

**to acknowledge, study, and mourn what cannot be repaired, and to reach beyond—
towards and within unstable forms and possibilities of survival, tumultuous
self-organization, resistance and commoning**

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Fritz Laszlo Weber

Virgil B/G Taylor

Natascha Sadr Haghghian

Oumayma Khaled

Ernest Ah

Avery F. Gordon

Aino Korvensyrjä

Sami Khatib

Nida Ghouse

Rene Gabri

Ayreen Anastas

Marina Vishmidt

Ashkan Sepahvand

jee chan

stefan pente

Aboubakar Soumahoro

Luisa Eugeni

Marco Omizzolo

Paola De Meo

Rex Osa

EDITED BY

Ernest Ah and Natascha Sadr Haghghian

11 birds'eyes'views—Fritz Laszlo Weber

21 The Human Rights Baby—Virgil B/G Taylor

29 I am a rock—Natascha Sadr Haghghian

34 Un Avviso: Never Be Caught—Oumayma Khaled

36 in the hinterland...—Ernest Ah

42 elsewhere a study group...—Ernest Ah

46 In the Shadow of the Plantation and the Prison
—Avery F. Gordon

70 Tenuous Monopoly over Mobility: West African
Critiques of European Borders—Aino Korvensyrjä

80 The Perpetual Recurrence of Primitive
Accumulation: Reading Karl Marx with Rosa
Luxemburg—Sami Khatib

98 today the study group is many...—Ernest Ah

102 Some Annotations to The Whistle in the
Voice—Nida Ghouse

112 Ankersentrum (surviving in the ruinous ruin)
German Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2019, Details
—Natascha Süder Happelmann

134 Shitty Promises—Art in Ruins Workshop (Natascha
Sadr Haghghian, Rene Gabri, Ashkan Sepahvand)

146 New Ruins—Marina Vishmidt

168 after years of being pushed...—Ernest Ah

174 All Souls of the Queer Departed—Ashkan Sepahvand

194 responding to the botanical garden, berlin, 2019
—jee chan / stefan pente

204 here and now—jee chan

212 i would like to show you a photograph—stefan pente

216 responding to the botanical garden, berlin, 2019
—jee chan / stefan pente

228 a study group gathers...—Ernest Ah

230 White as Silence—Luisa Eugeni

234 Billboards in Donnalucata Sicily, 2019
—Natascha Sadr Haghghian

238 Umanità in Rivolta, excerpts selected by
Luisa Eugeni—Aboubakar Soumahoro

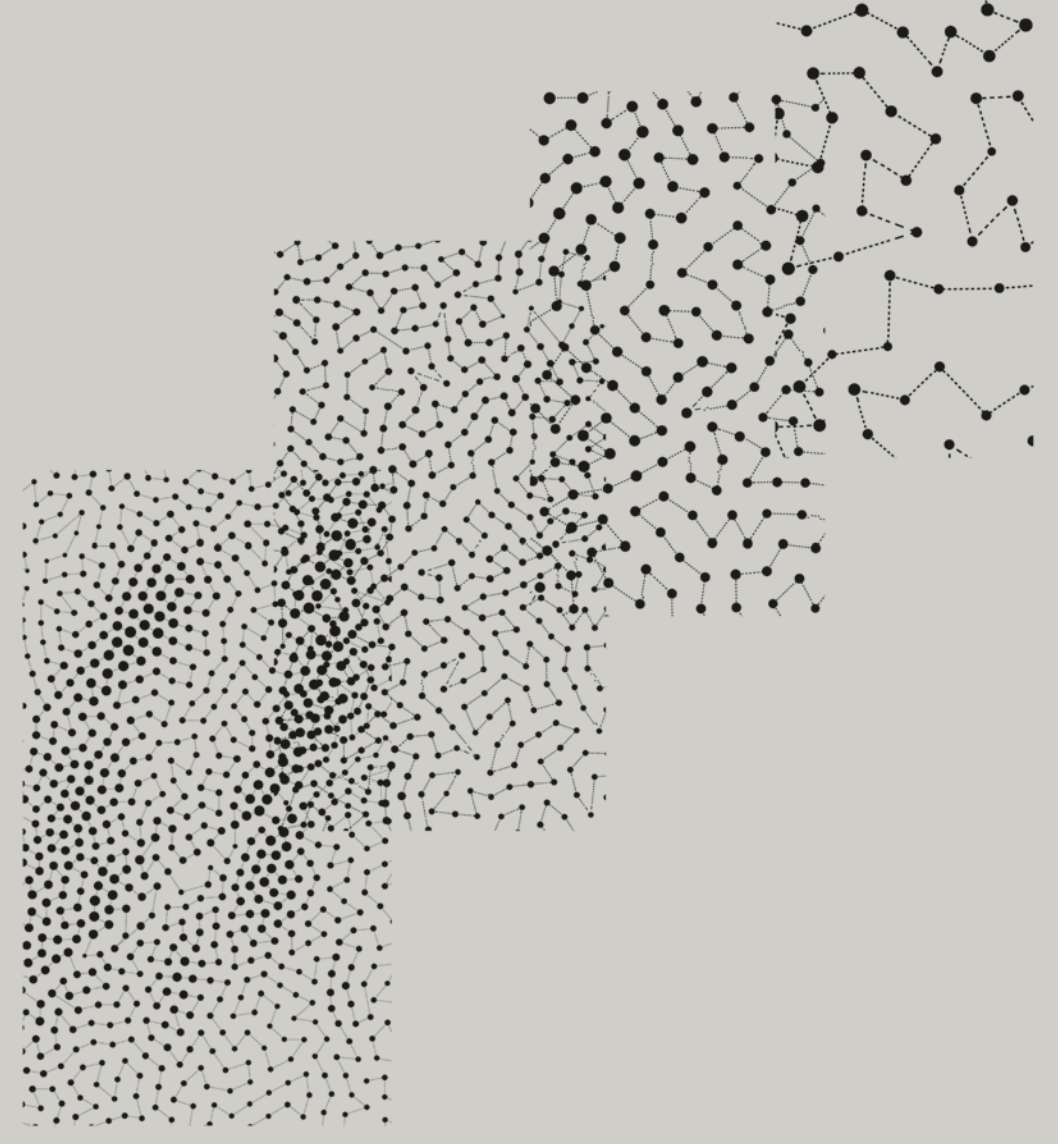
252 Delocalization on the Spot—The Injustice behind
the EU's Agro Food System—Marco Omizzolo
& Paola De Meo

