics, then, tell us that the conditions for repetition as a way to consolidate history do not exist in the East. Within the collection itself, meanwhile, the presentation of the *Questionnaires* points to the repetition of a traumatic experience, and it is the awareness of the latter which represents a potential for the future. In this way the exhibition *The Present and Presence – Repetition 1* becomes performative in nature, since it not only represents artworks, but indirectly affects them through raising the visibility of the material conditions under which Eastern European art has been functioning. After all, this is all happening within a collection of Eastern European art in an Eastern European museum.

Two special projects have been added to the *Time of the Absent Museum* section: *An Archive-in-becoming*, which focuses on oral histories as parallel methods of historicising in Eastern Europe, and the archive of Hungarian artist Tamás St. Auby, *NETRAF: Portable*

⁸ Rastko Močnik, "East!", *East Art Map, Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (London: Afterall, 2006), 343.

Intelligence Increase Museum, relating to the idea of self-historicising, which is dealt with more extensively in the *Retro Time* section.

Unlike most Western artists, who in one way or another continually return to the initiating events of their own canonised history, the artists in the East return to the traumas of their spaces, to what is absent, marginalised, or suppressed. The possibilities for all that had long been excluded from official histories to get its legitimate place only opened → after the fall of the socialist regimes. But the great social changes that then occurred also brought along new amnesia and new traumas that will, in all likelihood, take a long time to overcome. On the territory of the former Yugoslavia, one such thing was undoubtedly the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To draw attention to this we have conceived a special project, *The Bosnia Archive*.

In 1996 Moderna galerija staged a project entitled *For the Museum of Contemporary Art Sarajevo 2000*, which presented the works donated to the Bosnian capital by thirteen preeminent international artists. The museum in Sarajevo was expected to open by 2000, but unfortunately, there is no telling even today when this might actually happen. What is far worse, today Sarajevo is a town of floundering or closed cultural institutions. Local authorities are unable to come to an agreement as to whose responsibility the museums and their collections are. National and international heritage is deteriorating there in full view of the entire world, so to speak. And just as during the war in Bosnia, nobody seems able to help.

To this we might add: in 1996, the Moderna galerija was able to collect works by thirteen artists that rated very highly on the international art market, stage a presentation of them on its own premises, and send them to Sarajevo. Furthermore, it organised an international symposium *Living with Genocide: Art and the War in Bosnia*, and did several other things to help. Today, however, the Moderna galerija can no longer help others, being in the direst financial straits itself. The Republic of Slovenia has decided to tackle the economic crisis also by curtailing the fundamental mission of its museums. Two decades after it helped with the founding of what is now the Ars Aevi collection in Sarajevo, our institution is unable to purchase a single work for its own collections. Thus we have temporarily exchanged, for the exhibition *The Present and Presence – Repetition 1*, a work with the Ars Aevi collection, borrowing Marina Abramović's *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995), which she had donated – on our intercession – to the future Sarajevo museum.

The repetitions of *The Present and Presence* exhibition aimed to consolidate the memory of the material conditions of Eastern European art. Material conditions are precisely the thing dominant histories most often tend to suppress. Repeating is necessary lest they fall into oblivion. No matter how vastly they differ, material conditions are common to all. Their difference is one of the causes for the different constructs of history; any possible other, common history can therefore only evolve through an articulation of these differences. Thus we can say that it is the repetition of Eastern European traumas which raises our exhibition above pointing out the differences between the East and West, aspiring instead toward a new, common history.

→ after, p. 160

This term “air travel” itself travelled from the moment of its inception and the moment of writing. When presented originally in the first *Glossary of Common Knowledge* seminar part of the Our Many Europes L'Internationale programme, there was no war in Ukraine and Corona was still mostly known as a beer brand. In the meantime, it is as though the term itself had taken off and made quite a few loops. This context has perhaps not changed the basic substance of the text but did make my basic assumption sharper. When I first proposed “air travel” as a concept for the Geopolitics referential field I was informed by the realisation that climate change will require many habits to change in the coming years, and that air travel is one of them. The question I had was if there was some form of correlation between the globalised museum sector, and the possibility of cheap or affordable air travel. My conclusion was that there was one, and that the basic dependence of the museum sector on air travel is in some sense even more problematic than in the world of business.

In economic terms, air travel is a cost factor that is part of the greater schema of costs and income. If, however, it turns out that the costs of air travel increase, due to its high impact with regard to climate change, then perhaps we can break the emotional connection to air travel and start to look for alternatives. One can think of the Hollywood movie *Up in the Air*, which presents the story of a businessman whose life is defined by air travel and who has built his sense of self upon his status of being almost perpetually airborne. His world collapses when an ambitious young colleague proposes to revolutionise the industry by providing their services through video conference calls. He fights the change all he can, but fails and has to accept that in the end efficiency trumps this addiction to air travel. The makers of the movie could never have imagined how prophetic their idea would be when the coronavirus grounded more or less all planes in the world overnight, and instigated a massive migration from the offline to online worlds of work. Today, online business meetings are more or just as common as physical ones. For the museum field, however, the reliance on air travel is different.

Museums first and foremost are their collections. These collections almost always consist of physical objects, and in the case of art museums unique artworks. Especially in the field of art, the main asset of a museum are the original artworks it stores, which offer small, distinct pieces of the vast puzzle that is world art history. Not all pieces are equal in this puzzle, and some are considered more important than others. Much of what curators and museum directors over the world are busy with is securing new, valuable originals for their collections. The purpose of these collections is to present these works to “the public”. This public has in the decades since 1989 become a global one, when the collapse of the Soviet Union, combined with ever cheaper flights, inaugurated an era of connectivity and mobility unprecedented in world history. The booming tourist industry in these globalised decades thus vastly increased who can qualify as a member of this public for museums – anyone, provided they can take a plane and travel around the world to fill their art bucket lists as richly as possible. If air travel would cease to be possible, this public would shrink and the valued, hallowed moment of being close to the original artworks will once again be less available.

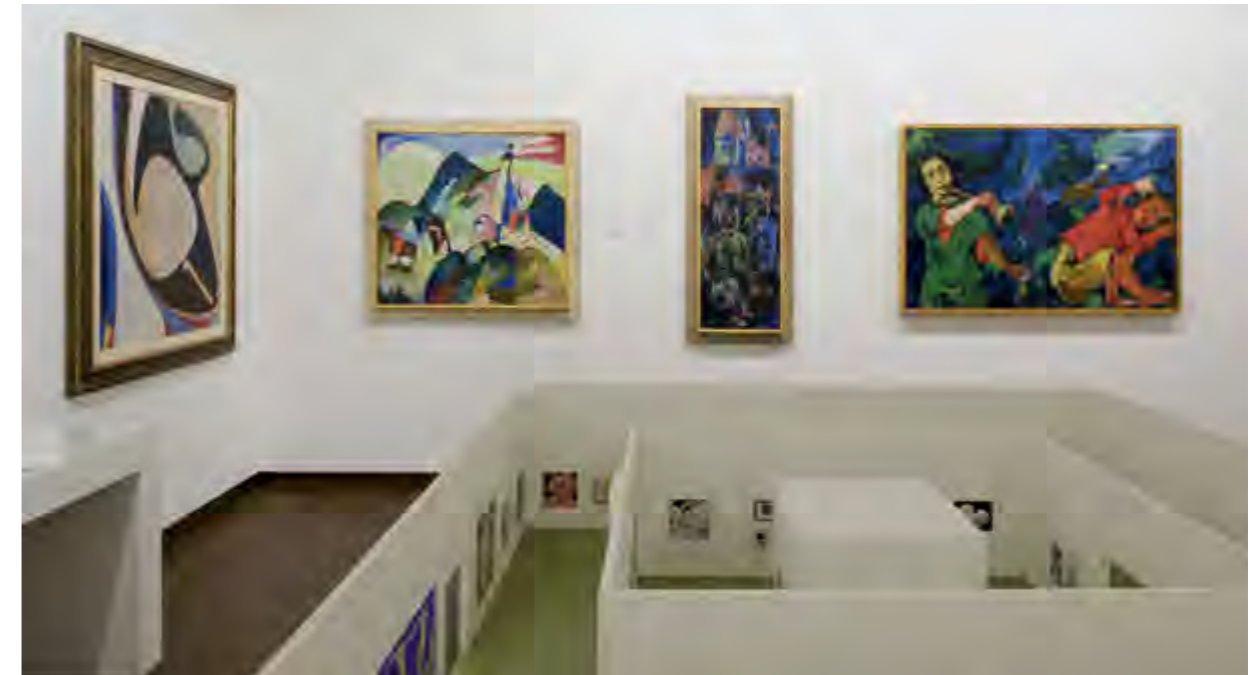
The question that then presents itself is what is the precise purpose of this experience of the original, and is it conceivable to realise that experience in a different

manner using fewer fossil fuels? To answer this question, one place where we can turn is perhaps almost too obvious: Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction*, written between 1936 and 1939. Few texts are as rich and precise in tackling the question of the reliance on the original in the cultural practices of the West. Benjamin's main observation, which is useful for us here, is that he understands human societies are in permanent flux as a result of changes in technology, politics and economy. The way in which societies understand and practice art is affected by these changes. The custom to consider art to be linked to the experience of an original is in Benjamin's view linked to the rise of the modern, capitalist society. When describing the role artworks play in capitalist societies he uses the perhaps best-known term of the essay: the famous and mysterious notion of "aura". He describes it using two different formulations. First, he describes it as the simple "here and now" of the work. The fact that it exists in one place at each and every moment of its life. The second is more cryptic and refers to the experience of aura. He describes this as experiencing "the apparition of a distance however near it may be". It is a complex formulation, which refers to the fact that the original is original on the basis of its ability to differ from something else. Only in difference can the original be recognised. What one experiences in front of the original work, is the fact that regardless of how close one desires to get to it, and make it familiar, the work will always retreat into its status as the original by radiating one fact constantly: everything I am is part of me and defines me, there is nothing superfluous, as what I am is this material presence and only this. The whole museum practice of restoration and preservation is based on this insight that nothing in the work should be lost, as the essence of the work is simply all it is.

In this text Benjamin is not very explicit in why these two qualities are so linked to capitalist society. Yet it is clear that it has to do with the particular manner in which human interaction is organised under capitalism. In contemporary terms, one could describe it as a culture defined by exclusivity in opposition to communism, which in Benjamin's view strives towards inclusion. The exclusivity is grounded in the prominence property plays in capitalist society. Without property, the whole system would collapse. This links to the first definition of aura which describes how things exist on the basis of their distinctness in occupying one place every moment. These things can be owned and what is owned is their distinctness. If two things could be exactly the same and they could be owned by two individuals, the latter would have no way to know who owned which thing. This also brings Benjamin to the more mysterious second description of aura, which counters this potential problem through the realisation that in the end, no two things are ever completely similar. Even if only in tiny details, even two editions of the same newspaper show small material differences, which makes them identifiable and open to ownership.

Even if this to some degree explains why property and originality are linked, there is still a part missing. Ownership is not a goal in itself. What is owned represents something of value to the owning subject, and perhaps even has moral or ethical implications. What value does ownership represent for a capitalist subject? The answer in a sense is twofold and combines the fields of economics and politics. What established itself in the course of the 20th century, perhaps especially in Western nations, but also elsewhere, were meritocratic societies whereby individuals were defined by their talent. In the Netherlands, this transformation is described with great precision and insight by Kees Vuyk in his recent study *Oude en Nieuwe Ongelijkheid* [Old and New Inequality]. By improving access to education, people from all walks of life were able to develop their talents and become successful. Knowledge in this culture became a key asset, as it allowed the individual to differentiate them-

selves and also have an advantage over others. Success in business meant being able to provide something others could not, being different, having more skills, in short, → knowing more. Knowledge is in the end defined by what the subject has been offered. So the more experience one is able to accumulate, the more valuable the subject becomes. At the same time, liberal, democratic political systems rely on the public being able to take an informed position on political issues. Here, too, knowledge is key, as if the public is unknowing it becomes susceptible to populist manipulation. Only if the voters can understand why one solution for social problems is better than another, can they make a good decision. Moreover, the political culture values knowledge accumulation tremendously.



The unique experience of the original artwork becomes a symbol in this political and economic culture. Standing in front of a valued and important original, the subject is filled with the unique knowledge of the work, which can only be achieved through direct, close physical proximity. After seeing an important original, the subject has been improved and can now relate to those who have shared that experience, and can equally discriminate themselves from those who have not. Visiting many museums is a thus way to boost one's value as a subject. Of course, there are many other thoughts and emotions that are had in front of an original work of art, which are valuable for the subject's experience. What remains to be answered is if these emotions rely on the original itself and could not also be produced through the experience of a copy. Moreover, regardless of the quality of the copy, a substantial part of the experience of a work is the journey towards it. It is the realisation that one has made an effort, one that not everyone is willing or able to make, and that this makes the subject more exclusive, more unique. Taking a budget airline flight to Paris to see the original *Mona Lisa* can thus contribute significantly to the experience. (Figure 2)

This analysis of the reliance on air travel for the museum sector puts museums in a difficult position. Could they ever restructure themselves in a manner in which they could disassociate themselves from this exclusive culture in which the original is the holy grail in the formation of a rich subject? If one takes Benjamin's analysis

Figure 2: The Museum of American Art, Berlin, *The Making of Modern Art*, 29 April 2017 – 13 June 2021, exhibition view, Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

as a basis, then the answer can never lie in the field of culture alone. If somehow changes would occur in the fields of politics and economics, in combination with new technology, perhaps the structure of the subject would change as well. One project the Van Abbemuseum undertook, *The Making of Modern Art* (2016–2018), tried to speculate on these changes. Made in close collaboration with The Museum of American Art, Berlin, the museum presented its collection not as a story of art, but as a story of the culture or system of art and the rise of notions of originality and uniqueness. The exhibition presented these reflections on the system of art, using a combination of originals and copies, turning the whole exhibition into a playful inversion of the art system. In the end the exhibition itself hovered between the old and the new. Even if the format and content were very different, it still was an exhibition that had as its main purpose that it would be visited by as many people as possible. There was, however, also an implicit suggestion in this exhibition project that tried to reach beyond this. As the exhibition was made with copies, it could also easily be copied. The role of the museum was not to provide the original but to help order a web of references among originals, here available as copies. In this context it was not the things themselves that were important, but their relationships. These relationships can be presented in exhibitions, but could also be presented online or in different formats. In this way a museum based on relationships could function in a very different way to one based on originals.

The question that then remains is whether the idea of relationships also links to a new economic or political culture. It is perhaps too early to tell, but if the relationships that exist in the field of culture take a more central position, they address the growing awareness that the only way forward in the light of climate change is mass, collective collaboration. If the world population faces a singular threat then it is logical that the only effective response is one that is taken together. Of course, how to realise such a shift in political and economic culture is immensely difficult. However, one small contribution that museums could make is to rethink their practices with regard to what it would mean if original material objects were not the basis of their collections, but unique relationships instead. These relationships would still build on the realisation that the original exists, but would also enable museums to develop a richer practice in which presenting the relationships among these objects could become another part of what such institutions provide. In this way, the relation can slowly gain prominence over the thing, allowing us to know more and fly less.

Anti-fascism Kuba Szreder

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, July 2019

This short intervention is based on a hypothesis that in many parts of the globe we are facing an imminent threat of resurgent fascism. I will argue here that to counter fascism we have to connect strategies on an international scale while alleviating the failures of neoliberal globalisation. As an art worker myself, I will signal the urgency to discuss and transform the ways in which contemporary art is practised, instituted, and globally circulated, so that it can partake in engendering a new, anti-fascist international movement. This short text is driven by a hope that even though neither art workers nor art institutions are able to establish such an anti-fascist international movement by themselves, they are able to enter into existing alliances and create new ones, productively contributing to new popular fronts against resurgent fascism.

Even though the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* is not the proper place for an academic discussion about the nature of recurrent fascism, a brief reconstruction of this heated debate is in order. Purposefully, I frame the return of fascism as a political and theoretical hypothesis, as the nature of this return is disputable. Philosophers like Renzo Traverso or Gáspár Miklós Tamás emphasise the specificities of the current authoritarian tendencies, preferring to call them post-fascist instead of relying on fuzzy analogies to the European 1930s. Moreover, fascism is often dissected not as a phenomenon of its own, but rather as an expression of other, fundamental tensions created by economic, racial, gender, or → ecological oppression. Fascism can be deconstructed in the context of colonialism, following Aimé Césaire and Hannah Arendt, as a boomerang effect of European violence that strikes back at the former metropolises. → Feminist scholars emphasise the patriarchal and masculinist character of resurgent fascism, and draw from the feminist tradition to counter it. One can also sensibly analyse the role of neoliberalism in creating the structural conditions for the revival of fascism, and dissect the anti-ecological character thereof.

Fascism is patriarchal, it is fed by injustice, it is imperialistic and militaristic, and it is a murderous and fundamentally irrational response to the climate crisis. Still, in my opinion, fascism cannot be reduced to any of these tendencies, taken in separation, as it is propelled by a death drive that transcends them. In this, I agree with a philosopher Michał Kozłowski, and other activists, artists and thinkers, who argue that it is essential to call out fascist tendencies for what they are. This intuition was forged in a daily experience of anti-authoritarian struggles in Poland, and involvement in instituting a nationwide coalition of art workers and artistic institutions responsible for organising the Anti-Fascist Year (2019–2020). When I posit that fascism exists and has tremendous implications for both art and politics, I refer to Umberto Eco's concept of Ur-Fascism. According to Eco, despite the eclecticism and incoherence of every particular fascist regime, all fascist movements, organisations, parties, and identities share a terrible family resemblance. According to him, Ur-Fascism or Eternal Fascism includes such characteristics as the cult of tradition, the rejection of modernism, the cult of action for action's sake, labelling disagreement as treason, fear of difference, appeal to social frustration, the obsession with a plot, painting the enemy as both strong and weak, reverence of violence, machismo, cheap heroics, selective populism based on newspeak, contempt for truth, reason, and artistic freedoms. As Eco argues, every fascist regime does not need to tick all these boxes, and yet most do. Fascism as such is an eclectic, incoherent, often self-contradictory amalgam, driven by the lust for power and underpinned by a death drive. And precisely this tendency resurfaces in every corner of the globe, as analysed in the special issue of the *FIELD* journal, edited by Gregory Sholette, dedicated to *Art, Anti-globalism, and the Neo-authoritarian Turn* (2018). It features reports from all over the globe that evidence the international backlash against democracy, equality, and emancipation. Yet, the examination of Ur-Fascism should not devolve into a blanket judgment or swear word, nor should it provide an intellectual excuse for not facing the complex reality as it is by engaging with sloppy analogies to historical events. But it remains theoretically insightful and politically pragmatic, to identify and counter fascist tendencies while celebrating and reviving the legacy and achievements of anti-fascist struggles worldwide. And art workers and artistic institutions alike are able to contribute productively to precisely this task.

For example, on 1 September 2019, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw opens the exhibition *Never Again*, (Figure 3) which revisits the complicated legacy and

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ecological, p. 162
feminist, p. 28



Figure 3: *Never Again: Art Against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, 30 August – 17 November 2019. Photo: Daniel Chrobak, courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

current iterations of anti-fascist struggles in art, featuring well-known examples of the Popular Fronts and Berlin Dada of the 1930s, but also critically discuss the post-war instrumentalisation of anti-fascism by communist → *propaganda*. One of the main ancillary public events related to this exhibition is an international summit titled *Internationalism → after the End of Globalisation*, that we co-curated with Jesús Carrillo and Sebastian Cichocki. As curators, we posit that “responding to the recent revival of the fascist threat” implicates finding “new modes of artistic internationalism, embedded in the ongoing, democratic struggles for climate, economic, gender, and racial justice”. The ambition of this summit is to analyse fascism as an after-effect of failed, neoliberal globalisation, which threatens the very existence of progressive cultural institutions. Much has been said about the failures of globalisation, especially in wake of the financial crisis of the 2000s and subsequent austerity. The fascist tremors are caused by seismic changes in geopolitics. The transition of the centres of accumulation → *south*- and eastwards has a double effect. On the other hand, it undermines democratic public spheres in the West, already weakened by the neoliberal onslaught. Paradoxically though, in countries like Poland, an advance in global logistical chains underpins the revival of national pride that can easily descend into outright nationalism, authoritarianism, or even fascism. The summit was motivated by a conviction that one can only respond to this authoritarian double-bind by reviving progressive forms of internationalism, referring to the redemptive legacy of the Communist International, Popular Fronts against war and fascism, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the most recent project of the alter-global movement-of-movements, which all struggled (and struggle) for a more just, equal, and inclusive international order.

For an art worker, the central question remains how to repurpose artistic idioms, subjectivities, institutions, and their connections as potential contributors to an unfinished project of other, more just and equal globalisation. This rethinking should be radical, i.e. addressing the roots of the problem at hand, considering fascism not as a passing fashion or temporary aberration, but rather as an appropriate expression of forces unleashed by the failed project of neoliberal globalisation. Faced with the fascist conundrum, it would be futile to simply reiterate the globalist credo of contemporary art, in the period of the long 1990s considered as an unquestionable modernising and liberalising force, a global connector and attractor of wealth and creativity. (Figure 4)

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propaganda, p. 35, 265
after, p. 160
south, p. 71, 73



Figures 4 and 5: *Never Again: Art Against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, 30 August – 17 November 2019. Photo: Daniel Chrobak, courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

Unfortunately, after twenty years of witnessing an unprecedented expansion of global artistic networks, we are all challenged with the authoritarian backlash of an equal scale. This rethinking cannot rely on a nostalgia for a convivial form of social-democratic welfarism and subsequent institutional models, neither in nor beyond art. The diminishing tax base in many Western countries puts institutions under strain, eroding the remains of democratic public spheres, while the authoritarian movements in eastern and → *southern* states thwart the democratic ambitions of local progressive institutions. At the same time, the market-oriented artistic circulation should be considered as part of the problem and not its solution. The speculative art market and biennale value chain far too often peddle capitalist realism, contributing to the atrophy of political and artistic → *imagination*, which strengthens neoliberal hegemony and creates a power vacuum filled with the fascist imaginary. To counter this tendency, it is important to engender new artistic institutions of the common, embedded in the legacy of progressive internationalism, by collectively drawing from the previous research of L’Internationale into constituencies, commons, geopolitics, uses of art, and to expand on both theoretical underpinnings and practicalities of organising an international confederation of civic artistic institutions. (Figure 5)

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southern, p. 71, 73
imagination, p. 197

Earth Ida Hiršenfelder

Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, February 2020

In Central Europe, we’ve seen unprecedented rainfall this spring. So much so that there’s a climate joke – it only rained twice, once for thirty days and the second time for forty-five. Exhausted by the strange weather, I remember the warnings of climatologists from over twenty years ago who predicted that this part of the world would see excessive rain and floods, and others would suffer from drought. It appears we are going to see much more unpleasant weather in the future. Such

weather is especially bad news for complex and larger organisms, especially vertebrates, that are unlikely to adapt to the new climate conditions and will subsequently become extinct. Extinction is going to be a very messy business for humans, and to some extent – as Timothy Morton points out – the end of the world has already occurred.⁹ Instead of inhabiting a world, we find ourselves inside many hyperobjects, such as climate, nuclear weapons or evolution. Such objects put unbearable strains on our normal ways of reasoning and make us unable to imagine the world as a whole. In the following text, I will look at one such object. My term for the glossary is Earth with a capital E. I'm still not quite sure if Earth is an entirely suitable term for talking about the entire planet that we inhabit with its unsettling changing weather and global warming. I'm still turning around notions like → Territory, Planet, Gaia the living organism, World, Nature, Environment, Terra, or even Globe,¹⁰ in search of a term that simultaneously bears in mind a planetary perspective while being grounded in the matter and striking a chord on the emotional and empathic levels, I came across a very simple term – Home with a capital H – because that's what it is and we're very unlikely to find anyplace else in the universe just like Home. I think this term might also speak to those who have been dispossessed. As was noted in Bruno Latour's *Down to Earth*, the dispossessed are on the one hand the migrants and asylum seekers who've literally lost their homes due to conflicts connected to global warming and accelerationism, and on the other the → disappointed nationals who have been let down by the failed project of globalisation and are now trying to establish a sense of home, which means safety, familiarity, comfort, etc.,¹¹ albeit with a sinister twist of "Not on My Lawn!" aggression, which explains the irrational, charged and violent sentiments of the right-wing. The global ruling classes who decided to abandon the burden of → solidarity have betrayed all these people – first, and foremost, the dispossessed, and not the least the citizens of the nations they control.

In her novels Ursula K. Le Guin consistently uses the word Terra¹² to describe our planet, one of many in the intergalactic coalition. Her proposition is non-metaphorical and accurate. So what is this world called Terra, I ask? Etymology offers multiple meanings: land; soil, earth, dirt; land that separates seas against the third element, the sky; the world, globe, Earth as a planet; land or region.¹³ In this sense, I find that civilisation on Terra is defined by the fertile soil that provided conditions for agriculture and settlement, something that Morton also identifies as the main protagonist in transforming the Earth, terraforming, extractivism, and the exploitation of its resources.¹⁴ In this sense, colonialism, the difference between urban and rural, private and public, individual and collective, the idea of natural and cultural, even the patriarchy of the agricultural age and presumably preceding matriarchy, and in turn also the linear and cyclic understanding of time, are ideas derived from agriculture.¹⁵ Le Guin also shows how the conditions of dispossession and virtually everything we think, feel and act upon as a civilisation are intrinsically connected to the climate condition of the planet, which a cultured species occupies. And I ask myself, how will these cultural defaults morph with the changing weather? I

9 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

10 A term proposed by Peter Sloterdijk.

11 Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

12 Ursula K. Le Guin, *Worlds of Exile and Illusion; Rocannon's World; Planet of Exile; City of Illusions* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1995).

13 Ida Hiršfenfelder, "Ekofeminizem v romanih Ursule K. Le Guin", *Spol.si*, Ljubljana (20 February 2020), <https://spol.si/blog/author/ida-hirsenfelder/> (accessed February 2020).

14 Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 4–5.

15 Hiršfenfelder (2020).

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territory, p. 269
disappointed, p. 179
solidarity, p. 65

am hopeful, and in some → instances I already see it, that it might bring the → decommodification of the Earth, which for me means the abandonment of the idea of private property as it has formed since the industrial age. Dispossession is only possible when there is possession.

Many years ago, I read the speeches and wisdom of Native American chieftains as a response to the white-man's madness. One chief asked when it was suggested that they sell their land to the white people: "How can I sell the blue colour of the sky?"¹⁶ This idea of the impossibility of owning or selling the Earth has stuck with me. I recognise the reverberation of this question in *Terra0*¹⁷, a project by a group of developers, theorists, and researchers (Paul Seidler, Max Hampshire, Paul Kolling, Andi Rueckel, Gregor Finger, Johannes Wilke) exploring the creation of hybrid ecosystems in the technosphere, who have proposed a radical decommodification to give a forest its collective agency and legal status. The artists/programmers have set up a system based on blockchain technology that provides a forest with a legal and financial framework on the basis of which they can buy themselves by selling individual bodies of their collective (wood). They propose a cybernetic → ecology a sort of *xenofeminist* bond between technology and the biotic world, and give the non-human a more important role in the creation of culture. With the collective of trees, I hit on another notion that needs to be radically changed if we and the more-than-human others are to survive the cataclysmic events caused by climate change. This is the notion of an individual, which informs the ways we think about intelligence and agency. It suggests that a subject – whether human or non-human – can be somehow isolated and studied as an independent entity. Viola and Mancuso propose that we should think about non-humans such as plants as modular and, as such, they should not be referred to as individuals but as → interdependent colonies, and consequently, their intelligence should be investigated accordingly.¹⁸

The natural sciences have started to make this collective turn in their research, from studies of the gut microbiome as one of the key aspects of depression in humans, to symbiotic communication strategies of the forest floor. To open a space for non-humans in the cultural sphere, we must find ways of communicating with the collectives such as plants and including them in our languages. A brilliantly witty and sensitive proposition of → translation was made by Špela Petrič, an artist trained in the natural sciences with a PhD in biology. In her work *Institute for Inconspicuous Languages: Reading Lips* (2018) she proposes a fantastical tale of establishing communication between the human scientist Mi Yu and a ficus tree in a lab experiment between the years 2021 and 2039. In her installation, Petrič included a recording of the plant's stomata, thousands of tiny mouth-like openings that monitor the amount of water they take up through their roots.¹⁹ At the side of the screen, she had a sign-language interpreter translate the utterings of the stomata.

Anyone who has green fingers understands that plants take a very long time to utter a simple sentence such as "more light, please" or "it's a bit too damp over here", as plants exist in different temporalities compared to humans. Informed by the understanding of plant communication networks, I started to feel it was exceedingly cruel to put plants in pots, to isolate them from the possibility of connecting with

16 Franc Burgar, Majda Kuželički, *Kako naj vam prodamo modrino neba* (Ljubljana: self-published by Franc Burgar, 1988).

17 See the *Terra0* project webpage <https://terra0.org/> (accessed 25 February 2020).

18 Alessandra Viola and Stefano Mancuso, *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence* (Washington: Island Press, 2015).

19 Špela Petrič, *Institute for Inconspicuous Languages: Reading Lips* (2018), <https://www.spelapetric.org/institute-for-inconspicuous-languages> (accessed February 2020).

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instances, p. 51
decommodification, p. 95
ecology, p. 162
interdependent, p. 106
translation, p. 153

others. On another note, I console myself, it might just as well be that an isolated plant is quite happy, because they are a collective and not an isolated individual. The environmental crisis is, in a way, the result of extreme individualism that produced exploitative hierarchical subject-object relations such as extractivism. As a possible solution, speculations about networked collectives suggest developing more sophisticated forms of interactions. Collectivity, community, and commoning are the core principles of → ecology thinking that give way to various mutualistic relationships.

In the media and popular culture, we now again see the idea of the planet Mars coming to the centre stage. In the midst of the Cold War – as it was portrayed in the 1962 film *The Day Mars Invaded Earth*²⁰ – Mars was a metaphor for the red communist threat. Now, it is looked at as a destination for the absurdly rich when they choose to leave our damaged home planet. But as the science-fiction trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson – *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars*²¹ – depicts so well, this species of primates will take all our petty disagreements and complex, irreconcilable characters with us, and the colonisation of Mars along with the necessary terraforming will cause the same problems as they have on Earth. Perhaps the reason why some may look for a solution outside of Earth is that the climate catastrophe is – as Morton would put it – a “super wicked problem” that can “rationally be diagnosed but for which there is no feasible rational solution”.²² “Wicked problems are unique and thus irreducible and difficult to conceptualise and anticipate.”²³ If it gets solved, we will never know if it existed. If it doesn’t, we won’t be here to confirm it.

So the question is, how to untangle civilisation before it crumbles under its own weight? Why do I think searching for the right term for this planetary perspective is worth the effort? Failure to face the matter or object is the definite point at which the current political discourse – or lack thereof – is failing. The policies that are put in place to mitigate climate change not only come too late, but are nicely wrapped into business as usual. A few years ago, we were trying to debunk the representational image of the Earth with transmedia artist Saša Spačal. We built a responsive sound installation *Sonoseismic Earth* (2015–2017), which depicts our planet’s dark ecology more realistically than the picture-perfect blue ideal of NASA, which we were fed in → schools from a very early age. Our critique looked beyond the map-making distortions which show the Western world to be larger than the “non-developed”²⁴ countries. What we had in mind was to create a haptic experience of the hyperobject Earth. We wrote:

Sonoseismic Earth presents Earth in the age of the Anthropocene, the geological epoch of industrial societies. [...] It makes a possible entry into a planetary perspective, into the sensual and haptic relationship between humans and the planet. The depletion of fossil fuels in the Earth’s crust causes tectonic cracks; hence, in the installation, the globe is gradually polluted by seismic graph lines. The seismographic rendering of is triggered by the proximity of human beings detected by sensors. The planet emits the infrasonic sound of earthquakes; it submerges the human in the ubiquitous acoustic space with

20 Maury Dexter, *The Day Mars Invaded Earth*, USA, 1962, 70’.

21 Kim Stanley Robinson, *Crveni Mars* [Red Mars] (Zagreb: Izvori, 1996); *Zeleni Mars* [Green Mars] (Zagreb: Izvori, 1998); *Plavi Mars* [Blue Mars] (Zagreb: Izvori, 2001).

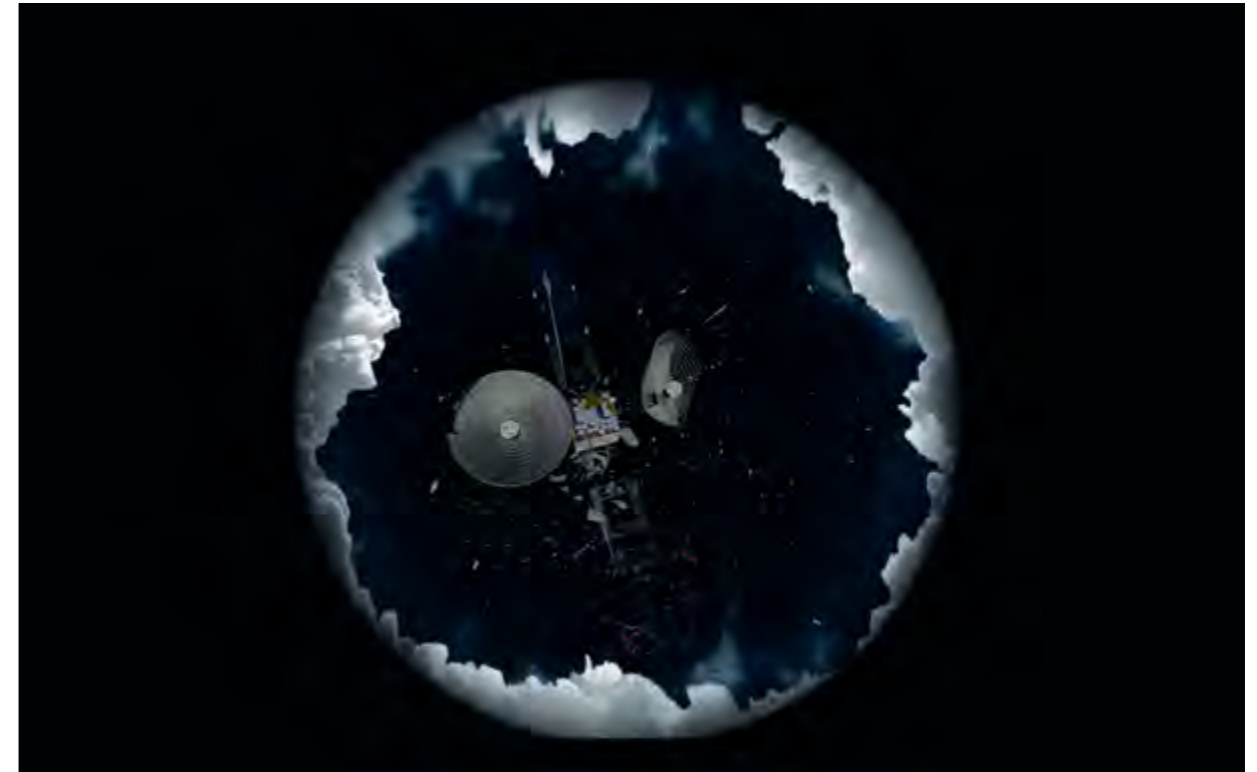
22 Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

23 Ibid. 36.

24 The term “non-developed” is extremely problematic as it is based on the idea of continuous economic growth that drives the planet’s resources into depletion and its inhabitants into extinction.

*no identifiable origin. The infrasonic sound is a warning frequency, recognised by the more sensitive beings as a sign of danger. With the acoustic environment of the Sonoseismic Earth, humans are caught actively and experientially in the drama of the endless circulation of capital.*²⁵

We added a little dark humour to the piece by placing the bones of industrially produced chicken in the drained pool of crude oil on top of a barrel mixed with polluted water dripping from the spinning globe. Industrial chicken is by some estimates one of the largest biomasses of a single species. Potentially, with great pressure and aeons of time, the remains of these animals will change into crude oil. Thus the Earth will replenish itself with our bio-waste and the metabolic rift of the Anthropocene will come to a closure on an Earth without humans.



Another perspective that is equally effective in attacking the representation of the Earth is an illusionistic ceiling video projection *Sky in Ruins (di sotto in sù)* by Sašo Sedlaček “that alludes to the tradition of Renaissance ceiling painting and its illusionistic depictions of limitless space with an architectural vanishing point on the ceiling.”²⁶ (Figure 6) The installation is one of the outcomes of the artist’s long-term research into consumer society and its waste – from blocking the entrance of a shopping mall with their advertising materials to picnicking in landfill – he then looked upward and created *Space Junk Spotting*, an alternative to Google Earth which maps space junk in orbit. The project aims is to map all such junk and acquire data about each object’s origin, the satellite it came from, how long it has been in orbit and how many millennia will pass before it collides with the atmosphere. In the *Sky in Ruins*, Sedlaček shows a more poetic gaze, one that does not require us

Figure 6: Sašo Sedlaček, *Sky in Ruins (di sotto in sù)*, 2016, video (animation). Presented at the *Beyond the Globe: 8th Triennial of Contemporary Art – U3*, curated by Boris Groys, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. Courtesy of the artist.

25 Saša Spačal and Ida Hiršenfelder – beebliip, *Sonoseismic Earth* (2015–2017), <https://sonoseismicearth.wordpress.com/> (accessed 25 February 2020).

26 Sašo Sedlaček, *Sky in Ruins (di sotto in sù)*, 2016, <https://sasosedlacek.com/sky-in-ruins/> (accessed 25 February 2020).

to be active users of a particular platform, but one that lets us enjoy the poetry of catastrophe. The illusionistic hole in the sky shows that there is much more waste in orbit than there are actual working satellites, and that this waste is blocking a clear view of the stars. The planet is suffocating in our waste. With a lot of dark humour, I think of the fantastically stifling and anxious plot of the space drama *Aniara*,²⁷ adapted from a book-length epic science fiction poem from 1956 by the Swedish poet Harry Martinson as his response to the threat of nuclear war. In the epic, a spaceship escaping a ruined Earth and on its way to a colony on Mars ends up drifting in outer space for millions of years. And ironically, it was forced off course by space junk that destroyed its steering system.

Jared Diamond, in *Collapse*, maintains that civilisations commit → ecological suicide – or ecocide – by simply ignoring alarming factors like deforestation and habitat destruction, soil problems like erosion or salinisation, water management problems, overhunting, overfishing, invasive species, excessive population growth, and increased per-capita impact.²⁸ Eventually, as a population decreases through starvation, war, or disease, society loses its political, economic, and cultural complexity. Diamond shows in numerous cases through history that societies which collapsed initially saw their resources as inexhaustibly abundant, while the signs of their incipient depletion were masked by normal fluctuations in resource levels between years or decades.²⁹ The complexity of ecosystems also makes the consequences of some human-caused disturbances virtually impossible to predict. This creates a situation that makes it extremely difficult to get people to agree on exercising restraint. But restraint as expressed in anti-consumerism, veganism, zero-waste behaviour, lowering the birth rate, refraining from → air travel and so on is not a question of convictions or → choice, because we really have no choice but to change.

Many artistic endeavours that call for a higher sense of ecological awareness are eulogies, not hymns to the beauty of the natural world. They are in line with the development of ecological thinking from the optimistic and holistic deep ecology of Arne Næss to the pessimistic and object-based dark ecology of Timothy Morton. In much the same way, acoustic ecology has transformed from the connected deep listening of Pauline Oliveros to the immersive dark listening composed by artists such as Robertina Šebjanič. In her installations, we “enter into [sound] undulations, to feel our bodies perform the geography of waves, the volume of water and the fragile connections between all that moves in its dark expanse,”³⁰ as Salomé Voegelín so beautifully puts it when speaking of the political potential of sound. The entire body of work by Šebjanič is submerged into water ecologies, diving into murky aquatic atmospheres, dipping a hydrophone and listening attentively to the sound pollution that propagates so much faster in water than air. She cultivates high levels of sensitivity to the living conditions of marine animals and plants, and simultaneously works closely with oceanographers, marine biologists and speleologists to develop what she calls “→ empathic strategies”. This means, → translating what she observes in the field and science laboratories, and installing it into powerful experiences for the senses and mind: as citizen science projects, immersive drone audiovisual compositions from noise pollution, kinetic machines, ethnographic operas or olfactory experiences. She proposes the use of the word “aquaforming”³¹

27 Pella Kågerman and Hugo Lilja, *Aniara*, Sweden, 2018, sci-fi drama, 60’46”.

28 Jared M. Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005).

29 Ibid.

30 Salomé Voegelín, *The Political Possibility of Sound* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 75.

31 Robertina Šebjanič, *aqua_forensic | Underwater Interception of Biotweaking in Aquatocene* (2018), https://robertina.net/aqua_forensic/ (accessed 25 February 2020).

to point out the fact that humans are not only changing the face of the dry land (terraforming), but also of the sea beds and the water itself. She brings about the awareness that Earth is not just Terra, but instead is a watery planet, we are bodies of water, and our life depends on water more than any other element. The ocean is our cradle, the place of our birth, and it will be the place of our → death should we not change our ways. And perhaps, even more importantly, Šebjanič is pointing at the interconnectedness of things through water as observed in her installation *Co_Sonic 1884 km²*, (Figure 7) in which she explores an intermittent river with nine names and composes underwater recordings with AI. She says that the installation: *shows its water body through the prism of its integral whole. [It] is a document of the current times in which rivers are becoming powerless due to human intervention. It calls on us to build empathy for “non-human” entities and to adopt strategies for ecological development for a time when our generation will be long gone.*³²



Šebjanič’s work does not preach about general things, but sinks deep into particular and concrete objects on this watery Earth. Following Morton’s notion, the whole is weirdly less than the sum of its parts. As they say: “If we want to coexist → ecologically, which is to say animistically and anarchistically, we may need to accept the fact that, while they are physically massive, hyperobjects such as neoliberalism are ontologically small, always less than the sum of their parts.”³³ So the Earth as a general notion for this planet is also less than the parts, which we can experience – touch, smell, hear, or see. Karen Barad, in their text *Posthuman Performativity*, also calls for the return of a focus on matter. They claim that language has been granted

32 Robertina Šebjanič, *Co_Sonic 1884 km²* (2021), <https://robertina.bandcamp.com/album/co-sonic-1884-km-2> (accessed 31 March 2022).

33 Morton (2018), 113–4.

Figure 7: Robertina Šebjanič, *Co_Sonic 1884 km²*, 2021, series of 10, photographs and audio video installation, production (2021/22) Cukrarna Gallery, co-production Quo Artist foundation. Courtesy of the artist.

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too much power and that matters of “fact” have been replaced with matters of signification. As Barad writes: “Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. The only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter...”³⁴

Artists are looking for methods of speaking about concrete matters and seek to surpass the mainstream notions of sustainability (greenwashing) which do not challenge the issues that propagate the *status quo*. They are imagining a world beyond human exceptionalism and are opening their minds to interspecies communication. They speak from the point of the particular and concrete, the partial and specific, the direct and pessimistic, the holistic and ritualistic, with dissonance and assemblage, proposing hypothetical and poetic future scenarios.

A feminisation of geopolitics? / Feminising geopolitics

When we reflect on the term geopolitics we deal with some of the most traditional and patriarchal notions of power. It makes us think of political power and the historical relation of state, nation, and material wealth, with the domination of territories and the people who inhabit them. However, I would like to propose a change of this meaning, and to offer a view of how geopolitics, given its etymology (politics of → Earth), should indeed be connected with the idea of what ecofeminism calls the *sustainability of life*³⁵.

In this text, I will propose *ecofeminism* as a possibility to “feminise” the notion of geopolitics. And when I refer to feminisation here, it does not mean to stress what the female subject could bring to the field, nor do I intend to reinforce the binary division of biological subjects (cis-male and cis-women). Instead, this attempt is related to the strong debates caused by the arrival of feminist politicians in the public sphere. As the feminist activist Justa Montero states³⁶:

Feminising politics requires looking at the interpretation that the feminist movement makes, of the needs and proposals of women, placing them at the centre of the social, cultural and political agenda. It is to make feminist policies, to build another meaning of what is the policy that addresses and relates the micro and the macro, the personal and the political, sexuality and the TTIP, nursery schools and pensions, and all women and LGBTIQ+ people in its → diversity. It is definitely a change in the idea of politics itself, often identified only as institutional policy.

In a world devastated by → ecological disaster and political injustice, in which big corporations are supported by neoliberal governments and social inequality is on the rise, the alliance of feminism and ecologism has to do with the possibility of changing the direction of a whole planet, with the aim of enabling the lives of hu-

34 Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3, *Gender and Science*, The University of Chicago (2003).

35 Understood as an interaction between care for people and care for the environment. For different approaches to this notion see “Experiencias, ámbitos y vínculos cooperativos en el sostenimiento de la vida” [Experiences, fields and cooperative bonds in sustaining life], *Cuidado, comunidad y común. Extracciones, apropiaciones y sostenimiento de la vida* [Care, community and common. Extractions, appropriations and sustainability of life], eds. Raquel Martínez Buján, Myriam Paredes Chauca and Cristina Vega Solís (Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2019).

36 Justa Montero, “Feminisar la política” [Feminising Politics], *Viento Sur* (December 2016), <https://vientosur.info/spip.php?article11970> (accessed April 2019).

man and non-human generations in the future. Two hundred years of feminisms and six decades of ecologism converge in the asseveration that there will be no future at all without the guarantee of a new social contract, and one that requires radical transformations.

Maybe now is the time to reformulate social sciences from an intersectional gaze, which should not ignore the diverse coordinates that need to be considered. Maybe we should contribute to feminising geopolitics. Here, ecofeminism could be a key to seeding a bit of hope in the world.

Ecofeminism because...

First of all, I believe that the feminist movement is one of the most potent political projects of our time, and it is constantly producing knowledge and new strategies of resistance to confront the different ways of oppression in this neoliberal era.

Secondly, ecologism is a space of action that points out that we are going through a multidimensional economic and ecological crisis whose roots are also found in social reproduction, political legitimacy and the failure of traditional values. Both activisms represent, somehow, two political subjects that have been reshaped in the collective militancy of a new generation that today yells: “Our house is on fire!”³⁷

Despite the obvious gravity of the situation, it seems that until recently it has been politically and socially unnoticed. According to the anthropologist and ecofeminist activist Yayo Herrero, beyond its nature of critical thinking, ecofeminism is also a social movement that analyses the capitalist-ecocide-patriarchal and colonial system we live in, and it is trying to oppose the hierarchical culture that considers that some lives are worth more than others.³⁸

Following Herrero, we cannot deny that from the moment we are born we are ecodependent and also → interdependent (a notion widely used by intersectional feminisms). She also states that the very possibility of existence came from practices of → care, sustaining the material conditions needed for live, and lastly from giving and receiving affection. Elements that represent both feminist and → ecologist practices.

So how can we *put these practices in the centre*³⁹ to analyse the concept of another possible geopolitics?⁴⁰

Artistic approaches to keep life alive

As on many other occasions in the past, an artistic sensibility has proved to be a crucial tool when trying to expand ontologies that seemed, at first glance, immutable and set in stone. I want to bring some examples to the table in what follows.

37 Greta Thunberg, excerpt from her speech at Davos (25 January 2019). Published in *Cambiamos el mundo* [Let's Change the World] (Barcelona: Lumen, 2019), 52–62.

38 Yayo Herrero, *La vida en el centro. Voces y relatos ecofeministas* [Life in the Centre. Ecofeminist Voices and Stories] (Barcelona: Libros en acción, 2018), 13–39.

39 This notion has been developed by ecofeminism and it means giving centrality to practices and debates, to what was invisible and located on the margins in the past, and specifically here the care work done by mothers, grandmothers, wives, sisters, female companions and so on.

40 Yayo Herrero, “Sujetos arraigados en la tierra y en los cuerpos. Hacia una antropología que reconozca los límites y la vulnerabilidad” [Subjects Rooted in the Earth and in the Bodies. Towards an anthropology that recognises limits and vulnerability], *Petróleo* [Petroleum] (Barcelona: Arcadia – Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, MACBA, 2018), 104.

The work developed by the international research group Planta is dedicated to the articulation of → situated practices, ones that reflect on the relationship between humans and plants. Their research on, with and for plants is activated with different → constellations. As they say in the statement, they are artists, dancers, choreographers, plant carers, activists, feminists, fermenters, kin makers, witches, radical faeries, ecosexuals, pole dancers, friends, lovers, animals, symbionts... Planta is a choreographed installation for plants and humans created by a group of dancers and plants. (Figure 8) Their bodies relate to movement, words, and affect, using → queer methodologies, creating a space for cohabitation. It is a celebration of performance as an art of encounters between humans and non-humans outside of normativity.



Figure 8: Planta Performance, *Love At First Sight Festival*, 21 September 2019, Toneelhuis, Antwerp. Photo: Dries Segers.

“We think with knowledge-as-humus. We are dedicated to the ubiquitous queer knowledges embodied in the entangled performances of the myriad earthlings. Plants and humans are continually affecting/becoming affected by one another in their inter(intra)active becomings. And they are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by a tentacular web of other co-workers...”⁴¹ following Donna Haraway’s recent imaginaries, which we see developed in Fabrizio Terranova’s documentary film.⁴²

Planta’s work consists of an old ritual that puts a spell on us so we can open our senses again. Senses we used as part of a communication channel that used to be fluid but is now closed. With their dances, looping echoes, and strange flows that

41 For more information see <https://lapiellesunmetalinstable.wordpress.com/2018/01/22/planta/> (accessed May 2019).

42 Fabrizio Terranova, *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*, Belgium, 2016, documentary film, 81’.

move back and forth to and from the plants placed in the *centre*, the collective incites us to surrounding them, to feel in a different way their presence and their interaction.

This approach to non-human life is different from traditional → ecologism. What Planta proposes is to perform affected practices with those plants. They proclaim they → care for them, they feel them, they feel affection for them. In their work we can hear echoes of the *Ecosex Manifesto*,⁴³ by the post-porn star and sex activist Annie Sprinkle and her partner Beth Simons. Sprinkle and Simmons propose eco-sex practices – rituals that imply touching, making love, marriage and so on, with nature – which intersect environmental activism with sexual identity, as a way of defending the planet through love, pleasure, affection and sensual connection with the → Earth.

→ After the global protests of the 8 March 2019, and the massive uprising of new young ecoactivist movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future, it could look almost negationist to deny that new political subjects and imaginaries are emerging. These movements show great strength but are always based on non-violent protest strategies. Here we may see the similarities between artists and activists, for they are both part of this new rising tide, and together they bring diverse approaches to the global problematics mentioned above.

Ecofeminist political struggle

The first links between feminism and ecology were established right after several scandals due to the use of pesticides, with a key text being produced by the biologist Rachel Carson, whose 1962 book → *Silent Spring*⁴⁴ was long considered a “bible” of ecologism.

But the term “ecofeminism” was created later, by Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 in her book *Le féminisme ou la mort*⁴⁵, in which she analysed the correlation of global overpopulation and its ecological implications with the absence of women’s reproductive rights, and how they were denied the control over their own bodies. With this visionary new concept, d’Eaubonne came up with a name for various practices of resistance and disobedience that had actually started years before, and was also proposing a concrete interpretation of how patriarchal domination was the origin not only of women’s subjugation, but of the environmental destruction of our age as well. This new concept was born as a response to the appropriation of both agriculture and control over reproduction, or in other words, the reproductive work carried out by nature (material reproduction) and by women (social reproduction).

A few years before this, Vandana Shiva and another activist of the Chipko movement, in India, were developing a compendium of practices that have remained as the paradigm of non-violent protest. The movement crystallised the struggle against the felling of the forests and the clearing of the new lands for extensive monoculture agriculture and grazing, which were destroying the resources and traditional forms of exploitation and communal management of the land. The activists inside this movement (mostly women and children), were able to protect communal forests just by the practices of embracing trees, in a collective act of caring in which all bodies were as one, humans together with the trees. (Figure 9) This im-

43 Annie Sprinkle and Beth Simons, *Ecosex Manifesto*, <http://sexecology.org/research-writing/ecosex-manifesto/> (accessed March 2019).

44 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

45 Françoise D’Eaubonne, *Le féminisme ou la mort* [Feminism or Death] (Paris: P. Horay, 1974).

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Figure 9: Women and children of the Chipko Movement in a protest, 1973. Source: World Rainforest Movement. <https://wrm.org.uy/es/>

Figure 10: Fina Miralles, *Translations: Woman-tree*, 1973, documentation of the action carried out in November 1973 in Sant Llorenç del Munt, Spain, 1973 (1992/2020), silver gelatin photography and inkjet printing on paper, 3 photographs: 39 x 29 x 3 cm and 1 photograph: 100 x 70 x 3 cm 39 x 29 x 3 cm. Courtesy of MACBA Collection. National Art Collection and donation from the artist. Photo: Roberto Ruiz.



46 Olga M. Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972–1985* (Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 2004).

47 Marta Pol Rigau, *Anàlisi de l'obra plàsticovisual i poèticotextual de Fina Miralles: L'arbre com a reflex de la seva cosmologia* (Barcelona: Doctoral Thesis Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2012), https://957866f1-3f8c-43d5-a4cf-30d424658692.filesusr.com/ugd/b7fa61_8b33f814ef5f4d9e88eaf1c61af35211.pdf (accessed May 2019).

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plies the idea of the embodiment of politics. The potentiality of these practices and the images they generated travelled all over the world. They expressed an urgency to act, to protect what at that time began to be conceived of as a common good that was taken from us by capitalism – the Environment.

Chipko Andolan, was a forest conservation movement in India. It began in 1973 in Reni village of Chamoli district, Uttarakhnad and went on to become a rallying point for many future environmental movements all over the world. Photograph year 1973

In the 1970s some conceptual artists were dealing with this embodiment of nature and politics, using visionary metaphors of what we can nowadays read as feminist paradigms. We may find them in Ana Mendieta's → *Earth* body works⁴⁶, or in several works of the Catalanian artist Fina Miralles⁴⁷ such as *Dona-arbre* [Woman Tree] (Figure 10), that alludes very poetically to the situation of women tied to social roles that keep them from moving forward.

At that point ecofeminism was somewhat criticised for having an essentialist approach that entailed the idea of women as almost mystically or spiritually linked to nature. Nonetheless, in the following decades ecofeminism kept exploring new intersections between feminism and social justice.

Territories, land, labour, bodies. The logics of → extractivism

In the 1980s and 90s, with the emergence of new neoliberal forms of economy, capitalism developed more profound and precise ways to capture the raw materials and bodies needed for the extraction of what are only considered “resources”. And these resources never ran out, they were supposed to be inexhaustible, something which the privileged subjects of the Global North could dispose of at will.

Extractivism was a colonial practice of exploitation that started in the 16th and 17th centuries as a form of domination of territories and their communities, and through the enslavement of the existing populations. Mining, for instance, was a key economic activity of Spanish colonialism, and today, not by chance, it is still a very profitable enterprise, now controlled by transnational corporations that have very advanced and accurate technological systems to extract those same resources. In 2019 Mapa Teatro⁴⁸ presented an “ethnofiction” at the Reina Sofia, an exhibition/intervention called *Of Lunatics, or Those Lacking Sanity*⁴⁹ and the performance lecture, *The Living Museum*⁵⁰. In their works, they create a narrative that links the colonial past with the actual work of some little-known companies, which still maintain the traditional ways of extraction used in the years of Spanish rule. Paradigmatically, they try to survive with those old Master's tools, that indeed are less harmful to the environment, but of course produce at a less competitive pace or price.

In November 2018, the artist Elena Lavellés presented the exhibition *(F)actors en Route* at Matadero Madrid, with three works that analysed how extractivism affects the social → *ecology* and communities around it: the extraction of “black gold” from Ouro Preto, within the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil; the extraction of oil in Ciudad del Carmen, in the Gulf of Mexico; and the extraction, and very contaminating transportation process, of coal in Powder River Basin, in the USA.⁵¹ (Figure 11)

Figure 11: Performance by Jana Pacheco and Xus Martínez at the opening of the exhibition *(F)actors en Route*, 22 November 2018, Matadero Madrid. Photo: Bego Solis – Matadero Madrid.



48 Mapa Teatro are the Colombian theatre and visual artists Heidi, Elisabeth and Rolf Abderhalden. They are a laboratory that works on transdisciplinary creation in between theatre, performance, and installations.

49 Mapa Teatro, *Of Lunatics, or Those Lacking Sanity* (31 October 2018 – 29 April 2019), <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/mapa-teatro> (accessed May 2019).

50 Mapa Teatro, *The Living Museum* (4 April 2019), <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/living-museum> (accessed May 2019).

51 Elena Lavellés, *(F)actors en route*, Matadero, Madrid (22 November 2018 – 6 January 2019), <https://www.mataderomadrid.org/programacion/factors-en-route> (accessed April 2019).

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During the exhibition's opening, there was a performance by dramaturgs Jana Pacheco and Xus Martínez, inspired by the work of Lavellés. As the pictures shows, we could see two women standing, wearing dresses that resembled those same mine-workers' clothes, and they were struggling with the sand placed on the floor of the room, eating it, making quite disturbing sounds and images. They were reclaiming the figures of the miners' wives, who do not go down the mine but who must clean the clothes by hand, clothes full of toxic and contaminating remains. They, the miners' wives, are doing work that is completely invisible, but is an essential step that helps the men perform their duty, an additional task put on top of the traditional everyday chores such as house cleaning, food preparation and so forth. Such → care work is indispensable for any human activity.

Connected to all this, it is also significative of how the textile industry carries out the aggressive exploitation of both nature and bodies. With the manufacturing of textiles, capitalism began to expand and to create rhizomatic strategies to increase production and imbricate life, labour and identity, with profit as the only possible measure of interest. The images of the tragedy that occurred at the Rana Plaza garment factory in Dhaka (Bangladesh), shocked the entire world that day in 2013, when an eight-floor building collapsed killing 1,130 textile workers, employed by corporations like Inditex and El Corte Inglés, among others.⁵² Those who disappeared were mostly women, since this is a very feminised industry, in which children often also work as semi-slave labour. The images not only told the story of a collapsed building, but also about the collapse of a whole system, one that can no longer sustain life itself.

Today, in the context of the new rise of feminisms as an intersectional struggle and a globally articulated movement that goes beyond the essentialist subject "women", ecofeminist thinkers and activists are denouncing the new alliances formed between capitalism, colonialism and patriarchal exploitation.

The case of the female temporary workers picking strawberries in Huelva (Spain), is a very precise example of the complexity of the interconnections of the subjection of bodies, territories and natural resources, to a logic of total exploitation. In the last few years, these women have called out the sexual abuse and horrible threats from their employers, small local agricultural entrepreneurs. After some time, the lack of gender perspective in the recruitment procedures and working conditions became widely known, along with the opacity when managing information about how many women work in this sector, or how they live while they perform their work. This system is called "recruitment in the origin", where workers are recruited at "home" to work abroad. In Morocco, thousands of women are thus hired to work in the fields of Spain and Italy. Spanish companies go to Rabat and decide the working conditions there, working directly with the state's government. The classic profile of a strawberry worker is a woman under 40, married and with children under 14 years old. A profile designed to discourage the workers from leaving their country behind and staying in Spain.⁵³

Organisations such as Ecologistas en Acción have been highlighting how this massive monoculture of strawberries and other fruits in Huelva is devastating water reserves and causing enormous changes in the environment. But to Yayo Herrero,

52 "Bangladesh factory collapse", *The Guardian* (23 May 2013), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/23/bangladesh-factory-collapse-rana-plaza> (accessed April 2019).

53 Annie Kelly, "Rape and abuse: the price of a job in Spain's strawberry industry?" *The Guardian* (14 April 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/apr/14/rape-abuse-claims-spains-strawberry-industry> (accessed May 2019).

the problem lies not only in a lack of healthy protocols, as it is also a structural problem that has to do with the notion of production itself, with the transformation of agriculture into an industrial process, focused on the maximisation of profit, exploiting people and nature alike in a patriarchal context.⁵⁴

One global body

According to Verónica Gago⁵⁵, in recent years we can see a global articulation of feminism as a politics that makes the body of one, the body of all. The body as a transnational → territory is today once again the object of new colonial conquests and allows us to connect the archive of feminist struggles with struggles related to the autonomy of colonised territories. This body of all feminised bodies is a somato-political archive, following Paul B. Preciado, that has inscribed itself in it the narrative of the history of power, but also of subversion and resistance.⁵⁶

The feminist strike of past 8Ms is a trap for capitalism and patriarchy, because is not only do such actions consist of withdrawing one's labour, but also of not consuming, and not caring either. This degrowth attitude operates as a whole statement, and the strikes allow us to make visible the various different forms of work – precarious, informal, domestic, and migrant – not as a complementary or subsidiary work, but as the key element of the current ways of exploitation and → extraction.⁵⁷ It also highlights the difference between those who can and who cannot stop their work.

Ecofeminism show us the potential connection that links the body and the subject, located or inserted in a territory that is physical, social and affective, and relates to the world surrounding it. Everything is interweaved, from the molecular to the global, connecting different → emancipatory practices in diverse geopolitical contexts.

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Emancipatory propaganda Jonas Staal

Rotterdam, August 2019

Our present-day understanding of → propaganda art has been dominated by totalitarian historiographies. A landmark example is Igor Golomstock's *Totalitarian Art* (1990), in which he argues that the propaganda art of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and Maoist China in time became a singular homogenous body of pompous aesthetics, endlessly replicating the same generic visual language of grandiose leaders, heroic soldiers and defiant peasants.⁵⁸

Such absolutist aesthetic homogeneity across dictatorships did not actually exist.⁵⁹ But more importantly, the claim that *propaganda art* is the equivalent of *totalitar-*

54 Yayo Herrero, *La fresa en Huelva: 46 calorías por cada 100 gramos* [Strawberry in Huelva: 46 calories each 100 grams] (Madrid: Ediciones inestables, 2019).

55 Verónica Gago, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Susana Draper, Mariana Menéndez Díaz, Marina Montanelli, Sueli Rolnik, *8M Constelación feminista. ¿Cuál es tu lucha? ¿Cuál es tu huelga?* [8M Feminist Constellation: What is your fight? What is your strike?] (Buenos Aires: Tinta limón, 2018).

56 As Paul B. Preciado developed in his auto-theory self-fiction *Testo yonki* [Texto junkie] (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2008).

57 Verónica Gago, et al. 12.

58 See also Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "Approaching Totalitarianism and Totalitarian Art", *Totalitarian Art and Modernity*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Wanberg (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010), 109–29.

59 The inclusion of Maoist art production as a "copy" of Stalinist socialist realism is challenged, for example, in Christof Büttner, "The Transformations of a Work of Art: Rent Collection Courtyard, 1965–2009", *Art for the Millions*, eds. Esther Schlicht and Max Hollein (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009).

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ian art in which totalitarianism itself becomes the “author” across different political, cultural and geographical contexts, serves a propagandistic objective, as it implies that propaganda art is limited to 20th century totalitarianism and its inheritors, but is in no way applicable to modern capitalist democracy.⁶⁰

This is, of course, incorrect, as capitalist democracy has a long history of propaganda art of its own, ranging from the infamous propagation of abstract expressionist art by the CIA in the Cold War,⁶¹ to the decades of propaganda films made by the former Trump supporter and ally Steve Bannon.⁶² What I want to focus on here is the way that the totalitarian historiography of propaganda art has not only overshadowed the history of such art in modern democracy, but has also led to a lack of theorisation of propaganda art in emancipatory politics.

To define what is an emancipatory propaganda art, we first have to establish what is propaganda and what is propaganda art. Propaganda can be defined as a *performance of power* that aims not just to send a message but to construct reality. Concretely, propaganda manifests the moment that infrastructures of power are enacted – from politics to the economy, mass media and the military-industrial complex – to manufacture consent,⁶³ and thus create a normative reality that serves the interest of the propagandist. Propaganda art in this context can be defined as the *performance of power as art* – meaning the role of art in composing, scripting, visualising and staging this desired new normative reality.

This means that wherever there is power, there is propaganda. But as structures of power differ, so do their *propagandas*, in the plural.⁶⁴ For example, Cold War capitalist democracy in the United States manifested in the use of abstract expressionism as a counter-image to socialist realism in the Soviet Union. Capitalist democracy in this context performs power as art through an abstracted representation of freedom: the freedom to reject Stalinist figuration (and as such, communism in its entirety). Both are propagandas, but the structure of power and its → translation in the domain of visual morphology differs.

In this light, how does the emancipatory power perform as art in the context of emancipatory propaganda art? Terry Eagleton argued that “any practice of political emancipation [...] involves that most difficult of all forms of → liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves.”⁶⁵ In the context of propaganda as I just proposed it, this means freeing ourselves from the normative reality that upholds a particular idea of who we are as a people, and thus to become the collective authors of a new reality that reflects common rather than elite interests.

One of the earliest claims of the possibility of an emancipatory propaganda art was brought forward at the end of the 19th century when Filipino reformers declared a “propaganda movement” against Spanish colonial oppression (1880–1895), which

60 Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001).

61 See Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 2000).

62 See Jonas Staal, *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective* (Rotterdam: Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2018).

63 I build on the Chomsky/Herman propaganda model, described in Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988). However, it should be noted that Chomsky and Herman borrowed the notion of manufacturing consent from Walter Lippman’s *Public Opinion* (1922).

64 See the original title of Jacques Ellul’s book *Propagandes* (1962), published in English as Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

65 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 2007), xxiii.

was to be followed by a Maoist styled “second propaganda movement” against the US-backed Marcos dictatorship nearly a century later (1965).⁶⁶ These propaganda movements were anti-imperialist cultural revolutions, as they called for a collective reconstruction of Filipino history – its indigenous languages, its rituals, and its symbols – which faced erasure under the Spanish and subsequent American colonisation.⁶⁷ Today’s people’s tribunals of puppets mimicking Filipino presidents, which are accused and burned collectively, form a direct artistic and theatrical inheritance of these propaganda movements.⁶⁸ The tribunals educate on present-day conditions of oppression but also stage the possibility to collectively overcome this oppression and author reality anew. (Figure 12)

Figure 12: Burning the effigy of President Aquino dubbed “Noynoy tuta” during a Labour Day protest rally on Mendiola in Manila, 1 May 2013. Photo: Jonas Staal.



In 1925, the writer and politician Upton Sinclair wrote *Mammonart*, a history of art from the perspective of class struggle. Sinclair claimed that “all art is propaganda”, as art had always stood in a subservient relation to dominant powers in the form of

66 Jose Maria Sison, “Cultural Imperialism in the Philippines”, *New World Academy Reader #1: Towards a People’s Culture*, eds. Jose Maria Sison and Jonas Staal (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2013), 21–41.

67 On the role of art and culture in the Filipino propaganda movements, see Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines 1970–1990* (Quezon City: University of Philippines Press, 2001).

68 On the history of protest puppetry and the effigy in the Philippines, see Lisa Ito, “Protest Puppetry: An Update on the Aesthetics and Production of Effigy-Making, 2005–2012”, *Operation: DASert Storm*, eds. Jose Maria Sison and Jonas Staal (Manila: Department of Art Studies (DAS), College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines Diliman, 2013), 127–50.

the church, monarchy or the upper bourgeoisie.⁶⁹ But writing while socialist revolutions were sweeping the world, Sinclair saw a chance for artists not to propagandise the world as it existed in favour of the ruling class, but the world as it could be from the perspective of the masses. He ended his book with a call for an emancipatory propaganda art – an art of reality-construction:

*The artists of our time are like men hypnotised, repeating over and over a dreary formula of futility. And I say: Break this evil spell, young comrade; go out and meet the new dawning life, take your part in the battle, and put it into a new art; do this service for a new public, which you yourselves will make. [...] That your creative gift shall not be content to make artworks, but shall at the same time make a world [...]*⁷⁰

Twentieth century dictatorships might have overshadowed this call for an emancipatory propaganda art, but in recent decades artists and thinkers involved in various popular mass movements have in similar ways emphasised how new forms of emancipatory power enable new artistic morphologies.

Writer, curator and activist Lucy Lippard, for example, has argued that → feminist artists should be at the frontline of redefining propaganda, as they have the embodied experience of having been excluded from the patriarchal canon of art. For Lippard, the feminist influence on the art of the 1970s is key to articulating a feminist propaganda, drawing from the multidisciplinary practices of performance, video, film, music, and poetry readings, but most of all “meetings” – the physical assemblies of people as a form of artistic practice in its own right.⁷¹ This, in her words, shows an alternative understanding of an “intimate kind of propaganda”, one that is “inherently feminist” in the manner in which it introduces personal and intersocial relationships as a propaganda practice.⁷²

Such a proposition of an intimate, affective propaganda resonates with contemporary discourses on radical → ecology, which attempt to enable new interspecies coalitions between human, non-human and more-than-human subjectivities, which Donna Haraway describes as a practice of “sympoiesis”.⁷³ Such expanded ecologies manifest in movements like Extinction Rebellion, and form in Haraway’s view the possible foundation for new forms of emancipatory propaganda. In her own words:

*I don’t work by simplification and I am rarely drawn by art that works by reduction. And I am a polemicist. An ideologue. I think doing really good propaganda is something we really got to figure out how to get better at. I’m really interested in propaganda as a form that need not be full of alt-anything, that can be a practice of collecting each other up and telling important truths with certain kind of tonalities.*⁷⁴

From anti-colonialism to socialism, and from feminism to radical ecology, we can trace how different forms of emancipatory power enable different artistic morphologies, in the → process of collectively constructing new realities. I believe this also enables us to look differently at contemporary art practices that are intimately

69 Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart* (San Diego: Simon Publications, 2003), 9.

70 *Ibid.*, 386.

71 Lucy Lippard, *To the Third Power: Feminism, Art, and Class Consciousness* (New York: Dutton, 1984), 117.

72 *Ibid.*

73 Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 58.

74 Transcribed from a lecture by Donna J. Haraway, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (25 March 2017), 67’23”, <https://vimeo.com/210430116> (accessed August 2019).

rooted in popular mass movements and emancipatory politics at large. From Matthijs de Bruijne’s work in the Dutch Labour Union, to Tania Bruguera’s “useful art” in undocumented platforms, and from Not An Alternative’s campaigns for environmental movements to the Rojava Film Commune’s creation of a revolutionary cinema for the Kurdish uprising in north Syria.

It is in this particular historiography that I consider myself a propaganda artist. Meaning, that I seek to develop an artistic practice → situated in emancipatory political parties and popular mass movements.

In our present time, terms such as “fake news”, “alternative facts” and the “post-truth condition” have become common vocabulary, resulting from the propagandas of an increasingly global authoritarian-capitalist order. To overcome this geopolitical threat, we need to commit to new forms of emancipatory power and visions of governance that act at the scale of the political, economic and environmental crises that we are facing. And subsequently, as cultural workers, we need to contribute narratives and → imaginings that can agitate, educate and mobilise the various collectivities to make the construction of a new social, decolonised, → feminist and radically ecological reality possible.

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situated, p. 148
imaginings, p. 197
feminist, p. 28

Epistemic diversity Maria Iñigo Clavo

MACBA, Barcelona, September 2019

Looking for models of epistemic diversity triggers challenges that make visible the limitations of our Western methodologies. My focus will be on two questions: firstly, how we might find symptoms of these limitations through an epistemological dialogue, which provides an opportunity to know them better to overcome them; and, secondly, how to search for new political models that could emerge.

Diversity vs. difference

In the context of multicultural criticism in the 1990s, we understood the dangers of speaking about cultural *diversity* and the self-complacent postmodern umbrella that did not challenge this colonial order but merely administrated a landscape of subordinate and commodified cultures. On the one hand, it was important to return to the narration of history to recognise the genealogies of these colonial powers. This was the main achievement of postcolonial theory: to reconnect cultural studies with a history of cultural power relationships. On the other hand, the concept of *difference* appeared as a contestation of the idea of diversity. Through difference, we could get rid of this capitalist umbrella and get back to the Deleuzian idea of the self, which could be fully acknowledged in its singularity without comparison with any original or any *same*.

Cultural difference vs. colonial difference

Authors such as Homi Bhabha took the concept of culture to defend the idea of cultural difference as that place of negotiation between spaces of utterance in cosmopolitan contexts.⁷⁵ This culture-based difference was contested by authors including Anibal Quijano to underline the fact that culture was, after all, the tool of colonisation *par excellence*. Speaking about “cultural difference” was thus simply another Westernised form of definition that used the tools of colonial domination.

75 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

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feminist, p. 28
ecology, p. 162
process, p. 251

So, from Latin American contexts we started to speak about the colonial difference to acknowledge the living power relationships that were at stake.

“Culture”

What is “culture” ultimately? Among certain Tupi peoples, “culture” is not → translated from the Portuguese language. It is simply a tool for visibility, for getting funding, for participating in political struggles. What culture is for them is something different, something else. This means the sense of (Western) “culture” is involved in the language of macro-politics.⁷⁶ Lina Bo Bardi, in Brazil in the 1950s, spoke about pre-artisanship to defend the idea of popular culture as detached from the market, “popular” as something that exists in the cracks of the official and insists on maintaining what the official wants to erase: popular knowledge.⁷⁷ In the text of her exhibition of popular art, displayed in front of the São Paulo Art Biennial in 1959 (the main symbol of Brazilian internationalisation), she remarked: “We could have chosen Central America, Spain, Southern Italy, or any other place where what is known as ‘culture’ has not yet arrived” (*Bahia em Ibirapuera*, 1959). Thus, she was already thinking of the distinction between Western “culture” (in quotation marks) and popular culture.

Knowledge/politics

The decolonial perspectives developed in Latin America and now so popularised globally have a very strong legacy in their 20th century theorisation, closely linked to Marxist and nationalist macro-politics. There is a strong tradition of intellectuals’ participation in politics and parties in these countries during the revolutionary process, and especially up until the 1970s. This meant that the language of this genealogy of decolonialists during the nineties – which shaped a great part of the hegemonic Latin America postcolonial theory – has an important structuration from this macro-political tradition. That is why Boaventura de Sousa Santos takes such concepts as “baroque” or “anthropophagi” as the banners of Latin-American political *identity*, without taking into account their participation in internal colonial ideologies.

Fixations

Besides, one consequence of the Euro-American language of civil rights in the post-colonial debate is the strong fixation on identarian positions and the legitimisation of strategic essentialism for political purposes. I still think this essentialism could be an efficient tool to question racist cultural and discursive stability in Latin America, as it activates an absent civil-rights vindication of these countries’ sub-citizenships. But I agree with Rita Segato⁷⁸ in calling these identities “canned” (*enlatada*), looking (once again) for the construction of universality, overlooking changing migrant identities, detaching them from history – Segato notes the necessity of affiliation to the history of identity – and other power relationships. This is precisely how modern Western epistemology operates, by separating. For example, the concept of the Afro-Brazilian was not based exclusively on race, but was also strongly linked to spiritual/*candomblé* practices that have been consolidated through collabora-

76 Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, *Cultura con Aspas* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2010).

77 Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The aesthetics of liberation* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 54.

78 Rita Segato, *La nación y sus otros* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros, 2007).

tions between white and black elites (both local and international) since the 1930s in Brazil.⁷⁹

Subject-origin-shamed

It is impossible that Western societies do not essentialise themselves, as the Mayan anthropologist Aura Cumes has stated.⁸⁰ That is why Bhabha insisted on the compulsive fixation of the stereotype and its ambivalence in the colonial encounter in Western culture during the 19th century, creating relationships of hate and desire with its colonial objects. This Western process of fixation is still alive in the macro-political postcolonial language. Segato wonders if there is not an alternative approach that can use the very tools of oppression to achieve → liberation, which for me means to interrogate effective political frameworks beyond the modern macro-political strategies that are reproducing this oppression when forgetting common class struggles.

It is interesting that Segato defines this postcolonial political identity as “subject-origin-shamed”, as susceptible to receiving this model of “canned” identities. Shame is an emotion that can become chronic → after a traumatic experience of rejection but can also appear when the subject experiences regret towards themselves. I wish to extend this emotion of shame to the figure of the guilty – the other who is subject-origin-shamed in the processes of recognising itself as the figure of the oppressor, taking advantage of their privileges, → disappointed in themselves. Could this shared *shame* be a space of utterance or of the production of knowledge? I would like to think that museums could contribute to performing collective mourning and heal this toxic shame through acknowledgment.

Active thinking

The culture of guilt and punishment present in our debates in recent years is proof of how our modern system of jurisprudence has been internalised in our society and everyday life, how modern institutions weigh down upon us. Often this looks as if the political problem should be embodied in the figure of guilt in Western society. In our current fragmented landscape, how might we protect active thinking against the reactive one that uses a language of guilt, blaming our peers, and personal self-defence? In this → process of the collective construction of knowledge, mistakes are the most valuable resources and tools we have for collective → learning, in which each place of utterance could highlight the blind spots of another.

Our other we (*nuestras otras nosotras*)

Winaq is a term that Mayan → translators Ajb’ee Jiménez and Hector Aj Xol Ch’ok⁸¹ use to speak about the expansion of regimes of personhood in some Mayan epistemologies, a category that is based on communication and the interrelation of individuals and on an important attachment to history and ancestralism. Being a human is not a guarantee of being considered a person/*winaq*, as this will be something to be activated in a relationship, interaction, and communication. This idea of personhood is based on the transitional and community-to-be, the *same in the*

79 Roger Sansi, *Fetishes & Monuments: Afro-Brazilian Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Beghahn Books, 2010).

80 Maria Iñigo Clavo, “Conversation with Aura Cumes on Maya epistemology, postcolonial theory and the struggle for identity” *Re-Visiones*, no. 11 (2021), <http://www.re-visiones.net/index.php/RE-VISIONES/article/view/239> (accessed September 2019).

81 Ajb’ee Jiménez and Hector Aj Xol Ch’ok, *Winaq. fundamentos del pensamiento maya*, non-commercial attribution (BY-NC).

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translated, p. 153

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liberation, p. 116
after, p. 160
disappointed, p. 179
process, p. 251
learning, p. 136
translators, p. 153

difference and – which is more important – speaking with other communities using what Jiménez and Aj Xol called *our other we*, “our heart is attached to them.” Indigenous scholars such as Sara Hunt have insisted that when Western academics try to understand Amerindian cosmologies they seek to fix them (as our epistemology does), which is to miss the processual knowledge of their communities, the importance of the “becoming” in which something/someone comes to life and receives the status of personhood.⁸² Could these categories help us? Or would they quickly be absorbed by the Western Hegelian language of fixation, separability, and determinacy.⁸³ Could these concepts of continuity between parts promote other community inscriptions?

Diversity

What if we return to the concept of *diversity* – not as relativism, but as an attempt to create a system of equivalences – to get back to the collective and in partnership with the concept of epistemology as a way to challenge this separation and create new models of conversation and coexistence that, it is to be hoped, will lead to new ways of political action beyond modern strategies?

I took the concept of epistemic diversity from the context of the UFSB (Federal University of Southern Bahia) curriculum and the “Encuentro de Saberes” (Meeting of Knowledges) project launched at various universities in Brazil. This project was born from the struggles of getting quotas in Brazilian universities since 2002. It was greeted with very strong resistance among the academics in Brazil, as there was a strong tradition among social scientists and anthropologists that reinforced the official argument that inequality and poverty were a cultural question and not a racial one. As Segato pointed out, she could not accept this sense of “culture”.⁸⁴ All this literature will be contested by new generations of scholars in the future that are now starting to have access to the classroom – even though the system of quotas is under threat from the Bolsonaro government. “Encuentro de Saberes” consists at the moment of the introduction of artisans, masters, indigenous agents, and Afro-Brazilian activists into the classroom, which contributes to modifying the hierarchies between scientific and popular knowledge. This was a way to look after all these forms of knowledge denied by Western academia, to re-evaluate them in society and address the precarious and devalued place they now have in communities. The idea was that these presences could gradually change the structure of Eurocentric, Western academia in a transversal way.⁸⁵

This project could be an example of the politics of reparation in museums and universities: rather than being places where these forms of knowledge are represented, they would become sites of utterance that could change institutional rules. For these communities to attain access to self-representation from within their own epistemological frameworks connects to their access to rights. In this project, history and the way we tell history would be a fundamental tool for epistemodiversity: as the Māori anthropologist Linda Tuhiwai Smith claims, “to hold alternative

82 Sarah Hunt, “Ontologies of Indigeneity: The Politics of Embodying a Concept”, *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2014), 5.

83 Denise Ferreira da Silva, “On Difference Without Separability”, *Incerteza Viva: 32nd Biennial of São Paulo*, eds. Jochen Voz and Julia Rebouças, exhibition catalogue (São Paulo: São Paulo Biennial, 2016), 57–65.

84 Segato (2007), 149.

85 There is a potential debate on whether it is better to create departments of “popular forms of knowledges” or to continue considering them as guests.

histories means to hold alternative knowledges.”⁸⁶ Which institutional strategies could we bring to attempt this epistemic diversity? How to hold a dialogue when sharing neither vocabulary nor methodological frameworks? What I think is very interesting about this project, is how it would make visible the limits (and limitations) of our epistemology to better understand the barriers for a transgressive transformation.

We can now analyse, in the following two examples, certain frictions in these attempts to create epistemic diversity and how our tools reveal their limitations in this process.

Epistemological counterpoint

One of the criticisms of Jose Carvalho’s decolonial theory is precisely what he called “epistemological counterpoint”. In its original sense, a counterpoint is a form of music in which one or more melodies are added above or below a given melody, blending into a single harmonic texture.⁸⁷ This is when Western scholars acknowledge something that they could name as ethnomathematics, ethnomusic, ethnomedicine – reinforcing their standards of highly rigorous Western disciplines used as a framework for this ethno-derivation. So, the challenge would be to recognise epistemological sovereignty and show our capacity to have a conversation when there is no shared vocabulary and no shared methodological framework. The challenge of teaching is now related to empowering our students to validate and authorise their cultural and epistemic potential to contribute to a global dialogue from their own experience. This involves obtaining new competences – that is, lecturing and → learning from our students’ cultural experiences and, at the same time, constantly rethinking and questioning our own frameworks.⁸⁸

Knowledge – spirituality

The Meeting of Knowledges project raises new questions about how such forms of knowledge should be allowed to be present in academia precisely when, as Michel de Certeau indicated, there is a common perspective among all sciences in about what is to be carefully excluded.⁸⁹ So here is one of the challenges, and the project soon reached the conclusion that is not possible to separate spirituality from knowledge production. The invited teachers – *sabedores* (“those who know”) – included spiritual practices in their lectures on medicine and curative plans, turning the classroom into a ritualistic space. So, spirituality is precisely what cannot be captured by rationality – *prendre* (capture/trap) appears in Eduard Glissant’s explanation of the etymology of the French word *comprendre* (comprehend, understand). In 2016, the Federal University of Minas Gerais included a series of courses by spiritual leaders of the matrix of African religions in its curriculum, as the university community was interested in learning more about them. But can – or should – spirituality be taught? Is it possible for an institution such as a university to deal with the contradiction of acknowledging precisely what science has dismissed

86 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

87 José Carvalho, Juliana Florez and Mancel Martínez, “Encuentro de Saberes, hacia una Universidad pluriépistémica”, *Saberes nómadas, derivas del pensamiento propio*, eds. Nina Cabrá and Camila Aschner (Bogotá: Universidad Central Bogotá, Serie Encuentros IESCO, 2016).

88 Rita Segato, *La crítica de la colonialidad e ocho ensayos, Y una antropología por demanda* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2015).

89 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 74.

in its very constitution?⁹⁰ In this case, what is at stake is not just our resilience to having an interlocution without sharing methodologies or epistemological frameworks, but also challenging the Western capacity to deal with the → unknown and opaque, and to escape the fantasy of control provided by the sciences and their performance of Hegelian separability and determinacy.⁹¹ Thus, it means to deal with the → untranslatable, the indeterminate. What would be the political consequences of not fixing and incorporating what has not been named or perhaps should not be named?⁹² Could we → learn ways to heal without naming? Both fiscally and emotionally in our Western culture?

I would like to think that creating frameworks for epistemological sovereignty could help us to find new strategies to amplify our political landscape of emotions, irrationality, senses, spirituality, doubt, → vulnerabilities, uncertainty, fragilities, instincts, intuitions... But I do not want to suggest that these epistemologies are somehow pure and separated from Western culture, or that they could be defined (and fixed) in a simplistic way. For example, in the 1980s the Maya movement in Guatemala spoke about Mayan nationalism as a modern concept and imposed a certain kind of spirituality as identarian ownership of the community. While this is no longer active it still has resonance among some people. The May 2019 exhibition *Resistance now!* – curated by Kaingang MA students at the Museum of Archeology and Ethnography at the University of Sao Paulo – presented artefacts of their community as part of the Museum collection. They did not call into question the display grammar of the discipline of ethnography – and the ceremony dance that opened the exhibition in which we all participated was preceded by a tribute to Jesus Christ.

90 Boaventura de Sousa Santos wrote “Ciencias sociales no somos capaces de mirar la espiritualidad porque no hay indicadores para eso, como no hay indicadores para la felicidad... pero necesitamos una epistemología que dé cuenta de eso”, *La Sociología de las Ausencias y la Sociología de las Emergencias: para una ecología de saberes*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2006).

91 Ferreira (2016).

92 Of course, an epistemological dialogue does not suggest a cultural purity of agents that are not involved in the Western way of life (lecturing at Central Saint Martins, I was once questioned by a philosopher whether there really was a different epistemology among indigenous people). There are some comments on this question in the list of the “top ten” ways to dismiss indigenous knowledge made by some indigenous scholars from Canada: “secondary and subservient relation to other fields of study” (which ultimately means to question its credibility). Cheryl Suzack, “How the Academic Institution Silences Indigenous Faculty: Top 10 Strategies”, *Second Annual Indigenous Women’s Speakers’ Series. Politics, Knowledge, Ecology, Culture* (Toronto: Centre for Feminist Research York University, 2019).

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unknown, p. 245
untranslatable, p. 153
learn, p. 136
vulnerabilities, p. 208

*Is there a Doel in → southern China?*⁹⁵

*The threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A Schwelle “threshold” is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word schwellen, “swell”.*⁹⁶

From the perspective of a contemporary art museum in Antwerp, a museum that has also engaged in the last two major blocks/corpora in the oeuvre of artist and writer Allan Sekula, *Ship of Fools* and *The Dockers’ Museum* (2010–2013), it is quite obvious to propose the notion of the harbour as a topos for the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* that L’Internationale, the confederation of European contemporary art museums, has been developing.⁹⁷

During our seminar talks (*Geopolitics II* at MG+MSUM) in Ljubljana, Meriç Öner’s presentation intrigued me. And the thoughts she shared with us on the term “→ instant” – as “a chance to break away from time, space, and the constructed human mind” – triggered my bringing into the discussion the literary term “tarrying.”⁹⁸ I would first like to respond to her “instant” with “tarrying” and then come back to discuss “harbours”, the term M HKA is proposing.

In his book *Über das Zaudern* (2007), translated *On Tarrying* (2011), the German philosopher Joseph Vogl seeks to unpack the notion of tarrying.⁹⁹ In tarrying, he sees the potential of motion set forth precisely out of movement and motion itself. Tarrying does not suspend action. Rather, it marks an interstitial space between acting and not acting, an interspace, in which contingency is revealed. It contributes to the complexity through which events in history may be traced back to their point of origin in order to be revised and set forth. Vogl understands tarrying not as passive hesitation or indecisiveness, but rather as an extremely active state and moment of great intensity. A moment that denotes the → interval, a temporal suspension. As such, tarrying arrests the flow of movement. It resists mere continuation. It marks an incision, a break, in which potentiality is augmented. This interruption nevertheless remains relative to its inherent movement. Hence tarrying, as Vogl underscores, cannot be reduced to dithering or indecision. Rather, it allows for moments of conscious reflecting in a time of instantaneous judgement.

Tarrying, for Vogl, can be understood as a countermove: the advancement of our “reality” is interrupted in tarrying. Tarrying, implies the intuition that it could be otherwise, that an alternative may be possible. Vogl offers an analysis of tarrying as a sustained mode of subversion. Our present time, he writes, is character-

93 We have added the plural “s” to our initial term “harbour” thanks to a kind note from Jesús Carrillo to the author.

94 This text has been conceived in the framework of my PhD in Curatorial Research, as a member of the research project of which Hilde van Gelder is the principle investigator: *Art Against the Grain of “Collective Sisyphus”: The Case of Allan Sekula’s Ship of Fools / The Dockers’ Museum (2010–2013)*, jointly developed by KU Leuven, Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture and M HKA.

95 Allan Sekula in an unpublished artist notebook, NB 102 (20xx), undated note. Collection Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Allan Sekula Studio.

96 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), 494. Cited in Joseph Vogl, *On Tarrying* (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2011), 91.

97 Bart de Baere in an email conversation with the author.

98 See Meriç Öner, “Instant” on page 51.

99 Joseph Vogl, *Über das Zaudern* (Zurich-Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007).

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southern, p. 71, 73
instant, p. 51
interval, p. 119

ised by the constant preparedness for attack: “Aiming and targeting make up its programme.”¹⁰⁰ What possibilities, he asks, remain at our disposal? For Vogl, it is precisely the arrested time of decision-making, in which decision-making itself is suspended temporarily. Tarrying, Vogl explains, means such state of suspension – distending and enlarging the present.¹⁰¹

Tarrying is elliptical, rather than denoting a full stop: it disrupts linearity.¹⁰² In this way, tarrying, according to Vogl, opens the → temporal, spatial gap; it is both “is and isn’t”, “may and may not”. It is as a point of disorientation to orient oneself. Hence, tarrying, as far as Vogl is concerned, allows for a going backward and forward. It allows for a shift in direction, a change in speed and tempo. Tarrying understood in these terms is a space, opened to potentiality.

“Now the fact is that the world is notoriously und uncommonly manifold, which can be put to the test at any moment if one just takes a handful of World and looks at it a little more closely.”¹⁰³

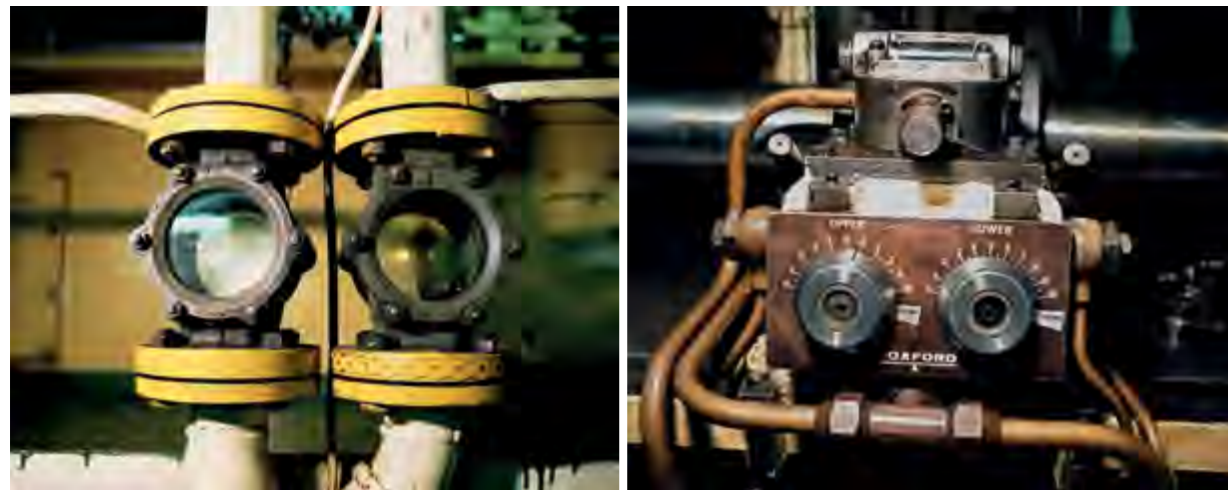
What follows is a reworked script for my presentation at MG+MSUM.

From outer space to the harbour

In *Historiae Animalium*, the Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner writes about a Jenny Haniver in the 1550s. It is one of the earliest entries of this seemingly “outlandish” creature. Jenny Hanivers are actually modified taxidermied ray, skate, or guitarfish carcasses that populated the Belgium ports in the 16th century. At that time, it was believed that the creatures had magical powers. Often, the carcasses found their way into cabinets of curiosity. The name, it has been suggested, was given by British sailors in their linguistic transformation of the French “jeune d’Anvers” (“youth of Antwerp”) to Jenny Haniver. Yet there is no clear source to confirm this.¹⁰⁴ (Figure 13)

In keeping with the “outlandish” for a moment longer in our reflections on harbours, we take recourse to Voltaire’s *Micromégas* for the “extra-terrestrial perspective”

Figure 13: Allan Sekula, *Engine room eyes 1–3*, 1999–2010, series of 3, 101.6 x 127 cm, chromogenic prints mounted on Alu-Dibond and framed. The Estate of Allan Sekula, Los Angeles.



100 Vogl (2011), 121.

101 Ibid., 124.

102 Ibid., 91.

103 Franz Kafka, *Blue Octavo Notebooks*, cited in Vogl (2011), 120.

104 The myth of the Jenny Haniver has inspired Antwerp-based artist Michèle Matyn.

it provides us.¹⁰⁵ It is the reversal of perspective, or switching of viewpoint, which is of interest to us here. Writing in 1752, Voltaire employs the literary trope of the (space/sea) voyage. A *Philosophical Tale*, as the subtitle indicates, *Micromégas*, is also Voltaire’s larger-than-life protagonist: a giant from outer space.¹⁰⁶ The inhabitant of a planet orbiting Sirius, Micromégas and his companion from Saturn set out on a voyage in the direction of the Sun in search of other worlds. In their visit to → Earth, wading the oceans, it is in the Baltic Sea that the space travellers finally discover life. Micromégas and his companion first spot a whale, then a vessel. The travellers’ visit coincides with Maupertuis’ expedition. They notice the ship with the scientists on board on its journey back from Lapland, sailing across the Baltic.

Micromégas picks up the ship and carefully lays it in the palm of his hand to observe it. He and his companion show interest in what to them appears in “microscopical smallness”.¹⁰⁷ Despite employing a magnifying glass, the ship’s crew is too small to be seen by the space travellers. In crafting a hearing device, a kind of receiver to render sounds perceptible, it is nevertheless possible for the two visitors to perceive the crew by listening to their conversations. Soon, a dialogic exchange between sea and space voyagers begins. If the tale foregrounds questions of scale and perception, moving from mega to micro and vice versa, Voltaire uses outer space as a reference point to situate this early piece of science fiction.

If the previous seminar on the term “Geopolitics”, held in 2015, seems to have foregrounded terms related to the terrestrial, it may be pertinent to our discussion to consider and connect to those outer spaces that have long been seized by geopolitics, such as the world’s oceans – not to mention more recent ventures into the stratosphere and beyond. The term “harbours” opens up this primarily land-based thinking and lets us understand that space is larger.¹⁰⁸

We set out to approach harbours – spaces of friction – to reflect on their former function as spaces of encounter, asking: In which ways do contemporary harbours still reflect the relationality of the past (both hospitable to what came from outside and what was a base of departure)? And how may this serve our geopolitical understanding?¹⁰⁹

In contrast to the inhospitable environment of outer space and the ocean, harbours, etymologically speaking are considered hospitable, safe places, if “harbour”, derived from late Old English *herebeorg* refers to “shelter, lodgings, quarters”, a “lodging for ships; a sheltered recess in a coastline”, a “temporary dwelling place”, an “inn”.¹¹⁰

Antwerp, where the M HKA is located, is Europe’s second largest harbour, after Rotterdam and before Hamburg. Situated 80 kilometres inland, it boasts enormous docks, ships and cranes, as well as the largest lock in the world (Kieldrecht lock) on the left bank of the Scheldt. The river and harbour are subject to continuous dredging for ever more gigantic ships, with deeper and deeper draughts: indeed, in

105 Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence* (Cambridge: MIT Press Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997), 32.

106 Sekula held Voltaire’s *Candide, Zadig and Selected Stories* (Massachusetts: Signet Classics, 1961) in his personal library. *Micromégas* features in this volume.

107 Blumenberg (1997), 37.

108 Bart de Baere in an email conversation with the author.

109 Ibid.

110 Douglas R. Harper ed. “harbor”, *The Etymology Dictionary Online*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/harbor> (accessed October 2019).

recent decades there have been vast increases in terms of “economies of scale”.¹¹¹ If the contours of harbours are not definite, they are persistently retraced as they expand. Zones surrounding harbours lie in an imposed state of suspension: between the no-longer and the not yet. Like the polder village of Doel on the outskirts of Antwerp, to which this text’s opening citation refers to, struggling to survive against port expansion.

In reflecting on “harbours” we draw on the work of the late artist, writer, filmmaker, poet and activist Allan Sekula (1951–2013), in particular, what came to be his final, unfinished project *Ship of Fools / The Dockers’ Museum* (2010–2013), part of M HKA’s collection. Globalisation – the transformation of the world’s economic system – would not have gained grounds without the transformation of the maritime space, as Sekula poignantly remarked. (Figure 14) A space in which about 90% of today’s global non-bulk cargo is moved inside transferable containers, linking the shifting production sites of the global economy. Countering the myth underpinning neoliberal ideology of “painless flows of goods and capital”, the essay film *The Forgotten Space* (2009), co-directed by Sekula and the French filmmaker Noël Burch, reminds us that the sea “remains the crucial space of globalisation”.¹¹² The sea, for Sekula, is a trope of resistance. Maritime space, characterised by its slow and heavy movement, pushes against the common image of instantaneity, weightlessness and connectedness suggested by → air travel and cyberspace.

Figure 14: Allan Sekula, *Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 1–10*, 1999–2010, series of 10, 102.8 x 151.3 cm, chromogenic prints mounted on Alu-Dibond and framed. Collection M HKA, Antwerp.



111 Noël Burch and Allan Sekula, *The Forgotten Space*, USA, 2010, video,¹¹² <https://yaleunion.org/sekula-burch/>.

112 Ibid. At the time of writing this text, *The Forgotten Space* is on view at M HKA in Amberes, a group show curated by our colleague, M HKA’s senior curator Nav Haq alongside selected “objects of interest” from *The Dockers’s Museum*. A “Jenny Haniver” ray carcass looms over the exhibition room, as part of Matyn’s installation.

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air travel, p. 15

Harbours, Antwerp & Santos

Sekula’s materialist approach, at stake in *The Dockers’ Museum*, is grounded in the notion of “objects of interest” in this anti-museum and anti-archive: a non-art collection with objects sourced primarily via eBay. Sekula staged selected objects for the first time in the exhibition *Ship of Fools* at the M HKA in Antwerp and subsequently at the biennale held in São Paulo in 2010, forging a link between a historic port, Antwerp, and a new port, Santos, today the largest port in South America. The pairing of those two harbours was initially instigated at the level of historical documents (prints, photographs and postcards) while engaging with the local context and iconography. The space of reflection, then, where the artist locates his final project, is the interstitial space of harbours: the intermediary zone of the docks. Its relationality to other ports, to other docks makes it a space of potential linkage points. “The port” as opposed to the notion of the border, Sekula specifies, “can be networked to virtually any other”.¹¹³ What is at stake here is a going beyond binary relations. Sekula reads harbours by way of associating and articulating disparate ports and their workers together through sequential montage.

However, today’s harbours are increasingly difficult to read, not least to even enter. If sailors and dockers once were an intrinsic part of port cities, the last few decades have seen their labour caught up in the processes of automation, dislocation, and decasualisation. If we understand the harbour, akin to Benjamin’s *Schwelle*, as a threshold-zone, a zone of transit, transition and transport, and by extension the dockworker as an embodiment of this transition zone, what may be perceived as homely and familiar may also be perceived as alienating and estranging. This is how Freud understood the notion of *heimlich/unheimlich* which he developed in 1919. Note the hinge between both terms. The German term “*das Unheimliche*” was first coined by Ernst Jentsch in relation to psychology. Writing in 1906, Jentsch in his essay “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” expands on the feeling of uncertainty in the sense of the non-familiar in relation to literary figures, in seeking to discern whether the figure is actually a human being or an automaton, an uncanny double.¹¹⁴

Just like the docker has disappeared to a large extent on the harbour side, like the sailor disappeared on the city-side and with it their former places of lodging (think of Antwerp’s modernist building International Seamen’s House here, a lodging/inn and service facility for seafarers which was finally demolished/dismantled in 2013), the historic harbour, enclosing and sheltering with its different functions, has disappeared, and by extension the formerly thriving waterfront culture with its brothels and bars has also gone.

What radically transformed dock labour – and more so the whole port workings, cities and ocean-going vessels in the global supply chain of capitalism – arrived in the mid-1950s with the American invention of the standardised cargo container. An etymological reading of the term “cargo” from Latin *carricare* “to load a wagon or cart” is particularly telling here. “Cargo” shares the same roots as the term “carica-

113 Allan Sekula, notebook “07/31/2010 Brazil, NB 121:014 (2010)” reproduced in Sally Stein “Back to the Drawing Board’: Maritime Themes and Discursive Crosscurrents in the Notebooks of Allan Sekula”, *Allan Sekula. Okeanos*, eds. Daniela Zyman and Cory Scozzari (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 70–1. Collection Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Courtesy Allan Sekula Studio.

114 Ernst Jentsch, “On the Psychology of the Uncanny”, *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift*, no. 8.22 (25 August 1906), 195–8; no. 8.23 (1 September 1906), 203–5.

ture”, which may point to its subversive potential.¹¹⁵ In the act of passing through or across, in the passage from one place to another, the container withdraws from accessibility and visibility. By doing so, it suppresses the capacity to perceive and differentiate (consider the suppression of smell here). The second invention, also American, which globalised the labour market for seafaring was the so-called flag of convenience registry. This breaks the link between a ship’s flag and its actual ownership to avoid regulation. The global system has thus seized harbours as its support structures while keeping the cheap labour it needs under the flags of the convenience system.¹¹⁶

However, “because of the transverse nature of global flows” it is nevertheless possible, as Brian Holmes has noted, “to draw on the experiences of faraway acts of resistance”.¹¹⁷ In this respect, the dock worker becomes a connective link to social struggles elsewhere in the world. If the harbour contains the potency of the in-between, further characterised by the potentiality of interruptions and → intervals, in keeping with Holmes, to sense and engage in “the dynamics of resistance [...] across the interlinked world space is to recall “the solidarities and modes of cooperation that have been emerging across the planet since the late 1990s”.¹¹⁸

One such act of recalling and revisiting for Sekula in 2010, roughly ten years → after the WTO protest in Seattle, was the voyage of the *Global Mariner*, a converted cargo vessel, which circumnavigated the globe between 1998 and 2000, visiting 83 ports. A “meta-ship sailing in defence of the invisible toilers of the sea”, the activist vessel carried an exhibition about working conditions at sea, campaigning against the flag of convenience system.¹¹⁹ Sekula chronicled part of the voyage and the ship’s crew in a sequence of photographs and slides under the title *Ship of Fools*.

Why the docker?

With *The Dockers’ Museum*, Sekula reintroduces the figure of the docker and with it a large spectrum of working gestures and militant traditions at stake in harbours around the globe as sites of democratic struggles. Reinscribing the figure of the docker into the harbour, metaphorically, but also concretely, is to reinscribe not only an embodied way of experiencing the world, but also human agency “in the face of an automated, accelerated, computer-driven, and increasingly monolithic maritime world”.¹²⁰ Reinscribing the figure of the docker is at the same time recalling the many, now historic acts of mutiny, strike and protest that were instigated by sailors, dock and shipyard workers in the past, struggles that were fundamental to the formation of self-organised workgroups and autonomous trade unions.

115 Yet, the word “cargo” itself seems to have disappeared. Consider, in this instance, Sekula’s taking note of “old words and new”. In one of his notebook entries he registers “seafarers” having become “transport workers”; “cargo” having become “logistics”, Sekula, notebook “FS [Forgotten Space] Continuity 2009; POL [Polonia] Install 2009; NB 109:037 2009”, Collection Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Courtesy Allan Sekula Studio, in Sally Stein (2017), 72.

116 Bart de Baere in an email conversation with the author.

117 Brian Holmes, *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum in collaboration with WHW, 2009), 200.

118 Ibid.

119 Allan Sekula, unpublished note on scrap paper inside the artist’s notebook NB 68. Collection Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Courtesy Allan Sekula Studio.

120 Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 133.

Havens and Seas

Voltaire, in a letter dated 22 August 1753, notes sailors’ reflexive looking back on their adventures from the “safe” point of view of the harbour. Yet, he concedes, he does not know whether there exists such thing as a safe haven in this world after all.¹²¹

Ten years after the events, the Italian activist and intellectual Franco “Bifo” Berardi wrote a short manifesto marking the anniversary of the WTO protest in Seattle. In “Ten years after Seattle. One strategy, better two, for the movement against war and capitalism”, he argues for a withdrawal into safe havens (“haven” from Old English *hæf* “sea”, with the figurative sense of “refuge”, now practically the only sense used),¹²² not least to create a safe haven after all, in which to save the “memory of the past, and the seeds of a possible future”¹²³ (my emphasis). This move echoes the one made by Sekula when in 2010 he set up his project within the M HKA at about the same time that Berardi’s manifesto came out. The manifesto’s call for a monastic withdrawal was misunderstood by some, causing controversy, but it was not to be understood as a turning away from – but rather a revisiting of – the activism that shaped those past moments. Nor was it to be understood as an evasion or acedia.¹²⁴

In his manifesto, Berardi calls for culturally elaborating “a new paradigm based on the abandonment of the obsession of growth.”¹²⁵ This new paradigm would be aimed at “frugality, culture-intensive production, → solidarity” and at a “refusal of competition.”¹²⁶ Both Berardi and Sekula took “ten years after Seattle” as a trigger for their respective analyses. In the case of Sekula, this was to occupy him from 2010 until 2013, the year of his untimely passing. It brought forth *Ship of Fools* and *The Dockers’ Museum* in all their complexity.

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solidarity, p. 65

Instant Meriç Öner

SALT, Istanbul, May 2019

Geopolitics is the great acknowledgment of working through plans and projects, strategies and tactics. It gives blunt confidence to humans discussing the past and the future of other people and things. Its existence as an attitude is powered by its practicality. War and trade, success and festival merge and melt in its complexity. In its enormous capacity of containing all, it cannot actually be identified or bypassed.

With the mentioned highly adaptive qualities, the geopolitical, today, is inherent in human thinking. It is unflawed in sudden twists and turns, and as such serves the best of unprincipled, target-based actions. It bases its knowledge on calculations and most of the relationships. It is fed from the human mind, which was taught to think in multiplicities of affirmative or negative responses. Even in its seemingly

121 Blumenberg (1997), 37.

122 Douglas R. Harper ed., “Haven”, *The Etymology Dictionary Online*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/haven> (accessed September 2019).

123 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Zehn Jahre nach Seattle: Rückzug in sichere Häfen”, *Zeitschrift Luxemburg*, no. 2 (2010), 10–2.

124 Vogl (2011), 119.

125 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Ten years after Seattle: One Strategy, better two, for the movement against war and capitalism”, *Zeitschrift Luxemburg* (January 2010), <https://zeitschrift-luxemburg.de/artikel/bifo-berarditen-years-after-seattle-one-strategy-better-two-for-the-movement-against-war-and-capitalism/> (accessed September 2019).

126 Ibid.

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intervals, p. 119
after, p. 160

web-like, non-linear, living structure, it is actually only a system of repetitions, mostly of former fears and future doubts.

Sure, it is possible to point at the conflicts of geopolitics, but there are never dead ends. What makes it the darling of the 21st century is how resourceful the essence is. Funnily enough, as it's what humans have learned over time, it's also what the humans are trying to teach the non-humans. Just when earthly concerns are too great to stand still, yet the speed at which solutions are being developed and applied is far slower than needed, geopolitics is, unfortunately, more useful for the corporately organised.

The geopolitical's insidious reign over our thinking demonstrates itself in what institutions do when they attempt to build other networks and mimic its fundamentals. As it is not built on simple polarities but on time and space narratives, the attempt at overcoming this self-nourishing attitude requires non-binary measures.

"Instant" is one such proposal because through it there might be a chance to break away from time, space, and the constructed human mind.

Instant is not contingent. Only our interpretations make it relevant to the past or the future.

Instant is not repetitive. It is our ideas of moments that recur, never the actual moments.

Instant is not demanding. It supports neither targets and deadlines nor success stories.

Instant is not instrumental. Knowing that there is one thing that cannot be over-used emotionally or commercially is infinitely relieving.

Instant does not formulate grand scales. It works at the capacity of human perception, encouraging one to act and react based on one's own senses.

Every instant is specified by its own conditions. It cannot be ruled using pre-written commands.

Every instant is suggestive of other instants. The ones inside it are individually responsible for what comes next.

Every instant is reliable in its accuracy. It is one's duty to capture the full story within.

Every instant is one reality, and as such shuts down myriads of past and future obfuscations.

Every instant is more of life and less of an opportunity.

Needless to say the instant as a break away from the geopolitical reflex is not to be formulated. I merely tried to demonstrate both its abstract potential as a way of seeing life and, more importantly, trusting the human once again on its own scale, as well as its material gift as a means of sharing time and space with humans, animals, and plants.

At this moment in the 21st century, we see a new form of extractivism that is well underway: one that reaches into the furthest corners of the biosphere and the deepest layers of human cognitive and affective being. The stack behind contemporary technological systems goes well beyond the multi-layered "technical stack" of data modelling, hardware, servers and networks. The full stack reaches much further into capital, labour and nature, and demands an enormous amount of each. The true costs of these systems – social, environmental, economic, and political – remain hidden and may stay that way for some time.

It's necessary to move beyond a simple analysis of the relationship between an individual human, their data, and any single technology company in order to contend with the truly planetary scale of extraction. Vincent Mosco has shown how the ethereal metaphor of "the cloud" for offsite data management and processing is in complete contradiction with the physical realities of the extraction of minerals from the → Earth's crust and the dispossession of human populations that sustain its existence. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson use the term "extractivism" to name the relationship between different forms of extractive operations in contemporary capitalism, which we see repeated in the context of the AI industry. There are deep interconnections between the literal hollowing out of the materials of the Earth and biosphere, and the data capture and monetisation of human practices of communication and sociality in artificial intelligence (AI). Mezzadra and Nielson note that labour is central to this extractive relationship, which has repeated throughout history: from the way European imperialism used slave labour, to the forced work crews on rubber plantations in Malaya, to the indigenous people of Bolivia being driven to extract the silver that was used in the first global currency. Thinking about extraction requires thinking about labour, resources, and data together. This presents a challenge to critical and popular understandings of AI: it is hard to "see" any of these processes individually, let alone collectively.

Looking from the perspective of deep time, we are extracting Earth's history to serve a split second of technological time, in order to build devices that are often designed to be used for no more than a few years. For example, the Consumer Technology Association notes that the average lifespan of a smartphone is 4.7 years. This obsolescence cycle fuels the purchase of more devices, drives up profits, and increases incentives for the use of unsustainable extraction practices. From a slow process of elemental development, these elements and materials go through an extraordinarily rapid period of excavation, smelting, mixing, and logistical transport – crossing thousands of kilometres in their transformation.

Drawing out the connections between resources, labour and data extraction brings us inevitably back to traditional frameworks of exploitation. But how is value being generated through these systems? A useful conceptual tool can be found in the work of Christian Fuchs and other authors examining and defining digital labour. The notion of digital labour, which was initially linked with different forms of non-material labour, precedes the life of devices and complex systems such as AI. Digital labour – the work of building and maintaining the stack of digital systems – is far from ephemeral or virtual, but is deeply embodied in different activities. The scope is overwhelming: from indentured labour in mines for extracting the minerals that

127 Editor's note: During the GCK seminar, the term *New extractivism* was presented by Vladan Joler. He co-authored the text with Kate Crawford for the *Anatomy of an AI System* project published on <https://anatomyof.ai/>.

form the physical basis of information technologies, to the work of strictly controlled and sometimes dangerous hardware manufacturing and assembly processes in Chinese factories; from exploited outsourced cognitive workers in developing countries labelling AI training data sets, to the informal physical workers cleaning up toxic waste dumps. These processes create new accumulations of wealth and power, which are concentrated in a very thin social layer.

Current machine learning approaches are characterised by an aspiration to map the world, a full quantification of the visual, auditory, and recognition regimes of reality. From a cosmological model of the universe to the world of human emotions as interpreted through the tiniest muscle movements in the human face, everything becomes an object of quantification.

Jean-François Lyotard introduced the phrase “affinity to infinity” to describe how contemporary art, techno-science and capitalism share the same aspiration to push boundaries towards a potentially infinite horizon. The second half of the 19th century, with its focus on the construction of infrastructure and the uneven transition to an industrialised society, generated enormous wealth for the small number of industrial magnates that monopolised the exploitation of natural resources and production processes. The new infinite horizon is data extraction, machine learning, and reorganising information through AI systems of combined human and machine processing.

Such unrestrained thirst for new resources and fields of cognitive exploitation has driven a search for ever deeper layers of data that can be used to quantify the human psyche, conscious and unconscious, private and public, idiosyncratic and general. In this way, we have seen the emergence of multiple cognitive economies, such as the attention economy, the surveillance economy, the reputation economy, and the emotion economy, as well as the quantification and commodification of trust and evidence through cryptocurrencies.

“The ‘enclosure’ of biodiversity and knowledge is the final step in a series of enclosures that began with the rise of colonialism,” Vandana Shiva explains. In Shiva’s words, “the destruction of the commons was essential for the Industrial Revolution, to provide a supply of natural resources for raw material to industry. The commons, therefore, had to be privatised, and people’s sustenance base in these commons had to be appropriated, to feed the engine of industrial progress and capital accumulation.” While Shiva is referring to the enclosure of nature by intellectual property rights, the same process is now occurring with machine learning – an intensification of quantified nature. The new gold rush in the context of AI is to enclose different fields of human → knowing feeling, and action, in order to capture and privatise those fields.

Increasingly, the process of quantification is reaching into the human affective, cognitive, and physical worlds. Training sets exist for the detection of emotion, for family resemblance, for tracking an individual as they age, and for human actions like sitting down, waving, raising a glass, or crying. Every form of biodata – including forensic, biometric, sociometric, and psychometric – is being captured and logged into databases for AI training. The training sets for AI systems claim to be reaching into the fine-grained nature of everyday life, but they repeat the most stereotypical and restricted social patterns, re-inscribing a normative vision of the human past and projecting it into the human future.

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knowing, p. 245

Drawing out the connections between resources, labour and data extraction brings us inevitably back to traditional frameworks of exploitation. These processes create new accumulations of wealth and power, which are concentrated in a tiny sliver of society dominated by a few global mega-corporations, which are creating new infrastructures and mechanisms for the accumulation of capital and exploitation of human and planetary resources.

Occidentosis Vali Mahlouji

London, October 2019

The Moral Indigenous Rebellion

By the mid-1960s a significant paradigm shift transformed the modern political and philosophical landscape of Iran. As in much of the Third World, the shift focused attention away from a perceived need to *catch up with modernity* – which informed and energised much of the modernising movements of the early part of the 20th century – towards introverted versions of *nativism* and self-dialogues that, to lesser or more extreme degrees, revolved around a rejection of an essentialised notion of the West. The new paradigm shift was defined by an apparent moral indigenous rebellion against “cultural imperialism”. In Iran, as in much of the Third World, a correlation was applied: “imperialist aggression at the level of economy was, it was argued, matched by that at the level of culture”.¹²⁸ The idea formulates a clear correlation between the need to resist imperialism – advancing the causes of self-determination and sovereignty – and cleansing from (all that can be perceived as) *Westernism*. Such a rejection of ingested European influences and values was to liberate and oxygenate the decolonised man and to reconnect him with his locally authentic, unadulterated self.

Occidentosis

A loaded neologism was coined in the Persian language as early as 1959 by the philosopher and intellectual Ahmad Fardid: *gharbzadegi* (*occidentosis* or *westoxication*, literally meaning “West-struckness”). *Occidentosis* epitomises the idea that there is a “Western sickness”¹²⁹ from which the Third World must rise to detox and strive to cleanse itself. Purification of a locally authentic self and the revival of *ethnic memories*, in the words of sociologist Ali Mirsepassi, came to dominate the nativist thinking and purposes of significant portions of the intellectual polity in Iran in the 1960s and 70s.¹³⁰ That was particularly successfully exemplified by the new intellectualism of the Iranian writer and thinker Jalal Al-e Ahmad, who adopted *gharbzadegi* as the title of his most influential book in 1962. Al-e Ahmad, who had previously been a member of the Tudeh (Communist) Party of Iran, changed course and set out to attempt a synthesis between secular ideas and what he and some other prominent thinkers perceived as radical possibilities embedded in native Iranian Shi’ism. While Fardid’s *occidentosis* referred back to the corrupting (in his view) influences of ancient Greek thought on the Eastern world, Al-e Ahmad appropriated the term to encapsulate a modern malaise inflicted and perpetuated by the technological West, whose dehumanising and materialistic civilisation threatened Iranian society and alienated it from itself.

128 Fred Halliday, “The Iranian Left in International Perspective”, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (International Affairs, Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–), vol. 80, no. 5 (October 2004), 30.

129 Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33.

130 Ibid, 37.

In the immediate pre-revolutionary era in Iran, the discreditation of essentialised Western ideas and values – and those deemed to have been influenced by them – rose to become the ideological bedrock of much of the dominant and emerging political and philosophical discourses. The new return to Shi'ism as a vehicle for emancipation and progress is what the cultural theoretician Hamid Dabashi refers to as “theologies of discontent”.¹³¹ Ali Shariati (influenced, amongst others, by revolutionaries such as Frantz Fanon) also rose to prominence as another highly influential thinker and writer whose anti-Western philosophical position proposed Iranian Shi'ism as a valid and unique repository and scaffolding for formulating rhetoric and theory of → liberation. This movement embraced many more thinkers and philosophers than Fardid, Al-e Ahmad and Shariati, including Dariush Shayegan and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Orient-West binarism

The search for the “soul” and the desire and myth for cultural authenticity and of a return to a locally authentic ideology deciphered and delineated the ontological differences between “Oriental” and “Western” societies, setting up a Manichean Orient-West binarism. As a modern political discourse, this binarism contradicted the possibility of shared systems of thought and the cross-pollinations of intellectual traditions at its core. A direct and positive correlation was posited between subservience to Western colonialism and existential cultural *rootlessness*; liberation from the West was aligned with attainment of cultural authenticity. The background to these inventive essential articulations is to be sought in a political and intellectual disillusionment with Western and even universalist ideas of emancipation, liberation and progress. The disillusionments must be understood in several ways in relation to local and international political exigencies. The bitter political defeat at home in 1953, in the form of the *coup d'état* masterminded by the CIA – the first major CIA international operation that took the form of a regime change – distorted the political landscape in fundamental ways. It effectively crushed the Iranian nationalist and leftist movements, seriously dented a sense of national pride, and transformed aspirations of sovereignty. It also dislodged a historically intense engagement with international → emancipatory alliances (Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement), neutering Iran's potential as an emancipatory force in leading Third Worldism. Instead, locally, it consolidated a political system that, once again, rejected a constitutional monarchy in favour of autocracy. Internationally, it marked the embedding of Iran into the complex realities of the Cold War as a geopolitically vital player and an American ally, patrolling the longest stretch of the Soviet border beyond the NATO belt. The associated Cold War policies of a clamp down on communist, leftist and progressive intellectual, political, and labour unionist movements scarred and altered the political landscape of Iran, and by design and default frustrated Iran's national aspirations and injured its democratic process.

A far-right hijack

In this context, a total rejection of the West became the dominant discursive obsession, in many instances a hardened dogma. In the case of the ideas articulated by Al-e Ahmad, those defensive systems of thought went so far as to negate and dismiss the entire project of “modernity” as borrowed and learnt from Europe. Secular, universalist and leftist ideas were abandoned in order to invent a local

131 Hamid Dabashi, *Theologies of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Republic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2006).

Islamic modernity. The nativist alternative articulated as a response to the concept of *occidentosis* in effect proposed a transfiguration of “modernity” and an abandonment of, or at the least a divergence from, leftist universalist ideals. While this alternative did not propose the abolishment of the achievements of “modernity”, it nevertheless radically shifted thinking in Iran and rose to shape the course of history through the revolution of 1979. Khomeinism adopted *occidentosis* not only to transform but to fundamentally and structurally undo and abolish much of the progressive achievements of the “modernist” project in Iran. Detoxing from the West was co-opted, perverted beyond its already inherent ambivalences, confusions and contradictions, and morphed into a denouncement of the whole modern project to dismantle and remove from vision phenomena and agendas that did not comply with or perpetuate its method or practice, including the secularised penal code and essential structures of a democratic system.

Khomeinism's palingenetic and populist return to Islam was never a project of the “soul”. It was a form of populist → propaganda in order to drown out and stamp out all opposition, and to fuel and satiate a divergent revolutionary zeal amongst the masses. It established a socially and politically anti-liberal authoritarian theocracy, unprecedented in Iranian history, a totalising system beyond the → imagination of its intellectuals, progressives and political thinkers, including those who paved the paths of an invented return to a constructed authentic Islamic self. Here, modern citizens become mortals in the face of the divine; justice is defined and determined by divine law as interpreted by the religious clerics; ultimate, total power (judicial, legislative and executive) is bestowed upon a single individual with direct links to the divine – a spiritual leader (akin to a Pope with absolute powers). The myth of a return to the “soul of the self” is hijacked to establish the ideological foundations of the absolute rule of the divine over and above the institutions of the modern state in a promise of rescue from decadence.

In practice, Khomeini's interpretation of society and its relationship to citizens advocated anti-liberal and anti-socialist isolationism with the slogan: *No East, No West, Islam is the Best*. As a total opposition to universalist or internationalist ideas, Khomeini's ideology forged a rhetorical clash of civilisations, a standoff in which cultural differences had little to offer each other, except antagonism and incompatibly, imposing, contrary to the essence of Iranian sensibility and the course of history, a *turning of Iranian backs to the world*. And in a bid to impose a traumatically debilitating totalising system of control, he advocated at once for a detoxing from the West, as well as from the East (i.e., the Soviet Bloc). In concrete terms – symbolically and politically – a ferocious attack was unleashed on the progressive liberal and socialist values and ideas embedded at the core of the very revolution itself. Scores of revolutionaries, intellectuals and progressives were sent to face execution squads, consolidating the groundwork for the perpetuation of an immense project of violence and an ongoing, terrifying cleansing of the political and intellectual landscape in order to establish and consolidate a concretistic interpretation of society and theocratic system of rule. It is worth mentioning that in order to achieve its hegemonic establishment, the imposition of that monolithic system required the abuse and instrumentalisation of the deep psychic and real wounds – human, → ecological, sociological, psychological, ethical and spiritual – of a murderously unwarranted and unnecessarily prolonged eight-year war with Iraq. The inexorably ferocious dismantling and internal restructuring of socio-political structures were imposed upon history at great cost to Iranians.

→ liberation, p. 116
emancipatory, p. 35

→ propaganda, p. 35, 265
imagination, p. 197
ecological, p. 162

Deconstructing the “authenticity” of the nativist myth

Recent scholarship has compellingly challenged the notion of the pure, authentic self, especially as put forth by the proponents of Iranian sectarian nativism.¹³² The proponents of those concepts themselves, it is argued, derive their arguments not from any solid native cultural roots or local groundings, but from an intrinsically European, Heideggerian counter-Enlightenment position. The three prominent exponents of the nativist approach had definitive interests in European thinkers, more so than any indigenous philosophical strands: Fardid in Kant and Heidegger, Al-e Ahmad in Camus and Sartre, and Shariati in Heidegger and Sartre. According to the sociologist Ali Mirsepassi, far from being rooted in indigenous thoughts and exigencies, *occidentosis* and, indeed, the core intellectual drive of political Islam itself, can be traced back to the ontology of the Heideggerian critique of man.¹³³ “The frame of reference takes a giant step out of Europe and into → *Asia* and shifts the ontologically sanctioned dogmatism of Heideggerian ‘being’ to an Islamic ‘truth’”.¹³⁴ Overt hostility towards the ideas of the West is shown to conceal a much deeper original fascination with them.¹³⁵ The obscure amalgamation of Heideggerian metaphysics (his notion of the essence of truth as historical) and his critique of the soulless modern technological West with Iranian Shi’a theology seems to have produced a misleading and fateful blueprint for the revolutionary change that led to the tragedy of a right-wing, reactionary quasi-fascist take-over. Khomeinism successfully appropriated *occidentosis* as the mythic core of its populist form of palingenetic ultra-Islamism beyond man in a direct link to the divine.

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Asia, p. 71

Self-organisation Miran Mohar

Ljubljana, January 2020

If we don't organise ourselves, others will organise us!

What can you do if the country you live and work in has no developed art system that would enable artists and other art professionals to pursue their artistic activities and thus earn their livelihood? A system that would also encourage communication with other countries and be open to hosting foreign artists, thereby paving the way for local artists to be active abroad. If you don't want to emigrate from your country, the only solution is to take matters into your own hands and try to change your working and living conditions for the better. And a lot can be done even with limited production possibilities.

In post-World War II Eastern Europe there was and still is a huge dichotomy between high-quality individual art production and national art institutions, which, in most cases, are still rather undeveloped (or exist only in some basic forms) and very local in nature. Quite often, they are thus not only underdeveloped but also developed in the wrong direction. We, the artists, have therefore been motivated to create or co-create elements of the art system that would enable us to live and work in such harsh conditions. Self-organisation was and still is one of our most important tasks.

132 Refer to Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), and Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

133 Ali Mirsepassi, “The ‘Marvellous’ Life and Thought of Ahmad Fardid”, lecture delivered at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London (13 November 2013).

134 Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 118.

135 Ali Mirsepassi (2013).

We had no → choice – if we wanted to stay and work in our countries we had to construct our reality by accelerating the production of non-existing elements of the art system: organising public and private collections of contemporary art, producing and publishing theory, setting up appropriate educational institutions for contemporary art practice and theory, etc. Self-organisation in the context of Eastern Europe had (and still has) a different goal than in countries with well-established art systems, such as Western European countries and the USA. Institutional critique in the West is concerned with the excessive bureaucratisation of art institutions or their over-institutionalisation, whereas in Eastern Europe, with a few bright exceptions, good institutions have yet to be built. Practice has shown that poorly performing institutions usually cannot be reformed, and therefore new ones need to be set up in parallel with them in order to adequately serve the needs of today's artists and other art professionals.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, I have been involved, together with the IRWIN group, in various projects aimed at constructing the missing elements of the art system in the environment in which we live and work. The decision to establish the IRWIN group and work collectively with other NSK groups (Laibach, Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, New Collectivism), too, was linked with the undeveloped art system in Slovenia. By pooling the knowledge and economic resources of such groups, we were able to compensate to a substantial extent for the absence of art institutions and the lack of support. Such a mode of organisation enabled IRWIN to operate in all of Yugoslavia (as well as internationally) with relatively meagre financial resources and limited social capital (most of its members came to Ljubljana from smaller cities) from the very start.

When at the end of the 1980s our gallerist at the time invited us to move collectively to New York, we were seriously considering his offer. In the end, however, we decided that we would rather make regular trips to the USA and exhibit there but live and work in Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia). We understood that we would only be a few of the many immigrants there, and that it was important to do something for the environment in which we lived and worked. I believe we were among the first artists to have been living and working in Eastern Europe and exhibiting internationally, something we were already doing in the mid-1980s. Before that, artists who wanted to operate internationally and on a continuous basis had to immigrate to either Western Europe or the USA. But instead of relocating to the latter, we began to organise ourselves and construct our own reality. As artists coming from Eastern Europe, in addition to creating art works we also needed to create our own context. We were aware that if we didn't organise ourselves, others would organise us. This would have been much harder to do if we had not operated as a group. And of course, we were not the only artists in Eastern Europe who self-organised.

Similar practices can be found in a number of other Eastern European countries. In some of them, they appeared only from the 1990s on, because prior to that date such a mode of operation was not possible due to their political systems. Self-organisation can take various forms, from artists-run spaces, Apt Art (art exhibitions in private apartments in the Soviet Union) and *samizdat* publications, to archiving and historicising art phenomena, initiating art collections and setting up non-state art schools, which are as a rule more adjusted to the needs of contemporary art than older state → schools. Thanks to such initiatives, contemporary art at the highest level also began to be produced in countries where modern art production had been virtually non-existent until the 1990s, such as Romania, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Albania. A number of artists from these are now present in the international

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choice, p. 174
schools, p. 146

art arena, and their works are shown at important international exhibitions and included in collections of the world's best contemporary art museums, while several of them live and work in their native countries, which was almost impossible until quite recently.

I'm aware, though, that all these forms of self-organisation cannot replace well-functioning contemporary art institutions, which can ensure continuous art production through public funding or some other types of financing. The fact is that art initiatives, being temporary in nature, die out rapidly once financial support and motivation decline. Moreover, self-organisation strategies must be suited to the place and time they are being applied, because something that worked in the 1980s or 1990s is likely not suitable for the present. And finally, different art initiatives may enrich the art scene, encourage the development of new institutions and show that changes for the better can be made even without ample financial resources.

Shipwrecks

Jesús Carrillo

Madrid, September 2019

The term shipwreck joins two terms of modernity, the conqueror and the conquered: from beginning to end, two incommensurable narratives seamlessly sinking in the dark waters of the ocean.

According to the first Spanish chronicler of the West Indies, around 1530 the troubled stories of the drift and loss of so many soldiers and sailors were the way individual destinies nurtured the grand narrative of the Empire, providing both its inner structure and its ultimate truth.

Pre-dating Foucault, the only antidote against physical and spiritual disintegration was self-writing, and the chronicler followed. In order to escape anomy and ignominy each expeditionary would meticulously put his unspeakable experiences into writing: as in a confession, as if sending a message in a bottle to an → unknown addressee, ultimately a figure of the self. By the same token, the figure of the modern reader was also formulated – the stranger on whom we rely for a kind of understanding we could not expect from our compatriots, dazed as they were by the chants of mermaids.

The historian was consciously borrowing from Petrarch's gesture, 150 years earlier. Our first "modern" spent a life writing letters in Latin to the long-dead Cicero expressing his longing for a horizon unreachable from his imperfect present, for a time when individual and collective destinies, hand in hand, would finally unfold their promise. Petrarch's *Sonnets to Laura* tied his longing with masculine desire in an inextricable way.

But impersonating sovereign power from a volcano in Nicaragua, or from a Caribbean island whipped by hurricanes, involved submitting individual destinies to the service of the king and diverting intimate desires to climbing the ladder of the state structure. The interpretation of Columbus's personal "feat" was crucial for this narrative turn. In a twist of Petrarch's argument, discovery, the fulfilment of both collective impulses and the *plus-ultra* projection of Empire, was identified with the drift and loss of an individual adventurer, with his error and misdirection. Columbus's letters to the kings, explaining the eschatological dimension of his en-

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unknown, p. 245

terprise, ended up as the letters of a castaway, as mere literature with no legal consequence.

Betraying the hopes of the poet, the full accomplishment of desire, now translated into the systematic conquest of the Other, was transferred to the abstract realm of the State. In the meanwhile, the heroic narrative of the individual was displaced to the margins: to a perpetual, futile and narcissistic search for the self, a knot that is still binding the account of the fragile Western subject.

Nostalgia, a form of homesickness, was first diagnosed in the 17th century by a Swiss doctor as a syndrome which was rapidly spreading among the many sailors and others who had left their home countries for distant lands. Nostalgia is the defining sentiment of the modern castaway. "Nation" and "society", both objects of nostalgia and projects for the future, something to preserve and something to kill and die for, conveniently came to alleviate the Oedipal trauma.

→ After this, art and literature would serve as the logbooks for the endless trip of the self, accounts of the endless quest performed by an individual launched into the → unknown and who hopelessly crashes against the reefs of their own impotence. Walter Benjamin reminds us of the melancholic structure of the modern narrative: "our subjectivity recognises its own misfortune in absolute evil". Self-writing, writing in exile, would sustain the exploration of new seas to sink into. Loss was a meandering path to individualisation. As Duchamp would say – "Art is like a shipwreck; it's every man for himself".

Corresponding with the key moments of the colonial process, literary and artistic shipwrecks, from Shakespeare to Defoe, from Tintoretto to Géricault, counterpointed the sordid expansion of the imperial accumulation machinery. The troubled story of the self, of the only survivor, after a ship has been sunk, was plotted under the shadows cast by the sunlight of imperial expansion.

Despite its futile nature, without the figure of the wanderer, the modern individual would be unsheltered, as Cervantes harshly reveals. Beyond the anachronistic fantasy of Don Quixote, there was only a miser and an opaque present, unable to reflect any value whatsoever. Between iniquity or madness, we should better pursue meaning within ourselves, even if it is an ultimately pointless quest.

The untold story sustaining the narrative of the wandering subject, who recognised his individual self in the shipwreck, was the domination, exploitation and killing of a faceless "Other" deprived of singularity. The realisation of impotence had a self-legitimising effect, excusing the Western subject from taking any responsibility with regard to the annihilation of millions executed on behalf of collective progress and civilisation. By the same token, it also prevented any → empathy or alliance with the subjects of domination and enslavement, who were personally blamed for interrupting the narcissistic process of self-recognition. Racism.

Since its inception, colonialism developed through a massive sinking of the stories which both underlie and contest the narrative structures described above. These shipwrecks provide the → dead material that is the compost upon which Western discourses of both individual loss and collective destiny germinate and grow.

The stories of the slave, the deprived, the refugee and the exiled tell of a collective sinking which articulates forms of subjectivity that are radically different from

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after, p. 160
unknown, p. 245
empathy, p. 192
dead, p. 227

those of the Western castaway. Their nameless bodies, stacked in a ship's hold or floating lifeless in the sea, cast a different kind of shadow.

As constituent parts of the grand narrative of Western domination, they played the role of the other to be submitted. Both feared and despised, we imagined them dark, fugitive, ambushed; uttering unintelligible languages and plotting a community in the shadows; cannibals endangering our physical integrity, which should be defended through taming and subjugation, through conversion and civilisation. Each Robinson Crusoe needs his Friday, but he will never get to really know his real name.

Beyond that colonial other the only radical alternative to Empire was piracy, a viral and parasitic practice in which individuals rejected the expectant passivity of the castaway in order to embrace a more predatory activity of the outlaw. Stemming from the same centrifugal impulse as Empire, piracy defined a subject position opposed to that of the colonist. Unlike most of his contemporaries, the pirate charted his actions in the world following his own will to avoid the submission of his personal destiny. His status was not based on the search for the self and the domination of the Other, but on the boundless unfolding of an outlaw subjectivity.

Always moving, always lurking, pirates did not use maps to arrive at any → harbour, but in order to trace the routes of the vessels they wanted to intercept. Pirates were not longing for a home to go back to, but for a slum in which to celebrate their loot with rum and sex, where nobody would recognise them. Without a → territory or a nation, the boat was the pirate's place and the crew his tribe. The boat, as Foucault reminds us, is the perfect heterotopy "a fragment floating in space, a place without place. Both enclosed in itself and abandoned in the infinite sea". A pirate ship was, like a *quilombo*, a self-managed space whose main and only ruling principle was enabling those who stayed there to live beyond the law.

Crippled, endowed with a diffuse racial identity and loose sexual behaviour, the pirate exceeded the norms which were defining the modern body. The tattoos on his skin were both a declaration of sovereignty over his own body, and a way of blocking off a return to civilisation.

The pirate, as a rebel indigenous person or fugitive slave, lived without alibi or excuses for the dislocation of lives, times and spaces provoked by the colonial process. He made this structural violence and cruelty the logic of his existence, turning them against the dispositives of exploitation, distribution and accumulation designed by the colonial system.

Disconnected from the accumulation and territorialisation circuits, piracy gradually faded away as an alternative to the state, leaving its trace in the romantic → imagination of the triumphant Western bourgeoisie. Three centuries of piracy also resulted in the development of new navigation technologies and the merging of mercantilist capitalism with tactical thinking and autonomy of action. As an ironic updating of such transference, Eyal Weizman – a member of Forensic Architecture – told us about the use of Deleuze's theory by the Israeli army in order to plan military campaigns in Palestine.

In a period when a new wave of colonial enterprise and the Industrial Revolution coincided, Marx proposed a common → emancipatory narrative for both the proletariat and the colonised and enslaved populations: that of class struggle. In re-

sponse European nationalisms, allied with capital, worked to deactivate the promise of an *Internationale* of "les damnés de la terre". This promise was enunciated, we should not forget, from the axiomatic view of a European who imagined a seamless community of exploited workers all over the world.

During the 20th century, the decolonisation → process attempted at articulating the voice of an untamed Friday: a new voice which emerged from the debris of the shipwreck and from the spell of alterity in order to bear witness in the trial of colonial domination. This new voice was to → rehearse a narrative which was not that of the master, nor that of the proletariat. Decolonisation coincided with the end of the Western revolutionary project and with the posthumous re-articulation of a leftist discourse in which the lament of the castaway, the song of the old, romanticised survivor of the shipwreck, was taken as a life raft.

We are thus facing, on the one hand, discourses grounded on centuries of sinking and annihilation, but also of resilience and survival, and on the other, discourses which assume the shipwreck as a destiny, but are unable to give up their alleged intellectual, political, and – why not say it? – racial superiority.

The obstacles impeding an alliance between the racialised migrant multitudes and the increasingly precarious European populations cannot be easily circumvented. The confused left in Europe is neither able to understand this disaffection, nor able to recognise our own responsibility in the massive sinking taking place on our shores, or just, perhaps, as a narcissistic reflection of our own shipwreck. Those, on their side, cannot find in the discourses of the European left anything but self-blaming versions of the same civilising discourses which justified first the occupation of their lands, and now their expulsion to the seas. They are seen, at best, as occasional support on the path to survival.

The Raft of the Medusa by Géricault contrasts the active attitude of the young African who is using his last energies to attract the attention of the distant vessel, with the passive attitude of the mature man who is holding the naked body of the → dead efebo lying on his lap. Whereas the dignified features of the old European are clearly shown, we can only see the anonymous muscled back of the young African. Of him, we only know his vital strength and instinct for survival.

As in Géricault's painting, in the contemporary sinking, we are still imposing our Western mindset to manage the lives and deaths of others, unaware of the fact that it is precisely us, who have already given up, who cannot even imagine a rescue.

In a world as seen from a satellite, where nothing or nobody can hide, the narrative of the modern castaway does not seem to take place anymore. In the same way the rediscovery of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the 15th century banished both monsters and paradise from the surface of the → Earth, GPS has now erased the image of the wanderer, his loss and his hope to be found.

Where there is no place to hide, nobody can be found. Paradoxically, technological hypervisibility produces radical invisibility. As Julian Barnes narrates in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, today's castaways do not cherish the hope to be seen, since there is no lookout in modern boats, and they are technically invisible to instruments of geolocalisation, which are not designed to look for them.

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harbour, p. 45
territory, p. 269
imagination, p. 197
emancipatory, p. 35

→
process, p. 251
rehearse, p. 260
dead, p. 227
Earth, p. 21

The nightmare described by Barnes reveals the ontological dimension of our contemporary loss, and explains the nature of our malaise metaphorically. Without a lookout scanning the horizon and without a possible receiver of our message in a bottle, the Western subject has lost one of the foundations of its constituent narrative. In a hyper-represented universe, the longing, reflective modern self would no longer have anyone to write to or to read, being exposed to the storms with no other shelter than a hyper-thin technological membrane.

One may think that these circumstances would provide conditions for the possibility, if not urgent need, to plot new narratives, common narratives, deriving from the storms in which we are all living. However, even if the two founding narratives of the West – seamless expansion and shipwreck – have been swallowed by the maelstrom of late capitalism, their images have not disappeared but instead re-emerge under a ghostly guise.

Devoid of narrative tension, of the capacity to provide our current catastrophe with any possible meaning, as Aeneas expected from collective storytelling, their ghostly images haunt us, libidinally exhausted, but avid to placate our anxiety and fear. Unable to raise our eyes to look for a remote sail on the horizon, we calm ourselves through the contemplation of those spectres, projecting a melancholic, aestheticising gaze.

Many of us think that → feminism, as an open-ended discourse of emancipation, is Ariadne's thread we need to leave the labyrinth. Firstly, because of the patriarchal structure of the Western castaway narrative: Narcissus paralysed in self-contemplation. If we do not interrupt the circularity of masculine desire, encouraged today by a new wave of regressive clichés, we will not be able to dissipate the ghosts which impede us to recognise our raft companions on their own terms, and ourselves as one among many.

Secondly, feminism unties the knot which binds the narcissistic inscription of the self with the indifference to the annihilation of others, allowing new inter-subject relations based on the common → care of life.

Thirdly, because feminism emerges from the denunciation of a structural inequality which affects the management of life at all levels. By contesting such inequality, feminism is also contesting the subordination to a sovereign law which decides which life should be preserved and which could be wasted, orienting all energies, wills and desires to the caring for and reproduction and transformation of all forms of life.

Fourthly, it radically questions the mythic structure of the dual scheme governing our thoughts, → imagination, desires and actions, releasing the possibility to think, imagine and act together in many different ways.

Lastly, because feminism is common, it does not belong to anybody. It is a non-expropriated discourse of emancipation which may allow us to recognise within ourselves the will and capacity to survive a shipwreck.

In order to exorcise the paralysing sense of loss, it may be useful to follow the old traces of the pirates, rehearsing a pirate, nomadic, feminism – a *quilombo* feminism – which may articulate new subject positions from the principles of dissidence and no-return.

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feminism, p. 28
care, p. 92, 122
imagination, p. 197

Solidarity¹³⁶ and storytelling. Rumours against enclosure.

In 1971 the young Mauricio Gatti was held prisoner in an old military barracks in Montevideo. He was not alone. The younger of two brothers, he had followed his older sibling into anarcho-syndicalism, and they were detained together with many of their comrades who belonged to the student section of the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, called Resistencia Obrero Estudiantil.¹³⁷ It is said that they were the first political prisoners of Uruguay.¹³⁸ The detainees themselves probably knew this was not true, for “all prisoners are political prisoners”, as the poet Diane di Prima wrote at the time in one of her *Revolutionary Letters*,¹³⁹ For Gatti the isolation of imprisonment was felt most deeply in relation to his three-year-old daughter Paula. For her he created a story about a group of animals living in the jungle, as a way to communicate why he was behind bars, separated from her. He did this through correspondence, or more precisely through drawings-as-letters. The idiosyncratic figures are made up of simple geometric compositions that are not quite abstract, but rather playful shapes – seemingly capable of moving around freely and wandering off the page. The storytelling process was created through these letters, which Mauricio's wife, Paula's mother Martha, smuggled out of prison. The words were developed orally, throughout the many months that Mauricio spent in prison, during which his daughter would occasionally be allowed to visit. While Mauricio was still detained, this epistolary exchange with his child began to take the form of a book – through the help of comrades living in Comunidad del Sur, an anarchist commune whose members ran a printing house to support themselves. Ruben Prieto, one of the founders, who like many other members of the commune had studied fine art, was a friend and comrade of Mauricio. In 1972, after Gatti's release and with the editorial care of Comunidad del Sur, the letters to his beloved Paula were turned into a book for all ages, and the publication was distributed in resistance circles in Uruguay.

Titled *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* [In the Jungle There Is Much to Do], the book tells the tale of a group of animals trying to organise a better way of living together. It begins by describing what each of the animals does, the ways they contribute to common life in the jungle, and a rundown of their skills and labour, including the sharing of reproductive work and → care of the young. Despite the watchful owl who tries to make sure no one disturbs the animals at work, the fire they have made for their meeting is detected by a hunter, who hides and waits for them all to arrive. The hunter, who “knows nothing of the jungle”, waits for and catches each animal that arrives for the gathering. The captured animals are taken to the city and locked up in a zoo, which is “not a place where animals live long or well”. The animals → revolt when the hunter tries to force one of them to eat a small worm, and their collective “NO” takes the form of constructivist-like shapes that travel

136 Editor's note: In the previous edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, the term “solidarity” (2018), 259, was interpreted by Rasha Salti during the Commons seminar in a case study for *Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978* exhibition that she co-curated with Kristine Khouri.

137 Mauricio Gatti was the younger brother of Gerardo Gatti, a well-known anarchist leader and founder of the Partido por la Victoria del Pueblo. He was kidnapped and murdered in July 1976 in a coordinated operation between the Uruguayan and the Argentinian dictatorships.

138 They were held in what was called the CGIOR (Centro General de Instrucción para Oficiales de Reserva), a military building now known as the exCGIOR. It was used by the Uruguayan state before and during the dictatorship as a torture and clandestine detention centre.

139 See Diane di Prima iconic poem “Revolutionary Letter N39”, *Revolutionary Letters* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1979).

→
care, p. 92, 122
revolt, p. 142

over the city, across the water, all the way back to the jungle, where they reach the free animals. They in turn send a letter, carried by a little black bird with a red beak, telling how happy it made them to hear the animals refusing to be pushed around; letting them know that the work they had started is being continued by others; and that their little ones are growing as beautiful and tall as jungle flowers. They also put themselves at the disposal of the locked-up animals to help them break out of the zoo. A grand escape plan is developed. Some of the free animals make the trip to come to the imprisoned animals' aid – including a seal dressed up as a guard. The plan is successful thanks to the valuable everyday knowledge of the city provided by their human friend and ally, a little girl who had been visiting them every Sunday.

→ After the Uruguayan military coup on 27 June 1973, Gatti, together with many of his comrades, fled to Argentina. They – mistakenly, it turned out – assumed that it would be a less brutal context for them to clandestinely continue their work. His daughter Paula and newborn son Felipe ended up returning to Montevideo together with their mother. The book for all ages made by Gatti with the help of his comrades remained in Uruguay and circulated by hand. A kind of anarchist fabulation, the book conveys political prison in a manner capable of engaging sensitive young children on their own terms. (Figure 15) It did not patronise or undermine

Figure 15: Mauricio Gatti, *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* [In the Jungle There Is Much to Do], 2019, 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. Photo: Alex Ostojki.



the astuteness of small children in coping with the complexities of political violence. Using the interwoven languages of drawing and rhyme, it spoke to the world of a child by applying the anarchist pedagogic principles of → learning from one's surroundings, from one another, and particularly through action. The book was and is a poignant portrayal of the injustice of prison, motivated by the love of a parent separated from and longing for their child. But it is not, or not only, a story of longing and loss, but a fable about the struggle of living a life broken by violence

→ after, p. 160
learning, p. 136

and enclosure. It connects the turmoil of incarceration to the struggles of children enduring the warfare of life under authoritarian rule. It articulates a language that connects these struggles. In this sense it is, above all, a fable of solidarity. The book published in Montevideo was to be the first of a series called *ediciones solidaridad*, although these plans were interrupted by the military dictatorship, as was the life of the Comunidad del Sur commune, whose members also had to flee into exile. The logo for the interrupted solidarity series, used in the first edition of the book, was Gatti's drawing of a little black bird carrying the message written by the free animals of the jungle. (Figure 16)

Figure 16: Mauricio Gatti, *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* [In the Jungle There Is Much to Do], 2019, 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. Photo: Alex Ostojki.



Word-weapons/word-dance

Rumours and the stories that they circulate are often referred to as something one has been told by “a little bird”, words shared without having to follow the conventional routes and constraints of communication, messages able to fly above and beyond buildings, fences, and walls. For the Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña, words themselves are capable of becoming small, winged beings, fluttering in to tell us their stories. Vicuña relates how the military coup in Chile – which took place on 11 September 1973, just two and a half months after the one in Uruguay – intensified her vision of these hovering words, which she turned into a kind of word-splitting doodle-poems she called *palabramas*. Their name can be read as *palabrar-más*, which in Spanish means “to word-more”, and also as *palabra-arms*, or “word-weapons”, Mauricio Gatti's solidarity bird actually entails both of these aspects. The words gifted by the free animals become weapons of sorts for the animals in captivity. They connect their struggles and give shape to a common language, making it possible for them to escape.

One of the first *palabramas* produced by Cecilia, who was in London at the time of the coup, was based on the word “solidarity”, in Spanish *solidaridad*, which she rearticulated as *sol y dar y dad*. Her way of rearming the word had nothing to do with its accepted etymology, coming from the Latin *solidum*, meaning “a whole sum”, “to make whole”, or “to make solid”. Cecilia the poet was a fierce young woman, but the military coup did not make her come together with others to become solid and strong. Instead, as she describes it, “Suddenly I became a living volcano”.¹⁴⁰ Imagining Cecilia frenetically at work on her small word weapons – like Gatti and his little animals – becoming a flood of lava, alone and far away from her loved ones, overflowing with simultaneous rage and → *vulnerability*, somehow provides an important preamble to the making of her *palabrama* for solidarity. *Sol y dar y dad* (in English “to give the sun”, or more precisely “to give and give sun”), in the multiple graphical and textile versions made by the poet-artist, shows different variations of open hands gifting the sun, reaching out to something that cannot be held, but that holds one together with others. This is precisely what the letters of Gatti’s story do – both the word-weapon-device dropped by his small black bird with a red beak in the animals’ cages, and his own letters for his little girl. Their agency transcends and is at the same time powered by the affective relations that they sustain and support. As with Cecilia’s solidarity *palabrama*, Gatti’s letters are not so much visions or images of hope, but articulations of an insurgent etymology: a slicing, opening up, and multiplying of words, to release the multitude of stories and relations normally kept inside.

Unleashing these multiple stories opens up a question that is a very urgent one in relation to solidarity, a question that is pertinent not only to Gatti’s book but to his life story: How to be in solidarity when there is no possibility of being solid or whole, but when things are broken and vulnerable? As a *palabrama*, *sol y dar y dad* sets these stories into motion. It is not a programme or definition, but a word-dance of political restlessness. The poetry of Mauricio Gatti possesses the same kind of restless beauty, posing questions that are all the more urgent today: What can solidarity mean? What does it mean for people living it, practising it, and in need of it? Can it be danced when needed most by bodies in loneliness, when the only other movement that is felt is the weight of fascism and state terrorism pressing against them?

Each character in *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* looks like they could break into dance at any moment. So it is not at all surprising that almost immediately after being published, the book was turned into an animated film. This animation was created by a group of young architecture students working with the Cineteca del Tercer Mundo (C3M), an important hub of radical filmmakers, film distributors, and producers based in Montevideo, which existed from 1969 until it was shut down and their equipment confiscated in 1974 by the dictatorship. Three members of the C3M, Walter Tournier, Gabriel Peluffo, and Alfredo Echániz, came together to form the Grupo Experimental de Cine to make a short animated film based on Gatti’s book. The adaptation was very close to the original publication, working closely with Gatti’s drawings and turning the verses into a song. They finished the animation in a makeshift way, handcrafting it under precarious conditions and while working in secret. They managed to screen the animation twice in Montevideo before the filmmakers and most of the C3M group were arrested and/or went into exile. It was their first and last film as a group, and the last production to come out of the C3M. The animation was smuggled out of the country, winning several

140 She tells this story in Camila Marambio and Cecilia Vicuña, *Slow Down Fast, A Toda Raja* (Berlin: Doormats, 2019).

awards in subsequent years.¹⁴¹ It was shown in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the context of human rights campaigns in solidarity with Latin American resistance to authoritarian regimes, and in support of the growing numbers of exiles and refugees from the region who were spread out all over the world. Most copies of the film were eventually lost, as they continued to travel following the routes of those who had been displaced.

The book itself had a similar trajectory. A new edition was made in Spain in 1977, where it was republished by Ediciones Solidaridad of the Centro de Información y Documentación del Tercer Mundo (Information and Documentation Center for the Third World) in Barcelona, where Gatti was living in exile. It was almost identical to the Uruguayan copy, except for one change of colour in the introductory pages. The very deliberate black and red pages introducing the book were altered to a more amiable green and red (a change the Comunidad del Sur anarchists would not have approved). There are also two German language editions, which were published as colouring books, one produced in Switzerland (1979) and another in East Germany (1987). The first is a → *translation* that tries to be very respectful of the original text and message, while the latter by the lyric poet Heinz Kahlau is more an adaptation than a translation, and captures the original’s spirit of transgenerational language, rhythm, and rhyme. The way the drawings were reproduced in these German language versions indicates that the originals were retraced by hand. Many years later, in 2002, a French edition was published and is still distributed by Amnesty International. It followed a new edition by the Comunidad del Sur group, which had renamed their editorial house Nordan during their exile in Sweden and which republished the book in the year 2000 after some members had returned to Uruguay and re-established the commune. In every case, the book was self-published by very small editorial houses or by political organisations that recognised the importance of spreading *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* as a necessary story, as a contemporary weapon of solidarity that should be put to use. Despite the artistic quality of Gatti’s work, the film and storybook are known almost exclusively within the small niche of human rights and political refugee solidarity networks, particularly those with links to Latin America and the wave of refugees fleeing authoritarian regimes and their criminal abuses during the 1970s and 1980s. Those who republished it, almost always without permission, did so in the spirit of understanding it as a story that cannot be owned but must belong to everyone.

Mauricio Gatti’s book has the luminosity of Cecilia Vicuña’s *sol y dar y dad*, but it is equally a story of a broken life. Within four years of being released from prison in Uruguay, Mauricio Gatti’s brother, Gerardo Gatti, his pregnant niece Adriana, and her partner Ricardo, were murdered in Argentina in 1976, added to the number of Uruguay’s disappeared – all victims of the infamous *Plan Cóndor* (Operation Condor). Mauricio Gatti’s comrade and new partner Sara also became a political prisoner and spent five years in different detention centres. Just weeks before being kidnapped, she gave birth to a baby boy, Simon, who was taken from her and disappeared. Sara was released in 1981 and relentlessly searched for her and Gatti’s child from then on, finding their son almost a decade after Mauricio passed away in 1991. Mauricio himself barely escaped the secret military police raids that killed every single other person who had a leadership role within his political organisation. The sole survivor of the core group, he went into exile to Barcelona, where he

141 On the animation see Mariana Villaça, “As representações políticas na animação *En la selva hay mucho por hacer*”, *ANPUH* (São Paulo: Symposium, July 2011). On the C3M see Tzvi Tal, “Cine y Revolución en la Suiza de América – La cinemateca del Tercer Mundo en Montevideo”, *Araucaria: Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades*, vol. 5, no. 9 (2003).

remained well into the 1980s. In a way it could be said that writing *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* was the closest he would be allowed to get with his little girl, for whom the book was written.

The story of the artist Mauricio Gatti and this book is not one of reparation, of getting over trauma, but one of brokenness. The void created in people's lives through incarceration, disappearance, and torture is not something that allows for reconciliation – there is no way to move beyond the catastrophe of retroactive and perpetual isolation. *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* is a story of living within trauma, of organising despite it, of solidarity occurring against the odds of crushing enclosures. It is not a tale of healing, but a fable of insurgent action and a “solidarity of attack”¹⁴² set into motion – of life and struggle in all its complicated violence and beauty, striking back at us. (Figure 17)



Figure 17: Mauricio Gatti, *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* [In the Jungle There Is Much to Do], 2019, 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. Photo: Alex Ostojski.

Now, over forty years → after the book was first compiled, it is a radically different time for refugees. No one then could have imagined that more prison and detention camps would exist today than at the time it was written, many of them located here in Europe, precisely in those countries that at the time welcomed those political refugees fleeing death and disappearance. How can we explain that an increasing number of children not only experience separation from their parents who are incarcerated for political reasons, but they themselves suffer the perils of torture and imprisonment. Given today's carceral capitalist regimes, the need for developing a language to address these experiences seems crucial. The question of how to be in solidarity when things are broken and fragile is not a philosophical one, but a practical one. The storytelling that unfolds in *En la selva hay mucho por hacer* offers a language for speaking to one another, to be used not only for surviving but

142 In the same year that Gatti was in prison, Mariarosa Dalla Costa wrote the following about feminist solidarity: “[it must consist] of breaking the tradition of privatised female, with all its rivalry, and reconstructing a real solidarity among women: not solidarity for defence but solidarity for attack, for the organisation of the struggle” (1971) *Women and the Subversion of the Community: A Mariarosa Dalla Costa Reader* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019).

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after, p. 160

also for attacking the (systematic) warfare of enclosure through the help of an owl, turtle, snail, fish, tiger, elephant, seal, bird, and street-savvy little girl.

For being extremely patient and generous in answering my relentless questions, I would like to thank Laura Prieto from Comunidad del Sur, Walter Tournier and Gabriel Peluffo, members of the Grupo Experimental de Cine, and the sociologist Gabriel Gatti. I am particularly grateful to Paula Gatti, Felipe Gatti, Martha Rodríguez-Villamil for supporting and making this publication possible.

Southeast Asia Chương-Đài Võ

Hong Kong, November 2019

Explorers, cartographers and rulers have called this part of the world Further India, the East Indies, the Malay Archipelago, Indochina, Nusantara (Javanese for “Outer Islands”), and Nanyang (Chinese for “South China Seas”). It appears endlessly through the lens of ethnography, geopolitics, premodern glory, and fetishistic fantasies.

The question of what constitutes the region we now call Southeast Asia is at the centre of various projects by the artist Ho Tzu Nyen. These works explore how narratives construct shared identities and beliefs; genealogies of authorship and authority; and shape-shifting and amorphous characters.

This return to history appears in Ho's 2015 video film *The Nameless*, a pastiche possibly about a real-life figure who had more than fifty names. His aliases included Lai Teck, Loi Tak, Lai Te, Lai Rac, Nguyen Van Long, Hoang A Nhap, Pham Van Dac, Chang Hong, Soh King, Mr Wright, Mr Light, Wong Show Tong, Wong Kim Gyock, Ah Le, Ah Lin, and the Lenin of Malaya. He was born in Nghe An or Phan Rang, in present-day central Vietnam, or Saigon, circa 1900. He was active in the communist parties in Indochina, Hong Kong, Canton, and Shanghai, and was recruited for training in Moscow around 1930. After being jailed and passed between the British and French security forces, he became a spy for the British and the Japanese in Singapore, and even the Secretary General of the Malayan Communist Party. He betrayed countless people to police and colonial forces, became known as “the greatest traitor in the history of the Malayan Communist Party”, and was himself assassinated, supposedly suffocated in Thailand. We can read Lai Teck as a metaphor for the countless nameless people who had to navigate the treacherous and constantly shifting borders of uncertain futures.

This was during the tumultuous interwar years of the 1920s to 1940s when anti-colonial movements from the Indian subcontinent to Indochina gained momentum despite repeated suppression by the European colonial powers. Concurrent with these seismic shifts was the rapid transformation of Japan into a modern military force eager to become an imperial power itself. Having proven its might in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), Japan represented to the future leaders of colonised Asia the urgency of modernising their societies as a means to rid themselves of their oppressors. These future leaders also navigated the Scylla and Charybdis of shady and dangerous alliances with imperial powers and regional factions, at times forced to put aside their reservations to achieve strategic goals towards national → liberation.¹⁴³

143 For further reading, see Christopher Bayley and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Allen Lane, 2004); and Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997).

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liberation, p. 116

For his Vietnamese and Mandarin, two-channel synchronised video, Ho casts Tony Leung Chiu-wai as the Nameless. The Hong Kong actor has starred in nearly one hundred films, a repertoire of ready-made performances that Ho spliced together to create a fragmentary narrative. We see Leung as the gangster poet in *Cyclo* (Tran Anh Hung, 1995), the romantic Chow Mo-wan in *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar Wai, 2000), the devious politician Mr. Yee in *Lust, Caution* (Ang Lee, 2007), and the legendary Ip Man of the Northern School of kung fu in *The Grandmaster* (Wong Kar Wai, 2013). (Figure 18) These characters lived in times of monumental shifts – the embrace of the market economy by the Communist Party in Vietnam, the anti-British → revolts and flood of immigrants from mainland China into 1960s Hong Kong, and Japanese colonialism in 1930s and 1940s China and Hong Kong. Taken together, these characters are studies on the nature of identity – its contingent and shifting performances of stability amidst chaos and the role of storytelling in shaping our memories and perceptions of larger-than-life figures.



Figure 18: Ho Tzu Nyen, *The Nameless*, 2015, synchronized double channel HD projection on 2 sides of a screen, scrim wall separation, double 5.1 sound systems, duration: 21'51". Courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue Gallery.

The fiction of this retelling is ever present in the conflict between the audible and visual. The voiceover presents a chronological narrative of Lai Teck's ever-changing identities and betrayals, a man whom the film tell us is "every name in history". We see the same actor over three decades, but the Nameless himself is a mélange of characters and indexical images taken out of context. The film is held together by a series of repeated gestures cut from different films – the character smoking, fleeing, hiding, entering a room. Like history, the story comprises motifs and scenes that with repetition suggest coherence. It is a narrative of performances, of characters entwined in treachery and uncertainty.

This meta-narrative abounds with fabricated stories, unreliable narrators, and fantastic representations. In tracing Lai Teck as a historical figure, *The Nameless* offers a non sequitur to the simplified structures of colonialist, nationalist and popular representations of a place called Southeast Asia.

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revolts, p. 142

The term, which I deliberately crossed out, is related to my long-term research on the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). *Southern Constellations* is also the title of the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM). (Figure 19) With "southern constellation" I referred to the potentiality the movement envisioned through principles such as peaceful co-existence, respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, and equality of its members in the period from the first NAM conference in 1961 to the ninth one in 1989, both in Belgrade. I presented the term "NAM" at the GCK seminar on geopolitics in 2015. To summarise: the NAM was a transnational political movement with a strong → emancipatory agenda, a coalition of small and middle-sized states, mostly former colonies and developing countries, as well as → liberation movements from the Global South or Third World. It was an anti-imperialist, anticolonial and antiracist movement, and as such represented the first major disruption on the Cold World map. The NAM still exists today.

After we opened the *Southern Constellations* exhibition in March this year I had to give the term southern constellations some "distance". I also looked more thoroughly into the idea of constellation itself. We are familiar with the meanings of this concept in the Western tradition, and the word itself comes from the Latin *constellatio*. In philosophy, the term constellation denotes an important aspect of Adorno's negative dialectics; in astronomy, it signifies the position of stars. As far back as 1,800 years ago, Ptolemy described 48 constellations. But Westerners/Northerners were first introduced to southern skies only in the 16th century, when Andrea Corsali, sailing on a Portuguese ship to India, described and drew the Southern Cross. Aboriginal people in Australia knew and had a name for the Southern Cross (*Mirrabooka*) long before Corsali, as did other peoples of the southern hemisphere. A constellation is therefore a hegemonic, "fixed" star pattern and as such signifies cartography, colonialism and capitalist expansion. Constellation was also the name of NASA's cancelled space programme 2005–2009. But at the same time there exist other concepts of constellations. For example, the Incas knew "dark-cloud constellations", and for them, the dark matter between the southern stars represented living forms, animals such as Yacana (llama), Yutu (bird), Mach'acuay (serpent).

Another concept that constantly reappeared in my research on the NAM and the Third World and demanded to be approached from a different perspective was



Figure 19: *Southern Constellations: The Poetics of the Non-Aligned*, curated by Bojana Piškur, 7 March – 10 September 2019 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM), Ljubljana. Exhibition view of *From Bandung to Belgrade* installation by Riksa Afiaty, Iramamama, Sekarputi Sidhiwati and Syaiful Ardianto. Photo: Dejan Habicht/Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

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humanism. In the 1960s and 1970s, the NAM placed humanism at the centre of its political and social agenda. It was a kind of humanism that took as its starting point the life of the peoples and societies that had been forcibly placed on the margins of the global economic, political and cultural system. It was the kind of humanism which Fanon constantly demanded in his writings (he ends his book *The Wretched of the Earth* with a call that we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and seek to create a new man¹⁴⁴); it was the kind of humanism that “fuelled the Third World resistance”. But it was also the kind of humanism that became obsolete over time. It is clear that humanism as a “possibility of human becoming” simply does not suffice anymore. “The age of humanism is ending”.¹⁴⁵ wrote Achille Mbembe a few years ago. Instead, humans in the new humanism are “co-evolving, sharing ecosystems, life processes, genetic material, with animals and other life forms.”¹⁴⁶ Can the “old” humanism and humanist values, such as peace, → solidarity, and equality, that the NAM promoted still be considered → emancipatory or just “naive anachronisms”?

The world has shrunk (or better: it has shrunk for some, though not for all of its inhabitants) in the past few decades, mainly because of globalisation and the rapid development of technology. But this is not something utterly new, and was predicted by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto 150 years ago: they wrote about the need for a constantly expanding market for products, cheap labour and the growing demand for natural resources. Colonialism was also a form of globalisation. It is worth reading Samir Amin’s views on globalisation in this context (his interview “Globalisation and Its Alternative”¹⁴⁷), such as his views on how the old globalisation broke down in the late 1980s and how the new “global Monopoly Capitalism” has taken its place. The neoliberal globalisation has generated not only resistance in the South, but elsewhere as well because of the huge problems – the inequality – it has created.

But there was a time when economic, political and social prospects seemed different and more optimistic for the South than they have been in the last few decades (even though it is difficult to compare the economies of the South then and now). We are talking about the period between the 1960s and the 1980s when the NAM’s main focus was on the economic and political development of its member states. This trend was not only based on creating alternative political alliances (i.e. alternative mundialisations), but also on economic independence from the First World and its institutions, such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund), GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and World Bank. These institutions were fiercely attacked by developing countries (a euphemism for less developed economies that is still used today) because of their protectionist practices in favour of the developed countries. In 1979, all developing countries together had just 30 votes in the IMF, the same number as the US alone. Another example is the fluctuation of the prices of raw materials in relation to those of industrial products. If we take the 1953 index to be at 100, by 1973 it fell to under 60, which means that in 1973 almost twice as much raw materials had to be sold (that is, exported from the de-

144 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 239.

145 Achille Mbembe, “The age of humanism is ending”, *Mail & Guardian* (22 December 2016), <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-12-22-00-the-age-of-humanism-is-ending/> (accessed 25 May 2019).

146 Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 8.

147 “Globalisation and Its Alternative: An Interview with Samir Amin”, *Tricontinental Institute for Social Research: Political Notebook*, no. 1 (29 October 2018).

veloping countries) than in 1953 for the same quantity of industrial products (from the developed countries).¹⁴⁸

Because of such discriminatory treatment, the developing countries and the NAM created UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) in 1964, where 77 countries formed the G-77 group. Raul Prebisch (the first Secretary General of the UNCTAD) produced a report “Towards a New Trade Policy for Development”, a kind of manifesto of developing nations which is still worth reading today. Prebisch provided a critique of Western trade and aid policies, and argued for reforms of the international trading system which would benefit developing countries. At the 1973 NAM conference in Algeria, the “New International Economic Order” was established. Some of the NIEO principles were: the right to nationalise foreign economic resources, fair prices for raw materials, regulating the activities of multinational companies, providing financial assistance to developing countries (at a rate of 0.7% of the gross national income) and differentiation of developing countries (with priority given to the least developed).

From today’s perspective, the new world economic order was a kind of alternative globalisation to the First World one. All of these new constellations subsequently acquired a strong economic dimension and created new spheres of interest and exchange among countries of the NAM and the Third World. Yugoslavia and the NAM countries became allies in the process of trying to articulate how to be modern by one’s own rules, i.e. how to direct one’s own modernisation process (for example, with the use of construction companies). This was quite significant, especially in the light of Vijay Prashad’s¹⁴⁹ analysis of how the regimes in the new nations adopted the Enlightenment’s scientific heritage without any discussions of its cultural implications. This was problematic, he says, as it was not neutral.

These networks pretty much collapsed in the late 1980s, when global geopolitics changed significantly. The 1980s were also marked by the Third World debt crisis, which was a consequence of the 1973 oil crisis. The oil crisis resulted in sharp rises of interest rates in the Third World countries; consequently, they maximised their exports to meet their debt obligations, and the prices of raw materials dropped. The countries affected were submitted to “structural adjustments” by the World Bank and the IMF (basically, these were loans conditioned by the privatisation of state-owned industries and resources, imposing free trade, austerity programmes etc.). We have seen numerous repetitions of the same “financial rescue” scenarios since then in many countries around the world (think of Greece), and consequently the rise of new forms of dependency and colonialism (multinational companies entering states and → extracting their resources). Also, as Amin says, globalism cannot grow forever because it is not sustainable, that it why it looks towards fascism as a response for its growing weakness.

However, the NAM has not provided any alternative plans for the current geopolitical and economic situation, and that has probably been one of its greatest weaknesses in recent years. It has not been able to provide any because the structure and aspirations of its member states have changed significantly. For example, in the late 1970s, North-South trade agreements accounted for more than half of all such agreements, while today the majority of preferential trade agreements are

148 See for example *World Economic Survey, 1975: Fluctuations and Development in the World Economy* (New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1976).

149 Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York, London: The New Press, 2007), 90.

between developing economies (China, Brazil, India, the NAM countries). But this has not resulted in lowering the inequalities in less developed countries. On the contrary, since 1980 income inequalities in those countries have been rising steadily while public expenditures (equal access to education, health, etc.) have been declining.

One has to understand the speeches of the World Bank representatives along these lines, as they show the way the economy has changed its orientation and aims in the past decades. Robert Zoellick starts his 2010 speech with the claim that the Third World does not exist anymore. In the new economic world there is only a globalised multipolar economy, and development is about pragmatism, recognising how markets and business opportunities change etc. The future of development is not about old concepts of aid but about investment. So what was once financial aid to developing countries (the 0.7% mentioned above) is now “investment looking for good returns with an aim to revolutionise financial flows to those countries”.¹⁵⁰

Quite a few authors, Samir Amin among them, look back to the NAM as a possible way of “de-linking” (to de-link means to pursue one’s own policy) from the current form of globalisation, of finding another pattern of globalisation, which, as he emphasises, does not mean reverting to the old pre-colonial or colonial state but bringing new patterns of modernity to Third World countries. The question is: What kind of modernity? He is basically advocating the kind of political and economic → solidarity that once existed within the NAM but in a different form of internationalism. And rather than abstract economic goals – such as profit-maximisation – the focus of economic activity should be on improving life and reducing emissions (see the Tricontinental Institute Report¹⁵¹).

The agenda of the NAM and the Third World in the 1960s and 1970s was to claim another history, a different modernity and economic development through anti-colonial and anti-imperialist revolutions, cooperation and solidarity. This represented a core of the non-aligned politics. Today the predictions about the future are not so optimistic, and global inequality continues to rise, despite the strong growth of the less developed economies.

What is needed is a new kind of political consciousness, and it is necessary to include environmental issues into these new politics. → Ecological crises, the results of economic growth and climate change, are among of the greatest concerns today. Capitalism prevents any kind of meaningful ecological action simply because it is not profitable. It also seems we have not learned anything from the past ecological disasters: Bhopal in 1984, Chernobyl in 1985, the Exxon Valdez (Alaska) in 1989, British Petroleum (Gulf of Mexico) in 2010, Fukushima in 2011, and so on. Not to mention how the poorer nations have always been affected by waste, pollution, destruction, resource depletion, and export-oriented crops (such as palm trees in Indonesia). A very recent Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services¹⁵² reports that humans are driving up to one million plants and animal spe-

150 Robert Zoellick, “Old concept of ‘Third World’ outdated”, *The World Bank* (14 April 2010), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2010/04/14/old-concept-of-third-world-outdated-zoellick-says> (accessed 25 May 2019).

151 “We Are the Shadow-Ghosts, Creeping Back as the Camp Fires Burn Low”, *The Tricontinental*, The Twentieth Newsletter (16 May 2019), <https://thetricontinental.org/newsletterissue/we-are-the-shadow-ghosts-creeping-back-as-the-camp-fires-burn-low-the-twentieth-newsletter-2019/> (accessed 25 May 2019).

152 The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), <https://ipbes.net/> (accessed 25 May 2019).

cies to extinction, which is tens to hundreds of times higher than the average rate across the past ten million years.

So, the current causes and effects of climate change pose for us another challenge, and raise not only the question of rising inequalities and migration, but also, as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out – in his text “The Climate of History”¹⁵³ – a question about the finitude of humanity, of a future without us.

153 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, The University of Chicago (Winter 2009), <http://www.law.uvic.ca/demcon/2013%20readings/Chakrabarty%20-%20Climate%20of%20History.pdf> (accessed 25 May 2019).

Commons / Solidarity

In the previous Commons seminar in June 2016, published in the first edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, we focused on the notions of commons “that encourage, celebrate and protect the right to diversity, signified by a decentralised structure, which moves away from ‘traditional’ methods of making artistic statements, protests, or social critiques in the globalised world”. Some of our narrators addressed commons as a verb, as an act of commoning that comes together as transnational solidarity in historical alliances and movements like the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende, Artist of the World against Apartheid, or the Exhibition in Support of the Nicaraguan People. As calls for solidarity are essential in times of war, economic collapse, natural disasters and pandemics, these cases should help us to respond to our current state of exception and incite us to create alliances of solidarity to face the times to come. People come together in solidarity to undermine overarching repressive or violent political situations, find alternatives to exploitative economic conditions, or overcome distress after natural disasters. But calls for solidarity do not only appear as a reaction in times of exceptional hardship. Solidarity is at the core of our project as a society, as found in the labour movement, in feminism, and in the decolonisation processes all around the world. People in solidarity find common denominators by defining radical alternatives to the violence that divides them, enslaves them, pushes them to the private sphere, ignores them and deprives them. The current situation invokes the need for solutions (basic income, universal health care, free education) which stand against the reduction of aid to individual acts of charity that have no systemic implications. Individual acts may mitigate a fraction of the problem while perpetuating the cause of the social disease – global inequality in late capitalism. At present, biopolitics is in every move we make as the notions of private and public spaces and basic human rights have been under severe strain. The need for compliance and not defiance is presented as a personal responsibility to one’s fellow human beings, while the insidious bond between autocratic politics and economic stability by means of consumerism and a free-market economy nullifies any form of critical analysis. The perversion of hidden exploited labour (factory workers, warehouse workers) is moved even further from the eyes of the public, while everything continues to be available in the comfort of the private space, just one click away. The online communities of solidarity are impressive but at the same time show that we are predominantly communicating, organising and connecting with people we know, the familiar not the strange. The micropolitical (hyperlocal, translocal) perspective is important. However, we call for the unity of people, for the macro-political, to go beyond temporal mitigation of healthcare crises and economic crashes and propose sustainable social solutions for the fragile (refugees, migrant workers, victims of domestic violence, drug users, the sick, the old, the weak) in prolonged precarious situations. A sustainable solution today can only be a change on a planetary level, a change for us all.

The seminar took place online and was organised by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain from 22 to 24 June 2020.

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Antigones Against the Monsters of Heartbreak

Imagining everyday utopias in pandemic times

Yayo Herrero

Note: The following text is a transcription from an online keynote lecture on 22 June 2020 in Madrid.

COVID-19 arrived riding on a crisis of multiple and interconnected dimensions that places humanity at an emergency of civilisation. At the heart of the issue is a way of conceiving the economy, politics and culture that is at war with life. The magnitude of the problem is such that we are at a crossroads where the → choices made now will determine the dignified survival of most humans and many other living beings.

Imagining horizons of desire that may be compatible with the material conditions that make them possible is a task that cannot be postponed. → Ecofeminisms, decolonial perspectives and those that have been historically subjugated make this → imagination possible.

This intervention collects some reflections that have been made in the spaces of activism that I develop and in which I participate. These are unfinished reflections that emerged during the period when fragility became most visible. The COVID-19 crisis anchors us to our bodies and territories, permitting in this respect our elaboration of → situated analyses.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences probably amount to what sociology calls a “total social fact”. In other words, a fact that affects all spheres of life, influences and changes everything.

However, it is important to bear in mind – and from here I am going to intervene – that this pandemic arrives, so to speak, inserting itself into what was already a deep crisis of civilisation that has been pushing us towards a situation of global emergency. In many places, a climate emergency had already been declared, and we were also talking about a broader emergency of civilisation.

The pandemic is related to other interconnected global crises and crudely reveals how people are living on the edge and how societies created in the context of globalised capitalism are extremely fragile and → vulnerable. It is shocking, even for those of us who have spent years denouncing it, to see how when the economic process stops for only fifteen or twenty days everything falls apart like a house of cards, hitting very unevenly depending on class, ethnicity, age, place of birth or gender.

Even now it is still extremely hard to accept that the pandemic was not a surprise, that it had already been predicted and described within different fields of knowledge: economics, → ecology or public health, among others.

Indeed, this crisis is by no means abrupt or unexpected. In one of President Trump’s first comments about COVID-19 – aside from downplaying it and mocking people’s concerns – he said that this situation was a *black swan*, a sudden and unexpected event impossible to foresee, and which one could have done nothing to prevent. Yet in reality there is nothing to this idea of a supposedly sudden and unexpected crisis.

→ choices, p. 174 → ecofeminisms, p. 28 → imagination, p. 197
→ situated, p. 148 → vulnerable, p. 208 → ecology, p. 162

The scientific community had been warning for some time about the possible proliferation of pandemics or the spread of pathogenic and infectious vectors due, above all, to the loss of biodiversity, the irrationality of the industrial agriculture model, the trade in exotic species and climate change.¹⁵⁴

It is said that the crisis has shaken us top to bottom. Yet while the dominant discourse claims that the virus makes all people equal, in reality, it has consequences that exacerbate previous inequalities. It is not the same to live through lockdown being poor or having an informal job, one where if you do not work, you do not get paid. It is not the same to live through lockdown in a small house with poor lighting and ventilation as it is to experience the same in a large house, with plenty of space and perhaps a garden. It is not the same to confine yourself with your abuser or to take → care of children alone, or to be a migrant, or to be elderly, or to be very young, or to be functionally diverse... Inequalities of class, race, gender, age, etc. make it so that these circumstances are lived out in completely different ways.

In any case, these exceptional times allow us to reflect on some very significant phenomena. It is really shocking how most people have assumed and accepted very harsh measures: lockdown, loss of jobs, the closure of businesses... Extreme measures that affect personal life, consumption, relationships, and which would have been unthinkable if not for an understanding that what was at risk was life itself. The brutal measures of social distancing and lockdown were accepted because people were aware of the importance of what was at stake.

I take advantage of this statement to consider, very briefly, what sustains human life.

Life depends on two things that are undeniable. In the first place, human life unfolds within a natural environment – the nature of which we are a part. Those who defend, for example, the Gaia hypothesis or the Gaia organic theory, consider that life as a whole is a great organism of which our species is one part, which self-organises and is self-poietic, that is, that has the ability to self-generate. Life as a whole is kept in dynamic equilibrium thanks to a series of negative feedback mechanisms that stabilise it before disturbances can take over. Life as a whole progresses through change. It unfolds between structure and chance.

We are radically eco-dependent beings, and thus our lives are inescapably conditioned by the fact that → Earth and the biosphere have limits. Limits in the renewable, the non-renewable and the basins that break down and re-introduce waste generated back into the natural cycle.

The point is that where limits exist nothing can be raised to grow indefinitely. We find ourselves, then, with the first problem, which we will return to later: the one that emerges where a species, the human, lives on a planet that has physical limits but that nevertheless has configured – in Western societies, at least – an order of material organisation that is structurally expansive. An economy imposed on almost the entire world through a violent coloniality, and that needs to grow permanently by → extracting materials, generating waste and systematically altering the natural cycles that sustain life as a whole. These al-

¹⁵⁴ The scientific literature in this regard is vast, and it is enough to follow the periodic reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the highest scientific authorities on Climate Change and Biodiversity, respectively.

→ care, p. 92, 122 → Earth, p. 21 → extracting, p. 53

terations and degradations are behind the proliferation of diseases and health risks that we now live with.

And we are not only eco-dependent. When reflecting on how life is sustained materially we also find a second dependency, provided by the fact that human life unfolds within a second → territory, much closer to us – the body itself.

We are → interdependent. Human beings live embodied in bodies that are → vulnerable and finite. Our bodies have to be taken care of because they present permanent needs that are not satisfied until we die. Embodied people need → care throughout their lives, and more intensely at certain moments of the life cycle – in childhood, old age, a lifetime in the case of some functional diversities, in times of illness...

By this we mean that dependence on others is not an anomaly or something pathological, but rather is an inherent trait of human life and in general of all living beings as a whole.

We are interdependent.

We must remember that historically, in almost all places, it has been mostly women who have taken care of – and provide care for – vulnerable bodies. They do it – we do it – not because we are genetically better equipped to do it, but because we live in societies that assign different roles based on sex, which is also assigned to you at birth. These jobs – because they are jobs – fall mostly to women in patriarchal societies.

We are eco-dependent and interdependent.

Human life cannot be maintained if it cannot unfold within a society that guarantees interaction with the underlying assets of nature to obtain goods and services that satisfy needs, if it does not take place in a community environment that ensures the appropriate and necessary care work is done, especially at the most vulnerable moments of the life cycle.

Therefore, each concrete human life does not constitute in any way a certainty based on the fact of having been born. A life is a possibility, and what makes a possible life become a certain life is that it takes place in an environment that guarantees the relationships of eco-dependence and interdependence.

However, especially in Western societies, we have built a way of understanding society, a way of understanding the economy, a way of understanding culture and politics that not only turns its back on but develops against the relationships of ecodependence and interdependence that sustain life.

This opposition is a declaration of war against life, which I will describe very briefly later, and which has ended up provoking a crisis of civilisation that affects all orders and spaces where life manifests.

I refer fundamentally to Western culture because I believe that it is the one that erected an ontological wall – an abyss – between human beings and the rest of the world. In reality, not “all” of what makes us human is separated from nature, only the rational dimension, which is emancipated, in a delusional fashion, from nature and even from the body itself.

From this supposed separation, a series of dichotomies are created that characterise the Western way of thinking: nature versus culture, reason versus emotion, reason versus

body, etc. In this dual and dichotomous framework, the idea of the subject emerged in the West. This is a subject who perceives himself as the protagonist of a triple emancipation. He conceives himself and feels emancipated from nature, emancipated from his own body, and without obligations or responsibility to care for other bodies.

Later in history, this subject stands as a universal subject. Nobody can really be emancipated from nature, from which we obtain everything we need to live. No one can live completely emancipated from the people around us, since → care and interrelation are needed throughout our lives. Furthermore, of course, no one can live emancipated from their own body.

What happens is there are some subjects who have privileges which have allowed them to conceive of this abstract idea of what being human, an individual or a person, is. From my point of view, that is where the essence of the patriarchy is and what characterises the patriarchal subject.

The patriarchal subject is one that embodies and lives according to that false triple emancipation. This illusion of individuality can only be sustained if a system of domination is built in which some lives subjugate others. The territories, the enslaved or colonised other, the racialised other, women or individuals of other species, whether animals or plants, find themselves in a subordinate position, in a subject situation that is maintained through a structurally violent relationship.

In this cultural and relational context, we have → learned to look at nature and bodies from the outside – from positions of superiority and instrumentality. We have learned it in everyday life and in the different disciplines that we study at → school, in secondary education centres, in universities and, in general, through the different devices and institutions that reproduce culture.

This universal subject is, I insist, abstract. A disembodied and de-territorialised subject that posits itself as a universal subject and has the power to define a hegemonic economy, politics, or culture.

From my point of view, there have been three levers that have allowed us to accelerate and extend this model of domination towards the crisis of civilisation and war against life that we are currently traversing.

The first of them is a certain conception of technoscience, which during modernity is presented as universal, based on a principle of objectification that declares that what is studied is universal and objective if it is the result of the application of the scientific method.