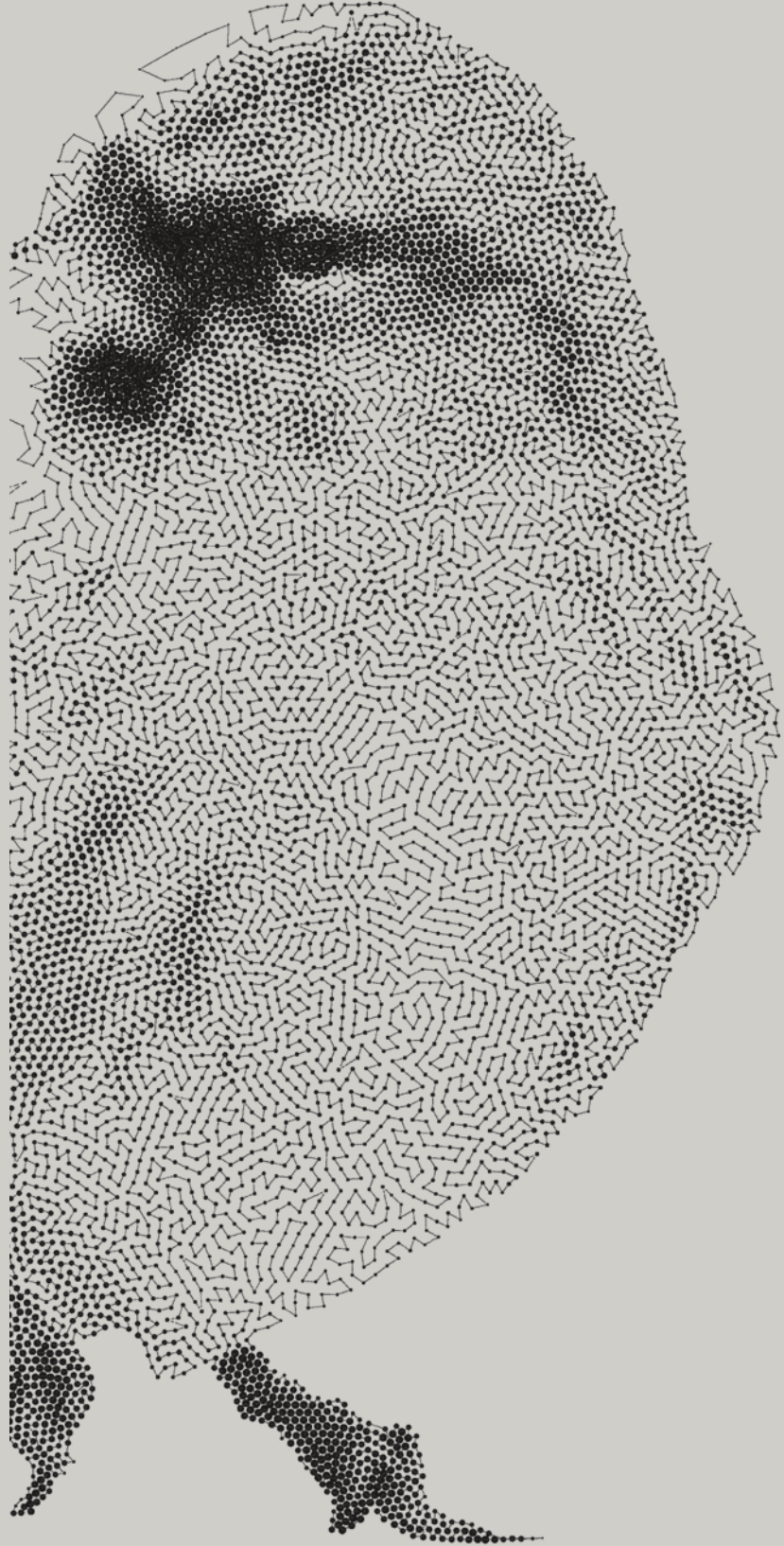
272 Migration Information Point—Building a House from
the Knowledge of Migration Experience—Rex Osa
in conversation with Aino Korvensyrjä and
Natascha Sadr Haghghian