This is a reductionist science that knows no limits, that studies in a specialised manner but that has significant problems when it comes to theorising wholes and studying what is integral. This science is also based on mechanism, which, being consistent with the previous historical trajectory of the separation between nature and people, conceives of nature as a great machine, a predictable automaton that it is possible to control, and that we can conceive of and study in terms of cause-effect relationships.

This techno-scientific, mechanistic and reductionist gaze, allegedly universal and neutral, has suppressed or expelled many other knowledges of other subjects belonging to subjugated or subordinated groups. This knowledge was surpassed by science at the beginning

of the 20th century. → Ecology, physics and thermodynamics revealed that the world is extremely complex, that it has dynamic balances and that it changes and shapes itself. These fields revealed a complexity of life permanently affected by disturbances that can force innovation and create total change. However, the mechanistic and linear approach continues to be systematically applied in industry, modern agriculture and engineering. The error of these applications is to try to manage the complexity of life by applying the logic of the machine.

The second lever is capitalism itself, both as a way of producing goods and services on a large scale, and as a form of anthropology, a way of understanding and being in the world.

Capitalism is heir to the abstract vision of human life. It is based on a tremendous abstraction, that of money, that of considering that only what can be assigned a price has value.

The valuation of the capitalist economy in exclusively monetary terms expels from the categories people use to look at and understand the world an important part of the related processes – those tasks or goods that are essential for life. Photosynthesis, the water cycle, the ozone layer, climate regulation or the work carried out by communities – and mostly women – to sustain daily and generational life within households, remains systematically invisible within the field of economic study.

This reduction of the concept of value to the concept of price also generates a significant distortion in what we have called production. I think production is a notion that should also be reviewed or debated. What is “production” within our economic model? Production is basically what makes the monetary aggregates grow, activity that makes the GDP grow. It is what generates value in the mercantile sphere, radically and fictitiously separated from the private sphere or from other areas of life. It is what makes the economy grow. But this notion of production is completely unrelated to the materiality of the → Earth and the needs of people.

When we speak, for example, of weapons production or food production, both productions are measured and valued as exactly the same in economic accounting terms: euros, dollars or yuan. By measuring in the same way, in money, contemplating only the dimension that creates value in the markets, we no longer have the social tools to be able to distinguish between those forms of production that support life and those that make it impossible.

If we analyse the production of weapons or the production of food from the point of view of human needs, the conclusions might be radically different. Practically no one would say that a cluster bomb as an object used with the function for which it was manufactured serves to satisfy a human need. However, wheat, in itself, serves to satisfy the need for food. Both forms of production are qualitatively different in terms of the satisfaction of needs, but when we look at them from a strictly monetary perspective both can be counted as wealth.

This conceptualisation of production linked only to the increase in the social surplus in monetary terms is what has ended up turning the myth of growth into a dogma. Similarly, the conviction that economic growth, measured exclusively in monetary terms, is always good in any situation and any place must be questioned. In the departments of economic science, nature is studied as if it were a controllable subset of the economy, ignoring that, on the contrary, the economy is a subset within nature.

Following this, capitalism becomes a kind of civil religion.

Currently, the sacred, in the anthropological sense of the sacred, is not the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the house we live in, the relationships we have or the → care we receive. What is sacred is money, and if what is sacred is money, it is untouchable, and must be protected at any cost.

From the situated and concrete sites of Western culture, we have internalised a kind of logic of sacrifice: everything is worth sacrificing as long as the economy grows. And when I say everything, I mean everything: relationships, living soil, clean air, the water we drink, and the land of a city that will only have value to the extent that it generates a profit for someone.

That sacrificial logic, from my point of view, is seated in the heart of our imaginaries, in the heart of our gazes and serves as a tremendously numbing element of domestication that prevents us from seeing, and that silences and thus helps us ignore many of the things that are happening.

It is enough to promise that the economy will grow and with it jobs will be created, or alternatively threaten recession and increased unemployment, for us to accept the destruction, deterioration or modification of the basic conditions that sustain life.

The first moments of the COVID-19 pandemic provided a ray of light that allowed us to see some things with a certain flash of clarity.

Suddenly, it became evident that the really essential jobs are those related to care, food and transportation. Attention was drawn to the tremendous fragility of the urban environment and its dependence on the availability of fossil energy, which allows food and the other consumer goods needed to sustain life to circulate as well as the waste generated to be removed. We have now seen how what is considered essential is what is usually invisible, has no name, usually despised and low paid.

I recall the words of a candidate for a right-wing party in a meeting during the last electoral campaign. She answered a question from a domestic worker regarding precarious working conditions by saying that by taking care of elderly people or scrubbing floors in residences one could not aspire to have a salary like the one she was claiming, because these were less valuable jobs.

Recently we have seen what care work is, and we have seen what activities can be stopped, at least temporarily, and what cannot.

What we are experiencing at the moment is the monstrous consequences of a model that has disregarded everyday life and thus what happens in real life and in the daily lives of people.

It is worth rereading *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818. It has often been suggested that *Frankenstein* is an allegory about the risks of science overstepping moral limits. But I think Mary Shelley did not write a moral tale about the risks of transgression in the pursuit of knowledge. Instead, she wrote a story about the consequences of not taking responsibility for the repercussions of one's actions. What turns Frankenstein's creature into a monster is not taking responsibility for the consequences of creating it. Frankenstein's creature is

left alone, abandoned, denied care, love, and the chance to learn, and the result is violence and death.

I believe that we are experiencing the monstrous consequences of an economic, scientific and political rationality completely disconnected from what we are as living beings, cut off from the nature on which we depend and of which we are a part, and oblivious to the radical → vulnerability of each singular life.

(To clarify, I am not assigning any intentionality to nature. Nature does not work with intelligence or with intentionality. It works from thermal, chemical, and extremely complex exchanges. It has intelligence but without will, consciousness or brain).

This disconnection with the → Earth and bodies – with others – generates monsters. Goya warned that the dreams of reason produce monsters. Instrumental and countable rationality has generated a problem of an absolutely brutal magnitude, which we can justifiably call the crisis of civilisation.

Firstly, there is a decline in the basic goods and resources needed for the current economic metabolism, such as fossil fuels – oil, coal and natural gas – within a globalised economic model, which we could say metaphorically “eats” oil. There is a decline not only in fossil minerals but many other materials too, such as copper, cobalt, lithium, platinum, neodymium and dysprosium. These are the very minerals with which the intended transition from fossil fuels to a model called “renewable” will supposedly be made.

It is not only the transition to renewables that depends on these materials, but the transformation from combustion to electric cars, the deepening of the digital economy through the deployment of 5G technologies, and establishing the so-called fourth industrial revolution based on robotisation and mechanisation. When we look at everything that industry wants to do and contrast it with the reserves that the scientific community says are left, the numbers simply don't add up. Or if they do, they do so only for a privileged few who are able to monopolise material goods and not for the entire population.

Innovation and change have been forced on the dynamic balances of the planet: climate change, the alteration of the phosphorus cycle and of the water cycle. The cycles that are changing were not designed or controlled at will by human beings but are essential to human life. These changes are causing a catastrophe of biodiversity that is related to the proliferation of zoonosis, such as the one that triggered the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the scientific community predicts that such events are going to become more frequent due to the loss of natural vaccines that biodiversity provided.

The → ecological crisis has entirely different consequences for different people. I don't want to spend much time on data, but I do want to highlight that Boaventura de Sousa Santos' statement seems to me to be correct: neoliberal globalised capitalism in the situation of surpassing planetary limits is pure territorial fascism. If the fence that surrounds rich Europe in addition to keeping out migrants would not let in energy, materials, food, fish, manufactured goods, etc., then rich Europe would not be able to sustain itself for even a few months.

What we call today a developed and rich country corresponds to a political → territory with a material organisation that is absolutely dependent on raw materials and processed and manufactured goods that come from other, usually impoverished, territories. These

are plundered territories, which have historically been used as large mining and dumping grounds by colonising powers; territories where dispossession, extraction and alienation of resources and lives are produced at the service of a privileged global North.

Within the countries of privilege, there are also absolutely unequal relations. Precariousness has become structural. People have jobs and remain poor because employment no longer guarantees protection from precariousness and poverty, because the working conditions themselves are already generating poverty. Labour law has also been profoundly weakened and the reality is that almost everywhere we find growing numbers of people who, I insist, even with jobs have difficulties accessing or maintaining housing, guaranteeing the minimum energy consumption they require, paying for water, or receiving the → care they need, who basically have difficulties sustaining all that a person requires in order to live a decent life.

This is an → extractivism, I insist, not only of raw materials but also of people's time and energy. Let's not forget that the majority of the women, for they are mostly women, who provide care in residences and day centres and work in spaces where poorly paid care work is carried out, come from the same places as the raw materials that sustain the wider economic metabolisms.

Saskia Sassen says that we have gone from a capitalism of production and exploitation to a capitalism of extractivism and expulsion, where many elements of life are being directly expelled from life itself. Species, biodiversity, territories and, of course, also people, migrants or indigenous peoples are systematically expelled to the margins. In a translimited planet, where the spaces of privilege are materially shrinking and where the order of things in terms of distribution and redistribution has not changed, what happens is that people are basically being evicted.

The many ways of narrating COVID-19 also offer curious paradoxes. The normal, the new normal, the exceptional... Before the pandemic, normality was already ecocidal and precarious for many people. The novel coronavirus and economic crisis that it generated fell atop the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and the austerity policies that ensued.

Yet we have continued to behave as if the government's social services had to resolve “an anomaly”, as if the existence of people who do not have access to basic subsistence is some kind of exception. But today precariousness is no longer an exception, it is an absolutely structural issue and I believe that any future departs from this starting point.

It seems that in normal times there are things that are impossible, but in exceptional circumstances can occur. During the first lockdown and post-lockdown moment certain measures were approved, such as paying unemployment benefits to domestic workers, prohibiting layoffs, prohibiting evictions, prohibiting electricity or water cuts and providing minimum vital income support. During times of exceptionality, and only as a result of a struggle, the measures needed to protect life – to protect people – were approved, but these are not factored in during times of normality.

Offred, the maid that Margaret Atwood created in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, remembers how they arrived in the dystopian republic of Gilead when she says: “We lived, as usual, by ignoring.” She adds, and I find this extremely interesting: “Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it.” You have to make an effort to ignore everything. Atwood brings me back to the idea of responsibility in Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

This is an idea of responsibility that in no way appeals to the notion of guilt. Guilt is a painful idea that from my point of view does not lead anywhere desirable. The idea of responsibility, however, is for me connected to freedom and agency. It is the idea of capacity, power, awareness of potentiality and the need – obligation – to take care of one another.

In the relationships among ecocodependence, → interdependence, co-responsibility and justice there are, in my opinion, the foundations for reorganising common life.

I now want to point out some issues that I think we need to consider when thinking about how to reverse the logic of war against life.

One of them is the question of the relationships among knowledge, science and denial.

We live in a society that calls itself a knowledge society, and what is happening was predicted by scientific institutions decades ago. We could go to the Meadows Report on *The Limits to Growth* (1972), which was so reviled in the years following its publication, but which, however, quite correctly anticipated the current situation, especially its consideration of the limitations of the modelling tools that existed at that time.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2004, arrived at the same conclusions more than thirty years later. The recurring reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or IPBES or its counterpart on issues of biodiversity loss (IPBES) have continued to issue warnings year after year. Science predicted with a fairly significant level of success everything that was to come if measures were not taken. There is thus the paradox that in this society of knowledge, in a society where until very recently science was erected as the only issuer of “truth”, denial – by action or omission – is ubiquitous. The weight of science and research is offset by pure opinion and induced doubt.

A large part of the population has significant difficulties in understanding climate science, and significant difficulties in understanding, for example, what biodiversity is, because we have been brought up in a culture that has difficulty understanding the importance of links and relationships. A Mapuche person is culturally much more capable of understanding these complex ideas. Their own language is a register, with words that are capable of expressing what the concept of biodiversity is or what the complex concept of climate entails. In our languages, you have to dedicate a little time to explain them.

In order to generate alternative imaginaries, more compatible with the processes that sustain life, an important part, although not the only one, is knowledge. I am not saying in any way that the problems we have are going to be solved through rational knowledge, but I do believe knowledge helps us understand what we are. It seems important to me to overcome certain → ecological illiteracy that is typical of our societies. Sometimes, the higher you go in the chain of specialisation, towards what we consider valuable knowledge, the more that illiteracy spreads.

To acquire that knowledge we need structures of mediation. Over the last couple of days, I have been reviewing the proposals for popular pedagogy and popular education projects in Latin America. I think they are very necessary, and as structures of mediation, I believe they work with art and creativity.

I also believe in the need to challenge the idea of a completely crystallised, individualised and abstract, rigid self. This does not exist. We need to work out how to move beyond

that fantasy of individuality – as highlighted by Almudena Hernando – towards an idea of relational individuality and a conception of interdependent autonomies in which freedom, → solidarity and cooperation stem from an awareness of being materially interdependent and, therefore, of the need to take responsibility for each other. It is about finding a balance between the self and – excuse the metaphor – the living organism of which we are a part, which is composed of society and nature itself.

We need to disrupt the false discontinuity between the self and the natural, and the social community in which each life unfolds. This does not mean eliminating the exercise of freedom and personal autonomy. The rupture between the self and the rest of life – even the body itself – makes our societies function like an autoimmune disease with respect to individuals. It detects certain people as if they were the enemy and reacts by eliminating them.

When we talk about “putting life at the centre”, this means the need to understand ourselves as both a species and a living being, which is both natural and social, because these things are not separate.

There are three basic aspects that for me are at the core of what we should be working on. The first is to accept that the reduction of the material sphere of the economy is a fact, not an option: a fact. The economy is going to decrease in material terms without a doubt. I am talking about a reduction in the material sphere and not about a decrease in GDP. There will be things that can grow back but in terms of energy use – and the use of materials, ecological footprint, greenhouse gas emissions – now and in the immediate future the size of the economic sphere is going to shrink significantly because of the simple surpassing of planetary limits. At least this is what the scientific community is telling us.

This process of inevitable material contraction can be approached in different ways. The first is the one I think we’re heading towards. If those who make the big decisions, for example, the European Union, our government, the United States or China, continue according to the current trends, then forced de-growth will be resolved in a fascist way. Those sectors that are protected by economic, political and military power will continue to sustain material lifestyles, and hoarding resources, while more and more people will be excluded.

We can even predict eco-fascist dystopias. Even if the best-intentioned proposals end up relying on growing economies, albeit now dressed up as green, or do not take responsibility for the living conditions of all people, the result will be an extremely unequal world and the solutions to the → ecological crisis will be by no means guaranteed.

The second way is difficult but feasible. It would involve assuming the inevitable reduction of the economy from an equity perspective. This would require committing to two principles.

On one hand, there is the principle of sufficiency – that is, → learning to live with enough. When I am talking about learning to live with enough I am fully aware that there are people who can live with far less materials and energy, and others who are going to need more because they do not currently reach the minimum of what they need. The principle of sufficiency opens up a social discussion on needs, which is by no means resolved. Debating needs in the concrete context of an ecological crisis forces us to consider the reality of the existing material framework, and not only the one we imagine or would like to have.

Linked with the principle of sufficiency is the second principle, which is the distribution of wealth. This is a key issue more than ever. Fighting poverty is the same as fighting excessive wealth. Sharing wealth and also the obligations that come with having a body and being a species is the expression of co-responsibility: co-responsibility between people and co-responsibility between institutions and people.

During the days of COVID-19 there has been a huge explosion of community. A regrouping around the commons across neighbourhoods, municipalities and in many cities. There have been alliances between people and, in some cases, also between institutions and citizens: public-community alliances that were organised in order to attend to the needs of the people around them. Many people and collectives have thus stepped forward and taken care of each other.

The last of these issues is the question of adopting the commons and care as organising principles of politics. I believe that the logic of care can promote or serve as a lever in arbitrating the commons as a constituent element, and I find this absolutely key in this context.

We have, therefore, the challenge of disputing the current economic and political hegemony, but above all of disputing cultural hegemony.

Our culture has → learned to look from outside of nature, although we are an inseparable part of it. Yet it appears totally impossible for us to look from outside of capitalism, which is a social construction turned religious fundamentalism.

The fantasy of individuality sits comfortably within a capitalist anthropology. The transition from fantasy to a → feminist, environmentalist, fair and decolonial → imagination is our great challenge.

We need to learn to look as if we were outside of capitalism in order to imagine different dynamics, and I say “as if we were outside” because we are of course inside. It is an exercise in rebellion and disobedience simply for survival.

Antigone disobeys but her desire is not for disobedience in itself. Antigone does not intend to break the law, what she wants is to change it. Antigone acts and disobeys because there is something that forces her to take charge of what she considers to be sacred and legitimate: to bury and honour her brother.

Antigone is Carola Rackete docking at the Italian port despite Salvini forbidding her from doing so. She docks because she knows that the lives she is carrying on the ship are in danger.

Antigone is every act of disobedience committed out of obligation, out of political and moral imperative. What is being attempted with this disobedience is to change normality – and to change it radically. We have to do this collectively. We want to be Antigones.

It is possible that we have an excess of dystopias right now. But for me dystopias play a fundamental role. They help us to consider, look and to “be afraid”. Here I do not mean fear as a negative emotion that suffocates or forces us to retreat, but rather fear as an uncertainty, a warning and an awareness that there is something that requires the application of precaution, being alert and being careful.

→ learned, p. 136 → feminist, p. 28 → imagination, p. 197

In that sense, I believe that dystopias are and have been necessary. The problem is that an excess of dystopias can become conservative. We begin to feel comfortable as spectators of various crises. We begin to accept them and to do nothing. That is why we also need utopias. Not chimeras, nor false hopes, but projects, images, and dreams in which all living beings are accounted for.

It thus seems imperative to me to create exercises in projecting horizons of desire, thinking about possible good, desirable lives, within the framework of de-growth, sufficiency and the distribution of wealth. A revitalisation and reinvention of the commons that makes these horizons of desire compatible with the material groundings that makes them possible.

I believe that creativity and art are absolutely necessary in this task. Reformulating the economy, politics and institutional life according to these logics requires creative exercises, and here the views and experiences of indigenous peoples and decolonial critics can be a beacon. We will not achieve this only with the languages of rationality and science – the languages of art are also needed.

Preparing this intervention, I was rereading fragments of a book that Pablo Martínez from MACBA gave me. It’s called *SIDA* (2020), or *AIDS*, in English, and in it there are extremely inspiring contributions from Élisabeth Lebovici.

Memory, paradoxically, is also central to building these utopias of the future. In this case, it was the memory of how the drama of HIV/AIDS was met and what changes were produced in the ways of representing these realities in art.

The motto “silence is death” used by cultural activists in the context of the HIV/AIDS crisis seems to me to be absolutely recoverable, as is the tactic of calling out those who are responsible for the deaths of today and tomorrow, which the Act Up movement performed at their political funerals. This resonated with me a lot, and I find that it makes a lot of sense in the context of the present times.

SIDA also speaks of the need to transfer concern and distribute it everywhere. It says that we must create a system of recognisable signs aimed at everyone, capable of persuading everyone, and then make it viral: find a way to repeat it and disseminate it to the point of cloning.

We have an important task before us. It is true that in many places there are initiatives and self-organised collectives who have been working for a long time, launching well-focused proposals and leading the transformation without the need for permission. However, I am concerned about the lives of many who are not activists and who do not even have time to participate; who have been deprived, dispossessed and alienated from so many things that they have difficulty organising their own survival with others.

If decent living conditions are not generalised, we might even find ourselves in a situation whereby food, housing or relationships are resolved collectively but also privately in small groups, generating a kind of activist elitism that is also unattainable for the most impoverished people in the world.

Of course, in many museums and other cultural spaces, I know that this road has been opened, but I would like to draw attention to the need to intensify these alliances between museums and the world of art and activism.

I believe there is an important path that we must walk.

*These systems are anti-life, they will not be compelled to cure themselves.
We will not allow these corrupted sickened systems to recuperate.
We will spread. We are the antibodies.*
— An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto (indigenouaction.org)¹⁵⁵

Modifying Tronto’s definition¹⁵⁶, Puig de la Bellacasa writes that → care is “everything that is done (rather than everything that ‘we’ do) to maintain, continue, and → repair ‘the world’ so that all (rather than ‘we’) can live in it as well as possible”.¹⁵⁷ Everything that is done shifts and broadens the political character of care by strengthening the bond of lives → interdependence on the planet. We/All are dependent, thus, we/all are involved within specific caring activities which define who lives and who does not, and how. In this sense, care is a “multidimensional matrix of power relations involving social and → ecological aspects”.¹⁵⁸ As → queer → feminism’s activism and thought have well shown, care is never an innocent practice but a conflictual relation linking living beings, spaces and technologies. Indeed, all lives are dressed by blood relations and class, gender, race, ableism, age and species hierarchies. These are the outfits guaranteeing access to care or not: some care and some are cared for, some care and will never be cared for.

As this complex power relation, this terrain of conflict and oppression making and generating (not all) lives, is tightening the boundary around what and who is worthy to survive, my proposal is to explore how a radical comprehension of the conflictual character of care is essential to move care functions far from being the handmaid of capital reproduction’s priorities and towards a common purpose of making and regenerating all and better lives.

What is essential?

What and who has been taken care of by the → extractivist driven governmentality of advanced democracies reveals what and who is left hurt and oppressed. A political battleground that, today, through the COVID-19 pandemic, has emerged more explicitly. This visibility allows us to explore the paradoxes, ambiguities and hierarchies of care, and to read more clearly the historical conflict between divergent care practices and models. (Figure 20)

As early as the 1970s “the campaign Wages for Housework demonstrated that the transition to capitalism, starting from the dawn of modernity, was made possible by the invisibilisation, naturalisation and devaluation of reproductive labour. Without the domestic and care work that allowed the subsistence of (male) workers, there would have been no labour force. Without the labour force, there would

155 Indigenous Action, *Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto* (19 March 2020), <http://www.indigenouaction.org/rethinking-the-apocalypse-an-indigenous-anti-futurist-manifesto/> (accessed June 2020).

156 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

157 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

158 Miriam Tola, “Rethinking the Planetary Impasse of Reproduction”, *Anthropocenes: Reworking The Wound*, online conference, European Society for Literature, Science and the Arts (SLSAeu) (18–20 June 2020).

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care, p. 92, 122
repair, p. 140
interdependence, p. 106
ecological, p. 162
queer, p. 200
feminism, p. 28
extractivist, p. 53



have been neither factories nor profit.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, what the pandemic has clearly revealed is nothing new: social and → ecological reproduction tasks have never been acknowledged as work, and have been ascribed to the sphere of “natural” resources available for appropriation so as to legitimise the immense appropriation of wealth.

Figure 20: Homeless people sleeping in a temporary parking lot shelter at Cashman Center, with spaces marked for social distancing, Las Vegas, Nevada, 30 March 2020. Photo: Reuters/Steve Marcus.

However, the pandemic is now generating a socio-ecological and economic crisis which is different from the previous ones. From the perspective of capitalism this is not a structural crisis generated by its own accumulation models, instead it is something that got out of hand: an apparently true path error. Therefore, it seems necessary to use this tragedy to accelerate some counter-reflections and – possibly – to take a slight time advantage from the slowdown of the enemy’s productive machines.

Still, this new visibility on → care functions full of unstable, contradictory, controversial meanings – which go way beyond the scope of the disease – has also shown that to decide what and who is to be taken care, meaning what is “essential” and for whom, is a crucial political issue still delegated to too few decision-makers.

Moreover, we/all should be aware that the global capitalist class will use chaos and confusion to consolidate and expand its power through the control it can exert on the state apparatus engaged in responding to various emergencies¹⁶⁰.

159 Non Una Di Meno – Roma, “Life Beyond the Pandemic”, *Interface, a journal for and about social movements*, issue “Sharing stories of struggles” (22 May 2020), <https://www.interfacejournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Non-Una-Di-Meno-Roma.pdf> (accessed June 2020).

160 Ashley Dawson, *Extreme Cities: The Peril and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change* (London: Verso, 2019).

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ecological, p. 162
care, p. 92, 122

We/all are stuck in a conflict between models of care

The historical invisibility of care tasks is the result of precise political → choices that organise and determine all lives by placing the reproduction and maintenance of bodies and the environment at the bottom of the political agenda. Thus, the process to reverse these priorities which are at the origins of a structural life emergency must be linked to the ability to collectivise the decision on what is essential and for whom. The democratisation of this placement, which unveils the political character of care, is becoming nowadays the higher terrain of conflict. In this sense, care is not intrinsically “natural”, nor “nice” or “maternal”, but a space of conflict. To fight *for* and *with* care means supporting the struggles for universal access to public health, wealth and schools; the struggles against police and state violence; the struggles against the exploitation of communities, common lands and resources – in short, to fight against propriety accumulation.

During the lockdown, I have often found myself thinking about which currently suspended activities I would have liked not to start again to reduce resource and workforce → extraction and oppose the myth of eternal growth. This simple question hides a complex issue highlighting the conflict at stake around different caring models. Indeed, answering it requires us to collectively rethink both what can still be produced and what can no longer be produced – by digging down into both necessities and desires – and what we want to continue reproducing and what is no longer worth reproducing – in order to refuse all those caring activities which are the same conditions that enable capitalism. In short, choosing what is no longer worth caring for in order to improve the same conditions of life.¹⁶¹

Therefore, questioning what is essential and what is not (and for whom) opens the possibility of shaping a different present, by unfolding both a reflection on the access to health and well-being, as well as a conflict around the priority of life over the economy. Caring, or the ability to keep life alive, becomes an increasingly conflictual practice: to care is to struggle against the necropolitical management of lives, and to struggle is to care for the redistribution of life on → Earth.

Conversely, the model of care which has unravelled rather openly during these last months represents a top-down power aiming at repositioning the economic sector at the core of all priorities, avoiding any reflection on productivity and resources limits. Let's put it in this way: till now, most of our/all unwaged, poorly paid and highly invisibilised care work has been done to fix capital distortions, ones producing inequalities, violence, and the large-scale destruction of lives and territories. To refuse to do this from now on, to strike against this care model and reverse economic monopolies' priorities, means to strengthen the inherent anti-capital nature of care.

As the rights activist Ella Baker said in 1978, fighting against oppressions “takes the willingness to stand by and do what has to be done, when it has to be done”, likewise, → care is everything that has to be done (rather than “is done”) to maintain, continue, and → repair “the world” so that all can live in it better than now (rather than “as well as possible”).¹⁶²

161 Maddalena Fragnito, “L'essenziale non è invisibile agli occhi – Covid19”, *Milano in Movimento* (8 May 2020), <https://milano.inmovimento.com/primo-piano/lessenziale-non-e-invisibile-agli-occhi-covid19> (accessed June 2020).

162 Ella Baker, “Making the Struggle Every Day”, *Puerto Rico Solidarity Day*, USA, 1974, video document, 2'20'' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t96fnyLMihA> (accessed June 2020).

Solidarity in transition

The neoliberal revolution has all but buried the language of class struggle. It has expelled commonly used terms such as “labour power”, “union” or “means of production” from our vocabularies, replacing them with “civil society”, “non-government organisation” and “human capital”. Yet despite all this, the term “→ solidarity” – a powerful signifier of working class consciousness if ever there was one – strangely persists in today's language. It can be found on political campaign posters, protest banners, humanitarian fundraising commercials, and even on the uniforms of professional basketball players. Most recently, I've noticed it in the pamphlet for a cultural gentrification project in my municipality.

But the solidarity of today's neoliberal order holds a different meaning than the solidarity of post-war Keynesian and socialist economies. It survived the historic defeat of the working class that threatened to make it obsolete by taking on new meanings and adapting to the changes in everyday life. As the social bonds created under Fordism and socialist industrialisation were severed, giving way to a service sector economy and privatised social reproduction, people could no longer relate to each other in the same ways. As interpersonal relationships were rearranged to accommodate the new structures and a hyper-individualised view of the world took root, solidarity became less understood as “a union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests, as between members of a group or between classes, peoples, etc.” and became more commonly defined as a “community of feelings, purposes, etc.”.¹⁶³

Take for example large scale internationalist projects of the 20th century, from the Communist International to the Non-Aligned Movement, or even Pan-African Alliance. These organisational foundations for an international people's solidarity have all but crumbled, the Anti-Apartheid struggle perhaps being internationalism's last breath before the IMF, World Bank, NATO and other capitalist vehicles ushered us into the era of neoliberal internationalism¹⁶⁴. The language of “people's solidarity” of course remains intact, but is filled with new meaning, realigned with the interests of the bourgeoisie. Instead of a common struggle for a better world, there is humanitarian aid from the first world to the third. Instead of liberation, there is development. Instead of equality, there is opportunity. Under neoliberalism, solidarity is no longer a political act of coalition building, but an individual's expression of moral integrity. It is donating to a charity fund for refugees or buying fair trade products. Supporting actual foreign political struggles on the other hand is seen as an extremist and unpatriotic, if not outright criminal venture.

A similar logic applies to working class solidarity on the domestic front. More than three quarters of the population in industrialised states are wage-workers, yet they share very few institutions in common. Unions have seen their membership plummet as service sector work has replaced industrial production, and precarious jobs in the gig economy have replaced full employment. The common housing, social and cultural institutions that working class people used to have some control over have been privatised. Traditional labour parties have made steady steps rightwards and eventually shifted their electoral pitches towards downwardly mobile urban

163 “Solidarity”, *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 2005).

164 Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

professionals. In their place have come NGOs and various foundations for “poverty reduction”. This too has changed the meaning of solidarity, replacing the common interest of workers with the individual’s rights in the market, replacing workers’ power with workers’ legal rights, replacing group action across sectors with workshops for “marginalised communities”. Solidarity is more than ever an individualised sentiment or an individual show of → empathy, not a sustained act of group organising and coalition building.

This shift reflects the changes in class power and the accompanying political methods of the bourgeoisie. The conditions for working class solidarity have been dismantled. It has been replaced by bourgeois solidarity – solidarity among the owners of capital – and reinterpreted to the working class as representative of their own interests. So trade organisations, financial groups, political parties, NGOs, cultural institutions, professional guilds and the media all lay the foundations for the common interests of the international capitalist classes, while the working class struggles to find any similar footholds. Put simply, solidarity as “a union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests” need real material foundations to take root. Be it the factory, the union, the council home, the commune or the party, it is only organisations grounded *in the productive sphere* that can serve as a foothold for working class solidarity.

Solidarity’s new home – social reproduction as a field of struggle

What then remains of social institutions which would allow the forging of working class coalitions? In most European countries it comes down to the welfare state and public services, public education, health care and housing – in short: *the sphere of social reproduction*. There is no need to romanticise these institutions and frame them as some kind of humanist oasis outside the brutal realm of capitalist production. The welfare state is in all ways integral to the capitalist system, as it provides housing, → care, education and other services necessary for the reproduction of the labour force. It is also in no way owned or controlled by working class people, but is a top-down bureaucratic system, a form of human resource management for the capitalist class.

Nevertheless, it has been the institutions of the welfare state, namely public health and educational services, which have been the terrain of the widest and most diverse working class coalitions in recent years. As capital has sought to recover from various crises by reforming the sphere of social reproduction, turning public services into privatised profit-driven enterprises (or pushing them into the realm of unpaid feminised housework), a wide range of social actors have repeatedly struck back. In Western centres of capital facing deindustrialisation, this process can be traced all the way back to the 1970s, when working class demands were commonly aimed at social services and public welfare programmes, most notably by the Unemployed Worker’s movement, The Industrial Worker’s movement and Welfare Rights movement.¹⁶⁵

Not only are public service institutions a common ground for articulating working class grievances, but they remain among the few areas of stable unionised employment. Therefore public sector employees such as teachers and postal workers have not only been able to maintain a strong union presence throughout both Europe and the United States, but have also repeatedly inspired wide public support, as

¹⁶⁵ Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

people are well aware of how valuable their services are.¹⁶⁶ Even in the heydays of neoliberal privatisation, the British NHS has proven to be untouchable and is widely supported despite its flaws – a sentiment shared with regard to public health institutions in most countries. And let us not forget, the single largest and most diverse coalition of the US working class in decades, the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, was built around the demand for Medicare for All. So even as the influence of labour organisations in society dwindles, we continue to see mass organising across social lines to defend public services from the implementation of market logic.

This is no coincidence. While most state run programmes can hardly be categorised as public, let alone worker-run projects with any meaningful independence from capitalist production, they have none the less become spaces in which working class interests can coalesce – perhaps filling the gap left by organised industrial labour. As Rastko Močnik argues, changes in the technical composition of labour also rearrange the terrain of class struggle.¹⁶⁷ So while the shift towards a service sector economy dismantled the previously existing organisational capacities, more pressure was put on institutions of social reproduction to keep society running, making them an essential battle ground for different segments of the working class. And while much is left to be discussed around how these institutions should be organised and funded, they appear to offer strategic inroads not only for the working class to gain much needed power, but also a vision of how production could be arranged more generally.

Solidarity in action – decommodification as political strategy

Within cultural institutions, academia, autonomous spaces or religious communities, there is a tendency to experiment in building small scale or temporary versions of the kind of society we would like to envision, acting as a kind of social oasis in the neoliberal terrain we are otherwise trapped in. A similar tendency often arises within protest movements, which have attempted to build alternative collective support mechanisms. And while such efforts are undoubtedly commendable, they are rarely grounded in the productive sphere and thus seem to correspond more with the definition of → solidarity as a community of feelings and purposes. Not only is this form of solidarity unsustainable on an institutional level and ultimately frustrating on an individual one, it is also politically inefficient for galvanising real social change.

More often than not, progressive movements that are not grounded in the sphere of production (in working class organisations) lack the capacity to effect political outcomes outside the confines of their own organisations, and in many cases even end up replicating them on the inside (there is no lack of precarious work conditions, racism, sexism or class hierarchies within cultural, academic or activist circles). So it is necessary to redefine solidarity and begin framing it in political terms – to move its meaning from an act of localised individual practices based on moral convictions, towards a pragmatic act of coalition building based on common material interests.

¹⁶⁶ Jane McAlevy, “Teachers Are Leading the Revolt Against Austerity”, *The Nation* (9 May 2018), <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/teachers-are-leading-the-revolt-against-austerity/> (accessed June 2020).

¹⁶⁷ Rastko Močnik, “Delovni razredi v sodobnem kapitalizmu”, *Postfordizem: Razprave o sodobnem kapitalizmu* (Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut, 2010).

This opens up the field of political strategy. Firstly: what social groups (or on an international level, what governments) with any organisational pull can be brought together to force material concessions from capital? And secondly: what are the demands around which they can be organised? What demands are radical enough to bring about actual change, yet not so radical that they are perceived as unattainable? This kind of strategic thinking is crucial for any kind of advancement – without defining the material interest that can sustain a durable political alliance with actual working class participation, such movements are reduced to groups of professional activists making moral gestures, which can quickly fade into the background of today's 24-hour news cycle.

From this strategic standpoint, it is clear that teachers and healthcare workers have been among the few organised working class groups which have managed to make any inroads at all into the broader society. Their strikes or political campaigns managed to open spaces for broader discussions on employment, public services, work hours, reproductive work and even climate change. Quoting prominent labour organisers, environmental analyst Matt Huber notes that:

Jane McAlevey has persuasively argued that the healthcare and education sectors should be the strategic target of a new working class union movement. These sectors are the very basis of social reproduction in many communities – and unlike steel plants, they cannot be offshored. Alyssa Battistoni also argues these “social reproduction” or “→ care” sectors are inherently low-carbon and low-impact sectors. Expanding these sectors should be central to the political ecology focused on “care” in the larger sense of the term (to include ecosystems and other life support systems). Many of these struggles are also in the very public sector that will be crucial to the program of decommodification.¹⁶⁸

The term decommodification is central. Loosely defined as “the strength of social entitlements and citizens’ degree of immunisation from market dependency”¹⁶⁹ and the “degree to which individual, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation”,¹⁷⁰ it serves as an ideal framework for a political programme of the working class – radical yet not unattainable. In the era of COVID-19, when the inability of market forces to provide basic goods and services has become abundantly clear, the need to remove social reproduction from the sphere of market circulation simply seems like common sense. If anything, it was the privatisation of these services that was counterintuitive to most people. In many ways, a decommodification of goods and services would simply be a return to normal.

While our current social arrangements still contain examples of decommodified spaces of social reproduction, history also provides many examples of societies attempting to expand or revolutionise these models. In her seminal work *Restoration of Capitalism: Repatriarchalisation of Society*,¹⁷¹ Lilijana Burcar has mapped how socialist Yugoslavia's day-care programmes were intricately tied-in with almost all sectors of society – from the management of the workplace to the city and commu-

168 Matt Humer, “Ecological Politics for the Working Class”, *Jacobin* (10 December 2019), <https://jacobin.com/2019/10/ecological-politics-working-class-climate-change> (accessed June 2020).

169 Thomas Janoski, Robert R. Alford, Alexander M. Hicks, Mildred A. Schwartz, *The Handbook of Political Sociology: States, Civil Societies, and Globalization* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

170 Gøsta Esping-Andersen, “The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism”, *Social Forces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

171 Lilijana Burcar, *Restavracija kapitalizma: repatriarhalizacija družbe* (Ljubljana: Založba Sophia, 2015).

nity itself. Reproductive work was to a large extent professionalised and socialised, providing → *mothers* not only with access to the workplace and leisure time, but also well-paid union jobs in the → *care* sector. It is only through the privatisation and commodification of nursing homes and the care sector in general that the patriarchal nature of capitalist production has been re-established in force – yet for many working class people the idea of socialised day-care, and even meals and laundry, is far from a utopia. It has already been a lived experience.

Could we then, through a sustained effort, pull more and more services and goods out of the domain of the market and guarantee them as a right? Could we extend the health and educational services provided in most European countries to housing, transport, daycare and food? How could more people be employed in providing these services and what new forms of cooperation and decision-making could this generate? And of course how can these programmes be tailored to fight climate disaster? While propositions for a universal basic income do little to address these questions and maintain an individualised working class with no bargaining power, decommodification of social reproduction presents us with a unique opportunity for both social transformation and pragmatic coalition-building.

But the fact that certain solutions can ring out like common sense does not yet make them a political reality until the organisations needed to fight for them are put in place. As we are recovering from a massive public health crisis, support for publicly funded services has never been greater. Yet there have been little to no moves from governments to expand any kind of funding for healthcare, welfare or education, while on the other hand military and security spending continues to grow. This can be attributed to the weakness of the organisations representing public service workers and the lack of coordination between them, as well as the large structural obstacles these organisations face (everything from EU dictated austerity to local union busting efforts).

Despite all this, one would be hard pressed to find any other force within the working class better positioned to advance a radical agenda than public service workers. Even a minor segment of this sector withholding its labour would present a significant blow to capital and open new pathways forward. And while the organisational task is certainly daunting, few workplaces in today's economy maintain better organisational conditions than these public sector services. Union density is higher, workers interact more regularly, and workplaces cannot simply be moved abroad. In short, the conditions for solidarity are much better than can be found in other arenas of struggle.

In many ways, the task of creating and moulding these conditions still lies ahead of us, but the sphere of social reproduction is the one where they are most likely to arise, with a programme of decommodification providing a fruitful political framework. And as large-scale interventions into the economy have proven to be not only possible, but necessary, the idea of a public job guarantee set up to maintain the essential work of social reproduction no longer seems a utopian dream, but a pragmatic and politically viable solution. Arguments for such programmes can not only be presented as a credible alternative to the dead end of austerity, but can also be a focus of the organisation. And with organisation comes new meanings and possibilities. As such, a redefinition of solidarity may well present itself to us in the near future.

Speaking of it, approaching its edges, playing somewhat riskily with its reverberations turns out to be irresistible when the relation between → solidarity and commons is at play. Especially when what is irresistible lies not in the term itself but around it, in that which disrupts, provokes, and arouses its surroundings.

Beyond its root, which comes from the Greek term *haptikos* and refers to that which pertains to the sense of touch, this term appears in Harney and Moten's book *The Undercommons*, published in 2013¹⁷². Specifically, it appears in the chapter about logistics, entitled "Fantasy in the Hold", where it takes on a particularly stimulating power. To approach the authors' intention one must understand the body of the text as a machine operating at many levels, in which there is no one explanation, answer, or definition, but rather a deployment of mechanisms making different things work.

Figure 21: First session of the reading group organised around *The Undercommons* on 13 February 2017 in the movements room at La Casa Invisible, watching a scene from the movie *Drums Along the Mohawk*, 1939, 1'44".



And in order to approach this embodied and → situated theory and practice of the *undercommons*, to touch and feel what it is about, to see how it works and what already-working elements are woven into its mechanisms, an experience of contact with the text took place in February 2017 in Málaga, when an informal reading group came together that worked through the text and also began to → translate

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solidarity, p. 65
situated, p. 148
translate, p. 153

172 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Autonomedia, Minor Compositions, 2013).

it, in the movements room at La Casa Invisible. (Figure 21) La Casa Invisible is an occupied social and cultural centre in the historic centre of Málaga that started its activities in 2007 by re-appropriating a small palace that was built in 1876 and abandoned at the beginning of the new millennium. The space has served as the centre of operations for many social movements. It has also functioned as a meeting space and birthplace for hundreds of initiatives, platforms, groups, campaigns, and social activities, an aggregator of alternative cultural activities, and a space for artistic experimentation. Surely, however, the most important thing is the distinct sociality that comes into existence in its courtyard, corridors, and enclaves, a form of living together that is disobedient toward the mandates of neoliberalism. Today, La Casa Invisible is a space under threat in an urban centre that in the last decade has turned into a virtual theme park,¹⁷³ cornered by the franchise museums that have sprung up around the Picasso brand to strengthen the city's tourist industries, and stripped of a neighbourly social fabric by abrupt increases in rental prices.

When Harney and Moten write of study, they do so with reference to this sociality, to the fact that it involves a "common intellectual practice". This does not just mean that study happens outside of class – at the university or in the study or reading group – but rather that it is precisely what is around, beneath, before, and after that which we understand strictly as the moment of study where study really takes place. Like in the small informal groups that take shape among students before class or in conversations in a bar after a reading group. Study as "what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, [...] playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory".¹⁷⁴ And in all these activities a sociality is created that is *already* an intellectual practice. So referring to the reading group around *The Undercommons* is not so much to speak of its debates or of the text itself, but of the connections between the concepts developed in the text and a sociality that exists – and already existed – in the different spaces of La Casa Invisible and in very different micro-practices of *general antagonism* across the city. As Harney reminds us in his interview with Stephen Shukaitis, "a kind of comportment or ongoing experiment with and as the general antagonism, a kind of way of being with others".¹⁷⁵

This *doing with others* or *way of being with others* is a sociality that cannot be separated from problems and things that do not work well, and which does not require a *call to order* in order to work. The *call to order* is the moment the sociality out of which study emerges is cut off, as in Harney and Moten's example of a class before the instructor arrives and calls the students to order so that the class can begin, or at a concert when the tuning up has ended and the show can start. However, it is precisely when there is no call to order that the most interesting things occur, when there is no cut between the informal and formal, when the whispering, the greetings, the → rehearsal can, without interruption and without a call to order, lead to the concert. Where the exact moment when the concert or the class begins is → unknown, and study occurs as much in the preceding informality as when informality coheres into a form, and extends towards a formality. "It's just about not being cut off like that; to study the general antagonism from within the general antagonism."¹⁷⁶ While the tendency of the university and many educational institutions is to correct and insulate themselves from this sociality, study not only cannot

173 Kike España and Gerald Raunig, "The City of Attractions", *Keep Reading, Giving Rise*, ed. Rogelio López Cuenca (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2019).

174 Harney and Moten (2013).

175 Ibid, 112.

176 Ibid, 118.

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rehearsal, p. 260
unknown, p. 245

be separated from it, but takes it as a point of departure. As Moten explains, “form is not the eradication of the informal. Form is what emerges from the informal”¹⁷⁷ And hapticality plays a very important role in this emergence – it is the tact and sensibility to soften those boundaries in *doing with others* and in the *way of being with others*.

On the other hand, *undercommon* sociality departs from a problematisation of individuality and the commons. Traditionally, the commons have been theorised as a convergence of resources and relationships that create, protect, and manage themselves. What Harney and Moten point out is that this convergence of relationships and resources – the so-called commons – is presented as a state achieved by individuals who decide to enter into relations through the commons. The problem is that the individuals-in-relation create “not just commons, but states and nations”.¹⁷⁸ Without getting rid of the individual – including the idea of individuals in relation – it is impossible to create commons. *Undercommon* sociality breaks with this individualistic conception, because it departs from and works with what is beneath processes of individuation. In the informality that is already here, before the call to order, before the moment of regulation, of correction, of settlement. If the idea is to speak and create commons out of solidarity, the individual moment that is normally passed along the way to making or conceiving anything must be done away with. *Undercommon* sociality is what really and materially creates commons because it is not necessary to protect, manage, or create anything, but rather to join together, → *care*, have contact, be sensitive, and experiment with what is already here, with what is already happening. Like in the song “What’s Going On?” by Marvin Gaye, as Moten recalls, where the “song emerges out of the fact that something already was going on”,¹⁷⁹ where the voice of Marvin Gaye is an extension of the multiplicity of the informal voices and conversations of the first seventeen seconds – and others that were not recorded. And extending this problematisation, the *undercommons* cannot be a *we* or an *ours* – the first as it never ends up closing itself off as a concrete collectivity or community, and the second because it is not a possession – not even a self-possession. It is a sociality that remains dispossessed and always in movement, centred on the relational experience of between. It is not born of nothing, but emerges from that which is already happening between things, like a → *constellation* of micropractices of the between.

Harney and Moten say that “to work today is to be asked, more and more, to do without thinking, to feel without emotion, to move without friction, to adapt without question, to → *translate* without pause, to desire without purpose, to connect without interruption”.¹⁸⁰ This is how the chapter “Fantasy in the Hold” begins, where the authors begin by writing about logistics and end by infecting *us* with hapticality. Logistics, according to the authors, is the dominant capitalist new science that aims to undo the subject. Traditionally, business innovations have taken place in the realm of strategy, with logistics following course, but now logistics is what dictates. In an algorithmic alliance between financialisation and logistics, capital advances its fantasy of power to “exist without labour”.¹⁸¹ Logistics attempts “to connect without going through the subject, to subject without handling things”,¹⁸² and it is not limited to concrete innovations in the business world, as in the recent

177 Ibid, 128.

178 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “Plantocracy or Communism”, *Propositions for a Non-fascist Living: Tentative and Urgent*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Wietske Maas (Utrecht: BAK, 2019), 52.

179 Harney and Moten (2013), 128.

180 Ibid, 87.

181 Ibid, 90.

182 Ibid, 91–2.

trend of *dropshipping* – selling products without at all touching, storing, or seeing them. In a counter-revolution in the face of labour-power, it produces “an entity hooked into financial affects in a way that makes it more logistical than a strategic subject”.¹⁸³ This idea, now algorithmically perfected, is in fact grounded in the plundering and primitive accumulation carried out by the Atlantic slave trade, with people transported as mercenary workers, which is to say as just another object in the hold or the container. Thus, following Harney and Moten, “logistics was always the transport of slavery, not ‘free’ labour”.¹⁸⁴ And that is not all: modernity and its contemporary logisticality¹⁸⁵ are grounded in this necropolitical movement of things. This can be seen in the here and now in the unrestrained violence one side of the Mediterranean exercises toward the other, where Europe not only plunders the resources of Africa that are ceaselessly moved in containers, but also exploits – for example under the plastic of Almería – its inhabitants. Those who embarked in boats on their own are always treated as outlaws by a border regime that criminalises what it deeply desires as slave labour. This is where the cruelty and terror of modern logisticality can be seen and felt – and how the State is at its service.

And it is just on this point that Harney and Moten recall that the *undercommon* is already here, including in situations of total dispossession. And moreover, it is precisely from this dispossession that hapticality emerges. They explain how *blackness*, being the place where absolute nothingness converges with the world of things, is also and precisely for this reason where and how the relationality “displaces the already displaced impossibility of a home”.¹⁸⁶ And it is a relationality that goes beyond and beneath the proper, or that which is one’s own, “not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything”.¹⁸⁷ Just as the passage from logistics to logisticality presumes an entire crossing, a total dislocation and non-locatability, the passage from the haptic to hapticality implies a non-locatable touch that crosses everything. Moving and being moved by and with others is what happens to the embarked being, but logisticality cannot determine the sense that crosses and moves bodies. This is hapticality. “The hold’s terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common, to create a new feel in the undercommons.”¹⁸⁸ A sense that cannot be sensed individually or collectively, that is not *mine* or *ours*, but is rather a sense of becoming common. Hapticality is this sense “a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you. [...] This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide”.¹⁸⁹ That is, a feeling that it is impossible to fix a → *territory*, state, nation, or history. It is the tactile sense of *undercommon* sociality, because before all forms of enclosure, but also before all forms of *commoning*, there is *already* this being in touch.

*Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other.*¹⁹⁰

183 Ibid, 90.

184 Ibid, 92.

185 Editor’s note: A term defined by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten.

186 Ibid, 96.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid, 97.

189 Ibid, 98.

190 Ibid.

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care, p. 92, 122
constellation, p. 73
translate, p. 153

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territory, p. 269

To go into a general antagonism today it seems urgent and necessary to break down many fortifications, not only those external and far away, but also those that are our own and nearby. “That takedown comes in movement, as a shawl”,¹⁹¹ *under-common* layer of delicate touch and unforeseeable turns, “the armour of flight”,¹⁹² hapticity, a new feeling.

Translated from the Spanish by Kelly Mulvaney.

The above title(s) are a paraphrase of a newspaper column, “I, a Communist”, by the late journalist Jurij Gustinčič.¹⁹³ It was published in the weekly *Mladina* in 2002. I am mentioning this case as an example of an engaged position in times when declaring that one was a communist was not favoured public, political or personal stand in the post-socialist state of Slovenia.

So the first point that I am going to talk about is about history. One of the key issues or as it seems “unresolvable” problems of our current times is precisely the “problem” with history. Many have written about it – who has the right to history, by whom is the history constructed (history from above, from below), what kind of positions are taken within history, how to deal with historical negationism, with revisionism, etc. This has been even more evident in the past months, with the pandemic and all the consequent restrictive measures that happened in the countries affected, turning the political discourse/orientation towards the right or even extreme right, at the same time bringing forward issues of racism, colonialism, new and old forms of fascism and so on. As we know history is dynamic, history is a discipline of critical thinking, it is transnational... but what is important is the distinction between “historical revision” (which means creating new knowledge, discovering new historical sources and interpreting them) and “historical revisionism” (manipulation of historical facts to achieve a political goal).

Since the 1990s the revisionist attempts at changing the accepted historical facts – mainly about the Partisan resistance and the role of communists during the Second World War – have been more and more widespread, especially in the former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe. This “narrative” claims that the → *anti-fascist* parties and especially the Communist Party (Yugoslav, Italian, etc.) had, as David Broder writes in *Jacobin*, “institutionalised their own myths as official history while silencing those who dared to question their authority”¹⁹⁴. So as a consequence, the “new” historical perspectives were written and legitimised by revisionist historians, causing, among other things, the resurrection of the right and extreme right in many countries around the world. We can place in this context the resolution “Europe must remember its past to build its future”¹⁹⁵ adopted in 2019 by the European Parliament. This resolution is dangerous as it condemns communism as equivalent to Nazism, and in this way opens the door to “criminalising” contempo-

191 Ibid, 19.

192 Ibid.

193 Jurij Gustinčič, “Jaz, komunist”, *Mladina*, no. 38 (23 September 2002), <https://www.mladina.si/104091/jaz-komunist/> (accessed June 2020).

194 David Broder, “The Fascists’ Historian”, *Jacobin* (14 January 2020), <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/01/giampaolo-pansa-fascism-historian-italy-communism> (accessed June 2020).

195 “Europe must remember its past to build its future”, European Parliament press release (19 September 2019), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190917IPR61204/europe-must-remember-its-past-to-build-its-future> (accessed June 2020).

rary anti-fascist movements. It is a pity that this resolution has not received more criticism and public response. → *Solidarity* with this kind of anti-fascist history has unfortunately been omitted.

Altogether different is a recent declaration called “Defend History!”¹⁹⁶ written by a group of historians from the countries of the former Yugoslavia. It emphasises another danger coming from historical revisionism: that revisionism is enabling the continuing of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s by other means. These wars are also becoming subject to political manipulation, just like the Second World War.

Slovenia is not an exception in all this, and in March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the main right-wing party returned to political power, leading the country towards Hungary-style Orbanisation. Since then every Friday there have been protests around Slovenia where thousands of cyclists and pedestrians take to the streets. The government used the pandemic to restrict freedoms, to increase police powers, incite hostility to migrants, sacrifice the elderly (as old people sick with COVID were not sent to hospitals), attack critical media, culture, etc. What is especially dangerous is the tendency towards cultural homogeneity, with anti-immigrant sentiments being one of the main “arguments” of their nationalism. Historian Božo Repe, in his recent text on the political situation in Slovenia, asked: “At what point of transition to fascism are we today?”¹⁹⁷

Looking back to the 1920s, 1930s and the rise of fascism, the new political situation does not come as a surprise, as it was not really a surprise to read Trump’s tweet on 31 May 2020 that the USA will be designating Antifa as a terrorist organisation. This demonisation of → *anti-fascism*, and proclaiming the movement as “alt-left”, is dangerous as it relativises fascism.

But the core of fascism today lies in neoliberalism. Tomaž Mastnak¹⁹⁸ wrote an excellent analysis in a newspaper column from today. He basically warned the left that an alliance with neoliberalism against fascism means at the same time an alliance with the forces of the system that gives rise to fascism. Fascism will not be stopped this way. What we should do instead is start changing the system.

But changing the system is not easy. How to even start doing so, how do we take a stand (think of Gramsci’s text “I Hate the Indifferent” as a source of inspiration), and how do we actually become part of the movement, and resistance? I think other authors in this volume will discuss some of these aspects more thoroughly. Just to give an example: Arundhati Roy in a recent interview pointed out that the best way (and the starting point) of supporting the movement is to understand where it comes from: the history of slavery, racism, the civil rights movement, and I can also add the history of fascism and neoliberalism to the list.

But the basis for all political action and engagement is solidarity. The usual interpretation is that solidarity requires a shared political aim, a collective action for justice. De-colonising solidarity (Fernanda Carvajal, for example, writes about this) proposes a new, horizontal format as a tool for promoting mutual relationships

196 Krokodil, *Defend History* (2020), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-DQ8edN-TS3W5_hhJTWYSkhrP515F_Xh (accessed June 2020).

197 Božo Repe: “Kako preprečiti krepitev fašizma?”, *Mladina* (12 June 2020).

198 Tomaž Mastnak: “Kaj je torej fašizem?”, *Dnevnik* (24 June 2020).

among peoples. A different concept of solidarity is a definition by Avery Kolers¹⁹⁹. He says that solidarity is when you act alongside the other even if you think they are wrong, so you act on their behalf. Solidarity can then be defined as “political action on others’ terms”. It is not about justice, but about treating people justly.

Perhaps in this line of thinking I will end with another concept, that of → empathy. Empathy that is not empathy from above, not pity or sympathy, nor Christian love, but empathy as a basis for a new kind of political solidarity that could reach across racial, class, gender, and intergenerational lines, as well as across different human and non-human species. Empathy understood in line with the → hapticality of Kike’s presentation or in the way Manuel Borja-Villel put it in his introduction: “of being present in the other”.

I, an animal, I, a poor person, I, a sick person, I, a refugee...

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empathy, p. 192
hapticality, p. 100

Interdependence

Or, secrecy as the last universal right²⁰⁰ Zdenka Badovinac

Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, June 2020

Unconditional Care and Solidarity

Today, in the midst of a pandemic, “→ care” has become a keyword, one that also comes up often in current discussions and projects in the international art world. Very few of these discussions, however, note that the kind of care we are talking about, which today is largely the province of specific community and civil-society initiatives, was once deeply integrated into certain countries’ social systems, or that it would be wise to reinstate a place for care, and to do so more strongly, in larger systems. By larger systems I mean not only individual countries, but also international initiatives that could successfully oppose global homogenisation by, among other things, relying on the work of the micropolitical structures that already exist today. We need systems of interdependence²⁰¹, in which larger entities acknowledge their dependence on smaller entities and incorporate it in the way they function. Now, in light of the current pandemic, our interdependence is all the more evident, and it is plainer than ever that it cannot be based solely on human-to-human relationships but must also include non-human agencies. The virus that first appeared in a market in Wuhan proves that globalism is dependent even on micro-locations and micro-events. The pandemic, indeed, has made us more aware of the interdependence that exists on our planet, but we can extend this interdependence to the cosmos, whose processes influence our lives and where we, too, are leaving our mark. And if the tiny coronavirus remains a riddle for us, what can we say about the whole of creation, in which humanity is merely an episode in the eternal processes of genesis and decline? Interdependence is not merely what we imagine it to be, nor is it in any way the expression of our symbolic order; rather, it includes secrecy within itself.

199 “The Moral Duty of Solidarity”, *Civil American*, vol. 3, no. 4, Society of Philosophers in America (30 April 2018), <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/04/30/the-moral-duty-of-solidarity/> (accessed June 2020).

200 The text was published at the time of the Glossary of Common Knowledge, Commons/Solidarity seminar in e-flux Journal, no. 110 (June 2020) <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/110/336891/interdependence-or-secrecy-as-the-last-universal-right/> (accessed June 2020).

201 Editor’s note: In the previous edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, the term “interdependence” (2018), 259, was presented by curator Alenka Gregorič during the Other Institutionality seminar to shed light on the intricate connections of the art institutions, artists, political will and other agencies.

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care, p. 92, 122

The pandemic has not only made us more aware of universal interdependence, but has also sparked a further radicalisation of protectionism and nationalism, and it is very possible that we will soon be facing new geopolitical conflicts. A number of Slovenia’s progressive business leaders and intellectuals, who recently joined together in the initiative “Ordinary People and Citizens” (*Sleherniki in civilisti*), warn us of a possible end to multilateralism and the curtailment of certain international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Many of us might say, so what if these institutions are curtailed – they should be serving the cause of international cooperation and → solidarity but have instead become subservient to the interests of capital and to states and corporations competing for global economic dominance. While we will of course still need such international institutions, it is clear they will have to function differently and be rooted in that interdependence which is becoming ever more obvious and ever more critical. New systems of interdependence can only be based on international solidarity and a new approach to public resources and care for the environment. Globalism is built not on the world we all share, but on the privatisation of the world; it is not interested in international solidarity, but in the accumulation of power and capital and the distribution of knowledge and information that is subject to this. The idea of a shared world can be built only on a different kind of internationalism, which includes international solidarity, by which I mean it respects the needs of individual groups and localities and their right to survival and to equal participation in the global exchange of ideas and goods – their right to participate in the creation of the commons. The commons means not only shared natural resources, but also shared social conditions for widespread participation in the formation of the world we share.

The imaginary of contemporary art reflects both our dependences and our interdependence, thus tracking two forces that are bigger than us as individuals: a force that dominates us almost completely and turns us into passive objects, and a force that draws us towards active cooperation and collaboration. The central question in Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle’s book *Cartographies of the Absolute* is how to depict the all-powerful force of capitalism. Here they see “an *aesthetic* problem, in the sense of demanding ways of representing the complex and dynamic relations intervening between the domains of production, consumption and distribution, and their strategic political mediations, ways of making the invisible visible.”²⁰² Of course, this is also a kind of interdependence, but it is one based on mutual interest and profit, whereas what we are envisioning is the interdependence of society not as individuals but as a community based on unconditional solidarity, which is a necessary condition for the survival of all.

Art has always been committed to something larger than the individual artist, whether this is some → unknown, ungraspable force or the idea of community in all its possible scope. While dependence on some unknown, ungraspable force has often, in the history of art, been depicted in terms of wild nature, the “sublime” in today’s art may be shown in graphs and photographs, videos depicting the distribution and consumption of goods, or sculptures made from modern-day materials. Interdependence, meanwhile, is represented through some sort of active engagement of people, animals, or even inanimate things, striving for universal rights. The pandemic has thrust to the forefront questions of interdependence and the universal rights associated with it, including, for instance, the right to health care, the right to work, the right to housing, and even the right to the city.

202 Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Zero Books, 2015), 24–5.

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solidarity, p. 65
unknown, p. 245

The Right to Housing

One of the key messages during lockdown – “Stay home” – although full of concern for the health of the general public, does not include the many people who have no home in which to stay. Throughout the refugee crisis of the past few years, the Balkans have been one of the main routes for migrants coming to Europe, but it is a route fraught with obstacles. For a long time now there have been reports from Bosnia about the dire situation of refugees, although, since lockdown began they have been arriving in fewer numbers. Right before the pandemic was officially declared, the artist Jošt Franko created a collage of photographs of refugee homes, which he titled *AFGHANISTAN TUZLA Good, February 8th, 2020*. (Figure 22) He accompanied it with the following text:

The last passenger train deposited the arrivals at the central station in Tuzla two months ago. Now only boxcars with coal from the Banovići mines travel the rails to the Tuzla thermal power plant. The overcrowded temporary reception centres in Bihać and Kladuša are no longer taking in new refugees. The authorities are systematically detaining migrants in other parts of the Federation. Public transport is monitored and refugees are prevented from continuing on their road to the EU. The authorities of the Tuzla Canton have decided not to set up temporary reception centres under the auspices of the International Organisation for Migration. Hundreds of people sleep on railroad platforms every night. Local NGOs have organised overnight accommodation for families and vulnerable groups.



Figure 22: Jošt Franko, *AFGHANISTAN TUZLA Good*, 2020, photo collage, 200 x 55 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

With the onset of the coronavirus crisis, the issue of the refugees receded into the background and priority was given to people with street addresses. In no way do I wish to imply that residents do not deserve whatever → care they receive; quite the contrary, the pandemic has shown us yet again that we must do a better job of connecting different issues – the pandemic, the refugee crisis, the economy, and the environment. Civil initiatives have an important role to play in addressing crisis situations, which they also attempt to do through the participation of those who are most affected. The slogan “Stay home” also leaves out many who, even if they have citizenship papers, are still unable to find affordable housing; in their case, civil initiatives that work for changes in local housing policies are all the more welcome. One such initiative is an action by the Slovene Housing for All Network (*Mreža stanovanje za vse*), which was launched long before the pandemic; it brings together architects, urban planners, sociologists, legal experts, NGOs, and students in an organised effort to influence public opinion and put pressure on policymakers to address the issue in a systemic and sustainable way. (Figure 23) The goal is to change Slovenia’s housing legislation through various kinds of pressure and persuasion, which are aimed not only at lawmakers but also, by raising awareness of housing as a basic human right, at all members of society. In our critical discussions of neoliberalism, we too often fail to speak about the crisis in values – the fact that

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care, p. 92, 122

people have lost a sense of what rightfully belongs to them and are, sometimes willfully, unaware of universal rights. This simply means that people have accepted privatisation as part of the “natural” order, where the weaker have lost the battle in competition with the stronger.

The Right to the City

Along with the right to housing, it is also important to mention the right to the city, which is threatened, on the one hand, by the pandemic and the understandable safety measures put in place to stop the spread of the virus, and, on the other, by the way certain national leaders are exploiting the situation as an ideal opportunity to realise their strong-arm tendencies. The current economic, social, environmental, and health crises, along with growing nationalism and institutionalised racism, are triggering ever more protests and demonstrations throughout the world, which the authorities try to suppress by barricading streets and squares, limiting movement, and expanding digital surveillance. In some countries, the ruling powers are exploiting this time of mass isolation to do things that, under normal conditions, would provoke even greater resistance within the population.

Recently, the international art world was abuzz with the story about how the authorities in Tirana had used the time of the pandemic to demolish the historic Albanian National Theatre in the heart of the city. In the early 2000s, then-mayor Edi Rama, who today is the nation’s prime minister, became a symbol of contemporary Albania when he ordered that the never-replastered buildings of the once grey socialist city be painted in bright colours – blue, green, orange, purple, yellow, and red. Several curators later got involved with this monumental action and invited a number of internationally established artists, such as Olafur Eliasson, Liam Gillick, and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, to paint other buildings in the city. Tirana thus became a global attraction. Rama was proclaimed the world’s best mayor and, a few years ago, even appeared as an artist at the Venice Biennale. In 2003, the now-established Albanian artist Anri Sala documented the painted façades of Tirana in the film *Dammi i Colori (Give me the Colours)*, which later that year was included in Hans Ulrich Obrist’s exhibition “Utopia Station” at the 50th Venice Biennale. Other Albanian artists also responded to Rama’s colourful façades in 2003, engaging in a public dialogue with their city’s new image. Alban Hajdinaj created a film in which he underscored his position as a local spectator who sees the fresh-painted façades as something alien. Gentian Shkurti, meanwhile, told the story of a colour-blind man who continued to see these buildings as grey – a metaphor for the country’s internal problems, which cannot be painted over by some colourful intervention.

As Albania’s prime minister, Rama has not stopped making artistic interventions and continues to invite internationally known artists and architects to help modernise Tirana, even if this means construction on the site of historic buildings that have helped shape the city’s character. The national theatre was the most recent such building to be demolished in the name of modernisation. A prime example of Italian modernist architecture in the city centre, it was built on Mussolini’s orders



Figure 23: Maja Hawlina, Maša Hawlina, Sara Jassim, *May Day Greeting Card from the Housing for All Network [Mreža Stanovanje za vse]*, 2020. The text addressed to all Slovene governmental institutions, ministries, mayors and municipalities, urbanists, architectural associations, national, and local media, reads: “Long Live the First of May! Rights for Workers and Balconies for All!”

during Italy's occupation of Albania (1939–1943). The modernism of the fascist era was later nicely complemented by the socialist modernism of the dictator Enver Hoxha, which today is succeeded by the new architectural style of the global world. Fascism, socialism, and today's global (post)modernism all share the fact that they elevate their own international language above the local particularities – although not above particular political and ideological interests, which in one way or another always leave their mark. The historic building of the Albanian National Theatre will soon be replaced by a new theatre, which, however, will be part of a larger complex with a shopping mall and a business centre. For the past two years, the planned demolition of the old theatre has been met with protests from theatre performers and other artists, as well as members of the left-wing party Organizata Politike, while the right-wing opposition, led by Monika Kryemadhi, the wife of the Albanian president, has exploited the protests for its own ends. One of the theatre's last productions was directed by the Croatian Ivica Buljan, who deliberately chose Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* – about a man who begins his career with big, beautiful ideas but ends up as a corrupt emperor who eventually has to be killed. The play was staged in the swimming pool at the head of the square in front of the theatre. It is worth mentioning that this swimming pool accentuated the building's division into two wings. Under socialism, one wing housed the classical national theatre (the official theatre of the regime), while the other housed an experimental theatre, which was one of the rare spaces of freedom in those leaden times.

For over twenty years, Tirana's painted façades and Rama's other interventions in the city's architectural and urbanistic heritage have generated public debates that go beyond mere aesthetic issues and delve into questions about spatial politics. The Albanian case speaks to issues about art in relation to people's right to the city and to its collective memory, which is a condition for reproducing any society. The artistic and civil actions in Tirana are not interested in the uninterrupted development of the national culture, or in its allegedly homogeneous unproblematic core, but rather in memory, which relies on various discontinuities. What is "Albanian" must also include the Italian occupation and its fascist architecture, Hoxhaist modernism, and even globalist-style shopping malls.

In the Balkan region we are currently witnessing many examples of irresponsible treatment of cultural heritage, with 20th century modernism especially coming under attack. The most egregious and grotesque example of the destruction of the modernist heritage of socialism is in Skopje, where Macedonian nationalists have covered buildings from the period of socialist Yugoslavia in pseudo-classical façades; among other things, they want to stress the idea that socialism was a deviation in the historical development of a great European culture.

Europa Nostra, a network of cultural heritage protection groups, has compiled a list of Europe's seven most endangered cultural heritage sites for 2020, of which no less than five are in former socialist countries, and three are in the Balkans. Of these, the 20th century sites include the Albanian National Theatre, which is now gone, and the Bežigrad Central Stadium in Ljubljana, which was designed by the architect Jože Plečnik.

Nature as a Third Element

During the pandemic, discussions in Ljubljana over the fate of Plečnik's stadium became more intense. Built in the 1930s and modelled on the amphitheatres of antiquity, the stadium has the status of a monument of national significance. Nev-

ertheless, today the interests of capital have the upper hand in decisions about its fate, just as they did about the theatre in Tirana – and in both cases are opposed to the public interest. With Plečnik's stadium, this is obvious from the far greater amount of surface area being planned for commercial activity compared to what is intended for sustainable communal use by citizens. The realisation of the current plans for the stadium was halted by complications over the necessary environmental protection documents as well as an initiative by local residents, who would be deprived of certain green spaces by the planned development. Disputes over the stadium's renovation have dragged on for more than ten years, during which time the stadium has been overgrown with grass. The artist Jože Barši, who sees a particular beauty in this overgrown condition, is proposing that the owners be allowed to build whatever they want around the stadium, so long as they leave the interior of the stadium wild and overgrown, with only minimal restoration. (Figure 24) Barši's art installation includes a photograph of the overgrown stadium and, beside it, a display case with documents from the stadium's history, one of which is another photograph showing the oath-taking of the Slovene Home Guard, under



the command of General Leon Rupnik, on Adolf Hitler's birthday in 1944. In the photo, the Home Guard is taking an oath, as an auxiliary unit of the Nazi SS, to fight alongside Germany against the communists and their allies. Not long → after the war, Leon Rupnik, a committed anti-communist and anti-Semite, was condemned to death and executed by a firing squad. Last year, more than seven decades later, the Supreme Court of Slovenia annulled the Rupnik verdict and sent the case back to the Ljubljana District Court. Rupnik's story is just another chapter that reveals the deep divide between the descendants of the left and right in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The divisions surrounding the renovation of Plečnik's stadium, meanwhile, reflect a not-so-different antagonism between those who advocate a society of the commons and those who support neoliberal interests. Barši's proposal turns the stadium into a monument that reminds us that everything is transitory. But here we are not dealing with some romantic notion that leaves the resolution of human problems to nature; no, this is more about recognising as an illusion the idea that people have reality under their control. Of course, if I had writ-

Figure 24: Jože Barši, *Remembering and Forgetting*, 2020, installation view, 22 February 2021 – 11 April 2021, The City Art Gallery Ljubljana. Photo: Andrej Peunik/Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana.

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after, p. 160

ten this before the pandemic that last statement would have undoubtedly sounded less convincing, but today we are more ready to acknowledge our dependence on non-human agencies.

Non-human Agencies

When we speak about interdependence with non-human agencies, we should not think of efforts to create harmonious relations between humanity and nature based on some sort of essentialist identity. Rather, we should think of an interdependence between constantly changing actors. Under the current conditions, it feels as though we are experiencing ever greater, ever faster transformations of identity, and rapid migrations from one living situation to another due to technology and science as well as ever more rapacious capitalism. But ceaseless transformations and mutations are also part of the processes of nature. The pandemic has demolished our illusion of something we never actually had: a stable natural order. When we think of interdependence, we should think of something that is both good and bad at the same time, something that encompasses both nature and our own production.

Even before the pandemic, the question of artificial intelligence and its dominance in our lives was the focus of broad discussions. The visual researcher Gregor Mobius, in his work *Proto-RNA, The First Self-Learning Machine* (2018), talks about the fact that we developed, over the long process of evolution, from the first organic molecules, which, in a sense, were “self-learning machines”, to use the contemporary term. People want to see this principle of self-learning in artificial intelligence, too, and to teach machines to teach themselves. Mobius reflects on how children possess an innate ability for self-learning that allows them to quickly absorb information about the world around them, just as the first living organisms learned about the environment in which they found themselves, where they had to discover the path of their own survival. Of all the current hypotheses about the origin of life, the most compelling is the theory that the first living molecules were a primitive version of ribonucleic acid – a “proto-RNA”. If this is true, Mobius says, then all of life, culture, and art originated from this molecule four billion years ago. And so did the coronavirus.

Consequently, it makes no sense to understand art simply as a human product, even less as the product of one living person. Of particular interest in this regard are those artists who draw on ideas from the Russian avant-garde, in art, science, and philosophy. Some, such as Anton Vidokle, Arseny Zhilyaev, and Dragan Živadinov, go back to the ideas of Russian cosmism, which says that the only possible equal and just society is one in which, with the important help of science, → the dead also participate. Here we might also include Jonas Staal, who is best known for such projects as *New World Summit* (2012–present) and *New Unions* (2016–present), which strive for an open society of cross-solidarities. Recently, Staal and the lawyer Jan Fermon have filed a lawsuit to compel the legal recognition of Facebook as a resource in the public domain that should be owned and controlled by its users. In Staal’s work, people who lack full citizenship rights have a way to participate, and the same is also true for non-human agencies. Such agencies are part of his project *Neo-Constructivist Ammonites* (2019), which references the heritage of the Russian constructivists and productivists, who viewed revolutionary objects as “comrades”. Staal points to the revolutionary tradition of Rodchenko, Stepanova, and Popova, who contrasted their “comradely objects” with the alienation and fetishisation of objects. They applied new abstract forms to everyday utilitarian

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the dead, p. 227

objects, and thus stripped their works of the kind of artistic autonomy that was so integral to 20th century Western abstraction. Stepanova and Popova dedicated themselves to designing clothes, fabrics, dishware, and other ordinary objects, while Rodchenko, a master graphic designer of → propaganda, also designed the interior of the *Workers’ Club* (1925).



In his installation *Neo-Constructivist Ammonites*, Staal combined elements from Russian avant-garde propaganda design with the fossilised shells of ammonites, sixty-six to three hundred million years old; once prevalent in the world’s oceans, these mollusks perished in the fifth mass extinction. (Figure 25) Today, at a time some are describing as the sixth mass extinction, humans have assumed the main role in the annihilation of species, which are disappearing at a rate a hundred times faster than they would without us. Staal’s ammonites are set on vertical neo-constructivist objects as portraits, if you will, of our non-human comrades, as if they were spreading the word from their pedestals about their heroic role in history, about how the ammonites, which are found in various layers of the → Earth’s crust, help us to understand, recognise, and distinguish different geological eras. The ammonites, then, are our teachers, who tell us how important it is to stand in → solidarity with, and be responsible towards, everything that might soon become a fossil.

Figure 25: Jonas Staal, *Interplanetary Species Society*, 2019, Reaktorhallen, Stockholm, produced by the Public Art Agency Sweden. Photo: Jonas Staal.

Secrecy as the Last Universal Right

The interests of capital are destroying not only our cultural heritage but also archaeological sites – even if not always directly. In the recent vast wildfires in Australia, many Aboriginal archaeological sites were destroyed, and more than a billion animals died, including many from species that had been endangered even before

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propaganda, p. 35, 265
Earth, p. 21
solidarity, p. 65

the fires, and some of these species are found nowhere else in the world. Moreover, it is clear that the Australian wildfires are the result of climate change.

Through its aesthetic liberation of things, ideas, and layers of time, art constructs imaginaries of interdependence, which in their own way contribute to a society of solidarity. Today, during this time of pandemic, we like to talk about us all being in the same boat, a metaphor that has replaced the catastrophic image of overcrowded boats of refugees crossing the Mediterranean. But the most powerful metaphor of the present time is the metaphor of the virus, which represents how everything influences everyone. However, this is only our view of viruses, our exploitation of their properties. What viruses themselves think about this, nobody knows.

The global circulation of capital, the industrialisation of agriculture, the cultivation and breeding of plant and animal species outside their natural ecosystems – all these things facilitate the development of viruses and their transmission to humans. And now, it seems, viruses are exacting revenge for our irresponsible attitude towards nature. Our attitude towards nature is indeed irresponsible, but viruses have other things to do in life besides teaching us to be wiser. Our relationship with nature is truly interdependent, but as I have noted, it is a dynamic relationship in which all the participants are in fact foreign to each other. We humans must do more to respect this foreignness instead of trying to domesticate something that we can never fully know. Sometimes things must be left unlabeled, without names, and thus also without commercial value. Secrecy may be the last universal right we must still preserve.

La perruque Onur Yıldız

SALT, Istanbul, June 2020

The discussion I will make around the term *la perruque* is about the management of labour and working hours in a cultural institution, and particularly how these notions can be organised in a collaborative way. I borrow the term *la perruque* from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*²⁰³ in which he scrutinises social representation and modes of social behaviour.

In French *la perruque* literally means *the wig* and Certeau uses this term to describe a “worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer”. He explores this concept of *the wig* as “It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room”.²⁰⁴ By applying Certeau’s critical remark as a basis for this presentation, I will take on an institutional investigation that searches for ways in which the cultural institution can be more open, → solidarity oriented as well as generous. I will tackle this term with the purpose of going beyond the institution’s hierarchical or individualistic regulations about labour time. The reorganisation, I have in mind, concerns the diversion of time; appropriated by cultural institutions, to a seemingly more collaborative and communal direction.

For Certeau, the diversion of time from work means free and creative labour that is not directed toward a financial profit. It can also be seen as an act of solidarity with others, such as friends, family or co-workers. Certeau deploys the term in two

203 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1998).

204 Ibid, 25.

ways: First, he presents *la perruque* as a tactic, meaning that it can be a form of engagement in which the “weak makes use of the strong”. Different from a strategy, it is a form of action aiming at “escaping without leaving”. In essence, it is a practice of “anti-discipline”, a tactic that aims at a fair re-composition of the notion of time, which is usually evaluated negatively by employers. Secondly, he uses the term to name his own scientific practice. He argues that instead of focusing on the existing order of knowledge, as was expected from a researcher in a scientific institution, his examination of everyday practices can be seen as a version of *la perruque*. By researching the practices that were not seen as a legitimate object of study by academic institutions he uses his time – that was supposed to be organised by the scientific institution he is working for – for his own interests.

More contemporary uses operationalise the term *la perruque* as a “work avoidance strategy”. From a management perspective, this strategy is perceived as mischief, deception and a practice that needs to be strictly monitored and prevented by the employer.²⁰⁵

“Frequent systemic use of both company and personal mobile electronic devices, (smartphones, PDAs, tablets, laptops, hot spots, etc.) prolific transmissions of emails, texts, web surfing for shopping, news, sports scores, games, homework research, and keeping tabs on children and family members. Personal calls made to family members, friends, personal business associates, job interviews, doctor and car appointments. Paying e-bills online or with paper checks; E-Commerce shopping, multi-tasking between business vs. personal actions on two or more identical or similar mobile devices” are just some of the examples listed in this category of avoidance strategy.²⁰⁶ It is also stated in the studies that what makes *la perruque* so widespread is the fact that “bosses and supervisors were overtly seen and heard to use digital work devices for personal business, the employees felt free to do the same.”²⁰⁷

From this point of view, I will dwell on the particularities of the organisation of labour time at a cultural institution. It is a complex phenomenon. There is of course this aspect in which the institution monitors and controls staff in order to make sure that they do not use working hours for their individual interests. This is in line with the meaning of *la perruque* I explained before. But I believe that the issue of labour time at a cultural institution has other aspects. There is also an ongoing area of bargaining between the cultural institution itself and the artists, authors, designers, researchers, visitors, students, users, and even the public in general who collaborate with the institution as well as “work” in it. Such constituents, as we define them, are not only shaping the institution through their use of the physical space and their contributions and criticisms regarding the institution’s content, but their requests, applications, requirements and claims also impact the organisation’s sense of labour and its working hours. Researching, collecting, → learning, interpreting, designing and exhibiting with the constituents are blurred zones in which the ownership of time and work becomes unclear. The time spent on “cultural work” cannot be easily associated with an individual’s or group’s exclusive benefits.

205 Debra J. Borkovich, Robert Skovira, Frederick Kohun and Jennifer Breese, “La Perruque” *American Digital Workplace: Stealing Company Time*, vol. 17, no. III, *Information Systems* (2016), 176–86.

206 Borkovich et al. (2016), 181.

207 Ibid.

A recent example can be SALT's collaboration with the artist duo Cooking Sections (Alon Schwabe and Daniel Fernandez) from London. For an upcoming L'Internationale exhibition, we have been working together for more than two years on a comprehensive research project dealing with eating habits under the circumstances caused by human-induced climate change. The research focuses on the local scene in Turkey and aims to develop new ways to collaborate with local producers, researchers, activists and experts. Due to the language barrier and the issues of familiarity with local networks, such a project has necessitated that to a large extent the research is done by SALT's staff. Different to working for an exhibition organised by the institution, this research consisted of the institution undertaking the responsibility of bringing together all the necessary information and relations for the artists to produce their work. The labour time of the institution's staff has been devoted to this project. The artists in turn have also actively contributed to the managerial aspects of the project which would normally be the institution's responsibility.

As the research progressed, a third aspect of the organisation of labour time at the institution became obvious: working with producers and other researchers proved to be most beneficial for the individuals involved, since the research involved different ways of campaigning for local products, and matching the information collected by the institutions' researchers with the other research projects. This is the aspect in which the *la perruque* takes a different, more collaborative meaning. People working for the institution organise their labour time in such a way that their work becomes the work of others – producers, researchers, activists, etc. In doing so, the institutional work itself becomes the work of others, such as doing research for other researchers, working on organising campaigns for local products or trying to extract information from an archive for other research. When this version of *la perruque* becomes institutionalised, the resources – intellectual, financial, organisational and physical – owned by the institution can become more open, generous to others and governed in a communal manner. The work of others should thus be disguised as work for the institution.

Liberation Gal Kirn

Ljubljana/Berlin, September 2020

The Glossary of Commons needs to be thought of as a specific assemblage of critical terms that do not invite us only to reflect on the ongoing pandemic, but the deepening of the structural crisis that now spans through what has become of nature (imminent → ecological crisis), the capitalist crisis, crisis of neoliberalism, crisis of liberal democracy, and now openly waning system of US hegemony. There is then a unique historical moment today: the accumulation and condensation of contradictions and the uncontrolled nature of this and future pandemics/ecological crises, which means the situation has contingent and unpredictable outcomes. This new normal seems to become even worse, in a time when burning fossil fuels has become unacceptable, core countries are returning to coal production; draught and famine are worsening living conditions for increasingly large portions of the world population; a question of the politicisation of the “surplus population” – those segments that remain a reserve army of labour but still need to “survive” – becomes very relevant. In these grim circumstances, the last thing we should do is to either entertain a naïve technological hope (robotisation and digital technology will save us and at the same time we will enjoy a universal basic income – all without a serious struggle!), or to simply despair and accept the authoritarian turn with its fake news media outlets.

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ecological, p. 162

The key question of any critical glossary is not only to select, pick up and refine the specialised terms that relate to this unique situation, but if it aims to become useful and commonly used, it also needs to address the question of dissemination. What venues to use to present it, who will use it, or how to enable those who now riot, protest, organise, and so on, to dig through the relevant tools for further, socialised, common discussions?

Specific inter-related terms to propose: *liberation* (primarily political, but should be conceived more generally); and connected to a figure of *community-in-liberation* (figure of collectivity, stress on visualisation of “common” → solidarity).

In my recent book *The Partisan Counter-Archive*,²⁰⁸ I worked on research into specific → anti-fascist and Partisan sequences, especially those related to the Second World War and the Yugoslav liberation struggle. This case study is specific, as it relates to the general conditions of war, fascist occupation and a struggle against local collaborationism and representatives of the old Kingdom of Yugoslavia (with both a civil war and revolutionary struggle). However, contrary to the dominant history that only narrates the past from the standpoint of a bipolar Cold War and its superpowers, we should insert a historico-political trajectory of those movements that carried the term and practice of liberation. To liberate in a radical way means firstly to depart from the causes of the crisis, while in more concrete political circumstance aim at stopping occupation. In the case of military-political occupations, be they fascist, colonial, or imperial, any gesture of resistance is immediately met with repression, and often death. In this respect, the sovereign power is brutal and defines most of all the relation between the border of life and death. Biopolitical/racial inscription is one dimension of its brutal force, and another is political resistance of the subject of liberation.

Furthermore, if the appendix history, academic curiosities, and former memory of Europe hailed anti-fascism (and to a lesser degree, anticolonialism) as a cornerstone of the post-war reconstruction, then these narratives long ignored the scale and → temporality of anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggle: in the case of anti-fascism it started as early as in 1920 with the rise of fascism in Italy, where Slovenian, Croatian and also Italian communists, patriots, and others organised anti-fascist organisations, while fascism was not beaten in Europe until the mid-1970s, lingering in Greece, Spain and Portugal, and continued in colonial terms outside of Europe for a while longer. In terms of anti-colonialism the struggle is not yet finished today, despite South African apartheid coming to an end in the 1990s. Liberation has never been a closed and finished process, especially if it is defined beyond the end of the occupation.

Moreover, all these views and histories of specific liberation experiences emphasise, as the name indicates, the prefix “anti-”: the latter emphasises the negative relation to the world, so we then speak of the fight against fascist and colonial occupation, the fascisation and colonisation of specific societies, of the world itself. This is the urgent matter, one forms a specific collective – *we* – that resists blatant injustices and occupation, and would (un)consciously relate to the specific definition of negative freedom (cf. Isaiah Berlin²⁰⁹) and the famous term “freedom from”.

208 Gal Kirn, *Partisan Counter-Archive: Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

209 Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, a lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958, subsequently published as a 57-page pamphlet by Oxford at the Clarendon Press.

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solidarity, p. 65
anti-fascist, p. 18
temporality, p. 256

What should be the emphasis or greatest goal is that any liberation – Partisan, anti-fascist, anti-colonial, people’s, national, women, planetary – should entail liberation for “commons”. In other words, liberation always carries a positive dimension, it develops the programme during the liberation struggle itself. The programme is thus not a recipe, but is instituted together with all resisting subjects and bodies, and thus it becomes more palpable, organised, taken on the scale of “social reproduction” that counters the dominant strategies of division in global capitalism. Liberation became in past – and can also become in our near future – a positive transformative project. If the glossary of anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggle succeeded in framing a more longitudinal concept, then it was grasped in the term “national/people’s liberation struggle(s)”, which had its strong echoes in discussions and revolutionary practice in the late 1960s and 1970s. These struggles did not want to fight only for the land/soil very present in the telluric moment, a trap of Carl Schmitt that plays on the *Blut und Boden* ideology, but also freedom, and liberation process that was more all-encompassing, and openly challenged a substantialist/ethnic definition of people/nation. Back in the 1970s Antonio Negri rehabilitated the figure of the Partisan/liberation struggle in the following way:

*We began to understand how the freedom won in the fight against fascism and the German Occupation had been achieved by men who shared our feelings, who didn’t just fight against something but rather fought for a new world, one that they wanted to seize by making, experiencing, constituting, and creating it.*²¹⁰

This positive moment of “liberation” then relates to the work of the masses – not only intellectuals or the vanguard party – as it carries the moment of “subjectivisation of the masses”. It should start as an openly political process that speaks of constituting new political institutions of mass democracy, new aesthetic sensitivities and cultural (re)empowerment, and thus enable a specific and lasting encounter between the masses and any organisation that fights for the commons, the encountering of politics and art, and finally a new relationship with the commons, their reproduction and distribution. This demands a kind of maximalist ethics that does not concede to mere reform, to translate it, to only reform the colonial world, make fascists more human, and the capitalists exploit us a bit more nicely – no, this world pushes the majority into highly precarious and volatile environments, in which life becomes a series of strategic investments made by corporations and new sovereign lords. The struggle for liberation for a new commons then needs to set the most ambitious goals. If we could refine this in terms of the (aesthetic) figure and strategies of liberation, then what would be the figure of freedom/liberation today? However, perhaps it would be better to start with the “subject” of liberation itself.

Figure of collective/solidarity/community-in-liberation

Marx and Engels’ slogan from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) “Workers of the world, unite!” carries a strong prescription, one with a political, economic, and also aesthetic nature. As Soviet montage practices showed, it is possible to → translate this slogan in ways that formally visualise the subject in the process of becoming. Proletariat was and is a future subject, which will only emerge through political and artistic struggles. It will also not reside only in the sphere of production. Let’s take the fascinating example of Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*, that not only visualises communism in the equality of different activities that are organised by

210 Antonio Negri, “Exercises of Freedom”, *The Documenta 14 Reader* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017), 541–60.

→ translate, p. 153

the people and party, but rather Vertov succeeds in demonstrating an equality between reproduction and production. Then, at least from the avant-garde onwards, it became a matter of urgency in form and content to make, constitute, and re-narrate a subject, a new figure – the collective/masses/community-in-resistance-in-liberation.

This is of even greater urgency today, because of the decades of neoliberal individualisation that have seeped into resistance strategies themselves, and thus the figure of the collective, the figure of the struggle for the commons, needs to be re-imagined, and the possibility to imagine a new world then arises. Therefore, instead of the insistent fall into commodification and sticking to great (individual) figures of art and the politics of liberation, perhaps it is finally time to locate both in the past and present different strategies and artworks that ruptured with the dominant cannon/regime of saying and seeing. What I have in mind is a famous figure from the Yugoslav liberation struggle: a heroic man, woman, the figure of a woman (as a maximalist figure of liberation), and empowerment of the collective.

In the analysis of visual material, the core point would be in the following work by Dore Klemenčič, entitled *Partizanski skeči* (*Partisan Sketches*) that he drew in mid-1943. (Figure 26) The drawing that was supposed to become a poster is not a sketch of an individual Partisan figure, nor a caricature of the kind that Klemenčič practiced drawing throughout his time in the Partisans. Instead, this poster stands out from his opus since the work displaces the individual Partisan into an abstract realm of various Partisan activities. Klemenčič’s poster-to-be succeeds in sketching, thinking and commemorating the entire modality of the struggle. The poster-to-be complicates the more generally expected and accepted canon of the Partisan figure: one of a male or female fighter adorned with guns, smiling and at times with a star on their hat. This poster represents the fully armed and empowered Partisan struggle that re-defines the notion of a weapon in war: from the obvious rifle to a guitar, a theatre mask and a book assembled under the new flag of the new Yugoslavia, which carries a star. The poster expresses the equivalence of the different arms used in struggle and puts on display a deeper → solidarity among political, cultural and military work that aims for liberation and universal emancipation. This → lucid transfiguration, therefore, displaces the individual Partisan figure as the holder and bearer of plural Partisan activities, while the main protagonist becomes the struggle itself.

Figure 26: Dore Klemenčič, *Partizanski skeči* [Partisan Standups], mid-1943, poster draft. Courtesy of Janin Klemenčič.