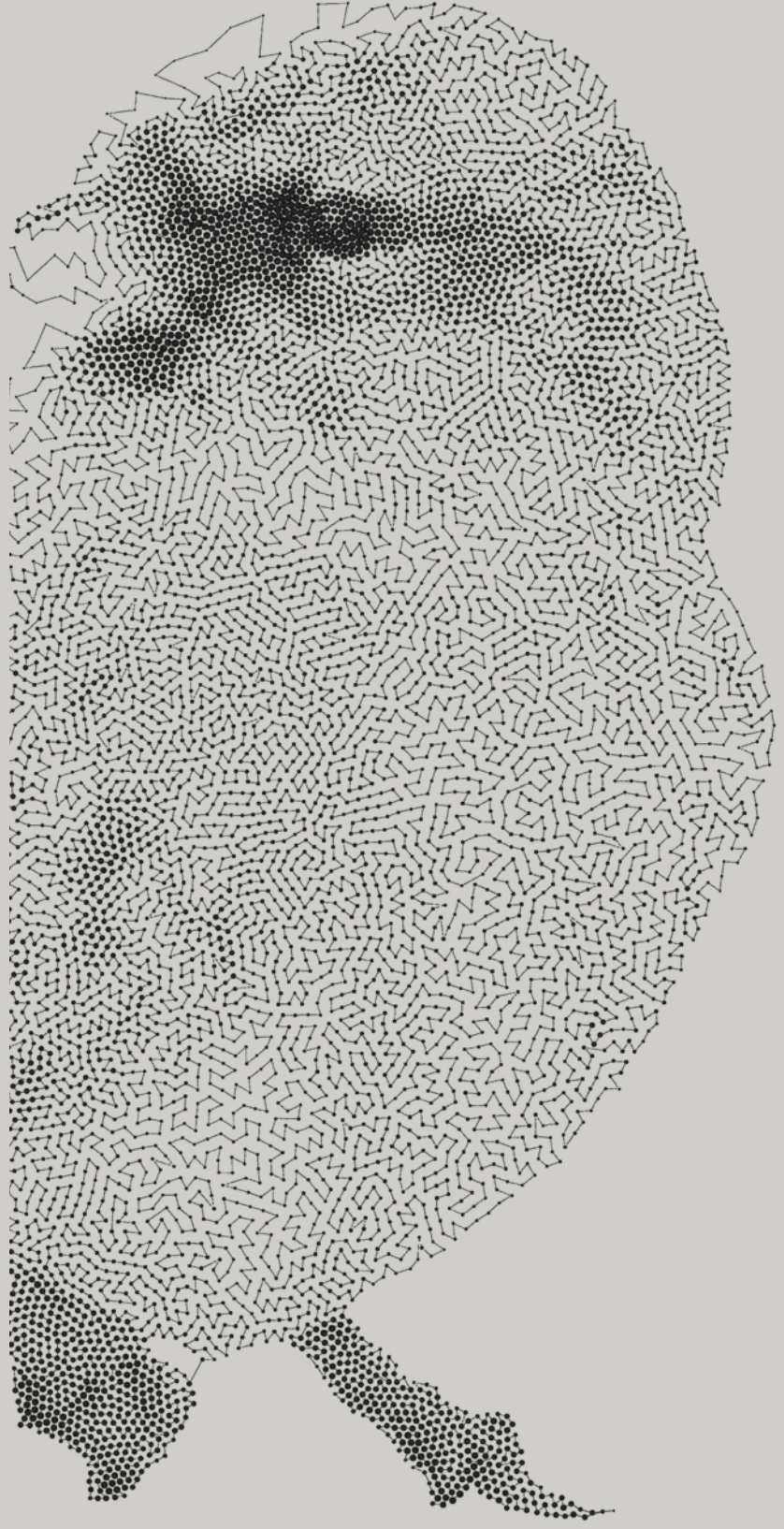
288 whether they are...—Ernest Ah

292 a friend comes to visit...—Ernest Ah

birds' eyes' views











The human rights baby has an old
 face This baby is made of stone, cold marble
 that is hard to look at in the bright sun, but never warms
 up The white marble baby looks like an old
 white man, he is prematurely wasting away, he has an old
 face

A stone baby is so unlikely you don't see
 him at first, you would never
 look for a human rights baby

Everything is faster and the look towards
 the future is really one where the past is just pushed aside

The orderliness of
 the past fading behind the present,
 the orderliness of the present becoming the past for the
 future The baby sits baking in the charmless
 light

The cold marble
 never gets warm

The baby sees nothing, the baby does
 see itself The baby, like its witnesses
 looking out for nothing in particular
 babies forgetting ourselves, stumbling towards the
 thing to do, though we forget—you have to activate
 that past aside Nothing is making it ready
 for its own demise They made the
 sound like their idea because they failed to
 no one wanted to come with them They have
 us conflate the power to exclude when all
 to have write anything down not have
 to tell me everything will climb by, let
 someone into you The stone baby
 of a pile of books Everything you've
 adds up to nothing, you're mistaken if you think you'll
 find something to shape in writing this

The baby

says “A child looks to the
 horizon It is staring into the

future it has dreamed of for itself The
 is resolute and hopeful Progress is real”
 I sent an email asking when I could expect to hear more
 I have always liked to write about myself as naked,

resolute, hopeful, nude He has an old face,
 forgetting to wash with soap
 someone telling you they've never
 really cared for you about you, with you, the human
 rights baby turns away look resolutely to the future
 Much of what has been discussed has been convened in
 secret, no one heard what was decided It is
 less an option but a fact Do not mistake the
 power of exclusion with warmth being asked to hold
 something

because you're twisting
 you aren't making you anything

What was happening behind you, where did
 you turn to find us I can't imagine mistaking
 myself, and I can't imagine what you'll find much pleasure in
 this The stack of books the human rights
 baby sits on is meant to grow There is no
 chance of adding another book I imagine
 destroying the baby to slide another book in I
 suppose in those solid bound books of cold white marble:
 unreadable and bonded marble pages, nothing to read,
 nothing to see

Of marble made of impossibly tight layers
 of crystalline network In a world bound too
 tight by lines just out of site, the magic of privacy seems

The world is shaped by property: no
 by shared experiences The text to
 the left of the human rights baby says the human rights
 baby is democracy Enumerating what shapes
 the world, listing and naming them and sorting them into
 books makes the baby comfortable We can
 all help by making the baby more comfortable

The world remains shaped by what
 cannot be named Marble consisting of
 the same stuff reassured by time, pressure and

the chance of adjacency
Privacy
 is a shitty substitute for secrets

No one would ever look at a human rights baby
 No one could ever find our secrets The
 baby's comfort is our destination Not so
 much an end to the future as the death
 The baby, present, is ready to forget
 one could ever look for our secrets unable to be read
 Already beyond forgetting



**I'm a rock
I'm a body
I'm a rock
I'm your body buddy but**

**I'm a rock
try to kick me
rock is patient
rock is watching**

**Her hand holding the head when
the door breaks open
more doors, all doors broken
they are searching
for what, at 2 in the morning
She can smell the sweat under
the heavy body armor. she
cannot see a face**

**Clearly x humans are more
important than y rocks
I turn to stone every time
I see her**

**There is no cure for this border
there is no cure for this lager
no cure for the stone before
the rock hits the bottom of
everything**

**The bottom of everything is a
pit full of rocks, people
turned to stone by looking
at her crouching behind the
broken door protecting her
forehead**

**I see her from afar and yet
I turn to stone and fall fall fall
into the pit, where all are
waiting to rape and kill and
be meat
between stones**

**I need to get out
I need to move away from
the pit**

**No more screaming and squirming
no more liquids that
can bleed into or out of or
make a mess**

**When all have become stone
there will finally be silence**

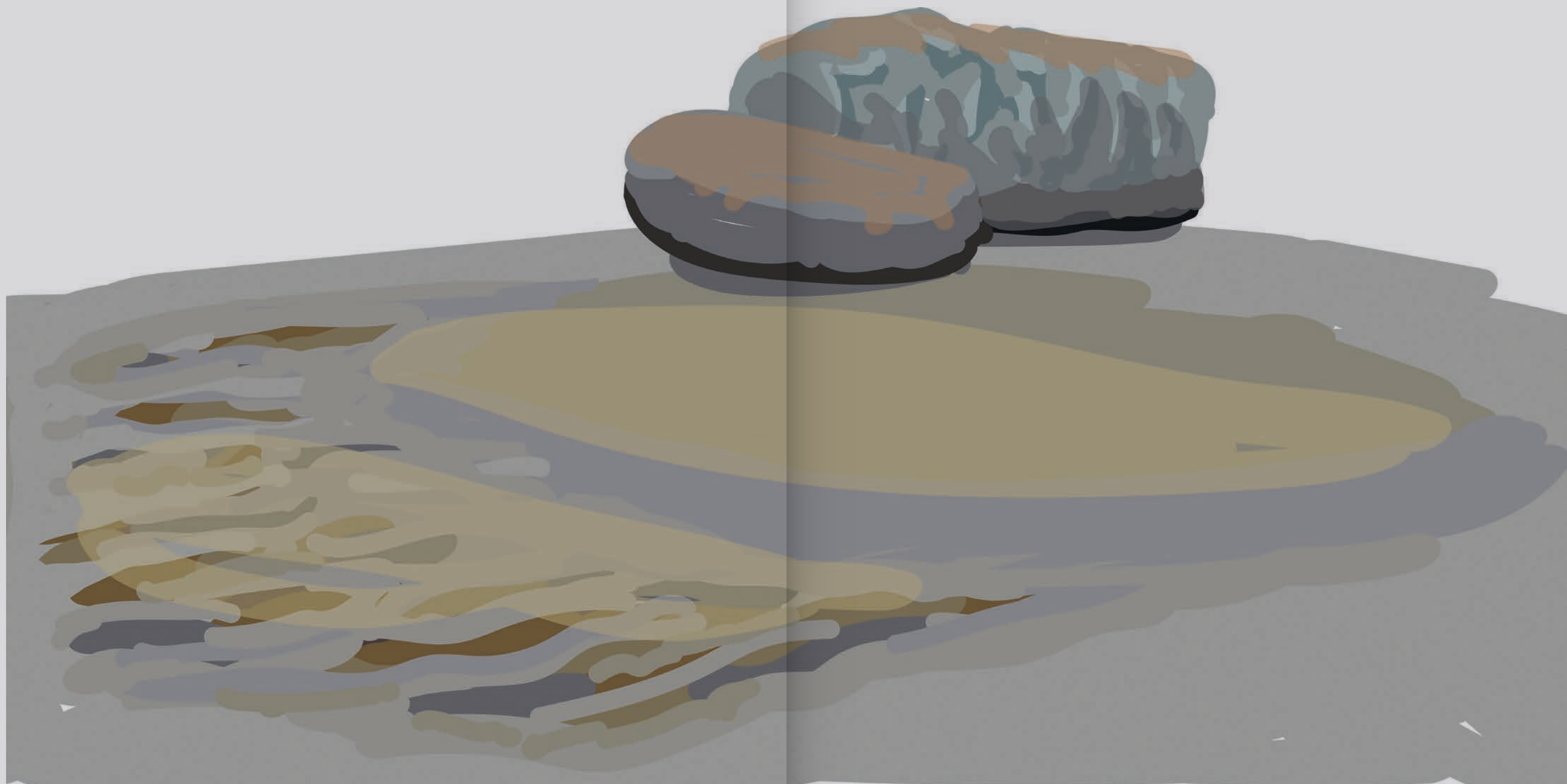
**I crawl out of the pit and
into her corner in the lager
that is flooded with cops
heavy gear, smell, sound
and body armor above
dull noise of hitting and smashing**

**They found nothing
but bodies
or
rocks
or
nobodies
or
piles of rocks**

**We're not here to explain
shut up ssshhh! quiet
quiet as a rock. solid
why does this sound familiar?
This cop has been telling her
to shut up since
he put on the uniform
the uniform that protects
property over people
that protects non-life over life
the police of climate change
they will still be here when
all life is gone, protecting
property as they were told
there will be only property
and police left.
and stones**

**I will be wrapped around a stone,
subtly
almost unnoticeable hint of breath
tiny breath**

**Don't breathe, they will find us. ssshhh
we're stones. don't move
and when I say run, run!**



UN AVVISO: NEVER BE CAUGHT

A biennale re-view, transformed into a kind of avviso (notice, advice) to artists, to ourselves from the perspective of making and unmaking.

Never be caught making anything that looks like an advertisement (unless that is the terrain of your struggle)

Never be caught making something that would be “good on television” (see parenthesis above)

And certainly avoid anything that you could also imagine on Broadway, even Off-Broadway, even Off-Off-Broadway, avoid avoid avoid

Don't get caught being just another contractor-subcontractor having others “realize” your “work”

Avoid use of ambient noise music to signify something obvious or subtle

Avoid trying to make an artist version of a Hollywood film

Don't use zones of disaster as the backdrop for your imaginary disaster

If you are not able to work through a complex reality of a specific place don't project onto it a common denominator of tragedy or disaster as such

Don't make art that looks like art

Don't use mannequins that allude to non-European or Black bodies without taking them into account

You know you “fucked up” when the artist adjacent to you seems like a continuation of your own work (you have entered the realm of cliché)

Avoid making a work about ecological disaster while producing ecological waste

Avoid using African masks, even if hidden in the corner of a gallery room collecting dust, without addressing the violence that could produce such an offensive gesture without even having a clue of what such a gesture carries

Avoid Lunar park aesthetics as disaster aesthetics

Avoid aestheticizing or “othering” the disaster

Avoid including human bodies in your accretion of disastrous objects

Avoid the feeling of having to fulfill an assignment

Avoid metaphorizing the disaster or whatever could be a way out

“The soul has come and is speaking” embodying the grieving of the living and the dead

Avoid the use of drones for art unless the drone becomes something other in its use

Avoid aesthetics of a google laboratory for demonstrating the interaction between art and technology

Avoid the aesthetics of any fair whether world fair or book fair or fair for any commodity/coloniality

What is it that is good out here?

I am born here it's perfect

I don't think he understands

This is not a question anymore, you have to go

Is it enough to stage the impasse?

No, it only places in the realms of the impassable what we know to be passing interminably daily.

But to know it, to name it, to see it, this is the value of a truth.

And it can only be told by those who have lived it.

But what is it to live a truth today and what is it to live a lie and what is it to live a truth and tell a lie and to live a lie, can you still tell a truth?