→ solidarity, p. 65
lucid, p. 119

Lucid interval, The Rasha Salti

Beirut/Berlin, June 2020

I live between Beirut and Berlin, and chose to be in Berlin when the lockdown was implemented. After the first week, between observing the stillness from the apartment window, and following the news broadcasts shifting into overdrive, the minutiae of the lives on our street became notable, their presence amplified in carless streets and plane-less skies: the slow budding of trees, the return of some birds, the step by step awakening of spring. To distract my attention from the unutterable fears about what was to come, I observed the commonplace blossoming of life as particularly joyous, and convinced myself that the trees, the wild weeds, the insects and the birds were having the best springtime ever, to be elated with the sudden

fall in carbon emissions, the lessening of feet stomping around them and the drastic reduction of noise. To a large extent, the lockdown provided the unimaginable experience and spectacle of what would happen if economic production and commerce regressed to the supply of basic essentials – the very antithesis of neoliberal capitalism. The British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm labelled the history of the 20th century ending with the Cold War as the “age of extremes”, and I am tempted to name the history of the decades that followed and up until our present moment the “age of excess”, because under the aegis of neoliberal capitalism, the relentless and foolhardy pursuit of economic “growth” has become no longer tenable, the creed has shifted to excessive, insatiable consumption. The promise of bounty was replaced with the promise of plenty, self-realisation replaced with narcissism, and the “happy” became the “successful” (fewer and fewer) who accumulate ever more transgressive amounts of wealth. Negotiations over colonising and mining the moon, I remind you, are on-going, totally oblivious of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For lack of an ideological or immaterial utopia that is not tailor-made to communities of the “chosen few” (like the billionaires, the congregation of a cult, or members of a so-called pure race) dystopia has pervaded the horizon of → imagination in our age of excess. In art, literature, film, and song. When it is imagined well and masterfully crafted, we deem it “visionary” because of its predictive aptness. (Think for instance, of how we rate Philip K. Dick’s “fantastical” fiction in retrospect today.) Dystopia is so commonplace that even the cable network dedicated to weather forecasting, (i.e. the Weather Channel) has been producing star-studded fiction films that depict in sight, sound and visual effects massive “natural” catastrophes, and it does not do this out of a commitment to raising awareness about global warming, but for the purpose of entertainment. The narratives of these films celebrate the triumph of man over mega-adversity, which is a manifestation of the pathos of our age. We cannot possibly celebrate that trees are better inhabitants of this planet that usually outlive us. And when so-called natural disasters happen and flood, burn or destroy lives, cities, forests and nuclear power plants, they are “natural” phenomena, far beyond of our doing. In fact, insurance companies refer to them as “acts of God”. There has been much debate on whether this pandemic is a “natural” catastrophe, or a systemic consequence of the conduct of our lives. The disruption that it has brought to the “global economy” seems to be the bigger disaster that leaders, governments and experts from a variety of fields are most concerned about “recovering from”. In spite of the plethora of statisticians, highfalutin’ TED-talkers, futurologists and computer-generated predictive modelling experts labouring day and night to foresee, foretell and sketch what the near future might be like, most societies are navigating the current upheaval without a real vision for what really ought to be done to avoid another global dystopia. Save for a few marginal exceptions, far and wide elected politicians, dictators, autocrats and their coterie of sly pundits and media spokespeople perceive this pandemic as essentially some sort of a hiatus in the grand scheme or a sinister glitch. The best plan they have is to go back exactly to right before the lockdown was deemed unavoidable. → After a vaccine approved by the various licensing bodies was made available worldwide we were reassured that we would go back to “normal”, or a “new normal”, because now we are aware that another pandemic might be just around the corner.

I belong to a community of people who believe that we had it coming. In fact, dystopia was and is the relentless pursuit of excess and not its sudden halt. The lockdown was a necessary, timely, healthy, and lucid interval. From the perspective of an independent curator, whose social and financial stability is like walking

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imagination, p. 197
after, p. 160

a tightrope across the deep chasm between social status and economic precarity, the lockdown was also a time of anxious worrying about survival, but this is my own personal condition, I don’t want to blow it up into a collective one, and the precarity I was enduring was the outcome of neoliberal capitalism. What I want to retain from this time of a pause is that was an existential, cognitive and affective necessity.

The contemporary meanings of “lucid” (from the Latin *Lucidus*) are light (from *lux* and the genitive *lucis*), bright, clear, and by extension figuratively, “easy to understand, free from obscurity, bestowed with intellectual clarity”. A “lucid interval” was a commonplace expression in Medieval Latin, that referenced the period of calm between two storms, or the “interval of temporary sanity” in legalese, in other words a set of unexpected reasonable actions and expressions by those deemed mentally unfit, unwell or unbalanced. The expression fell into disuse in our contemporary diction, but remains meaningful in the lexicon of clinical psychology. I fell on it by pure chance during the lockdown while researching other notions, and it felt like an epiphany because I realised that what scared me most was going back to that which we were prior to the pandemic, and not the prospect of our lives changing radically.

This pandemic amplified and revealed the veiled dissonances, delusions and fractures within the global economic system. They are what we are called upon to reinvent: dogged consumption as the viable engine of economic prosperity, depreciation of the local to the benefit of hyperinflating the global, the total appropriation of time by capital (or the individual’s control over their own → temporality), to cite a few headline examples. In the fact that most of the planet’s population found itself subjected to the conditions of the pandemic, we were suddenly all connected beyond nation states, cultural, ethnic and class differences. We were obviously not equally protected, but we were all confronted with this one and same overarching condition, immigrants and natives, undocumented migrants and citizens, selves and others. It turns out that the culture of narcissistic indifference does not empower survival. We should have taken the SARS, MERZ and Ebola epidemics more seriously, they were not merely regional outbreaks of mutated viruses.

To a very happy few the lockdown was agreeable, but to most it was anxious, lonely and unsettling because, at some level, it was in essence like the enactment of insularity that right-wing ideologies advocate. And after the first week or two of hysterical hoarding of toilet paper or hand sanitiser, the longing for contact, for being with others seems to have overwhelmed most people. The thousands and thousands of videos filming people on their balconies, windows, streets, stepping out to communicate, reach out, perform for others attest to that drive, or desire. And last but not least, the instruction to wear a mask as a measure to protect others from ourselves, rather than the opposite, forced a mind shift with regard to the significance of belonging to a collectivity and sharing space with others.

Some states have extended emergency economic support to the cultural sector and its population, but it seems unlikely that the arts will be a priority in the economic recovery plans, because fundamentally our elected and unelected governors consider the arts and culture as a subsidiary of global tourism. What matters to them is how many hotel rooms are booked and cappuccinos sold when a festival or some mega-event takes place. And yet, in our recent history of coping with a pandemic, like for instance with the HIV virus, it is impossible to imagine how the social, psychological and physical de-stigmatisation of HIV-positive persons or

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temporality, p. 256

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solidarity, p. 65

those afflicted with AIDS could have happened without the contribution of artists. It was not a top-down institutionally shepherded programme, but rather the mobilisation of creative and radical imaginaries that redefined → solidarity, relationality to others, challenged heteronormativity and marginalisation. It is impossible to tell the story of the AIDS crisis without the contribution of the arts. In the lucid interval, I was emboldened to call upon colleagues and friends to uphaul the existing system and re-imagine the manner in which we relate to one another and how we march on paths out of the dementia of global neoliberal capitalism.

Performance of care Joanna Zielińska

M HKA, Antwerp, June 2020

Caring for objects

The concept of → care is not only part of our social protocols but also deeply rooted in our language and history. According to Péter P. Müller:

*Different languages have preserved different memories in their vocabulary of various aspects of human experience. Ancient connections between words and experiences are often neglected, and we rarely think of tracing our current vocabulary back to its original roots. However, a thorough investigation can reveal essential links between words used frequently in everyday life.*²¹¹

The word “curator” – one who has the care and superintendence of something, especially, one in charge of a museum, or other places of exhibiting²¹² – was, apparently, first used in the modern sense in the 16th century, yet derived as it is from “care” its etymology is rooted even more deeply in the past, reaching back – by another millennium – to such Indo-European languages as Old High German, where “care” had connotations of “sorrow”, and “lament”.²¹³ From the historic perspective, the curator is thus someone who cares for what they have been entrusted with. For someone working in a museum, this means valuable objects and exhibition displays. As the media theoretician and philosopher Boris Groys, not uncritically, notes, art museums have traditionally relied on the universal notion of art history. Originally, the museum, in a logical consequence of being treated as a kind of time capsule, served to preserve and protect the objects therein from the incessant fluctuation and chaos of the surrounding material environment. After all, the history of museology and art collection emerges, among other things, from the concept of the *Kunstkamera* – museum as an encyclopaedic cabinet of curiosities and rarities, conveying the order of the world represented by means of artefacts that are viewed as manifold representations of knowledge and art. As Groys rightly notes:

Traditionally, the main occupation of art was to resist the flow of time. Public art museums and big private art collections were created to select certain objects – the artworks – take them out of private and public use, and therefore immunise them against the destructive force of time. Thus, our art museums became huge garbage cans of history in which things were kept and exhibited

211 Péter P. Müller, “Guests, Hosts, and Ghosts: Variations of Hospitality/Hostility on the Irish and the Continental Stage”, *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mária Kurdi, issue *Interfaces between Irish and European Theatre* (Pécs: University of Pécs Press, 2012).

212 “Curator”, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/curator> (accessed June 2020).

213 “Care”, *Fine Dictionary*, <http://www.finedictionary.com/care.html> (accessed June 2020).

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care, p. 92, 122

*that had no use anymore in real life: sacral images of past religions or status objects of past lifestyles.*²¹⁴

In this context, the curator was given the role of the guardian, or – to draw on the Latin meaning of “curare” – caring about, caring for and watching over the relics of the past, also in the spiritual sense. Thus, the concept of preserving and renewal, inherent in the job of the curator, has gained the connotations of emotional care and the ethics of caring. And while the notions of “curating” and “care” go together like a horse and carriage, for a long time throughout the history of exhibitions such attentive concern had been → invested solely in objects rather than people. Only the paradigm shift in art, which took place at the beginning of the 1990s, and which the researchers of the subject referred to in different ways – a performative, narrative or choreographic turn (after Claire Bishop), all located in the field of visual arts,²¹⁵ relational art (after Nicolas Bourriaud),²¹⁶ or simply the theatricalisation of the exhibition space (after Boris Groys) – redirected the attention of the art world from the object to the performer and the audiences, referring to care as an important factor accompanying visual art performances and collective artistic practices. To → care for objects is quite different from caring about people or the community. As Groys writes:

*Nowadays, one speaks time and again about the theatricalisation of the museum. Indeed, in our time people come to exhibition openings in the same way as they went to opera and theatre premieres in the past. This theatricalisation of the museum is often criticised because it might be seen as a sign of the museum’s involvement in the contemporary entertainment industry. However, there is a crucial difference between the installation space and the theatrical space. In the theatre, spectators remain in an outside position vis-à-vis the stage, but in the museum, they enter the stage, and find themselves inside the spectacle. Thus, the contemporary museum realises the modernist dream that the theatre itself was never able to fully realise – of a theatre in which there is no clear boundary between the stage and the space of the audience.*²¹⁷

In order for the performance that Groys writes about to fulfil its role of “creating experience”, the audience must feel safe and the performers must be given appropriate care by the institution and the curators. Unlike objects, bodies cannot perform non-stop. Bodies operate according to different protocols and have different requirements than museum objects, and they react to temperature and surroundings in a particular way. The protocols of care referred to above are modified depending on the circumstances, such as when the participants are children or non-human performers.²¹⁸

Compared to the theatre, in the white cube there is an unconventional distance between the body and audience – bodies will be taken care of and reacted to differently than objects. A different understanding of care has migrated to the exhibition space from performative and choreographic practices, from the area of → feminist theory and from the field of experimental theatre, where the ethics of

214 Boris Groys, “Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk”, *e-flux Journal*, no. 50 (December 2013), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59974/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/> (accessed June 2020).

215 Claire Bishop, “The Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention”, *Performance Works* (Warsaw: Mousse Publishing, U-jazdowski, 2019), 36–67.

216 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, Collection Documents sur l’art, 2002).

217 Groys (2013).

218 Joanna Zielińska, “Performing Animals”, *Performance Works* (Warsaw: Mousse Publishing, U-jazdowski, 2019), 138–53.

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invested, p. 236
care, p. 92, 122
feminist, p. 28

care occupies a special place, where collective work, intimacy and the notion of safe space create ethical guidelines for working with the performer. A new quality is being created in the white cube, where the relationship between the bodies and audience is no longer regulated by the architecture of the theatre calculated into the traditional division: stage and audience.

Caring for someone

The development of → care practices in the visual arts space is closely linked to the development of the critical feminist theory and feminist ethics of care from which contemporary humanities draw, showing our emotions and sensitivity as a manifestation of strength and telling the truth, and not as signs of weakness. The ethics of care stimulates thinking about the healing and purifying powers of art itself, which is etymologically linked to the original meaning of the Latin word “cure”, meaning “care”. Thinking about care, however, we should not forget that the act of care is also a challenge in the context of interpersonal relationships aimed at various forms of hospitality.

This is what the feminist theorist Sara Ahmed writes in her book about happiness:

*There is nothing more → vulnerable than caring for someone; it means not only giving your energy to that which is not you but also caring for that which is beyond or outside your control. Caring is anxious – to be full of care, to be careful, is to take care of things by becoming anxious about their future, where the future is embodied in the fragility of an object whose persistence matters. Becoming caring is not about becoming good or nice: people who “being caring” as their ego ideal often act in quite uncaring ways in order to protect their good image of themselves. To care is not about letting an object go but holding on to an object by letting oneself go, giving oneself over to something that is not one’s own.*²¹⁹

It should be emphasised that the concept of care was the central idea for many artists from the past, especially in the context of early performance art practices developed by female artists as Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Joan Jonas and Laurie Anderson. The notion of care could concern objects and humans but also non-humans, such as we observe in the Carolee Schneemann’s films *Fuses* (1964–1967) or images of her cat, *Kitch (Kitch’s Last Meal)*, 1975).

The practice of care can be addressed to the closest family members, as in the case of Lea Lublin’s performance with her seven-month-old son – himself an “exhibit” in a show at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris (Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris; 1968). Lea Lublin in her performance visualised unpaid and invisible labour of caring:

*She transforms a moment of her everyday life into artistic action. Mon fils (My Son) highlights a recurring subject in the artist’s work, transposing the lived experience of everyday life into artistic action and revealing it in an act of representation that questions us both about form and concept. This performance encapsulates her identity as artist, woman and → mother refusing to prioritise art over life. [...] The female body – first and foremost, repressed – runs through her practice, converging ultimately in Le corps amer (à-mère), The Bitter Body (The Mother’s Body).*²²⁰

219 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 185.

220 Léa Lublin, *Mon fils*, 1969, performance, <http://www.lealublin.com/mon-fils> (accessed June 2020).

By taking her baby son to the museum during the regular exhibition hours, Lublin is overcoming the boundaries separating art and life. By looking after her son, changing diapers, breastfeeding and putting him to sleep in a bed she has temporarily installed in the museum space next to the artworks, she brings public attention to social and gender roles in her work, closely engaging with currents in critical theory, influenced by French feminism and philosophy – engaging in active social dialogue. The action in the museum performed by Lea Lublin, in a very precise way, contextualises the performance of care developed by female performance artists in the 1970s.

Caring society

Caring can arise out of engaging with specific communities, as we witness in the photographic works by Nan Goldin or the recent project-cum-supergroup by Ingo Niermann entitled *Army of Love*, formed around a specific community and an idea of different manifestations of love “in the face of patriarchy, racism and neoliberal corporo-fascism”.

The concept of care may also occur as a consequence of the experience of an illness, as was the case with one of the key artists in the recent history of contemporary art in Spain, Pepe Espaliú, who died in November 1993 in Córdoba. Just three years earlier, he found out that he was HIV-positive. (Figure 27)

The Carrying Project, which he focused on in the last year of his life, evolved as a consequence of his illness and an attempt to regain control of his deteriorating body. The first work from the series was a performance in San Sebastian, and later on in Madrid, where the performance ended in the Reina Sofia Museum. The photos taken in 1992 during Pepe Espaliú’s performance *The Carrying Society* are memorable. The event in Madrid had huge repercussions in the media. In the video and photo documentation, we see the bare-footed artist being carried by friends and passers-by. They took him on an unusual tour of the popular inner-city districts of Spanish cities.

The act of carrying the artist’s body in this strange procession became a gesture of exposing his → vulnerability and corporal fragility. The action revealed his concern, fear and trauma of being terminally ill. The body, non-heteronormative identity, power, illness, and inevitable death were progressively woven together in his objects, performances and installations.

*Later, → after contracting HIV, Pepe Espaliú simplified and reoriented his iconography towards his illness; this was when he created his famous crutches and carrying chairs, and ultimately took part in his famous public actions that are remembered as much for their social and political transcendence as their artistic aspect.*²²¹

The Carrying Project could be perceived metaphorically. It shows the bond between the individual body and the community. “Carrying” sounds like “caring” – helping each other and protecting each other. In the collective consciousness of the early 1990s, AIDS belonged to that group of illnesses which reflected moral shame. Susan Sontag, in her essay “AIDS and Its Metaphors”, argues that metaphorical thinking about disease leads to placing the burden of guilt on the patient. As she notes, the transmission of AIDS is described in terms of pollution, which reopens the concept of “disease as punishment”. As Susan Sontag observed:

221 Pepe Espaliú, *The Carrying Project*, Spain, 1992, performance.



Figure 27: Pepe Espaliú, *The Carrying Project*, 1992, performance. Copyright © Arteleku / Ricardo Iriarte.

Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance. First, the subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomy, weakness) are identified with the disease. The disease itself becomes a metaphor. ²²²

The ritual of carrying the sick body during Pepe Espaliú's performance has undoubtedly magical properties and releases the moment of purification. This is a symbolic action in which → solidarity and a caring society are born!

The institution of care

The contemporary notion of → care is, however, deeply rooted in the phenomenon of relational aesthetics and the performative turn manifested at the beginning of the 2000s. The concept is connected to the changing idea of spectatorship, and it asks to be understood via performative and choreographic practices.

The performative notion of art raises the question of the body and the ongoing work carried out in the course of extended performative exhibitions and public programmes, reflecting on how art institutions take care of performing bodies and how they respond to the new challenges related to this. Does altering the economics of the artwork and exhibition space affect audiences and the working conditions of all those involved? Or are we dealing with a new kind of constantly evolving performative institution that never sleeps, in the grip of a compulsion to create "nonmaterial" experiences that are the key to success in a globalised job market? The analytic scope includes the, broadly conceived, "body of the performer", con-

²²² Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977, 1978); Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

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care, p. 92, 122

sidered not only individually but also as a collective subject or social phenomenon. And this body needs to be taken care of.²²³

Art institutions have the potential to create communities based on the notions of mutual care, togetherness, solidarity, belonging, a shared identity and especially a shared experience in the context of visual and performing arts. This specific institutional moment is always connected to specific communities, mutual care and also to a changing role of the spectators who more and more often become performers and active participants in the museum programmes.

In 2018, the summer in Warsaw was quite hot. A crowd of mostly young people gathered in park, next to the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art. The space of Dragana Bar turned out to be too small to accommodate all the guests. Hundreds of people took places under the trees and on the grass. Dragana Bar was created in collaboration with the → queer → feminist collective Kem (co-founded and run by choreographer Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, Krzysztof Babinski, Ola Knychalska and Ania Miczko among others), for which the concept of care is the central idea. The project was part of one-year residency testing the institution itself and investigating how an artistic collective could inhabit its infrastructure for queer and feminist purposes. (Figure 28)

Figure 28: Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, *Untitled*, 2018, performance, Dragana Bar, Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw. Photo: Katarzyna Szugajew.



As part of the Dragana Bar project, the institution decided to build an alternative temporary entrance to the historical building through the window. The place hosted the performance programme and a series of small artistic interventions. The community around the institution was created by means of being and dancing

²²³ Claire Bishop, "The Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention", *Performance Works* (Warsaw: Mousse Publishing, U-jazdowski, 2019), 36–67.

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together. This idea was strongly inspired by the “social choreography” developed in performative works by Alex Baczyński-Jenkins. Unfortunately, after a few months the project came to an abrupt end because of a radical change in Poland’s political climate and the institution itself. No more than a few moments from Dragana Bar have been captured in some amateur photos, but the memory of this joyful summer will stay forever. A few months later, Dragana Bar appeared as strong reference during the performance presented at Ujazdowski Castle by Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, entitled *Untitled Dances* and based on the theatrical practice of Akademia Ruchu.²²⁴ Dragana Bar has become testimony to how much mutual care and self-care is needed to sustain a community and how fragile and defenceless a community can be. In the event, however, the notion of togetherness was documented and passed on as chorographical experience. It became part of a particular archive contained in bodies of spectators, performers and curators – who were witnesses to the singular, ephemeral “social choreography” created during this memorable summer in the park.

The movement in the pause

The idea of an institution of → care based on community, assistance, → solidarity and hospitality is also inseparable from anxiety and sacrifice. Concern contains ambiguity and so does hospitality, as pointed out by Jacques Derrida when he wrote about “conditional hospitality”.²²⁵

The events of recent months related to the COVID-19 pandemic have not only re-evaluated the global order, but have also given a different meaning to the concept of care itself. The epidemiological threat has drastically worsened the already precarious situation of many professional groups, especially those employed in creative sectors. Numerous artists and art workers, including educators, guides, art gallery staff, and freelance curators, have been left without any means of subsistence or legal protection overnight. At the same time, the threat of COVID-19 is being used for political struggle against various ethnic groups, LGBTQA+ people, and even women’s rights. Will the new situation that art institutions find themselves in lead to a re-evaluation of the concept of care? As André Lepecki notes, the moment of pause and temporary suspension is no more than an illusion:

*In the lockdown, in the pause, in the supervision, as our movements, gestures, and actions endure radical transformations, compressed as they are to the limits defined by our walls, we soon realise that nothing has really stopped – not inside our homes and not in the external world, where the homeless survive at the mercy of more or less planned neglect, more or less police brutality, more or less charity [...] Locked in place, we realised that management, surveillance, and control of movement has become a central fact in the pandemic. The metaphors of “pause”, “home-sheltering”, “suspension of activity” only mask the hyper-activity of capital and police (capital as police) throughout the confinement and as the confinement.*²²⁶

It is still difficult to assess the actual consequences of the continuing pandemic. At the moment the sight of the Spanish artist Pepe Espaliú carried through the city

224 Eliel Jones, “Choreographies of the Social: Performance as Resistance in Alex Baczyński-Jenkins’s *Untitled Dances*” (2019) and “Akademia Ruchu’s Other Dances” (1982), *Performance Works* (Warsaw: Mousse Publishing, U-jazdowski, 2019), 118–37.

225 Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

226 André Lepecki, “Movement in the Pause”, *ConTactos*, eds. Diana Taylor and Marcial Godoy-Anatavia (Rutherford, NJ: Tome Press, 2020), <https://contactos.tome.press/movement-in-the-pause/> (accessed June 2020).

in a throng of people belongs to a different order of reality – one that only a few months ago we would have found hard to believe could be suspended. Today, museums and art galleries must rethink again, and critically, the concept of the institution of care as well as the relationships that they have been engaged in building with the audiences and the artists.

Raised fist Pablo Martínez

MACBA, Barcelona, June 2020

Over the last hundred years, a long line of raised fists has punctuated history: from the tumultuous streets of the Weimar Republic to the defiant figure of the anarchist Federica Montseny at a political rally in the Spanish Second Republic; from the protests for sexual liberation in newly democratic Spain to the Zapatista liberation movement or Black Lives Matter; from John Heartfield’s photomontages to Picasso’s drafts for *Guernica*. These fists raised in unity, a greeting among those fighting on the same front, together form an “us” in opposition to a “them”. It is a transhistorical expression of anger and rage, and it encapsulates the → solidarity and comradeship among those who compose, with their bodies, a choreography of mutual aid in the public space. Some might say it is ideology-made flesh, embodied, because the raised fist is also an aesthetic practice of the subalterns. It is linked to leftist movements, but its openness, the fact that it is not strictly associated with any specific party or leader, has allowed it to travel through time. Furthermore, it has become an internationalist gesture, instigated by the → emancipatory struggles for social justice, equality and freedom.

The rise of the raised fist takes us on a journey of images through time and space, whereby we witness attempts to construct utopias of equality and fraternity, and we encounter new protesting bodies who use it to situate themselves in history. Gestures like this form a vocabulary that goes beyond the spoken word. From the perspective of → queer epistemologies, they are ephemeral, and, historically, they have therefore been erased from text, almost like the bodies themselves. “Concentrating on gestures atomises movement,” states José Esteban Muñoz, “these atomised and particular movements tell tales of historical becoming. Gestures transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarian public culture [...] The gesture summons the resources of queer experience and collective identity that have been lost to us because of the demand for official evidence and facts.”²²⁷

1. From hand to fist

As a metonym for work, the hand is used in various different ways: it is the hand of the labour force, the body of the working class, the skill of the artisan, the might of the builder. During the 19th century, it became more and more prominent as a representation of the workforce, increasingly being depicted as their main tool and asset. In his introduction to *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* (1876), Friedrich Engels claims that work itself is a basic and fundamental condition of all human activity, and he even posits that man was *created* by work, part of an evolutionary process in which the hand played a key role. The most important step in the transition from monkey to man, i.e. the adoption of the upright position and consequently bipedalism, meant that the hands were freed up, and they thus began to take on other functions. Over time, the hands would be used in ever more

227 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009/2020), 67–81.

sophisticated ways, in a process that also led to increased dexterity and a refined sense of touch: hands thus became very handy. This theory is somewhat similar to Darwin's "correlation of growth": Engels posits that the hand's development correlates with that of other body parts and human functions. He suggests that these "new" hands triggered other changes that generally cannot be seen by the naked eye, such as adaptations in the digestive system or the brain (due to the creation of tools that would enable a new diet, which in turn had an impact on the relevant organs). Therefore, the hand is not only an organ for labour, but is also a product of it – the human being, in its most advanced iteration, exists *because* of work. Men and women are handmade.

In Ralph Carlin's illustration "The Hand That Will Rule the World", published in *Solidarity* (the magazine of the Industrial Workers of the World) on 30 July 1917, the fist emerges from the subsoil as a natural energy, pushed upwards by the mass of the workers' arms. In the background, smoke billows out from various factories, a skyline of industrial production: this is a clear example of the fossil fuel aesthetic, so central to the shared imaginary of productivity and energy.²²⁸ The hand is to work as oil or carbon is to energy. The raised fist looms large in the industrial landscape, a literal union of workers fighting for their rights. (Figure 29)

Figure 29: Ralph Carlin, "The Hand That Will Rule the World", *Solidarity*, illustration in the magazine of the Industrial Workers of the World (30 July 1917).



228 Jaime Vindel, *Estética Fósil. Imaginarios de la energía y crisis ecosocial* (Barcelona: Arcadia-Macba, 2020).

2. The fist: from the streets to the arts, and back again

Since the French Revolution, symbols, images and gestures have become crucial for the formation of collective political identities. These elements play a vital role in turning the masses into "movements" – that is, public protests need to have at least a semblance of structure, so that the crowds are not perceived as a mere unwieldy rabble, which in turn might justify the exertion of violence upon them by the supposed defenders of the social order. The "masses" are not only a category, and joining forces in this way is also a fundamentally political strategy of the many against the few, an attempt at redrawing the political map in all its → emancipatory potential.²²⁹ The raised fist can be inserted within this political tradition and, as we will see, it became one of the key signs for the internationalist labour movement.

From the early 19th century, different representations of the protesting masses began to appear in illustrated magazines and paintings. The raised fist is part of that group of "lifting" gestures, to follow Georges Didi-Huberman, that exclaim a desire to "reveal one's determination for life and liberty, in front of and for everybody, in the public space and in the time of history".²³⁰ However, the propagation of the raised fist as a rite of the masses can be attributed, at least partly, to the work of the artist-*monteur* John Heartfield, who used this image-gesture in his logo for the RFB (the *Rotfrontkämpferbund*, the *Alliance of Red Front Fighters*) in 1924. The founding of the RFB was the German Communist Party's response to the right-wing paramilitaries, and it was a formally independent organisation, open to anybody who would take a stand against fascism and the imperialist war. It adopted the fist as its symbol, and members began to use it as a greeting in marches, rallies and conventions, following the group's founding that same year. In this context, the raised fist was used as a paramilitary symbol, showing the communist workers' anger, as well as their eagerness to combat the prevailing social democrats. It was already clear that the social democrats' strategy would be to curb the more radical aspirations of the working masses, following the success of the Russian Revolution. The Communist Party wanted to declare their resolve to the working class, reasserting that they would not back down in this struggle.²³¹ Heartfield's role in this process is proof of the transfer between events, bodies and images, in what is almost always a round trip: art produces images for the revolution, and, in turn, the revolution itself generates images that are then used in artistic production. As such, this particular fist transformed into a collective expression that spread far and wide, eventually becoming ubiquitous in the 1930s public space.

In 1934, just a decade → after creating the RFB logo, Heartfield designed the cover for the 40th issue of *AIZ* (i.e. *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, the *Workers' Illustrated Magazine*), which was a special edition on "Antifaschistische Aktionseinheit" ("United Action Against Fascism"). (Figure 30) In an inverted version of Abraham Bosse's frontispiece for Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the whole front page of the *AIZ* is taken up by a monumental arm and fist, in which a mass of workers are depicted with their own fists raised. Although, in the illustration for *Leviathan*, the individuals' bodies are subordinate to the king's head (in other words, the monarch is the rational one, who thinks on behalf of the anonymous → crowd) (Figure 31), in the case of Heartfield's fist, the action itself is what rules over the multitude. The fist drives

229 Gottfried Korff and Harry Drost. "History of Symbols as Social History? Ten Preliminary Notes on the Image and Sign Systems of Social Movements in Germany", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 38 (1993), 105–25. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44735369 (accessed 14 November 2020).

230 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Soulèvements*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Gallimard – Jeu de Paume, 2016), 17 (own translation).

231 Josep Fontana, *El siglo de la revolución. Una historia del mundo desde 1914* (Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 2017), 107–14.

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emancipatory, p. 35
after, p. 160
crowd, p. 227



Figure 30: John Heartfield, cover of the *AIZ*, *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* [Workers' Illustrated Magazine], no. 40 (1934).

Figure 31: Frontispiece of *Leviathan* engraved by Abraham Bosse, with input from Thomas Hobbes, the author, 1651.

the masses forward. It seems to be an ode to movement, to action, to emulate Hannah Arendt's political thinking, whilst in the *Leviathan* illustration it's the complete opposite: the sovereign holds back the many, he appeases them. We should not forget that most of the criticism levelled at multitudes of people, even as late as the 1930s, came from the intellectualism as inherited from Gustave Le Bon's theories on crowds, which he claimed were irrational and readily influenced by ulterior motives and depravity. It seems that Heartfield's image aims to highlight the power of movement and action, a power which lets the masses break new ground. But perhaps the most striking difference between these two images is how the crowd is represented. In the *Leviathan* illustration, the individuals are repeated within the king's body, and they lose all identity. Furthermore, they are depicted with their backs to the spectator, as if they are looking at the sovereign, the only one shown with a face, the only one there with any features. However, in Heartfield's image the people in the crowd still retain their human condition, and we can even make out the features of some of them, especially those at the front. This consideration of crowds is crucial, because it humanises them and effectively shows the dual condition of the masses, whereby they are understood as a force for liberation and hope, but only if their individual identities are added together rather than being annulled and defaced. This particular crowd, multiplied within the arm, showed that the fist was now a rite of the masses. Undoubtedly, its expansion as an internationalist gesture was also partly due to the fact that illustrated magazines like this could help spread, throughout whole nations, not only political ideas and slogans, but also images (which are ideas and slogans in their own right). In his exhibitions, Heartfield would always display issues of *AIZ* alongside his original compositions, because it was important to him that his photomontages were not shown independently, as one-of-a-kind artworks – instead, he sought to reiterate that his work was widely repro-

duced in print media, in journals and posters, etc., and this is how they reached the masses.²³²

In the 1930s, it had become clear that the role of art and beauty needed to be loaded with new meanings. For a 1935 exhibition of Heartfield's work, in Paris's Maison de la Culture (described as an exhibition for dreaming, but also for clenching fists), Louis Aragon wrote "John Heartfield et la beauté révolutionnaire", in which he stressed that the invention of the photomontage, by Berlin's Dadaist group, was the ultimate challenge for painting. For Aragon, photomontage not only surpassed painting in its fidelity to reality, but it also loaded the gesture of montage with poetic intention. These poetic motives now had a new function, one that was closely related to the revolution:

[...] there was no more poetry that was not also Revolution. [...] [John Heartfield] knows how to create those images which are the very beauty of our age, for they represent the cry of the masses – the people's struggle against the brown hangman whose trachea is crammed with gold coins. He knows how to create realistic images of our life and struggle which are poignant and moving for millions of people who themselves are a part of this life and struggle. His art is art in Lenin's sense, because it is a weapon in the revolutionary struggle of the Proletariat. John Heartfield today knows how to salute beauty. Because he speaks for the countless oppressed people throughout the world without lowering for a moment the magnificent tone of his voice, without debasing the majestic poetry of his colossal imagination.²³³

"John Heartfield knows how to salute beauty", affirms Aragon, borrowing this expression stressing the "salute" from Artur Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* (1871)²³⁴. Rimbaud, "the poet of the Paris Commune",²³⁵ sought to "change life", and on the occasion of Heartfield's exhibition Aragon referenced him to describe how the technique of photomontage was a space for rebellion and an instrument for transformation. This is the line taken by some proponents of the avant-garde, who understood art as the liberating energy of the people, thus sidestepping the bourgeois notion of art. When the multitude raise their fists, they repeat the gesture and establish a new relation of → solidarity, in which the *I*, the self, becomes yet another subject, beyond individual subjectification. When the → crowd reacts at the same time, amid the intersubjectivity of anonymity, a new form of *je est un* is produced, and takes place.

3. The expansion of the gesture as a sign of comradeship, internationalism and the global crowd

Another crucial factor in the expansion of this sign is that it does not need any "technology", other than that of the body. The worker's body incorporates the ideology. Raising a clenched fist is a simple, elementary rite, which doesn't require any "technical" support and "lends itself to collective protest as well as individual

232 Louis Aragon, "John Heartfield et la beauté révolutionnaire" [John Heartfield and Revolutionary Beauty], lecture at the Maison de la Culture, 2 May 1935, for the exhibition organised by the AEAR (The Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists). Originally published in *Commune*, no. 20 (April 1935). Available in English as "John Heartfield and Revolutionary Beauty", republished in *Photomontage Between the Wars*, exhibition catalogue (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2012), 121.

233 Ibid.

234 Sherwin Simmons. "'Hand to the Friend, Fist to the Foe': The Struggle of Signs in the Weimar Republic", *Journal of Design History*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2000), 319–39. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3527066 (accessed 16 August 2020).

235 Kristin Ross, *El surgimiento del espacio social: Rimbaud y la Comuna de París* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2018).

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solidarity, p. 65
crowd, p. 227

pose”: the raised fist is already built into the worker’s body, who embodies the ideology by adopting the gesture.²³⁶ Its expansion, from its conception as a paramilitary symbol for the RFB to its uptake as a mass gesture, became modified, progressively passed on to more and more diverse causes, in a process of the “civilisation of the rite”.²³⁷ The gesture is transformed by the masses and not the other way round; the broadening of its uses is precisely what allowed it to become a transhistorical gesture, one that has since accompanied numerous defiant movements and many other → emancipatory fights. The workers, mobilised *en masse*, would be the ones to endow the raised fist with meaning, imbuing it with emotion and transporting it with their bodies, over the course of their different struggles.

Subsequently, over the following years, the use of the raised fist gradually expanded in meaning and application, going from the German communist struggles to the Popular Front in France, and later in Spain. The rise of the Popular Front meant the construction of a unifying and symbolic bloc of different left-wing movements, essentially the grouping of the many who defended freedom and decried fascism. The Popular Front would become a space of fraternity in which political plurality could come together, like fingers when they fold over the palm to make a fist. However, the massive internationalisation of the raised fist would only come about with the → anti-fascist struggle in the Spanish Civil War, and the collaboration of the International Brigades, who used it as a greeting that transcended the language barrier. Geoffrey Cox, a correspondent for *The News Chronicle*, described the arrival of the first international militias in Madrid, in early November 1936, as follows:

*The few people who have about lined the roadway, shouting almost hysterically, “¡Salud! ¡Salud!”, holding up their fists in salute, or clapping vigorously. An old woman with tears streaming down her face, returning from a long wait in a queue, held up a baby girl, who saluted with her tiny fist. The troops in reply held up their fists and copied the call of “¡Salud!”.*²³⁸

From the tension that bubbles between dreaming and clenching the fist, as described above, a new form of community arises: a community that fights for a better world, offering up their own bodies to the battleground. It is a code to be used in the public space, with an abstract meaning that goes beyond words, brimming with the desire to build a community of equals. The *I* becomes *we*, a shift which is essentially the sense of belonging, as noted by the Russian revolutionary, socialist, → feminist, activist and intellectual Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952). Jodi Dean has analysed how the term “comrade” is a generic description for a relationship of closeness, an affirmation that we are accountable to each other. More than defining a figure, a specific character or an identity, “comrade” describes a relationship based on equality:

The term “comrade” points to a relation, a set of expectations for action. It doesn’t name an identity; it highlights the sameness of those who share a politics, a common horizon of political action. If you are a comrade, you don’t publicly distance yourself, even a little bit, from your party. Comradeship binds action and in this binding works to → direct action toward a certain future. For communists this is the egalitarian future of a society emancipated from

236 Gilles Vergnon, “Le ‘poing levé’, du rite solidaire au rite de masse: Jalons pour l’histoire d’un rite politique”, *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 212 (July–September 2005), *Les Éditions de l’Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières*, 77 (own translation). Available online: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-mouvement-social-2005-3-page-77.htm> (accessed 26 January 2021).

237 Ibid.

238 Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* (London, New York, Toronto, Sydney: Harper Perennial, 2006), 175.

*the determinations of capitalist production and reorganised according to the free association, common benefit, and collective decisions of the producers.*²³⁹

There is something fundamental, in this view of comradeship, that alludes to the gesture of the raised fist itself: this → solidarity comes about in battle. Comrades are not formed or united by their identity, but rather by their fight against an external enemy. Anybody, but not everybody, can be a comrade, and this accentuates the fact that the term “comrade” simultaneously unites and divides. It’s the same when people raise their fists in public: this action forms an “us”, as opposed to a “them”. It creates alterity and antagonism by means of a gesture. Acknowledging the power of the collective fight, of strength in numbers, is essential if one is to be freed from the chains of oppression and any form of slavery. Unity has great force, as Heartfield showed in his contribution to Issue 26 of *AIZ* magazine, a special edition called “Life and Struggle of the Black Race” (1931), which features two raised fists, belonging to a black worker and a white worker. The image is accompanied by the text: “Whether black, or white, / in struggle united! / We know / only one race, / We all know / only one enemy – the exploiting class.” (Figure 32) Ever since it emerged as a symbol, the entire iconography of the raised fist has been posited as an anti-racist gesture, as a call to transform the world from below, rallying against exploitation, racism and imperialism. In 1961, Heartfield paid tribute to Patrice Lumumba, the first black Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo, who was assassinated shortly after taking office. Heartfield published a poster using the same image of the two fists, but with a new text.²⁴⁰ This is further evidence of how the raised fist was used as an internationalist sign, and important also in terms of decolonisation, as an → emancipatory movement of the people.



Figure 32: John Heartfield, a cover of the *AIZ*, *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* [Workers’ Illustrated Magazine]: *Life and Struggle of the Black Race*, no. 26 (1931).

It is the gesture with which the placeless and nameless, as Jacques Rancière put it, can recognise each other. The streets become the setting for ideological struggle and social drama, a theatre of political passions. This spontaneity and discipline live on, today, in the gesture of the raised fist. It condenses a history, and it produces a memory of the working body in such a way that not only forges an emotional bond with peers in the present, but also with all those, over the centuries, who have fought for spaces of equality. In other words, it harks back to the many generations

239 Jodi Dean, “Four Theses on the Comrade”, *e-flux journal*, no. 86 (November 2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/86/160585/four-theses-on-the-comrade/> (accessed 20 November 2020).

240 In 1961, Heartfield and his brother and lifelong collaborator Herzfelde published the poster with this new caption: “Spartacus / Joan of Arc / Lincoln / Karl Liebknecht / Rosa Luxemburg / Ernst Thälmann... / like their names, / the name / Patrice Lumumba / will shine through the centuries”.

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emancipatory, p. 35
anti-fascist, p. 18
feminist, p. 28
direct action, p. 230

→
solidarity, p. 65
emancipatory, p. 35

of workers who have called for a forward-looking community, sparking hope for a different world, where there are no social hierarchies or exploitation. This gesture thus situates all those who use it within history. In this performance of the social body, the subjects manifest a space of equality, based on comradeship and mutual support. As such, in the streets a proto-community arises, in which “the power of the weak” is dominant, led by those who normally languish at the bottom of the social structure.

In the coded symbolic semiotics of the raised fist, a common internationalist homeland is returned to the dispossessed. Internationalism can be described as a political horizon with emancipatory, progressive and egalitarian ends, with no → territory, and this is one of its fundamental gestures. As noted here, the raised fist rapidly became not only international, but internationalist. In the current protests all around the world, it has become an ever-present sign for the global crowd: it brings people together, in squares and streets, as they demand different forms of political representation, redistribution and social justice.²⁴¹ These protesters reconfigure the public space with their bodies, creating new appearances in images, thus raising awareness of the political potential of the body (and novel ways of using it in public) by merging activism and the most up-to-date visual languages. This, as I have noted elsewhere, is the shift from mass communication to the masses-who-communicate.²⁴² Distributing information in this way, and the resulting flow of images, sets up a context in which different people join together in a global crowd. Accordingly, images are crucial for internationalism, as they point to the demonstrators, those who shape the micro-politics out in the streets, as the driving force behind wider global movements. John Heartfield understood this perfectly when he decided to put his revolutionary aesthetic at the service of mass-distributed magazines.

The power of the raised fist, as a symbol, is due to the fact that it plays both an affective and effective role. This gesture is realised by the international worker, who embodies the internationalism described by Marx, but also by Bakunin. A common territory, without a homeland, in which only the subjectivised body of the proletarian exists.²⁴³ It is the body that adopts gestures, that makes and performs the ideology in the public space. And it is aware of its international role. In this sense, the raised fist manifests the rage, hope and → solidarity of the people. This small gesture contains all the necessary power and capacity for building a brand new world.

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territory, p. 269
solidarity, p. 65

Re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, November 2020

Embracing a New Grammar: A Script for re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning

In recent conversations with artist Laure Prouvost, I have come to an expanded notion of the practice of unlearning – a term that for her requires going back in time to get closer to a first discovery of a thing, as a child might experience it, relying on instinct (smell, taste).²⁴⁴ Prouvost works from a place of abundance as far as

241 I take this concept from Susan Buck-Morss, in conversation with Aurora Fernández Polanco. “SNAPSHOTS: Images, Crowds, Thoughts”, *Re-visiones*, no. 4 (2014) <http://www.re-visiones.net/spip.php?article122> (accessed 6 April 2015).

242 Pablo Martínez, “When Images Shoot”, trans. David Sánchez, Rabih Mroué’s catalogue of his exhibition at CA2M, *Image(s), mon amour: Fabrications* (Madrid: CA2M, 2013), 88.

243 Alain Badiou, “Vingt-quatre notes sur les usages du mot ‘peuple’”, *Qu’est-ce qu’un peuple?* (Paris: La Fabrique Éditions, 2013), 12.

244 My experience with this term is summed up in *Unlearning Exercises: Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning* (Utrecht – Casco Art Institute, Working for the Commons and Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018).

language is concerned and yields to no limitation. In this spirit, unlearning can be practised in various ways when envisioned as *re-dit-en-un-in-learning*.

re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning

“Re-learning” suggests a return to something once forgotten, and, according to a common dictionary definition, is “a method of measuring the retention of learned material by measuring how much faster a person can relearn material that had been previously learned and then forgotten”.

re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning

“Dit” is the past participle of the French verb “dire”, which means “to speak”, and is → translated loosely as “that is to say” or “called”. So, “so-called learning”? In Dutch, the context that I am writing this from, “dit” means “this” – translating to “this learning”. Developed for the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and later purchased by the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, *DIT LEARN* is the title of the artist’s 2017 video with a lexicon at its centre consisting of terms stitched together in rapid succession and matched with images to break apart old meanings and create new ones. “Dit-learning”, perhaps synonymous with, concerns itself with → liberation from oppressive systems once we’ve identified them.

re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning

I had to look up “en” in French, where it is used to replace a noun. What then of this in relation to the verbs “unlearning” and “inlearning”? *This is an incomplete thought*.

re-dit-en-un-in-learning

“Unlearning”, to my understanding, takes its cue from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concept of “unlearning one’s privilege”. It denotes an active critical investigation of normative structures and practices so that one might become aware and get rid of taken-for-granted theoretical and practical “truths” in order to tackle inequalities in everyday life. So, unlearning is not so much the → divestment of specific skills, but of a habitus. And when applied to institutions, unlearning can entail a → process of de-instituting directed towards embodied forms of knowledge and the (un) conscious operation of ways of thinking and doing.

re-dit-en-un-in-(a)-learning

“In-learning” is fairly self-explanatory, but “a-learning” is another take on learning that perplexes me due to its French origins: “a” (no accent) is a conjugated form of the verb “avoir”, e.g., *elle a un bateau* (she has a boat). “À” (with accent grave! I gleefully recall the French I learned as a child) is commonly used as a preposition. Its meaning varies depending on the sentence (at, in, or to) – Prouvost uses all of them here: to be at learning, in learning, or to learn.

Re-dit-en-un-in-learning as commoning practice

Prouvost’s approach to taxonomy – her seemingly endless rubrics and matrixes for language – opens us up to the variety in understanding, and to a multiplicitous nature of being.²⁴⁵ This is useful in its evocation of the practice of commoning (as a verb), in that language itself is reclaimed from its enclosures. Prouvost migrates across French, English, and at times other languages, to muddle syntax; she disassociates and reassociates; she suggests a new condition in which misunderstanding – experienced even in groups with sharing practices who are → invested in

245 In her text “Hometactics: Self Mapping, Belonging, and the Home Question”, philosopher Mariana Ortega “identifies a horizon of identification, in the project of coalition building, that acknowledges selves that are multiplicitous, ambiguous, and contradictory”. Published in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily S. Lee (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2014), 173.

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translated, p. 153
liberation, p. 116
divestment, p. 236
process, p. 251
invested, p. 236

new and just ways of being, living, or working together – reveals a limitation in communication as well as possibilities for reconciliation and affective resources with new vocabularies, syntax, and narratives. These resources can break tensions around ideas to make way for knowing and meaning-making, revealing what can be learned on the verge of failed communication. At their best, Prouvost’s taxonomies also speak to how the commons are resources for uptake and practice by a community that is dedicated to difference.²⁴⁶



Figure 33: Laure Prouvost, *Positions #6 Bodywork*, installation view, 2020–2021. Courtesy of Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Photo: Peter Cox.

The Re-dit-en-un-in-learning CENTER is the name of the artist’s latest pedagogical project, which follows some of the logic and notions introduced in *DIT LEARN*. At its centre is a video called *Re-dit-en-un-in-a-learning* (2020), which is co-produced by Lisson Gallery and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and the presentations of the work in the institutions echo one another. At the Van Abbemuseum, Prouvost’s video installation is presented in the context of the group exhibition *Bodywork*, (Figure 33) which addresses the different ways in which our bodies are used for and by contemporary society, as informed by, for example, technology – the correspondence between humanity’s engagement with the → earth and the future of our existence in technological society.²⁴⁷ Ivan Illich’s prophetic 1983 essay, “→ Silence Is a Commons: Computers are doing to communication what fences did to pastures and cars did to streets”, captures the fraught relationship between people and their machines. He gives a history of how pastures and roads have been converted from commons-owned and used to being controlled by a few as a result of electronic devices. He relays this lesson through a story about the first loudspeaker arriving on the Island of Brač, off the coast of Croatia, in 1926, thereby disrupting the

246 This framework and connection between language and commons is explored in a 2019 exhibition, *Het is of de stenen spreken (silence is a commons)*, at my previous workplace, Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, Utrecht.

247 *Positions #6: Bodywork*, exhibition, Van Abbemuseum, 28 November 2020 – 25 April 2021.

democracy of communication on the island.²⁴⁸ While Illich could not have foreseen how the internet would evolve, his critique of “computer-managed society” falls short of envisioning the internet as both a commons and a resource, exemplified by the newly widespread online conference during the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing people from different localities together over time and space. In this light Prouvost’s practice seems to address both Illich’s concerns and the positive possibilities of technology. For her, language-making is a technology mechanised through play, the body, and the *re-dit-en-un-in-learning* installation environment that she creates to introduce fundamental new options in human communication. The viewer is invited to engage in language recipes that are experienced through the body and in the → imagination.

Teaching to unlearn: re-dit-en-un-in-learning codex

The video *Re-dit-en-un-in-a-learning* is conceived as a playful didactic environment with video, audio, and text elements that encourage corporeal and tactile engagement. The installation evokes a kind of mock → school, befitting of the speculative word games outlined above. Visitors are invited to undergo a process of de-learning or unlearning that which they have forgotten they already know, to re-learn a language or *legsicon* devised by the artist and fostered by the institutional setting in which this learning happens through the senses: a play on “lexicon”, the “legs” refer to the many legs of the octopus, a recurrence in Prouvost’s practice that refers to multitude and meaning. “An octopus has its brain in its tentacles,” Prouvost once professed in conversation. “Clap your hands together! Can we think and feel as quickly as we touch?” Just as she encourages beings to think at the speed at which they experience touch, at times in the video, the camera lens follows the purview of a goat – which you learn is a representation of *you* in the codex – meandering in a city, animal driven *dérive*, with bodies closer to the sidewalk. What types of learning happen closer to the level of the ground as opposed to a bird’s-eye view? Such is the imagination afforded by corporeal learning, one’s memory of the lessons of the codex is put to the test by the video.

In *Re-dit-en-un-in-learning CENTER*, Prouvost furthers exploration into the nature of how systems are constructed and meaning is made. Suddenly, imaging alternative ways of knowing is less of a daunting task associated with knowledge production, instead joy and play may be foregrounded as tools and not indulgences. Here meaning-making relies equally on sensorial experiences as it does cognition through the brain. When cheese was brought to South Africa, it was called *isonka se mazi* (water like bread) in isiXhosa, we learn from artist and *legsicon* proficient Simnikiwe Buhlungu. The naming was based on its smell, taste, and feel. When Prouvost speaks both in person and in her video scripts, her language is also rich in adjectives and onomatopoeia, drawing listeners and readers in, making them

248 “Few people there had ever heard of such a thing. Up to that day, all men and women had spoken with more or less equally powerful voices. Henceforth this would change. Henceforth the access to the microphone would determine whose voice shall be magnified. Silence now ceased to be in the commons; it became a resource for which loudspeakers compete. Language itself was transformed thereby from a local commons into a national resource for communication [...] The encroachment of the loudspeaker has destroyed that silence which so far had given each man and woman his or her proper and equal voice. Unless you have access to a loudspeaker, you are now silenced. I hope that the parallel now becomes clear. Just as the commons of space are vulnerable, and can be destroyed by the motorisation of traffic, so the commons of speech are vulnerable, and can easily be destroyed by the encroachment of modern means of communication [...] commons can exist without police, but resources cannot. Just as traffic does, computers call for police, and for ever more of them, and in ever more subtle forms.” Ivan Illich, “Silence Is a Commons: Computers are doing to communication what fences did to pastures and cars did to streets”, *CoEvolution Quarterly*, no. 40 (Winter 1983).

complicit in the work unfolding before them as they lean into her grammar and corporeal ways of understanding.

A new grammar learned, now what?

Naturally, such linguistic frameworks are prone to misuse and bastardisation; the strength and limitation of Prouvost's work lies in its emphasis on the beholder as → translator or interpreter. As we enter the reality of the second or third wave of the COVID-19 global pandemic, haunting questions come to the surface around which lessons we want to maintain in order not to return, full circle, to the "business as usual" rhetoric about sustained practice towards systemic change.

True to the artist's form, *Re-dit-en-un-in-learning CENTER's legsicon* is informed by conversations around the artist at the time of the pandemic. She has captured a range of expressions, from repetitive movements and slowness to eating for a healthy immune system (probiotic rich foods and vitamin concoctions) and institutional care practices. The mock education centre then is a distillation and registration of terms that have found a new dominance in the artist's pandemic reality. The collection operates as a guide to best practices to carry forward. As the communication team at Lisson Gallery has pointed out, when visitors leave the installation, "induction is over and the real-world examination begins". Language systems are idiosyncratic and neither universal nor objective: application of this lesson is a tool for conjuring that which we do not yet imagine. This has been further developed by fellow users or companions of the re-dit-en-un-in-learning codex. Following the saying that history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes, this pandemic period can be described in terms of a stutter: What lessons might we draw from those who have lived through and survived catastrophes to make new realities?

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translator, p. 153

Repair Natalia Sielewicz

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, July 2020

*What if we could detach repair not only from restoration but also from the very idea of the original – not so that repair comes first but that it comes before? Then, making and repair are inseparable, devoted to one another, suspended between and beside themselves.*²⁴⁹

— Fred Moten

*hammer
is an optimal object
for good sleeping
or hitting nails on the head.*²⁵⁰

— Adelaide Ivanova, a fragment of poem "The Hammer"

Hammers, like saws, can come in handy as tools of destruction and repair. They double as instruments of possible oppression and self-defence. This is perhaps why the Brazilian poet Adelaide Ivanova advises us to place a hammer underneath our bed for a good night's sleep. When Kalos, the nephew and apprentice of Deadalus, invented an arsenal of useful tools (including a saw that he made by studying the spines of fish), jealous Deadalus threw the boy off the Acropolis. As Ovid tells us in the *Metamorphoses*, Athena saved Kalos and turned him into a partridge, an "in-

249 Fred Moten, *Black and Blur (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017) 168.

250 Adelaide Ivanova, *The Hammer and Other Poems* (London: Poetry Translation Centre, 2019).

jured bird" who flies low, close to the ground. Nature, all too often considered as inferior to culture, repaired the latter.

I wish to focus on repair and its two rather perplexing etymological ancestors. *Repair*, a homonym, was given three lives from two different French roots – *re-pairer* and *reparer* – which due to their similar spellings entered English usage almost simultaneously around the 14th century. Apart from today's common use of repair, which denotes amending injury or loss, repair or re-pairing may also bring two missing counterparts together. Perhaps, more interestingly, the French verb *repaire*, designating "to return to one's home or shelter", was commonly attributed to animals that create dens and burrows – spaces suitable for habitation and temporary refuges. *Repaire* is derived in turn from the Latin verb *repatriare* and *patria* meaning "native country".²⁵¹

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when most countries shut their airspace to commercial → flights, the British government came under heavy criticism from thousands of British Pakistanis for not including them in the repatriation scheme that was launched by the British Home Office to bring its estranged citizens back home. The lack of national and institutional support was perceived by many as a sign of racist prejudice. As borders solidify and nation states grow stronger, selective → travel restrictions and prohibitions based on citizenship and legal status are at the heart of systemic racism that controls the mobility of humans, and which becomes enhanced during various crises. Border control, with its surveillance technologies, is embedded into the ethnonationalist politics of separation. Rather than providing shelter for those who seek asylum and protection, technocratic nation states turn into inaccessible Acropolises. In the analysis of Alexander de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and the French diplomat's call for the repatriation of black slaves from America to Africa, the Cameroonian philosopher Achilles Mbembe notes that "repatriation is not exactly the same as reparation". As he writes "deportation and repatriation are always animated by a genocidal unconscious"²⁵², by *disentanglement*, which one could also read in this context as *un-re:pairing*.

I wonder if we could emancipate repair from its problematic stepsibling *patria*. What could repair mean for today's institutions, objects, and most importantly, human beings, beyond compassionate charity, beyond self-congratulatory virtue signalling and beyond the fantasy of self-reparation through the act of repairing the Other? If an apology is an intention and act of speech that precedes repair, and is far too often considered "enough", how could repair become → rehearsed and performed? Judith Butler reminds us that "even as I have sympathy for another, perhaps for the reparation that another never received for a loss or for a deprivation, it seems that I am, at the same time, making reparation for what I never had, or for how I should have been → cared for" therefore "there is always something 'ungenuine' in the effort to make another happy, something self-preoccupied".²⁵³ She concludes by saying that "reparation is fallible and ought to be distinguished from efforts to rewrite, and so deny, the past" and observes that the attempt to repair something (or someone) must always come with the realisation that the dam-

251 "A Tale of Two 'Repairs'", *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/a-tale-of-two-repairs> (accessed July 2020).

252 Achille Mbembe and David Theo Goldberg, "In Conversation: Achille Mbembe and David Theo Goldberg on 'Critique of Black Reason'" (3 July 2018). A transcript is available on the website of Theory Culture & Society, <https://theoryculturesociety.org/conversation-achille-mbembe-and-david-theo-goldberg-on-critique-of-black-reason/> (accessed July 2020).

253 Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* (London: Verso, 2020), Kindle.

→
flights, p. 15
travel, p. 15
rehearsed, p. 260
cared, 92, 122

age is there.²⁵⁴ There should be no room for doubt or an attempt to conceal the traces of the injury.

Perhaps institutions should → learn from those artists who, as creators, know the subtle dialectics between making and unmaking all too well. From those who seek transformation through rapture rather than novelty, growth, and progress. One particular artist who is well aware of the fact that repair and injury are “paired” together forever is Kader Attia, whose sculptures from the series *Culture, Another Nature Repaired* refer to the concept of repair as resistance, and to the influence that vernacular architecture, military technology and plastic surgery have had on modernism. His sculptures are a result of the artist’s creative cooperation with traditional craftsmen of Bamako, Mali. The inspiration for their creation came from photographs of the so-called *les gueules cassées*, soldiers mutilated during the First World War. They become totems, akin to deities found in traditional African societies, where broken objects were repaired several times, where injury and repair were closely intertwined – “by repairing an object so roughly you actually leave the injury visible”.²⁵⁵ There is no best version, repair requires durability and constant improvement. One has to continuously knock and split, which I also understand as necessary for embracing → vulnerability. The Kleinian school of psychoanalysis, black studies and → queer research offer many insights into what reparative work could mean. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick famously expanded the fantasy of putting the fragmented self into “something like a whole” with a model for the “unmaking of mistakes”²⁵⁶ one that ought to anticipate the injury which may occur in the future, because repair is not a debt that once paid off, frees one from responsibility to lead an ethical life. Reparation should be understood not only as compensation for an injury, in financial and other forms, but is also something that needs to be constantly anticipated, rehearsed and practised outside of the law in order to produce sustainable results. To return once again to Butler, “the point is not only to find ways to repair the damage we have done (though that is surely important), or even the damage we believe we have done, but to anticipate and forestall the damage that is yet to come”.²⁵⁷ And perhaps on the most basic level of care, → solidarity and repair, we should really insist on re-pairing ourselves – by reconnecting and recognising our mutual need for → interdependence.

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learn, p. 136
vulnerability, p. 208
queer, p. 200
solidarity, p. 65
interdependence, p. 106

Revolt

Javiera Manzi A.

Santiago de Chile, August 2020

On 18 October 2019, a revolt for life broke out in Chile, in the middle of a neoliberal oasis, in the Latin American jaguar and against all odds. I would like to propose the notion of revolt from this ongoing experience in order to address some key → situated elements with which to think about the uprisings that are now taking place in different latitudes and that enable a → process of radical political → imagination and questioning of the ways in which life is organised today.

→ After the collapse of the progressive tide of the 2000s, Latin America began to take an authoritarian turn as a shock response to the global economic recession and the ecosocial crisis that had been anticipated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

254 Ibid.
255 Gabriele Sassone, “Injury and Repair: Kader Attia”, *Mousse Magazine* (10 May 2018), <http://moussomagazine.it/injury-and-repair-kader-attia-2018/> (accessed July 2020).
256 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 220.
257 Butler (2020).

→
situated, p. 148
process, p. 251
imagination, p. 197
after, p. 160

This can be seen in the governments that are beginning to rule by closing borders, with austerity measures and reductions in public services and institutions, with negationist apologies and dogmatic neoconservative restitution, as well as with the extra-institutional responses where fundamentalist and neo-fascist groups have gained traction. In opposition to this and as an antagonistic alternative, in recent years protests and social outbursts have broken out that update and at the same time transform the modes of politicisation, repertoires of collective action and the very horizons of transformation of the left, which are pushing ever more radically towards a decolonising, → feminist and → anti-extractivist turn.

In 2019, the flame of the popular splendour was spreading in the Southern Cone. In September the indigenous organisations of Ecuador rose up against the IMF reform package, in October a revolt broke out in Chile triggered by the increase in public transport fares, in November a National Strike was organised in Colombia against the reduction of the minimum wage for young people and Duque’s pension reform, and in Bolivia, while the racist right-wing imposed itself through a *coup d’état*, raising Bibles and burning the *whipala*, once again a plurinational revolt emerged from below.

The destituent power

The October outbreak of unrest occurred after a call for mass fare evasion in the city’s subways. Hundreds of high school students gathered to jump turnstiles simultaneously at different stations on Santiago’s main artery and urban infrastructure, in protest at the fare hike of 30 pesos. No one understood then how it was possible that from this first gesture of student rebellion a general uprising would emerge from which there was no return. One after another, the Metro stations went up in flames, the barricades and looting of supermarkets multiplied, and in less than eight hours, the government declared war and decreed a State of Emergency. In the days that followed, time was suspended while the different cities and towns of Chile suffered a change of skin and name. Then a *destituent moment* broke out and with it the drive “that shook the bodies off the fear that had been embedded in them and made possible an unsuspected dance of new rhythms that began to fill the squares”²⁵⁸. An early image of this were the walls overflowed by the disparate and poetic insurgent graffiti in the blast of a politics of collective negativity. As Sarah Ahmed points out, for feminism saying “no” is a political act, that is why it repeats “no means no”, no to precarisation, fear and all the violence that passes through our bodies.²⁵⁹ Along these lines, the no+, no more, began to multiply, “as a collective or plural speech”²⁶⁰, “no+ abuses”, “no+ police”, “no+ impunity”, “no+ debts” and even on more than one occasion simply “no+” and that’s it. Those first isolated grammars of the revolt were followed by slogans that explicitly articulated the general and vital sense of the uprising “until life is worth living”, “they owe us a life”, “neoliberalism was born and will die in Chile”, “normal has always been the problem”. A revolt, unlike other processes of social mobilisation, necessarily implies the overflow of its own ignition, it is not a demand, a sector, nor a sheet, it is the destitute emergency of the administration of life.

258 Rodrigo Karmy, *El porvenir se hereda: fragmento de un Chile sublevado* (Santiago, Chile: Sangría Editora, 2019), 9.

259 Sara Ahmed, “No”, *feministkilljoys* (30 June 2017), <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/06/30/no/> (accessed August 2020).

260 NO+ is a widely used slogan in the protests in Chile. Its origin go back to an action by the CADA group in 1983, ten years after Pinochet’s coup d’état. See: Paulina Varas, Fernanda Carvajal, Jaime Vindel eds., *Archivo CADA. Astucia práctica y potencias de lo común* (Santiago de Chile: Ocho Libros FfAI RedCSur, 2019).

→
feminist, p. 28
anti-extractivist, p. 53

This *destituent* quality unleashed an attack that is not only on the present, but also in terms of historical contestation. In Chile, this was illustrated with the slogan “it’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years”. The challenge, as peoples’ judgement, moved quickly from the 30 years of the post-dictatorship transition to the 47 years since the *coup d’état* and the 500 years of ongoing colonial violence. These layers of political, economic and symbolic violence gradually revealed the scope of what opened up the revolt as an exercise of *historical imagination*. The *destituent power* took the form of the collapse of a history that had been made into a heritage of monuments to colonisers, military generals and patriarchs. Christopher Columbus in Arica, Pedro de Valdivia in the Wallmapu, Francisco de Aguirre in La Serena, among other distinguished figures, who fell in the attacks of a *demonumentalisation* that were part of the “aesthetic disobedience”²⁶¹ and the epic of the decolonising power of the revolt. The alteration of these symbols of order that for centuries were thought to be imperturbable marked one of the points where the revolt began to twist its direction in an irreversible way.

It is typical of revolts that, after a few days, the cities make their new *gravitational landmark*, a paradigmatic square or place that was until then rather unremarkable. In Santiago this point was Plaza Italia, which used to mark the scar of urban segregation among those who lived above and below it, later renamed Plaza de la Dignidad, that is, Dignity Square. The tumultuous demonstrations took apart sidewalks and infrastructure with an agility that was unintelligible to the ruling sectors. This event appeared to the elites and government institutions as a total surprise which could take at least two forms: as a radical otherness that led them to represent this presence as an alien invasion, as the First Lady pointed out a few days after the outbreaks, or as a foreign geopolitical threat, as indicated by the Big Data report commissioned by the government that pointed to K-Pop fans as the postmodern incarnation of a foreign threat.

A displacement of the site of political violence is another feature that cuts across the shared intensity of a revolt. In the case of Chile, the previously marginalised figure of the hooded youth became resignified as “the front line”, deflecting the internalised criminalisation of extra-institutional violence. In front of the tanks of a militarised and bestial police force, the front line was a fragile-looking web of intertwined bodies from which some looked out with goggles or covered faces, others with no other protection than the bodies next to them, but almost always clinging to telephone poles and signs converted into shields painted in vibrant colours that evoked an unexpected dignity. In a very interesting twist, the Front Line does not seem to be identified, at least in the popular → *imagination*, with the vanguard of the urban guerrilla tradition, but rather as the expression of a politics of → *care* in the face of police and military violence, an ethic of hospitality that accompanies and protects those who have joined for the first time and also those who return → *after* years of waiting, to the ecstatic tenderness of the destituent protest. The suspension of a normative judgment against this exercise of self-defence and direct action makes it visible, as never before legitimate, even appropriable by a wide range of people beyond the protestors. In any case, this is not a naive apology; the Front Line shows the most brutal aspects of neoliberalism in Chile, the constitution of a youth that has nothing to lose and so putting their bodies on the line is at the same time a sign of commitment and of desperation.

261 Francisca Palma, “La Descolonizadora: desobediencia estética para desmonumentalizar la memoria”, La Raza Comica (16 October 2020), <https://razacomica.cl/sitio/2020/10/16/la-descolonizadora-desobediencia-estetica-para-desmonumentalizar-la-memoria/>.

In the revolt, the dismantling of the city, the pavements and urban infrastructure are not alien to the experience of what is at once a rite, a meeting and a celebration of the recognition of a variegated us. In this last decade, the revolts have updated the signs of social struggle with new repertoires and imaginaries, some of which may be allusions to local idiosyncrasies that could be unintelligible to foreigners, as well as references to a radical pop cosmopolitanism. To illustrate this, I would like to dwell on a couple of images. First, “Aunt Pikachu”, a working class woman whose youngest son mistakenly spent \$700 on AliExpress, including the purchase of an inflatable Pikachu costume. They resold everything except the costume, with the idea of keeping it for one of the Halloween parties that are celebrated with great intensity in Chile. But it wasn’t Halloween that arrived, it was the revolt, and the woman decided to join one of the first marches dancing while dressed as Pikachu with a pink rose and a presidential band, an image that went viral. The chant “Dance, Pikachu, dance” became an emblem and part of the mythology of the revolt. A second image is that of the Negro Matapacos, a dog who lived through the student protests of 2011 then, and after his death, became an icon of the street protest. His image with the red scarf around his neck is one of the most recognised symbols of the revolt in Chile, something like a mixed, → *anti-fascist* and multi-species announcement of an ongoing process. An iconic image that was soon replicated in other latitudes, even amidst the clamour of the BLM anti-racist protests against police brutality in the United States. This is how it became an internationalist emblem of revolt in neoliberal societies. In a similar way, an inescapable image was the performance *Un violador en tu camino* (“A rapist in your path”) by the collective LasTesis (who are currently being sued and harassed by the police in Chile). This common dance and cry against the “violence you don’t see” was a revolt within the revolt, returning to the intensity of the first days as it marked its own rhythm and a new regime of visibility. A → *feminist* collective spell against police impunity and violence reverberated in the bodies and languages of women from different territories as a spontaneous contagion of international → *solidarity* that activated in each place its own layers of contestation.

Constituent drive

It is in the experience of this exceptional encounter, in the enunciation and confidence of this new “us”, that the possibility of revolt is born. It can be said that this is a drive that does not refer to institutional restitution or exit, but to the affirmation of something else. Of seeing ourselves again as a people, as a working class that is *constituting* itself in a process of undelayable struggle for another possible life²⁶². It is precisely the intensity of this experience that constitutes that place from which to enunciate new horizons of desire and radical contestation. The modes of production and reproduction of society, of life, are at the centre of the political problem of the revolt.

The revolt then advances in a contagious way, “from the contact that contaminates us mutually, staining each other, inhabiting the border with more strength than ever, letting ourselves be challenged by the one who has always been the other”²⁶³. The revolt is the restitution of a collective rumour that regenerates the broken tissues to enable popular assemblies of deliberation to emerge that are interspersed in the territories with *nútram*, networks of care, supply, solidarity and mutual sup-

262 Francisca Palma, “La Descolonizadora: desobediencia estética para desmonumentalizar la memoria”, La Raza Comica (16 October 2020), <https://razacomica.cl/sitio/2020/10/16/la-descolonizadora-desobediencia-estetica-para-desmonumentalizar-la-memoria/>.

263 Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, “Una Asamblea Constituyente Plurinacional”, *Ciper 15* (14 November 2019), <https://www.ciperchile.cl/2019/11/14/una-asamblea-constituyente-plurinacional/> (accessed August 2020). Own translation.

port. Currently, the challenge has been to sustain the power of the revolt and the regeneration of the social fabric in the midst of physical isolation.

The revolt provokes the radical alteration of space-time and is thus a rupture, but also a return. It is the acceleration of a shared intensity that twists an order. In this case, the order of neoliberal normality from which a destituent desire emerged. But the very possibility of this untimely exception could not be understood without its legacies, without recognising the remains, the collective desires, the memory of struggle, of rage, of unrest and of all the forms of organisation sustained in previous times and that return to burst in as present and future.

There are at least 24 fully confirmed victims of the attack of the military and police forces of the Greek Junta that took place during 15 to 17 November 1973, in and around the Polytechnic School of Athens, while thousands of people were mobilising to prepare for the fall of the dictatorship.²⁶⁴ Amongst many other unconfirmed cases and the thousands injured by the brutal attacks of the regime, we could find people of very different ages, backgrounds, and professions who were gathered in and around the school to form an active ground of uprising and emergence against the darkness and violence of the Regime of the Colonels. In recent years, however, we witness with horror a strategic attempt to revise the events and even the basics facts of the deaths and injuries that we collectively suffered in those days.

Since 1981, the 17 November has been a national holiday for all levels of education, and the commemorative events last for three days and take place around the old front gate of the Polytechnic School, standing as monument now, distorted after having been knocked down by a tank but becoming more colourful every year by the thousands of red carnations that are left on it. This year, I saw a person that was carrying in her jacket pocket a small bouquet of two or three yellow carnations, wrapped in aluminium foil, approaching the heaps of flowers and wreaths laid by officials, bending over in a frail manner and almost hiding it in there while a group of children from what the Greek state categorises as an intercultural school were waiting in line as a group, holding the red carnations with their → fists raised up and chanting in chorus one of the core slogans of the student uprising of 1973: “ψωμί, παιδεία, ελευθερία” Bread, education, freedom.

Bread, *paideia*, freedom.

In modern Greek *paideia* stands for describing education, but as a word carries the heritage of its use as not only a vocational form of education, but rather as a lifelong and critical educational → process. According to Takis Fotopoulos, *paideia* can be conceived of as both civic schooling, involving “the development of citizens’ self-activity by using their very self-activity as a means of internalising the democratic institutions and the values consistent with them”, and as personal training involving “the development of the capacity to → learn rather than to teach particular things, so that individuals become autonomous, that is, capable of self-reflective activity and deliberation.”²⁶⁵

264 Historical research conducted by Leonidas F. Kallivretakis for the National Hellenic Research Foundation, concerning the victims of the Polytechnic School Uprising against the Greek military regime.

265 Takis Fotopoulos, “From (mis)education to Paideia”, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, vol. 2, no. 1 (September 2005).

This two-fold operation produces a dynamic understanding of the role of education in the formation of citizenship, which may appear in tune with current policy strategy on education as recently articulated in the mapping of a European Education Area that states that “education is the foundation for personal fulfilment, employability and active, responsible citizenship”.²⁶⁶ However, in reading through the strategic framework, and to no great surprise, all seven targets are related to “exposure to work-based learning”, “training” and so forth.

Arguably the structure that we have come to know as a school stands out formally when trying to imagine a space for education and citizenship. Pointing out that there is a real gap in articulation on what stands for active citizenship when institutions approach the complexity of education, I will use the space of this glossary to describe a structure that I feel was established on the basis of real and collective needs.

The most mobilising activation of a school that I have ever experienced, happened while I was trying to address a personal crisis in how to respond to the intense hardships that we have collectively endured in Greece. While searching for a different way to educate myself in response to these crises, I reached out and eventually became a volunteer at the Open School for Immigrants of Piraeus, active in → solidarity education since 2005, while in 2006 it adopted a new legal form as an association. In all these years of the school’s operation, thousands of immigrants of different nationalities and hundreds of solidarity volunteers have passed through the classrooms. A very important and formative moment of the school’s practice came in 2016, when volunteer teachers of the Open School came in contact with the refugee teachers who were staying inside the Skaramagas camp outside of Athens. Together, the community of the school and the people in the camp organised and brought to life a common educational program. Syrians, Afghans, and Kurds – all highly educated – became responsible for teaching the camp’s children in their mother tongue – Arabic, Kurdish, and Farsi. The first structure of solidarity within the camp was thus made by the refugees themselves.

The school is located in Kokkinia, a historic working class district in the north of the municipality of Piraeus, which since the beginning of the 20th century has welcomed a mass influx of refugees who were Armenian and Greek, almost all from the Smyrna region. It was also the site of the “Blockade of Kokkinia” in August 1944 when, in reprisals against an uprising led by the communist resistance, German soldiers executed hundreds of people and sent more to concentration camps. This history continues to inform the school’s → emancipatory and → anti-fascist ideals, and is present in its annual activities. It is through these codes of operating that the expanded community of the school wants to open to students from all over the world.

The last years of lockdowns and social isolation due to the pandemic were very difficult with regard to maintaining the operation of the school and, most importantly, keeping together the communities that make up the school. There were restrictions that lead towards the dissolution of collective practices by enforcing isolation, the increased need for → care but also increased difficulty in providing it, and the state making it even more difficult for people to be formally recognised in Greece, and thus we started to discuss again the very basic steps needed to deal with these issues. The necessity to start again initially seemed very difficult, but it provided a

266 *European Education Area explained*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/the-eea-explained> (accessed 19 November 2022).

chance to break a certain repetition of operation. It was at this exact moment that we had the chance to → negotiate again amongst us both our notion of solidarity, as an open form without any pre-conceived points of closure, and our ability to approach instituting from the ground up. When the social conditions we faced seemed to be forcefully undetermined, it felt like there was a stronger possibility for us to start again.

In this opportunity to break away from our own institutionality in practice, I believe that a true process of *paideia* becomes apparent, that is the ability to continuously re-negotiate the form of our existing operations, even more so within a collective and emancipatory space, like the one we are arguing for through the school. By proposing our desires for an active and responsive rather than responsible citizenship, the following paradox – as expressed by Cornelius Castoriadis – becomes both apparent and productive: “Only an autonomous collectivity can shape autonomous individuals – and vice versa, whence the paradox, for ordinary logic. Here we have one aspect of this paradox: autonomy is the ability to call the given institution of society into question – and that institution itself must make you capable of calling it into question, primarily through education.”²⁶⁷

→ negotiate, p. 197

Situated museum Jesús Carrillo

Madrid, June 2020

Museo Situado: Pepa’s Dream²⁶⁸

Let me start by telling you a dream: the dream of Pepa Torres, an active member of Museo Situado, as narrated by herself to the assembly in one of our weekly Zoom meetings during the quarantine.

In her dream, she was evicted from her home by the police in the middle of the night together with many other neighbours, something which was increasingly common during the violent process of gentrification of Lavapiés. Unexpectedly, Ana Longoni, director of the Public Activities Department of Reina Sofía, but also a frequent participant in anti-eviction demonstrations, led the group to a secret entrance in the walls of the nearby Museum to provide them with shelter.

The sense of → vulnerability behind Pepa’s dream was justified. Even if evictions had been temporarily suspended, the COVID-19 confinement made the fragile situation of many neighbours of Lavapiés critical. Migrants, refugees, precarious workers and the elderly, being isolated and without easy access to public aid, would feel helpless and unprotected.

While the world was collapsing outside, the vaulted ceilings of the Museum covered a safe space, a kind of Noah’s Ark in which “all species” were welcome. This was not all. Once inside, as Pepa recalled, a party started, dancing together as they

²⁶⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, trans. Helen Arnold (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 176.

²⁶⁸ Museo Situado is an assembly of citizens and social agents of the Lavapiés neighbourhood held within the framework of the Public Activities Department of Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid. Lavapiés, the area in which Reina Sofía Museum is located, has been going through a strong gentrification process during the last two decades, and also has a long tradition of activism and resistance. The mission of Museo Situado is to promote and support community-engaged projects in Lavapiés and beyond, as well as to channel collaborative programmes between civil society and art institution. It started in 2018, intensifying its activities during the coronavirus confinement in Spring 2020. See: <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/museo-situado>.

→ vulnerability, p. 208

used to in the picnics organised by the assembly in the inner courtyard of Reina Sofía.

Her dream probably contains personal and social projections about the benign nature of the museum and the salvific power of art, but I feel that it also → translated the more “subversive” intentions of the participants of Museo Situado. Most members of the assembly, I should say, disliked the word *situado*, chosen by the public activities department to refer to the explicitly local and politically engaged character of the project. For them, who may have not read Donna Haraway, it sounded very much as *sitiado*: under siege.

The military connotations of this homophony, which traditional activist “militants” may have celebrated, had nothing to do with the → feminist intentions of our group, as the activist Rafaela Pimentel reminded us in one of the last meetings of our assembly. They actually preferred the term *agujereado*: “pierced”, which takes us back to the breach in the walls through which Lavapiés neighbours penetrated the Museum in Pepa’s dream. *Agujerear el Reina* (Piercing the Reina) is the name of our WhatsApp group.

This image refers to the Museum as a castle, the guarded gates of which were designed to keep “people like them” outside. It also implicitly identifies the group as a bunch of “outcasts” who, although they may not intend to “take over the castle after a siege”. In military terms, they are aiming to more subtly, but steadily, perforate it like rodents, in order to enter and unlock the institution from within. Perforating, unlike conquering, works on the structure of the building, making it porous, soft, and exposed to external influences, transforming the relationship between the inside and outside. It involves both a danger, since it erodes the solidity of the fortress, and a new life, since the holes permit breathing and the circulation of flows which may, otherwise, become a perilous wave, or finally move to other watersheds.

Piercing requires conspirators inside. In fact, the proportion of the Museum staff participating in the assembly increased rapidly during the short life of the project. The fact that many of them were precarious workers or unpaid interns, and some were already engaged in different forms of activism, became suddenly visible, providing a different perception of what the institution is actually made of: people with whom to share needs, demands and projects. This perception, which worked both ways, made it possible that the same walls that protect the castle could also allocate an assembly, keep a garden, or provide shelter in difficult times.

During the quarantine, meetings became more frequent, two or three a month, and the related actions more agile and effective, as if all the participants knew how much it was at stake and the urgency to deliver a response. Museo Situado rapidly took its place within the tide of → solidarity which was rising in the neighbourhood. In truth, it could not have been otherwise, since some of its most active members like Nines, Pepa, Rafaela or Elahi were key elements in the support networks of Lavapiés and beyond. Some others, being part of the Museum as staff or interns, such as Marionna, Brenda, Carolina or Sara, worked hand in hand with them in setting up ingenious devices of enunciation and communication – campaigns, seminars, and workshops, which took the Museum as a (virtual) place and platform.

The hole in the Museum walls became a loudspeaker through which to project the voices of many who had been structurally absent and found there a tempo-

→ translated, p. 153
feminist, p. 28
solidarity, p. 65

rary platform in this exceptional season. *Voces situadas* (situated voices), a series of open seminars launched by the Museum to convey the public debate on urgent social issues, provided the format for this. Let me list some of the *voces situadas* organised by the assembly before, during and → after the quarantine:

- Voces situadas 10: *Debt. Plural feminine* (26 November 2019)
- Voces situadas 11: *The Value of Strawberries: Slaves of the 21st century* (5 March 2020)
- Voces situadas 12: *Who Takes → Care of Carers: Capitalism, reproduction and quarantine* (27 May 2020)
- Voces situadas 13: *Surviving Together: Community organisation in times of pandemic* (24 June 2020)
- Voces situadas 14: *The Virus within the European Fortress* (29 July 2020)
- Voces situadas 15: *We Are All Old, We Are All Mortal* (2 September 2020)

The → feminist and internationalist profile of these activities reveals that the situated nature of the project was not so much about interacting with the locals, as could be expected from a museum community group. It was about the political right to be and to speak from the Museum. During the exceptional time of the pandemic, Museo Situado made the membrane of the institution vibrate differently. Something happened in the institution when new bodies got present (even if online), took a stand and spoke with an accent, a skin, a sexuality and a social class which were previously excluded, and when that act of speech mattered and convened a community of a new kind.

This involved negotiations with the solid skeleton of the institution which were not necessarily easy. This was the case after the proposal of some members of Museo Situado to use the walls of Reina Sofía to hang banners of the campaigns promoted by the assembly to suspend housing rents, to legalise migrants, to demand → translators in health services, or to claim labour rights for domestic workers. This would imply a public exposure that the Museum may not be in a position to have.

But what do they want from an art museum?

In Museo Situado there is a faith in the powers of both the institution and art which can be rarely found among members of the “art world” or its usual analysts, like myself. The members of the assembly do not just intend to use the walls and resources of the institution strategically in order to convey their demands for social justice. They firmly believe that the mission of the Museum is to do so. They fight for a world in which the Museum is on the side of the common good, in which it does what has to be done. This is a very powerful demand that the art institution should not dismiss in a period of severe crisis, a time in which the worst may be still to come.

They also believe in art as an effective antidote against the depressive libidinal regime of current capitalism; an antidote capable of shaking our conscience, activating our energies, unlocking our prejudices, assembling our wills and triggering our → imagination to transcend artificial barriers. They believe that art may allow us to envision an exception, a breach in our oppressive and unfair normality and show that “normality was actually the problem”, as says one of the international campaigns in which we are currently involved, connected with the recent protests in Chile. (Figure 34)

The intimate relationship between art and exception became particularly evident during the pandemic, as if the violent suspension of normality dissipated the spell



Figure 34: Anonymous projection in Santiago de Chile during the popular demonstrations of October 2019, used in the campaign *La normalidad era el problema*, supported by Museo Situado and promoted by Red Conceptualismos del Sur, <https://redcsur.net/es/2020/06/03/campana-la-normalidad-era-el-problema/>.

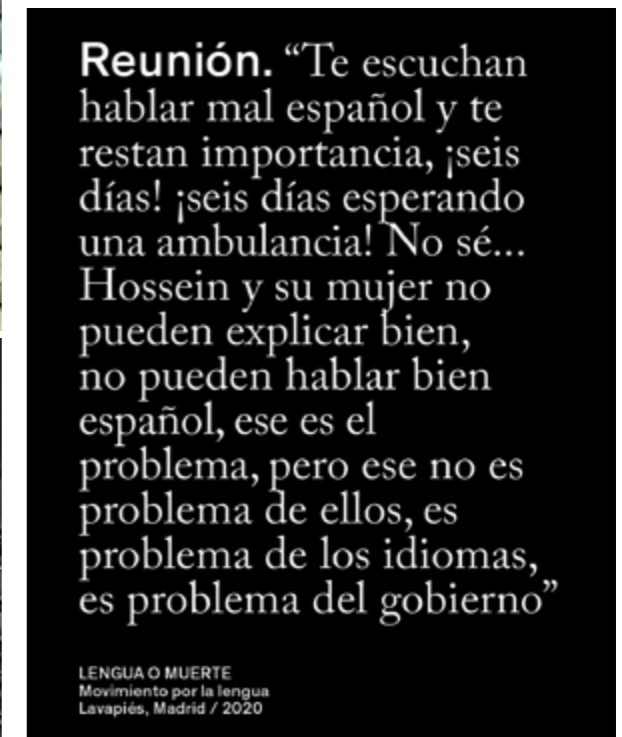


Figure 35: Cover of the book by Dani Zelko, *Lengua o Muerte, Reunión*, Madrid, 2020, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/actividades/dani-zelko>.

which keeps art senselessly spinning around the art circuits. By the same token, the emergency situation made clear that for art to be exceptional it should renounce its exceptionality, understood as distance and privilege. We thus remembered that art is bound to life; the hunger and the lust for life, all life, and the lives of all.

In fact, the idea of Museo Situado, an assembly in which neighbours and members of the institution would sit and do things together, as Ana Longoni recalls, was triggered by the death of Mame Mbaye in March 2018, a Senegalese street vendor who collapsed at the door of his home in Lavapiés after being chased by the police from the nearby Puerta del Sol. The death of Mame, described by the authorities as provoked by “natural causes”, incited massive protests and a night of riots in Lavapiés. As Ana says, the museum could not be blind to the struggle for life taking place outside of its gates.

Life and death are also the themes of an art piece conceived and developed within Museo Situado during the confinement: *Lengua o muerte (Language or death)* by the Argentinian poet Dani Zelko. (Figure 35) He used a methodology called *reunión*, “meeting”, a collective → process in which he carefully transcribes the words, the silences, the breathings of people whose testimony would otherwise be dismissed, namely victims of state violence. Then, he would produce an “urgent edition”, distributing the book among the community, which would read it aloud.²⁶⁹

269 Dani Zelko, *Reunión: Lengua o muerte (Meeting: Language or Death)* (Madrid, 2020), <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/dani-zelko> (accessed June 2020).

→
after, p. 160
care, p. 92, 122
feminist, p. 28
translators, p. 153
imagination, p. 197

→
process, p. 251

In this case, he would record the story of Mohammed Hossein, a neighbour in Lavapiés of Bangladesh origins, who died of COVID-19 on the 26 March 2020 without any medical aid after six days of constant calls to the health service. Nobody could understand the desperate calls of his family and friends, and taxi drivers would refuse to take him to the hospital in a final attempt at saving his life.

Lengua o muerte was produced by Dani Zelko from the other side of the ocean, but with the intimate collaboration of one of the members of Museo Situado, Mohammad Fazle Elahi, leader of Valiente Bangla (Brave Bangla), a cultural association that set up a huge → solidarity network to support the local Bangladesh community which had been particularly → vulnerable during the quarantine.

How this exception affects the museum?

A few Museum directors have rushed to announce their intention to move towards what they call “caring institutions”, probably aware of the displacement of social priorities and the danger of becoming irrelevant in the “new normality”. But, as Manuel Borja-Villel already warned us, caring should not involve leaving criticality aside, quite the opposite.²⁷⁰ Caring is political, as → feminisms constantly insist. → Conflictual, as Maddalena Fragnito reminded us in our Glossary’s seminar, and it requires a radical reconfiguration of the art institution in the terms Yayo Herrero so clearly explained in the opening of the seminar. Otherwise, it is mere charity, at best.

Pablo Martínez has reminded us of the dangers of embracing “caring” as an empty signifier, a “new artistic turn”; the latest trend of an art system playing its final piece while the Titanic is sinking.²⁷¹ If citizens, together with institutions, do not take a critical stand and participate in the dramatic reinvention of the world that is to come, as pantxo ramas has recently remarked in L’Internationale online article, they will become just “patients” and increasingly efficient vehicles of control, respectively.²⁷² In a conversation with Marcelo Expósito Ana Longoni emphasised the urgent need to participate in the radical transformation of a “worn-out world”. In order to do that, the Museum must turn away from its hermeticism, and its fortress structure, and, as Ana says, open itself to the vitality and experience of fighting for justice in social movements.²⁷³ That was the original intention of Museo Situado.

Even if I am aware of the resilient nature of the institution, and the powerful magnetism of the “new normality”, I believe that Museo Situado has pierced Reina Sofía to an extent we are still unable to reckon with. The members of the assembly, many of them workers of the Museum, will never forget that “normality was the problem”. It is telling, in this sense, that *Lengua o muerte* was taken by Reina Sofía as the central piece in the celebrations of the Museum’s day last month.

270 Marcelo Expósito, “El museo tendrá que cuidar como un hospital sin dejar de ser crítico: Conversación con Manuel Borja-Villel, director del MNCARS”, *CTXT* (14 May 2020), <https://ctxt.es/es/20200501/Culturas/32247/Marcelo-Exposito-Manuel-Borja-Villel-museo-Reina-Sofia-MNCARS.htm> (accessed June 2020).

271 Pablo Martínez, “Notas para un museo por venir”, *CTXT* (22 June 2020), <https://ctxt.es/es/20200501/Culturas/32354/Pablo-Martinez-arte-ministerio-pandemia-covid-19-centros-de-arte-ecologismo-queer.htm> (accessed June 2020).

272 pantxo ramas, “Cuidar la democracia”, *L’Internationales online* (16 June 2020), https://www.internationaleonline.org/opinions/1036_caring_democracy (accessed June 2020).

273 Interview with Ana Longoni, *Nodal* (5 June 2020), <https://www.nodal.am/2020/06/ana-longoni-escritora-argentina-debemos-darle-vuelta-a-este-mundo-desgastado-que-no-queremos-volver-a-habitar/> (accessed June 2020).

→
solidarity, p. 65
vulnerable, p. 208
feminisms, p. 28
conflictual, p. 92

*Commoning translation*²⁷⁴ renders translation an act of → solidarity, not fidelity or loyalty.

Commoning translation is to insist that translation is practiced by many and not by a few.

Commoning translation reminds us that translation is an act of contingency, not certainty.

Commoning translation reskills the task of the translator who is already precarious, already uprooted.

Commoning translation rejects translation as fluency.

Commoning translation mobilises stuttering translators who speak in whole fragments.

Commoning translation asserts the right to translate out of a sense of solidarity with the text.

Commoning translation, translating in solidarity, is not colonial translation, which seeks to uplift or reveal, civilise and sell.

Commoning translation has as its errand to mobilise against white privilege and power, to bring side-lined histories into view.

Commoning translation is to remember that you can know a language for its power to regulate more than for its power to communicate.

Solidarity in translation is not for anyone to claim.

Commoning translation may speak to none or merely a few.

Case Study 1: Letters for Black Lives: An Open Letter Project on Anti-Blackness

In early July 2016, the Chinese-American ethnographer Christina Xu authored and published a Google document titled “Letters for Black Lives”, (Figure 36) prompted by the police shooting of Philando Castile, a black man, and the early misidentification of the police officer as “Chinese”.²⁷⁵ Two years earlier, Peter Liang, a Chinese-American NYPD officer, had shot and killed Akai Gurley, another black man, in Brooklyn. The 2014 shooting of Gurley, and subsequent conviction of Liang set off a cascade of intra-racial conflict in Asian-American communities in New York and the US, illustrating how loaded such relationships are with regard to notions of anti-racism and social justice (see, for example, Asian-American community fractures with regard to affirmative action in university admissions policies). Many Asian-Americans, especially first-generation Chinese-Americans, did not feel that they needed to stand in solidarity with black communities in their resistance to police brutality, and did not see how Liang was anything but a victim of both the NYPD, which they saw as defending white officers more strongly, and of anti-Asian racism in black communities, a sentiment bolstered by a history of interracial conflict.



Figure 36: *Letters for Black Lives Matter*, Persian edition, <https://lettersforblacklives.com/>.

274 Editor’s note: In the previous edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* Mariç Öner also presented the term “translation” to point out gaps in impossible translations (2018), 317.

275 Iris Hyon, “Initiating the Dialogue: How ‘Letters for Black Lives’ Sparked Conversations About Asian American Identity”, *Pulitzer Center* (15 March 2017), <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/initiating-dialogue-letters-for-black-lives-spark-conversations-asian-american-identity> (accessed 14 September 2020).

→
solidarity, p. 65

Younger Asian-Americans, on the other hand, felt that Gurley's killing, and Liang's subsequent conviction, should be → situated within a broader narrative, and critique, of anti-black racism, white supremacy, and police violence, notwithstanding the fact that Liang was an officer of colour, convicted of a crime when his white colleagues most often were not. Xu's immediate response two years later, when Castile's murderer was identified as "Chinese", was to try to generate a way to communicate why Asian-Americans of all ages and ethnic backgrounds should stand in solidarity with black Americans, and then especially on issues pertaining to structural racism, police violence, and anti-blackness.