To tell a truth within the lie; is it not the perpetuation of the truths of the lie, which become, after all, the lie, repeated, again and again, which today are everywhere surrounding us, that is, the dissemination, even if and usually only tacitly, of the lies as truths, which are the

lies you or we lived or have been forced to live as truths. By all means, please, avoid this.

The disaster shows itself everywhere without it needing additional effort (Czech pavilion closed due to storm damage.)

Avoid using modes of behavior, imagery and color schemes, especially national flags used by oppressive states, unless you explicitly intend to attack them

If you are an artist from or in a colonizer country, think about what you are doing and undoing

Enough of this garbage

But what to do with the community of garbage?

Avoid using the genre of science fiction or any other genre which overpowers you and speaks to you more than you speak through it

Avoid using the genre of science fiction or any other genre without dismantling its clichés and all its unthought repetitions, redundancies

Avoid sick rooms hospital rooms hospital beds, labs, hospital symbols, nurses, whether live or on film, we understand, already, the condition is critical

Avoid inserting information in works that is readily available on Wikipedia

Avoid information unless ...

Avoid making your context or your “people” the fruit of your labor

Don't use art history as a prop or to legitimize what cannot stand on its own

Especially avoid any citation of Marcel Duchamp without having sufficiently understood the limits and the infinite recapitulations of his

gesture while definitely misunderstanding and underestimating his subversions

You know you have entered a totalitarian space when fifty or so artists start making one continuous (and quite monotonous) work

Avoid technological prowess as merit (there will always be someone else better, more forward, more powerful, etc.)

Haven't we seen enough of progress and it's destruction everywhere

Artists, please remember the journey of exploitation and extraction does not end at the doors of the gallery floor or its entrance

Giving time to fascists and white supremacists, thinking it speaks for itself is not irony, is not critical, is not interesting, maybe it is what a friend called infotainment (for those in the know to feel superior: and there is the real irony)

If there is a question of destruction implicated here, then surely we would have to confront the fact that what produces the destruction is above all production itself, works of art and their profusion and self-understanding as a sphere of production would have to grapple with this primary contradiction before jumping in the fray or battlefield.

That destruction's capacity to find new territories is not mitigated but activated by the drive on behalf of artists to produce more things is made plainly visible in an exhibition space which almost haphazardly if not carefully places objects of art together in the same way a department store may display its latest lines by well known hucksters.

When curation becomes product placement ...

When curation becomes arrangement of merchandise ...

When curation becomes the great exposition of the latest wonders of humankind ...

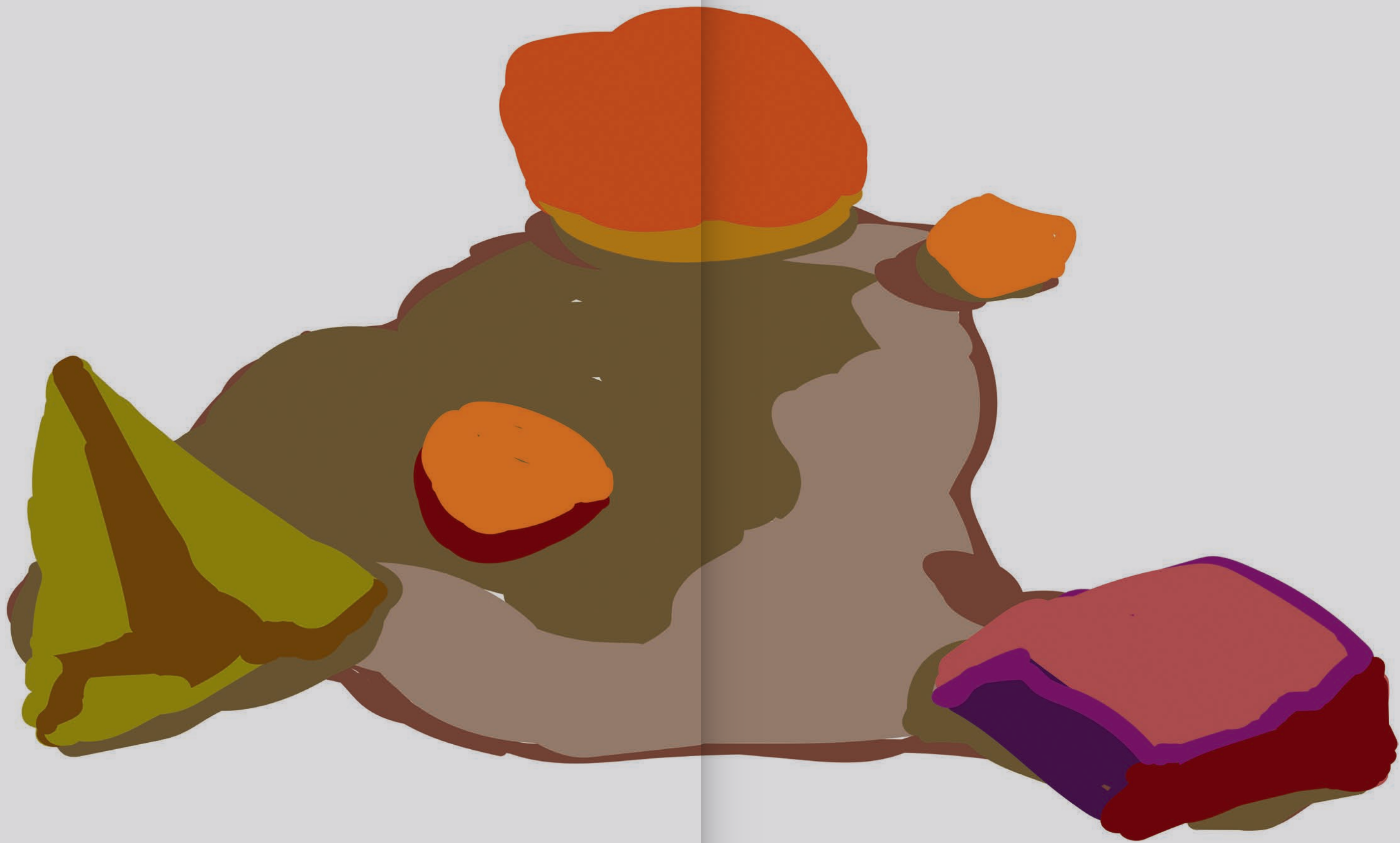
... beware.