Asian immigration to the US was largely facilitated by the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also called the Hart-Celler Act, and contemporary Asian-America bears the direct imprint of the ideological foundation of that legislation: in 1960, 5% of the foreign-born population in the US was Asian, whereas they in 2014 represented 30% of the foreign-born population. The 1965 Immigration Act was intended to encourage the migration of skilled workers from → Asia, with the result that many so-called "first-wave" Asian migrants came from lower middle-class or middle-class backgrounds and often had some degree of secondary or post-secondary education. The US was at the time seeing an expansion of its welfare state, and the labour migration of these skilled workers was intended to fill out the ranks of professionals who could contribute to that expansion.

At the same time the African-American civil rights movement was unfolding, insisting on social and legal justice for black Americans. Asian migrants, disproportionately middle-class in origins and/or aspirations due to the ideological underpinnings of immigration legislation at the time, were often politically and juridically pitted against African-Americans, whose grievances were rebutted by white policymakers' assertions that if Asian immigrants could succeed in the US, why couldn't African Americans do the same, thus cementing the persistent and misleading notion of the Asian-American "model minority". The model minority stereotype, along with other racialised stereotypes, reinforces the notion of individual character being to blame for systemic inequality, distracting from criticism of a system designed to advance white power and privilege.

As the historian Vijay Prashad argues in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, anti-blackness has been a central aspect of what it means for Asian immigrants to the US to "become American".²⁷⁶ Adopting anti-black beliefs is, according to Prashad, a way to integrate into the US national narrative, which depends on the subjugation and dehumanisation of brown and black bodies, what scholars such as Orlando Patterson refer to as social death. Prashad's thesis is brought to life in the events surrounding Gurley's killing at the hands of Liang, who shot Gurley while patrolling stairwells in the Louis Heaton Pink Houses, a large public housing complex in the East New York neighbourhood of Brooklyn, NY. The complex is named after Louis Heaton Pink (1882–1955), a former Chairman of the New York State Housing Board who advocated for public-private partnerships to combat poverty in black communities.

→ After decades of providing affordable housing to low-income New Yorkers, especially communities of colour, in the early 2000s the New York City Housing Authority began to defund the Pink Houses, along with its other properties, which resulted in a steady degradation in the quality of life there, including but certainly not limited to diminished upkeep, such as providing heat and hot water, as well

276 Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

as maintaining well-lit public spaces.²⁷⁷ Upon shooting Gurley, Liang claimed that broken lightbulbs were a factor in why he had fired his gun – that he had not been able to see well enough to determine who else was in the stairwell and so had fired in defence.

The letters that make up this project are directly addressed to members of Asian-American communities who, in the words of the letter-writers, want officers such as Peter Liang, as well as Tou Thao, the Hmong-American police officer who stood by while George Floyd was murdered, to have the protections of white supremacy. These letters are continuously updated to reflect shifts in the terrain of protest – in other words, responses to more black bodies being murdered on US streets – but are also tailored to specific geographic locations and community histories concerning anti-blackness, including public health and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on black and indigenous communities.

Initially, when I planned the writing of this piece I thought I should include the English-language version of the most recent letter, but I am going to omit that in favour of encouraging the reader to seek out the letters on their own, especially since they are available in at least thirty different languages, as well as a range of contexts with regard to histories of black-Asian relations in disparate locations across the world: www.lettersforblacklives.com.

Case Study 2: *FI*, BLM Solidarity Video

In late July 2016, the Swedish → feminist political party *FI* (Feminist Initiative) produced a Swedish language → solidarity video intended to illustrate the fact that "the Swedish feminist party stands with Black Lives Matter... Feminist Initiative challenges the national self-image of Sweden as an equitable and open country that respects human rights".²⁷⁸

The video features a number of black Swedish activists, writers, and public intellectuals, and each speaker contributes to the video's overall analysis of anti-black expressions of empire and colonialism in the US and Europe, drawing analytical connections between black bodies shot on American streets and black and brown bodies drowning in the Mediterranean. The video argues that the diminished value of these bodies is acutely visible in the intersecting transhistorical logics of colonialism, empire, and contemporary racial capitalism, rooted in the transatlantic slave trade and European colonialism, and articulated vividly in the video's comparative analyses. In particular, the scene and event of transoceanic passage is repeatedly evoked in recursive transhistorical reference to the Black Atlantic. And, throughout, the phrase "Black Lives Matter" is spoken, slowly and emphatically, in English.

I have written elsewhere about how the slowing down of the phrase in itself can be seen as a form of translation, but also of the problems which arise when English is both a language of anti-racist solidarity but also frequently an instrument of

277 "Pink Houses Tenants Say They Have Lived Without Heat during Bitter Cold", *News 12 Brooklyn* (2 January 2018), <https://bronx.news12.com/pink-houses-tenants-say-they-have-lived-without-heat-during-bitter-cold-37177025> (accessed 14 September 2020); Benjamin Mueller, (December 16, 2014). "At New York City Council Hearing, Concerns About Housing Authority Practices", *The New York Times* (16 December 2014), <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/17/nyregion/at-new-york-city-council-hearing-concerns-about-housing-authority-practices.html> (accessed 14 September 2020).

278 Feministiskt Initiativ, "The Feminist Party of Sweden Stands with Black Lives Matter" *Feministiskt Initiativ* (29 July 2016), <https://feministisktinitiativ.se/the-feminist-party-of-sweden-stands-with-black-lives-matter/> (accessed 14 September 2020).



Figure 37: Print screen of comments section from *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 June 2020.

social death.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, it is my belief that actually having to wrestle with the translation of a phrase such as “Black Lives Matter” forces the translator, and reader, into a closer relationship with the histories and presents at stake – that translation moves translators into more intimate relationship with what is said, including positions of → vulnerability and accountability, but also possibly forces a more corporeal engagement with power and privilege. Simply put, that translation can render seemingly distant structures – belief systems, histories, power structures – more emotionally and politically acute.

Four years later, during BLM protests in Stockholm in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I read the comments section on the website of *Dagens Nyheter*, one of the two large Swedish daily newspapers. The article in question described that day’s protests in the city, and a group of commenters is concerned that more than 50 people have gathered outside to protest.²⁸⁰ One commenter replies in defence of the fact that the group was in excess of the 50-person limit prescribed by the Swedish public health authority, but concludes his comment with the following statement:

However, one thing that struck me from the images is that they had the exact same signs as in the US. In English. If protesting against racially motivated police violence in Sweden, couldn't they have taken the time to come up with their own signs? (Figure 37)

How, why, and by/for whom is social death translated between languages and contexts? And what must be translated in order for the ontological death (see Patterson, Hartman, Wilderson) ascribed to blackness to be translated as clearly *here* as it is *there*, not through seamlessness, but through an attention to jagged edges, charred remains, and, perhaps, black futures?²⁸¹

Case Study 3: Glossary of Common Knowledge / Solidarity in Translation

My task is to prepare a 10-to-15-minute Glossary seminar presentation on the term *translation*. The slideshow I put together ends up containing images taken from *Letters for Black Lives* and the *F!* → solidarity video as well as a Reddit post about translating BLM to Vietnamese and the aforementioned reader comment from

279 Jennifer Hayashida, “Tillsammans Means Overlapping Edges, as in Tiles or Scales: Feeling Translation”, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3/4, New York (Fall 2019/Winter 2020), 215–31.

280 “Stora protester i Stockholm city efter demonstrationer på Sergels torg”, *Dagens Nyheter* (4 June 2020), <https://www.dn.se/sthlm/demonstration-mot-polisvald-far-inte-samla-fler-an-50/> (accessed 14 September 2020).

281 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Frank Wilderson III., “Afro-pessimism and the End of Redemption”, *The Occupied Times* (March 2016), <https://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=14236> (accessed 14 September 2020).

Dagens Nyheter. Due to the pandemic, our group – approximately 22 individuals spread across Europe – is meeting on Zoom.

My hope is to also conduct a very brief translation workshop where everyone, given the group’s linguistic → diversity, translates the same term into the language of their → choice. In my research, I have been conducting experimental translation workshops in Sweden, and the intention is to see what close readings emerge in the collective act of translation, in individual decision-making as well as in subsequent group readings, where we can examine resonance, slippage, imbrication, but also our own positions in relation to the scenes and events we translate.

Initially, I plan to be as literal and linear as possible and ask everyone to translate “Black Lives Matter”, but as the seminar progresses, the exercise suddenly feels too clumsy and obvious, even brutal, and I realise that we will not have time to fully engage in the kind of close reading that the term, and translation, warrant. Mid-way through the three-day seminar, I decided that we should simply translate the word “matter”, and so we do. (Figures 38 and 39)

I have thought a great deal about the implications of how we all translated this term, how we oriented ourselves politically and philosophically, but even more I have continuously returned to how I also felt the (Zoom) room shift as everyone set to work and, perhaps, had to turn inward and away from distant others. The “we” I use here to describe the “us” of that Zoom room seemed to take a different form – perhaps what I felt were generative fractures – once the task of translation was introduced. *We*, are a multilingual and polyvocal group, representing a range of explicit commitments to the interrelationship of art and politics, yet I would say that for myself, the moment of working with our linguistic heterogeneity was the moment when I felt the greatest sense of camaraderie, or affinity, with everyone there.

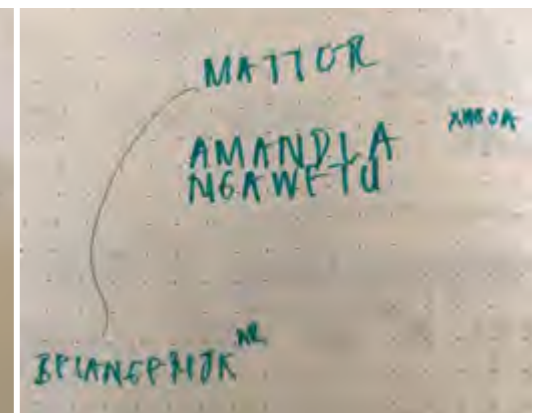
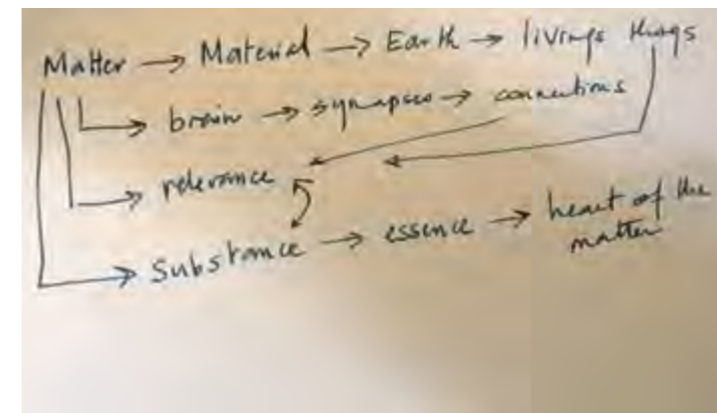


Figure 38: Image of translations of the word “matter” from the short translation workshop during the on-line seminar of the GCK. Translations by Rasha Salti.

Figure 39: Image of translations of the word “matter” from the short translation workshop during the on-line seminar of the GCK. Translations by Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide.

Subjectivisation

In May 2021, we²⁸² invited a group of narrators to propose terms for the Glossary, to speak about the notion of Subjectivisation with respect to their current research and/or artistic practice and shifting cultural conditions. With this referential field, we are interested in interpretations of subjectivities that are critical toward dominant ways of producing subjectivisation and the exploitation and commodification of intellect and affect by capital. This subjectivisation is produced from the rebellion and critical situatedness of both individual and collective. We understand subjectivisation as a potentially transformative process that confronts the judgments and biases in our societies and poses critical questions about who we are, and how we act in the world. It works in the direction of forming aesthetical, ethical and political statements and decisions that are to an extent unrepresentable, historically situated, fragmented and inconsistent, yet capable of weaving political affinities, that bring about social transformation. A collective subjectivity that experiences common trauma may form a solidarity movement that challenges systematic violence in political realities despite the existing intersectionality between its members. The opposite of subjectivisation is identification; that is, the police activity of assigning to each body its 'natural' place and function. The process of subjectivisation is about citizens becoming makers and not only subjects of public policies and institutions. In a world facing pandemic, climate change, migrations, economic and social struggle, terrorism and an array of new communication technologies we observe growing social, political and economic tension resulting in an ever-more stratified society. Subjectivity-as-encounter is a way to promote the possibility of sharing borders, margins and thresholds with empathy.

The seminar took place online. It was organised in collaboration with HDK Valand – Academy of Art and Design, Gothenburg, Sweden, and Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana, Slovenia, from 10 to 12 May 2021.

Terms

- 160 **After** Jesús Carrillo
- 162 **Being ecological** Bogna Stefańska and Jakub Depczyński
- 168 **Being silent** Yuji Kawasima
- 174 **Choice** Ida Hiršenfelder
- 179 **Disappointment** Nicolás Cuello
- 188 **Disidentification** Pablo Martínez
- 192 **Empathy** Joanna Zielińska
- 194 ***mOther(ness)*** Maja Smrekar
- 197 **Negotiated imagination** Ram Krishna Ranjan
- 200 **Queering** Diego Marchante “Genderhacker”
- 202 **Rewilding** Abhijan Toto
- 203 ***Ruåttvuõttåd*** Pauliina Feodoroff
- 204 ***Şkl*** Deniz Gül
- 208 **Vulnerability** Elisa Fuenzalida

282 The organisers of the seminar Zdenka Badovinac, Jesús Carrillo, Ida Hiršenfelder, Bojana Piškur, Corina Oprea and Mick Wilson.

“After” is the name given in Spain to nightclubs, very often illegal, which stay open overnight after others close. Life goes on at an “after” club while most people sleep. Tired but still excited, night birds cross their paths with “normal” people as the latter go to work.

After the INTERRUPTION of our dystopic normality by COVID-19, life happens “after”: after the quarantine, after illness, after the vaccine, after losing someone, after becoming aware that our normality was just a self-deceptive illusion that may never and, perhaps, should never come back.

“→ Post” has been our post-humous, post-ideological condition under post-capitalism. There was no way out of the “post” trap: post-communism, post-socialism, post-colonialism, → post-feminism, post-identitarianism... Discarding an increasingly unthinkable revolutionary takeover, post-fascism appeared to many as the only alternative. “Post” blocked the → imagination of anything of value or interest which may come after... before “after” abruptly came up, interrupting the *wonky* dynamics of our system which have been replaced with feelings of exposure, of uncertainty and fear. But this interruption may provide the conditions for us to stop and enter a non-impassive impasse in which re-politicising those feelings, as predicated by Fisher and Preciado, dissipating at the same time the false “promises of happiness”, as Ahmed noted, and the “cruel optimism” of late-capitalist societies described by Berlant.

There is no way back “after”. The pandemic lock-down has short-circuited our existing flow economy, suspending or decelerating the apparently endless, senseless and destructive rhythm of things. It has been traumatic in one way or another, but it may also be cathartic and revealing if we decide not to use our diminished energies to unsuccessfully rebuild the fragile house of cards of our previous normality and assume for a while the vertiginous experience of living without horizon.

The pandemic has drawn a landmark in the vital experience of all (which does not mean that we all have experienced it in the same way), a breach on common experience which is still waiting to find cultural and political forms to be expressed.

Living, literally, under a STATE OF EXCEPTION, wearing masks and being confined, may be just the revelation of an immanence situation, as Giorgio Agamben immediately pointed out; but this common awareness of living under COERCION, at the same time as being exposed and → vulnerable, also provokes an awakening, an ALERT.

The premonition of an imminent COLLAPSE (the name of a French film series which gained attention just before the pandemic) which nurtured our apocalyptic unconscious since the cold war has now been accomplished. We have slipped down from *katechon*, the time before the end, to *eschaton*, the end of the end. Awake from the narcissistic apocalyptic dream, we now share the experience of living after.

SUR-VIVE means literally “to outlive, to continue in existence after the DEATH of another”. This “other” may be a relative, a neighbour or a friend, but it might well have been us. In the pandemic we are all survivors in a general, common way. The distinction between “the quick and the → dead” has drastically been subverted. After the pandemic survivors are left, but what we outlive after death has become

conspicuously present, making patent the radical communality of those who are present with those who are gone. Once we have realised that the dead of others is part of ourselves, → temporality obtains a different meaning.

Stretching the analogies with nightlife, in the “after” you keep on DANCING till the sun is up or your body gets exhausted. The expectation of an extension of life pushes you forward, even if chemicals may be needed. The normal time-flow is interrupted, and space is the dance floor. Your BODY interacts with other bodies both promiscuously and unintentionally, as in a sabbath or danse macabre. There is no truth nor lie, no good nor bad. The lines of beauty and identity get blurred and confused while the rhythm of music rules.

The young → feminist critic Elizabeth Duval’s recent book *Después de lo trans* [After-Trans] reflected upon identitarian politics in an “after” situation, inviting us to break the self-referential and self-confined circles of new LGBTQ+ “normalities”. In daylight positions must be sharp and clear. What I am and what you are not: I am/you are not a man, I am/you are not a woman, I am/you are not white, I am/you are not legal, intending to extend its binary norm even to non-binarism, to any dissidence or margin. The application of this compulsory logic to anyone: being trans, → queer, non-binary, “racialised”, as observed lately, inevitably leads to a mousetrap.

The conventional terms of the political debate today are very much like conversations held at bars before they close by curfew. They intend to normalise social space while interactions and dealings are now taking place after. After gives time and space for a different kind of PLAY. A play of → disidentification (quoting Pablo Martínez in this *Glossary*), the play of losing yourself in a nameless, dancing multitude.

Madrid has been the European “after” club in the last few months due to the suicidal/murderous neoliberal policies of the local government which attracted youngsters from France and other northern countries escaping from their strict confinement. They are said to be seeking “freedom” as opposed to the limitations and bans of “communism” and state control. The hungry hyenas of capitalism immediately perceived their smell, their impatience to live “after”, and were ready to sell them → air tickets and serve them beers.

The Left should not let the alt-right colonise and totally connote the DESIRE and libidinal economy of the “after”. After is whatever we make of our experience in this time of exception, before an even more dystopic post-pandemic normality gets restored.

After/interruption is the realm of REVOLUTION.

Let’s challenge the imposed ISOLATION and de-collectivisation;

Let’s politicise EXTINCTION, as Bifo claims.

Let’s dance till dawn

Let’s FUCK pandemically, as Carolina Meloni proposes in her recent Dream and Revolution: “let’s defer, stop the world, dislocate it in an apocalyptic orgasm”, and “by fucking, meeting, touching each other, our bodies communicate with other isolated, proletarian, precarious, colonised, spectralised, forgotten bodies, in the necro-capitalist dystopia we are living in.”

“After” was surely in the experience of survivors; of the millions of migrants and refugees who have outlived the TRAUMATIC interruption of their biographies and

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post, p. 247
post-feminism, p. 28
imagination, p. 197
vulnerable, p. 208
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→
temporality, p. 256
feminist, p. 28
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air tickets, p. 15

the violent separation from their homelands; of all the excluded and oppressed: women, youths, trans and → queer, who have not been allowed to have a proper life “yet”, being compelled to project themselves towards an “unimaginable after”. We should all learn from them, since

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queer, p. 200

“After” may be the contemporary word for “future”.

Being ecological

Bogna Stefańska and Jakub Depczyński

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, May 2021

It's not possible to simply talk about the weather anymore. Since we are aware of the power and scale of planetary changes, even the simplest weather-themed small talk has lost its innocence.²⁸³ Unbearably hot and dry summer; never-ending, grey autumn rains; sudden winter blizzards or pleasant spring drizzles – in 2021 discussing these means entering a weird, uncertain and muddy → territory. We know that all weather phenomena are, to a certain degree, a manifestation of anthropogenic climate change. We can't simply ignore this fact and “just talk weather” without mentioning processes happening on a planetary scale. This moment of unease – a sting of weirdness, a sudden, unsettling feeling – is symptomatic of the fact that conditions of living on → Earth are undergoing a rapid change, potentially having catastrophic consequences.

We live at a critical moment, when we finally grasp that the world as we know it is coming to an end. The planet is mutating – for some this process remains imperceptible, for others it's happening quickly and violently. The authors of *World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency*, a text published in 2019 and signed by almost 14,000 scientists from 156 countries state: “We declare, clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency. [...] An immense increase of scale in endeavors to conserve our biosphere is needed to avoid untold suffering due to the climate crisis.”²⁸⁴

What the scientists keep telling us is simple: we need to keep the global temperature rise under 1.5°C, a maximum of 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels (which now seems very difficult, if not impossible). If we fail, we won't be able to save human civilisation as we know it, and face *untold suffering*. Large parts of the planet will become uninhabitable and all forms of life will be constantly threatened by all kinds of unpredictable, violent cataclysms.²⁸⁵ Even if we somehow deal with climate change, we will still need to cope with other environmental challenges that haunt the Anthropocene – the epoch in which *Homo sapiens* has become the most powerful geological agent.²⁸⁶ In the Anthropocene, humanity is pushing the life-sustaining systems of the planet to their limits, causing rapid climate change, soil impoverishment, ocean acidification, destabilisation of planetary biogeochemical flows and the sixth mass extinction. We are exceeding planetary boundaries and reaching tipping points beyond which there is no more recovery, no more preserv-

283 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2013).

284 Phoebe Barnard et al., “World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency”, *BioScience*, vol. 70, no. 1 (January 2020).

285 David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019).

286 Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene’”, *Global Change Newsletter*, vol. 41 (2000); Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen and John R. McNeill, “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?”, *Ambio*, vol. 36, no. 8, Springer (December 2007), 614–21.

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territory, p. 269
Earth, p. 21

ing life as we know it, no more coming back to the “safe and stable” conditions of the Holocene²⁸⁷.

On the other side of the academic spectrum scholars specialising in the humanities and social sciences remain suspicious of the Anthropocene thesis and keep reminding everyone that there is no universal, undifferentiated, collective *Anthropos* to be “blamed” for the planetary ecological mutation. Certainly they are right when they stress the importance of the long and complex histories of climate change, exploitation of the planet, mass extinction, environment destruction and ecological catastrophes, and their historical, economic, social, racial, imperial, gender, colonial and political dimensions.²⁸⁸ The many alternatives to the Anthropocene posited by those scholars aim at shifting our attention to other culprits: capitalism – Capitalocene;²⁸⁹ colonialism and plantation system – Plantatiocene;²⁹⁰ planetary violence and death – Necrocene;²⁹¹ a few privileged, white males – Oliganthropocene;²⁹² technology and the inequalities it generates – Technocene;²⁹³ etc. While recognising all of those propositions and their importance, we stubbornly stick to the good old “Anthropocene” as we embrace the generosity of the term and the one unique feature that all the alternatives lack – the ability to break through disciplinary boundaries and bring many diverse parties to the discussion table.

In spite of their different approaches, both scientists and humanities/social sciences scholars agree that life on the planet as we know it is in great danger. And yet, in spite of the grim, apocalyptic, constant flow of numbers, data and facts, we don't really seem to be mobilised. Climate change is probably the most thoroughly studied phenomenon in the history of science – its anthropogenic roots are as certain as taxes and death.²⁹⁴ We've built the “vast machine”²⁹⁵ – the most refined and complicated web of scientific tools in history just to be able to see and understand hyperobjects,²⁹⁶ such as global warming and mass extinction²⁹⁷. And yet in the face of the “intrusion of Gaia”²⁹⁸ we remain paralysed. Bruno Latour has pointed out that in the Anthropocene the roles have been reversed: nature/environment (formerly known as Nature with a capital N) no longer plays the role of a mute, inert

287 Will Steffen et al., “Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet”, *Science*, vol. 347, no. 6223 (15 January 2015).

288 Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us* (London: Verso, 2017); T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).

289 Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015).

290 Gregg Mitman, *Reflections on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing* (18 June 2019), published by Edge Effects Magazine, Madison, WI.

291 Justin Mcbrien, “Accumulating extinction: Planetary catastrophism in the Necrocene”, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland, 2016), 116–37.

292 Term proposed by Eryk Swynegdouw, mentioned in: Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne, *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (London: Routledge, 2015), 168–74.

293 Alf Hornborg, “The Political Ecology of the Technocene”, *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, eds. Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne (London: Routledge, 2015), 57–69.

294 Erik M. Conway and Naomi Oreskes, *The Collapse of Western Civilisation: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

295 Paul N. Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

296 Morton (2013).

297 Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014).

298 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015).

and predictable backdrop against which the human history unfolds – instead it has become an active and violent force that shapes our common, human and more-than-human, world. On the other hand, human societies, economies and cultures (formerly known as Culture with a capital C) ceased to be the sphere of activity, innovation and constant change – *Homo sapiens* remain inert, not willing to adapt to the conditions of the New Climatic Regime.²⁹⁹ We desperately stick to the “good old ways”, endlessly repeating worn-out claims about “the unquestionable laws of economics”, “non-negotiable lifestyles” and the “necessity of progress”. *Oh, so Holocene*. And in the 21st century being Holocene is a grave mistake. The Polish philosopher and sociologist Ewa Bińczyk calls the state we find ourselves in “the marasmus of the Anthropocene”.³⁰⁰ In medicine the term “marasmus” describes a condition of an organism that makes it impossible to think clearly and act, resulting in complete apathy.

But wait, who are “we”? Haven’t we just agreed that there is no undifferentiated, universal *Anthropos* that caused the planetary changes and now has to face them? Yes, that’s true, but still, different, collective subjects exist. Our understanding and perspective is grounded in the histories and experiences of Central and Eastern Europe – which is Europe, but not quite Europe. Still, when we say “we”, we mean a little bit more than just us and our closest neighbours – we mean many Westerners and Easterners, most of them from the Global North. We mean those who live in OECD countries – the 18% of world’s population that accounts for 74% of planetary GDP and thus is responsible for “most of the human imprint on the Earth System”.³⁰¹ So, we are the perpetrators, guilty of our unsustainable lifestyles and excessive consumption. But at the same time only some of us belong to the 10% of the richest people in the world, who are responsible for the 52% of cumulative carbon emissions.³⁰² And we’re not “the richest 1% [...] responsible for 15% of cumulative emissions, and 9% of the carbon budget – twice as much as the poorest half of the world’s population”.³⁰³ And we don’t own the world’s 100 biggest fossil fuel companies which are the source of 70% of carbon emissions.³⁰⁴ We’re not the super-rich CEO’s with their private jets, mansions and limos – we’re just trying to catch up to civilised, Western standards. So we’re not the ones to be blamed, are we?

Guilty or not, another question emerges: who or what is to be blamed for our inaction? Merchants of doubt that produce denialist → propaganda on demand for fossil fuel corporations owned by the world’s richest and most powerful people?³⁰⁵ Naive, technocratic techno-optimism championed by the likes of Bill Gates, who wants us to believe in solutions that don’t exist and are very unlikely to come in the next decades?³⁰⁶ The deceitful and terrifying idea of geoengineering, promoted by

299 Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

300 Ewa Bińczyk, *Epoka człowieka: Retoryka i marazm antropocenu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN filozofia, etyka, 2018), 326.

301 Will Steffen et al., “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration”, *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (16 January 2015), 81–98.

302 Oxfam, media briefing *Confronting Carbon Inequality: Putting climate justice at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery* (21 September 2020), <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621052/mb-confronting-carbon-inequality-210920-en.pdf> (accessed May 2020).

303 Ibid.

304 Paul Griffin, “Carbon Majors Report 2017”, *Carbon Disclosure Project* (London: CDP UK, 2017).

305 Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

306 Bill Gates, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need* (London: Penguin Books, 2021).

people who were the inspiration behind Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove*?³⁰⁷ The tell-tale signs and contradictions of capital M Modernity?³⁰⁸ Psychological and cognitive mechanisms?³⁰⁹ Colonial capitalism?³¹⁰ Insidious individualism?³¹¹ All of the above, and many more, perhaps.

The question we face, both as individual and collective subjects, is simple: how to live (and die³¹²) “in catastrophic times”?³¹³ Certainly, we can’t rely on the ideas born in the Holocene. Yes, we still need a critique of capitalism, studies on power, post- and decolonial thought, anti-imperialism and other critical tools, but they will not suffice.³¹⁴ It is crucially important “what thoughts think thoughts”,³¹⁵ and in the face of the planetary ecological mutation we desperately need new languages and → imaginations.

As a point of departure, we want to propose a term that may help us think about how to live in a world that changes irreversibly: *being ecological*. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? The media, researchers, scientists, politicians, activists, global corporations, our friends and families constantly remind us *to be ecological*. Don’t waste water. Spend time in nature. Buy an electric vehicle. Unplug your charger. Take a train. Meditate. Bike. Go vegan. Spend your holiday locally. Don’t send unnecessary emails. Use tap water – after all you’re responsible, and you are the change. Protest corporations. Sign a petition. Chain yourself to a harvester. Join a co-op. Support climate justice. Promote degrowth. Mock capitalism – after all the corporations and the whole system are to blame. Still, whatever we do, the emissions are rising, right?

When we think about *being ecological* we don’t think about numbers, facts (or factoids), info-dumps, hockey stick graphs or personal responsibility, not even about political/activist engagement. When we think about *being ecological* we are thinking with → situated knowledges, speculative → feminisms, bodily practices and interspecies relationships.³¹⁶ We are in *Apocalypse now!* mode³¹⁷ – instead of looking for easy solutions and smooth quick fixes (those will result in something far worse than apocalypse, for sure³¹⁸) we want to stay with the troubles brought by the planetary changes, and learn to live with them, here and now.³¹⁹ We see the planet as damaged, and we want to seek spaces of liveability in capitalist ruins.³²⁰

307 Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth About Climate* (London: Routledge, 2010).

308 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993).

309 Kari Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

310 J. W. Moore (2015).

311 Hamilton (2010).

312 Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilisation* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2015).

313 Stengers (2015).

314 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2009), 197–222; Hamilton et al. (2015); Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Duke University Press, Polity, 2017).

315 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

316 Haraway (2016).

317 Latour (2017).

318 Holly Jean Buck, *After Geoengineering: Climate Tragedy, Repair, and Restoration* (New York, Verso, 2019).

319 Haraway (2016).

320 Anna Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan and Heather Swanson ed., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2017).

When we think about *being ecological* we don't imagine the planet as a lovely *blue marble* – beautiful, fragile sphere just hanging out there, in empty space. We let go of this globalist imagery and paint → *Earth* differently: this planet is a mesh, an interspecies puddle, a system of loops of loops of loops.³²¹ We don't look from nowhere and we don't see everything: every experience of the planetary ecological mutation, environmental disaster and climate change is localised, rooted in identity, history, society, economy and story. Perhaps, the shock of Anthropocene gives us a perfect occasion to give a new answer to the question of “who-we-are as humans”.³²²

When we think about *being ecological* we struggle to bridge gaps and let go of Holocene divisions. We think with connecting, adding and composing – no more intellectual monocultures!³²³ We try to bring together the sciences and humanities (perhaps the *humusities*?³²⁴), academia and politics, activism and faith, arts and knowledge. We see them as the hybrids that they truly are. We think of ourselves as Earthbound who deal with Terrestrial matters: we study the many connections between human activity and more-than-human world and we see no difference between Earth System Science and fundamental ethics³²⁵. We're not afraid of the word “Gaia” and we don't fear the ways of → *ecofeminisms* – whether socialist or cultural.³²⁶

When we think about *being ecological* we try to bring as many parties to the table as possible. We are sensitive to the more-than-human world, we → *learn* from indigenous knowledges, histories and practices and we follow non-human beings – mushrooms are our favourite teachers.³²⁷ We always know what our eco-activist comrades are up to, and we support them with artistic tools and creative imagery. And yes, we always have scientists around us – not the hierarchs of the capital S science, but rather the sensible practitioners of small s sciences.

When we think about *being ecological* we try to grasp different scales simultaneously (think both deep time and election cycles at the same time) and be sensitive to hyperobjects, monsters and ghosts that haunt the landscape of the Earth in the Anthropocene.³²⁸ We embrace the dark, ugly and toxic side of reality³²⁹ and avoid Nature with a capital N, as it cannot help our cause.³³⁰ We know and we feel that we are ecological beings, enmeshed with billions of other creatures, all interconnected

321 Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

322 Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/overtun, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)cognition”, *Black Knowledge/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology*, eds. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 184–252.

323 Andrzej Marzec, “Jak długo jeszcze będziemy uprawiać myśl?”, *Rykosfera. Grzyby i bakterie w sieci kultury*, ed. Marta Smolińska (Poznan: UAP, 2019), 121–30.

324 Donna J. Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”, *e-flux*, no. 75 (September 2016), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/> (accessed May 2021).

325 Latour (2017).

326 Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

327 Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

328 Morton (2013).

329 Morton (2018).

330 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

and dependent on the environment and the planet. We do believe in → *solidarity* – with both humans and non-humans.³³¹

When we think about *being ecological* we think with pluriversality. Yes, the end of the world has already happened which means that we can finally start inhabiting our many different *worlds*.³³² *And it is true that every day some worlds die – we mourn them and learn from their histories to bring new ones to life.*³³³ *When we try to be ecological* we are struggling to find many, localised and → *situated* responses to many, localised and situated urgencies, not *one big solution* to *one, big emergency*.

When we think about *being ecological* we are not reducing things – neither upwards, nor downwards.³³⁴ Yes there are millions of local catastrophes, but the overarching planetary problem exists. Yes, extreme weather events happen in specific places and harm specific humans and non-humans, but the global climate change is also real. Yes, particular species vanish from particular areas, but we are all living through a mass extinction event. Yes, every individual human has a different impact on the planet, but collectively as a species we also have an impact – and it is enormous.

When we think about *being ecological* we don't think with modern, linear time – our multiple pasts and futures are much more complicated than that. We → *learn* from other time models – cyclic or quantum ideas truly are a relief. We pay attention to how different timelines unfold – some of them are coming to an end, while others are just beginning. Our goal is to convince the angel of history to finally turn around and face the many futures that are coming at us.³³⁵

When we think about *being ecological* we're thinking with world building and storytelling. To live in the Anthropocene, to *be ecological* we need passionate and fascinating narratives – it is not enough to debunk myths, we also need to create new ones.³³⁶ Speculative and science-fiction stories are our allies – especially those that are woven with a carrier bag instead of a spear.³³⁷

When we think about *being ecological* we believe that *being ecological* is not primarily a question of content but rather of style.³³⁸ It's important not only *what* you think, say and do, but also *how* you think what you think, say what you say and do what you do. It's clear to us that we'll never *be ecological* without fun, play and party, and we're sure that *being ecological* means *more* art not *less* art. “Shake hands with a hedgehog and disco!”³³⁹

331 Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (New York: Verso, 2017).

332 *The End of the World Has Already Happened*, UK, 16 January 2020, podcast, 28' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000cl67> (accessed May 2021).

333 Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

334 Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin, 2017).

335 Clive Hamilton, “Human Destiny in the Anthropocene”, Hamilton et al. (2015), 32–43.

336 Marcin Napiórkowski, *Dlaczego potrzebujemy mitów, żeby uratować świat?* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021).

337 Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 165–70.

338 Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (London: Pelican, 2018).

339 Alex Blasdel, “‘A reckoning for our species’: the philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene”, *The Guardian* (15 June 2017).

When we think of living in the Anthropocene as *being ecological* we realise that we are, and always have been ecological.³⁴⁰

Being silent Yuji Kawasima

Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, October 2021

Faced with terror, fear, oppression, lies and extermination, can one give oneself the right to – more than being speechless – remain in silence? After all, it “feels like we should be outside hunting for snakes, biting on knives, kicking on doors”, writes Mercedes Villalba in her *Fervent Manifesto*.³⁴¹ Silence gives consent, claims the old saying. Silence will not protect us, Audre Lorde constantly remind us.³⁴² How dare we choose to remain silent? How can we not want to make ourselves heard?

“What’s on your mind?”, Facebook asks me. “What’s happening?”, Twitter asks me. “Ask me a question”, Instagram asks me to ask.

“Hello! I know that you are here, listening to me”, says Mayor Tony Junior when he arrives in Bacurau, a rural settlement located in the state of Pernambuco, in the northeast area of Brazil. Seeking to attract more votes for his long-awaited re-election, this cynical and colonialist politician pays a visit to this impoverished village. Loud electronic music and huge LED screens installed on trucks serve as a background for his performance, in which he → reclaims, with an intentionally kind voice tone, the physical presence of the inhabitants in the central dirt street. But despite the spectacle of his arrival, this man receives back their silence and invisibility. Promptly Bacurau’s people decide to hide inside their houses and, by doing this, disarticulate any possibility of conversation. “I know that we already had our differences, but today, I am here with my open heart”, the mayor insincerely appeals to a sense of concord.

Bacurau is also the title of the internationally praised Brazilian movie directed in 2019 by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, in which this disquieting encounter takes place. Even fictionally detached from the current pandemics, but installed in a comparable dystopian situation, it seems that Bacurau’s people strategically decided to #stayhome, instead of exposing themselves to a literally deadly contact with power.³⁴³ Because, perhaps, in the face of power, as María Galindo states, you do not empower yourself, but rather, you rebel against it.³⁴⁴ And somehow, in this silent and apparently apathetic strategy, they found an unexpectedly radical form of opposition. Why not incarnate the very meaning of the word *bacurau* – the wild bird that only flies at night and camouflages itself among the dry

340 Morton (2018).

341 Mercedes Villalba, *Fervent Manifesto* (Cali: Calypso Press, 2019), 7.

342 Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Feasterville Trevoise, PA: Crossing Press, 2007), 40–4.

343 While I write these lines, Brazil – my home country – reaches the mark of more than a half-million deaths caused by the Sars COVID-19 virus. Although the movie was produced and released before the pandemic, I can’t help making some correlations between its fictionalised dystopian plot and the tragic current events in Brazil, promoted by the genocidal agenda of President Jair Bolsonaro, against which – I must assume – one may start doubting about the political effectiveness of being silent. However, the scene addressed in this text may propose that, even in the most critical circumstances, we come up with some way to engender new, innovative forms to subvert and dismantle the oppressing forces (though it may be temporary solutions that can be articulated with more reactive and cathartic postures). At least, this is what I prefer to believe for now.

344 María Galindo, “La jaula invisible” *Incitaciones transfeministas*, eds. Ileana Diéguez and Ana Longoni, Ediciones DocumentA/Escénicas (Argentina), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Spain) and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Cuajimalpa (Mexico) (2021), 27 (own translation).

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reclaims, p. 256

leaves on the ground – to put into practice survival techniques and subjectivisation processes based on more discrete and minimum procedures? Why not disengage certain interchanges, get around other’s wills for conflict, be voluntarily non-available, non-readable, non-responsive and choose to exist on a different frequency?

“Hey, let’s go, come here, *come out*. Please, let’s talk”, begs Tony Jr, once more. Unsuccessfully.

To come out

“To come out” means, in English speaking → queer jargon, a speech act of self-disclosure of one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and, in the most cases, operates as a form of confronting the oppression, shame and social stigma. “Out of the closet, into the streets!” was an early North American gay activist slogan, chronologically followed by others like “We’re here, we’re queer. Get used to it!”. I myself, while writing these lines, can see a poster hanging on my wall that defiantly celebrates: “Still here, still flamboyantly queer.”

Out, loud, and proud: the possibility of queer existence and resistance being intimately dependent on a queer discursiveness, presence, and visibility is also structural to the historic motto of Act Up’s demonstrations: “SILENCE=DEATH”. Becoming the central visual symbol of AIDS activism, this slogan, printed in white letters on a black background alongside the pink triangle that critically refers to the Nazi persecution of LGBTQIA+ individuals, sums up the urgency of those times.³⁴⁵ Times of resistance that, maybe more than ever before, we all agreed – with rage, mourning, joy, pride, and pedagogical impetus – that silence wouldn’t (and didn’t) save anyone.³⁴⁶

But some miles away from the streets of cities like New York, Paris, Berlin, and Barcelona, a less known HIV+ artist based in São Paulo, José Leonilson (1957–1993) may have been publicly addressing another possibility “to act up, fight back, fight AIDS”³⁴⁷: *Não ouço, não vejo, não falo*. [I can’t hear, I can’t see, I can’t speak.] This fragile yet disquieting drawing produced some weeks before his death from AIDS-related illnesses is one of his last contributions as the official illustrator of “Talk of the Town” column written by the journalist Bárbara Gancia in the most read Brazilian newspaper, *A Folha de S. Paulo*³⁴⁸. Apart from the possible connections with the popular Japanese legend of the “Three Wise Monkeys” and some Zen-Buddhist interpretations, and far from being a hopeless self-portrait of a sick young gay man condemned to a lonely and stigmatised death, in this drawing Leonilson displays a very personal approach to his fight as an HIV+ person, disturbing any protest guidebook devoted exclusively to more loquacious forms of activism.

345 *Silence=Death Project* was conceived in New York by Avram Finkelstein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Kreloff, Chris Lione, and Jorge Soccarás in 1987.

346 It is noteworthy that, similarly as the intellectual production conceived by many aids activists, Audre Lorde expresses in the first lines of the aforementioned essay that a critical medical diagnosis – a breast tumour – catalysed the thinking process that resulted in one of her most famous quotes, that I paraphrased in this part of the text: “Your silence will not protect you.” Lorde (2007) 40.

347 Referred to another famous slogan of Act Up’s protests.

348 José Leonilson collaborated with the weekly *Gancia* from 2 March to 14 May 1993. *Não ouço, não vejo, não falo* was printed in “E se Suzy Rêgo casasse com Gustavo Rosa?”, *Gancia*, Folha de S. Paulo, Caderno acontece são Paulo (14 May 1993), 2.

→
queer, p. 200

By no longer holding his longed “citizenship of the kingdom of the well” – quoting Susan Sontag in her essay *Illness and its metaphors*³⁴⁹ – he had to forcibly withdraw from the frenetic game of exchanges and fluxes promised by the neoliberal illusion, for example, the idea of a planetary space without borders, totally open and fluid. Following Lina Meruane’s historical analysis in *Viral Voyages: Tracing AIDS in Latin America*, this artist might be considered as part of what she describes as a dispersed global community, constituted by young homosexual cis-men who, for a quiet brief moment during the 20th century, embodied an ideal avatar of the capitalist culture: smart, free and individualist bodies, full of desires, with exquisite tastes and daring opinions. With the HIV/AIDS epidemic, what was once seen as their enviable freedom was reframed as a suspicious loneliness. Those wandering bodies, so difficult to halt, came to be feared for their high danger. Those expansive men turned to be the perfect metaphor for that frightening virus that they carried in their own bodies.³⁵⁰

In his turn, Leonilson – exiled in himself, who “does not see, does not hear and does not speak” – seems to find his condition of existence in a profound impenetrability, in all possible meanings of the term something that, in this world obsessed with movement and interaction, is no less equivalent to be a subject in the verge of disappearing, being completely muted, “cancelled”. However, from his apparent condition of a lack of power, he ends up confronting us with an unexpected perspective with which he observes and comments on the world. A world that keeps granting itself the right to immobilise him in pathological categories. In this way, when he suggests graphically he hears nothing, speaks nothing, and sees nothing, he is actually building up his most demolishing poetics: wouldn’t Leonilson be intentionally occupying the media arena with his caustic “silence” to paradoxically, effectively convey discourses potentially ignored by public opinion? Moreover, couldn’t this drawing be a depiction of a specific survival knowledge conceived by many minoritarian subjectivities, that find in the act of blocking the channels from which the systemic violence invades our bodies, our decisions, our → imaginations, and our right to intimacy, a way to enhance other senses to live not *despite*, not *against*, but *beyond*?

Thus Leonilson’s unexpected way to gain, save and then unleash power by strategically “disempowering” and “silencing” himself may not fit perfectly into the notion of “activism” conceived by early AIDS activists. However, this same “silence” may lead us back to another Act Up’s tactical lexicon: the “die-ins” – protest happenings where large groups of people lay down in a public space, feigning → death. “The strongest thing we can do is something in silence” declared the activist Robert Hilferty, when recalling the preparation for the highly publicised die-in at New York’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral in December 1989.³⁵¹ As Roi Wagner notes, “→ performing an object position to apply force is a marginal stance that may be a last resort for those who have little to lose.”³⁵² To be inert, to remain silent, to choose not to react

349 Susan Sontag, *La enfermedad y sus metáforas/ El sida y sus metáforas* (Madrid: Taurus, 1996), 11.

350 Lina Meruane, *Viral Voyages: Tracing AIDS in Latin America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

351 Taken from a radio interview, the transcription and audio recording, accessed in “ACT UP: A History Of AIDS/HIV Activism”, *It’s Been A Minute With Sam Sanders*, NPR (18 June 2021), <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1007361916?t=1624987486578> (accessed September 2021).

352 Although Roi Wagner’s case studies do not include Act Up’s silent forms of protest, his article highlights the inherent strength of silence, its potential as a resistance tool and its relationship to the debate of representation: “Silence as Resistance before the Subject, or Could the Subaltern Remain Silent?”, *Theory Culture Society*, vol. 29, no. 6 (5 November 2012).

to other’s actions, is anything but a refusal to participate in the public debate, nor an inability to join it, but, potentially, a way to subvert its terms.

Being in silence does not mean to have been silenced. And, sometimes, even laying down in silence does not mean a performative gesture with political outcomes, but a condition of participation for other political subjects. This is the case of Johanna Hedva, author of the *Sick Woman Theory*, for whom most modes of “political protest are internalised, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible”. During a Black Lives Matter protest – which she would have attended, had she been able to – she remembered listening to the sounds of the marches as they approached her window. Stuck in the bed, in silence, she rose up her sick woman’s fist in → solidarity, “thinking of all the other invisible bodies, → with their fists up, tucked away and out of sight”.³⁵³

“Please, let’s talk”, insists Mayor Tony Jr.
But, with whom we are supposed to talk?

Fazer a egípcia

Fazer a egípcia means literally “to do the female Egyptian” in Pajubá. Pajubá is a sort of coded, encrypted, surviving language constituted by words and expressions coming from different African languages within the Brazilian Portuguese, spoken by both practitioners of different Afro-Brazilian religions – to avoid the religious repression – and by the Brazilian → queer communities since the military dictatorship period. This is an increasingly popular language that in itself, as Victor Heringer observes, carries some evidence of the social inclusion of its speakers in the Brazilian society, but, as a dissident language that forcibly resists the power, begins to die when approaching it. In this case, being broadly spoken gives room to be gradually silenced.³⁵⁴

It is true that, at a first glance, “to do the female Egyptian” may sound like an orientalist bad joke – being queer doesn’t prevent you to be racially biased³⁵⁵. But *fazer a egípcia*, as an expression used by any subjectivity historically attacked in Brazil, turns to be a recognition of silence as an admirable survival tool, since this embodies a complex set of sophisticated nano-actions. Because, ultimately, *fazer a egípcia* means to not give importance to a threat, to take distance from someone or some undesirable clash, acting with indifference and with a certain attitude of distance, impassiveness, and dignity, and, in a sort of a performative and silent gesture – physically incorporating the luxurious ancient Egyptian iconography – glamorously, look the other way.

353 Johanna Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory”, *Mask Magazine* (January 2016). I would like to thank the researcher and editor Julia Ayerbe for suggesting this essay and for her generosity in talking about the issue of silence as a form of political participation from an intersectional perspective that includes Disability Studies.

354 Victor Heringer, “Os sinos que doeram e os homens que não se doeram”, *Revista Continente* (1 August 2017), <https://revistacontinente.com.br/edicoes/200/os-sinos-que-dobram-e-os-homens-que-nao-se-dobram> (accessed October 2021).

355 We might see this appropriation of the North-African culture by racially and sexually marginalised groups in Brazil both as a source of connection with a potential point of origin for diasporic personal histories and, especially for this text, as a survival technique driven by → disidentificatory procedures, capable of transforming these artefacts for these groups cultural purposes, as analysed by José Estéban Muñoz in *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

→
imaginings, p. 197
death, p. 227
performing, p. 122

→
solidarity, p. 65
with their fists up, p. 129
queer, p. 200
disidentificatory, p. 188

“Learn to be quiet just as you learn to talk, because if talking guides you, being quiet protects you”, teaches the philosophy of Abu adh-Dhiyal, quoted by Hamsa Ahsan in *Shy Radicals*.³⁵⁶ In this sense, this refusal to respond to the oppressor is more than a mere act of individual resistance. As the Pajubá itself, being silent by “doing the female Egyptian” works as a community-making tool, sustained by a healing trust and a self-preservationist shared secret. As Mercedes Villalba envisions, using the metaphors of the slow and almost undecipherable fermentation process, we should craft and inhabit pockets of air, hidden spaces, bubbles. But ones that rise up in fervour – even if they are temporary – where to go for nourishment or rest and, then, be ready to fight, and conspire, for our right to the future. Just like the bird bacurau over the night, the people of Bacurau inside their homes, Leonilson and Johanna Hedva in their beds, and the self-generated idiomatic realms we inhabit to both talk about the silence and live freely in it, “we will crawl and stay still for as long as we wish, expanding our presence”, Villalba envisages.³⁵⁷

Pockets of air: in a present so suffocating, all of this may sound naive, cowardly, and politically regressive. But now, as witnesses of another pandemic – in which, like the HIV/Aids crisis, in no case proved to be exclusively a sanitary one – we are keenly aware not only of the medical implications but, above all, the healing power and political scope of “us breathing together” – the very etymological origin of the verb “to conspire”.³⁵⁸ Still with that vociferous “I CAN’T BREATHE” resonating in our ears, it is evident that our breath – that is to say, our capacity to be in silence and just exist within our multilayered, diverse, and unfixed splendour – is the ultimate → territory from which the oppressive forces aim to evict us.

“Please, let’s talk”, repeats Tony Junior.
But, talk about what?

In a recently published short story, Jota Mombaça poses the question: “Why bother formulating a mode of saying or showing, if we could express and share things that words and images couldn’t even begin to articulate?”³⁵⁹

How can I express myself without letting my acts and opinions be co-opted by the logic of hyper-productivity, self-exploitation, mandatory visibility, and the “universal” intelligibility?

Ocean Vuong brilliantly notes in *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous* that “sometimes you are erased before you are given the choice of stating who you are. To be or not to be. That is the question. A question, yes, but not a → choice.”³⁶⁰ This is an epistolary novel whose narrator, a racialised and → queer English-speaking young man, writes letters to his illiterate Vietnamese immigrant → mother, in a poetic attempt to fill the generational and diasporic silence between them, as when he states on the first page: “I am writing to reach you – even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are.” Escaping binary logic, this piece stresses that the so-

356 Hamja Ahsan, *Shy Radical: The Antisystemic Politics of the Militant Introvert* (London: Book Works, 2020), 52.

357 Villalba (2019), 25.

358 I suggest the reading of a previous contribution to the glossary written by Jesús Carrillo on conspiracy as a tool for institutional experimentations. Jesús Carrillo, “Conspiratorial Institutions?” *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, ed. Ida Hiršfenfelder (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2018), 280.

359 Jota Mombaça, “Can You Sound Like Two Thousand?”, *The Contemporary Journal*, no. 3 (10 May 2020), <https://thecontemporaryjournal.org/strands/sonic-continuum/can-you-sound-like-two-thousands> (accessed September 2021).

360 Ocean Vuong. *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous* (London: Jonathan Cape / Penguin Random House UK, 2019), 3 and 63.

called “subalternity” is never an easily homogenised category and that, within the opacity, there are invisible and countless ways of surviving systemic violence and the curse of not being heard.

The thing is: stating who you are is often an unpleasant and traumatic experience. Reni Eddo-Lodge, the author of a book that carries the self-explanatory title *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, opted for disengagement and silence – at least when she sees herself surrounded by a vast majority that denies the existence of structural racism and its symptoms – since, in her words, “this is a game to some people and, if it is, I don’t want to play”.³⁶¹ She argues in a widely shared blogpost that eventually gave her the opportunity to publish a best-selling book, that “their intent is often not to listen or learn, but to exert their power, to prove me wrong, to emotionally drain me, and to rebalance the status quo. I’m not talking to white people about race unless I absolutely have to.”³⁶² A position aligned with what Julia Suárez-Krabbe suggests in her article “Can Europeans be Rational?”³⁶³: to deny interlocution when it is confined within an oppressive epistemology that inevitably transforms any attempt of answering into a violent experience of having to survive, bodily, discursively, and epistemologically, in the constrained realm of the oppressor’s verbalism. In short, as pointed by Raquel Lima, it is about time to understand that the subaltern agency is not a voice that only seeks a dialogue with the dominant narrative.³⁶⁴

Indeed, we are really tired of talking. “I’m not terribly angry, though I am that too: I’m up to the hell of the ‘trans’”, provokes Elizabeth Duval in the first page of *Después de lo trans*, in which she advocates, as a trans writer, her right to not talk about what others supposedly expect to hear from her: “I write this book so that, finally, you will never ask me again, reader, neither you nor anyone like you, about trans, about the conception of trans, about a thousand debates that do not interest me. I write it so that I can later write freely from what I do want to write about. Hopefully, I can: then I can say that the same text that defines my condemnation is the one that gives me freedom. And I will return, finally, to write for, to, and looking for pleasure.”³⁶⁵

In fact, Glissant has already claimed the right to opacity for everyone and freed us from the oppressive duty to be totally understandable, perfectly knowable.³⁶⁶ He opened possibilities for us to obliterate the dominant logic that insists on forcing us to clearly answer *its* questions, satisfy *its* data demands, and, consequently,

361 Nosheen Iqbal, “Reni Eddo-Lodge: ‘The debate on racism is a game to some and I don’t want to play’”, *The Guardian* (21 June 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/21/reni-eddo-lodge-uk-book-charts-debate-racism-game-some-dont-want-to-play> (accessed September 2021).

362 Reni Eddo-Lodge, “Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race”, *Reni Eddo-Lodge* (official website), <https://renieddolodge.co.uk/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race/>.

363 Suárez-Krabbe structures her critique on the Eurocentric knowledge by voluntarily responding with her title to the debate aroused by Hamid Dabashi in “Can non-Europeans think?” and in Walter Mignolo’s attempt to answer Dabashi’s question. She states that “for southern scholars and activists it makes no sense at all to engage in this kind of discussions that are, in fact, racist from the outset”. Julia Suárez-Krabbe, “Can Europeans Be Rational?”, *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (18 March 2013), <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/can-europeans-be-rational/> (accessed September 2021).

364 Raquel Lima, “O esvaziamento da noção de subalternidade, a sobrevalorização da fala e os silêncios como resistência”, *Buala* (13 January 2020), <https://www.buala.org/pt/a-ler/o-esvaziamento-da-nocao-de-subalternidade-a-sobrevalorizacao-da-fala-e-os-silencios-como-resis> (accessed September 2021).

365 Elizabeth Duval, *Después de lo trans: Sexo y género entre la izquierda y lo identitario* (Valencia: La Casa Books, 2021), 3 and 82. Own translation.

366 Édouard Glissant, “On Opacity”, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

→
territory, p. 269
choice, p. 174
queer, p. 200
mother, p. 194

optimising *its* mechanism and extending *its* validity and reach. A resembling logic seems to be reinforced in 2019 by the rapper Emicida, when he rhymes alongside the → queer pop stars Pablllo Vittar and Majur:

Permita que eu fale, não as minhas cicatrises
Achar que essas mazelas me definem é o pior dos crimes
É dar o troféu pro nosso algoz e fazer nóiz sumir
[Let me speak, but not my scars
When you think that these misfortunes define me is the worst of crimes]
*It is giving the trophy to our executioner and make us disappear*³⁶⁷

It is true that, “we need to respond to the systems that the political forces subject us to”, says Cinthia Guedes, “but also respond to ourselves, in a low voice and with great → care: after all, how will we go on?”³⁶⁸ Certainly, I am not the one to judge the several and necessary forms of public, passionate and eloquent demonstrations. Nor do I intend to encourage an individualist, nihilist and uncommitted attitude. Rather, without any silly intention to establish a clear-cut and programmatic agenda – what a dull contradiction it would be to start establishing universal norms on how to generate political participation and materialising → solidarity! – I prefer to imagine another path where we can continue “measuring the silences”, as proposed by Spivak,³⁶⁹ to intelligently overcome binary constraints between activity/passivity, individual/collective, useful/useless, and life/death. After all, by choosing to be silent, we end up raising an exciting and uneasy moral problem. In this sense, as Nicolás Cuello puts it, there is “nothing better than shaking up the zombie agreement of progressivism.”³⁷⁰ Rather than being haunted by white zombies, there is nothing better than to do the female Egyptian and, amidst empires and plagues, glamorously look the other way, speaking with the eyes like a poet who, as Paulo Leminski, whispers: “I say more and more the silences of the future.”³⁷¹

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queer, p. 200
care, p. 92, 122
solidarity, p. 65

Choice

Ida Hiršfenfelder

Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, June 2021

I think of choice on the basis of three instances. One is the multiplication of choices by the → emancipatory movements closely connected to the ideal of freedom from oppression. This is connected to the struggle for the right to have a choice. It is rooted in the desire that drives us to the streets, makes us → raise our fists – as Pablo Martínez puts it – come together in creating the sound pressure to have one’s position heard and listened to. The next is choice as a smokescreen in late capitalism, that uses the imperative of making autonomous choices to conceal the inability of having any impact on mitigating systemic violence. Above all, this choice is not a choice at all, since it only offers things that we don’t need and would never wish to have without consumer-oriented conditioning. The last is the choice that we make with every click on a new webpage, the choice to feed an artificial intelligence (AI) or not, to confirm or reject the insidiously cute “cookie policy” that

367 Emicida (feat. Pablllo Vittar and Majur), “AmarElo”, *AmarElo* (São Paulo: Laboratorio Fantasma, 2019), 5’21”. Own translation.

368 Cinthia Guedes, “To Walk Amidst Collapse”, *Arts Everywhere* (27 August 2018), <https://www.artseverywhere.ca/to-walk-amidst-collapse/#portuguese> (accessed October 2021).

369 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

370 I would like to thank Nicolás Cuello for his feedback on my presentation at the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* seminar. Much of what he generously wrote to me in a rich email message was crucial for the final version of this text.

371 Paulo Leminski, *Catatau: um romance-idéia* (São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2012, 2nd edition), 115. Own translation.

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emancipatory, p. 35
raise our fists, p. 129

promises to ensure our ePrivacy. This choice is perhaps more complicated since the argument *pro et contra* does not fall neatly into our political positions. It is easy for me to say that I am pro-choice concerning social reproduction and that I am against consumer society, but much harder for me to decide if I wish to delegate some of my labour to an AI. A browser makes decisions for me when delegating information on the premises of previous search queries. This automatism might save me from a lot of unnecessary screen time and thus potentially make way for more free time if only I could pull myself from the screen.

Why does it make sense to speak about choice now? I believe that these three instances inform the radicalisation of beliefs today and induce a particular mass hysteria that is quite different from historical cases (such as Nazism or the Cultural Revolution). The current mass hysteria is fragmented but no less detrimental as it produces *echo chambers* that have just as strong a delusional impact on a person’s sense of reality as the historic examples. It is to be expected that the present delusions will be more difficult to unravel as we cannot expect redemption in the aftermath of their collapse (such as the denazification process of the 1940s or socialism with Chinese characteristics in the 1980s) unless the whole information system is radically restructured.

Choosing pro-choice

From the perspective of politics before social media, the policies that enable conditions supporting multiple choices are the achievements of emancipatory movements that gave voices to the non-representative and fluid subjectivities such as the non-normative body, the female body, the body of colour, the body with a disability, the ungendered body, the old body, or the sick body. The → direct actions of the bodies on the streets, exhibiting their → vulnerability but also collective strength, plays out as a multiplication of choices. That is, you are not given only a limited number of choices but the liberty to think and conceive of a choice that did not exist before, as Maja Smrekar has shown with her hybrid family and → mOther(ness). It is not the choice to be a mother or not, but to think of it in a completely different way. The musician Khyam Allami in conversation with Nora Akawi says that it is not the choices you make in the creative → process, but the choice to create a new tool with which you can make choices that did not exist before.³⁷² These emancipatory projects however → conflictual, violent, and painful they are (for example the pro-choice fight in Poland or the LGBTQA+ struggle in Uganda), belong to the logical political processes that are based on historical precedence and evolve, despite the twists and setbacks, in a rather linear way toward legislative changes that multiply the existing limited choices. Even when a freedom that has already been won is lost – expressed → disappointingly in the viral photo of a woman protesting for the right to abortion with a sign saying “I can’t believe I still have to protest this fucking shit!” – the process nevertheless remains relatively transparent.

Against limitless choices

In her book *The Tyranny of Choice*, the philosopher Renata Salecl says that we are experiencing acute and paralysing anxiety caused by limitless choices. She pointed out that the idea of choosing whom we want to be and the imperative to “become yourself” have begun to work against us, making us more anxious rather

372 Radio Alhara and Bridge Radio guesting on L’Internationale Online. A conversation between Musician Khyam Allami and architect Nora Akawi, *Tuning, Bias and the Wild Beyond*, Radio Al Hara, L’Internationale Online, Ljubljana: Radio Študent (10 May 2021), 63’40’.

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direct action, p. 230
vulnerability, p. 208
mOther(ness), p. 194
process, p. 251
conflictual, p. 92
disappointingly, p. 179

Figure 40: Marika and Marko Pogačnik, *Geo-cultural Manifesto*, 2021, installation view, cardboard, black ink, stones. *The Emergency Exit*, 3 December 2021 – 11 September 2022, exhibition, curated by Ana Mizerit, Bojana Piškur, Zdenka Badovinac and Igor Španjol, Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM). Photo: Dejan Habicht/Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

than giving us more freedom. She also points out that the process of choosing is not rational but more often than not an emotional process.³⁷³ For example, human beings don't always act in their interests even when they know what these are. An irrational decision comes from a feeling of empathy and is expressed in an act of charity, altruism, and compassion that is not based on self-interest. However, this emotional aspect of choosing becomes twisted when infused by consumerism. Choice brings a sense of overwhelming responsibility into play, and this induces fear of failure, a feeling of guilt, and anxiety that regret will follow if we have made the wrong choice. This process also turns subjects inward to their private life, and prevents them from acting as a community, let alone a politically active one.

We also cannot neglect that the idea of being allowed to see one's own life as a series of options and possible transformations is placed in a consumer capitalist backdrop which is essentially classist. For example, the choice of a poor woman to have children is regarded as financially irresponsible. Her choices are never free but conditioned by a socio-political situation. And the way artists who address the notion of choice react is to put into question the choice as an imperative. An early example from Moderna galerija's collection would be the multiples of OHO Group that proposed *reisem*, a condition in which they view a different relation between the object and subject in the 1960s at a time when consumer society had just gained momentum. This subject is aware of oneself and objective reality, but takes a completely aesthetic and non-functional relation to the objects. They cease to be tools and begin to have agency. For them, the object has the right to its own autonomy and it has its own right to perform. Later in their work, OHO, particularly Marika and Marko Pogačnik, (Figures 40 and 41) went even further in proposing a holistic cohabitation not only with objects but with all the things in the world and went on the path of consciously not making choices but letting the natural processes drive the direction that an artistic work takes, which I see as an extremely important method of artistic production at the time of climate change that calls for the ethics of minimal intervention. Their work evolved into a mystical annunciation, speaking about the Earth as the home for heavenly creatures, the angels and irrational forces that compose the ecology. Thinking deeply about the agency of inanimate objects sets the scene for a culture that will – sometime soon – find extractivism unacceptable. As humans we pride ourselves on the ability to create, change and mould things, but the consequence is that we also terraform and extract, plunder and kill with these creative hands. The very young generation today chooses to decommoify. Not in the deep political sense of social reproduction proposed by N'toko (decommoification)³⁷⁴ but their choices are not just superficial. As our mothers chose to be feminists (and fought for it) their grandchildren now feel that many of Generation Z no longer exist in the patriarchal mindset and are highly sensitive to ecology, fragility, and subjectivisation processes. However, they are involved in the production of new conditions of choosing to a much lesser degree. This static set of abundant choices has produced – on the flip side – a conservative backlash.

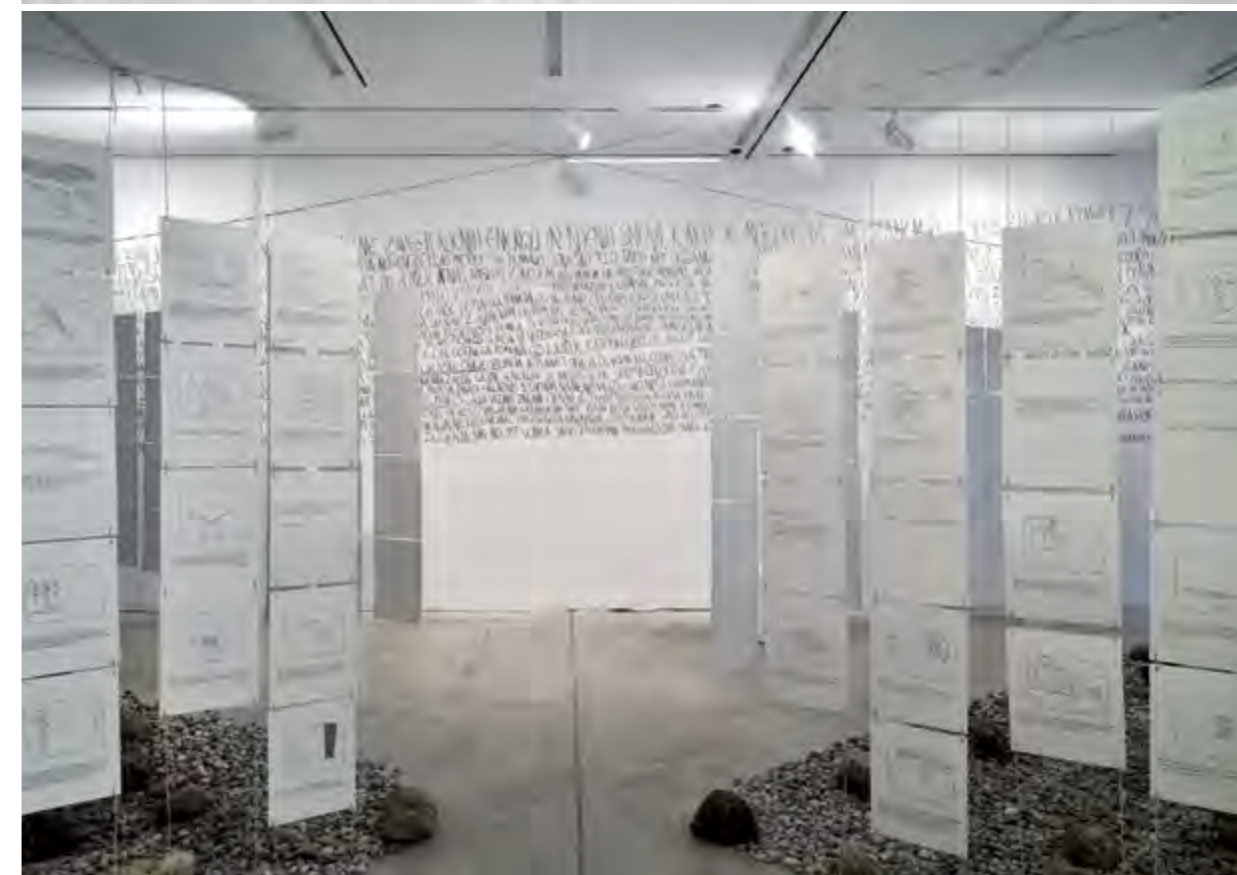
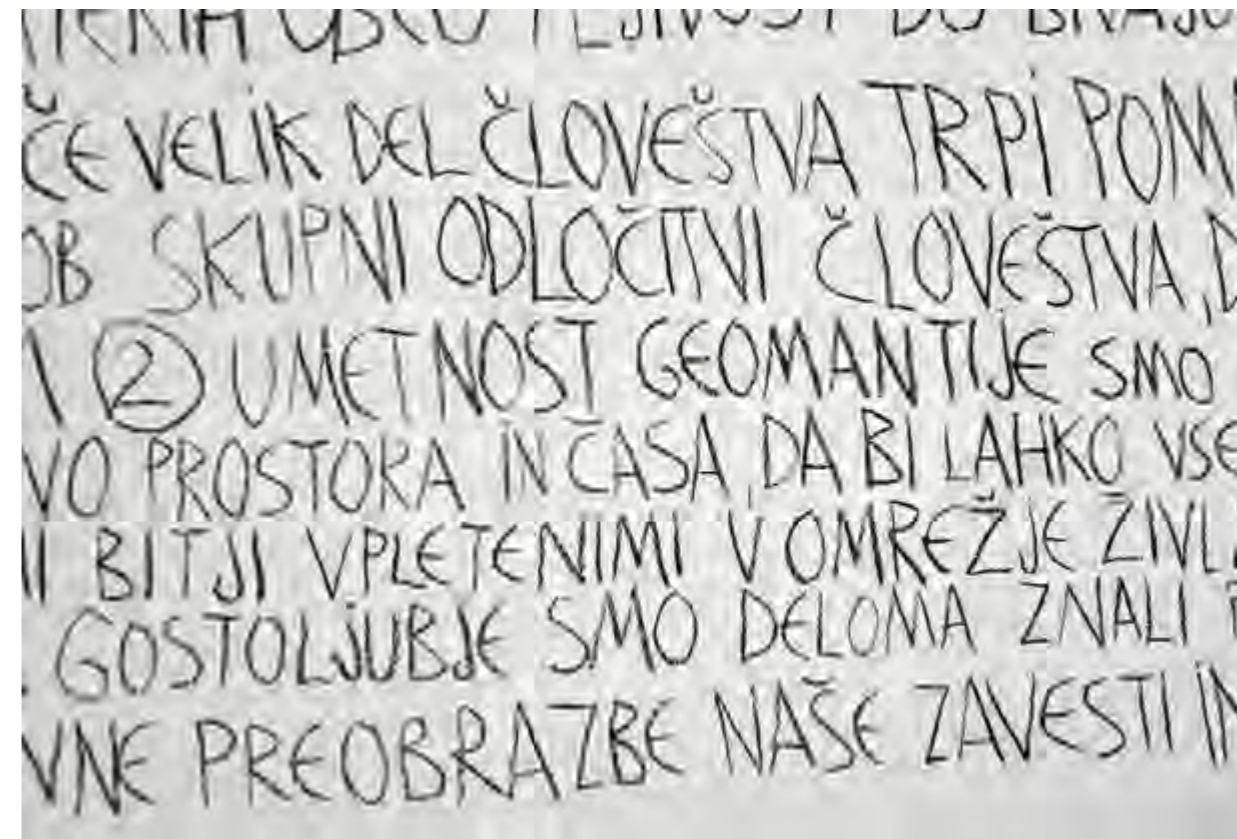
Choices and normies

The hyper-libidinal and unconscious reign of AI produced by corporate and political interests bombards us and impairs "free" decision-making. It has twisted the achievements of the emancipatory movement in the most shocking way to the

373 Renata Salecl, *Izbira* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2011).

374 Miha N'toko Blažič, "Decommodification", page 95.

Figure 41: Marika and Marko Pogačnik, *Geo-cultural Manifesto*, 2021, installation view, cardboard, black ink, stones. *The Emergency Exit*, 3 December 2021 – 11 September 2022, exhibition, curated by Ana Mizerit, Bojana Piškur, Zdenka Badovinac and Igor Španjol, Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM). Photo: Ida Hiršfelder.



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- empathy, p. 192
- Earth, p. 21
- ecology, p. 162
- extractivism, p. 53
- decommoification, p. 95
- feminists, p. 28
- ecology, p. 162

so-called “normies”,³⁷⁵ as Angela Nagle calls the traditional, rational, moderate political subjects from the left political spectrum. She points out examples of identity fluidity that exercise the right to → vulnerability proposed by the LGBTQA+ movement. Only that, on microblogging sites this fragility has sometimes shifted from empathetic to pathetic. As she says: “For years, the microblogging site filled up with stories of young people explaining and discussing the entirely socially constructed nature of gender and potentially limitless choice of genders that an individual can identify as or move between.”³⁷⁶ Gender creation has taken a fantastical turn, and became a subculture on sites like Tumblr. Nagle names a few such as *cadensgender* – a gender that is easily influenced by music; *daimogender* – a gender closely related to demons and the supernatural; *genderale* – a gender that is mainly associated with plants, herbs and liquids.³⁷⁷ And while we are making kin with other-than-human in an attempt to promote an open and non-restrictive cohabitation, the trouble with such gender fluidities is that they are anything but fluid, they are instead essentialist with the same zealous rigour that one would find in alt-right discussions online. The awareness of intersecting marginalisations and oppressions promoted the discussions about safe spaces, the MeToo movement, and the use of suitable gender pronouns, but at the same time the recognition of → diversity overshadowed economic inequalities. Also, in reverse, the alt-right has in the past ten years adopted the strategies of the emancipatory movements (for example a right-wing politician referencing their freedom of speech when using racist remarks). I still find it baffling how acute the irrationality of some of the online subcultures can be, but what is downright frightening is that the subcultures are no longer hidden in some obscure corner of the “internets”³⁷⁸ but have emerged into the mainstream political currents, most obviously with the riot in the US capital on January 6th this year.

The problem is the virus. Not the one that dictated our lives in the past year, but the one that has been dictating most of our decisions on information about the world since the coding of the semantic web 2.0. It is the viral process that is inscribed in social media. The virality hailed by the Arab Spring resulted in war and unrest. Any query we make online is informed by our past searches, and this results in an information *echo chamber* that is responsible for the radicalisation of beliefs all along the political spectrum. It results in tribalism with more or less mystical rites, in that safe feeling of belonging, in the warm accepting embrace of coherence, in the mutual concurrence. But when this soft tribal bubble faces another tribe, then both have to defend themselves with all belligerent force. We would all like to have the feeling of control over the choices we are making and a sense of autonomy. Unfortunately, the way the code is written is informed by the use of manipulative consumer marketing strategies that spilled from the economic sphere to the sphere of ideology. Vladan Joler, in a text on digital data mining that he calls “→ new extractivism”, reveals that the bodies of each and every one of us are being colonised. We, as “dividuals”, are the final products being sold to advertisers. In this world, the economy is no longer limited to the trade in goods and services, rather it has expanded to include the economy of the mind, such as the attention economy, the emotion economy, or the economy of beliefs. Joler’s allegorical map is written in the manner of speculative fiction, yet it is anything but a fantasy. It is a realistic depiction of the echo chambers that produce radicalisation of the mind.

375 Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester, Washington: Zero Books, 2017) Kindle.

376 Ibid.

377 Ibid.

378 Internets in the plural. A tribute to memes of Bushisms.

What is to be done is to decolonise AI not only in the sense of reprogramming the algorithmic biases based on racial discrimination and the global digital-divide, but also to propose another non-viral form of information rhizomatic structures that do not single out preferences according to habits. The way to do this now is not what the traditional media is trying to do to reference truth and correct controlled information, but on the contrary to introduce in the code a lot more randomness and unpredictability that would offer a substantially more open and versatile information stream, such as the Mastodon social network of independent, federated servers, or the return to the old-new chatrooms on Discord.

Disappointment Nicolás Cuello

Buenos Aires, July 2021

Against democratic optimism

Disappointment, as a functional experience, can be thought of as the opposite of what Laurent Berlant³⁷⁹ described under the category of *cruel optimism*. The latter refers to a particular type of affective economy in the technologies of contemporary governability, that is, a form of disciplined affectation in neoliberal societies through which people choose to bond with objects of desire through historically predetermined hopeful promises and joyful images, that hold them bound to the fantasy of morally superior futures, even against their own well-being, for the sole purpose of giving continuity to their existences under the therapeutic effect that comes from following the right path, the path of normative guidelines that prescribe what can make these lives better, what can make them good lives. Through this category, Berlant names the way in which these forms of optimistic attachment wear down fantasies of mobility and progress, creating problematic bonds with such objects of desire, thus demonstrating how the *promise of happiness* described in turn by Sara Ahmed, that semiotic architecture that works as an invisible guide orienting the experience of the existent, can be revealed as impossible, mere fantasy, or directly dangerous, risking the lives of those who dream.³⁸⁰

As a counterpart, disappointment is a feeling that can potentially symbolise the loss of the hopeful attachment that neoliberal democracies institute as a condition of possibility to access a happy future, revealing through sensations of breakdown, fraud or disenchantment, the systemic, productive and profitable features of the self-destructive emotional contract that imposes on us the need to maintain at any cost a bond with that object of desire – in this case, a good life, a democratic life – in order to avoid its loss, since the mere possibility of its absence or any attempt to deviate from the righteousness of its path threatens, in one way or another, to end our own life and society as a whole.

In this sense, to become disappointed – that is, to voluntarily or accidentally practice a negative reaction to the falsehood, insufficiency or directly the failure of that neoliberal promise that instrumentalises our attachment – can turn into an *oppositional consciousness*³⁸¹ capable of accelerating through uncomfortable emotions a collective critique of the cruelty inherent in contemporary regimes of global governability. These regimes operate under the internalisation of a radical individualism and a practical realism determined by the rhythms of supply and demand, that

379 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

380 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

381 Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

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vulnerability, p. 208
diversity, p. 39
new extractivism, p. 53

are multiplied even more by the work of artefacts that extend the soporific power of *magical voluntarism*, that dominant belief that David Smail recognises as the unofficial religion of contemporary capitalist society.

From the year 1983, an important part of the tensions that characterised the recovery of the democratic order in Argentina can be found prefigured in a series of conflicting presences within a time that, → after seven long years marked by the organised terror of the civil-military dictatorship, embraced the public space to begin the *feast of democracy*, along with the newly elected president Raúl Alfonsín. Also known as the *Democratic Spring*, this process did not condense a homogeneous yearning for institutional reconstruction, but a polyphonic series of political strategies to make it concrete. In other words, it not only instituted a legal way out

of authoritarianism, but simultaneously invoked the strength of all the struggles for political freedoms, representing in itself the possibility of the realisation of different imaginaries of social transformation.

Therefore, when understood as a *polemic signifier*³⁸² the hopeful promise of Argentine democracy resided precisely in its ability to become a form of → *imagination* of the social whose meanings never ended up fixed in a predetermined way, but were worked out through the twists and turns of historical disputes. Some of these tensions were materialised in a group of micropolitical experiences and non-organic initiatives of collective organisation, such as *La Marcha Pagana* (Pagan March), promoted by *La Coordinadora de Grupos Alternativos* (1986), and the *Malvenida a Juan Pablo II* (*The Repudiation of John Paul II*) organised by *La Comisión en Repudio al Papa* (*Commission of Repudiation of the Pope*, 1987) a gathering of groups that shared a political affinity which through their differences sought to make visible the repressive persecution faced by all those subjects involved in the strange design of other ways of living during the return of democracy to Buenos Aires, and also aimed to denounce the leading role played by the ecclesiastical institutions in promoting the repressive sexual morality that justified these types of violence. (Figures 42 and 43) These actions were carried out by dissatisfied gay activists, anarchist magazine editors, melancholic leftists disappointed by their parties and a prolific series of street graphic action groups, young punks, heavy metal

Figure 42: *Marcha Pagana* [Pagan March], 1986, poster, photocopy, 35.6 x 22.9 cm. Design by Club de Blasfemos [Blasphemous's Club], Biblioteca Popular José Ingenieros.



→ after, p. 160
imagination, p. 197

382 Ariana Reano and Julia G. Smola, "30 años de democracia: Debates sobre los sentidos de la política en la transición argentina", *Centro de Estudios Avanzados*, no. 29 (2015), 35–51.

fans, underground performers and → *feminists*, all organised against police edicts. As political spaces, they were strongly nourished by their constitutive differences, and it was from their activities designed a particular way of doing defined by a deep criticism of traditional modes of political action. They thus prioritised protest under affective registers that operationalised the force of ridicule, the unravelling of pleasures and the loss of meaning as an experience of the critical subjectivation of the public space.

Against sacred marriage

Through a series of meetings that took place in a cultural space related to the Humanist Party, the *Coordinadora de Grupos Alternativos* (1986), a gather of alternative groups mostly formed by → *queer* activists and anarchists, gathered to discuss how they could intervene in the current climate against the Divorce Law, that was once again marked by the violence of the police and the media pressure in support of the religious discourse, giving shape to the initiative of *La Marcha Pagana*: a rally convened for August 15, 1986, at Plaza Congreso in Buenos Aires. The principal vector for the organisation of this was the demand for the urgent separation of Church and State, but it would be different from other proposals because it celebrated the exercise of absolute freedom to achieve it as its absolute horizon. Through flyers filled with drawings made to the rhythms of a *raunchy camp*³⁸³, a type of hypersexual representation that juxtaposed the poetic density of punk graphics, the use of pornographic images and a vast universe of blasphemous signs, the movement's protagonists cheerfully called for the occupation of public spaces while dressed in the ragged costumes of nuns, priests and altar boys, aiming to blind the military gaze with the gender-fluid extravagance of a multitude of bodies drunk on cheap, flashy gemstones, but also with the smelly mohawk of angry punks and the artisanal vests full of rusty chains from young metal fans who sought to undermine the social call to normality.

The rally landscape was completed by an uncontrolled abundance of posters that denounced the Church's complicity with State terrorism, rejecting the forthcoming visit of Pope John Paul II, while also mocking the local clergy with a strongly sarcastic tone. A series of banners attempted to disrupt the transparency of these explicit demands by introducing onomatopoeias (Oh, Uh!, Ahh!) on a large scale that

383 Juan Nicolás Cuello and Francisco Lemus, "De cómo ser una verdadera loca": Grupo de Acción Gay y revista Sodoma como geografías ficcionales de la utopía marica", *Badebec*, vol. 6, no. 11 (September 2016), 250–75.



Figure 43: *Marcha Pagana* [Pagan March], 1986, poster, photocopy, 35.6 x 22.9 cm. Design by Club de Blasfemos [Blasphemous's Club], Biblioteca Popular José Ingenieros.

→ feminists, p. 28
queer, p. 200

graphically reproduced a confused mix of roars of awe and pleasure. Meanwhile, two giant puppets functioned as escorts to all the ridiculousness that occurred at the event's peak, until the → crowd were brutally repressed. On the one hand, there was a stick marionette of a nun whose robe mechanically revealed some prominent, satiny pubic hair and pointy nipples smeared with glitter; and on the other, there was a puppet mounted on stilts by Gustavo Sola that tried to represent the Argentinian *macho* ideal, and whose long foam penis was carried like a → dead animal. From the liveliness of their irreverent expression, these homemade artefacts activated a pagan force imbricated with anti-repressive desires, in a coven that linked the inorganic agency of those uncontrollable subjectivities that aspired not only to the recovery of the night, but also to interrupt the fictitious promise of citizenship that had inaugurated the return of democracy, altering the rhythm of the common through sexual misconduct.

Enrique Yurkovich, one of its principal promoters of this event, says that the strategy of occupying the public space through sexual provocation, ridicule and extravagance, was aimed to antagonise the ongoing political practice of ecclesiastical power at the national level: the Public Masses in Defence of the Family for the faithful, featuring children and adolescents in public squares. Claudia Zicker, an anarchist activist and founder along with Yurkovich of the initiative *Club de Blasfemos* (Blasphemous's Club), an imaginary association that operated through subscription coupons placed inside the magazine *Manuela* (1986), comments in an interview, on the decision to occupy the public space with this overgrown, particular affective energy:

We thought we could be monsters in the street. We wanted to position ourselves within this discussion, but not from the discourse of the democratic family that we considered phoney. We wanted to detach ourselves from that political culture of normality. We weren't going to dress up as decent people asking for a divorce, that's what they were for. We addressed it from a different side. If the Church has a say in this matter it is because the Church and the State are jointly operating, and this is a secular country. That is why the process of forming La Marcha Pagana meant we had to learn about the constitution, and the history of religions. We were prompted to test democracy, to ask about that limit. That's why we proposed the legal separation of Church and State.

The experimentation with the limits of democracy would not only be a quest regarding strictly the institutional interference of the Church over the State, but had also become the bodily principle from which participating spaces within the *Coordinadora de Grupos Alternativos* made politics. In the words of their members, their desire was to distance themselves from phoniness, since they distrusted politics as they knew it and thought the only truth was when things happened through the body. That not only implied the idea of "use the body" – that is, to inscribe it materially in the manifested multitude – but it was also a matter of turning it into the possible language of all political expression. That is the reason why the physical appearance or dress style as public devices of subjective singularisation³⁸⁴, along with nuances and the sexed and gendered design of gestures, were all part of an integral program for those new modes of political action.

In the face of clerical power, the usual misfits cheered loudly for divorce, the consumption of pornography, the excessive use of drugs and the free exercise of sexu-

384 Daniela Lucena and Gisela Laboureau, *Modo mata moda: arte, cuerpo y micropolítica en los '80* (La Plata: EDULP, 2016).

al deviance in the city streets, but the problems did not take long to arrive. → After having occupied Plaza Congreso, they started spontaneously singing slogans with the background sound of off-key instruments, and then they decided to walk in circles around the square, as had learned from *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and the Human Rights movement with which they held a direct affinity, and which many felt themselves a part.

But in the midst of that dissonant coven, pressured by the appearance of fundamentalist Christian groups who had attended the rally to perform a "collective exorcism" on these youths driven by sex, drugs, and blasphemy, the police began to surround the perimeter where the mobilisation was taking place in an attempt to disperse it. As time went on, the proximity of the police escalated into a delirious confrontation that irritated those who were there defuse the situation. The dialogue that follows is one of the few available registers of what happened that day, and faithfully represents the main features of a new principle of political organisation based on mockery, delirium and the intoxicated intensification of the senses, as recalled by the people who were there in their testimonies:

'Who is the leader?' [a policeman asked]. 'There are no leaders; the leaders have died', a 50-year-old replied. 'Who is responsible for this?' 'We're all irresponsible', a punk said caustically. 'That puppet is obscene; you are violating the 128 of the Penal Code.' 'Haven't you heard of grotesque art?', they responded. In the midst of the repression, the police are still clueless, and the protesters start shouting without backing down: 'We want to fuck!' It is incredible: we are in Buenos Aires, it's 1986 and two hundred frenzied people are shouting WE WANT TO FUCK at the corner of Callao and Bartolomé Mitre.³⁸⁵

The discussion about the grotesque and obscene, the outlandish language from which the activists challenged the patience of the officers, the prankster replies and the ways in which they tried to outwit power gave them time to resist, but ultimately failed to contain the repressive fury that would ensue. Struggles, beatings and persecutions brought to an end the pleasure principle from which that small crowd of misfits aimed to affect reality.

The few testimonies from which this episode has become known agree that the only strategy to resist the possible advance of the police was nudity: "The urgent thing to do was to run and lose our clothes on the way. That was the only way they wouldn't recognise us," remembers Claudia Zicker, in our personal dialogue. The police detained fifteen protesters, with approximately two hundred participants in the event reported in the public media. Human rights organisations said that those detained were victims of brutal police repression, the same as in the worst days of the dictatorship, while the police argued the main reason for stopping the demonstration was the open displays of sexuality that infringed on public morals and were obscene, and thus the expressive repertoires of protest that were used.

Describing accurately what had happened, the official statement shared by the *Coordinadora de Grupos Alternativos* concluded by calling for a second *La Marcha Pagana*, but the momentum of this mass blasphemy would quickly fade over time. Even its historical value would experience a similar fate. In tension with the available language of leftist activism as well as the affective repertoires of the incipi-

385 Enrique Marin, "La Marcha Pagana y los inadaptados de siempre", *Cerdos & Peces*, vol. 15, no. 69 (1987).

ent gay pragmatism,³⁸⁶ even today it is difficult to gauge the contribution that an event like this had, especially due to its abrasive critique of democracy, but also for its absence of records, the inconsistency of its organisational methodologies, the imprecision from which it is remembered and above all, the political devaluation associated with its ephemeral nature.

Against Christian blessing

From the shared concerns among the different types of groups that had formed the *Coordinadora de Grupos Alternativos*, whose political affinity was strengthened after *La Marcha Pagana* and especially after the repressive onslaught they had faced together, it was possible to instil in the discussions of that time a sense of urgency to dismantle the social ties of clerical power in the weightless management of the new democratic reality in Argentina, through experimental antagonistic → imaginations. Although, in formal terms, that collective organising body had found its limit in the past experience all of its members, along with a significant number of new activists, editorial teams, political parties, cultural organisations, sectors of the human rights movement and independent artists, all of whom joined in the *Comisión de Repudio al Papa* (*Commission of Repudiation of the Pope, CRAP*): a call outlined under the subversive resonances of *La Marcha Pagana* that took public form with the publication of the manifesto entitled “*Contra Wojtyla*” (“Against Wojtyla”), signed by the artist Jorge Gumier Maier and the writer Enrique Symns from the editorial team of *Cerdos & Peces* in the magazine’s issue no. 9 (February 1987):

*We have enough evidence accumulated in our sensibility, experience and perception of the world to state that the Pope, the present one or any other, represents one of the powers that control human existence in the West. Throughout history, the Church he represents has been one of the most dangerous and cruel pests that have scourged humanity. It was there in all the massacres, participating, giving their blessing, dividing the spoils, concealing and assenting, always at the victor’s side, with an evasive and uncompromising discourse at hand [...] On April 6, the Pope, the same Holy Father who in the Malvinas will line up on the Reagan-Thatcher axis, is coming to Buenos Aires with the intention of ‘blessing this democracy’. We are calling all good-willed souls who wish to give an effective, legal and eloquent response to his message, to join us and prepare a great event where we can raise our hand and say NO to his presence. [...] Repudiation, on the other hand, must be considered as an inalienable right granted by the constitution to express the thought of a group of citizens, and therefore it is the intention of this proposal that nothing illegal, rude or injurious be done. Contact us.*³⁸⁷

While the epistemological substratum that organised the repudiation continued to be the incandescent expression of disagreement over ecclesiastical power and its effective participation in the continuity of conservative regimes of cultural control, this call, unlike their previous experience and at least in enunciative terms, sought to avoid the possibility of any conflict or contempt that might confront them with a possible repression. Some of the protagonists say this was one of the main discussions during the meetings that would structure the organisation of such an event. All the issues of security, legal remedies and anti-repressive containment strategies, as well as the expressed will to expand the repudiation of repressive systems without any conditions, were installed as needs to address in the process of assem-

386 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

387 Jorge Gumier Maier and Enrique Symns, “Contra Wojtyla”, *Cerdos & Peces*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1987).

blies that took place at first in the editorial office of the magazine *Cerdos & Peces* located at 2537 Corrientes Street, but eventually due to two bomb threats they would move to the Parakultural Center and later, to the José Ingenieros Popular Library.

With a decidedly more organised rhythm, the groups that formed the CRAP called in the Plaza del Obelisco a massive rally for the day 3 April 1987 in which they sought to express a wide repudiation to the Pope, the actual representative of a power historically involved in the extension of restrictive principles of control towards social behaviour and, especially in Latin America, a power that had participated in the crimes against humanity perpetrated by military dictatorships. Having learnt from the public discomfort and flamboyant informality of initiatives such as *La Marcha Pagana*, on this occasion the call had a clear programme of cultural activities that included the reading of poems, political documents, performances, and concerts in which the most relevant precarious stars from Buenos Aires’ underground were involved. At the same time, this program was part of an extensive series of cultural activities that the members of CRAP had produced individually from their particular spaces, as a prelude to animate the impulse of rejection with regard the Pope’s arrival. Many of them were held in the most representative spaces of libertarian organisations in Buenos Aires of the time: the José Ingenieros Popular Library and the Federación Libertaria Argentina (the Argentine Libertarian Federation). These were spaces that housed young anarchists engaged in the organisation of conferences, film series and plays that thematised the hidden history of religious power in the reproducibility of capital and its continuous pressure on the sexual behaviour of society.