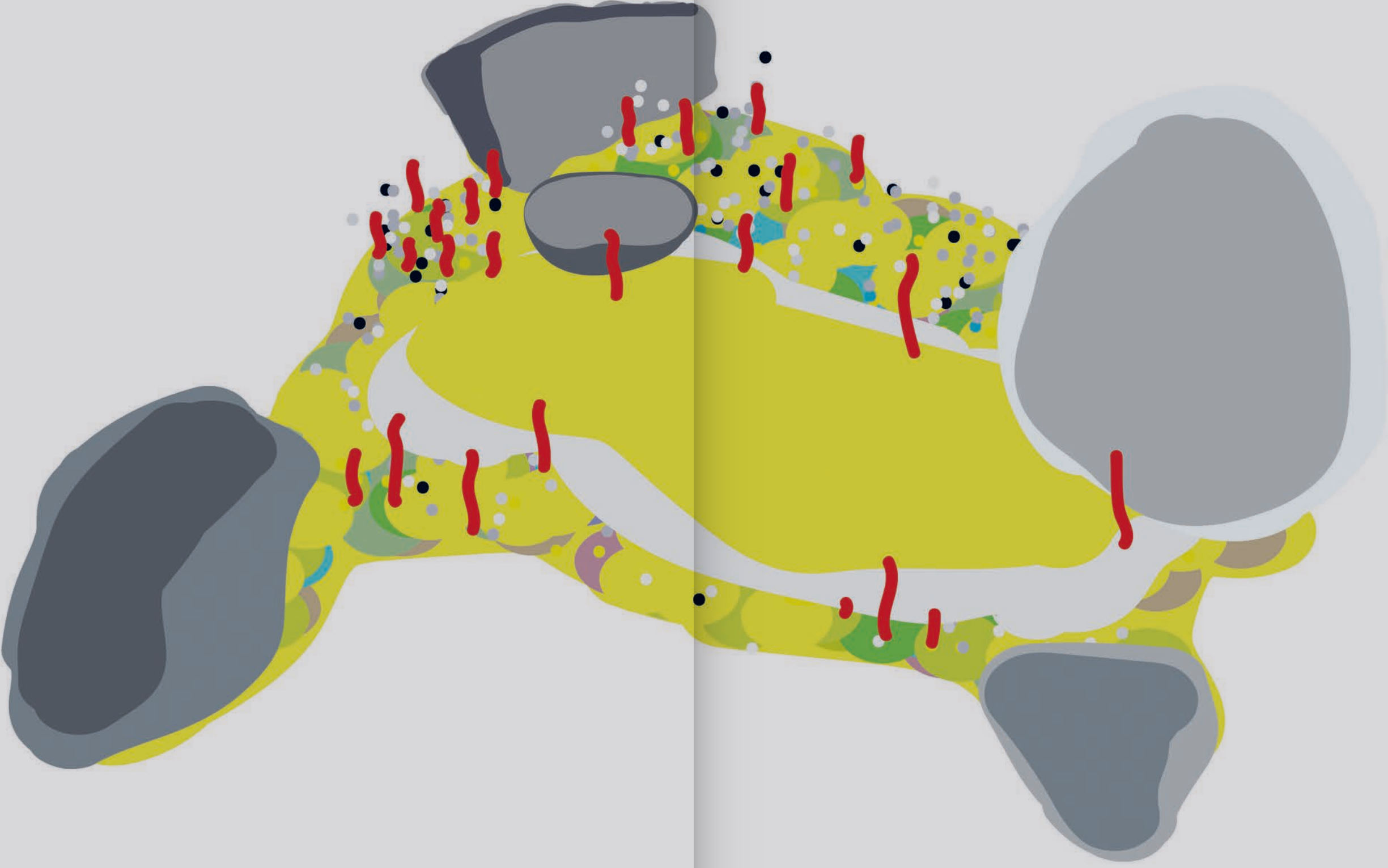
When the image of the disaster is so concretized in animations or objects, even the imagination and threat of the continuous and insidious disaster is robbed of its force to disrupt, to alter the course, to interrupt the incessant.

And if you have lived a lie, can you then live a truth, and how, would be a question that the coming artists as well as community will have to ask themselves.

1948, Oumayma Khaled (lives and works as a writer and an artist in Haifa)

in the hinterland of capitalism a study group gathers. who is the study group? the leftovers, those who are out of all compass however precisely they are located, those who choose their names, who dress like children, those who don't know how to dress, who worry that they stink, who manage to evade self-management in the enclosure, those who are locked up to be controlled, who were born on a ship, who have big bellies, who would rather be dogs, the rocks, rock pigeons, the pidgin-speaking, the neurotics, noisy women who destroy everything that comes their way, the unfucked, the unfuckable, those who are too late, too loving, too full, too flowing, too dread, those who can't breathe, the burrowing and borrowing ones, those who cohabit in the space of the undercommons, the utopian margins, the forest, mortville, all our friends.