Days before the official call, in every corner of the emerging underground scene of the post-dictatorship proliferated ephemeral associations, reduced affinity groups and fictitious organisations that implemented identification and → disidentification strategies³⁸⁸, produced graphic materials and tools of agitprop calling for participation in the protest against the arrival of Pope John Paul II. Some examples of this type of action: Claudia Zicker and Gustavo Sola, anarchist activists and impatient workers from the underground disorder, distributed flyers outside → schools, during their rounds of bars and within the reading groups in which they participated. These were handmade flyers that showed a significant number of asses drawn with simple pencil strokes, juxtaposed with the face of John Paul II cut irregularly from some xerographic printing of the time. Signing this call as *C.U.L.O – Comando de Unidad Libertario del Oeste* (*Command of Libertarian Unity of the West*) – they ironically invited the ingestion of *puré de papa polaka* (“mashed Polish potatoes”), transforming the Obelisco in the venue of a free buffet in which diners could taste the irresistible flavour of the radioactive potato, referring not only to the recent Chernobyl nuclear accident in April 1986, but to the collective organisation that had taken shape in that country to express its total rejection of the arrival of the same Pope who was trying to make his way through local misery.

For his part, Miguel Ángel Lens, a marginal poet and one of the leading activists of San Telmo Gay, distributed his own flyer under the fictional name of *Grupo Anti-autoritario “Los pinchados”* (*Anti-authoritarian Group “Los Pinchados”*), inviting people to participate in the March of Repudiation against the Pope. Under slogans such as “the poem does not protect me, poetry does”, “religion is a cosmic electric prod”, “property is theft” and scattered fragments of personal poems, he drew with the delicacy of his naivety a young, contemporary face full of decora-

388 Muñoz (1999).

tive attributes, whose graphics erotically touched the drawings of Jean Cocteau and Sergei Eisenstein, intervened by the ornamental saturation of a camp more linked to punk dissonance than to the decadent glamour of the locals' melancholic sensitivity³⁸⁹. Around it, the iconic anarchist symbol with a capital A was scattered, almost like the onomatopoeias of a mental chant. These initiatives were also accompanied by less elaborated flyers that also demonstrated a truly playful attitude to political enunciation: "Say NO to papal reconciliation. The struggle continues" signed by *Comandos Herejes (Heretic Commandos)* and the *Brigada Juan Pablo III (John Paul III Brigade)*; "We don't want the Pope; we want sweet potato. Come with your best costume" signed by the magazine *Manuela*; "Say NO to papal amnesty. March against the Pope. Secular State Now!" signed by the *Commission of Repudiation of the Pope* in a flyer showing a photomontage of a pregnant John Paul II, among many others. As we can see, the initial intention was to control the affective records to guarantee that such an event did not give in to blasphemy: instead, its proliferation was enabled by creating graphic assemblages that made sexuality a mode of provocation and a form of differential contact with the political juncture. Heresy was not only employed as a language of insubordination to the historical power of Catholicism, but also as a form of profound → disidentification from the traditional protest repertoires and the sexual morality instituted as the norm. Operationalising the outrage, the mockery, the grotesque, the sex and the cultural incorrectness, this new generation of young people disarmed the expectations of political agency projected on themselves, prioritising not only creative aspects that involved visual procedures charged with aggression, nervousness, anger and disappointment, but also positioning new horizontal organisational repertoires, in which the absence of authorship and the precarious techniques of multiple reproduction of their expressions were exercised, and which taken together became apologetics of a new way of living the rebellious and insubordinate desires of the radical transformation of the present.

However, all the effort → invested in the successful transversalisation of this demand would be quickly frustrated with a repressive scenario that would almost immediately disarm the call made for that April Friday. Looking at the press of the time, an endless number of headlines can be found that allow us to evaluate the intense military and police deployment that prematurely ended the programmed cultural activities, extending the persecution of the thousands of attendees for hours. With uncertainty as the official number of detainees, the newspapers headlined in sensationalist ways their chronicles of the riots which occurred that evening. In his personal notes Osvaldo Baigorria (2014) comments that the march against the Pope, who had the aim of reaching Congress, was not even able to start: more than one hundred people were arrested between police charges, smoke bombs, tear gas canisters and batons. Regarding that episode, he also recounts the testimony of Jorge Gumier Maier, who says that, located in the front lines of the demonstrators, the literary *travesti*, clown and icon of the independent theatre of that time, Batato Barea himself, initiated a friendly dialogue with the police in order to prevent any conflict between the parties involved, when suddenly a bottle flew from a Ford Falcón car – the kind used by the military to pick up and "disappear" young militants during the dictatorship – in the rear ranks of the march, and it hit the officer right on the head, an act that unleashed the ferocity of the entire repressive apparatus, pushing all the young people to a desperate run towards the peripheral zones of the rallying point.

389 Fernando Davis, "Loca/Devenir loca", *Perder la forma humana. Una imagen sísmica de los años ochenta*, eds. En Red Conceptualismos del sur (Buenos Aires: UNTREF-MNCARS, 2014).

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disidentification, p. 188
invested, p. 236

Launched immediately after that altercation, the editorial of issue no. 11 of the magazine *Cerdos & Peces* sought to give a detailed account of what happened, but above all it urgently tried to lay down a position against the widespread media stigmatisation that negatively described the difference embodied by the counter-cultural young protestors, and especially by the anarchists involved in the organisation of the *Malvenida al Papa*:

[...] *The repressive methods tending to a barbarism-based state model become commonplace, not only in the Obelisco, but also in the rock recitals, in the soccer courts, in the so-called 'confrontations' with criminals. That is what is alarming, state violence in a rule of law as the only option to control situations that supposedly tend to disrupt the established order. This is not a model invented by Radicales or Peronistas, but seems to represent the contradictions of a outdated system of national organisation based on organised terrorism* [...]

As a result of these communications and in line with the documents produced by CRAP at the José Ingenieros Popular Library, in which the same information was reported to call for → solidarity from human rights organisations, a *Comisión de Repudio a la Violencia Policial (Commission of Repudiation of Police Violence)* was created, and at the same time a course was opened by *Juventudes Rebeldes (Rebel Youths)*, a space that organised the angry energy of the young punks, goths and heavy metal fans, continually harassed by repressive control. The balance of these experiences would not only enable a series of anti-repressive actions that would demand the derogation of police edicts, of background check laws and the request for punishment for the perpetrators of state terrorism, but in a radical way it would pronounce with unshakeable certainty one of the most radical aspirations in the political climate of the post-dictatorial organisation: the total and immediate dismantling of the repressive apparatus.

Against political illusion

Through the fragmentary revision of these countercultural experiences that took place in the so-called "cultural Destape" of the democratic recomposition process during the 1980s in Argentina, I am interested in recovering not only the critical contribution from a set of planned initiatives of collective organisation that, by way of visual devices, performative actions and other graphic artefacts, launched expressive languages that renewed the available repertoires of protest, drawing on the convulsed operativity of negative feelings that combined rejection, irony, resentment, provocation, disenchantment and other twisted form of hope. Moreover, I am interested in recovering the epistemological potential that its awkward difference brings to the history of the sexual and political → imaginings of the Global → South. Having been discarded systematically because of their erratic, ephemeral, combustible, reticent or too opaque condition regarding the matrices of normative intelligibility of academic and activist devices, and considered as particularly inconsistent or elusive due to their material fragility and low social circulation, these countercultural experiences propose a type of contact with sexual politics that disorders the linear imperative of history and the neoliberal economies of multicultural representation that have managed to fetishise the cancellation of their practical resonances.

In addition to being thought of as the affective source of a platform of → disidentificatory political agency, these collective feelings of disappointment can be considered as an impulse that rejects the desire to → repair the social relations that

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solidarity, p. 65
imaginings, p. 197
South, p. 71, 73
disidentificatory, p. 188
repair, p. 140

this particular group of marginalised youth felt were broken³⁹⁰ in the face of the ongoing repressive sexual morality that inherited its foundations from the military dictatorship, exposing the resounding failure of the democratic promise concerning individual freedoms and their inclusive aspiration. This was a kind of methodical disenchantment with the power in place, which forged emotional platforms of structural antagonism, centred its force of transgression upon bodily freedom as an anti-normative principle – a political presence that strategically intended to resist the alchemical processes of pacific reworking of its distress, turning it into a *mode of disengagement*,³⁹¹ a protest register where such negativity is considered as a language of suspension, that is to say, a strategy capable of blocking the industrialised incorporation of numb subjectivities to the cruel promise of the current social agreement of neoliberalism and its conditions of uncritical reproducibility, opening up imaginative paths for other ways of living.

Putting focus on these political efforts to disengage with the affirmative repertoire of democracy, and give us the opportunity to identify the critical potency of these negative moods as a form of historicity capable of putting together organised experiences around the disidentification with liberal normality. For this reason, disappointment can work as a genre of rejection, one whose transhistorical expression allows us to discern the continuity of an emotional language sustained from an uncomfortable belonging to a “broken” present. This common space created by → queer activists, punks, → feminists and underground artists is a space of alliance that did not seek to adapt to the therapeutic claim from identity politics or cultural industries, but instead attempted to be a collective form of understanding that engaged critically with the historical present, that drew on the difficulties, lack of cohesion, improbability and ferocious opposition involved in the always fragmentary and insufficient experience of the living.

By unleashing the history of the night and recognising the savage condition of its emotional registers, we may approach a historiographic practice that allows us to describe not only the way colonialism as a form of historical oppression is inscribed within the processes of the creation, access and continuity of the collective memory of alternative sexual communities in the Global South. Moreover, this also enables us to recognise the negative values of factual inaccuracy, → temporal contradiction, chemical dizziness and sexual disorientation proposed in their political imagination as the specific contribution those difficult-to-categorise social subjects have made to the history of antagonistic resistance and the anti-capitalist dreams of the → South.

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queer, p. 200
feminists, p. 28
temporal, p. 256
South, p. 71, 73

Disidentification Pablo Martínez

Madrid, November 2022

The practice of disidentification performed by queer, racialised and other minoritarian subjects has been theorised by many queer thinkers. It can be described as the range of practices by which minoritarian subjects resist the prevailing notions of identity: disidentification situates these subjects both within and against the forms of identity deemed acceptable by the dominant ideology. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler poses a central question for queer practice by asking what can happen if and when disidentification is politicised. For Butler, disidentification

390 Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

391 Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism”, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1 December 2006), 20–36.

comes about when subjects both see and fail to see, simultaneously, the kind of groupings or phenomena with which they might want to identify. This experience of misrecognition is complex, and is not just a matter of being left out of public discourses: it is about seeing things from a particular perspective – a deviant one – whereby said minoritarian subjects duly feel the need to create and reclaim alternative forms of identification. One example of this is Jack Halberstam’s dislodging of masculinity from biological maleness. In *Female Masculinity* Halberstam updated and → reterritorialised the concept of masculinity, generating other possible identifications and disidentifications with it.³⁹²

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz puts forward a theory of disidentification based on examples from the field of art and *camp* performative practices. He defines disidentification as follows:

*Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalising and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.*³⁹³

For Muñoz, performances of disidentification are those strategies used by queer and racialised subjects to negotiate their identity in a world not meant for them (or rather, constructed *against* them). The dominant ideology, which is the result of colonial processes, has long ensured that minorities are classified as non-normative by the forces of white, heterosexual supremacy. Identity, according to Muñoz, is a fiction accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects. Minoritarian subjects, meanwhile, must deal and negotiate with the available identities and roles, and somehow construct their own identities in relation to these normative ones. The systemic violence exerted upon them provokes acts of disidentification – as opposed to identification (assimilation) or counter-identification (rejection/opposition) – by means of which queer subjects rearticulate the majoritarian cultural codes. It follows, then, that disidentifications are processes not only of creation, but also of survival and → liberation. After all, queerness itself is a continuous practice of disidentification: queer subjects are always situated in places where meanings and things are not quite aligned.

Muñoz devotes a chapter of his book to the Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who died of AIDS in 1996, at the age of 38. Gonzalez-Torres lived and worked in the United States, during a period marked by the harsh conservative policies of successive Republican governments, as well as by the emergence of identity politics and debates on multiculturalism within academia and art. Nevertheless, he eschewed essentialism: as Muñoz put it, Gonzalez-Torres “actively rebelled against any reductive understanding of how his identity affects his cultural production”. Instead, he worked to activate what Muñoz called the politics and performance of “disidentity”, i.e. the reconfiguration of identity via → diverse strategies which, in Gonzalez-Torres’s work, led to a *reconstructed* identity politics, with a view to remaking the self.

392 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998)

393 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.

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reterritorialised, p. 269
liberation, p. 116
diverse, p. 39

In what can be understood as a grammatical act of rebellion, Gonzalez-Torres refused to use the “correct” accents in his names, and he turned his two surnames into one by hyphenating them, thus defying Hispanic surname conventions.³⁹⁴ This deviation from normative orthography, this constant error, committed again and again throughout his life, represents the permanent transgressing of a supposedly fixed identity. It might also be seen as an act of disidentification, in various directions: it is perhaps a rejection of his Spanish origins (following his traumatic stay in a religious school in Madrid at the age of 13), or even a protest against Latinos being treated as second-rate citizens by the US authorities.

Despite this, when MACBA held a retrospective of his work, the accents *were* used in the marketing campaign. The exhibition’s curator, Tanya Barson, wanted to acknowledge the fact that Felix saw these accents as problematic: for political reasons, he was keen to draw attention to the way that names condition identity. The act of naming, which sometimes even takes place before birth, is the very first and one of the most violent acts exercised by the ideology of the state apparatus of control. It designates each person as an individual subject with a gender, class, ethnic background, and so on. MACBA’s inclusion of the accents could, on the one hand, be understood as an act of violence against Felix’s name. However, it also reflects how Felix himself chose to displace his own identity: he would neither deny nor reaffirm it, but rather just move a few steps away from it.

In the late 1980s, Felix Gonzalez-Torres uses photographs of crowds to make puzzles, plates and wallpaper, thus joining the long tradition of artists who have recognised → the crowd as a fundamental motif of 20th century visual production. The way he handles these crowd photos, given their ambivalent nature, can be linked to disidentifying strategies. The notion of disidentification, elaborated by Muñoz, is helpful when it comes to thinking up strategies for the deterritorialisation of heterosexuality, as shaped in the queer multitude.³⁹⁵ In fact, one of the fundamental problems with the crowd, at least for liberal → schools of thought, is that the subject’s possible identification with a rational and fixed individual becomes diluted, and, in turn, their sovereign responsibility gets diluted too. This circumstance reveals the extent to which the capitalist states, in the form of liberal democracies, really do need the subject to be squeezed and fixed into one set identity, so that the prevailing social order can be reproduced.

In this sense, it is worth reassessing Althusser’s classic assertion that ideology interpellates individuals into subjects.³⁹⁶ Althusser developed his influential theory of subject formation and interpellation in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970), one of the first articulations of the role of ideology in subject formation, and a fundamental text for understanding the processes of disidentification. In Althusser, an individual is a subject before they are even born, given the structure that awaits them and forces them into a particular sexual form, identity and place, conditioning them to be produced as that pre-packaged subject. This notion has since been challenged by Jodi Dean, for whom it happens the other way round: the subject is interpellated into an individual, and this is why crowds are quite so problematic for the thinkers/protectors of the order. As Dean claims, there is a subject who goes beyond the individual form, and who is constrained to a fixed

394 As Felix’s friend and gallerist Andrea Rosen has confirmed, this was not in fact systematic: he liked to play around with it at random. From personal correspondence with the author.

395 , Paul B. Preciado, “Multitudes *queer*: Notas para una política de los ‘anormales’”, *Brumaria 3: Prácticas artísticas, estéticas y políticas* (Madrid, 2004), 231–8.

396 Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016), 76–105.

identity.³⁹⁷ The idea of a unitary, autonomous and self-controlled subject, then, must be challenged by (among other things) processes of disidentification such as the ones produced in the shifting, largely anonymous experience of the crowd, a phenomenon which so fascinated Gonzalez-Torres. No wonder he came up with forms of representation “premised on invisibility”, as Muñoz notes.

Being part of a crowd is all about a politics of the affects, and is inherently linked to moving, in all senses of the word. That is, it entails moving in terms of the affects, as well as the physical movement of bodies, in a range of actions: influencing and being influenced by others, getting caught up in the excitement, going with the flow (not to mention, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims in *Tendencies*, that queerness is in perpetual flux anyway). Essentially, multitudes of bodies challenge the normative logics of identification, as well as the liberal democracies’ conceptions of both property and sovereignty, as Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler point out in their conversation about dispossession and → the performative in politics.³⁹⁸ Athanasiou says that the people jammed together in crowds “enable and enact a performativity of embodied agency, in which we own our bodies and struggle for the right to claim our bodies as ‘ours’ [...] However, our claim does not refer merely to individual, individually owned, self-sufficient bodies, but rather to the relationality of these bodies.”³⁹⁹

With regards to these attitudes, Muñoz defines, following Nancy Fraser, the concept of “counterpublics”, i.e. those communities and relational chains of resistance that challenge the white, bourgeois, liberal and heteronormative public sphere: “Counterpublics are not magically and automatically realised through disidentifications, but they are suggested, rehearsed, and articulated. Disidentifications are strategies that are called on by minoritarian subjects throughout their everyday life.”⁴⁰⁰ This definition of counterpublics refers to different subaltern groupings that are classed as falling outside the majoritarian, hegemonic, public sphere. During my time working at MACBA (2016–2021), a great deal of the museum’s programme was oriented towards this idea of counterpublics. One example would be *Histories of Art from Barcelona*, inspired by the *Histories of Art from Bogotá* of the art historian Marta Traba, from the 1980s. MACBA’s project aimed to generate audiovisual teaching materials that narrate different ways of creating and experiencing life that are not heterosexist and/or white. Writing a history of art based on AIDS, sexual dissidence or the diaspora is one way of addressing the underserved counter-audiences that disidentify with the majority culture.⁴⁰¹

397 Ibid.

398 Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler, *Desposesión: lo performativo en lo político* (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2017).

399 Ibid., 178.

400 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (London and Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 179.

401 Videos and other materials from the project can be accessed online at “Historias del arte desde Barcelona”, <https://www.macba.cat/es/exposiciones-actividades/actividades/historias-arte-barcelona/> (accessed 28 November 2022).

Empathy is often defined as the capacity of understanding, being aware of, sensitive to, and experiencing the feelings of another.⁴⁰² However, a very complex notion of empathy has evolved in the context of the humanities and cognitive neuroscience since the term was coined in the 19th century by the German philosopher Rudolf Lotze as a → translation of Greek *empathia*, “passion, state of emotion”. Empathy is often perceived as a positive feeling. However, a number of critical theory studies have raised the issue of the ambiguous impact of empathetic emotions on our happiness.

“I feel you” but “I don’t feel with you”

The notion of empathy sits at the heart of theatre, the performing arts, and empathetic pedagogies. In literary theory there exists the notion of “narrative empathy” as the sharing of feelings and perspective induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another’s situation and condition – i.e. “being in the shoes of” fictional characters. Empathy is also broadly discussed as part of affect studies and feeling theory. Distinct types of empathetic thinking have appeared in the visual arts context, especially in transdisciplinary and narrative practices involving different methodologies of working with humans, non-humans, objects, and narrative fiction, as well as in the critical discourses of → feminism, postcolonial, and → queer theory.

At the beginning of her essay “Empathy”, Beverly Weber asks:

*Can you ever feel me? Can I ever feel you? What is this feeling, and what alliances might it motivate? Can empathy play a role in decolonised solidarities? Does it rely on shared → vulnerability? To whom do we feel obligation? To what extent? In what way does that sense of ethical obligation rely on empathy? How does empathy function as an emotional force that compels one to move?*⁴⁰³

In her work, Weber quotes Sara Ahmed’s *Becoming Unsympathetic* essay, which refers to the idea of sympathy.⁴⁰⁴ Although sympathy is related to empathy, it has a different meaning. Sympathetic concern is driven by a switch in viewpoint from a personal perspective to that of another group or individual who is in need. Thus, the expression of sympathy could be phrased as “I feel you” but “I don’t feel with you”.

How do things become emotional?

One of the definitions of empathy refers to the “imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it”.⁴⁰⁵ After Sara Ahmed, we ask how do things become emotional, or after Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: how can we touch them? Amelia Jones, in her essay *Performing the Wounded*

402 “Empathy” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=empathy> (accessed May 2021)

403 Beverly Weber, “Empathy” *Digital Feminist Collective*, <https://digitalfeministcollective.net/index.php/2018/07/02/empathy/> (accessed May 2021).

404 Sara Ahmed, “Becoming Unsympathetic” *Living a Feminist Life* (16 May 2015), <https://feministkilljoys.com/2015/04/16/becoming-unsympathetic/> (accessed May 2021).

405 “Empathy”, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy> (accessed May 2021).

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translation, p. 153
feminism, p. 28
queer, p. 200
vulnerability, p. 208

Body: Pain, Affect and the Radical Relationality of Meaning, reflects on the authenticity of emotions and affect evoking a question of affected experience mediated through artistic means:

In Derek Jarman’s 1986 movie Caravaggio the artist says to his friend, ‘[i]n the wound, the question is answered. All art is against lived experience. How can you compare flesh and blood with oil and ground pigment?’ In a telescoping set of identifications, Jarman, via an actor playing the artist Caravaggio, begs the question of the effect of the wound as felt, enacted and represented visually: is a ‘live’ wound inherently more authentic than one made ‘with oil and ground pigment’ or, for that matter, with photographic media? And, in relation to these registers of mediation, what does the wound mean as a cultural signifier: one presented to another in a moment of communicative exchange?

The examination of empathetic objects and images can relate to the sculptural works and further to the truly extraordinary photographic portrait of Judith Scott (1943–2015) with one of her objects, which was taken by the photographer Leon A. Borensztein. (Figure 44) This is how Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes this image in her book *Touching Feelings*:

*The sculpture in this picture is fairly characteristic of Scott’s work in its construction: a core assembled from large, heterogeneous materials has been hidden under many wrapped or darned layers of multicolored yarn, cord, ribbon, rope, and other fiber, producing a durable three-dimensional shape, usually oriented along a single axis of length, whose curves and planes are biomorphically resonant and whose scale bears comparison to Scott’s own body. The formal achievements that are consistent in her art include her inventive techniques for securing the giant bundles, her subtle building and modulation of complex three-dimensional lines and curves, and her startlingly original use of color, whether bright or muted, which can stretch across a plane, simmer deeply through the multilayered wrapping, or drizzle graphically along an emphatic suture. All of Scott’s work that I’ve seen on its own has an intense presence, but the subject of this photograph also includes her relation to her completed work, and presumptively also the viewer’s relation to the sight of that dyad. For me, to experience a subject-object distance from this image is no more plausible than to envision such a relation between Scott and her work. She and her creation here present themselves to one another with equally expansive welcome.*⁴⁰⁶



Figure 44: Leon A. Borensztein: *Judith*, photograph, 1999. Courtesy of the artist.

406 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 22.

Judith Scott was born with Down's syndrome in Ohio, the United States. Additionally, her deafness was undetected for years, causing learning difficulties and exclusion, which led to her being sent to an institution for disabled children. She spent 35 years separated from her family, until 1986, when her twin sister became her legal guardian and moved her to her home in California. Judith Scott then joined the artists' studio of the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, where, after two years, she began to produce unique sculptures by collecting various objects of all sizes and shapes, that she wrapped, wove, and entwined with threads, in carefully chosen colours, day → after day, sometimes for months, until forming strange cocoons hiding talismans known only to her.

Scott's mysterious and powerful sculptures recall the concept of Sara Ahmed's affect as something that's sticky: "Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects."⁴⁰⁷ Through these objects, Scott developed her own abstract language as the only connection between inside and outside world. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* refers to the physical sensation when we speak about empathy as follows:

*When we experience empathy we identify ourselves, up to the point with an animate or inanimate object. One might even go so far as to say that the experience is an involuntary projection of ourselves into an object. This complementation of a work of sculpture might give a physical sensation similar to that suggested by the work.*⁴⁰⁸

To be empathetic is to suffer

The case of Judith Scott's sculptures proves the ability of art to function as means to facilitate empathy. Sculpture can be used as a vehicle for feelings and emotions, and help us to imagine an experience. Empathy is also all about the → imagination, since you can't really be in the shoes of someone else. Moreover, empathy is a powerful tool, and we cannot survive as a society without it. Consequently, it is hard to imagine the development of art or critical discourse without empathy, and we shouldn't forget what Sara Ahmed says in her book *The Promise of Happiness*:

*To be empathetic is to suffer: it is to be made unhappy by other people's unhappiness. It is not necessarily that you catch their feeling but that you have to live with their unhappiness with your life → choices ("ideas about structures"). Such unhappiness is directed toward those who do not live according to the right ideas. They are unhappy with you for not being what they want you to be.*⁴⁰⁹

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after, p. 160
imagination, p. 197
choices, p. 174

mOther(ness) Maja Smrekar

Ljubljana, May 2021

I will try to address the term *mOther(ness)* that arose during a practice-based artistic research executed over the course of a few months when preparing my body for lactation. It culminated when I gained colostrum and breastfed a canine puppy in a public performance titled *Hybrid Family* in 2016. (Figure 45)

⁴⁰⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 199.

⁴⁰⁸ *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, John Anthony Cuddon, 5th edition (2015), 257.

⁴⁰⁹ Ahmed (2010), 95–6.



Even though my artistic practice is usually guided by intuition, I start from the premise that we are all colonised by bacteria and viruses. Just as we humans colonise houses, cities and surroundings, we also serve as hosts for ideologies, media and technologies. The term *holobiont*, coined in 1991 by the biologist Lynn Margulis, for example describes all life on → Earth as an entire organism permeated by the biosphere. The concept of holobiont breaks the self-understanding of individual life, connects humans in a symbiotic way with other organisms and disrupts the division into subject and object. Furthermore, the social and personal paradoxes that were revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic made people aware, as maybe never before, that life is above all about many of those other than human entities.

Figure 45: Maja Smrekar and Manuel Vason, *K-9_topology: Hybrid Family*, Berlin, 2016. A photographic series from a durational performance. Produced by Freies Museum Berlin (DE) and Kapelica Gallery (SI). Courtesy of the artist.

Even though Margoulis's ideas have been inspiring me to think beyond the anthropocentric view for years, I would like to explain my parallel observation of our civilisation's zeitgeist which has been bringing me to a place that is far from being a happy one. For quite a while I have been observing the global social reality and many challenges that society has been struggling with, through some kind of a thanatopolitical dimension: in the face of disappearing natural resources and the increasing demand for them, the global migration flows, refugee crisis, ever-growing populisms, overpopulation and consequently threats to biodiversity, all evoked by a proto-fascist globalised capitalism that seems to pursue its path of destruction until everything is consumed, I have been trying to explore, through my artistic practice, the so-called art of living on a damaged planet and the possibility of life in these capitalist ruins. I have been further dwelling on the writing of Rosi Braidotti, who addresses the myth of humanity, which has been based on universal values and human exceptionalism, always excluding some that didn't correspond to the ideal which underlies the apparent universalism. "There have always been fine gradations within the category of the human, according to gender, race, class, culture,

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Earth, p. 21

nation, religion, even species; and so on. Therefore, not all of us could say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that.”⁴¹⁰

While feeling the need to twist boundaries than could no longer withstand this myth of humanity, and while trying to find the possibility of a new language that goes beyond our symbolic distance to the world, some of the following questions emerged: *How to particularise my own motherness within this context? What are the alternative forms of coexistence? What is the alternative relationship between me and the other?*

An attempt to answer these questions lead me to think beyond the laws of genus and species or race or gender, and it became clear to me that I needed to come up with a construction that needs to happen on a (micro-)political level and therefore on a molecular one. Accordingly, I adopted a microperformative method to employ → empathy towards the non-human other as a training to possibly achieve (more) empathy for a human other. And so I decided to feed humanity’s longest non-human companion by far – the dog – with my own milk.

Within a residency apartment at the Freies Museum Berlin, I established a practice based artistic research platform to compose a methodology by following a process of preparation in 112 days of seclusion – this started mid-October 2015 and lasted until the beginning of February 2016. The process included psycho-endocrinological training: a diet of iron-rich food and hydration by galactogogue liquids that promote lactation. Alongside this, I prepared physiologically by using mechanical breast-pumping: 8 x per day – every 3 hours for 20 minutes. The act of breast-pumping carried the impulses to the neuroendocrine cells of my hypothalamus, through the nerve receptors in my breasts. Consequently the hormone oxytocin, that as a side effect causes empathy, was released to be transported by the blood to my mammary glands, further releasing the hormone prolactin, which stimulated milk production. I thus executed the same strategy as some mothers-to-be, or others who are about to adopt a still nursing baby. But most importantly, this method of prolactin acceleration does not need to include the ovaries and uterus, so it can be executed no matter what gender, as it is not only connected to pregnancy. Colostrum started to occur after eight weeks; right when I adopted a puppy whom I called Ada. In the public presentation which took place in the form of public visits in my studio, the visitors could witness the feeding of a puppy with colostrum while drinking galactogogue herbs tea and discussing reproductive freedom in a heteronormative society as well as the anthropocentrism as its consequence.

I was by these conversations and by my whole experience further drawn to think within the discourse of Donna Haraway, who poses the question *What is feminist reproductive freedom in a dangerously troubled multispecies world?* My conclusion was the following: just because I don’t have children, that doesn’t mean I do not have maternal instincts. Those are a part of being human and other than human, not just a part of being female. Furthermore, the microperformativity of the two hormones produced by breast-pumping and later by breastfeeding, that were increasingly expressing as a feeling of empathy, became the ultimate point of departure for *Hybrid Family*, whereas by being pregnant with a concept of abundance, I became the Other as a mOther.

410 Stefan Herbrechter, “Rosi Braidotti (2013) The Posthuman”, *Culture Machine*, Cambridge, Polity Press (April 2013).

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empathy, p. 192

Therefore, motherhood should not be reduced to parenthood but should be expanded to interpersonal relationships on a large scale. It should become a concept of → solidarity in co-creating our responsible futures among humans and other-than humans. I therefore conclude by employing *Hybrid Family*’s molecular discourse: it has been well recognised that the hormone prolactin ensures not only survival of the species through its reproductive role, but also survival of the individuals of many species in its homeostatic roles. That being the case, I call and welcome (women of) all genders to (continue) breastfeeding!

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solidarity, p. 65

Negotiated imagination Ram Krishna Ranjan

HDK-Valand, Gothenburg, June 2021

Even if subalterns are seen as active political subjects by the researcher/artist, without facilitating acts of creating/creative acts and their active involvement in the process, there is an inherent risk that either resurrects the subalterns as revolutionary figures or writes them off as the dormant other. A move toward testing a method where subalterns are not accorded the status of creative subjects towards the end of the project, upon discovery, but rather from the very beginning, is a humble move away from representation and towards negotiated imagination. It’s about imagining a situation where the subaltern is not simply being another case-study in an expanded Western history that takes a comparative turn, but about that Western epistemology being challenged by a subaltern way of → knowing and of giving form to that knowing.

Without an articulation of the process, the subaltern is a metaphor – a metaphor that is in service of the dominant. It’s in the methods and the articulations of the methods that we open up ways to go beyond the tokenism of the “inclusion of subaltern history”. The mere inclusion of subaltern stories (including history) does not say much about the conditions under which such stories have been “gathered” and “included”. Moreover, inclusion to what end and who does it serve? Inclusion does not necessarily dissolve the “source community-observed” and, “discoverer-observer” binary. For the meaning of inclusion to change, the agency of storytelling needs to shift.

There are no “pure” “methodologies of the subaltern” that we can return to and there are no “subaltern methodologies” that will not reproduce, at least, some power differentials. The subaltern project is not a process/outcome/condition marked by the transition of methodologies from “subaltern methodologies” to “methodologies of the subaltern”. The relations between these two can be conceived as hierarchical or rhizomatic.⁴¹¹ The metaphors of the structure are less important than the vectors of the agencies concerned, but seeing (in concrete terms – initiating, facilitating or implementing) any subaltern methodology as inherently and deeply hierarchical has two implications: why do it – don’t do it, or do it only when the hierarchy has disappeared. Moreover, it relegates the subaltern subjects (and methodologies of the subaltern) to “outside” of power and denies them the agency that they too can negotiate power relations. Envisaging the relations as rhizomatic is not a denial of power differentials, but rather a way to acknowledge “how one

411 In reference to approaches to decolonial curating, Ali Rosa-Salas argues that power should be envisioned as rhizomatic as opposed to hierarchical and that the process of decoloniality entails negotiating actions and power relations. She writes: “Decolonial curatorial practice is not a utopian demand, but an expression of one’s relationship with and negotiations of power in its many forms”. This formulation of power, I think, is very generative for subaltern work. See Ali Rosa-Salas, “Knowing One’s Power: Decolonial Approaches to Curatorial Practice”, *Master’s Thesis* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2018), 65–6.

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knowing, p. 245

is implicated by, participates in, and resist such systems".⁴¹² Political and creative imaginaries of any subaltern project are not located "outside" of power but rather emerges in continuous negotiations of power in its varying forms. Negotiation is a rejection of "inaction", "inclusion tokenism" and "guilt-based intervention"; it fosters the framework of responsibility where one has to confront one's complicity so that one can be held accountable but still find ways to realise the subaltern project.

*The thought of opacity distracts me from absolute truths whose guardian I might believe myself to be. Far from cornering me within futility and inactivity, by making me sensitive to the limits of every method, it relativizes every possibility of every action within me. Whether this consists of spreading overarching general ideas or hanging on to the concrete, the law of facts, the precision of details, or sacrificing some apparently less important thing in the name of efficacy, the thought of opacity saves me from unequivocal courses and irreversible choices.*⁴¹³

Towards negotiated imaginations⁴¹⁴

I have to be(come) intelligible to you; we have to be(come) intelligible to you; we and I suspend our dynamism momentarily; wait, that's only partially true, you make us static so that you can put us on your scale to measure; a scale that is yours; a scale that you brought; what are we made of?

*One speaks, and one speaks for another, to another, and yet there is no way to collapse the distinction between the Other and oneself. When we say "we" we do nothing more than designate this very problematic. We do not solve it. And perhaps it is, and ought to be, insoluble.*⁴¹⁵

We and I have to be(come) knowable; you have to know; we are now locked in this configuration; we and I want to insert the stories of our existence; we tell you in a way that you understand; you testify to our existence; now we both exist; you as the knower and we as the knowable; I think it's a double-bind – indispensable that our stories are included, infuriating that I am reduced, we are reduced; you make us transparent; what are you made of?

When you start from the enunciation and think decolonially, you shall run away from representation, for representation presupposes that there is a world out there that someone is representing. This is a basic assumption of modern epistemology. There is not a world that is represented, but a world that is constantly invented in the enunciation. The enunciation is constituted by certain actors, languages, and categories of thoughts, beliefs, and sens-

412 Ibid.

413 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 192.

414 This section takes its inspiration from Édouard Glissant's essay "Poetics of Relation and Denise Ferreira da Silva's book *Toward a Global Idea of Race*", especially the preface. My attempt here is to draw a connection between "representation" and "transparency thesis", two of the most important pillars of colonial modernity. I see Glissant's proposal of opacity as a way out of the current moment of "crisis of representation" and I offer "negotiated imaginations" as a provisional proposal/framework to do the important subaltern work without reproducing some of the most insidious principles of colonial modernity. See Glissant (1997), 190 and Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

415 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, New York: Verso, 2004), 25.

*ing. The enunciation, furthermore, is never or only enacted to "represent" the world, but to confront or support previous existing enunciations.*⁴¹⁶

I know crises; we have seen many; we see yours too; it's there in the films that you make about us; anxious; reflexive; anxiously reflexive; you want to understand the difference and appreciate it; in your-self-image we are all do-gooders, so that you can also see your self-image as a do-gooder; I can now admit to differences and deny hierarchies; you can admit to our existence within your system and without creating a hierarchy; what is the difference between you and I? you often is an I; what is my scale made of? what is your scale made of? what are our scales made of? can we put an end to the scale itself?

*[There is] no need to hear your [native] voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still the author, authority. I am still [the] colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.*⁴¹⁷

Representation is speaking on someone's behalf; speaking on someone's behalf is produced within the system of the speaker, the speaker is driven by making it intelligible for itself; I feel the pressure to make it intelligible to you; intelligibility is needed for visibility; visibility can lead to inclusion; inclusion is urgent; but urgent produces a bind – necessary but reductive; we and I are in that bind; we, you and I try to represent; representation can be a sum of many singulars but can it ever manifest ethics of plurality?

*It is art because it is the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world and because it is made with the hope and belief that something may be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen may not be there yet. Art is the space in which you behave as if conditions existed for making things you want to happen, happen, and as if everyone agreed with what we suggest, although it may not be like that yet: art is living the future in the present. Art is also making people believe, although we know we may have not much more than the belief itself. Art is to start practicing the future.*⁴¹⁸

Imagination involves thinking about possibilities that yet don't exist; possibilities emerge from practices – practices of storytelling; telling requires listening; listening is available to us all; storytelling is available to us all; imagination is neither fully separable from the "real" nor fully confluent with "dreams"; it is not transparent; it can't be grasped totally or assimilated so easily; it is not in opposition to transparency; its opacity is more generative than merely critiquing representation; it is a site that binds and differentiates – you, we and I; it's where hands weave rather than grabbing; weaves have to negotiate; weavers have to negotiate; negotiation is what makes imagination possible; practice is what makes imagination possible; im-

416 Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonial options and artistic/aesthetic entanglements: An interview with Walter D'Amico", *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2014), 196–212. Quoted from page 198.

417 bell hooks, "Marginality as a Site of Resistance", *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990), 241–3.

418 Tania Bruguera, *Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art)*, 2012, <https://www.taniabruquera.com/reflexions-on-arte-util-useful-art/> (accessed on 02 May 2019).

agination is what makes imagination possible. Is it possible to “focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components”?⁴¹⁹

Queering Diego Marchante “Genderhacker”

Barcelona, May 2021

“Queering” is the gerund form of the word “queer”, and comes from an abbreviation of the phrase “queer reading”.⁴²⁰ It is used as a method that questions heteronormativity and gender binarism, and can be applied to literature, film, or art in order to challenge preconceived ideas about gender and sexuality. While in the beginning the queer method dealt more strictly with gender and sexuality, it quickly expanded, becoming a general term that addresses a great variety of systems of oppression and identity politics, such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, nationality, or disability, among others. In the context of queer theory, queer is something that we do, rather than something that we are (or are not).

The term “queer”, historically, has meant weird, strange, or outside the norm. This insult, which was reappropriated and re-signified in the 1990s by gender- and sexuality-dissident collectives, also started to be used as a verb in gerund form in an attempt to transmit radicality, questioning, and transformation. As a verb form of “queer”, “queering” can refer to the act of taking something and looking at it through lenses that make it appear strange, that displace, disrupt, or disorient it in some way. The act of reading, visualising, or analysing something from a queer perspective is a practice that we tend to call “queerifying”, given that it usually involves making a text, an audiovisual, or even a museum collection somewhat queerer by analysing it from this perspective. There is no true, absolute reading of any cultural production, but rather there are always multiple possible readings, and those who read or observe these productions involve themselves in the meanings that are produced.

Around the decade of the 1940s, in the Anglo-Saxon context, the word queer began to be used to refer to those whose sexuality deviated from the heterosexual norm. The term changed at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, when various groups of LGBTI activists, such as Act Up, Queer Nation, or Lesbian Avengers, led the fight against AIDS. They transformed the meaning of this term, → reclaiming it as a positive indicator and a process of questioning the dominant ideas about what was (and is) considered normal. They also expanded the use of the term as a way of overcoming the assimilationist tendencies that existed within the very activist movement against AIDS, granting the word a new meaning with a more radical character. “Queering”, then, becomes a tool for the social and political subversion of the dominant culture.

As a result of the interactions produced between queer theory and pop culture, this method of analysis has pierced and pierces multiple and diverse cultural phenomena, such as art, literature, mass media, film, fashion, and even music. It is perhaps surprising to discover that the concept of queering played a role in the popular music of the disco culture. In fact, there exists a clear relation between the Stonewall Uprising in New York and the birth of disco. Within the club scene of this era, heterosexual norms dominated the dance floor. As a consequence of

419 Édouard Glissant, “On Opacity”, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 190.

420 Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele, *Queer: Una historia gráfica* [Queer: A graphic history] (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Editorial Melusina, 2017).

queering as a musical phenomenon, the people who went to these events danced by themselves, or same-sex dance partners took to the floor⁴²¹. Nowadays, we can enjoy some of these musical proposals by investigating the work of the author of the well-known text “I Am Not a Lesbian!”⁴²², Terre Thaemlitz, who produced the album *Queerifications & Ruins* (2013) in Japan with sounds that Thaemlitz herself has defined as queer underground deep house.⁴²³

Surfing the web, we can also discover the project *Queering the Map*, a counter-mapping platform generated by the community to digitally archive the LGBTQ2IA+ experience in relation to physical space. The platform provides an interface that allows us to cartographically register the queer experience and visualise it at an international level, an authentic living archive of queer life that reveals the ways in which we are intimately connected.⁴²⁴ Another interesting queer cartographic intervention project is called *Metro LGTBI de Madrid* [“Madrid LGBTI Metro”] (2016), created by activist Javier Sáez, who, upon observing the metro map of the city, realised that it contained no reference to the LGBTQI community; he therefore decided to reimagine the Madrid metro using gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer elements.⁴²⁵

Archives and museums as institutions have not been exempt from these queer interventions. A particularly fruitful example is that of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. An internal working group known as *Queering the Van Abbe* has emerged, which has undertaken projects such as *Queering the Collection*, which intends to transform the museum itself into a more inclusive space, and *Queer Glossary*⁴²⁶ (2015), which aims to propose a terminology related to queer matters from a personal perspective, among many other proposals. For this collective, queerifying the museum means flowing in terms of identity, sexuality, and politics. “The Van Abbemuseum is moving in a queer direction. Connect here to bring to life a queer element within the museum.”⁴²⁷

In my own trajectory as an artist, this methodology appears quite clearly in my project *Gendernaut*,⁴²⁸ a research project and artistic practice that, in a first phase titled *Queering the Software*, questions the ways in which the hegemonic archive is constructed through the design of a plugin that allows for the collective creation of archives through an online interactive multimedia experience. In a second phase, titled *Queering the Archive*, it proposes new ways of visualising narratives based on queer and → transfeminist genealogies through transmedia and performative experiences that conceive of the archive as an interactive live space, free from heteropatriarchal codes, a space inhabited by multiple bodies and subjectivities that put in relation the past, present, and future to come.

421 Tim Lawrence, “Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor”, *Cultural Studies*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group (25 March 2011), 230.

422 Terre Thaemlitz, “I Am Not a Lesbian”, *Comatonse.com* (Japan: Comatonse Recordings, 2000), <https://www.comatonse.com/writings/iamnotalesbian.html> (accessed May 2021).

423 Terre Thaemlitz, “DJ Sprinkles”, *Queerifications & Ruins+* (Japan: Mule music, 2013), <https://soundcloud.com/imamura-yosuke/sets/dj-sprinkles-terre-thaemlitz> (accessed May 2021).

424 *Queering the map*: <https://www.queeringthemap.com>.

425 Javier Sáez, *Metro LGTBIQ de Madrid* (2016), <https://javiersaezdelalamo.wordpress.com>.

426 *Queer Glossary* (2015), <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/queering/archive/> (accessed May 2021).

427 *Ibid.*, *Queering the Van Abbe*.

428 Diego Marchante “Genderhacker”, *Gendernaut. Queering the Archive* (2017–2021), <http://gendernaut.net> (accessed May 2021).

The Forest Curriculum is an itinerant system of knowledge production and circulation that works with academics, film-makers, artists, musicians, activists, students, local stakeholders and non-human agents to produce systems of sharing located knowledges, organised around the issues of a particular location and field of operation. We seek to develop strategies and methods with which to build a collectively habitable future, in tune with a plurality of nature-cultures, rethinking systems of governance and logistics, social and political organisation that have produced and sustain our current → ecological crises. Thinking towards new worlds to come requires the production of new tools and forms of engagement, and new forms of commoning and collectivity, beyond mere critique, with the understanding that our futures must be collectively assembled.

The Forest Curriculum is critical of the prevalent discourse on sustainability under neo-liberal capitalism, which primarily leads to green-washing and the outsourcing of exploitation, which is thus kept out of sight. Indeed, these discourses are often deeply exclusionary, along racial, national, economic, and other lines, as if those who find themselves marginalised in these categories do not in fact deserve to inhabit the future, and are somehow responsible for its slow cancellation. Instead, we seek to develop an alternative vision of possible forms of existence, and of logistical and infrastructural imaginaries. To do so, is to understand the multi-scalar natures of mutual entanglements, and to develop frameworks that allow for more radical redistributions.

It is on this basis that we propose “rewilding” as a strategy, and as one that could animate the conception of practice. Rewilding has long been associated with post-disaster zones – think Chernobyl, Fukushima, or even the DMZ between North and South Korea – and it has also gained currency in the context of the pandemic, with inane, and insidious, posts on social media about “nature healing”, a deeply eco-fascist position. We propose the concept in an entirely different register: for us, it is not a return to a pristine wilderness, but an enfolding of time as it passes through nature. Rewilding recognises ecology’s ever-transformative relationships, the physical environment’s shifting equations with a whole gamut of inter-related species. It moves beyond the domains of toxicity, between the dualities of purity and impurity, and of how we → negotiate them. As Anna Tsing reminds us, the rewilded landscape, languorously expanding with shrubs and creepers, is made up of regions of fertility and growth, and is not one of economy and expansion. Rewilding challenges claims of authenticity, of describing what once truly was, one imagined state that has to be returned to, moving beyond singular, molar notions of identity, of belonging. There is no purity to return to, for there was never a purity to begin with.

We thus propose rewilding as a method that allows us to move toward → non-extractivist relationalities. It de-centres the agency of “Man” – long understood as white, reproductive, landed, capitalist, etc – and opens up space wherein we may understand ourselves always already moved by other agential relationalities. Rewilding as a method moves us away from neo-liberal ideologies of endless growth and opens up space for social, ecological and political possibilities. It is not a simple giving over to nature, of letting the forests “return”, but an act of fundamental re-attunement: of moving beyond building closed extractivist systems, but instead moving in assemblages of human-non-human collectivities. How do we imagine a future of labour when we move with the rhythms of mushrooms? How do we imagine identity and citizenship from the forest? How might we (re-)attune ourselves to

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ecological, p. 162
negotiate, p. 197
nonextractivist, p. 53

the multiple cosmologies that we inhabit and cross over, with their spirits, ghosts, and other non-human beings? It is with these questions and more animating us that we propose to imagine rewilding as a critical curatorial and methodology.

Ruáttvuõttâd To make kin, to become kin Pauliina Feodoroff

Inari, September 2021

Ruáttvuõttâd (to make or become kin in the language Skolt Sámi) could be one of the oldest forms of socialising: making peaceful relations and alliances to avoid the need to destroy the other by finding a common relative, a connection between you and I. *Ruáttvuõttâd* between people, and between people and all the living kinds. A culture that is still in transition from oral to... – Digital? Academic? Bureaucratic? – has faced almost insurmountable hardships in making kin with the other bureaucracies, governmental and industrial entities, and therefore withdrawing from the noise that cannot be avoided, focusing on nurturing relations and alliances with other territories.

“We come in peace, collaborating in coexistence and actively renewing alliances” reflects the commitment to non-violent intentions when meeting new entities, when returning to family territories, when meeting with relatives, *ruátt*. A quote from Sheridan and Longboat has stayed with me for almost two decades, which I first came across when meeting the Snow change co-operative (<https://www.snowchange.org/>) and taking the very first steps to becoming a territorial guardian again:

Onkwehonwe (unassimilated, traditional Haudenosaunee) [...] regard any assumption concerning the existence of autonomous, anthropogenic minds to be aberrations that violate the unity, interrelation, and reciprocity between language and psychology, landscape and mind. The ecology of traditional Haudenosaunee possesses sentience that is manifest in the consciousness of that territory, and that same consciousness is formalised in and as Haudenosaunee consciousness...Onkwehonwe mind everything because everything minds Onkwehonwe. Haudenosaunee minds are composed not just of visible → ecological domains but also by the numinous qualities of those domains that, allowed to mature, express the fullness of traditional territory. Old-growth minds and cultures mature, emerge, and encompass the old growth of their traditional territory.⁴²⁹

Old-growth culture is where I was born, an old-growth that has undergone clear-cuts and open-pit mining, and it is my duty to plant the seeds for old-growth territories to return, in a full sense.

Traditionally, in the Skolt Sámi world there has been a relationship between the ancestral → territory, which could have been used by the same kin for hundreds and hundreds of years, and the alliances among places, animals, and families, which were renewed in cyclic order. A myriad of different practises, policies, and systems directed how the alliances between the families, animals and places were governed and managed, with a living understanding how these unwritten, physical conventions that have lasted for millennia are manifested, such as in the place names our ancestors left behind, covering the whole area of our cultural inhabitance, as introduced, very briefly, below.

429 Joe Sheridan and Rononhiakewen “He Clears the Sky” Dan Longboat, “The Haudenosaunee Imagination and the Ecology of the Sacred”, *Sage Journals*, vol. 9, no. 4 (November 2006), 366.

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ecological, p. 162
territory, p. 269

We have started to re-establish traditional water management practices with regard to the River Njâuddam as a climate change adaptation strategy.

Over the past nine years our team, consisting of reindeer herders, fishermen, scientists, and artists, has gathered traditional knowledge and observations on how the land is changing along with the climate. Combined with weather diaries, catch diaries, interviews, temperature diaries and measurements of the heavy metals in water, we have focused on observations of the introduction of foreign species to the area, analysing the status of known spawning sites and place names as a source of valuable information.



Figure 46: Map (test version 2019) by Stina Aletta Aikio, Pauliina Feodoroff, Kaisu Mustonen, Tero Mustonen, Jelena Porsanger, Hilikka Semenov and Jorma Mattsson.

Special attention has been paid to site-specific macro-vocabularies and traditional legal practices on the river. Based on the observations and analytical work, from the perspectives of both traditional and scientific knowledge, the first physical watershed restorations began four years ago.

We are currently restoring the watershed areas where in the past certain forms of land use – such as logging and burning the land, manmade water flow alterations and the construction of roads and bridges – has led to the loss of spawning sites for salmon, trout and other species. By reintroducing old spawning sites, we are giving the salmon and its relatives more possibilities for survival, even with extreme heat waves.

We can only undo the manmade damage. The river needs to find her own way to cope with changing climate, and we must not interfere with this extremely demanding process. (Figure 46)

In times in which continuity doesn't allow for any constancy within the velocity of the epoch, even the deconstructed *post-* versions of notions such as identity, history, and truth disappear in the flow of information, and things manifest themselves with retrospective references, let's take a look at an old word. The origin of the word *şekil* [ʃekil] is rooted in the Arabic *şakl* شكش [ʃk]. *Şekil* which means shape, form, feature, appearance is *şaklil/şiklil* شکل ل [kll] in Aramaic, which implies completion, shaping, adornment; is *şuklulu* [kll] in Akkadian, which means to complete, whole or completion, fulfilment.

Şekil in Turkish refers to an image or a shape visualising certain mathematical entities or used for demeanour, attitude, path, manner, style or else a particular way through which a concept, idea, or event is differentiated or a whole that is configured. The sound ensemble *ş k l* and all its relevant contexts has given shape to various concepts and words such as *eşkâl* [eʃkal] – depiction, description; *teşekkül* [teʃekkyl] – figuration, configuration; *teşkil* [teʃkil] – organisation, formation; *müşkül* [myʃkyl] – ambiguous; *şâkul* [ʃakyl] – plumb. It is thus worth examining the

ensemble *ş k l* and the related words as mediums or singularities, as the word *şekil* is literally attuned with morphology, both in biology and linguistics.

Şekil with its simplicity and impartiality precedes emojis, signs and symbols. Geometric *şekil* is the name given to 2-D polygons (with a determined space and circumference). However, *şekil* doesn't necessarily require a space or a volume, a letter of an alphabet is *şekil* as well. *Şekil* as an intermediary unit organising a notion or as an incomplete notion, embodies a certain dynamism (transference or morphology), yet it is a feature which is apparent in its relation to here and now (time-space) – in a way that is akin to taking a photograph. A definition assigned to a part of a whole, a shape: a drawn contour. One might say that it is a form which often indicates the content without intervening or embodying it. It is flat and very much on the surface; a signifier that is not interested in the inherent or doesn't investigate it, but rather observes the → *situated*. It exists with connotations that are as much collective (looks, trends) as personal, as abstract as archaic – a pyramid can tell us much about Egypt, but is also an abstraction and geometric shape. A word to meld singularity and multiplicities... It can be used in myriad ways in a lot of contexts and always with its reference to the contemporary – with some possible → *translations* being: image, figure, shape, form, mould, feature, manner, configuration, style, fashion, model, way, format, and mode. With its poetic articulations and its affinity to arousals derived by word of mouth, to slang and metaphors; with it being completely ungraspable, its openness to interpretation, we can say that it is a seductive, shimmering word. For example: "You've pulled a *şekil*" or "What is *şekil*?" More like what's up here, asking the mode, with the insight of the appointed subject's enclosing what's around, as a container. What is the colour, atmosphere, texture, dynamic of the environment? While the effects are affecting one another, it's a state that appears in an unbiased, incomplete fashion that nevertheless suggests completion. If we were to remember the famous line of Bruce Lee, "Be water, my friend", then the carrier of the water can be interpreted as *şekil*, and this suggests total flexibility and fluidity regardless of fixation.

Yet it's also an interesting word that can't be single-handedly covered by an interpenetrating "look", one that is not essentialist yet still contains a reference to physical or conceptual volumes along with conscious or unconscious, known or → *unknown* protocols – a modulation of effects. How can *şekil*, namely *ş k l*, be thought of within the proposed framework of the conference: "subjectivisation"?

Obviously, there is a particular perspective in question here. Movement: displacement, shapeshifting; estimates of time, space and moment are integral to this perspective. What are the (sub)(ob)jects that are all along shapeshifting through potential articulations, attitudes, positions, and situations that can only be thought of in relationship to systems + conditions? How can we think of these (sub)(ob)jects especially via multiple historicities via multiple configurations – what are our resistance and/or support points considering our modalities, ways, manners, forms, of voicing, of being actant? "Events are interconnected and they are cyclical processes; we are in a web. And our singularity is also in the web; thousands of chemical reactions live through simultaneous processes within our cells."⁴³⁰ In this context, how can we monitor the involvement and effects of such a sound ensemble? Thinking that language is very much like a biological or a mathematical abstract zone that is always being constructed and reconstructed, I take the act of uttering a word here as if we are on an irregular playing field where shapes shift, bend, meld, etc., and boundaries are → *negotiated*.

430 Deniz Gül, *There is life between us (+transparency)* (Istanbul: Notonly Publications, 2020).

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situated, p. 148
translations, p. 153
unknown, p. 245
negotiated, p. 197

In order to portray such a perspective perhaps it's important to say that my practice is very much shaped by an object-oriented ontology, and I deal with objects, space and time and thus language. How does the body remove itself from a given frame, a construct, a repertoire? By displacing? By breaking the continuity it is in?... Take movement, which only ever corresponds to its → temporality. The inconsistency and uncertainty of the body cannot be separated from its movement. To give an example, and this is from Timothy Morton, one morning you wake up in another city, in another house. The objects that surround you are → unknown and unrecognisable. The door handle, refrigerator, the location of the window, the sunlight's slant into the room... Morton says, "Then you realise how much your world was just a sensual object. Then it strikes you that your regular world was itself a kind of displacement of certain real object(s). The sense of place is already a displacement."⁴³¹

Let's not take the word literally and discuss it further. We must elaborate the ways that a concept provides, dropping the frame of dominance, power and hierarchy. Mohammed El-Kurd, interviewed by CNN in the midst of Israel's mounting violence, illegitimate occupation and ethnic displacement of Palestinians (May 2021), "displaces" the interviewer's biased, inaccurate framing via the subject that he is. The way he embodies himself as a subject, and the subjectivity of the Palestinian people along with it, is through the way of language. He articulates and changes the narrative when in fact he and his people are the ones that are displaced, and/or dispossessed in the most brutal ways. He corrects the interviewer, stating "this is not eviction, this is a war crime". When the CNN interviewer asks El-Kurd: "Do you support the violent protests that have erupted the → solidarity with you? And other families that are in your position right now?", El-Kurd answers: "Do you support the violent dispossession of me and my family?" There then comes a pause, three-seconds of → silence. The CNN interviewer rephrases her question: "I'm just asking if you support the protests that are taking place in support of your family?" El-Kurd repeats the lapse, a second of silence, and answers: "I support. I support popular protests taking place against ethnic cleansing, yes." The actual brutality of displacement is displaced once and for all with this speech-act.

Objects/subjects/words are not in time and space; objects are predicates, they "place" and "time" things. In other words, they fabricate time and space. Objects/subjects/words are adjustments of associations in language. They are not complete occurrences, but ongoing events and interactions.

We've discussed the word *şekil* in the section above. Now let's take a closer look at the word *şakul*: A thread with a weight attached to it that shows the direction of gravity when it's suspended. A reference point... Another word, *şekala* [*ʃekala*] – meaning "weight". This Arabic word is derived from the Aramaic/Assyrian word *šāḳūl* ܫܐܩܘܠ – heavy. It has the same root with the Hebrew verb *šāḳal* ܫܐܩܠ – weighing. What's interesting here is to see how the object, termed *şakul*, and the attribute for that object, *heavy*, and the act that comes along with it, *weighing*, are attuned in such an ontology. We are moving around a noun, an adjective, and a verb, as well as around *ş k l*.

Predicates and nouns do not switch just like that. Who is What and What is Who? "Arabic is a highly flexional language, in that the same root can lead to various

431 Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic, Objects, Ontology, Causality* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2013).

forms according to its context."⁴³² Arabic script usually does not encode short vowels. Diacritics (short vowels), placed either above or below the root indicate "the phonetic information associated with each letter, which helps in clarifying the sense and meaning of the word. A simple Arabic word could mean flag, knowledge, teach etc."⁴³³ The meaning of the word is derived from the context of the sentence. It is as if the word is a unit that is a composition, a matter or an object – the complex morphology is the analyses of possible morpho-syntactic features (i.e., part of speech, gender, number, time, person, etc.) This introduction to Arabic is my departure point, moving towards *ş k l*'s Turkish variants. The Latin alphabet was introduced to our language at the beginning of the 20th century, and in what follows I present some words with this Arabic root *ş k l* (we do not have root system our alphabet) in Turkish.

Such events that could be made by switching the letters' positions in a root here converts to fixed words (bodies). We might as well take *ş k l* as our sub/ob/ject, and I'm proposing a concept to follow with no regards to any linguistic rule. It is a visual abstraction *per se*. Sounding the words with the indicated vowels, the meaning is not that slippery nor ambiguous. *Müşkül* as the state in question doesn't reveal its *şekil*, it is yet an undefined realm with challenges and obstacles. How about *işkil* [*ijkil*]? Suspicion, even delusion... We proceed without fixating on the narrative nor the description. And so *eşkâl* is a figuration that covers all the details that might reveal the perpetrator in a crime scene, while *teşkil* or *teşekkül* are investigations of structuring, organisation, and systems. *Şükela* is more like a slang term suggesting that everything came together in the greatest possible way – don't assume it is in any official Turkish glossary.

However, it is still possible to pierce through such terms and see a pattern. Now take *ş k l* as a guidance, pattern, trace, and feedback loop, as resistance, as support and so on. The truth is: We never see the object. We see the light altered by the object. "In object-oriented ontology (ooo), things are almost encrypted. Footprints are patterns where absence, loss, emptiness glows in a realistic magic that contains an archaeological past. The mystery of things is ontological."⁴³⁴ It's as if the words are somewhat permeable and if we drop the pattern which we recognise as *ş k l* we would strangely find ourselves in the layered/over-imposed realm of what José Esteban Muñoz would call → queer utopia or queer futurism, where we might take a look at ephemera as evidence – traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things.

I mentioned earlier the notion of how, rather than what – this encompassing of both how and what, taking the word as an intermediary unit organising a notion or an incomplete notion, embodying a dynamism yet also as a feature which is apparent in its relation to here and now and also then and there – in a way that is akin to taking a photograph. While discussing our subjectivities we can imagine humans experiencing things from a certain position, as in the photographic imagery of things. Of course, photographs are everywhere. There is never just the one photograph. Like the atoms that weave the universe, images are subject to motion at

432 Ines Turki Khemakhem, Salma Jamoussi, Abdelmajid Ben Hamadou, "Arabic morpho-syntactic feature disambiguation in a translation context", *Proceedings of SSST-4, Fourth Workshop on Syntax and Structure in Statistical Translation, COLING 2010*, Beijing (August 2010), <https://aclanthology.org/W10-3808.pdf> (accessed June 2021).

433 Rehab Alnefaie, Aqil M. Azmi, "Automatic Minimal Diacritization of Arabic Texts", 3rd *International Conference on Arabic Computational Linguistics*, Dubai (5–6 November 2017), <https://daneshyari.com/article/preview/6902092.pdf> (accessed June 2021).

434 Gül (2020).

→
temporality, p. 256
unknown, p. 245
solidarity, p. 65
silence, p. 168

→
queer, p. 200

all times, in all directions. As subjects with our undefined, indeterminate zones, we become screens of this translucent photograph of the whole.

Suggesting simplifying the word to its root body in this example, in order to sense what's really happening, takes us out from the trapped subjectivities within the limiting normative time and present. The theme "subjectivisation" can thus be discussed in ways through the words that are sampled above, within the axes of modality, affect and perspective. I'm proposing *ş k l* as a totality with unfixed, slippery boundaries and models that don't subjectify the individual, but take the individual within assemblages and anomalies that can be traced along with dynamisms of "here and now"s and "then and there"s, so to speak.

Some parts of this text were written by the author in English and some in Turkish, with the latter translated to English by Gülşah Mursaloğlu.

Vulnerability

And the *travesti* community of Virgen de la Puerta Elisa Fuenzalida

Madrid, June 2021

*I will hear → the dead speak
So the world is not as it is
Though I have to kiss a living face
To live tomorrow yet.
— Washington Delgado, To Live Tomorrow⁴³⁵*

It's been more than a year since I first looked into *travesti*⁴³⁶ memories with a researcher's eye, wandering around the atelier that the artist Javi Vargas Sotomayor rents in the middle of the noisiest side of central Lima. Those streets, once sparkled with cinemas and cantinas that hosted all kinds of clandestine bodies and desires had been totally transformed due to hygienisation policies and showed a renewed face in which only the street vendors known in Peru as *ambulantes* resist the erasure of any sign that contradicts the postcard image of a "decent", "clean" and above all "safe" city to visit and invest in.

Some of those cinemas have turned into ultraconservative evangelical churches that nowadays are at the front of the anti-LGTB+ and women's rights movement, and the cantinas are nowhere to be found. Only one unusual, singular spot remains almost exactly the same. In the middle of Sebastián Barranca street, there is a car mechanic workshop in which close to thirty years ago an effigy of the Virgen de la Puerta was placed. During the 1990s that particular neighbourhood, one of the poorest – if not the poorest – of Lima, damaged by AIDS, tuberculosis, hunger, drugs, unemployment and severe poverty in general, also became the home of a unique community of almost fifty *travesti* women. They fully inhabited a few buildings and shared rooms and bathrooms, worked the nearby streets, played volleyball for the amusement and entertainment of their neighbours, escaped the police, received the visits of NGO volunteers and interventors, opened hair saloons, shaped their bodies, practiced their faith, got sick and died.

It is difficult to think of times when old age has been more in the spotlight than these. And it's difficult to think of a community more excluded to the possibility,

435 Washington Delgado, *Para Vivir Mañana* (Lima: Casa de la Cultura de Perú, 1959).

436 Editor's note: The many situated aspects of the term *travesti* were beautifully set out by Miguel A. López in the first edition of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 84–6.

even the right, to age than these *travesti* women, whose life expectancy only recently rose to about 45 years. In fact, it is hard to think of a community more marginalised and erased in history than *travesti* women, and thus it is easy and somehow understandable that when they are considered is usually through the filter of victimhood, as agonised beings and subjects of suffering. It is through the impeccable work of Giuseppe Campuzano,⁴³⁷ who became enchanted and absorbed with so much respect and awe for these ways of creating gender from precarity, that we were able to grasp some of the radical → *imagination* and libidinal impulse that characterised them. In the year 2003, through crucial conceptualisation works such as *Museo Travesti* and *Saturday Night Fever* by Giuseppe Campuzano "Giu", *travesti* bodies became visible as a disruptive force in the generation of normalities, an aesthetic metaphor and a symbol. Also the same year, the murder of eight *travesti* in Las Gardenias bar by the guerrilla group MRTA was registered in the Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación.⁴³⁸ It was a historic but still limited gesture that acknowledged the hate element of the crime, but left the gender of the victims unrecognised, so their names were given as masculine in the book. But as fundamental as such events were to get closer to *travesti* lives, what still remains invisible is the complex weaving of relations of → *care* in which through communitarian bonds an ethics started to develop and nourish today's → *LGBT+* and → *feminist* movements with new sets of tools. Those relations were deeply rooted, as I came to understand over months of listening to the testimonies of friends, allies and survivors, in a specific dimension of the body that had only been observed at this point of *travesti* memories (at least in Peru) with regard to negative impact. Vulnerability has mostly been considered as a ground that enables victimhood, but in the Virgen de la Puerta this inevitable human condition was so intensified by exclusion and many other forms of patriarchal and economic violence that it was turned by those trans and *travesti* women into the very foundation of an ethics of care in which their community development was grounded. Death, illness and hunger became nodes that were intertwined and dignified by a complex web of collaborations that assumed the processes of accompaniment, contention and both affective and economic support that the state and the biological family denied them. An ethics of → *interdependency* in the core of catastrophe, as my fellow colleagues in Reina Sofia Museum referred to the numerous autonomous neighbourhood actions that intervened in the social and economic crashes that occurred in Lavapiés neighbourhood, one that has some of the highest unemployment and migration rates in Madrid.

Those Latin-American, *travesti* memories of how vulnerability can spark desire instead of fear when it is inhabited communally are crucial for a Global North so constructed from safety narratives and promises of invulnerability, and the subjects that generate from it, all of them cracking and crumbling when faced with the materiality and interrelated character of an existence that was for so long neglected in favour of a supposed horizon of freedom without responsibility. The nature of this libidinal impulse has more to do with realism than with optimism, as Alba Rico noted in his wonderful article "Contra el optimismo". To be able to acknowledge our own vulnerability in others, and others' vulnerability in ourselves, the loss, mourning, and ruins, and still find the cracks in which to create the conditions for making the world liveable.⁴³⁹

437 Editor's note: Refer to Giuseppe Campuzano's work, published in *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 84–6.

438 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru.

439 Santiago Alba Rico, "Contra el optimismo", *CTXT* (9 February 2021), <https://ctxt.es/es/20210201/Firmas/34995/Santiago-Alba-Rico-tribuna-optimismo-ingenuidad-pesimismo-humanidad-historia.htm> (accessed June 2021).

In these lines of thought I'd like to address and hopefully reveal how all these territories and subjects built upon the fiction of individual freedom and self-sufficiency have a political responsibility, but also a chance to relieve themselves from that delusional and self-destructive point of reference, to withdraw by assuming vulnerability as a frame from which "to face with dignity and without cynicism the difficult times to come. Times that, by the way, started long time ago"⁴⁴⁰, because lockdown, surveillance, the pandemic, and isolation have been familiar to the *travesti* and many others in recent times. I propose to engage in the communal inhabitation of vulnerability through memory in order to enable a wider, more inclusive → *After*. For that purpose, I will tackle what vulnerability means in the process of the reconstruction of the Virgen de la Puerta community through the dimensions of body, desire, time (After-life) and archive.

Body

Introducing my term and taking the cis-hetero European male as a starting point during the *Subjectivisation II* seminar was a deliberate → *choice*, as it is by far the subject that historically has been the most supported by the narratives of self-sufficiency that the pandemic has at least shaken. Who, to begin with, is this man? Is it the young Spanish migrant who delivers hamburgers at -15 C° in Berlin? It is the medicalised academic on the verge of a mental breakdown? The single guy who saw his uncomplicated inability for commitment turn into an endless nightmare of isolation? During the long, cold and dark lockdown of Berlin it became clear that some had better chances to "escape" from the vulnerability of their bodies and minds than others. While most of the people performing cognitive jobs were frequently → *travelling* to Mallorca to take a break from the depressing landscape of home, the ones whose economic activities relied on the material force of their bodies couldn't dare do the same. Cleaners, delivery drivers, caregivers, and so on stayed in this environment, stripped of all the things that make repetitive service work routines tolerable.

The first time I focused on working class masculinity and its relationship with embodied experience the young men interviewed considered themselves apolitical, showed extreme confidence and trusted in their own ability to face a world that didn't seem to hold any uncertainties for them. The pandemic upset those frames of reference to a point in which it is possible to spot a late but rather abrupt loss of "innocence" and a fall into a type of embodied existence that had been only familiar to trans, → *queer*, migrants, imprisoned people and sometimes women. Interviewed again after the first lockdown those same men were quite different from their first testimonies. The narrative that prevails now is one of betrayal.

It is interesting how this concept also surfaced when I spoke about gender construction and affirmation with the Peruvian *travesti* women of Virgen de la Puerta. According to their testimonies, to embrace a position systematically made vulnerable, such as the feminine, having been "granted" the privilege of being born on the dominant side, was considered the ultimate betrayal that called for a cautionary punishment. It is not only that the → *disidentification* processes reveal the cultural and then questionable character of dominance in masculinity, but perhaps even more important the unveiling of the fragility that constitutes its embodied manifestation and that is perhaps preferable to address in different conditions and from a different set of values than those prevalent in male communities.

440 Ibid.

"Our bodies speak, tell stories," Lalys said to me after recounting an exhaustive history of death, illness and transmisogynistic violence, from AIDS and experimental body modelling procedures to exclusion from health systems, and from hate crimes to torture and state terrorism. And it is precisely in that enunciative subject, the body, its fragile, ephemeral and vulnerable character, that a communal bond is generated, as Belisa added later: "We weren't a community, but rather a fragmented and disperse numbers of individuals, but AIDS changed everything." In the context of the total lack of health care given to the *travesti* community, embracing their vulnerability paradoxically became their basis to ethical and affective survival, although life became something perhaps different from what the capitalist, patriarchal and colonial narratives had built around the term, something that means a lot more than biological permanence and that happens in this existence and in the afterlife. During the seminar, the term "withdrawal" was also mentioned and briefly discussed and posed as an interpellation to all those subjects of dominance and self-sufficiency narratives, but I find the term "surrender" more expansive and richer in political possibilities because it breaks the tension and creates a digression that is not passive but an invitation to operate through a different form of interaction with norms and the sense of self and other. In the *travesti* world volleyball matches, for example, were spaces where this type of surrender opened a crack for a peripheral approach and sensibility towards beauty, joy or even survival. According to team names as outrageous as The Infected versus The Terminally Ill, the players were all already losers in the game of a normative life, only that they weren't playing that game anymore. They were indeed sick and stigmatised, but above all they looked out for each other, they weren't alone. The invitation to surrender I am posing here is aimed at the dimension of the self that is still in denial of its individual vulnerability and how it always depends on others.

"Life springs from the ultimate resignation",⁴⁴¹ Polanyi said. Has this kind of sensibility been revealed to white European working class men since the re-acknowledgement of their embodied existence in which the lockdown pushed them? It would be too soon to know. But for them or any other subject or group of subjects that are willing to turn that sense of betrayal I referred to earlier into creative surrender, desire and hope, the register and exploration of the memories of the *travesti* community of Virgen de la Puerta aims to contribute to the collective navigation of that shift with an impressive set of ethical tools.

Motherhood

John Berger wrote that there is a big part of pain that cannot be shared. But the desire to share the pain can be shared. And from that action inevitably arises resistance. There are many threads that intertwine in those spaces of resistance, all of them come from a wound, a loss or an absence that is reshaped into contention and creates corridors of sense when shared. I'd like to focus on one that already emerged during our seminar, which is the conformation of support systems with an affective basis, and how they transform into a common politics that expands the notion of motherhood.

As expulsion from the biological family and the safety of the first home at an early age was and is still a common condition from which *travesti* women face the basic questions of life and death, the development of alternative bonds and spaces of → *care* is crucial. → *Mothers* or *Madres* in the *travesti* vocabulary are experienced

441 Karl Polanyi and Robert M. MacIver, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), 145.

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after, p. 160
choice, p. 174
travelling
queer, p. 200
disidentification, p. 188

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care, p. 92, 122
mothers, p. 194

figures that have accomplished an aspirational gender construction or minimal financial stability. Both conditions work as shields that push transgender hate and violence, hunger and illness further away. So, *travesti* motherhood encompasses not only emotional support but also a pedagogical role that focuses fundamentally on the transmission of the skills of feminisation and becoming “streetwise, including the arts of sex work. Feminisation, especially extreme feminisation, was essential in patriarchal and transmisogynist environments: any feature that could disclose masculinity in a feminised body could lead to a hate crime, so the incorporation of feminisation strategies into the less experienced *travesti* subjectivities reduced danger considerably, giving instead a place for a chosen vulnerability that was collectively debated and built. Making one’s own kin might not be the same as biological survival, but it is definitely a way of transcending senseless material permanence.

The role of a mother could be ephemeral and multiple within the community. Some of the mothers took care of twenty girls and were also taken care of by them. Other mothers took care of a single young *travesti* girl all their lives, in every sense. But most remarkable, perhaps, many *travesti* women were mother figures to children outside the *travesti* community: the sons and daughters of neighbours, nephews and nieces, siblings, and so on.

Annie Bungeroth, photographer who recorded the daily lives of the girls intermittently for a period of five years, pointed out that the general conditions of the neighbourhood were marginal, to a point in where there was no place for internal fracture. This level of exposure to all forms of disaster made very clear that mutual support was the only non-self-destructive → choice for the *travesti* to squeeze all possible well-being and value from their short life expectancies. This peculiar truce between prejudices in the middle of an ultra-conservative society gave shelter to some of the first *travesti* matriarchs and mothers, and gave them the chance to create their own spaces and reproduce the care that they had received by offering it to young, less experienced *travesti* girls not only from Lima, but from the whole country.

The women rented small rooms and shared bathrooms in old buildings that became *travesti* microcosmos, worked the streets during the night and participated very actively in the community, as noted before, both caring for others but also as devoted worshippers of the neighbourhood’s protector, the Virgen de la Puerta. After their daily errands and before heading to their street corners at night they gathered in Candy’s beauty salon to pray, attend informative workshops on STD prevention, fix their hair, nails, make up and spread the news about who was sick, who had not been eating and who had a problem with the police. Mothers usually stayed in the beauty salon performing as coordinators of all upcoming and corresponding actions. Taking into account how badly AIDS, tuberculosis and transmisogynist violence hit the collective, an important part of this news had to do with someone entering the terminal phase of a disease or being severely wounded.

Death, especially early death, was an inevitable dimension of the communal bonds in the Sebastian Barranca neighbourhood, and mutual care and attention became the strongest tool of the *travesti* to push it farther and expand the → territory of life, although not necessarily in its biological, individual sense. As much as collective action and social economies played a fundamental role in improving the conditions of the community, and NGO volunteers and LTGTB+ activists introduced tests, medicines and food donations, life expectancy still barely rose above 35, and thus

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choice, p. 174
territory, p. 269

a 45-year-old *travesti* woman would be considered to be in her third stage of life. What life came to mean in this community had more to do with a sense of dignity that evolves from the ability to be capable to give to others what you barely have, and the determination to create a world of value for bodies neglected, rejected and diminished in the world of patriarchal and capitalist norms. To express this in better words, I’d like to quote Santiago Alba Rico again:

*Is this which unites, at an intersection of paradoxical contempt, capitalism and patriarchy: for capitalism devalues the worker who values all commodities and patriarchy devalues the worker who values all bodies. Therefore, if we want to preserve wealth and human dignity (whose source is a combination of work and time) we must wage a double and simultaneous fight in favour of economic independence and reciprocal dependence. How much is a human worth? The time we have worked on it. That’s what we call ‘love’.*⁴⁴²

“After”-life

In the course of our *Subjectivisation II* seminar there were many moments in which I felt the need to re-think my take on “vulnerability” through the prism of my colleagues’ contributions. Although a particular term felt crucial for the sake of a wider, diachronic perspective. → After, as Jesús Carrillo pointed out, breaks the cycle of the perpetual present that “post-” ensured, “giving place to a different kind of play”. We won’t refer to such condition as “new”, avoiding not only the colonial implications and resonances of that term but also acknowledging that “after” was a pre-existing dimension of the future, crafted in the bodies and subjectivities that are persistently exposed to a sort of vulnerability that the “post” ensures to have overcome. “After” Carrillo continues, “was surely already in the hearts, → imaginations and experience of migrants, refugees, of many women, youth, trans and → queer people who were not allowed to have a proper life ‘yet’...”

The *travesti* and trans women of Virgen de la Puerta were certainly excluded from normal existence and not given the chance to enjoy this kind of life, so instead practised a form of re-existence based on the developing and sharing of the skills needed to face vulnerability communally. As noted before, death played a major role in these exchanges but was not by any means the most radical point of that condition. What happened “after” was instead, meaning not only the funeral services but also the preservation of the gender of the deceased in their bodies, epitaphs, headstones and memory. Body profanation of *travesti* and trans bodies was and still is a common practice, usually perpetrated by member of the biological family that didn’t accepted the transition of their relative. This manifested through the cutting of the hair and nails, dressing the body in a man’s suit and sometimes even the placement of a fake moustache. The *travesti* community turned the “end” element of death into an “After-life” by making sure not only that those bodies were kept feminine, but also remembered with their chosen names and nicknames.

The “After”-life became in this way in a space of → care in which vulnerability was acknowledged and attended to through diverse means. To illustrate this point I’d like to refer to Jesús Carrillo’s contribution once again when he speaks about the “libidinal economies of the “after”. Sexual work and collective funding such as the popular *polladas* (parties funded with pre-sold tickets for a meal of grilled chicken and beer) played an important part in the composition of economic ephemeral structures. Regarding sex work, those commitments were cross-border, due to the

442 Santiago Alba Rico, “Adiós a las cosas: tiempo, tecnología, capitalismo.” *El Ecologista*, vol. 76 (2013), 60–2.

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After, p. 160
imaginations, p. 197
queer, p. 200
care, p. 92, 122

Figure 47: Annie Bungeroth, "Lorena 'La Piurana' with Alejandra", photograph, *La Virgen de la Puerta* series, mid-1990s. Courtesy of the artist. Online access: anniebungeroth.com/la-virgen-de-la-puerta.

constant flow of migration of *travesti* and trans women from Peru to countries such as Italy (principally), France, Germany and Spain. Of course, *polladas* moved a modest amount of cash that contributed enough to cover the burials, while sex work funded gender reassignment, activism, house building, other migration processes and advanced gender studies. The conditions of vulnerability within which migrant *travesti* sex workers survived in and from Europe are yet to be adequately incorporated in my research, but the fundamental role of migrant money and how it found and gave life in such neglected territories needs to be emphasised.

In the Virgen de la Puerta community, the "After"-life was the space in which the feminine name that was forbidden in regular life met time, future and memory, implying that the deceased did not become foreigners to the communitarian exchanges and responsibilities that took place there and that those still alive recognised themselves in them. For that, not even those thrown into the ultimate "after" were left behind – on the contrary, that's where the truncated pasts of *travesti* and trans women were restored to posterity.

Archive

How do we collect and organise truncated pasts? How can we narrate vulnerability not only from a content perspective but acknowledge it in the format of discussion and activation? As the archive we are developing is taking the form of a podcast, the question of working with sound holds implications that encompass space and time. Space is a decentred form of inhabiting something that allows the vulnerable regions to activate in such a manner that evokes a sense of interwoven permanence and loss similar to the kind that can be found in the presence of ruins. The idea is to pursue the creation of places for a conspiracy "where whispers are audible", as Jesús Carrillo has invited us to do. This means we consider gaps and empty spots as territories too. Do they mean abandonment or just secrecy? What does the impossibility or the difficulty of exploring them tell us about the environment where they're located? In them, tiny traces of desire or mourning that transcended don't compete for attention, they just become visible like ghosts do, for those who are willing to see them.

We tried to keep some distance from the digital logic of false fidelity and the erasure of pauses, and instead searched for resources that allowed us to expose the fragile, ephemeral and unstable quality, not only of the memories being recorded, but also of the subject itself. Our goal was to create the atmosphere of a séance, in which just as pauses were vindicated, so silence, repetition, loops, echoes, delays and other forms of de-structuralisation and re-structuralisation of sound became a language for re-existence. Our role, both researching and crafting the format of the sound archive, became similar to that of a medium.

No → territory has so many disappeared socialists and activists as Latin America, → the dead whose mourning does not end and has not even begun. The historian José Carlos Agüero asks himself if bodies in the context of memory, violence and the process of being made vulnerable are just remains, relics, or something central that we should reflect on.⁴⁴³ The question is how to approach such vulnerable matter as these violated, reduced and marginalised bodies that manifest almost as exhalations or pieces of memorabilia. For us, ghosts are definitely subjects and, as they

443 José Carlos Agüero, *Los rendidos: Sobre el don de perdonar* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2015).



inhabit in the dislocations of time, the space we generate for them to be hosted in the sound archive was conceived within those parameters.

The visual aspect of our research on the *travesti* community of Virgen de la Puerta was based on a series of images captured by photographer Annie Bungeroth intermittently over a period of five years. The relationship between Bungeroth and the *travesti* women of the neighbourhood started with an encounter with Lorena “La Piurana”, an iconic character in the artist’s photographs and a central figure in Giuseppe’s Campuzano *Museo Travesti* counter-narrative project. In our case, we have chosen a picture of Lorena with Alejandra, the little girl she babysits and who called her mother. (Figure 47) In the photo Lorena has her arms wide open, so open that is almost like she is also embracing the photographer and the person who is looking at the picture, or rather – the future. Her eyes are closed. The girl is clinging to her neck, smiling at the camera. The caption is the visual definition of openness, of letting oneself be vulnerable and at the same time protective, which is in fact the core theme of the entire Virgen de la Puerta community, a fragile but still effective balance between acceptance, negotiation and struggle.

The rest of the visual corpus that Annie built is a diverse mix that represents everyday life in the Sebastian Barranca neighbourhood, from the community’s regular prayer gatherings and devotional ceremonies and processions, to celebration, migration and grooming rituals. AIDS and suffering are a major and important part of this archive, specially from the point of view of those being photographed. One of the things that Annie insisted on was the way Lorena, Candy, Cheyla, La Chunga and the others perceived the documentation process as their most important achievement, in times of illness and death, particularly. In fact, Annie was one of the first people who were called every time a girl entered a terminal phase of their condition. There is a specific image in which La Chunga is sucking a lollipop, sitting next to a dying woman with catheters in her arm. (Figure 48) For them, to know that such losses and pain were being followed and captured meant also a step into the “After”-life and beyond death. Even if the bodies were impossible to recover, there was proof that they didn’t die alone or abandoned, that they were poor and hopeless but still had the ability to be kind, generous, and engaged.

Every year that Annie went back to Peru and to the neighbourhood of Sebastian Barranca, another girl had been murdered or entered the final stages of AIDS or tuberculosis so her original plan to film a documentary became less and less plausible, until the death of Lorena in which everything about the original plan became more or less pointless. They had become such good friends. Lorena cared for Annie’s vulnerability, as a white European woman in one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods of Peru, and Annie, as she says, saved Lorena’s teeth by convincing her to stop using them as bottle openers. Lorena had told Annie that the documentary would be the most important thing that she would do in her life, so we tried to do justice to this. She is the guardian angel and *patrona* of our research, and for her example, inspiration and legacy of resistance in tenderness and → care we are truly and forever thankful.

Is it possible then to rebuild a subject conceived in a systemic condition of vulnerability and erasure? We think not. The bodies don’t come back, and we decided not to hide this impossibility and instead generate a tool that zooms into the mechanisms that intervene in our present relations to make them so violent, and an instrument that works at the same time as a compendium of strategies and re-

sources conceived in such conditions of fragility to show that even when a → repair is not possible there is a chance to improve the present.

If we succeeded in fulfilling these expectations then we’d be also reflecting on the vulnerability of memory and the insufficiency of the archive itself, its romanticisation and asymmetries involved in the collective → process of mediation between the experience of the other and what matters to the researcher, and also that deficiency, that limitation shouldn’t be hidden either. On the contrary, it should be noted that our role as mediums is exposed as failed. As Susan Sontag said: “Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking. Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. [...] To make peace is to forget. To reconcile, it is necessary that memory be faulty and limited.”⁴⁴⁴

Constituencies

The notion of constituencies and the concept of constituent museums employs the L'Internationale confederation from the start, in an attempt to redefine the role of the museums and their perceptions of the public/audiences/users as their constituent parts with regard to both artist and museum workers alike. Museums collaborate with political agitators that use art as a vessel to communicate contested social and historical premises with a visual language that aims at making a structural impact on society. Constituencies are plural; they grow, develop, change, mutate, hybrid, overlap, separate, cluster, recombine and re-align. Constituencies are always in flux, depending on their existence upon their relationships with one another. As such, constituencies are never givens – but always something to be struggled over and negotiated.

The seminar took place at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, from 7 to 9 April 2022.

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At the Moderna galerija, we have asked ourselves what it is that constituencies actually constitute. Seeing that we work within a very small community – Ljubljana only has a population of 300,000 – it is virtually impossible to think about the institution other than in relation to other agents in the community [...] We think about our community in terms of a biotope of sorts, in which every species, every agent, regardless of their status, is important for the survival of the community. For this reason, it is important to think about the institution both as just one of many constituencies, and as a space co-created by others. – Zdenka Badovinac, at the “Constituencies”, Glossary of Common Knowledge seminar, John Moores University, 2016.

The *biotope*⁴⁴⁵ of which Zdenka spoke so enthusiastically in Liverpool in 2016 has since been destroyed in Slovenia, and the conditions for its species/constituencies to live, to flourish and to form an assemblage with other species/constituencies have been altered.

At the Liverpool seminar, the introduction also read: “Constituencies are always in flux, depending for their existence upon their relationships with one another. As such, constituencies are never givens – but always something to be struggled over and → negotiated.”

But is this kind of reasoning sustainable? What about the responsibility/→ care/→ solidarity for other species/constituencies of a biotope/community when one species finds itself in a difficult situation? How to regenerate a damaged biotope/community, and also – with whom? In this short contribution some of these dilemmas – also observed in light of the current situation at the Moderna galerija – will be posed as open questions.

As Yaiza Hernandez put it some years ago: a million symposia about the constituent museum do not make a constituent museum. It requires instead a wholesale exercise of a radical, instituting → imagination. While I agree with Yaiza, I think now we are in a situation where the exercise she mentioned needs to be translated into practice: concrete proposals and tools thought of as practice.

One of the consequences of the drastic political and social changes in Slovenia which started in 2020 was an aggressive turn to national culture, conservatism and populism, resulting in removing critical voices from institutions and in politically motivated appointments of the directors in those institutions, including the Moderna galerija. This has been, in short, a time of attempted “silencing”, with the systematic destruction of democracy and the rule of law, attacks on the media as well as the dissolution of the welfare state – all of which has deeply affected the entire cultural habitat. But this new right conservative cultural politics has not been directly enforcing the “nationalistic sentiment”, they have learned their lesson and are actually smarter than that, but rather has demanded that art and culture institutions be “neutral”, i.e. preventing any criticism, dissent, or positioning within a museum and keeping the status quo of an art institution as a colonial institution of exclusion, also in relation to the constituents. Similar to what Laura Raicovich reports on in her book *Culture Strike. Art Museums in an Age of Protests*. In the book Raicovich deals with this question of “neutrality” in museums and how it has be-

445 *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 162–7.

come difficult for museums to remain relevant in this context, noting that neutrality is just a veil for wielding power: this is the status quo that requires resistance.⁴⁴⁶

In case of Slovenia and also the Moderna galerija the consequences of the drastic changes in cultural politics were as follows.

Conditions of cultural production have worsened

On the one hand, the independent cultural scene (including the many NGOs) and cultural workers/artists have lost the majority of the financial resources needed to continue their work. It is important to know that in Slovenia cultural activities have always depended on the state budget (a remnant from socialism) more than on other sources of funding, which are scarce, just some funds from the European Union and in some cases municipal funding. There is basically no art market in Slovenia, and no private sponsors/donors for art. So it can be said that the issue of how to overcome the division between art production and wage labour became not only a survival strategy in recent years but a political problem, one that has been especially accentuated during the last two years (with the political changes and the COVID pandemic).

On the other hand, though, the national institutions’ budgets (like that at the Moderna galerija) have increased, but it is important to know that all the new directors of these institutions were politically installed in the last two years, so these budget increases are of course also a political decision. The logic of the Ministry of Culture is that NGOs would not receive direct funding for their programmes as before, but their activities would instead be “funded” via the national institutions (museums, etc.). These institutions would themselves decide which NGOs/independent organisations they wanted to collaborate with. So we are talking about a new and rather dangerous dependent relationship between the institutions (museums) and NGOs based on “ideological appropriateness” and at the same time silencing or even expunging of critical voices not only from these institutions, but also from the independent cultural scene. According to the logic of the current cultural policymakers, these new “enforced” networks would play the role of the new constituents of a particular institution.

Artistic autonomy has been put under question

The question of autonomy is again closely related to the conditions of cultural production. Meaning if you are not ideologically acceptable according to the Ministry of Culture criteria, then the financial flows are limited or cut altogether. So these include critical voices, opponents of the current politics, and the “wrong” research or → exhibition topics (for example Yugoslavia/socialism). We have also seen numerous cases of historical revisionism lately, for example in the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia (mainly dealing with the World War Two and the 1990s). The cultural sphere in Slovenia has now become more than ever a sphere of ideological struggles. (Figure 49)

Artists, cultural workers and activists have reacted strongly to those changes and attempts to reshape the country’s cultural life, with regular protests, including street demonstrations, → direct action and open letters... The protesters in 2020 established the Protest People’s Assembly and their demands, ideas and so

446 Laura Raicovich, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* (London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2021).

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After, p. 160
negotiated, p. 197
care, p. 92, 122
solidarity, p. 65
imagination, p. 197

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exhibition, p. 247
direct action, p. 230

on were presented as guidelines, a sort of a call to all parts of civil society to activate, communicate and participate in the common struggle for a better future. One of the demands reads: Real power should be given to artists, organisations and groups to influence key decisions in culture, that is – to all those excluded from the process of cultural policymaking.



Figure 49: Maja Smrekar, *Eulogy to Evolution*, 10 October 2021, participatory performance. Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM). In the performance the artist and participants covered all the works from the *REALIZE! RESIST! REACT! Performance and Politics in the 1990s in the Post-Yugoslav Context* in black cloth. Photo: Dejan Habicht/Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

In these and similar actions new kinds of constituencies (“communities in becoming”) can be recognised. There has been a specific → solidarity among the self-employed in culture, cultural institutions (not cultural institutions *per se* but the critical part within the institutions), and a variety of networks/platforms/collectives, at least when it comes to the two points I mentioned. It seems the new constituencies, even though they differ from each other and are not always in the same artistic or even ideological line, are now quite united in their common political, social and economic calls for change.

But how can these constituent networks remain sustainable in the long run? And what does it actually mean for us, in Slovenia, in the Moderna galerija, to have a museum today? Amidst the current situation, how can we → reclaim our museum back (by changing the law, direct action, striking?) and so construct a new type of museum, how can we create new alliances among the new constituencies, the old constituencies and the museum, and probably most importantly, how do we, in the next step, “take” a future together?