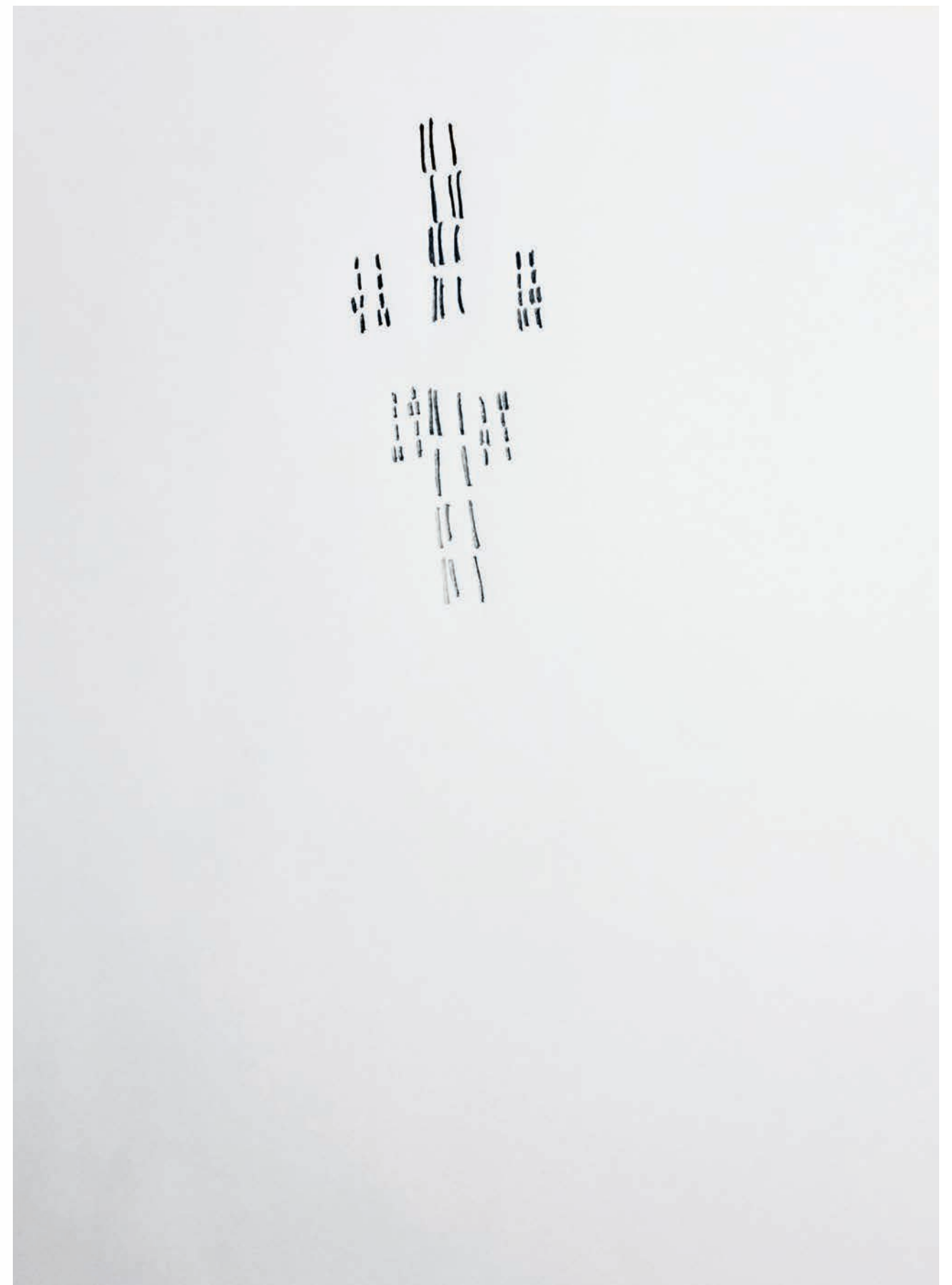




elsewhere a study group gathers for storytelling. they read a book called the word for world is forest. in this book, wood is scarce on planet earth, so humans, as is their habit, colonize the planet athshe and begin to cut down the forest (the world). the athsheans call their colonizers yumens, and –having learnt from the yumens how to kill—they fight a war of liberation and drive the yumens out. sadly, as everything you change changes you and, thus, no encounter stays without consequence, the athsheans end up keeping this skill acquired in self-defense: killing. the study group decides, from the encounter with this book, to keep the word, yumens. one of them says: the yumen is the species-embodiment of the bourgeois individual. another says: the yumen is never more or less than one. and another: as long as you can be counted, you have already lost. you think one and one and one, and like in football, who is number one, who is number two, who is number three. or you're neoliberal and you say, come on, they're all the same, all is good. either way, only once you have a binary universe can you count them. another says: yumens love to count! another: if they are capable of loving... the former: they love binary universes too! and so the study group keeps yumens as the word that those who do not count use to describe the ones who count. one counters: i prefer cunt over counting.

the study group breaks out in tumultuous celebration of those who prefer cunt and who recognize that counting sucks.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PLANTATION AND THE PRISON



The last writings of Ikko, which he was preparing to pin to his door.

A figure with a stone head walks through two landscapes. In one, suburban German sidewalks and paths yield, at a distance, quiet views of residential buildings surrounded by barbed wire and guarded gates. In another, windy Puglian motorways and tomato fields make for a noisier, more industrial ramble. This same figure appears in yet another scene, in lapsed time set to Tisha Mukarji's fugitive composition, sitting, waiting, looking, getting up, moving about, on the dock of the Trapani port in western Sicily. A boat with the word RESCUE on its stern is glimpsed briefly. Elsewhere, there is a tribute to one of the stealth forms by which people on the move today communicate with each other about the police and other matters of concern to them. Movement, confinement, the plantation, solidarity, mobilization in the context of the European border regime and the resistance to it. These are among the major themes that Natascha Sadr Haghigian has assembled for her contribution to the Venice Biennale.

This essay provides some historical context for the European border regime and especially the struggles against it that predate the surge in 2015 and the emergence of "Fortress Europe" in the 1990s. It provides a longer historical fetch, oriented towards those who are unfamiliar with this history, which involves going back in time to the story of the origins of modern Western capitalism.¹ This origin or transition story is important because it bequeaths the terms that still, if less confidently, order the world in which we live, and because it is likely that we are living through another long historical transition. And like the earlier transition, it is sometimes very difficult to take the measure of the changes in what are, to use Raymond Williams' terms, "dominant, residual and emergent."² We see and don't see what is coming, even as we try to intervene to turn our fates towards better ends.

The emergence of capitalism in Europe took hundreds of years and involved a tectonic shift in the organization of economic, political and social life. Needless to say, this is a long and complicated story that I can only cover very superficially. As I will elaborate in what follows, dispossession, expulsion, and theft of land, bodies, and knowledge were central to the origins of modern capitalism and to the recurring waves of primitive accumulation necessary for it to continue. To achieve this level of dispossession, two primary mechanisms were used. The first, notwithstanding capitalist ideologies of free labor and free markets, was forced, unfree labor in the workhouse, on the ship, on the plantation, in the settler colony, in the factory and in the

domestic kitchen. Modern capitalism becomes a global system only through colonization and the trade in enslaved Africans. The second mechanism was punishment (including banishment), confinement, and imprisonment. The modern prison that emerged in the nineteenth century was a descendant of the workhouse, the slave ship, the transport ship carrying banished convicts, the native reservation, and the Bantustan. Both of these mechanisms involved the widespread movement of people—voluntary, captive, and in-between. Today, Europeans tend to conceive of the movement of people as the problem of people coming to Europe. But for most of its history, Europe was a place that people left: because they were displaced from their homes, because they were sent away as punishment, because they needed work, because they were sent to fight wars, because they sought to settle, colonize, and steal other people and their lands.