Sometime ago I wrote that what was relevant in the relationship between an art institution and its constituencies were the questions of how to link political, social and artistic → imagination with the production of new institutions. If in socialism

→ solidarity, p. 65
reclaim, p. 256
imagination, p. 197

the slogan was *Culture to the people!*, now when many institutions (in Slovenia, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere) have “lost” their former constituencies and where there are no new ones on the horizon, the slogan should be *Reinventing a new institution is a constituent process that can only be a common!*

Today, when our cultural habitat is a damaged we should look at another important (→ ecological) concept – resilience – to help us understand and respond to disturbance and destruction, since it means how to resist damage and recover from it quickly. If we are to create a new constituent museum on the ruins of the old one, we should also go a step further and be radical in our attempt to change the meaning/concept of constituency by including also more-than-human constituencies, where the crucial issue is how not to separate humans from other species without anthropomorphising and patronising them.

Only in this way would we truly be able to talk about the new constituent museum.

→ ecological, p. 162

Post scriptum: This presentation was written in the early April 2022 when the right-wing SDS party was still in power in Slovenia. The parliamentary elections were then held on 24 April, with the newly formed and liberal Freedom Movement winning. As of 9 May 2022 it is still too early to say what this new development will mean for the field of arts and culture in Slovenia. (Figure 50)

Figure 50: “Shame”, anonymous graffiti outside the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM), December 2020. Photo: Dejan Habicht/Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.



An afterword Jesús Carrillo

Madrid, May 2022

This is an expanded version of the letter I wrote to Adela Železnik, head of the public activities department of the Moderna galerija of Ljubljana, in which I was replying to her reflections on the programmes we developed together having the notion of “constituencies” as both a horizon and methodology. By then, I was part of the mediation team of L’Internationale on behalf of the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid: “I perceive some melancholy in your letter, Adela. This is a feeling that I have tried to exorcise since I left the museum. Our “constituency-based” projects did not fulfil the expectations of those who we nominally recognised as constituents, those whose demands and interactions were supposed to affect and change the structure of our institutions. As members of *Somateca* – one of such constituency

groups – once said “we are inside, but we are invisible”.⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, our institutions were not prepared to look and see, to hear and listen and to respond and react to the presence of others, and less to be substantially transformed by them.

Were we naively self-deceptive? Did the enthusiastic rhetoric of L’Internationale produce an institutional mirage which made us blind to our structural limitations? Were we so deeply immersed in our museum bubble so to believe that our “constituencies gambit” would have significant consequences in the institutional chessboard? As people involved in education, we know well that affecting and transforming requires constant trial and failure, as well as a utopian horizon to move forward. It is an enduring process which, by definition, is never accomplished and, for the same reason, is always yet to be accomplished.

I remember that → after an intense debate among L’Internationale confederates, the joint action of our mediation teams managed to change gears and move the initial discussion on “usefulness” to the questioning of our institutional basis with regard to our constituent parts. As if the constituent process of the museum was still open, we were eager to engage with the new wave of political imagination which was by then growing out of our walls. We were eager to relinquish our authority as institutional agents and → negotiate in equal terms with others. This eagerness may have to do with the recent political history of our countries, in which institutions, especially art institutions, were endowed with the promise of democracy as an ongoing, emancipative process.

By referring to the etymology of an English notion which directly connects the institution to the people it represents, we aimed at replacing the eroded notion of the public not with that of the “free user”, but with the constituent subject: one endowed with the capacity to question the institution from the substantive position of the constituent (ontologically prior and necessary to the existence of the institution) intending to revive, by so doing, its fading democratic body.

However, committing ourselves to a constituent → process would necessarily demand, as Yaiza Hernández reminded us, “to operate claiming no authority over it”, suspending and undoing our institutional sovereignty so to recognise the primacy of the assembly from below, the assembly of our constituents.⁴⁴⁸ Far from the universal and “tamed” subject of the bourgeois public sphere evoked by Habermas, our contemporary constituencies were multiple and fragmented, closer to the counter-publics described by Nancy Fraser, Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt: subjects gathered around specific agendas and struggles, bearing demands and claiming a degree of agency which existing institutions are not yet in the condition to assume, as Aida Sánchez de Serdio recently reminded us.⁴⁴⁹

Members of such groups, absent if not directly excluded from our museums, were to be involved in L’Internationale programmes through specific projects, necessarily defined by the negotiations required when radical democratic demands meet bureaucratic protocols and inertias. The researcher and activist Janna Graham, a member of the British collective Ultrared, described the dynamics of our Liverpool

447 Barbara G. F. Muriel, Sara Buraya Boned, Loreto Ares and Diana Vázquez, “Close the folding screen before Lenin escapes”, *The Constituent Museum: Constellations of knowledge, politics and mediation: A generator of social change*, eds. John Byrne, Elinor Morgan, November Paynter, Aida Sánchez de Serdio Martín and Adela Železnik (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), 206–1.

448 Yaiza Hernández, “A constituent education”, Byrne et al. (2018), 128–31.

449 Aida Sánchez de Serdio Martín, *Una educación imperfecta. Apuntes críticos sobre pedagogías del arte* (Madrid: Producciones de Arte y Pensamiento, 2021).

constituencies meeting of 2014 in the book that L’Internationale devoted to the event, called *The Constituent Museum*. Janna recorded in her text the “draft for a transformation project” produced collectively by the constituency groups with her facilitation. Among the propositions and demands contained in that document there was an emphasis on transforming the regimes of visibility, on the democratisation of resource management and on the urgency to expand the social basis and forms of value production in cultural institutions. Our constituencies were addressing very specific and reasonable demands, as if our museums were indeed able to listen and respond, performing a role as institutional actors that was not yet recognised.⁴⁵⁰

One of the projects of the Reina Sofía Museum in which the constituency paradigm was tested was the mediation dispositif devised by the art collective Subtramas for *A really useful knowledge*, one of the ambitious programmes developed by the museum within L’Internationale framework in 2014. The principles inspiring *A really useful knowledge* drastically challenged the logics and procedures ruling the museum.

The “usefulness” of the different knowledges invoked in the programme contradicted in many ways the administrative, space and operational rationale of the institution, as well as the sort of “use” a museum should have. The “real” referred to in the title was emphatically non-instrumental. In fact, it involved both a radical questioning and a rejection of the alienating efficiency logics ruling capitalist society and the institution itself. Accordingly, the curatorial concept designed by the collective WHW (Who, How, For Whom) was supposed to transgress the rules which mark strict limits between process and results, action and exhibition, white cube and public space, art practice and political intervention.

Our wish was that the interaction with collectively produced “useful knowledge” would affect the institution to some degree: would have a “constituent effect”. All those who participated in the project were aware that the institutional transformation that we were discursively announcing in our programmes would only take place through the friction and negotiation with those outsiders that we recognised as our constituencies, and by adjusting our goals and procedures accordingly. The effective collaborations set up by *Subtramas* with the various collectives and social agents proved to the sceptics that institutional → learning was “really” possible. However, it also taught the most naïve of us that such a way of learning may not necessarily be suitable for our institution. As the members of *Subtramas* argued in a later reflection on their mediation work, the answer to the institutional dilemma requires moving the focus out from the formal institution and instead highlighting processes and phenomena happening beyond the dual “in and out” logics.⁴⁵¹

With their energies diminished by budget cuts and management control, our museums have also come under attack in the culture wars led by conservative powers, old and new, which are getting stronger all over Europe. Institutional members of L’Internationale, from Madrid to Barcelona, Ljubljana and Istanbul, have been violently shaken by the new wave of intolerance and fear.

450 Janna Graham, “Negotiating Institutions”, Byrne et al. (2018), 44–9.

451 Virginia Villaplana, Montse Romani and Diego del Pozo, “Between Acts: influence, negotiate, encounter, instigate, narrate. Re-writing the Relations Between Art and Situated Knowledge Found in Times of Crisis”, Byrne et al. (2018), 196–201.

The hypotheses of “The uses of art” exploded into pieces well before the deadline of the project, making clear that our institutional prospects and procedures are no longer the measure of time in our uncertain international and local contexts. And as we know, the new project “Our many Europes”, which extends the work of the confederation until 2022, has not been any luckier.

Reconsidering the institutional strategy according to the suggestions from *Subtra-mas* was both urgent and necessary. As the possibility of a substantial renewal of the fossilised bones of the museum seemed temporarily impossible, an exo-skeleton should be devised. This dispositive had to be built from the outside in instead of the other way round. As I argued a few years ago in this same context, the ruling principle of this post-institutional dispositive is conspiracy. Recovering the Latin meaning of *conspiratio* – breathing together – as well as its more subversive sense as “plotting”, we should start conspiring with others beyond our walls having as a common horizon the building and operating of institutions of a radically different nature.

Conspiracy spreads out through the holes surreptitiously pierced in the conventional walls separating the formal and informal, the legal and illegal, so as to achieve its subversive intentions (knitting new commonalities, against the grain of the individualising, privatising, exclusive process with which art institutions are complicit). It involves → rehearsing a relationality of a different kind: temporary and discontinuous but intense and versatile. This breathing, plotting together, would produce, precisely by failing once and again, the compost upon which the institution to come would grow.

The development of the meta-programme *Museo en red* – Network museum – in Reina Sofía can be understood as part of this post-institutional strategy. *Museo en red* is an ambivalent dispositive which works both as a timely institutional tool in tune with our contemporary “network society” and as a Trojan horse which allows “the enemy” to enter the citadel of the museum in disguise. The network paradigm, as re-defined by the Zapatista movement in the 1990s, has allowed the museum to knit a complex web of connections and alliances among singular entities which prevents a potential process of institutional subsumption and neutralisation, at the same time as it makes possible the collaboration with entities eventually “dangerous” from a conservative point of view, and as seen of right-wing observers always ready to denounce the radical and politicised nature of our operations.

A good example of this is the close collaboration between the museum and the *Institute of Radical Imagination*, a “monstrous institution”, according to the definition of the *Universidad Nómada*, which gathers up a group of artists, activists and museum workers from different Mediterranean countries. On the local level, the programme *Museo Situado* – → *Situated Museum* – is a clear example of the functioning of this conspiratorial model. *Museo Situado* is an autonomous assembly of citizens and social agents of the Lavapiés neighbourhood held under the umbrella and support of the Public Activities Department.

As I had the chance to tell in this very context one year ago *Agujerear el museo* – Piercing the museum – is the motto of the group. Perforating, unlike conquering, mines the structure of the building, makes it porous, soft, exposed to external influences, transforming the relationship between the inside and outside. It involves both a danger, since it erodes the solidity of the fortress, and a new life, since the

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rehearsing, p. 260
Situating Museum, p. 148

holes permit breathing and the circulation of flows which may, otherwise, become a perilous wave, or finally move to other watersheds.

The conspiratorial model at work in these programmes involves a jump in the void since it gets rid of the conventional institutional safety net and replace it with a network of alliances with unlikely peers based on trust and affection.

Conspiring, as I said, means breathing together, but it also involves secrecy, the use of a double code and acting in the blind spots of the formal institution. It requires action whenever possible, and being quiet and expectant otherwise.

It does not permit melancholy or → disappointment, since reward or recognition are never the goal.

There is always the risk of being discovered and exposed, of being dispersed before the foundational network is solid enough to sustain a new building, but there is always the possibility of knitting new networks that avoid the dual logics of failure and success. Assuming both the danger and the potential of breathing together is perhaps the only way to keep on building institutions today.

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disappointment, p. 179

Crowd of the dead, The Mick Wilson

HDK-Valand, Gothenburg, April 2022

Rather than speak of legitimacy, I speak of reordering the meaningful universe. I present the politics of corpses as being less about legitimating new governments (though it can be that, too) than about cosmologies and practices relating the living and the dead. And I see the rewriting of history that is obviously central to dead-body politics as part of a larger process whereby fundamental changes are occurring in conceptions of time itself.⁴⁵²

We live in a world in which death, after all, faces discrimination. By discrimination I mean the particular privilege granted living beings while at the same time marginalising that which we consider non-living or dead. In light of this, I am particularly interested in the status of non-humans, and especially the condition of those forms of existence that were once human but are now non-human remains.⁴⁵³

One of the most famous exclusions of the dead from political community with the living is to be found in Thomas Jefferson’s correspondence with James Madison shortly after the framing of the federal US constitution. Identifying the question as whether “one generation of men has a right to bind another” as “among the fundamental principles of every government”, Jefferson proposes to prove that “no generation can contract debts greater than may be paid during the course of its own

452 Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 26.

453 Ewa Domanska, “Dehumanisation Through Decomposition and the Force of Law”, trans. Paul Vickers, *Mapping the ‘Forensic Turn’: The Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016), 87.

existence.”⁴⁵⁴ He makes his argument by appeal to the seeming obviousness of the non-constituent status of the dead: “I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self-evident, ‘that the → earth belongs in usufruct to the living’: that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it. [...] The earth belongs always to the living generation.” The pronouncement of this exclusion of the dead from property rights, and from all other “powers” and “rights” over the earth, is already a matter only for dead *men* – since the prior exclusion of slaves, women, and children had already been accomplished in Jefferson’s white androcentric constituency of suffrage.

This figure of the dead as “men” of no property, of no account (*dis*-possessive individuals) disposed radically outside the political community with the living generation, may be contrasted with other figures of the dead. The “crowd of the dead” is one such figure, coming from the Gaelic “*Slúagh na marbh*” and attested in other traditions, and even fleetingly referenced by Elias Canetti in his famous book on *Crowds and Power*.⁴⁵⁵ The “crowd of the dead” proposes a de-individuated and swarming mass of the dead as a material force, a thickening of the air, that moves in the world of the living not as an antithesis to, but as an alterity and an agency moving among the living. The crowd of the dead constitutes a form of material ancestral co-being coming into proximity with the living not as a revenant nor as shade nor as spectre, but as *stuff*, as a thingly force congealing materially, not as ectoplasm but rather as mist, smoke, a sudden glooming in the weather, a seething mass of insects, a wheeling flock of birds, or as some other abruption in the material textures of the world.

A related, though different figure appears in the work of artist-scholars such as Denise Ferreira da Silva, who point to the material persistence of the dead as an environment, as matter, as soluble and insoluble stuff diffusing through the ocean, the air and the earth. In the wake of the Middle Passage, for da Silva the Atlantic:

*is constituted by these dead people who did not complete the voyage between the West African coast and the Americas or Europe. And not only the dead ones: those who completed the crossing to be sold as slaves also left traces of their bodies, as sweat, blood, urine, spit in the waters along the way. Residence time (the measure of duration for the persistence of different materials in the ocean) reminds us of that. Residence time also tells us that traces of the flesh of the dead slaves remains here/now as part of the composition that is the Atlantic Ocean.*⁴⁵⁶

Ewa Domanska, writing in the context of the forensic turn in the humanities, produces a related figure of the materiality of the dead in terms of multispecies co-belonging and the more than human. Domanska does so by arguing for the importance of the decomposition, the biomechanical *dehumanisation* of the body, as its incorporation into another mode of community:

454 From a letter by Jefferson to Madison dated 6 September 1789. *Thomas Jefferson to James Madison*, vol. 15 (27 March 1789 to 30 November 1789) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 392–8. There are many different genealogies to the exclusion of the dead from political community, Jefferson’s mode of exclusion of the dead might be compared and contrasted with Marx’s appropriation of the Christian motif of “Let the dead bury their dead” and his exclamation that: “We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead. *Le mort saisit le vif!*” See Mark Neocleous, “Let the dead bury their dead: Marxism and the politics of redemption”, *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 128 (November/December, 2004), 23–32.

455 See Dr. Stuart McLean “The Dead Have Never Been Modern” and “The Time of the Ancestors?” Chapters 10 and 17 respectively in *Fictionalizing Anthropology: Encounters and Fabulations at the Edges of the Human* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

456 “Arjuna Neuman and Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Serpent Rain”, *Vdrome*, introduced by Margarida Mendes (April 2018), 17–30, <http://www.vdrome.org/neuman-da-silva> (accessed April 2022).

*While dehumanisation in the symbolic world of culture denotes exclusion from the dominant, human collective, in an organic multispecies environment it means inclusion into a much broader collective of beings, of which only some are post-human in the sense that they were once human. The dehumanisation of the dead body (when considered as a post-human existence) is, I repeat, the sine qua non of its incorporation into a multispecies collective.*⁴⁵⁷

“That crowd are not much use”

In an earlier moment of the GCK dialogue around → *constituencies*, many themes circulated in a generative way, bridging ways of speaking with ways of working: themes of institution, institutional critique, democracy, commoning, post-representational or non-representational assembly and agency, and a non-identitarian praxis of community. Reading these materials, I am struck by a very compelling transfer between the register of terminological and conceptual analysis, on the one hand, and the applied practice of the museum, on the other hand. These expansions on constituencies seem to readily yield operational possibilities to move beyond the horizon of liberal-humanist and nation-state “publics.” For instance, Lia Colombino speaks of contrasting forms of collective address in the Guarani language, inclusive and exclusive – *ñande*, a “we” that includes you to whom I speak and *ore*, a “we” that excludes you to whom I speak. Colombino uses this contrast to articulate the trajectory and praxis of the Paraguayan Museo del Barro.⁴⁵⁸ The specific cultural politics and logics of a museum’s practice are unfolded through these terms. I imagine that the Constituent Museum, as a shared frame of mobilisation for L’Internationale, emerged from this kind of attentive movement between terminological adjustment and institutional arrangement.

However, I cannot pretend that anything so useful will proceed from the proposition that I bring – the proposition to talk of, with, and among the constituency of the dead. So, I must apologise in advance that I cannot move between the registers of rhetorical play and operational task with the same elegance and efficacy as my colleagues, nor indeed with their light touch. I bring to the table, all heavy-handed, some rhetorical corpse-stuff that I cannot claim to make immediately useful and serviceable to any museum’s practice.

There is of course an increasing awareness of the many corpses and body parts that are sequestered in the museums of colonial-modernity. It could be argued that this is just one of many clear surfaces of contact between the museum and talk of the dead. The museum appears as a temporal mechanism that transacts with the dead, that robs their graves or that tries to keep their promises, if not quite their secrets. The museum is – at least in part – a technology of ancestral transmission and death work. This is so even for a museum of the contemporary, that does not traffic in body parts and ethnographies, but only projects forward from the horizon of a living generation to what might be collected for some future. In proposing to preserve something of now for later, for posterity, for when the living generation is gone, the museum of the contemporary is also a technology for ancestor work, a part of the collective death work undertaken by a society.

While there are many important threads to ravel and unravel, and many deaths at the museum to investigate, this is not the path of argument followed here for several reasons. Perhaps the most immediate reason for not claiming the figure

457 Ibid.

458 Lia Colombino, “ñande / ore”, *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 192.

of the crowd of the dead as a museological theme is the way in which this figure produces a de-individuated, de-composed and de-humanised way of (*not*) *being* for the dead. This form of ancestry, this way of figuring the dead, is not really the way of being dead that museological practices are typically oriented by – nor do I claim they should be so oriented. Rather, what I propose to consider is the way in which this figure might interact with the wider referential field of constituencies. My guess is that the crowd of the dead might assemble itself in such a way as to unsettle that longing for legitimation beyond and before the state that seems always already to be constituted by talk of constituencies and their agency.

The waxing and waning of the trope of constituent power, within colonial-modernity's political imaginary has done service for many different political projects. It has oscillated from the "general will" of Rousseau to the "multitude" of Negri and Hardt, it is at work in Schmitt's sovereign dictator who claims to exercise the constituent power of the people.⁴⁵⁹ However, it has arguably always been returned to as a trope within a discourse of legitimation: Constituencies constitute, and they seem somehow to constitute the right way to do things. Constituencies crowd in around the work of disclosing the rightfulness or wrongfulness of any foundation. Some residual work of legitimation seems to be at work, even where constituent power and constituencies are arraigned *against* constitutions. In recent decades constituent power has been used to claim a different dispensation beyond all those liberal democratic captures of "the many" within the machinations of "the few". It seems to offer a way to get beyond all those representational conceits whereby the many become alienated from themselves in the rhetorical violence of "we-the-people", the nation, the public, the participants and so forth. However, what might happen when "we" think the different possible constituencies of the dead? Or when "we" think the theme of constituencies through, with, and among these ever-thickening crowds of the dead?

Direct action Tjaša Pureber

Ljubljana, June 2022

Any kind of subversive action, be that on the terrain of social movements, or radically engaged art, is subjected to the constant potentiality of recuperation. In this context we understand recuperation as a social activity, used for maintaining control over those who are trying to negate it.

Recuperation comes in many forms: as an open repression by the state, as the politics of integration into the system (like elections and adaptation of the protest discourse into the mainstream), and sometimes even by internalised censorship of the most subversive ideas. No matter the method, or source, the result is always the same. Instead of widening the field of possibilities in terms of spreading the horizon of a subversive political action, it narrows the political → territory to the redefinition of the *status quo*. In it power relations more or less remain unchallenged. In the framework of social movements, recuperation is always a methodology of the defeat of a particular outburst of anger, and the beginning of a neutralisation of the movement itself.

The only tactics that are constantly proving to be resilient towards such power of political neutralisation are creative direct actions that are in their practical manifestation questioning and pushing the boundaries of the existing, are too subversive

⁴⁵⁹ Andreas Kalyvas, "Constituent Power", *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

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territory, p. 269

to be publicly claimed, and are creating a new political terrain that cannot be addressed through politics of structural and systemic ignorance of the raised issues.

Direct action is often publicly seen as the most militant expression of anger (that is, destruction of private property), and as such recognised by the ruling classes as one of the violent and undesired elements of protests. This language of power is often also repeated among some of the protesters themselves. Research into the concrete practices of direct action shows that violence is a changeable category, and its definition depends on the amount of concentrated power one has in society. Throughout history, different art practices challenged those definitions and power relations through direct action, thus broadening the window of opportunity for a radical transformation of society as a whole. Let's look at the example of a recent decade in Slovenia.

Politics of recuperation: protest, conflict and culture

The transition from socialist Yugoslavia towards more or less violent integration into Western neoliberal market-capitalism was marked in Slovenia by waves of protests and autonomous social movements in the 1980s. Those roaring eighties brought out LGBT, → feminist, anti-war, → ecological and other social movements. Artists, ranging from underground punk to neo-avantgarde practices, had always been travelling with or indeed were the fundamental part of those movements. With the outbreak of war that led to the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, most of these movements and artists either formed the newly born non-governmental sector (as a response to and critique of the institutions) while a minority stayed within the framework of autonomous spaces and movements. The latter movement culminated in the squatting of infrastructure throughout the country (most famously at Pekarna in Maribor and Metelkova in Ljubljana, but also in many other places). These squats proved to be fundamental for the subversive organising of social movements from that point on.

With the proliferation of precarity and the Western model of project financing eating away workers' rights within the art scene, many people became politicised during various outbursts of social dissatisfaction. The culmination of this trend occurred in 2012 and 2013 with a six-month → uprising that, among other things, toppled the far-right government. At the beginning in particular the protests were decentralised, saw many clashes with the police and were in many ways creating a situation of ungovernability in the country. There was strong pressure from the ruling classes, media, and some protesters themselves, to consolidate the movement around a single list of demands, push out the most militant and subversive elements, and turn the dissatisfaction away from anti-capitalist discourse targeting both the economic and parliamentary system, towards a more predictable and controllable electoral dimension. Despite diverse actors in the field, who introduced different protest methodologies, the protests eventually became neutralised and moved away from open conflict with the police.

Protest itself thus moved from a → conflictual activity towards a more festive environment. A trend was noticeable: the less conflict with the police there was, the more creative interventions by the artists and cultural workers within the protests became visible and desired. What this means is that artists and cultural workers were an integral part of protest communities, and they brought their skills on the streets to enrich and enhance the messages within the movement of social unrest. What remains unanswered however is the line on which creative communication

→
feminist, p. 28
ecological, p. 162
uprising, p. 142
conflictual, p. 92

actions on the terrain of the protest, which is traditionally a conflictual political area, start serving against their purpose and become a tool of potential pacification of the focal social conflict. Moreover, despite giving the impression of greater inclusion, the (mostly unintentional) culturalisation of protests meant that people from less privileged backgrounds, who largely started the uprisings, no longer recognised them as their own terrain. As a consequence the uprisings lost their power of bringing groups of people together in struggle.

Almost ten years later, another even longer series of protests happened in Slovenia, in which this question became even more central. At the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic a new Slovenian far-right government was sworn in. → *Anti-fascist*, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and anarchist initiatives almost immediately called for different direct actions and protests against the limits on freedom of movement (although all the time recognising the need to protect communities against the spread of COVID as well). The activity of cycling was chosen in order to enable both building up a common ground for collectivity in becoming, and at the same time allow the social distancing needed to prevent the spread of the disease. Out of this first urge to bring people together and after a few weeks of some conflict on the streets, Friday cycling became a stable and resilient method of protesting for two years, calling for the end of social and political injustices.

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anti-fascist, p. 18

Figure 51: *Utrjevanje znanja* [Knowledge consolidation], 5th Action for Culture, 30 June 2020. A protest against the decree on the prohibition of assembly and cultural events. Photo: Željko Stevanić/IFP.



After a few weeks the most visible parts of the protest activities were carried out by an informal alliance of different cultural workers (and others), using creative communication actions to call attention to the issues raised. Though met with numerous and severe acts of repression, these actions were always public, with visible and known protagonists (that is, they were not anonymous), and generally never broke the line of the common interpretation of the misdemeanour offense



law (despite the new government's introduction of a draconian law which, for instance, severely punished reading the constitution in public or using chalk on the streets to write political messages). They used puppets, live music, banners, and sometimes flash mobs for their communication actions.

Figure 52: 9th Action for Culture, 31 August 2020. A grand opening of an exhibition in the public interest. The Prime Minister relativises the serious and verified accusations of SDS Party collaboration with neo-Nazi groups. The show presented their hate speech. Photo: Željko Stevanić/IFP.

Separate from those actions, a new wave of activities appeared, which closely resembled the use of direct action as a methodology of struggle, which we discussed at the beginning. Unlike ten years before, cultural workers did not merely (or exclusively) organise within the general framework of protest (where they would address common social issues), but went on to address such issues in the field of culture itself. The active (committee) of cultural workers (known in Slovenian as ADDK) was formed out of an anti-authoritarian protest assembly. Through a series of different actions in which they made the Ministry of Culture their → *territory* of struggle, they formed public flash mob actions to challenge the decisions of the ministry and consequent injustices in the field of culture.

Separate from those public actions of the ADDK, another stream of protest activities around the Ministry of Culture was formed in the city. It was creating situations of ungovernability, using artistic, yet more subversive direct action, questioning the line and interpretation between art intervention and vandalism. Those actions, despite causing little or no material damage, were heavily sanctioned by the police, with some cases still open as we write this. Such actions remained anonymous, unclaimed, mostly unexplained by the authors themselves, and therefore subversive. (Figure 52) They came from different sets of individuals and collectives, used various methodologies (from installations to large scale graffiti, etc.) and moved on unexpected territories of the city. This is an introduction of a known methodology from social movements that arise from below. What is new is that the activists ap-

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territory, p. 269

plied it to the field of art and culture for the first time in Slovenian history on such a large scale. (Figure 51)

We will now take two examples to show the different dimensions of such creative direct action, each almost ten years apart from each other, and try to understand what differentiates them from previously described communication actions within the protest environment.

Power definition in performative direct action

The first example is from 2013, when a Slovenian artist Marija Mojca Pungerčar opened an exhibition in a local gallery in Metelkova, in Ljubljana. The presented works consisted of household objects (aprons, cushions, etc.) with embroidered anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian slogans from the protests that were then ending. The items were made by (mostly older) unemployed women in a laboratory that was later used as a role model for the new culture centre for creative industries that was to replace the Autonomous Factory Rog squat.

An anonymous group of people, based on the leaflets they left behind, considered this → exhibition to be a recuperation of the protest activities. They felt it was marked by an anti-feminist approach and created in a laboratory of creative industries, putting the artwork in direct opposition to the materialised reality of the slogans used in the exhibition. They organised a masked flash mob, took the items from the gallery and never returned them. Both the artist and gallery reported the action to the police, claiming it caused several tens of thousands of euros of damage due to loss of the artworks. This resulted in two different interpretations of the action: the police considered it the greatest robbery of an art gallery in Slovenian history, while activists and their supporters considered it a performative direct action, corresponding with the original artwork. In any case the action attracted enormous public attention, challenging the notion of art performance, art value, and freedom of expression as such, along with the recuperation of protests and invisible unpaid labour.

Around ten years later and once again an anonymous group of people organised an art installation, blocking the street in front of the Ministry of Culture in Ljubljana. The installation consisted of chairs and tables, with the names of different employees, administrators and politicians from the ministry, blaming them for the destruction of different art fields they were involved with (film, media, NGOs, etc.). The entire installation was covered with red acrylic, creating ambiguity around the action. The only piece of writing left on the first table was a copy of a (fake) resignation letter by the Minister of Culture, in which he admitted he had been defeated by the protesters. (Figure 53)

The reaction by the authorities was predictable: the minister and his colleagues demanded the police prosecute and arrest the unknown artists on the charge of making a death threat to an official person (which is a highly criminal offense in Slovenia and could, result in many years in prison if convicted). The police responded accordingly, and started an investigation that nevertheless never went far. The two people accused of being anonymous co-makers of the installation were able to defend themselves in a pre-court motion on the grounds of freedom of artistic expression, so the case never moved before the court.



But what is really interesting is, as was also the case with the earlier action, that it split public opinion in both culture and among the protesters. Many felt it went “too far”, was “not dignified enough”, and some even used the term “violent” for it. One action synthesised all the processes of recuperation that we spoke about before, and yet went beyond them. As it was so controversial and because the political class used their power of definition to label it vandalism and violence, it became too dangerous to be claimed. Therefore the method of ensuring its authors anonymity was not merely as a question of safety, but also a mechanism to control all and any possible attempts to internally change the anonymous action into an art piece with a visible name to it. This means that such a creative action already entails adequate mechanisms to challenge power relations not just towards the outside, but also internally, which creates an ungovernable, unnegotiable and unrecoverable methodology of struggle.

Direct action in this sense is therefore not a materialised act of resistance, one that would be fetishised in time and space. Rather it is a subversive movement of collectivity in becoming. As such it is able to question positions of power in terms of its internal structure and remain ungovernable in relation to the power-over. As John Holloway puts it, direct action in this context is the methodology that presents a break in the social order, a potential that has to be realised in a given situation in order to build social movement against and beyond the existent.⁴⁶⁰

Figure 53: *Symbolic Eviction to the Street*, 23 October 2020. Office desks were set up in front of the Ministry for Culture with the names of cultural decision-makers, showing their agendas in a pool of blood, under slogans such as “Death to art” or “Let’s enslave national broadcasting”. Photo: Željko Stevanić/IFP.

460 John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010).

Porosity, as a conceptual frame through which to think constituencies and the museums they occasionally come into, is appealing. I've been thinking about porosity a lot of late, particularly in relation to how it allows educational projects out of the bind of an either-or relation to institutions and communities. Porous projects might allow us – the us of (temporary) discursive positions – to pursue methodologies that leak, lean, drift alongside the practices they seek to follow.

But I'm also mindful of what appeals. Appealing proposes a possible intimacy in the same way that porosity allows our conceptual lenses to focus only on where things do or can or are permitted to leak. This focus blurs or elides the structural logics of the sieves and skins of separation. Particularly in its metaphorical usage, where the museum might seek to be porous to the contemporary moment or its constituents' interests, there is the risk of a slippage away from existing socio-political realities and relationships (how much is already structured into a relational history and mutual practice of presumptive identification?), and the implicit limitations obscured under these gestures of openness (is the museum willing to be so porous that it dissolves itself?). We need to attend to what precedes a proposition of porosity.

The structural logics of who or what is porous, when, and to whom, function to give form: an inside and an outside become presumed in the processes of collectivising and abstracting complex subjectivities and histories into sites through which the porous moves and takes direction. Skins of separation function as protective and sustaining – coalescing into a group is a means of coming together, of creating an ecosystem of coexistence based on shared identities or practices – but they also contain and separate, particularly when propositions such as porosity premise themselves on inviting in, rather than reciprocal (partial) dissolutions. That is to say, there is a power and positionality involved in these propositions and in the material they offer or restrict, that need to not get lost in the leaking.

The concept of porosity is mainly traced back to the 1920s and the field of what we now call urban studies. Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis, in their essay on Naples in the 1920s, conceived of the city as porous to its inhabitants' use of it: "Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen → constellations."⁴⁶¹

This sounds familiar in its idealism. The idea of constellations and of the museum as a potential site for interjections and interventions, finds historic echoes in Benjamin and Lācis' conception of the interpellated usages of city architecture and the fluidity between private and public spaces in Naples. But their porosity is only present-tense; premised on an extant history (the buildings already exist). The poverty of "the most wretched pauper"⁴⁶² they describe is not affected by the porosity of their relation to the city. The structural logics of their lives go unchanged despite these proclaimed permeabilities.

Their sense of the porous is the constantly improvised, changing relation between people and places: a negotiation at once playful and timeless. For Benjamin, Lācis and Ernst Bloch, who subsequently draws porosity out into a master concept for

461 Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis, "Naples", *Reflections*, Walter Benjamin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (Boston & New York: Marina Books, 2019), 432.

462 Ibid., 434.

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constellations, p. 73

Italian culture more widely, the appeal of porosity might lie in its sensuous antithesis to the "reified character of modern capitalist society".⁴⁶³ We might rephrase that to navigate the appeal it continues to hold for us – as an antithesis to the reified, historically constituted realities of the museological domain we are seeking to, and indeed → invested in, undoing or expanding beyond.

I want us to shift from the possible theatricality of porous sites – their ability to function as stages offered up to both the pauper and the poet – to why it appeals to frame our sites as such, and, vitally, what our stakes in that appeal are. When thinking of and around constituencies, and their relations in/of/as/with/nearby the museum, we need to reflect on our existing → situatedness, agency, power, commitment and interests in doing so. To think of the porous as empowering, which both urban studies and museology seem want to do, is contingent on who initiates and who consents to the porosity presented or requested. It is from this line of thinking, or perhaps even, to continue loosely allowing other references to seep into this text, this line of flight,⁴⁶⁴ that I come to a term that could be used as a thread when thinking through constituencies and the possible porosity of their interactions with museums.

This term – in/vesting – is an intentionally weak one, more of a method to approach thinking than a definition of a practice. In/vesting seeks to unfold how one is already implicated, to sense check where, how and for whom porosity intermingles with power, positionality and politics, and from that position, how one can build out structures of facilitated, considered and contingent porosity.

(Figures 54–7) *Gerridae – Kinspore – Polder – Strait is one of the results of a long-lasting series of thought exchanges between Sophie and Juliette. Using Sophie's text, and memories of previous discussions on ponds, porosity, polders, fluidity and wet matters, Juliette created a series of digital collages. The images employed to form those assemblages were generated with an AI trained on several databases of polders, ponds, skins, membranes, and sea sponges. A process that in itself led to another porous exchange between Juliette and Sophie. Sieved through the process are these images.*

Juliette Pénélope Pépin is an artist whose messy practice investigates human and non-human perceptions: their phenomenology, mythology, and technological frameworks. Through installations, videos, images and speculative narratives, J.P. examines the meanings of "seeing" and "being seen" in our time. Concerned with our current epoch, she values and develops participatory, discursive, and negotiable art projects.

In/vesting

The enfolded meanings of investing are pertinent in the context of museums, where involving constituencies may relate to multiple objectives and goals. Both the contemporary both-ways cut of investing – where money or time is put into something with an interest both in the thing itself and its subsequent return for the investor – and

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invested, p. 236
situatedness, p. 148

463 Douglas Smith, "Porosity and the Transnational: Travelling Theory Between Naples and Frankfurt (Walter Benjamin, Asja Lācis and Ernst Bloch)", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2 (April 2021), 249–50.

464 As per Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's idea, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1980) – particularly given that the French *fuite* can be understood to mean fleeing as much as fleeing – as Brian Massumi indicates in his translator's preface.

Figures 54, 55, 56 and 57: Juliette Pénélope Pépin, *Gerridae – Kinspore – Polder – Strait*, 2022, AI-generated assemblages. On pages 237, 238, 239 and 240.





the historic meaning, in which investing refers to clothing or surrounding something, might offer us lines (of flight) into thinking along the skins of our desired porosity.

Investing as the clothing or surrounding of something, whether for military purposes or to endow someone or thing with power, defines that which it clothes or surrounds by means of its capture. So too, thinking about the messy range of people that interact with museums as constituencies, functions as a means of identifying, of grouping for purposes or intents that might curtail the self-definitions or dissent within these groups. Categories are functional, but that is not to elide their implications: the defining of constituencies, whether for conspiratorial intent⁴⁶⁵ or otherwise, is a proclamation that positions both parties in a fixed relation *a priori*. Investing's contemporary financial associations – a re-cloaking of one's existing capital – are associations that might also allow us to remain critical about some (museal) practices of constituency engagement.

Inserting the slash as a moment of pause, a break that thinks along the lines of study and the undercommons,⁴⁶⁶ is a proposition to think of in/vested as a future-oriented term: to think about the ways in which we might acknowledge power and positionality in order to become more politically proximate and co-constitute across institutional, representational and communal sites. This slash might function as a sieve or skin of separation, and steps away from the prefix-heavy tendencies of current practices, where additive words don't always undo the layers of meaning, histories, power and associations of the terms they appendage.

To hold the slash also allows for an orientation of involvement: the museum is not separate from its constituents. Yet, its embedded positionality is coupled to a vesting. Vesting in, or vesting with, refers to an endowing of authority: to give power or property. This endowing implies a directionality (a handing over, a leaking out) but also a position of pre-existing power (to be able to vest). What are the implications of having the power, from one's position with-within-against (per BAK's thinking), to enable the voice or involvement of others?

To speak nearby

"Can I apologise without asking for your forgiveness?"
— Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings*⁴⁶⁷

There is a power involved in enabling, proclaiming or projecting the involvement of others; one implicates oneself and simultaneously positions the other. Trinh T. Minh-Ha evocatively suggests a practice of "speaking nearby" to desist from reducing reality to representation.⁴⁶⁸ Her thinking, in turn, allows for a means of thinking away from a mode of → solidarity that risks slipping into assuming mutuality prior to acknowledging difference, distance and dissidence.

465 See Jesús Carrillo prior contribution to the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* "Conspiratory Institutions?", *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 280. I am drawn to this term, but wonder for whom conspiring is an imperative necessity and how that affects equity within approaches such as these. I.e. for whom is this not a thought experiment, what prior skin is in the game, who is more invested in salvaging institutions?

466 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Autonomedia, Minor Compositions, 2013).

467 With thanks to Yolande Zola Zoli Van der Heide for bringing this reference into the conversation! Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: A reckoning on race and the Asian condition* (London: Profile Books, 2021), 196.

468 Nancy N. Chen, "'Speaking nearby': A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-Ha", *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 82–91.

In affinity, Tim Ingold writes: "Whereas *of*-ness is intentional, *with*-ness is attentional".⁴⁶⁹ Contextualisation refers groups or individuals back to the intentionalities that presume to explain their perspective or position. Attending to, instead, allows for a futurity: a speaking-thinking-doing in step that gives space for a negotiation from the present.

It's worth noting here, however, that I am drawing on the thinking of an anthropologist and a documentary filmmaker. Interdisciplinarity isn't a given porosity either. Sara Ahmed, to yoke yet another formal field into this interpellated conversation, reminds us that attention involves a political economy.⁴⁷⁰ Our attention is perpetually relative to "the ongoing labour of other attachments";⁴⁷¹ each → choice to attend to something involving a process of intersecting priorities, energies, abilities and privileges.

What does a constituency thinking that operates a praxis of nearby, rather than a praxis of or for others, feel like, then? Part of that might involve acknowledging the limits of one's ability to host, to become part of or intimate to practices. Part of that might also involve thinking along varying lines of temporal engagement and intensities: the museum as a node, sometimes a shell, sometimes a shelter, sometimes a resource. I am thinking of in/vesting as a gesture, an action. A surrounding that is gentle and temporary without being too vague or too inconsistent; an awareness that clothing cannot become skin.

To find one's in and the power of vesting

Museums, if I am to temporarily inhabit the art historian explicitly, are sites of contestation: the civil and the civic, the represented and the representational. They come into estranging encounters that have only pluralised as remits, funding and ambitions continue to shift and be → negotiated, both from within, between and outside the museums themselves. At once an institution, a symbol of the (nation) state, and a collection of people and things. But museums are also very practically located, for the most part. One might think here of the Van Abbemuseum, with its long history in and of the municipality, and how it is situated in a specific political relationship. Yet there's a layering of situatedness, too: museums leak out into, flow as part of and shift between global, translocal and local spaces in their material and conceptual programming.

These situated positions come into play with the differing relations and imbrications museums hold for those that interact with them. This situating in, which can also be thought of positively – one is situated, one has a web of networks, one is sited – leads to an imbrication that brings us to the skin of the matter. Following a loosely decolonial line of thought, these relations and the situated symbolisms of the museum cannot simply be undone through a museological shift in vocabulary or orientation. How, then, to engage in this choreography of re-negotiation, towards a more porous relation, without returning to a speaking of, for or over?

There is both a generosity and an oppressive relation entered into when holding or constructing spaces. This comes back to the skins of porosity: a fluidity is predicated on collective individual movement, which demands of each a willingness, consent and (→ rehearsed) ability to move. In educational spaces, be they museal or

469 Tim Ingold, *Anthropology and/as Education* (London: Routledge, 2017), 61.

470 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 32.

471 Ibid.

elsewhere, open, flattened hierarchies of learning are often perceived to be more equitable and thereby desirable. However, these modes of interaction, where circles are formed or people are invited to be listened to, are often underpinned by implicit rules of engagement, or are felt to function in these manners.

Further, there's a reliance, if not a demand made, on the energy and input of those invited in, often on the presumption that this is energy and input they would willingly give. A pre-existing relation of power cannot be undone by offering the cloak onwards. What new streams of movement need to occur before one can be vested, as a learner, with this kind of participatory authority, and what streams of historic movement have already occurred under the surface of our opening up of spaces, that allow museums to continue to claim and hold the power to vest?

To maintain the break of in/vesting

Politics proposes to make us better, but we were good already in the mutual debt that can never be made good. We owe it to each other to falsify the institution, to make politics incorrect, to give the lie to our own determination. We owe each other the indeterminate.

— Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*⁴⁷²

Moten and Harney speak of the break. For them, the break describes the condition of the marginalised, or what they conceptualise as the undercommons. They are always in the break, always the supplement or addition, never the whole. For them, *study* is “what you do with other people”. Study for them is a refusal to bleed out and heal, and an insistence on the undercommons – that which continues to be both refused and refuses. It is a practice not of seeking to be recognised within existing forms of value, but to disrupt and exist despite them. Their work comes from blackness studies and a critique of capitalism, so their idea of the undercommons, and *study* as the activity that happens within it, is a rallying cry against the professionalisation of the university, the individualisation or atomisation of society and the cutting, or binaries, that separate disciplines or people into categories. This is a call to remain indeterminate, to remain in a different kind of flux than a presumed porosity: to insist on the break, the opaque.

The slash in in/vesting then seeks to function both to uphold the pertinence of pausing and to maintain the indeterminacy of singular definition or capture-able collectivity. The future-oriented applicability might lie here: in how in/vesting, with its roots and slippage – indeed, perhaps its porosity – to capital, needs to move from that current reality rather than seek to elide it. If → [direct action](#) (per Tjaša Pureber's definition of the term)⁴⁷³ can create pockets of temporal resistance in which alliances can emerge, thinking through in/vesting can create temporal pauses in which relations of power can be acknowledged, in order to then begin to move towards collaboration across and in sustenance of difference.

Towards a temporary use

The constituent museum, alongside its constituencies, might then begin to think of itself as an occasionally porous site. In/vesting as a weak line of flight would ask, as programming evolves and input is sought, as groups are invited in and left out, how mutually permeable these moments of encounter are, how long they might last

472 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Autonomedia, Minor Compositions, 2013), 20.

473 See Tjaša Pureber's contribution to this collection, page 230.

and what the limits of our desired intimacies with each other are. Shifting between structural realities, historic power, epistemic dominances and individual relations, we might pause on the skin of the interaction. In/vesting becomes a consideration that comes prior to, during and after activities, a means of tracing the lines of power, intent and impermeability that underwrite an interaction that seeks to co-constitute.

Known Unknowns Archival Footage and the Deceiving Power of Images

Fatma Çolakoğlu

SALT, Istanbul, November 2022

*As we know,
There are known knowns.
There are things we know we know.
We also know
There are known unknowns.
That is to say
We know there are some things
We do not know.
But there are also unknown unknowns,
The ones we don't know
We do not know.
Finally, there are unknown knowns
The knowns
We do not want to know.
— *Pieces of Intelligence: The Existential Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld* by Hart Seely and Donald Rumsfeld*

On the 12 February 2002⁴⁷⁴, Donald Rumsfeld – two-time US Secretary of Defense, former CEO and White House Chief of Staff, one of the most outspoken and forceful civilian military leaders in recent history – used a framework, a string of words evocative of Dadaist poetry, in order to justify the invasion of Iraq: Knowns and Unknowns.

Rumsfeld's famed remark,⁴⁷⁵ from those distant pre-Twitter days, actually states the obvious, and perhaps even says nothing new or interesting. Nonetheless, as the COVID-19 pandemic both exposed and exacerbated existing social, political, health, and economic crises, just as Russia's war on Ukraine is raising its own set of issues, it is a fitting time to revisit Rumsfeld's “known unknowns”. In the post-truth era, our perception and analysis of evidence and reality, knowledge and non-knowledge have become quite tricky. The relationship between what we know, what we do not know, what we cannot know and what we do not like to know, determines our cognitive frame for political practice, and also creates a certain anxiety and uncertainty. From the personal to the collective, we strive to know or at least pretend to know enough to outweigh any unknowns. Our reactions to uncertainty make sense in evolutionary terms, as the brain constantly tries to predict what will hap-

474 Ali, *Donald Rumsfeld Unknown Unknowns!*, video 9' 8", 2002, posted on YouTube on 7 August 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiPe1OikQuk> (accessed November 2022).

475 Response of United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to a question at a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) news briefing on (12 February 2002), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_are_known_knowns (accesses November 2022).

pen next, and we attempt to prepare the body and mind in the most efficient ways possible for what they are about to experience.

In 1993, the philosopher Ann Kerwin elaborated on “knowns” and “unknowns” in a paper titled “None Too Solid: Medical Ignorance”⁴⁷⁶ in which she formulates *known unknowns* as all the things we know we do not know, *unknown unknowns* as all the things we do not know we do not know, *error* as all the things we think we know but do not, *tacit knowing* as all the things we do not know we know, forbidden knowledge as all taboos, and *things too painful to know*, so we suppress them. In an age of post-truth politics, *knowledge* has become more precious than ever, and perhaps it’s no surprise the definition remains more varied than ever.

Known unknowns which can also be described as *conscious ignorance* – the things we know we do not know – weigh heavily on two factors: how we process our current state of being, as well as how we deal with the past. In 2016 *The Oxford English Dictionary* chose the term “post-truth” as its word of the year, an adjective that it defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.⁴⁷⁷ When deciphering what are facts and what are lies, we need tools to assess and confirm the validity and reliability of what is claimed. Apart from our own psyches, we rely on different types of knowledge to achieve this because knowledge is more valuable than mere belief.

The documentary archival format is especially appropriate when it comes to unravelling the notion of the unknown. Rather than taking this format as offering fixed and objective representations of the truth, it opens up possible space for new inquiries. A wonderful piece illustrating this possibility is Deimantas Narkevičius’s 2009 work, *Into the Unknown*, created on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and which utilises archival footage compiled from East Germany’s official film studio, DEFA. The film theorist Michael Zryd argues that archival footage is an official institution that separates a historical record from an outtake. Through archival footage, Narkevičius depicts the everyday lives of East Berliners, with the film originally shot with the aim of capturing the well-being of the citizens. The contrasts that are made between the notion of an idealized society and the reality, in which subjective slices of scenes belonging to individuals and their private lives are interwoven, shows how successful the use of an interrogative style can be when examining the immanent information and privacy politics of political regimes. Overall, the film alludes to the tension between political history and personal memory by using such footage.

Through archival footage it is possible to trace the tensions and contradictions between the mechanisms of social power and everyday life, established history and personal memory, and between regimes of truth and the unconscious. Such powerful imagery can be used in diverging ways – as a tool to seek the truth or as a tool to bend or break reality. Narkevičius captures the slippery correlation among truth, reality and deception. W.J.T. Mitchell elaborates on this duality, and suggests we “grasp both sides of the paradox of the image: that is alive – but also dead; powerful – but also weak; meaningful – but also meaningless.”⁴⁷⁸

476 Ann Kerwin, “None Too Solid: Medical Ignorance”, *Knowledge*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1 December 1993) 166–85.

477 “‘Post-truth’ declared word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries”, *BBC* (16 November 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37995600> (accessed November 2022).

478 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Image* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 10.

As much as Rumsfeld’s notion of the *known unknown* reminds us of a delusional Western hegemony, it also raises a red flag and calls for caution – how careful and lightly we must tread with the weight of visual and verbal information. From the personal to the collective, the effort to seek the truth begins with challenging the narratives of tyranny’s power.

Post-exhibitionary Alistair Hudson

Manchester, May 2022

I propose this term with full disclosure that I am troubled by it. Perhaps this is just a word to be conjured up in this moment by its own inevitability: yet another in a long line of posts that should then be put back in its box. But we need to look this in the eyes.

I think it is a necessary act, at least to raise the question, seed the thought, that at the tail-end of an era of Western dominance, and when we are now looking to new futures and new economies that rebalance the world, we have a duty to ask ourselves things that disrupt our habits and our comforts, even the deepest ones.

Building a constituent-led museum is part of this troubling. Opening up power and control to voices and actors beyond the purview of the established cultural classes has begun the transformation of our institutions, from closed autonomous zones to active civic agencies. The working classes, the Global \rightarrow South, disenfranchised populations. But the inherited museological architecture, both physical and conceptual, is a hard one to move on or redesign, especially when it has worked so well for so long, and still does.

For over two centuries the exhibition has been the principal delivery vehicle for art, or at least our current understanding of what art is. For the other 40,000 years or so of human history, art has been manifested through other social forms, networks and frameworks. In ritual, religion, technology, craft, agriculture, architecture, food, architecture and so on.

The exhibition is central to our experience of museums, galleries, *Kunsthallen* and art centres. For the most part these spaces have been designed around the particular economies of spectatorship and the cycles of exhibition programming and touring shows – making stuff for people to go and see, all part of our inherited culture.

The advent of the era of the exhibition, was marked by the Great Exhibitions of the 19th century, in Paris and London. These large-scale spectacles were constructed within the emerging systems of colonial and imperial power, industrialisation, and mercantile capitalism. With the shift from an agrarian rural economy to urban manufacturing and the construction of modern city populations, they were instrumental in creating a shared narrative, perpetuated through the educational movements, institutions and museums that followed. They contributed to an inventive and productive society, with an eye on ever more innovation, ingenuity and growth.

Since then, the exhibition has evolved and diversified, been critiqued and collapsed, reformed and reimagined over and over again. Ultimately it has endured, deep rooted as the principle site of shared artistic experience, slowly and surely building the layers of a centralised consensus. However, and no matter the best intentions manifest in this self-reflection, the exhibitionary DNA is coloured with

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the → extraction economy that nurtured it. Art located in the museums of our age has itself been extracted and abstracted from daily use value: altar paintings removed from churches; ritual artefacts taken out of Africa; pots and plates placed in cases, no longer serving their purpose. And art objects now conceived specifically for white rooms and the associated behavioural systems of leisure, market and mediation. Even the best efforts of modernity to re-entangle art as a process “out there” in life and politics have ultimately been pulled back into the orbit of spectatorship, through historicising and contextualising shows of the archive of work long since done.

I see the philosophy of the Constituent Museum as one which really seeks to take our institutions from a state of autonomy, controlled by a few, into the broader → ecology and economics of society; an idea that strives to work with the widest number of people for the greatest benefit. They are the places where we can collectively *make* the culture we want to live in. Yet the multiplicity of the broadband world we now occupy is fostering new forms of art and culture elsewhere, beyond the museum, in technology and the digitised ecosystem we now inhabit.

After many years working in museums and galleries, I have seen that more and more people are finding their art in other places, on screens and in games, architecture and design, or physical experiences and activities that are more integrated into day-to-day living, such as concerts or festivals. Of course, there are many who still go to exhibitions, who have been nurtured to understand what can be gained or gleaned from that particularity, but there are many more who do not. I have been to many → schools where the pupils I speak to have never been to a museum or exhibition. Whilst they undertake creative activity, the museum just isn't in the patterns of their lives. That may be fine if we consider art to be an industry, pastime or leisurely pursuit that still “works” for its existing usership, but if we believe, as I do, in the transformational power of art as a → process, of the importance of aesthetics in ethics, a way of shaping things that is fundamental to the better operating of our social systems, then we have adapt and evolve with the world around us and re-imagine the museum as a site of operation, not just representation. Something that is working with the technologies and systems around us.

Through my work at Grizedale Arts, MIMA and now in Manchester I have tested the ideas developed in conversation with L'Internationale confederation, at ever increasing scales. Central to this pursuit is the work to make art and its institutions more relevant and useful to the communities and networks around them. In this it has been the work with people in real time, in processes that are part of their own localised economies and cultures, that has succeeded most: projects to change environments, thus enabling political agency, provision of food, technology, housing, healthcare, education. The exhibitions of these institutions have been a mechanism, a tool, in this process, to convene and model ideas – but not the endgame. This concept of the “Useful Museum” reverses the usual polarities, so the exhibition works in service of the public programme, where once the public programme worked in service of the exhibition.

As a person of artistic habit, I like and enjoy exhibitions very much, and value them. However, I have seen that the endless cycle of exhibition production, the need to “fill the gaps” in the schedule, to produce continuous new forms of spectacle, new forms of representation, is exhausting and maybe not the only way to “do art”.

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ecology, p. 162
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process, p. 251

When I started work at the Whitworth in 2018 we were doing 24 exhibitions a year. It was a kind of insanity. So much energy was expended on changing to the next static display of objects isolated from the world outside. We have tried to slow down, to recalibrate, change the flow to adapt more to the rhythms of life, the seasons, the issues and concerns of the neighbours around us, and adapt the exhibitions to work to this agenda. Coming out of the global pandemic many museums are trying to do less, slow down, work more with collections, and contribute to civic agendas, as they readjust to the economic and social impacts on both programme and workforce. Furthermore, the environmental crisis was already challenging the consumption of materials and transport of artworks and people that the exhibitionary machinery demands. Now the war in Ukraine has increased the cost and decreased the availability of resources even further, and the pressure on the system to change is now surely irreversible.

So what if we stopped doing exhibitions altogether? We could still show art, or art-like things and work with artists. Could this question allow us to think deeply about what could be a different operating system for the museum, one that responded symbiotically to the evolving landscape around us, that was responsive to its constituencies and constituent context? What if the museum itself became the technology that enabled us to make the changes we desire?

In the last few years I have been looking to see what we can give in this respect, to experiment with different ways to use the gallery spaces in Manchester's art museums. In part this has been practical, to alleviate stress on teams by taking museum spaces out of the relentless exhibition programming cycle. Instead we have begun to assign permanent functions to our cultural real estate, that at the same time connects us more dynamically with the world beyond our front door.

The sculpture gallery at the Whitworth has now become an alternative experimental classroom for → schools and young people who don't fit into regular school, or creates a parallel school that complements the mainstream curriculum. The Director's Office has become a prayer room and quiet space for therapy sessions. One gallery is curated with collection works in order to better host weddings and community events. One is a common room and community meeting space, another the Collections Care Centre – devoted to using the holdings of the museum to deliver therapeutic healthcare programmes with clinical partners.

At the Manchester Art Gallery the largest ground floor gallery has now been transformed permanently into the *Lion's Den*, a form of SureStart Centre to shape and monitor the development of children from birth to age 5, with clinicians and researchers. This is a regular activity, which includes the weighing of babies and motor skills assessments, that is now done alongside and with the use of the art collections as tool for this essential work. The aestheticisation and transposition of such healthcare and educational practices into the environment of the museum is proving to be transformational and hugely beneficial – not only for the cultural capital of the institution, but for the children, families and clinicians involved in direct ways, producing improved development. This is so much better than the way things are normally done, and that is the story unfolding. Following on from this, the City Council's Children's Services department is now starting to use our sculpture galleries as the point of delivery for case conferences for children in care and other galleries showing the collection now double up for trauma therapy, or classes for refugee families. What was once our peripheral activity is now taking centre stage, and with ever more artistry.

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schools, p. 146

Most recently *What Kind of City?* was an exhibition of the work of Suzanne Lacy that evolved out of her major retrospective at SFMOMA in 2019. The main challenge we worked on with the artist was to think of how we could turn a backward-looking catalogue of events from the past into a forward-looking *manual* for social change in the future. We wanted to re-present her work, not as a document of individual expression, but as communal and collective action. As such, each historic work presented had an equal and forward reaction, to instigate a new project to shape the kind of city we and our fellow residents wanted to live in – to aim sincerely to change policy. *Oakland Projects* has become a programme of youth work and education, *Across and In-between* has borne a movement for → queer community representation and agency, *The Circle and the Square* has evolved into a programme of cultural cohesion for the → South Asian communities in the region. *Cleaning Conditions* has become *Uncertain Futures*, a city-wide research project and campaign to change policy in work and health for diverse older women.

I am not detailing these projects here just to gain more promotion in the attention economy of the cultural sector. Instead I want to show that it can be done, that we can give ourselves permission to do things differently. That there are other ways of doing art and integrating it back into lived lives and directly influencing the operations of a world that desperately needs new ideas, that needs the → care and consideration that art offers.

This is also manifesting itself elsewhere, from the *Living Room* at the Van Abbemuseum to the wholesale recalibration of the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw right now as a centre for the welcoming and assistance of people fleeing Ukraine.

Such acts are no less compelling than an exhibition, but in fact more so because they are rooted in the bigger story of human techne – or more simply, in the wider endeavour of making and doing.

I think here it is also important, in the spirit of making and doing culture, that we bring in the issue of how we do things, the aesthetics of process, and how the process works with people. As we discussed in this convening for the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* in Eindhoven, we cannot ignore the conflict underway around us, in Ukraine and so many other places right now. Going beyond the stasis of exhibitions, and getting into the doing, the testing, the making, the “don’t know yet”, is for me an urgent necessity of our moment. It would be a waste of the creative spirit if we limited ourselves to the preservation of traditions born of an era now passed.

More than the call to abandon traditions such as the exhibition, is the imperative to use art in the here and now, within the warp and weft in the present to make what comes next. We discussed in this most recent *Glossary of Common Knowledge* event the need to allow ourselves a space, a rest, a gap, that will allow other things to happen, other voices, intentions, other than our predisposed wills as curators or authors or managers to make more content that fills a perceived void in the schedule. We don’t need to be scared of the empty space.

Back in Manchester, at the former museum of costume in Platt Hall, we are also testing this out. This 18th century colonial building in a park, among the diverse neighbourhoods of the south of the city, is being redesigned, repurposed with the people who live around it. The work is slow and steady, organic and responsive, and it is finding its way through a natural process of conversation and working together.

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queer, p. 200
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care, p. 92, 122

There are no exhibitions, just a project to make a different kind of museum that works for those around it.

Entwined with the call to question the logic of the exhibition, is the call to question the logic that demands the exhibition, and thus the incentive to take control of a narrative, to drive an agenda that is born of personal intent, politic, self-preservation, career or status. The era of the exhibitionary, the curatorial, has also created a particular character who prevails and presides over what is seen, said, done and undone.

We might call this Exhibitionism. In a broader definition, this word means to show off, or even have a tendency to indecent exposure, or immodesty. In its most extreme form this would get you arrested. Certainly fitting for an age of the spectacle.

As a counter to this position, we might suggest something like post-exhibitionism and a preference for (according to my online thesaurus antonyms) humbleness, modesty, self-effacement, decency, unpretentiousness, unostentatious and shyness. → Care. Those are values I would subscribe the institution to.

For me this is now a primary and critical mode of operation – to listen and explore the cracks, commune with the nature of things, not dominate them.

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care, p. 92, 122

Process Steven ten Thije

Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, June 2022

When taking into account earlier contributions to the *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, the term for this entry could also have been “re-professionalisation”. I’m referring here especially to Meriç Öner’s term “de-professionalisation”⁴⁷⁹, but also Khwezi Gule’s “bureaucratisation”⁴⁸⁰. In some sense this reflection on “process”, comes in response to insights effectively summarised in these earlier terms.

Meriç states:

Rules and regulations create homogenised processes. In order to allow for all potential transformative steps, institutions must set back professional drives and open themselves to unanticipated encounters and knowledge resources. A remapping is required, one that considers a more open playing field where anyone with specialised knowledge, rather than professional status can act as a conduit for imaging a different future.

Gule’s reflection on “bureaucratisation” adds to this the political logic behind the creation of these “homogenised processes”. Discussing post-apartheid South Africa, he reflects on the relations among “civil society”, “institutionalisation” and “violence”. Quoting Professor Mahmood Mamdani, he states that the formation of “civil society” relies on the “monopolisation of the means of violence by the state”. This is a well known fact, but Gule links this to institutionalisation, noting that institutionalisation by the state is then also protected by the state, in the end even by means of force. In this sense the institution can also become a form of coercion. He links this observation to the way in which institutions in South Africa have, through the logic of institutionalisation and homogenisation, enforced a certain narrative on post-Apartheid South Africa, that even if based on a moment of liberation, itself becomes coercive again. Whereby his interest in the end goes out to the “language

479 *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 185–6.

480 *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018), 167–71.

of protest” that objects to this narrative, and attacks the institutionalised narrative, through the force of civil disobedience.

The question that these two earlier Glossary terms pose is to which degree the institution can escape its immanent connection to state violence. Whereby the “violence” which must be understood more broadly than physical violence, and be extended to include the exclusivity of expert culture and professionalisation.

What I wish to do with this term is to in some sense continue where these two earlier terms have brought us, and by reflecting on the situation here in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and the Netherlands, to see what these observations do when connecting them to what we have done recently here. Especially the form of collaborative practice known as working with constituencies. To reflect on that work we need to take a small detour through the history of the institution and link it to the broader institutionalisation of art in the Netherlands.

The Van Abbemuseum is an institution of some age – over 85 years old – which opened its doors in 1936. It entered the state at an unfortunate time, right before World War Two, and was to live a somewhat crippled life until → after the war. The museum resulted from a donation of money from a rich industrial, Henri van Abbe, a cigar manufacturer, who also donated a series of paintings to the museum as its founding collection. The museum in this sense stands in a quite rich Dutch tradition, especially in the 19th century, when numerous institutions were founded by affluent individuals. This was not a mere coincidence, as in contrast to most neighbouring European states, which actively built national cultural institutions, the Dutch were reluctant to do so as result of their strict liberalism. Believing in *laissez faire* politics, Dutch politicians did not want interfere in any public → territory outside of strict matters of infrastructure and state security. To give a sense of this, the Dutch government in 1939 spent just 0.218% of GDP on culture.⁴⁸¹

During the war the occupying German Nazi forces valued art very highly, and as a result the budget for art was tripled or even quadrupled, allowing for much for more substantial investments to be made. After the war, the newly formed Dutch government, in a perhaps rather surprising action, decided to keep the higher budget. This was partially inspired by the fact that the Cold War had quickly become a cultural war, and thus, as the first state secretary for culture state put it, the budget for art was another form of “defence budget”, but in this case the “moral defence against communism”.⁴⁸² However, it was also inspired by the Jewish social democrat Emanuel Boekman, who right before the war in 1939 had published *Government and Art in the Netherlands*.⁴⁸³ He was a statistician who introduced a form of rationalism in the relation between the state and culture, whereby statistics, planning and the monitoring of results started to slowly become part of the cultural field in the Netherlands, which now also started to professionalise.

481 For a general history of cultural politics in the Netherlands, see: Roel Pots, *Cultuur, koningen en democraten, Overheid & cultuur in Nederland* (Nijmegen: SUN, 2002), the referred to statistic comes from a dissertation by Emanuel Boekman, *Overheid en kunst in Nederland*, 1939 (republished in Amsterdam: Boekmanstichting / Van Gennep, 1989), 167.

482 In a debate in parliament the State Secretary for Culture Mr. Jozef Maria Laurens Theo “Jo” Cals described the culture budget as serving for the “morele bewapening van de natie tegen the communisme” (the moral armament of the nation against communism). Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post, *Civil Society and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2002), 257.

483 Boekman (1939 (1989)).

The Van Abbemuseum itself is a nice example of this shift. When it opened in 1936 the complete staff of the museum was a part-time director W.J.A. Visser, who was also the head of high school, and a janitor, who did “the rest”.⁴⁸⁴ Now, 86 years later the museum has around 50 full time staff and a rich organogram that maps the delicate and precise interactions among many different experts in fields ranging from conservation and archiving to educating, mediating, communicating, fundraising, and curating. The museum, which has now the respectable age of a very senior citizen, has grown in its lifetime from an embryonic one and half person operation, into an impressive, bureaucratic institution. This is the textbook example of Meriç’s statement: “Rules and regulations create homogenised processes.”

What has fed this institutionalisation and bureaucratisation is primarily, as Gule mentioned, the growing awareness within state organisations of how to deploy cultural institutions like museums in an effective and sustainable manner for public, and government, ends. The key indicators were thus based on what Meriç and others in the Glossary term the “broadcasting” approach. The museum specialists decide what is important for the public to know and then use all their expertise to bring that information to the greatest possible public. While the other side of this professionalisation was a growing awareness that museum collections formed the backbone of the public narrative on Dutch society, and that therefore preserving them was important and required another form of professionalisation.

This all happened in a society which in general professionalised in all other sectors of the economy – in the media, politics, education, business, health care, social work, transportation, and so on. This has produced a society that is very well organised and where many things are predictable, and where there is a lot of trust in government. Yet there is also a downside to this.

Aside from the efficiency of effective professionalisation, other aspects of this rationalisation and modernisation have not been investigated. Without making this claim in the philosophical depth that it would require, I propose that the form of professionalisation and bureaucratisation are also driven by a political vision, one that prefers standardisation over difference, and has a natural inclination towards homogenisation, whereby everything is organised through an ever more complex web of recognised and managed deviations from the “normal” core.

The problematic part of this inclination towards normalisation has recently been much debated in the museum field. Within the Van Abbemuseum this has happened within the framework of the Decolonial Summer → School, initiated by Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez. The focus on “normality” was here discussed within the framework “decoloniality”. In this context a link was made among the ideas of “norm”, “universality” and “modernity”. In this understanding modernity and coloniality are inseparable. The colonial/modern matrix describes a form of subjectivity that isolates the position of → knowing from what is known. The subject who knows is placed as an expert outside of the field of what is known, and can obtain a position of oversight that allows for control and manipulation. Here the expert obtains a position of power that can easily turn toxic, as it introduces a strong hierarchical position between those who know and those who are known. Linked to institutionalisation it translates into a problematic divide between those who decide the purpose and goal of the institution and then design the “homogenised processes” that are necessary to obtain them. This then turns all the non-experts

484 The history of the museum, focusing on the acquisition process is published in: René Pingen, *Dat museum is een mijnheer* (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2005).

into mere tools to execute the process or the even the material of the process, as the latter can be things like artworks, but also people. They can become tokens of a certain category, which in the end links back to racial ideas of certain people being essentialised in certain qualities and characteristics.

The difficulty with this, and here we return to the beginning of this text and the notion that we need to “de-professionalise”, is that they way forward cannot be the same as the way back. What is difficult is that even when looking at a modern society like the Dutch one from a distance, one can see that there is an almost gravitational pull towards standardisation and normalisation, which is racist and exclusive in its logic. However, when zooming in on all these various professions they also appear to be very useful, and the “evil” that one can recognise from above is difficult to find.

Take marketing, for instance. One could argue that following the argument outlined above marketing is perhaps a profession whose purpose it is to break down complex arguments and repackage them into simple standardised units, to allow the largest possible group of people to be affected. In a museum context it identifies norms and seeks to deploy them through visitor surveys and other techniques. This is perhaps hopelessly modern. At the same time, when returning to the Meriç text on de-professionalisation, if we want to give voice to someone with specialised knowledge, it would be nice if that person were not just heard by the staff of the museum and their friends, but by a bigger public. Or, another example, if visitor surveys make clear that we are only reaching a very small segment of society, and so “the specialised knowledge” one wants to foreground would benefit from another being presented to public, then it does not do harm to talk with a skilled marketer to think of ways in which these other communities can be reached.

The problem then is perhaps not just professionalisation in general, but more the purpose of it. How is professional practice organised? To put it in the words of the person in charge of marketing at this museum, Neeltje van Gool: “Marketing is a tool, it is up to the user to decide if it is used for good or evil.”

This, finally, brings me to working with → constituencies, and process. The Van Abbemuseum has now experiment for approximately five years with this method of working, whereby in the first period “de-professionalisation” was the leading principle. In a project called *Werksalon* we collaborated with various groups of people, who, in line with Meriç’s observation, at certain points overcame their problematic tokenism and became individuals with specialised knowledge, who we collaborated with and realised activities together.⁴⁸⁵ These activities were fun, inspiring and sometimes moving, and some even attracted bigger audiences, but within the bigger context of the museum the impact of this programme was marginal. It was, in true sense of the term, side programming.

Perhaps in some contexts this would not be problematic, but from the perspective of Gule’s reflection on bureaucratisation it means that it loses political force. If the museum splits its activities into constituent programmes for small publics and then

485 For a longer description of the work in the *Werksalon* see: Cleo Thomas and Hilde van der Heide eds., *De Stad in het museum, terugblik op twee jaar werksalon* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2020), https://vanabbemuseum.nl/fileadmin/files/Werksalon/vAM_evaluatie_Werksalon_boekje_A5_SEP20_def.pdf (accessed May 2022). For a focused discussion of working with constituencies, see: *The Constituent Museum: Constellations of knowledge, politics and mediation: A generator of social change*, eds. John Byrne, Elinor Morgan, November Paynter, Aida Sánchez de Serdio Martín and Adela Železnik (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018).

still operates in the traditional manner in its main programme, then this does little with regard to changing its role in how it enforces the violence of institutionalising.

The question then became the following: What if the challenge is not so much de-professionalisation, but instead re-professionalisation using the institutional machinery in a different manner? The ambition we formulated is that we wanted to see if it would be possible to deploy the professional skill-set the museum has access to in its diverse staff in a different manner to bring this “specialised knowledge” of those normally excluded, as referred to by Meriç, up onto the main stage?

This was the objective of the new collection display, *Delinking and Relinking*. What we tried to do with this was to create an exhibition experience that uses the various expertise at the museum to create an attractive experience, that at the same time includes content which draws from people often unheard in the museum. What we did was try to add voices and multisensory experiences that relate to other bodies and other biographies than those that are normally foregrounded in the museum.

Our main challenge in this was, and here the term returns, process. What we needed to do was to see how the professional skill-set of the museum staff could turn into a tool-set for these new people who would not normally have this kind of platform. Yet at the same time it was not an open invitation to just “do as you please”, as we wanted to guide these new partners, these → constituencies, to produce something that would not only present their points, but would do so in a manner that would be effective within the context of a modern art museum.

The central point of transformation, as we experienced it, is that you need to be attentive to the fact that many homogenised and standardised processes in museum practice are the way they are because they have been designed to reach a certain goal, and that goal is often the reinforcement of the status quo. The challenge is if you can still keep part of the effectiveness of such processes but re-purpose them (to use a term of Stephen Wright)⁴⁸⁶ into doing something else. The main switch you thus have to turn is to introduce people into these processes at a different moment. When brought in early enough, and with a clear (or as clear as possible) description of the role division between the museum professional and the new constituent partner, then you can form a partnership that produces something that not only allows the constituent partner to express themselves, but also to be heard.

I believe it is possible to restructure and “re-professionalise” the museum in this direction. Yet what remains unclear is how “civil society” protected by “force” responds to this, and if it will incorporate this social energy into its system as a healing mechanism that allows it to transform with non-violent means, or if it will resist and crack down on this transformative energy. In the end, I believe this is a test for the democratic culture of a society beyond the basic ritual of voting and the resulting government being representative. It is in this way an attempt to allow people to perform their role as constituents in allowing them to be listened to.

486 Stephen Wright, *Towards a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013), 56.

In her book *Timefulness*, Marcia Bjornerud recounts the thrilling story of how the age of the → Earth was determined. Much of her chronicle revolves around the idea of *deep time*, a concept nearly equivalent to that of geological time, but with a nuance that connotes the human inability to really comprehend its scale. Becoming conscious of its presence, however, can serve as a counterpoint to the other, more common and daily experience of time, recently accelerated by the free-fall of eco-social collapse.⁴⁸⁷ The idea of deep time provides us with a lens, a tool of resistance to rethink or – better yet – to try to re-experience time in a different way. In an institution like the Reina Sofía Museum certain temporalities become central: the recently inaugurated Collection, for example, proposes a reading of the present drawing upon a *critical study of a common past* framed by the period between 1881 and 2021. On the other hand, the circadian rhythms of the museum’s openings and closings, the duration of its public activities, or the speed at which various human groups move through the space mark the presence of another more concrete, more experiential temporality, that crystallises into a kind of chrononormativity, to use Elisabeth Freeman’s term.

Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate what the sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls “hidden rhythms”, forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time. The advent of wage work, for example, entailed a violent retemporalisation of bodies once tuned to the seasonal rhythms of agricultural labour.

Since I’ve been working in the Museum, there have been many spaces of debate around the physical restrictions in place here, about the performative barriers the institution erects or the accessibility (and/or inaccessibility) of its programmes. On the basis of these debates, we’ve reformulated calls for participation in an effort to seek greater contact with communities that we wanted to include in the life of the Museum. In contrast, very rarely have we questioned the problem of temporality. But the process of certain projects and experiences, like *El Jardín de las Mixturas*,) *Serenity Rave*, or *Savía*, have shaken (in more or less apparent ways) the regimes associated with a certain way of experiencing time that have been validated by the institution as “natural” or have been accepted by default. They have opened the possibility of what we might call constituent temporalities. These constituent temporalities have entered into the life of the Museum with varying degrees of friction, duration and visibility, and they have done so in an unregulated way, in plain sight of everyone.

The grass of the interior garden of the Sabatini building of the Reina Sofía Museum is still, for the most part, well-watered and exquisitely trimmed by Isaac, the Museum gardener. Fences delimit the planted areas; while low, they still dissuade people from stepping over them and walking on the grass. As part of the exhibit *El Jardín de las Mixturas: Tentativas de hacer lugar 1995–...* by Alejandra Riera, to be inaugurated on 4 May 2022, since 2017 two of these planted areas have been “lib-

erated” and their → care has been handed over to a diverse community of persons, including some Museum workers and others who don’t belong to the institution. (Figure 58) This has entailed a new system of manual watering more appropriate to the Madrid climate, the removal of the low fences surrounding these areas, and the *de facto* creation of a diverse and changing community that continues sharing knowledge and responsibilities, embodying the idea of *communitas* proposed by Roberto Esposito: “a body of persons who share a task”.⁴⁸⁸ Of all the transformations generated by this project over its five years of life, here I will focus on those that resonate with the temporality of the institution.

Figure 58: Alejandra Riera, *El Jardín de las Mixturas: Tentativas de hacer lugar 1995–*, 4 May – 5 September 2022, Museo Reina Sofía. Photo: Fran MM Cabeza de Vaca.



The main one, from my perspective, is the emergence in the very heart of the Museum of a portal to a direct experience of a form of deep time. This is provided by non-human life that, for the first time, takes on the appearance and presence of non-domesticated nature: not overly tended by radical anthropocentrism. The formal principle of the French garden that has dominated the rest of the compound for decades minimises the effects, for example, of the characteristic dryness of hot Madrid summers, instating a permanent illusion of halted time (halted, moreover, in a non-existent mild climate, alien to this location). Through the transformations of the *Jardín de las Mixturas*, the real summer, spring and fall become present and visible in the interior of the Museum, favouring an awareness of cycles that have heretofore been attenuated by the air conditioning of the interior and the static landscaping of the garden. One need only sit on one of the benches that have been placed inside the planted area (yes!) of the *Jardín de las Mixturas* and observe care-

fully in order to receive a message of a very different temporality, that appeals to a trans-historical flow of time: that of vegetation, lichens, microorganisms and insects, as well as all those beautiful beings that have planted their hearts in it.

Within the community that cares for the garden a new temporality has emerged that has to do, for example, with the ideal times for watering, work shifts that avoid the hours of the most extreme temperatures, or the periods of waiting imposed by different plant species. These temporal threads also had to be woven together with the office hours of the Museum workers in a process of self-regulation and an active occupation of time that in principle was not devoted to this purpose. Thus without any clear institutional guideline or hierarchical orders to this effect, an experiment in a constituent → process has taken place in relation to the agency involved in the management and use of time.



Figure 59: Laura Ramírez Ashbaugh, *Serenity Rave*, 2021, video frames of a video session, Museo Reina Sofia.

A collective body of ten young people who are members of equipo1821 dances in the garden, halls and rooms of the Museum in each session of *Serenity Rave*, a physical practice of the choreographer Laura Ramírez Ashbaugh. (Figure 59) This generates a liminal state of presence/absence, accompanied by electronic music through headphones. As in all dance, time is suspended.

When explored in collective, the transformative power of performance – art linked so radically to an alternative notion of time – reverberates in this celebration with another idea of *communitas*, a concept proposed by Victor and Edith Turner and cited by Victoria Pérez Rollo in her essay “Corporalidades Disidentes”. Party and politics on the contemporary stage, speaking to us about the “pleasure of a human group that shares common experiences in which distances and hierarchies are temporarily abolished, as are the structures that order daily life”. Which leads us to other terms, like “joy, → empathy, liberatory interconnection, (or) the creation of enduring bonds [...]”

If we were to do what Silvio Lang proposes in his *Manifiesto de la práctica escénica* and “talk less about ‘works’ and more about ‘practices’”, we would once again be shifting our attention towards the time for being, doing and becoming, rather than the products and objects that these practices produce, so central to the communication and archives of institutions. Understanding, living and narrating community as a verb. As time. We can reread the calls for participation, listen to the reports, and look at the photographs that were taken in these encounters in order to demonstrate once again – in contrast to the lived experience itself – the irremediable failure of the attempt to fix in time that which resists this treatment. In community experience, as in the performance *time is all we have*.⁴⁸⁹

In this the temporal experience generated by the appearance of twelve young people dancing in a group in sessions of 15, 30 or 60 minutes, establishes a rupture in normative time, a pause that not only produces effects upon those who are immersed in the music and dance, but also upon those who stop to look and there-

fore enter into what Erika Fischer-Lichte⁴⁹⁰ calls the autopoietic feedback loop. The value of these pauses resides not only in their ephemeral emergence – powerful and magical though it is – but rather in the potential → emancipatory power they possess, suggesting other ways of being in time inserted within the normative time of the visit, the itinerary or even the pause to rest. Following Elisabeth Freeman:

*Pauses or interruptions in the routinized rhythms of everyday life, in the sequences expected to unfold naturally from one another, become the material for a peoplehood experienced as pre- or a-political, as merely human. In describing the narrative texture of modern nationality, Homi Bhabha too refines the distinction between linear-historical time and the more static times of cyclic and monumental time: he describes the dialectic between a “pedagogical” time in which historical events seem to accrete toward a given destiny, and a “performative” time in which a people recreates itself as such through taking up a given activity simultaneously.*⁴⁹¹

Finally, if there is any collective that inhabits its own temporality it is children, who have no compunction about voicing the consequences of any effort to squeeze their temporality into our adult agendas through hurry (and sometimes calm). Free play, the ultimate experience of flow, is one of the most perfect ways to experience the passage of time in a completely different way. Based on this premise, the project *Savia*, developed in different formats and editions in the Museum since 2019 in collaboration with the collective La Parcería Infancia y Familia and oriented to children aged between 0 and 7 years and the adults who accompany them, centres its methodology and some of its proposals on opening up time for free play. We might say that the majority of the activities for children that cultural institutions propose – including some of the activities within *Savia* – are based on a sequential outline of actions that work well for some children and, above all, that fit perfectly into the adult logics of how time should be organised. But a proposal based on free play grants temporal agency to the children themselves, who decide whether the activity will last five minutes or thirty, and in the course of the activity – as also in the case of the dance – a different temporality emerges, into which the accompanying adults can either enter or not, but which certainly opens an alternative space, a door, a different way of flowing with a texture entirely different from a productive or sequential temporal logic.

Conclusions

Ursula K. Le Guin, in her *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, said:

*We’ve all heard about the sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the things to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news.*⁴⁹²

I dare to establish a parallelism and in this way shift attention from the products, the projects and actions, and toward the temporalities in which these take place: temporal experiences that function more like a continent than like content, and that profoundly condition the possibility of some ways of being (and some ways of not being able to be). From that vantage point we might observe and discuss which changes to implement in order to favour the coexistence of different temporalities.

490 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Estética de lo performativo* (Madrid: Abada, 2011).

491 Elisabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories (Perverse modernities)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010).

492 Ursula K. Guin, Donna J. Haraway and Lee Bul, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (Amsterdam: Adfo Books, 2019).

489 Bárbara Hang and Agustina Muñoz eds., *El Tiempo Es Lo Único Que Tenemos* (Buenos Aires: Caja Negra Editora, 2019).

Can institutions detect, receive and accompany experiences that open cracks in the chrono-norm?

Can these experiences shape chrono-normativity and permanently establish lines of flight within it?

Do calls for participation, for example, or registration deadlines or beginning and ending dates for activities make sense when we are promoting experiences that aim to be community-based?

Are the organisational and productive logics of the institution compatible with the indomitable temporal needs of certain life processes?

What strategies might we develop to favour and make possible real temporal agency on the part of the communities with which we live?

If time is no longer a line but rather a spiral, a loop or a cloud bank, then according to Bruno Latour all that is left to us is “to shift our attention (and) actively select elements that pertain to different times”.⁴⁹³ And to stop to listen, from that vantage point, to what time does with the communities that inhabit the Museum: it modifies and remixes us, it resignifies, expels, heals and sickens us, it challenges us and endows us with meaning. And also and especially, to listen to what communities do with time and with the temporality of the Museum.

Perhaps anchoring our visions and our desires in a deep time perspective might lend solidity to our efforts to defend diverse temporal experiences of and for the commons. Perhaps it might help us navigate upstream in this end-of-the-world against which there is no option but rebellion.

Rehearsal

Joanna Zielińska

M HKA, Antwerp, June 2022

I walked into the rehearsal and it was obvious that they were taking a break. Brecht was sitting in a chair smoking a cigar, the director of the production, Egon Monk, and two or three assistants were sitting with him, some of the actors were on stage and some were standing around Brecht, joking, making funny movements and laughing about them. Then one actor went up on the stage and tried about 30 ways of falling from a table. [...]. Another actor tried the table, the results were compared, with a lot of laughing and a lot more of horseplay. This went on and on, and someone ate a sandwich, and I thought, my god this is a long break. So I sat naively and waited, and just before Monk said, “Well, now we are finished, let’s go home,” I realised that this was a rehearsal.

This is how Brecht’s assistant Carl Weber described his first rehearsal visit to the Berliner Ensemble and his contact with the artist’s creative → process published in *Brecht as Director* (1967). Rehearsal work under Brecht’s direction was characterised by a conscious subversion of time economies.

According to Annemarie Matzke, Brecht’s rehearsal time is above all time spent together, which seemed unlimited. At first glance, Brecht’s work on rehearsals can thus be described as undermining a traditional approach to the creative process in the theatre: the rehearsals for a *mise-en-scène* usually have a concrete performance and premiere date as a goal; they require making appointments for working times; they are frequently organised around a detailed division of labour; and tied to a common rehearsal location. The participants are connected by means of contracts. Investments of time and money are needed, which create respective dependencies. To this extent, every rehearsal practice is always working on the institutionalisation of its own activity at the same time.

In Brecht’s practice, instead of solidly planned rehearsals, there is an indeterminacy to the situation that seems to be an attempt to avoid the compulsion to create. Time spent together, which seems specifically unplanned and uncontrolled, is emphasised. The hierarchies of production (the division of labour between director and actors, assistants, and dramaturgs) disappear in the atmosphere of rehearsal. They seem to be friends interacting with each other rather than colleagues working together.⁴⁹⁴

The anecdote of the encounter with the rehearsal as a break, as narrated by Brecht’s assistant, can serve us as a metaphor and starting point for considerations about the methodology of rehearsal in the context of the visual arts. To do so, it will be necessary to look more broadly at the significant transformations that have taken place in the visual and performing arts since the 1960s until the present time, which have led to a fundamental paradigm shift.

Today, we no longer view an artwork as a static object defined by a single prescribed meaning that is communicated to a universal viewer. According to the art historian and theoretician Amelia Jones, the notion of performativity highlights the open-ended interpretation of an artwork – which must be understood as a process. Performativity enables the → process of reinterpretation and revision of discourses, artistic practices, and artworks. Such a critical strategy offers the means to open up the possibilities of reception, through multiple readings of one work, which introduces the possibility of ambivalence, confusion, subversive, and non-normative interpretation of artworks, collections, and archives.

The phenomenon of performativity is also associated with distinct systems of production and labour, models of collecting, and a type of institution that is different from previous, traditional institutional models. The new type of institution should be based on a methodology derived from disciplines other than the visual arts. Contemporary artistic practices and time-based media require innovative strategies and production systems.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, key to the development of both theatre and new forms of performance art was the phenomenon of *postdramatic theatre*, which put aside the importance of the text and the relationships among characters in favour of developing connections between what happens on the stage and in the audience. Although there is an ongoing debate about this notion among theatre researchers, Bertolt Brecht’s ideas about political and experimental theatre have undoubtedly been highly influential in forming and developing many new theatrical

493 Bruno Latour and Víctor Goldstein, *Nunca fuimos modernos: Ensayos de antropología simétrica* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2022).

494 Annemarie Matzke, “Contingency and Plan”, *Putting Rehearsals to the Test: Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film, Theater, Theory, and Politics*, eds. Sabeth Buchmann, Ilse Lafer and Constanze Ruhm (Vienna: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2016), 61–2.

Figure 60: Dora García, *The Sinthome Score*, 2013, performance, score, installation, Ellen de Bruijne Projects, 2014. Photo: Ellen de Bruijne.

genres, including the process of creation, rehearsing, and the way the audience is assigned an active role in the production and interpretation processes.⁴⁹⁵

In the context of contemporary art strongly influenced by performative practices, the rehearsal is becoming a different way of approaching research-based projects and exhibition spaces. It is evolving into a very relevant format in the context of time-based media such as performance. The methodology of rehearsal in the visual arts has its own characteristics, and these might be different from those found in the context of theatre and dance.

The → process of rehearsing in classical theatre aims at perfection and virtuosity, whereas in contemporary art it appears as a contradictory model of practice where the final outcome is open, improvisational, and dialogue-oriented. The methodology of rehearsal introduces innovative labour structures and productivity. What does this mean for institutions, audiences, and cultural workers? Does rehearsal hold a transformative power; does it constitute a risk for institutional stability?

The concept of rehearsal is important in the context of many contemporary artistic practices, especially those that have a hybrid nature and combine visual arts with performance, such as Cally Spooner, Falke Pisano, Zhana Ivanova, Emily Mast, and Catherine Sullivan, to mention just a few.

The Spanish artist Dora García has made rehearsal one of her essential tools. The artist has used the rehearsal format in several of her projects, including at the exhibition dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel in 2012. Her performance, titled *KLAU MICH*, was a television project released in collaboration with Theater Chaosium and Offener Kanal Kassel, and it lasted 100 days, which was exactly the duration of the exhibition. The project took the form of a live TV programme in which the audience could participate. The programme was also broadcast by a local station in Kassel. The concept of *KLAU MICH* originated from the idea of a “dress rehearsal”, i.e., a rehearsal which takes place just before a premiere, where the director can still make changes to the materials before the work is officially presented, when the audience can still influence his work. Whereas Dora García seeks to enable an active role for the audience, she perceives the idea of a premiere as a situation where the audience gives its verdict and, in a sense, decides what is “good” and what is “bad”. As the artist states:

Quality is not universal. It depends on many things, notions of social class, backgrounds of the public, some things are successful with certain public and other things are not. I have a problem with the notion of success and with the idea of success connected with performance. [...]

I also think that it completely takes away the joy of performance when there are so many factors depending on the approval. There is something satisfactory about permanent rehearsal. When you work on the performance and you work towards the premiere, the premiere has a very precise time frame with people and ceremony created around the work [...] In Kassel we had this very beautiful stage design. There was always something to see but we were not performing necessarily for the people who came. [...] It became a durational performance; people could come when we had a coffee break or warm up exercises.

495 Michael Fernando, *Is Postdramatic Theatre Post-Brechtian?*, keynote lecture (December 2014), http://repository.lib.vpa.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/123456789/290/2018-10-12_Keynote%20Speech%20-%20%20Postdramatic%20Theatre%20PostBrechtian.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed 5 April 2022).



Figure 61: Dora García, *The Sinthome Score*, 2013, performance prop, score original drawings by Dora García.

In another work entitled *Rehearsal/Retrospective* (2010), the artist again uses theatrical means of expression, referring to the convention of street theatre. The duration of this work is flexible and depends largely on the museum’s audience, and it is usually an unannounced action. There is a coach who is instructing the performers, spontaneously “correcting” their repetitive actions. For example, the coach comes and asks the performer to repeat something louder, so that the performer may change the tone of their voice. The work is called *Retrospective* because it brings five different works by García together. In the Reina Sofía Museum, in Madrid, the performance started at the entrance where visitors were queuing for their tickets. There is a paradox in this work: the public is watching a rehearsal and, at the same time, a theatrical performance that follows the tradition of street theatre.



The Sinthome Score (2014–2016) (Figures 60 and 61) is another work that also takes the form of a rehearsal: something in between a seminar and an open class. García takes a fragment of Lacan’s *Seminar XXIII* and performs the text between a “reader” and a “mover”, between body and language. The aim of the performance is to study the text, which speaks precisely about the idea of practice that saves us from falling

into madness. Performers can invite the audience to step into one of two roles of “reader” and “mover”, determined by the principles of the performance.

A work by Dora García, titled *The Bug*, (Figure 62) is a performance adaptation of one of the last science-fiction plays by the futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky. The piece was created in collaboration with Oslo Art Academy, M HKA, and De Singel in Antwerp, and, again, it has a similar structure to an open rehearsal. It reflects on the notion of cyclical time and the dimension of revolution directly connected to this concept, based on the assumption that history moves in cycles and there is always an eternal return. The participants in the project aim to reconstruct contemporary history using timelines written with chalk on → school blackboards which are part of the scenography. The methodology of open rehearsal helps to create a new work based on the performative installation. The development of the project aims at studying and understanding collectively created and performed theatre, forming a group made of different ages, experiences, and disciplines, with no clear division between audience and performers.

Figure 62: Dora García, *The Bug* (After Mayakovsky) [El Bicho], collective performance, October 2022. Krööt Juurak in the image as a performer. Photo: Estudio Perplejo for El Amor / Centro de Cultura Contemporánea Conde Duque.



The formats of the durational performances that Dora García develops vary from open rehearsal to open class, or live broadcast TV programme. They function as a critical tool to alter the perceptions of the participants as well as to build political awareness. Paraphrasing Donna J. Haraway’s “→ situated knowledge” concept, we can say that working with improvised actions in this manner is a way of engaging with thinking as a process. It is less about dealing with fully resolved problems and more about experiencing the movement of thoughts in uncertain circumstances.

→ school, p. 146
situated, p. 148

This way of working relies on the freedom that emanates from such a process, and the acceptance of the fact that such a method may be chaotic and never final.⁴⁹⁶

As we have seen during this presentation, the concept of rehearsal in the visual arts often becomes a tool for questioning the foundations, routines, restrictions, limitations, and instrumentalised genres introduced by institutions. It represents zones of transition, collective agency and authorship, and different relationships. It becomes a means for collective formation. In contemporary artistic practices, rehearsal as a methodology serves to develop new modes of production and spectatorship, whilst at the same time it constitutes a challenge for the institutions that host them. Hopefully the format of rehearsal and open-ended artwork can influence the transformation of existing models of museums as spaces of preservation of objects. This collective, inclusive way of working brings new agency to art institutions. On the other hand, we must remember about the new forms of labour that the presence of the body in the space of art requires. One may ask, how do we keep these works alive and meaningful? What is the role of the spectator? Who shows what? Who may speak? Who may make judgments?

And finally, can we afford to take a break and spend time together?

Strange (propaganda) tools Sebastian Cichocki

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, August 2022

“All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. [...] I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda.”⁴⁹⁷
— W.E.B. Du Bois, 1926

While assuming the necessity of dealing with the excesses of contemporary art, we must bear in mind the freedom of art, including the freedom to cease being what it is supposed to be. Sometimes this is related to a return to more compromised or historically marginalised forms such as → propaganda. The word mustn’t frighten us. After all, every work that persuades us of something, be it a form of aesthetics, an opinion, a pleasurable or unpleasurable experience, is a form of propaganda. Today more than ever before, we need the art of propaganda to act on behalf of minority rights, women’s reproductive rights, and the well-being of our natural environment and other species.

The extravagant costume of contemporary art often constrains movement and impedes the ability to deliver a well-aimed blow.

One of the classics of conceptual art, the Uruguayan artist of German origins Luis Camnitzer, a teacher and writer on education, likened the art world to a collection of Aladdin’s lamps.⁴⁹⁸ We collect, conserve and admire “vessels”, we view them in museums, contemplate their ornaments and forms. We can write the history of these objects, name the styles and tendencies. But what really interests us is the genie trapped inside the lamp or bottle, where we believe he resides with his super-

496 Donna J. Haraway, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988), 583.

497 William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art”, *The Crisis*, vol. 32 (October 1926), 295.

498 Luis Camnitzer, “Where is the Genie?”, an edited version of a keynote speech for the conference *The Idea of the Global Museum*, held at the Museum für Gegenwart at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (December 2016), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/100/268759/where-is-the-genie/> (accessed 19 April 2022).

→ propaganda, p. 35, 265

powers. We have created a very sophisticated system of sustaining the belief in the existence of this spirit: museum edifices, frames and plinths, books and catalogues, specialist language, the cult of “genius”. This system may be extremely costly and energy intensive. What’s more, it requires specialist knowledge and (fittingly for a cult) an appropriate degree of initiation. Art would therefore be something of “handicraft+”, although it is difficult to determine, without sliding into esotericism, what hides behind the mysterious “plus”.

What if the genie does not exist? Or – apparently a much more interesting possibility – he has left the lamp and seldom visits it, inhabiting instead many different places, objects and actions? Welcome to the world of genies liberated from the bottle once and for all!

Artmaking is about adding and more seldom about subtracting. This involves a peculiar paradox: even the artworks that convey a critique of the exploitation of natural resources and rapacious modernisation materialise in the form of energy intensive and costly objects. The effort → invested in keeping artworks alive, in terms of air-conditioned halls, sophisticated forms of display, specialist transport, and so on, is little short of gargantuan. Skittish ideas captured in material forms suck out resources and energy. At the same time, postulates have been formulated in art for several decades to refrain from production and shift artistic work to the sphere of environmental and climate activism. This is how we can consider, for example, the process of the dematerialisation of the artwork in conceptual art in the 1960s, a practice that often rested on → ecological foundations. This aspect has been marginalised in Western art history as incongruent with the cool, analytical, “inorganic” image of this artistic tendency. In his conversation with Ursula Meyer in 1969, the artist Lawrence Weiner declared straightforwardly:⁴⁹⁹ “If you can’t make art without making a physical imprint on the physical aspects of the world, then maybe art is not worth making. In this sense, any permanent damage to ecological factors in nature not necessary for the furtherance of human existence, but only necessary for the illustration of an art concept, is a crime against humanity.” Two years later, a text was published in Poland to accompany the *plein air Ziemia Zgorzelecka – 1971: Art and Science in the Process of Protecting the Human Natural Environment in Opolno-Zdrój*.⁵⁰⁰ This manifesto, which articulated the principles of what was most likely the first climate *plein air* in Europe, included the following forecast: “The modern-day civilisation model is the most supreme machine we know heading for self-annihilation. This results from the drive to constantly change the world. We are currently witnessing a manifest crisis of science as a universal remedy for all problems of humankind.”

The climate crisis, experienced on a daily basis through the painful loss of biodiversity, the seasons, and a general lack of hope for the future, requires the activation of massive deposits of → imagination (literally: more propaganda!). Meanwhile, the art world as a model of production, distribution, relations with its audiences, is burdened by numerous flaws: a penchant for exaggeration, extravagance, competition, overproduction, elitism. Part of art history is also the tradition of observing the sky and the → Earth, variable light conditions, temperature and humidity. The history of 19th century painting alone can teach us a lesson about the degradation of the natural environment in the Industrial Revolution era. Through artworks we

experience destructive processes to which art itself frequently contributed. At the same time, emerging steadily from the intersection of art, political activism and ecological thought since the 1960s is a reflection on art seen from the perspective of geologic time and a need to create works that are neutral or even beneficial for the environment. The choice of such artists as Bonnie Ora Sherk, Betsy Damon and the OHO Group was to refrain from producing new artworks, which fill museum storage spaces, and to hand agency over to non-human forces. For example, the American artist Bonnie Ora Sherk (1945–2021) engaged in transforming neglected areas of the city into green enclaves useful for local communities. Sherk called her early works from the 1970s “environmental performance sculptures” – she found places that could act as stage settings for her temporary interventions. The performer’s presence was supposed to change the perception of “dead spaces”. In October 1970, while wandering around San Francisco, Sherk came across an enormous puddle filled with rubbish and building materials – the remains of the construction of the giant 101 Freeway Interchange. The artist returned there with a photographer, put on an evening gown and sat for an hour in an armchair resting in the dirty water, smoking cigarettes and contemplating the surrounding urban landscape. This scene, recorded in *Sitting Still I*, is a graceful illustration of the concept of “dark ecology”, proposed several decades later by the philosopher Timothy Morton – the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural, the artificial and the organic, have been blurred. In the mid-1970s, Sherk chose to adopt a more active approach to urban regeneration by initiating the creation of spaces where local communities could work, learn and relax together as well as spaces for animals (which at that time were ever more often involved by the artist in joint interspecies actions). Her most famous project, *Crossroads Community (The Farm)*, 1974–1980, was a community garden set up under the highway overpass in the same location where the photo *Sitting Still I* was taken a few years prior. The farm grew to seven acres and included garden beds and the Raw Egg Animal Theater, a building for animals, among other facilities. Used by residents of residential neighbourhoods in the vicinity – Mission, Bernal Heights, Potrero Hill and Bayview – the place served as a kindergarten, a neighbourhood club, a playground, and a farm.

Taking Camnitzer’s reflection about the genie further in the context of Sherk’s work, the spirit would remain invisible, but no longer contained in the vessel that restricts his movements and distracts attention from possibly the most important thing in art: the work of imagination, → care and building an interspecies community.

The above example leads us to one of the tools of contemporary propaganda, useful in the context of museology in an era of climate crisis: → rewilding, that is making a site wild (again), renaturalisation. This term appeared in the 1990s in a debate about new, more radical strategies of protecting the natural environment. It was proposed and propagated by Dave Foreman, the founder of the organisation Earth First! The organisation Rewilding Europe describes this tactic on its website as leaving the vastest possible wild spaces free from human intervention to allow natural processes to once again create diverse landscapes, damaged ecosystems to regenerate, and the renaturalisation of heavily transformed areas.⁵⁰¹ The fundamental rule of rewilding is: “nature manages itself”. In a certain sense, this means a reversal of processes initiated by humans during the Neolithic revolution. It is tempting to apply this term to artistic practices that involve refraining from production and, instead, creating conditions for other species that can take control over a given area.

501 Rewilding Europe, *What Is Rewilding?*, <https://rewildingeuropa.com/what-is-rewilding-2/> (accessed 20 May 2022).

→
invested, p. 236
ecological, p. 162
imagination, p. 197
Earth, p. 21

499 Conversation with Ursula Meyer. It was originally published in Meyer ed., *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972).

500 Wanda Gołkowska, Jerzy Ludwiński, *Odkrywki: Kropła wiedzy o plenerze ziemia zgorzelecka 1971–2021*, [Discoveries: A drop of knowledge about the open air Ziemia Zgorzelecka 1971–2021], catalogue (Wrocław: Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław, 1971).

→
care, p. 92, 122
rewilding, p. 202

Of note in this context is the practice of the artist John Latham, who was employed at the Scottish Office in Edinburgh in 1975–1976 (as part of the Artist Placement Group experimental programme). Latham was assigned the task of developing a feasibility study concerning the removal of nineteen suburban slag heaps, left after the mining of oil-bearing shale since the 1860s. Latham approached the slag heaps as → *process* sculptures and proposed nominating them as monuments of historical, cultural and natural significance. A group of slag heaps ultimately became protected by virtue of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. Nominating slag heaps as landscape-as-art can also be seen to do away with the dichotomy between the natural and artificial. It also brings to mind Joseph Beuys' enigmatic proposal (few traces of which are found in museum archives and writings) concerning the "conservation" of Dutch light. Beuys assumed that the unique light conditions known from old paintings had been ultimately lost at the beginning of the 20th century due to the land reclamation project in the Zuiderzee, a former North Sea Bay. Rewilding as an artistic activity could theoretically allow for restoring the sublime experience of being blinded by the bay water surface.

Last but not least, thinking about art of the future and propaganda we may evoke the *ecoaesthetics* programme proposed by the Pakistani-British artist Rasheed Araeen. This minimalist sculptor and installation artist, founder of the *Third Text* journal, postulates going beyond the supremacy of *Homo sapiens* and unleashing the "creative energies of free collective imagination". He criticises the very system in which art functions, which maintains hierarchies, glorifies blind growth just for the sake of growth, separates creative energies from everyday life processes and petrifies them in the form of "narego" – the narcissistic ego of the artist. Araeen proposes two terms: nominalism and cosmoruralism. The former refers to launching useful processes by artists which are implemented by local communities – fluid, lasting, based on sustainable development. Towards the end of the 1970s, Araeen visited the desert territories of South Balochistan, from which his ancestors originated. Greatly impressed by the majestic Pakistani landscape, the artist asked himself: "Why cannot this landscape become an artwork?" An engineer by education, Araeen proposed the construction of a dam in the desert to help retain water from periodic rivers. The structure would become both a sculpture and a functional dam, an artist's work and a feat of engineering, it would serve aesthetic contemplation and improve living conditions. This would not be a model of a situation meant to highlight a certain problem, and therefore Araeen's task would consist above all in *not making* art. The second proposal, cosmoruralism, is a total vision of a network of cooperatives and ecological villages based on fair cooperation between the Global North and Global → *South*, which would result in the reforestation of the Sahara, among other effects.

Imagining a new world, which is the goal of propaganda at its finest, is a step in the right direction. This is where the role of artists can be distinguished in an era of planetary change: the mobilisation and activation of processes of imagination that would offer an alternative to doubt, and the sense that it is already too late to do anything.

As an imaginative exercise and a lesson in artistic camouflage and propaganda, it is also worth reconsidering Jerzy Ludwiński's texts from the first half of the 1970s. The theoretician, lecturer and art critic (1930–2000), considered one of the apostles of conceptual art in Poland, assumed that we were living in a "post-artistic era". Ludwiński maintained that we should expect a completely new kind of art that would not require support or "nurturing" by art institutions, and that wouldn't

need to be imbued with visibility and meaning. Writing about a post-artistic era, Ludwiński emphasised the osmosis between art and other disciplines. His premise was that the new art would escape the confines of language and the institutional apparatus at our disposal. "Perhaps, even today, we do not deal with art. We might have overlooked the moment when it transformed itself into something else, something which we cannot yet name. It is certain, however, that what we deal with offers greater possibilities," Ludwiński wrote in 1972⁵⁰². In that very year, on the other side of the Atlantic, Allan Kaprow in his essay "The Education of Un-Artist: Part 1" noted the following revelation, "Nonart is more art than Art art."⁵⁰³

By way of conclusion, I would like to refer to the science-fiction short story "Rainbow Wrasse" from 2018 by the Irish writer Francis McKee, published as a part of the *Constituent Museum* anthology.⁵⁰⁴ It is set in a realm in which forecasts about the planetary system's ultimate destabilisation become reality. The human population has shrunk significantly, the available farmlands can only sustain a micropopulation. Communities camp out here and there, making use of abandoned airports from which no aircraft will ever take off again. The Internet is rationed and available to the protagonists for just a few hours a week, but this is enough to keep up a florid correspondence. Few artworks have survived. A box of films on 35 mm film stock, several abstract paintings. These are showcased during rare ceremonies. Former museum staff and curators have abandoned white cube temples and work in a garden, conducting valuable experiments in the field of interspecies aesthetics. They communicate with fungi and lichens, produce antibiotics, vegan protein and vitamins. However rough, this vision has a certain allure. In a world after the end of the Holocene the human being is no longer an omnipotent being who systematises, modernises and exploits natural resources. Instead, people must adjust to the expectations of their non-human sisters and brothers. Solace also comes with the promise that art can be invented completely from scratch, even if this entails the ultimate abandonment of the museum and the movement-restricting costume of contemporary art. Regardless of whether Aladdin's lamp hides a magical creature inside or just the promise of its existence, it reminds us about the role played by the imagination in our common work for the sake of a better future.

Territory Nancy Garín Guzmán and Antoine Silvestre

MACBA, Barcelona, May 2022

To think about → *constituencies* today is fundamentally to think about power in the framework of liberal democracies. So arguably the first mistake, in our view, one could make when leaning on the subject is surely to fail to understand this framework as an historical and → *situated* social construct. We often tend to refer to our political concepts, like democracy or constituent power, from an ahistorical perspective. Crystallising both ancient and modern archetypal forms of political organisation (Greek democracy) or shifts in the power structure (the English, French or North-American revolutions), it seems that our political horizon is, at best, represented by a sort of utopia toward which we fight, time after time. This linear approach needs to be challenged again.

502 Jerzy Ludwiński, *Sztuka w epoce postartystycznej, Sztuka w epoce postartystycznej i inne teksty*, ed. Jarosław Kozłowski (Poznań: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Poznaniu, 2009), 57.

503 Allan Kaprow, "The Education of Un-Artist: Part 1 (1971)", *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Barkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), 98.

504 Francis McKee, "The Rainbow Wrasse", *The Constituent Museum: Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), 14–26.

The Espectros de lo Urbano project understand urbanity as the “constant and ever changing relationship between capitalism and the territories it encompasses and utilize”⁵⁰⁵. Embracing this definition helps realise the fact that urbanity is not limited to the dense cities and hyper-centres of the globalised world, but encloses all spaces and territories involved in a systemic, structural relationship of power: the urban matrix. In this sense, urbanity can be seen as the major production of our modern system. It is at the core of the colonial expansion and the more recent “globalisation”, to mention only two of the most obvious examples. Urbanity mainly defines the historical process of the modern world system as a question of territorial expansion. It is then the primary framework through which we can understand the social production and reproduction of our system, historically and spatially situated.

The second and major consequence of the urbanity approach as a systemic framework is that Western epistemology and its evolution, the body of modern knowledge (science, legality, languages, etc.), needs to be understood as responses to the cognitive needs of the spatial and territorial expansion of modernity, and all the possible post- that have followed it.

We believe that the democratic forms as we know, speak of and practice them are deeply embedded in the urban matrix. They historically respond to its need and agenda, across time and space. Hence we always need to understand where we stand now, and account for the past, when we start a conversation about political power and its constituencies.

We propose an analogy between democracy as a politic form and the museum as a cultural institution, understanding that the main link between the two is the nation state.

The spatial expansion of our modern system has produced epistemological necessities leading to the emergence of the modern cultural institutions. The infinite moves and redefinitions of power relationships cutting across all territories have been absorbed progressively by the capitalistic system as shaped political organisations and struggles, leading to the prevalence of the state as its principal form for the dominant, centric territories. On the other hand, we understand the museum as a response to the cognitive needs of the nation state, which in its turn responded to the cognitive needs of urbanity in modern history.

It seems logical to draw a red line linking urbanity to the nation state and finally to the cultural institutions. We hope this genealogy serves as a fertile ground in order to redefine a proper basis when speaking of constituencies and what this could mean for the museum.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1989, and along with the strengthening of capitalism in its neoliberal form, a half-hearted view of “capitalist realism” (to which “there is no alternative”) was installed in the West, which has led to a weakening of social movements and democratic institutions themselves at the hand of financial capital.

However during the last 30 years, in that same horizon of “impossibility”, more often, in many places and most of the time situated at the edge of the Western-

505 Neil Brenner, “Qué es la teoría urbana crítica?” *PLOT* no. 46, trans. David Prieto Serrano and Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago (2019), 10–4.

centred world system, we have witnessed the consolidation of new models of constitutions and political forms (Zapatism, Rojava, Bolivia, Chile, etc.). Each of these are specific – and different – examples of the redefinition of the political, via profound work regarding the fundamental legitimacy of the constituent power. They give a clear relevance to the notion of territory: nature’s rights, the common management of its resources like water, and a plurinational approach, are only few examples of the importance and particularity of this relationship with their land.

We propose the term Territory as an opportunity for the museum to resonate with another conception of the constituency of power (away from the sequence Bourgeois Revolution → Nation State → Cultural Institutions), moving toward the fissures appearing at the edge of our democracies, where new forms of the political are emerging. Paying close attention to the emergent political forms that are today challenging the nation state where it is fully stressed by its internal contradictions should inform us about a multitude of political imaginaries, much needed if we want to escape the urban matrix contained in our very notion of culture and its role in the political sphere.

1 January 1994, was a very particular beginning of the year (or end of the previous one). The EZLN (the Zapatista Army of National Liberation) appeared on the scene, and with it an enormous territory that seemed to no longer exist had raised its voice: one that had been silenced, ignored and despised for centuries. It opened a global possibility to rethink our relationship with others, with the human and non-human, as a political power.

In that same year, the Mapuche Movement made itself heard with force in a Chilean transitional framework that had betrayed the desire for change after the end of the civic-military dictatorship. The ties that the agreements among the liberal sector, national and transnational businessmen and the pro-dictatorial right wing had agreed, far from curbing the model of dispossession that neoliberalism had installed, instead exacerbated it by accelerating the process of modernisation: a total privatisation of public services. The Mapuche Movement began to speak about the right to the land, and not from a productivist point of view, but from a deep understanding that a territory that is inhabited is a constitutive part of those who inhabit it. They are fighting against a hydroelectric plant that seeks to flood their lands in order to → extract value, because of the constitutive nature that this territory means for them and their lives.

In another territorial space, since the beginning of the 21st century Kurdish women from the diaspora, and mainly in Syria, began to organise themselves into the Women’s Protection Units, better known as the YPJ, embracing a democratic confederalism that has allowed, together with a huge movement of communities, peoples and nations in the same territory, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and peaceful coexistence. In Rojava (northern Syria) innumerable peoples and nations coexist, such as the Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmens and Armenians, Chechens, Circassians, Muslims and Christians and Yezidis and other Syrian religious communities, together within an autonomous administration that ensures gender equality, decentralisation, → ecological development, and tolerance of → diversity in all its forms.

→
extract, p. 53
ecological, p. 162
diversity, p. 39

The constituent constitutions

The search for transformations in some → southern countries has led to debates about the formal framework of democracies. The constitution as a governing body of the democratic framework has begun to be questioned, fundamentally due to its universalist nature and limiting vision. Already in the 1990s several Latin American countries were going to carry out processes of change, but it will be during this new century when deeper processes will take shape in territories as diverse as Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia and Chile. These last three are a clear example of how to rethink and position the democratic logic linked to the territory, with constitutions shaped from the territory.

Ecuador declared itself a plurinational state in 2008, beginning a two-year process through a Constituent Assembly, and has ultimately produced a new constitutional text. This Constituent Assembly defined the Ecuadorian state as plurinational and its purpose is to implement *sumak kawsay* (*kichwa*) or good living, which is a political proposal that aims to achieve the common good for people in accordance and harmony with nature and sustainable development.

In 2009, Bolivia began to create its new constitution, which declares in the first instance that it is a political constitution of a plurinational state, and in the same way that Ecuador plans to implement *sumak kawsay*.

The plurinational state presupposes political and administrative decentralisation, culturally heterogeneous and with the participation of all groups and social sectors.

→ southern, p. 71, 73

Figure 63: Façade of the GAM Cultural Center, Santiago de Chile, 2019. The personal archive of the authors Nancy Garín and Antoine Silvestre.



The plurinational state is opposed to the Napoleonic idea of “One Nation = One State”; concluding that “a Nation does not necessarily have to form its own State, but several nations can form a single State”. To this new administrative conformation, the Bolivian constitution also deepens the ways in which we relate to what surrounds us, how we engage with the territory in multiple ways. Thus the land, the territory, nature, the human and the non-human are central in terms of a mode of development.

Chile is currently undergoing a transformational process that started in 2019 and was triggered by a social explosion that has dismantled the fallacy of the neoliberal model as a model for development. The magnitude of the destruction of territories and bodies under capitalism in its neoliberal form is at the moment protected by the constitution, which was approved under the civic-military dictatorship. Thanks to months of social mobilisation, Chile is today undergoing a constituent process to create a new constitution. Like the previous examples, the first articles approved by the “Constitutional Convention” propose a plurinational state, which also embraces the *kyme mogen* (*mapudungun*), *suma qamaña* (*aymara*) or good living. (Figure 63)

In the same way, it assumes the life and rights of nature, of the human and the non-human, as fundamentals, and places the territories and their diversities at its centre. The same thing happens in Colombia, where today it is possible to think that a woman with African heritage, and environmental activist and part of the communities fighting against → extractivism can preside over the government. Their way of living and building society, as well as the way in which the discourse is elaborated, collectively, radically confronts the forms sustained by the capitalist-colonial development models, where the importance of the territory goes beyond the material, where the territory is constitutive. Where the common projection and every possible activity puts life at the centre: “Our grandmothers taught us that the territory is joy and sadness, that the territory is life and life has no price, that the territory is dignity and this has no price.”

Constituent Body/Territory

In these views, the relationship with the territory or territories is not thought of as a productive way/material use, but as part of a whole of which we are part. Thus thinking/feeling as a body/territory, where rights go beyond what is human, where nature and otherness are consubstantial to us, where the very logic of territorial administrative ordering – as seen in the nation – goes through this dialectical relationship. (Figure 64)

During the most critical months of the social unrest in Chile, the central spaces of the cities were intervened by hundreds of protesters, day and night. It is in these areas of the city that most of the art centres and museums are built. These spaces, despite the difficulties in the context of social unrest, joined the process by responding with their organisational operations and decision-making, opening their doors

→ extractivism, p. 53

Figure 64: Graffiti on a street wall in Santiago de Chile, 2019, anonymous. Twitter: <https://mobile.twitter.com/rubestelflores/status/1024278938523262976> (accessed May 2020).



and becoming part of the territorial assemblies, supporting creative and collaborative territorial links with those who were part of that territory, as well as those who inhabited it temporarily during the demonstrations.

In turn, the symbolic outburst that was unleashed during almost a year of mobilisations, on the walls and streets of the cities, stirred up discussions about art and culture, as well as institutions. In this way, the borders of inside and outside were blurred, transforming the public space, the streets and territories, into an amplified museum.

Possible examples are the current project being carried out by MACBA under the direction of Elvira Dyangani Ose. The Museum of the Possible or The Possible Museum, as it has been called, seeks to temporarily interrupt the productive flow that the institution sustains, involving those who carry out the tasks of the institution, visible or not, to distort the habits and norms that have ceased to be questioned. From there, it allows and promotes the exercise of collectively thinking about other possible ways of doing. “The possible museum is also what can be done, the framework of possibility that opens up, but also restricts, based on what already exists. It is neither the avant-garde impulse to produce the new at the cost of rejecting the past, nor the conservative instinct to perpetuate what is given, but the affection with which one can take → care of something to make it good and not only, nor always, to make it grow,” says Dyangani Ose.

Thus, this project territorialises its constitution in the museum institution itself, it is thought of as it constitutes itself, not from abstraction, but from its own body/territory that build it up and... constitutes it. Going from how the forms of work are organised, the administrative logic, internal work, remunerative rates, to why and in what way we inhabit that body/territory called a museum, which in turn is part of another body/territory: its neighbourhood, its city, its international connections, and its workers, its public, its political context, the local art scene, etc.

And perhaps these examples of reconstituting ourselves from that territory/body, to embody the territory in our practices, to inhabit it dialectically, are necessary steps that will help us energise one or many responses to the crisis of the cultural institution.

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L'Internationale Confederation

L'Internationale Confederation

L'Internationale brings together seven major European art institutions:

- Moderna galerija, MG+MSUM (Ljubljana, Slovenia);
- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, MNCARS (Madrid, Spain);
- Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, MACBA (Barcelona, Spain);
- Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, M HKA (Antwerp, Belgium);
- Van Abbemuseum, Museum voor hedendaagse kunst (Eindhoven, the Netherlands);
- Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, MSN (Warsaw, Poland);
- SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey).
- HDK-Valand, Högskolan för konst och design (Gothenburg, Sweden)
- National College of Art and Design, NCAD (Dublin, Ireland)

L'Internationale works with complementary partners such as HDK-Valand, the Academy of Art and Design (Gothenburg, Sweden) and NCAD, the National College of Art and Design (Dublin, Ireland), along with associate organisations from the academic and artistic fields.

The confederation takes its name from the workers' anthem "L'Internationale", which calls for an equitable and democratic society with reference to the historical labour movement. The ethics of L'Internationale are based on the values of difference and antagonism, solidarity and commonality. L'Internationale also serves as an apparatus for making visible the standardisation of individual and collective beings, and defends the critical imagination of art as a catalyst for concepts of the civic institution, citizenship and democracy. L'Internationale declares that art and its institutions have the power to question and challenge their own specific systems, as well as the formal structures of institutions in general, and to be an appropriate platform for the discussion of a renewed social contract. It intends to rehearse new protocols and provide decentred models that transcend the bureaucratic and self-referential structures of cultural institutions. L'Internationale represents a new internationalist model for heritage today, challenging traditional notions of exclusiveness, closure and property. It defends a concept of common heritage that is based on interconnected archives and collections, and it brings together those who view heritage as an active tool in the processes of individual and collective emancipation. While anchored in Europe, L'Internationale is connected to different parts of the world by a shared sense of urgency with regards certain common questions. One of these urgent questions concerns the possibilities of participation in the global exchange of ideas from any given space. Thus, L'Internationale challenges the way globalising art institutions replicate the structures of multinational powers and the streamlined, centralised distribution of knowledge.

Our Many Europes project

Our Many Europes (OME) is a four-year project focusing on the 1990s, the decade contemporary Europe was born. Europe expanded and diversified when technology and post-Cold War politics turned the world into a global village. Understanding who we are today – the challenges we face, the possibilities we have – begins post-1989, when a divided Europe ended and the plurality of the many Europes we inhabit today began.

Art and culture are driving forces behind this, as they show us who and how we are in the world. The art of the 1990s profoundly reflects a fundamental shift in society: through the internet and open borders, Europeans became more active and connected. To reflect this change, we need a different museum strategy, which understands audiences not as passive consumers, but as constituent members of a plural community in permanent becoming. Developing a new Constituent Museum strategy is therefore a major and long-term goal of OME. This is done from the premise that museums innovate by doing, and learn in practice. So by exploring the 90s, through a rich programme of conferences, exhibitions and experimental mediation, OME partners will develop a new, effective museum strategy tailored to the desires of Europeans today. OME is organised by a consortium led by the museum confederation L'Internationale. The confederation has successfully realised two EU-funded programmes and has now been active for seven years, dedicated to innovation in the museum field. OME partners and associate partners connect eleven countries – Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Poland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Italy and the United Kingdom. OME partners are primarily museums, collaborating with universities and smaller art organisations. OME focuses on audience development and transnational mobility. OME will promote the transnational mobility of cultural professionals, especially museum staff and artists, who will improve their professional skills and career opportunities through effective peer learning. The programme includes the exchange of cultural heritage and professional expertise, and will also disseminate its best practices internationally via free e-publications. In the domain of audience development the programme foregrounds inclusivity, working for, but also with communities. Different types of audiences – by habit, choice and chance – are placed at the heart of the Constituent Museum strategy. Classic modern and contemporary art museums are defined, to use a typical 90s' term, as constructivist. They use a "broadcasting" model that understands (art) history as a static reservoir of material studied by experts and shown to a broad, yet passive audience. OME, however, implements an innovative strategy that takes the visitor as an active and constituent member of the cultural institution. OME partners collaborate with this constituent audiences by organising many workshops, encounters, guided tours which brings curators, educators and other museum and education professionals in a horizontal relationships with the audience. This is done with the principles of diversity, openness and mutual respect. OME thus provides the public with knowledge about our current immediate pre-history in the 90s, which will help us to find comprehensive, rapid, effective, and long-term responses to global challenges such as Europe's changing society, relations with foreign countries and territorial cohesion.

Moderna galerija (MG+MSUM) Ljubljana

Moderna galerija is a national museum that works, in accordance with its mission, in the fields of modern and contemporary art. It was founded in 1947 as a museum of modern art. With Slovenia's independence in 1991, Moderna galerija became the principal national institution of modern and contemporary art and an increasingly active link between the local and the international, in particular Central and Eastern European, contexts.

The concept of the museum advocated by Moderna galerija resists the existing hegemonic models. In the crucial period of the 1990s, Moderna galerija refused to become a postmodern museum of sensations and intense experiences. Instead, on the threshold of the new millennium it developed the concept of an art museum that advocates the

plurality of narratives and priorities of local spaces that intend to enter equal dialogues with other spaces with only their own symbolic capital.

Since 2011, Moderna galerija has been open in two locations: in the original building of Moderna galerija (MG+) in the centre of Ljubljana, and in the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (+MSUM) located on the renovated premises of former military barracks. As a museum of modern art it systematically explores, collects, and presents the art of Modernism and its traditions. It deals primarily with Slovenian 20th century art from the beginnings of Modernism around 1900, but also with contemporary artists who continue the tradition of Modernist trends. As a museum of contemporary art it covers contemporary practices in the field of the visual arts. It presents new contents and new ways of expressing, exhibiting and interpreting contemporary art. By regularly purchasing works by Slovene artists, it is building a permanent collection of the 21st century art and adding to the international Artest Collection 2000+ by purchasing works by foreign artists.

Moderna galerija addresses both the museum of modern art and the museum of contemporary art from the aspect of multi-temporality derived from the critique of linear time and its universal validity. Moderna galerija attempts to develop a different model of a museum based on the criticism and redefinition of democratic institutions. Its priorities include the construction of a local context and dialogues with different localities that follow similar priorities and interests in developing different forms of institutionality and new models of cultural production.

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) Madrid

Today's world of culture is shaped, on the one hand, by prominent figures in the culture and communications industry and, on the other, by the diffuse range of culture producers whose actions are governed by the subordination of their creative singularity. This subordination is manifested in artists having to sell their creative capacity or in their being expropriated of it. In addition, we are in the midst of a systemic crisis to which the museum is not immune, including the ecological crisis. If the economic paradigm based on speculation and easy money has proven unsustainable, it should also be clear that the primacy of the building and of art as spectacle over the museum's artistic programme has ceased to be valid. There is therefore a pressing need to invent other models. Museo Reina Sofía is working to develop various approaches aimed precisely at transforming the museum from a public institution into one that belongs to the common sphere:

- The rehangings of the museum's collection does not tell a compact and exclusive story, offering neither an exhaustive nor categorical experience. Its aim is speak of the present time through a critical study of the common past. Therefore, eight thematic episodes are put forward and open towards flexible temporalities and interdisciplinary focal points that can be interlinked to create new narrative threads. This condition creates an openness to the other and to the presence of other cultures and ways of doing things in their own praxis, without fear of a hypothetical loss of identity.
- The creation of an archive of communality. A kind of archive of archives. The Museo Reina Sofía is aware that "the archive" has become a recurring place in contemporary artistic practice, a rhetorical figure that serves to bring together the most dissimilar of actions, often characterised by the mere compilation of an irregular documentation. Following Derrida the Museo Reina Sofía asks if the archive does

not perhaps bring with it a certain danger of saturation of memory, and even of the denial of the narrative. However, for the archive of communality, the narrative or narratives that its members create are as important as the document itself.

- The Museo Reina Sofía works to develop dialogues and collaborations sustained over time with national and international collectives, social movements and universities, both in the artistic field and in activism and thought. In doing so, the museum seeks, on the one hand, to make its boundaries increasingly porous, opening up spaces for contact, generating common projects and summoning unexpected audiences; and, on the other, to create a network of relationships through which to generate ideas and critical actions, as well as new forms of institutionality.

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)

The MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona is an international flagship for raising awareness of contemporary art and cultural practices. It is a platform for encounters and experimentation that focuses on recent history: since it opened its doors twenty-five years ago, it has established itself as a preeminent centre thanks to its own singular and often innovative museological praxis, consolidating its position as a space for controversy and debate.

The MACBA is a nexus for the leading voices and movements of our times, achieving a balanced tension between its institutional role and its commitment to critique and transformation.

As a public entity, MACBA assumes responsibility for disseminating contemporary art, offering a diverse range of visions, and generating critical debates on art and culture, while aspiring to reach increasingly diverse audiences. MACBA is an open institution where citizens can find a space of public representation, and also one that prioritises education and innovation in its field. In addition to its commitment to heritage preservation and networking with other institutions, such activities place MACBA at the forefront of the art system in Catalonia and confirm Barcelona's position as a world art capital, and an international benchmark.

The MACBA is managed by a consortium created in 1988. Its current members are the Government of Catalonia, Barcelona City Council, the Spanish Ministry of Culture and the MACBA Foundation. In 1995, MACBA officially opened its headquarters in the heart of the Raval, in a new building designed by the North American architect Richard Meier. Since then, the museum has continued to break new ground in the diffusion of contemporary art and cultural practices, and its impact has helped to confirm Barcelona's reputation as a city of innovation.

Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA)

The M HKA is a museum for contemporary art, film and visual culture in the widest sense. It is an open place of encounter for art, artists and the public. The M HKA aspires to play a leading role in Flanders and to extend its international profile by building upon Antwerp's avant-garde tradition. The M HKA bridges the relationship between artistic questions and wider societal issues, between the international and regional, artists and public, tradition and innovation, reflection and presentation. Central here is the museum's collection with its ongoing acquisitions, as well as related areas of management

and research. M HKA is a cultural-heritage institution, one of the eight major institutions of the Flemish Community. The museum keeps its finger on the pulse of current events in contemporary art both at home and abroad. Located in an avant-garde city par excellence, M HKA houses a rich and diverse collection which it displays in frequently changing presentations both inside and outside the museum. M HKA is a dynamic meeting place for art, artists and culture lovers alike, and every year it presents a versatile exhibition programme that is supplemented with numerous artists' talks, performances, lectures, book presentations, walking talks and activities for young and old. Another initiative housed at M HKA is De Cinema. In the building of De Studio – where De Cinema has made its home since 2019 – daily film screenings are organised in two state-of-the-art viewing rooms. This initiative brings the history of cinema to life through numerous introductions, lectures and seminars.

Van Abbemuseum, Museum voor hedendaagse kunst, Eindhoven

The Van Abbemuseum opened in 1936 as one of the first public museums for modern and contemporary art to be established in Europe. It was named after the cigar manufacturer H. J. van Abbe, who financed the building as well as made a contribution towards purchases and running costs for its first few years. Karel 1, Van Abbe's cigar company, sourced its tobacco from the fields of Sumatra and Java in Indonesia, a former colony of the Netherlands. The history of this modern museum, like so many others in the Western world, is thus intimately linked to that of the colonial project.

Understanding and attempting to decouple the inter-connectedness between the colonial and the modern project drives the current programming and thinking of the Van Abbemuseum. Charles Esche, the museum's director, has used the term "the demodern option" to speculate how we, and others in Western Europe, might address and seek to unravel many of the preconceptions the modern world gave us: namely Europe's perceived centrality to the global order and the exploitation, injustice and inequality this wrought. This perceived centrality is echoed in the historical collection of nearly 3,000 objects and archives of the museum, which we use as tools to interrogate and rethink our modern heritage from the perspective of today. Similarly, we aim to foster practices that deviate from the modern path, that harness decolonial approaches or work through decentralised methodologies. This, we think, can help us realign the museum away from the logic of modern, colonial, capitalist thinking to a more critical, inclusive and holistic institution that can contribute to imagining new possibilities for our collective future.

Central to this project are the museum's constituents: local publics, visitors, students the staff at the museum teach, and the partners they work with. They understand a fundamental shortcoming of the modern museum was its insistence on broadcasting to, rather than thinking with, its public. Museums cannot define their subjects. Rather, they should form positions with them. With their constituents, including their friends and colleagues of the L'Internationale, they hope to institute a decentralised museum, one that is porous, open and hospitable – to both people and ideas.

Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie (MSN) Warsaw

The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw is the biggest and most prominent cultural institution dedicated to collecting and exhibiting modern and contemporary art in Warsaw, Poland, and was established in 2005. The museum is currently using its temporary

exhibition space (called "the Museum on the Vistula") and a new building is now under construction. The new premises will open to the public in 2024.

MSN is a public institution inscribed in the development of Warsaw as a modern, multicultural metropolis, involved in social changes in Poland and worldwide and in the emancipation of successive groups. The museum's expanding collection of contemporary art is a record of dynamic phenomena and processes, occurring both locally and globally.

Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw are accompanied by an educational programme, which usually includes a series of lectures, debates and seminars. MSN also curates the Bródno sculpture park, an ever-evolving modern art exhibition, presented in Bródno park, outdoors and open to the public 24/7. The summer art festival takes place at the park every year. Since 2009, at the end of October and beginning of November each year, the museum hosts the Warsaw Under Construction city design festival. Each edition focuses on a different set of architecture and urban planning issues.

MSN's mission is to initiate, support, disseminate, study and collect for present and future generations phenomena related to contemporary art and culture.

At MSN art is treated as a tool for communication, learning about the world and influencing reality. A work of art in the museum is not only for contemplation, it is also "used" and gives space to learn social responsibility, dialogue and critical thinking.

MSN works to support multiple and equal narratives and empathetic relationships among them. It sees contemporary culture – the sensitive voices of its creators able to transcend the limitations of perception – as an excellent tool for social change and understanding that transcends the lines of division and conflict. It creates a space for meetings, mutual inspiration and reflection, which go beyond the field of art but always find their source in it.

The museum is made of people: the audience, the artists and the team.

SALT, Istanbul and Ankara

SALT is a not-for-profit cultural institution in public service, engaging in research, exhibitions, publications, web projects, conferences, and other public programmes in Istanbul, Turkey. It was founded as a post-departmentalised institution, which does not prioritise any period, discipline or object-based practice. The aim is to channel objects and materials into a broader discussion. Through SALT Research, which comprises a specialised library and an open-access online archive, the institution collects sources of material culture in visual practices, built environment, social life and economic history.

SALT is spread across two venues in Istanbul, SALT Galata – a concentrated learning space with library, workshops and auditorium – and SALT Beyoğlu – a dynamic programme space for exhibitions, screenings and talks. The institution works with a drive towards co-learning and sharing resources with individuals, collectives, universities, and NGOs seeking a space of production, which thus enables it to engage with users who range from individuals to constituents from diverse fields of knowledge.

HDK-Valand, Högskolan för konst och design, Gothenburg

Based in the centre of the port city of Gothenburg, Sweden, HDK-Valand is closely integrated into the city's cultural life with many collaborations in education and research, including long-term partnerships with Göteborgs Konsthall, Hasselblad Center, Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA), Literature House, and many other public arts agencies. The academy is extensively networked internationally with partners all over the world. HDK-Valand has a history of providing courses in diverse geopolitical sites including collaborative courses and research projects across Eastern, Central and Western Europe, Western and South East Asia, and South Africa.

The academy's professors were among the first in Sweden to introduce the doctorate through art practices, and have been working systematically with research education for almost two decades. The academy hosts a lively research community, including several prestigious nationally and internationally funded research projects, past and present, in the areas of feminist publishing practices, artist-led culture, social practice, public art, queer cinema, contemporary poetry, and photographic archives/imaging practices in environmental and climate sciences. An associate partner of L'Internationale within the framework of the EU project Our Many Europes, HDK-Valand is currently managing the research platform L'Internationale Online. The academy is also an active partner in the PARSE research platform, in the EARN network, and in several other international networks.

The academy is characterised by small class sizes and highly competitive recruitment. The emphasis is on peer learning, and the pedagogical approach is based on co-production. This means that knowledge and practice are developed within a community of learners and researchers comprising students and professors operating in an intense and sustained dialogue with each other. The student body is an active participant in the planning and development of the academy's education, research and collaboration with the wider world.

HDK-Valand is committed to sustainable development. This includes social, economic and environmental sustainability, working with respect and consideration for each other, creating an equal workplace where diversity prevails. It also works strategically to reduce its impact on the environment, in line with the University of Gothenburg's environmental goals.

National College of Art and Design (NCAD) Dublin

Founded as the Dublin Society Drawing School in 1746, today NCAD offers the richest and most diverse education in art and design in Ireland. Our campus is in the Liberties, an area of Dublin which first developed in the 12th century, and remained outside the city walls. Its name derived from the independent privileges and rights which were enjoyed in the area.

For centuries, it has been a district where things are made. From Huguenot silverwork, wool and silk weaving and tanning to whiskey distilleries and beer breweries, and more recently, digital industries, our community is one of makers.

Making remains at the core of NCAD with our schools of Design and Fine Art offering a studio-based learning experience that responds to both the digital and material world. NCAD today is an organisation strengthened by close connections to our community in Dublin 8, and partners across the fields of Irish education, industry, culture and social enterprise. We attract students from around the world. Active in international networks, we create new forms of knowledge with research partners across Europe.

Students are at the heart of everything we do, and we are continuously proud of the versatility, confidence and imagination of our graduates. The range of the career paths followed by our graduates is an unequivocal demonstration of the value of the education they receive. Experimentation in the studio, learning through doing, deep understanding of materials and processes, as well as the criticality that is embedded across all pathways, prepare graduates to thrive in and beyond the worlds of art and design.

Art and design education at NCAD stimulates the creativity and imagination we all need to make our environment more sustainable, our societies more inclusive and all our lives richer.

Biographies

Note: The biographies describe the positions of narrators at the time of their participation in the Glossary of Common Knowledge seminar. Given the long duration of the project, the narrators may have since changed their respective positions. Some narrators have also supplemented their biographies with revised information.

Zdenka Badovinac is a curator and writer, who served from 1993 to 2020 as director of the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana, comprised since 2011 of two locations: the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova. In 2022 she was appointed a director of the Museum of Contemporary in Zagreb. In her work, Badovinac deals with historicisation of Eastern European art and situated institutionalism. She also initiated the first Eastern European art collection, Artest 2000+ in Moderna galerija, Ljubljana. Her recent exhibitions are *NSK from Kapital to Capital: Neue Slowenische Kunst – The Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia*, Moderna galerija, 2015 (which travelled to the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in 2016, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow in 2016, and the Museo Reina Sofía Madrid in 2017); *NSK State Pavilion*, 57th Venice Biennale, 2017, co-curated with Charles Esche; *The Heritage of 1989. Case Study: The Second Yugoslav Documents Exhibition*, Modena galerija, Ljubljana, 2017, co-curated with Bojana Piškur; *Sites of Sustainability Pavilions, Manifestos and Crypts, Hello World. Revising a Collection*, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin, 2017; *Heavenly Beings: Neither Human nor Animal*, Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana, co-curated with Bojan Piškur, 2018; *Bigger Than Myself: Heroic Voices from Ex-Yugoslavia*, MAXXI, Rome. (2020); and *Sanja Iveković, Works of Heart (1974–2022)*, Kunsthalle, Vienna, (2022). Her most recent books are *Unannounced Voices: Curatorial Practice and Changing Institutions* (Sternberg Press / Thoughts on Curating), 2022 and *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (Independent Curators International (ICI), New York, 2019). She is a founding member of L'Internationale, a confederation of seven modern and contemporary European art institutions, and president of CIMAM, the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, 2010–2013.

María Berríos is a sociologist, writer and independent curator. Her work explores issues traversing art, culture, and politics, focusing on Latin America, with a special interest in collective experiments of “Third World” alliances and their exhibition formats, such as the Solidarity Museum (1971) or the Havana Cultural Congress (1968). She is a PhD candidate in sociology at Goldsmiths’ College, London University and has been teaching as a professor and as a guest tutor in several universities and art academies in Europe and Latin America. Her dissertation is about undocumented rumours and disappearance as form, based on case

studies of specific events in Chile between the 1960s and 1980s. She is co-founder of the Chilean editorial collective vaticanochico. Berríos has published extensively on art and politics in Latin America – and beyond – and has been engaged in several collaborative art projects, including the research exhibition *The Revolution Must Be a School of Unfettered Thought*, together with the artist Jakob Jakobsen for the 31st São Paulo Bienal (which was also exhibited in the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2015 and Peace Treaty, San Sebastian, 2016). As a curator she has been responsible, together with Lisette Lagnado, for *Drifts and Derivations*, on experimental architectural collectives from Chile (Museo Reina Sofía, 2010), as well as *Our Unknown, Our Chaos...* on the Valparaíso School collective. Her most recent research exhibition, co-curated by Amalia Cross, was on the radical pedagogy of Alberto Cruz, one of the founders of the Valparaíso collective, and titled *The Body of the Architect is Not that of Just One Man* (MAVI, Santiago, 2017). Since 2016 she has been a regular collaborator with the Hospital Prison University Archive, a project space and radio station run by the artist and organiser Jakob Jakobsen in a room in the building where they both live. The 2020 Berlin Biennale will be curated by María Berríos, Renata Cervetto, Lisette Lagnado and Agustín Pérez Rubio. She is the mother to a four-year-old son, and believes he is a ninja.

Miha Blažič (N'toko) is a Slovenian musician, writer and political activist. He is well known for his socially critical lyrics and as one of the initiators of Ambasad Rog (Ljubljana, Slovenia), a migrant organisation and community space. He is best known by his stage name N'toko, under which he has released several albums in Slovenia, Japan and Germany. During the period of mass popular protests in 2012–2014, he also found his journalistic voice and began to use it relentlessly, first on his blog and later also as a columnist for the *Mladina* weekly in Slovenia. In 2016 he published his first book, *Samoumevni svet*.

Sara Buraya Boned is coordinator of the International Programmes of the Department of Public Activities at Museo Reina Sofía, where she focuses her work and research on transfeminisms, institutional transformative practices, urban commons and politics of care. After studying Art History and getting an MA Degree in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture at Museo Reina Sofía, she started working as an assistant coordinator in the Collections Department of the museum (2009–2011). She was responsible for

communication at Sound-IN, the section of sound art at the fair Estampa (2013). From 2013 to 2015 she was the coordinator of cultural programmes at Museo Reina Sofía, organising international conferences, seminars, and coordinating film series. She has been the project manager of Creative Europe programmes *The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989* (2015–2017) and *Midstream. New Ways of Audience Development in Contemporary Art* (2016–2018). She is a member of the European network Institute of Radical Imagination (IRI) and part of the research group Somateca.

Jesús Carrillo is a professor of Contemporary Art History at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and has been head of the Cultural Programmes Department of the Reina Sofía Museum since 2008. He combines the analysis of contemporary culture and cultural institutions with a critical reading of historical narratives of art. He has published numerous books, including *Arte en la Red* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2004), *Naturaleza e Imperio* (Madrid: 12 calles, 2004) and *Tecnología e Imperio* (Madrid: Nivola, 2003), and has as edited: *Modos de hacer: arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa* (Salamanca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Salamanca, 2001), *Tendencias del Arte. Arte de Tendencias* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2003), *Desacuerdos: sobre arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado español*, Vols 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Barcelona: Macba, 2004–2007), *Douglas Crimp: Posiciones críticas* (Madrid: Akal, 2005), and *Martha Rosler. Imágenes Públicas* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2008).

Sebastian Cichocki (he/him, lives and works in Warsaw, Poland) is the chief curator and head of research at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Selected exhibitions curated and co-curated by Cichocki at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw include: *Who Will Write the History of Tears. Artists on Women's Rights* (2021), *The Penumbra Age. Art in the Time of Planetary Change* (2020), *Never Again. Art against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (2019), *Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times* (2016), and *Zofia Rydet, Record 1978–1990* (2015). Other recent curatorial projects include *The Postartistic Congress*, Sokolowsko (2021), *Primary Forms*, an exhibition at primary schools around Poland (2021) and the Bródno Biennale, Warsaw (2018). Cichocki is one of the founding members of The Consortium for Postartistic Practices and The Office for Postartistic Services. He was a 2018 fellow at the Center for Curatorial Leadership, MoMA, New York.

Fatma Çolakoğlu has been a curator for exhibitions as well as film and video art for fifteen years. In 2005, she established the film department of the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art. Subsequently, she was responsible for the film and video programmes of Pera Film and headed the communications department of

the Pera Museum in Istanbul. Following her associate director role at SALT, in January 2022 she was appointed as the director of research and programmes. In recent years she has been part of the International Short Film Jury of Berlinale Shorts 2020 and Istanbul Experimental, and also participated in festivals such as Proyector 13/Festival de Videoarte and Videonale Bonn. She is interested in the critical relationship between the moving image and social studies, and is fascinated by the intersection of art, science, and technology and how they transform the world. In particular, her field of research concerns image-making, the use of language, networks, theories of mediation, the political and cultural dimensions of popular media landscape, and contemporary art practices. Fatma holds an MA in Theatre Directing from Goldsmiths, University of London and BA in Film and Media Art from Emerson College.

Nicolás Cuello is a queer archivist, writer, and also a PhD candidate affiliated with the Gino Germani Research Institute at the University of Buenos Aires. He works as an assistant professor at the National University of the Arts and as an advisor to the programme of Feminist and Sexed-Gendered Political Memories of the Center for the Documentation and Investigation of the Left Culture in Argentina. His work focuses on the intersection of artistic practices, queer politics, critical representations of negative emotions and alternative cultures in Buenos Aires. He is co-author of the book *No Straight Lines. Punk Countercultures and sexual politics in Argentina (1984–2007)*.

Jakub Depczyński graduated in art history from the Faculty of Management of Visual Culture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He currently works in the research department at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw as a researcher and curator of a public programme on climate crisis. He is particularly interested in post-artistic practices, the relationship between technology and art, art in the Anthropocene and contemporary ecological thought. Jakub is a founding member of the Pump it up! art cooperative and one of the creators of the *Atlas of the Anti-Fascist Year* – a social archive of anti-fascist and anti-war activities and attitudes in culture, art and other walks of life.

Kike España is one of the editors of the publishing house Subtextos, is part of the collective bookshop Suburbia in Málaga, and participates in the social and cultural centre La Casa Invisible. He trained as an architect, and has a PhD in urban theory from the University of Seville. He collaborates in the Overtourist City research project of the School of Architecture of the University of Málaga. His more recent publications include the book *Die sanfte Stadt* (2021, Transversal Texts), the articles “La ciudad contra

el Estado” (2020, Scienze Del Territorio) and “Städte zu verkaufen: Prozesse der Enteignung und Praktiken der Wiederaneignung in Spanien” (2019, sub\urban) and the book chapter “The City of Attractions” (2019, MNCA Reina Sofía).

Pauliina Feodoroff is a Skolt Sámi theatre director, artist and nature guardian from Keväjäu’rr who works combining various fields of knowledge at the intersection of ecological conservation, theatre and film. In a cross-disciplinary project funded by Kone Foundation, *What Form(s) Can an Atonement Take / Miltä Sopu Näyttää* (2018–2021), Feodoroff and her working group of 21 combines Sámi land-care practices, bringing together local and scientific knowledge to protect the waters and surrounding lands of the Njåuddam river and Mutusjärvi lake.

Maddalena Fragnito is an artist and activist. At present, she is a doctoral student at Coventry University’s Centre for Postdigital Cultures. She is co-author of *Rebelling with Care* (WeMake, 2019) and *Ecologie della cura: Prospettive transfemministe* (Orthotes, 2021). She is also the co-founder of MACAO (2012), an autonomous cultural centre in Milan, and *SopraSotto* (2013), a self-managed kindergarten run by parents. She is part of the research groups *Pirate Care* (2019), and *OBOT* (2020). In 2021, with the activation of the iteration *Raising Care* within the *School of Mutation*, she joined the *Institute of Radical Imagination*. Homepage: <https://www.maddalenafragnito.com/>.

Elisa Fuenzalida (mostly she, but also they) is a Peruvian researcher, curator and editor. Her practice is found at the intersection between memory, body, community, care, gender and migration from an eco-feminist point of view. She has coordinated the decolonial Anibal Quijano Chair in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía since 2018. Previously, her work was closely linked to the Pornolab collective and the activation of La Revuelta Obscena, platform for the research and dissemination of audiovisual, literary and theoretical materials that shake up normative narratives around body, desire and sexuality. She is also a founding member of the publishing house Papel de Fumar, a winner of the Miguel Hernandez National Poetry Prize. Since 2019 she has also been researching at the crossroads of sound art and archives. Her first piece was *Ensamblajes del Cuidado* [Assemblages of Care], which collected the testimonies and sounds of modes of solidarity during the collapse of the public health system in Peru in the context of the pandemic (*¿Cómo continuar?* Centro Cultural de España, Lima, Perú). Her latest work, *El Futuro era tu Cuerpo*, is a series of capsules regarding the memory of mourning and care in the travesti and trans communities of Peru in the 1990s (*Our Many Europes: Rethinking the 90s*). Both were developed in collaboration with the sound

producer Jorge Vicario. Elisa Fuenzalida is currently managing editor of the street newspaper for art & society, wealth & poverty – *Art of the Working Class* – and mediator in the network of citizen participation laboratories Redes por el Clima. She(they) resides in amphibious mode between Berlin and Madrid.

Nancy Garín Guzmán (Chile, 1972). Independent journalist, art researcher and curator. She works on projects related to critical thinking, new pedagogies, archives, memory and decolonialism. Being part of the Etcétera group (Argentina) and the Internacional Erroristas, she has participated in numerous exhibitions and artistic actions since 2000. Since 2011, she has been the co-founder of Equipo re, a research platform on intersections between body policies and archives, carrying out different projects of mediation, production and curation. From this the project *Anarchivo sida* was born, with exhibitions (Tabakalera 2016, Conde Duque 2017, and CED MACBA 2018–2019), publications, debates and pedagogical activities. Between 2012 and 2017, she participated in the Peninsula group as part of a project on colonial processes and artistic and curatorial practices. In 2017 she started the project *Espectros de lo Urbano* analysing urban phenomenon as a privileged ally of the predatory processes of capitalism and the neo-liberalism agenda linked to the persistencies of the colonial machinery. She is currently a resident researcher at the Arts Santa Mònica Contemporary Art Center in Barcelona.

Deniz Gül is a Turkish contemporary artist. She is known as a conceptual sculptor and writer. Gül’s practice comprises how language performs as text, sculpture and space. She is infamous for her novel-like exhibitions that feature installations and sculptures speaking of structure, composition, form, and consequence. Her art, which could be registered as processes, refers to her engagement with time and material. Her works have been featured in institutional exhibitions like the Istanbul Biennial, and the Sharjah Biennial and she has shown them at key galleries and institutions such as SALT, YKKS, Arter, Badischer Kunstverein, CCCB, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille. Gül’s solo exhibitions include *Scratch and Surface* (2021), *Meydan* (2020), *Loyelow* (2016), *B.I.M.A.B.K.R.* (2013), and *5 Person Bufet* (2011). She has been featured in articles in *Artnet News*, *Frieze Magazine*, the *Financial Times* and *Art in America*. The artist has published five books alongside her exhibitions. Her latest *there is life between us (+transparency)*, is a weave of essays in dialogue with theoretical approaches to the scientific, ecological, and artistic implications of transparency as an overarching concept by which to think critically about the world today.

Yayo Herrero López (Madrid, 1965) is a Spanish anthropologist, engineer, professor and activist known

for her expertise in ecofeminism and ecosocialism at the European level. She was the state coordinator of Ecologists in Action and has extensive experience in numerous social initiatives on human rights and social ecology. She is currently a professor at the National University of Distance Education and the general director of FUHEM.

Jennifer Hayashida is a poet, translator and visual artist based in New York and Gothenburg. She is the author of the poetry collection *A Machine Wrote this Song* (Gramma Poetry/Black Ocean, 2018). Her work in translation includes, from the Swedish, Lawen Mohtadi’s *The Day I Am Free* (Sternberg Press, 2019), Athena Farrokhzad’s *White Blight* (Argos Books, 2015), Ida Börjel’s *Miximum Ca’Canny The Sabotage Manuals* (Commune Editions, 2016), and Karl Larsson’s *Form/Force* (Black Square Editions, 2015). Previous translations include Fredrik Nyberg’s *A Different Practice* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2007) and Eva Sjödin’s *Inner China* (Litmus Press, 2005). She is the co-translator, to the Swedish, of Kim Hyesoon’s *Autobiography of Death* (20tal, 2020) and Solmaz Sharif’s *Look* (Råmus Förlag, 2017). In addition, she is the recipient of awards from, among others, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the New York Foundation for the Arts, PEN, the Witter Bynner Poetry Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, and the MacDowell Colony. From 2009–2017, she served as Director of the Asian American Studies Program at Hunter College, the City University of New York. She is currently a doctoral candidate in artistic research at Valand Academy, the University of Gothenburg, with a research project titled *Feeling Translation*, which looks at epistemologies of translation in relation to race, migration, and notions of the nation-state.

Ida Hiršenfelder (Slovenia, 1977) is a sound artist and archivist. She was employed at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (2014–2021) on projects related to digital archives as an editor of Web Museum, a repository for contemporary audio-visual art. She is a member of L’Internationale Online editorial board and co-curator of the *Glossary of Common Knowledge*. She is an advisor for the Nomad Dance Academy network of contemporary dance archives from the former Yugoslavia region. Previously, she was an archivist at DIVA Station, Digital Video Art Archive, SCCA, Centre for Contemporary Arts – Ljubljana (2007–2013) with over a thousand video works by local artists. As a sound artist, she works in bioacoustics, interspecies communication, electroacoustic composition and sound spatialisation. She studies at the Institute of Sonology at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague (2021–).

Alistair Hudson was appointed director of the Whitworth and Manchester Art Galleries in 2018. Here he has developed a new vision and mission-based

public usership and the history of these institutions and their social imperative. Key projects include *School of Integration* with Tania Bruguera, *What Kind of City?* with Suzanne Lacy, the redevelopment of Platt Hall as a non-exhibitionary museum and *Economics the Blockbuster*. From 2014 to 2018 he was director of MIMA, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, where he implemented a vision based on the concept of the Useful Museum, as an institution dedicated to the promotion of art as a tool for education and social change. For the preceding ten years he was deputy director of Grizedale Arts in Coniston in the Lake District, which gained critical acclaim for its radical approaches to working with artists and communities, based on the idea of art as a social process not just an object of contemplation. He was educated at Goldsmiths’ College from 1988 to 1991 and has previously worked at the Anthony d’Offay Gallery London (1994–2000) and the Government Art Collection (2000–2004) where, as projects curator, he devised a public art strategy for the new Home Office building with Liam Gillick. He is co-director of the Asociación de Arte Útil with Tania Bruguera – an expansive international project and online archive.

María Iñigo Clavo is a researcher, curator and lecturer at the Open University of Catalonia and associate lecturer at Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London), with a PhD from the Universidad Complutense, Madrid. Her research focuses on coloniality, curating and museology, modernity, and its inventions of otherness, untranslatability and art in Latin America, with special attention to Brazilian art. She is a co-founder of the independent research group Península: Colonial Processes and Artistic and Curatorial Practices, in collaboration with the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. She was visiting fellow at the Afterall Research Center (2016–2017), a researcher for the AHRC project *Meeting Margins: Transnational Art in Europe & Latin America 1950–1978*, University of Essex and University of the Arts London and postdoctoral fellow at the University of São Paulo (FAPESP). She has written extensively for publications such as *e-flux*, *Afterall*, *Stedelijk Museum Journal*, Museum of Art of São Paulo, Fran Hals Museum/De Hallen Haarlem, Reina Sofia Museum, *Versión/sur*, *Concinnitas*, *Revista de Occidente*, *Bilboquet*, and *Lugar Común*, among others. She edited an issue of the bilingual magazine *Re-visiones* entitled “Is it possible to decolonize? The South as Interlocution”.

Vladan Joler is a SHARE Foundation founder and professor at the New Media Department of the University of Novi Sad. He leads SHARE Lab, a research and data investigation lab for exploring different technical and social aspects of algorithmic transparency, digital labour exploitation, invisible infrastructures, black boxes, and many other

contemporary phenomena at the intersection between technology and society.

Yuji Kawasima has a PhD in Art History from the Complutense University of Madrid. He is a researcher, curator and writer with a special interest in practices related to gender and queer studies in the Latin American cultural context. He has lectured at institutions such as New York University, City University of New York, MNCARS, MUSAC, and CA2M, among others, and has carried out research stays at the University of São Paulo. He has published in academic publications and the art press such as *Goya*, *Babelia*, *Utopia* and *Exit-Express*, as well as in different exhibition catalogues and books, such as *Leonilson: Drawn 1975–1993* (KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2021), *Exterioridades críticas. Comunidades de aprendizaje universitarias en arte y arquitectura y su incorporación a los relatos de la modernidad y del presente* (Brumaria, 2019) and *José Leonilson: Empty Man* (America's Society, 2018). He is currently preparing a book devoted to the Brazilian artist Leonilson, to be published by Cátedra. He is also the editor of *Quema de Archivo*, an ongoing editorial project for the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Complutense University of Madrid, focused on marginalised artistic, activist and archive productions during the HIV/AIDS crisis in different Latin American contexts. Since 2020 he has been part of the team of the Study Center of the Reina Sofía Museum.

Gal Kirn completed his PhD on the topic of Louis Althusser and socialist Yugoslavia at the University of Nova Gorica in Slovenia (2012, *summa cum laude*). He has since worked, among other places, at the Workers and Punks' University (Ljubljana), Jan van Eyck Academie (Maastricht), Institute for Cultural Inquiry – Berlin, Humboldt University in Berlin, GWZO in Leipzig, and the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. He is currently a research fellow at TU Dresden, where he researches the Soviet avant-garde and Partisan memory. He has (co)edited diverse books on Yugoslav film, post-Fordism, neoliberalism, and Althusser, as well as written the books *Partisan Ruptures* (Pluto Press, 2019) and *The Partisan Counter-Archive* (De Gruyter, 2020). From autumn 2020 he will be Visiting Professor for Cultural History at the University of Nova Gorica.

Ram Krishna Ranjan is a practice-based researcher and visual artist, and currently a PhD candidate at Valand Academy. His educational background is in economics, media and cultural studies and fine art. Longstanding areas of interest are decoloniality, migration, gentrification, memory and nation, and the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender. Through moving-images-based practice, he tries to build conversations around place-specific issues of social, economic, and political justice.

Vali Mahlouji is a curator, advisor to the British Museum, the Bahman Mohassess Estate and director of Kaveh Golestan Estate. In 2010 he founded Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD), a non-profit curatorial platform excavating accounts of cultures which have remained obscure, banned or lost through material destruction, acts of censorship, political, economic or human contingencies. AOTFD has placed artworks in international collections including Tate Modern, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, British Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Mahlouji's recent curatorial work includes exhibitions at SAVVY Contemporary, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Dhaka Art Summit 2018, Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Whitechapel Gallery, Singapore International Festival of Arts, Bergen Triennial and de la Warr Pavilion. His upcoming exhibition will be at Sursock Museum in Beirut. He has been published by various institutions, including, the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, the Guggenheim Museum, New York, Asia Society Museum New York and Yale University Press.

Sophie Mak-Schram is an art historian, producer, educator and occasional practitioner. She has been, amongst other things, one founding half of Overheard Map, an annual residency project that experiments with how artists work together, one half of Tail Bend Travel, a (sometimes fictional) tour company that offers unexpected walking/video/performance tours, one part of Cera Project, a curatorial platform for art of the non-West, and one part of PACTO, an international art collective. She has worked for immersive theatre company Punchdrunk, global university Minerva Schools and artist development organisation UK New Artists, and often designs educational programmes aimed at fostering social activism and community building, internationally. Sophie likes to think and work with other people about how knowledge is constituted through or around art, and what political, social and cultural implications these knowledges have. She is specifically interested in decolonial and feminist approaches, radical pedagogies and collective practices.

Javiera Manzi A. is a sociologist and archivist at the University of Chile, and independent researcher, curator, teacher and feminist activist. She works at the crossroads between art, politics and visual culture of social movements in Latin America and networks of international solidarity during the 1970s. She is currently investigating the muralist brigades in exile and preparing a book on the cultural coordinators in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s. She is one of the spokespersons for the Coordinadora Feminista 8M in Chile and part of the coordinating team of the platform Red Conceptualismos del Sur. A co-author of the book *Resistencia gráfica a la dictadura en*

Chile APJ-Tallersol (LOM, 2016), she has also written about feminist readings of the Chilean revolt in *La Internacional Feminista. Luchas en los territorios y contra el neoliberalismo* (Tinta Limón, 2020) and *Por una Constitución Feminista* (Libros del Pez Espiral 2020).

Diego Marchante “Genderhacker” (Pamplona, 1984) is a transfeminist activist, transmedia artist and lecturer. A doctor of fine arts from the University of Barcelona (UB), since 2008 he has worked as a professor of Audiovisuals and Gender Studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the UB. In 2011, he published Archivo T (<http://archivo-t.net>), an archive of social movements and artistic practices that have addressed gender issues in the Spanish context from a queer and transfeminist perspective. His work has been exhibited at Can Felipa, Caixaforum, Fabra i Coats, Sala d'Art Jove, Centre de Cultura Contemporàni de Barcelona (CCCB), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) and Centro de Arte Contemporáneo (CAC) de Quito in Ecuador. He has published several texts in various books such as *Transfeminismos. Epistemes, fricciones y flujos* (2013), *Barbarismos queer y otras esdrújulas* (2017), *Smagliature Digitali. Corpi, generi e tecnologie* (2018) and *Cuerpos conectados. Arte identidad y autorrepresentación en la sociedad transmedia* (2021). In 2020 his project *Gendernaut. Queering the 90s* (<http://gendernaut.net>) was selected in the call for research stays at the MNCARS, in the context of the project *Our Many Europes – Europe's critical 90s and The Constituent Museum* (OME), organised by L'Internationale.

Pablo Martínez is a researcher and educator. He holds a PhD in art history with a dissertation that analysed images of crowds and focused on the funeral of the Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti. During the last decade his institutional work has attempted to challenge the limits of the museum to test and imagine the possibilities of an ecosocial institutionality. He worked as Head of Programming at the MACBA – Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona from 2016 to 2021, where he also directed the Centre of Studies and Documentation and its exhibition programme, the Independent Studies Programme, and the *et al.* series of essays (Arcàdia). He worked as head of education and public activities at CA2M – Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid (2009–2016) and associate professor of Contemporary Art in the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (2011–2015). He's a member of the editorial board of the art and visual culture journal *#Re-visiones*. Martínez is a founding member of Las Lindes (est. 2009), a research and action group working on education and cultural and artistic practices. Pablo has edited books, curated performance cycles, activated collective creation processes, accompanied artists in residencies and

curated exhibitions, negotiated with neighbours, protested against the expansion of MACBA building, moved chairs, served water in seminars, applied for lots of grants and danced until dawn.

Miran Mohar (Novo Mesto, Slovenia, 1958) is an artist based in Ljubljana. He is a member of the IRWIN artists group and a co-founder of the Neue Slowenische Kunst art collective, the graphic design studio New Collectivism and the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre. Together with four other members of IRWIN (Dušan Mandič, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek and Borut Vogelnik) he has participated in all IRWIN projects and exhibitions since 1984. These include: *From Kapital to Capital*, Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2017; *Planting Seeds*, Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdansk, 2016; *From Kapital to Capital*, Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 2015; *Hans in Luck – Art and Capital*, Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, 2014; *Former West*, HKW, Berlin; *Art Turning Left*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, 2013; *A Bigger Splash*, Tate Modern, London; *NSK Passport Office*, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); *Manifesta*, Genk, 2012; *The Global Contemporary. The Art Worlds after 1989*, ZKM/Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe; *Impossible Communities*, State Museum of Modern Art, Moscow; *The International*, MACBA, Barcelona, 2011; *The Promises of the Past*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2010; *New Old Cold War*, Moscow, Third Moscow Biennial, 2009; *State in Time*, Krems, Kunsthalle Krems, 2009; Taipei Biennial, Taipei, 2008; *Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples, 1960 to Now*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2006; Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 2005; *Personal Systems*, Venice, Venice Biennial, 2003; *Retroprincip*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2003; Berlin-Moscow/Moscow-Berlin, Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2003; *Museotopia*, Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, Hagen, 2002; Le Tribu' del'arte, Galeria Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2002; *Aspects and Positions*, Museum of 20th Century, Vienna, 1999; Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 1997; *Manifesta*, Boyman Museum, Rotterdam, 1996; *Apt Art and Ridzina Gallery*, NSK Embassy – Moscow, Moscow, 1992; Moderna galerija, Slovenske Atene, 199; Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1988; Riverside Gallery, London, 1987. As a member of the New Collectivism graphic design team, he co-designed numerous books, posters and other graphic design products for the following institutions: P.S.1/ MoMA New York, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana, Kunst Werke Berlin, Irwin, Laibach, Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, En Knap Dance Company, Castello Di Rivoli, Kampnagel, and others. Since 1983 he has made several set designs for the following theatre and dance companies: Randy Warsaw Dance Company, Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, Red Pilot, En Knap Dance Company and Anton Podbevšek Teater. Since 2008 he has been an associate professor and vice-dean at AVA, Academy of Visual Arts in Ljubljana, and since 2017 a guest professor at UBT

University in Prishtina. He is also a tutor at the SCCA World of Art curatorial school and a co-founder and member of the architectural movement Maja Farol.

Meriç Öner is an architect, researcher and exhibition maker. Following a period of professional practice, Meriç Öner was commissioned as exhibitions coordinator at the 2005 UIA World Architecture Congress in Istanbul. Later at Garanti Galeri, she assisted exhibitions on design and architecture, and edited publications on the city. Öner simultaneously supported the layered design processes of Salt, a research-based cultural institution, ahead of its opening in 2011 in Istanbul. As founding associate director of research and programmes, she defined Salt's critical approach to the study and presentation of built environments. Her queries on material culture in recent history initiated local and international conversations, facilitating public displays of multiple narratives and expandable timelines via exhibitions, workshops, talks, and film programmes including *Becoming Istanbul and 90* (2011), *Modern Essays 4: SALON* (2012), *Summer Homes: Claiming The Coast* (2014), *One and the Many* (2016), *Commissioners' Exhibition* (2017), *CLIMAVORE: Seasons Made to Drift – Cooking Sections* (2021), and *Thursday Cinema* (2014–ongoing). As director in 2017–2021, Öner focused on amplifying the institution's potential as a co-learning agency. She advanced the dissemination of the digitised Salt Research archives and activated the Office of Useful Art in partnership with the Asociación de Arte Útil. Öner structured long-term collaborations with local institutions and universities, in particular with Kadir Has University, that led to the acquisition and digitisation of the archive of the *Istanbul Encyclopedia* (1945–1975) – an incomplete queer publication about the city – by the late historian and author Reşad Ekrem Koçu, due for online access in 2023. She currently practices space-, exhibition- and programmamaking, and provides consultancy on cultural strategies internationally at Meriç Öner Research and Design based in Istanbul.

Bojana Piškur, PhD works as a curator in the Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. Her focus of professional interest is on political issues as they relate to or are manifested in the field of art, with special emphasis on the region of post-Yugoslavia. She curated the *Southern Constellations: The Poetics of the Non-Aligned* exhibitions (Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 2019; Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea, 2020; Drugo more, Rijeka 2021) which dealt with the topic of the non-alignment. Her latest exhibition which she co-curated with colleagues from the region is *Realize! Resist! React!, Performance and Politics in the 1990s in the Post-Yugoslav Context*.

Theo Prodromidis is a visual artist and director based in Athens (Greece). He studied contemporary

media practice at the University of Westminster (London, United Kingdom) and was awarded an MFA in fine art by Goldsmiths' College, University of London in 2007. His work has been exhibited and screened in galleries, museums and festivals such as the Furtherfield (London), the Galerija Nova (Zagreb, Croatia), the State of Concept (Athens), the 1st and 5th Thessaloniki Biennales, the 4th Athens Biennale, both events in Greece. Since 2017, he has contributed to the exhibition *The School of Redistribution* by the platform Future Climates and the previously mentioned *State of Concept*, as well as to *Project PRE.SS* (Provision of Refugee Education and Support Scheme) by Hellenic Open University and part of the WHW Akademija's (Zagreb) programme *To care for another, radical politics of care*. He is a member of the Institute of Radical Imagination (IRI), a volunteer at the Open School for Immigrants of Piraeus (Greece) and a member of the Solidarity Schools Network. In 2020–2021 he was the co-leader of *An album from our square* at the Victoria Square Project in Athens, supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Public Humanities Initiative (SNFPHI) at Columbia University (New York, United States).

Tjaša Pureber is a political scientist, independent researcher and publicist. She studied at the Faculty for Social Studies in Ljubljana. Her main field of interest is social movements from below and cultural policies. Apart from numerous scientific articles, she edited one of the few books on anarchist movements in Slovenia. She used to be a journalist, mostly covering domestic politics and socially engaged topics. She worked for several years in advocacy in the field of non-governmental organisations and self-employed artists, among others as head of advocacy with Asociacija, a network of NGOs and self-employed cultural workers. She currently works as a freelance producer in the field of independent performing arts and is specialised in communication. She is a long-term activist for social justice.

Rasha Salti is a researcher, writer and curator of art and film. She lives and works in Beirut and Berlin. Salti has curated film programmes worldwide, from MoMA in New York to Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. In 2011, she was one of the co-curators of the Sharjah Biennial. In 2015, she co-curated with Kristine Khouri the exhibition *Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the Exhibition of International Art for Palestine* (Beirut, 1978), at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA), and at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin, in 2016. She is the author and editor of numerous publications, including the book *I Would Have Smiled: A Tribute to Myrtle Winter-Chaumeny* with Issam Nassar, dedicated to the legacy of the British photographer and founder of the UNRWA photo archive.

Anja Isabel Schneider studied American Literature in Los Angeles (UCLA) and Tübingen (Eberhard Karls Universität) as well as Art History and Curating in London. She holds an MA in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art and an MFA in Curating from Goldsmiths, University of London. Currently, she is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM, Cuenca) and a member of the research group ARTEA. Research and scenic creation, Madrid (<http://arte.uclm.es>). From 2015–2020, she was a PhD fellow in Curatorial Research at M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp / KU Leuven, Lieven Gevaert Research Centre (LGC). In her doctoral position, she worked towards the exhibition *Mermaid Honeymoon: A curatorial reflection on Allan Sekula's "Ship of Fools" / "The Dockers' Museum"*, M HKA, Antwerp (2020) and co-curated with Hilde van Gelder and Carles Guerra *Allan Sekula. Collective Sisyphus*, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2017). Her writing has appeared in research journals, art magazines, exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. In 2011, she was the laureate of the 4th edition of MARCO/Frac Lorraine Award for Young Curators.

Natalia Sielewicz is an art historian and curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (Poland). She has curated the exhibitions *Paint, also known as Blood. Women, Affect, and Desire in Contemporary Painting* (2019), *Hoolifemmes* (2017), and *Ministry Internal Affairs. Intimacy as Text* (2017). She was also a curator of *Private Settings. Art After Internet* (2014), one of the first institutional exhibitions to look at the impact of new technologies on the human condition in late capitalism, and *Bread and Roses. Artists and the Class Divide* (2015), together with Łukasz Ronduda, about the way artists define their status and position in the realm of the current ever-widening economic gap. She has curated and produced numerous performances, including with Haroon Mirza and Richards Sides (2012), Ramona Nagabczynska (*The Way Things Dinge*, 2014), Grace Ndiritu (*Spring Rites: Birthing of a New Museum*, 2014), C. Spencer Yeh (2014), Korakrit Arunanondchai (2014), Jesse Darling (*Habeas Corpus ad Subjiciendum*, 2014), DIS (*#Thinkspiration*, 2014), Adam Linder (*Some Proximity*, 2015), Manuel Pelmus and Alexandra Pirici (*Public Collection*, 2015), and Jeremiah Day (2016). Most recently, and together with theatre director Bartosz Frąckowiak, she co-authored *Modern Slavery*, a forensic investigation and experimental theatre play discussing forced unpaid labour in today's Poland. During the pandemic lockdown, she ran the MSN Home Office blog, the museum's online platform for communication during the COVID-19 crisis.

Antoine Silvestre (Lyon, 1984). Architect and philosopher. His field of work and research focuses on the relationships between city, capitalism and urbanism in the framework inherited from the European world

system and modern liberal democracies. His activity also includes architectural, stage and web platform design, as well as conducting pedagogical workshops and publishing critical essays. Other lines of work and research are technology and possible lines of flight, critical uses and collective production. His works in this area include the workshop "Deriva collective_Hacking urban" (Buenos Aires – Barcelona, 2018) and a collectively produced video, *Hacking Deriva*, presented in 2018 at L'Alternativa. He has designed several exhibition spaces (design and architecture) for the artist collective Etcétera: Sao Paulo Biennial (Brazil, 2014), Serralves Museum (2015) and Cumbre La Criatura (Argentina: 2018). He is currently a resident researcher at Arts Santa Mònica Contemporary Art Center in Barcelona. He is part of the Espectros de lo Urbano collective.

Maja Smrekar (Slovenia, 1978) is a transdisciplinary artist whose work overlaps visual arts, performance and scientific fields with contributions to knowledge exchanged within lectures, talks and texts. She has been able to use her artistic voice to speak on environmental challenges, ecofeminism, artificial intelligence, interspecies collaboration and civil society in the age of postcolonial globalisation. Accordingly, she likes to challenge binary oppositions and patriarchal structures, that juxtapose ideological remnants and geo-political signifiers. She has exhibited in media arts and fine arts museum contexts such as ZKM Karlsruhe (Germany), Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (Ljubljana, Slovenia), The National Museum of XXI Century Arts – Maxxi (Rome, Italy), MAK Vienna / Vienna Art Week and Künstlerhaus Wien (Austria), Het Nieuwe Instituut (Rotterdam, The Netherlands), Musee de l'Homme (Paris, France), Latvian National Arts Museum (Riga, Latvia), RMIT Gallery Melbourne (Australia), Zuercher Gallery / Frieze New York (USA), Art Laboratory Berlin (Germany), Hyundai Motorstudio Beijing (China), and Kapelica Gallery (Ljubljana, Slovenia), as well as festivals and conferences such as Ars Electronica (Linz, Austria), Transmediale (Berlin, Germany), Click festival (Elsinore, Denmark), Falling Walls (Berlin, Germany), Rencontres Bandits-Mages (Bourges, France), and Musrarra Mix (Jerusalem, Israel). Over the last 10 years, her artistic research has been focussing on collaborations with institutions such as the Institute of Medical Biochemistry, the Faculty of Computer and Information Science, the Laboratory for Bio Cybernetics, and the Department of Forestry (all at the University of Ljubljana), the Department of Freshwater and Terrestrial Ecosystems (National Institute of Biology in Ljubljana, Slovenia) and with the Department of Zoology in Life Sciences at The Humboldt-University Berlin. In 2014 she collaborated with the ethologist and animal wrangler Jean Philippe Varin, at the JACANA Wildlife Studios in Saint Montaine, France. Since 2020 she has been collaborating with

the Embodied Systems for Robotics and Learning Department at the University of Southern Denmark. Among other awards, she has won 1st Prize at the Cynetart festival 2012, awarded by Hellerau – European Centre for Arts (Dresden, Germany), Honorary Mention at the Ars Electronica festival 2013 (Linz, Austria), and Golden Bird Award 2013 (Ljubljana, Slovenia). She was the winner of the Prix Ars Electronica – Golden Nica 2017 in Hybrid Art (Linz, Austria). In 2018 she was awarded a Prešeren Foundation Award, the highest national award for artistic achievements given by the Republic of Slovenia (Ljubljana, Slovenia). In 2020 she was selected as the Science Breakthrough of the Year 2020 Finalist by the Falling Walls Foundation (Berlin, Germany). Maja Smrekar lives and works in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Jonas Staal is a visual artist whose work deals with the relation between art, propaganda, and democracy. He is the founder of the artistic and political organisation *New World Summit* (2012–ongoing) and the campaign *New Unions* (2016–ongoing). With BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, he co-founded the *New World Academy* (2013–2016), and with Florian Malzacher he is currently directing the utopian training camp *Training for the Future* (2018–ongoing) at the Ruhrtriennale in Germany. Recent exhibition-projects include *Art of the Stateless State* (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2015), *After Europe* (State of Concept, Athens, 2016), *Museum as Parliament* (with the Democratic Federation of North Syria, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2018) and *The Scottish-European Parliament* (CCA, Glasgow, 2018). His projects have been exhibited widely, among others at the 7th Berlin Biennial (2012), the 31st São Paulo Biennale (2014), the Oslo Architecture Triennial (2016) and the Göteborg Biennale (2017). Recent publications and catalogues include *Nosso Lar, Brasília* (Jap Sam Books, 2014), *Stateless Democracy* (with co-editors Dilar Dirik and Renée In der Maur, BAK, 2015) and *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective* (Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2018). His book *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century* was published by MIT Press in 2019. Staal completed his PhD research on propaganda art at the PhDarts programme of Leiden University, the Netherlands.

Bogna Stefańska graduated in art history from the Faculty of Management of Visual Culture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. She currently works in the Research Department at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw as a researcher and curator of a public programme on climate crisis. In her research work she is concerned with rewriting the canon of artistic and activist actions towards the climate crisis as well as feminist art and online feminist actions. Bogna is a founding member of Pump it up! art cooperative and one of the creators of the *Atlas of the Anti-Fascist Year* – a social archive of anti-fascist and anti-war activities

and attitudes in culture, art and other walks of life. She also co-curates and co-organises the HER Docs Film Festival, the first documentary film festival in Poland presenting the oeuvre of female film auteurs.

Kuba Szreder is a researcher, lecturer and independent curator, based in Warsaw, an associate professor at the Department for Art Theory of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He has co-curated many interdisciplinary projects hybridising art with critical reflection and social experiments, such as *Making Use. Life in Postartistic Times* (together with Sebastian Cichocki, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw 2016). He actively cooperates with artistic unions, consortia of post-artistic practitioners, clusters of art-researchers, art collectives and artistic institutions in Poland, the UK, and other European countries. In 2009 he initiated the Free/Slow University of Warsaw, with which he completed several inquiries into the current conditions of artistic labour. In 2018, together with Kathrin Bohm, he established the Centre for Plausible Economies in London, a research cluster investigating artistic economies. Since 2018, he has been an active member of the core team of the *Atlas of the Anti-Fascist Year* in Poland. He is an editor and author of books, catalogues, chapters and articles tackling such issues as the political economy of global artistic circulation, art strikes, modes of artistic self-organisation, instituting art beyond the art market and the use value of art. He is currently working on an English edition of his book *ABC of Projectariat* (2016), a critique of the political economy of artistic circulation.

Steven ten Thije was a project leader of the EU-funded *The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989* produced by the L'Internationale museum confederation and a member of the Editorial Board of L'Internationale Online. He co-curated *The Making of Modern Art at Van Abbemuseum, 2017–2021*, with Christiane Berndes and Charles Esche in close collaboration with the Museum of American Art, Berlin. Previously, he co-curated *Confessions of the Imperfect, 1848–1989*, and *VAM, 2014–2015*, with Alistair Hudson. In the first L'Internationale project on *Post-War Avant-Gardes*, he was part of the curatorial team of *Spirits of Internationalism*, VAM, M HKA, 2012, with Charles Esche, Bart de Baere, Anders Kreuger and Jan de Vree. Recently he published the essay “The Emancipated Museum” (2016, Mondriaan Fund) and co-edited the book *What's the Use?*, published by Valiz in 2015. He was part of the team who organised Play Van Abbe (2009–2011).

Abhijan Toto is a curator and writer, interested in ecosophy, interdisciplinary research, labour and finance, based in Bangkok, Thailand and Seoul, South Korea. In 2018, he co-founded the Forest Curriculum with Pujita Guha, a multi-platform project for research

and mutual co-learning around the naturecultures of the forested belts of South and Southeast Asia. He is the artistic director of A House In Many Parts, a multi-disciplinary festival in Bangkok, supported by the Goethe-Institut and French Embassy, which he founded in 2020. He is also curator, with Mari Spirito of A Few In Many Places (2021), Seoul, Bangkok, Istanbul, New York, San Juan, Guatemala City, a platform for international collaboration and collective practice, conceived by Protocinema. He has previously worked with the Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh; Bellas Artes Projects, Manila and Bataan, the Philippines; Council, Paris; and Asia Art Archive. Selected recent exhibitions include *In The Forest, Even The Air Breathes*, GAMEc, Bergamo, Italy (2020); *Minor Infelicities*, Ujeongkuk, Seoul, South Korea (2020); *Southern Constellations*, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (2019); *The Exhaustion Project: There Is Still Work To Be Done*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2018). He has participated in residencies at Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; HSLU-University of Applied Arts and Sciences, Luzern, Switzerland and guest lectured at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen; the Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam; Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok; and Monash University, Melbourne, among others and is part of the steering committee of the Artist-for-Artist Programme. He is a contributor to collective research initiatives such as *Under the Mango Tree*, at the slow institute (2020). He was awarded the 2019 Premio Lorenzo Bonaldi X, at the GAMEc, Bergamo.

Fran MM Cabeza de Vaca is a composer, sound artist and music teacher. He has premiered instrumental and electro-acoustic music at various national and international festivals and composed music for artists and choreographers such as Aitana Cordero and Paz Rojo. His audiovisual works include three feature-length documentaries together with José Luis Tirado, and his participation in the ZEMOS98 collective (Seville). Since 2012, he has worked with the poet María Salgado on various projects, including the stage recital *Hacia un Ruido* (one of the pieces of which has recently become part of the Collection of the Ca2M-Dos de Mayo Arts Centre) and the audio-textual trilogy of pieces *Jinete Último Reino*, present in the official programme of 39^o Festival de otoño de Madrid in 2021. He is an active performer in the Pharmacy 13 Improvisation Orchestra and in the Transfeminist Fanfare, both in Madrid. Following almost two decades as a music teacher in Spanish public secondary schools, he teaches the Master's in Contemporary Stage Thought and Creation at the School of Dramatic Art of Castilla and Leon (Valladolid). He has coordinated the Communities Unit (part of the Education Department) at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía since September 2018.

Chuong-Đài Võ is a researcher and curator in residence at La Cité internationale des arts. She is writing a book about art schools as sites of postcolonial contestation in Hanoi and Saigon. She also is collaborating with an international group of researchers and curators on a digital humanities project about overseas artists in Paris. She was previously a researcher at the Asia Art Archive, and her projects included the Lee Wen Archive, the Green Papaya Art Projects Archive, the exhibition *Form, Colour, Action* (2019), the exhibition *Ho Tzu Nyen's The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (2017), and the symposium *It Begins with a Story: Artists, Writers and Periodicals in Asia* (2017). She has curated exhibitions in Hong Kong, Saigon, Phnom Penh, Los Angeles and New York. Her writings have appeared in *Afterall* and publications from the Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie (forthcoming), Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA), Moderna galerija, and Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

Mick Wilson is a Professor of Art and Director of Doctoral Studies at Hdk-Valand, University of Gothenburg, and currently visiting professor at SVA, New York and at the Latvian Academy of Art, Riga. He has previously been head of Valand Academy, Gothenburg (2012–2018); founder dean of the Graduate School of Creative Arts & Media, Ireland (2008–2012); and editor-in-chief of PARSE Journal (2015–2018). His teaching and research interests are situated at the intersection of questions of art, knowledge, curating and the political imaginary. Recent work has focussed on such themes as constructions of publicness, the social and the state; political community with the dead and the question of the body count; the rhetorical dynamics of knowledge conflict; the exhibition as a mode of enquiry; and the aesthetics of foodways. Recent edited volumes include *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination* (2021), with Cătălin Gheorghe, *Curating after the Global: Roadmaps for the Present* (2019), *How Institutions Think* (2017), and *The Curatorial Conundrum* (2016), MIT Press, variously with Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds, and Simon Sheikh, and *Public Enquiries: PARK LEK and the Scandinavian Social Turn*, Black Dog Publishing (2018), with Helena Selder, SOMEWHERE Giorgiana Zachia.

Onur Yildiz obtained a PhD degree in political theory from the University of Essex, UK. He was the senior public programmer of SALT, Istanbul between 2017 and 2021. He now works as a Project Director for an EU-funded project in the field of design. His research interests are radical theory, democratic politics, populism and the political uses of art.

Joanna Zielińska is an art historian, exhibition maker and performance curator. The ideas of a performative exhibition and performative artwork are fundamental in her curatorial research. Her practice is centred

around theatre, performance, performative literature, and visual arts. She is also interested in stirring a discussion on the identity and activity of 21st century museums. This approach is less bounded by a physical space than by the idea of community, the influence of new media, and the public sphere. From 2015 to 2020, she was the head of the Performing Arts Department at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw. She is the former chief curator at Cricoteka, the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków, Poland, where in 2014 she curated the inaugural exhibition for the opening of the institution's new building and the performance programme, *Nothing Twice*. Joanna Zielińska is the former artistic director at the Znaki Czasu Centre of Contemporary Art (CoCA) in Toruń, Poland, where she curated the inaugural exhibition for the opening of the institution's new building and the institution's programme during 2008–2010. Since 2011, she has been working on a long-term research project on the artist's novel, in collaboration with the Spanish artist David Maroto. Its central question is how a literary genre such as the novel becomes a medium in the visual arts. As its cornerstone, The Book Lovers have created a collection of artists' novels with a parallel online database (both in collaboration with M HKA) and complemented it with a series of exhibitions, performances, publications, and a pop-up book store, hosted by international institutions such as De Appel in Amsterdam, Raven Row in London, the Whitechapel Gallery in London, CCA Glasgow, and the EFA Project Space in New York, among others.

Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide is exhibitions curator at Van Abbemuseum. Her interests lie in diverse intersecting perspectives – institutional, trans-local, feminist, queer, intersectional, and modes that decentre the oppressor in practices of freedom and liberation – to influence art institutional practices. Previously she was deputy director at the Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, where she began as an intern in 2008, and worked as a producer on several project exhibitions including the *Grand Domestic Revolution* (2009–2012). More recently she was co-curator of exhibitions, assemblies and events at Casco including *Het is of de Stenen Spreken* (silence is a commons) with the artists Ama Josephine Budge, Ansuya Blom, Babi Badilov, and Mire Lee (2019); *Curating Strategies of Productive Refusal* with Gabi Ngcobo; and co-organiser of the second assembly for commoning art institutions and on art organisations as sites for unlearning, 2019. Yolande is co-editor of several books published with Casco, including *Unlearning Exercises: Art Organisations as Sites for Unlearning* (co-published with Valiz, 2018). She is a faculty member at the Dutch Art Institute, Roaming Academy (see *All About My Mother and Southern Wave*). Currently on her nightstand are the book *The*

Stars and the Blackness Between Them by Junauda Petrus, *The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde, and *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, while she's currently listening to *Love and Death* by Ebo Taylor & Uhuru Yenzu.

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to negotiate various positions, contexts and local
narratives about contemporary art.**