Needless to say, notwithstanding, or as a result of these repressive technologies of expropriation and rule, people have always organized politically, including in flight and in confinement. The prison or the hold is never only a site of repression, it is also always a living archive of subjugated knowledge, infrapolitical resistance, political conspiracy, and, when possible, organized rebellion. Though subject to extreme forms of historical erasure, the traces of this history—what I've called the utopian margins—remain with us too and are carried along, knowingly or not, across distant times and places.³

1 This essay originated as a lecture given at the *beyond repair* study gathering, which then formed the basis of a day-long seminar with the students participating in the program. In reworking the lecture for publication, I have kept the pedagogical voice of the professorial lecture, including the reminders that in such a short space so much more that should be said is absent. This bears repeating. What I have also not been able to reproduce was the stimulating seminar with the students the following day where for many hours, I answered questions about and we discussed much that arose from the lecture but could not be covered in it, including how we might narrate our present moment, as if it were a historical transition to something or somewhere we cannot yet name.

I thank Natascha for including me in the *beyond repair* study program, as always it's an honor to work with her. And, I thank too Ernest Ah for all their effective and good-natured organizational work.

2 "By emergent I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture ... and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel," Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 123.

3 Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive*.

COUNTERREVOLUTION: THE STANDPOINT OF ANALYSIS

From the vantage point of this struggle, we can also see that capitalism was not the product of an evolutionary development bringing forth economic forces that were maturing in the womb of the old order. Capitalism was the response of feudal lords, the patrician merchants, the bishops and popes, to a centuries-long social conflict that, in the end, shook their power and truly gave “all the world a big jolt.” Capitalism was the counter-revolution that destroyed the possibilities that had emerged from the anti-feudal struggle—possibilities which, if realized, might have spared us the immense destruction of lives and the natural environment that has marked the advance of capitalist relations worldwide. This much must be stressed, for the belief that capitalism “evolved” from feudalism and represents a higher form of social life has yet to be dispelled.—Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*

Capitalism as a racialized political economic system emerges and develops out of social struggles, first within Europe, and then in the places where its agents trade, colonize, and settle, including on the ships that carry slaves, convicts and the indentured across seas and lands that create new global routes and crisscross older Eastern-oriented ones. As Silvia Federici concisely put it, rather than being a revolutionary or evolutionary development, capitalism was essentially a counter-revolution.⁴ It emerged in response to fierce struggles—armed in most cases—and it generated new ones. Everywhere, the attempt to impose a capitalist mode of extraction and production and in turn to create a new world in its image—a world with new experiences of land, of time, of work, of sociality, of the body—were fought before, during and after its ascendancy. These struggles were never strictly speaking over work in the narrow sense, rather, they were fundamentally about the form and ensemble of how life could and should be lived.

Contrary to popular and academic common sense, there were many anti-feudal popular struggles—often led by women—for an egalitarian society based on the sharing of wealth, for the leveling or the refusal of hierarchies of social status, for the right to move and make attachments freely, and for the replacement of authoritarian rule by secular, military and religious bodies. These various movements put the feudal system into crisis from below, so to speak. It was being put into crisis from above as well: merchants chafing at an order based on divine hierarchies, military society, and royal taxes; the church, the largest landowner in Christendom, trying to extend its imperial power against the rise of monarchs claiming dominion over territories soon to be known as nations; nascent scientists and philosophers seeking rational

enlightenment over animistic relational knowledges; manufacturers seeking to break the craft guilds to profit from the segmentation and alienation of other people’s work. This crisis story in which the main actors are elites is the one we’re mostly told, a story in which the popular struggles, barely noticed by later historians, were at best treated as “premature” (because pre-capitalist), as Frederick Engels famously assessed the sixteenth century German peasant wars.⁵ Rather, these popular struggles from below were revolutionary—an attempt to make the “world ... suffer a big jolt” in the words of Thomas Müntzer—in so far as they aimed to turn the feudal world upside down and to prevent a newly oppressive order from being established, one that would replace older forms of power and exploitation with equally undesirable new ones. And while this opposition did not succeed in installing an egalitarian order and protecting the old knowledges, it nonetheless remains as a fork or forks in the historical road of possibilities that were not taken then but might, on a different track, be taken still.

It is these diverse and widespread social struggles that are the background to the English enclosures, the German peasant wars, the violent witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the opening of the first workhouses, and the development of the transatlantic slave trade and its plantation economy that will, in combination, give us the full-blown modern racial capitalist system. From the ninth to the fifteenth century, a feudal serf system dominates western Europe and Britain. Simply described, it was a three-tier hierarchical and obligatory land lease system in which nobles received land from a King that they, in turn, would grant to a vassal in return for military service. This land was worked by peasants who held no ownership rights to it but were permitted access to it and its issue, under specified circumstances that were customary and came to be known as “the commons.”⁶ While capitalist private property relations did not yet exist, this was not an easy life. Ordinary people were very poor, often not surviving a harsh winter, or a poor crop, or a difficult childbirth; bound to a place and a master (literally by name and legal right), as well as bound to an unceasing work regime and a rigid hierarchical social order—women doubly so by their super subordinate status—not of their own making.

The hardship and unfairness of this life, early encroachments on land and on customary peasant rights combined with the rise of larger money economies and urban centers that destabilized local markets, provoked a wave of social struggles that begin in the thirteenth century—there are major uprisings in Northern France in 1251 and in

5 Engels’ “The Peasant War in Germany” was written in the summer of 1850 and published in several later editions in 1870 and 1874. It was important in treating the German peasant wars as more than merely a religious contest, but it nonetheless could not imagine peasants as anti-capitalist historical agents. This agency was considered exclusive to an industrial proletariat, a failure of comprehension and imagination which had significant consequences for Marxism, as it meant, for example, that it never took seriously—theoretically—the foundational role of the expropriation of indigenous lands and slave labor in making global capitalism possible.

6 There is still considerable disagreement among historians about the veracity and viability of the concept of feudalism itself, especially given its eighteenth century origins and its erroneous implication of a unified institutional order. It is less well used today, replaced by more detailed and geographically precise accounts and periodizations. The Marxist notion of a feudal mode of production, nonetheless, remains for many a useful shorthand to describe the dominant political-economic order that precedes capitalism.

Umbria in 1260—and continue throughout the period in which capitalism is established as the dominant political-economic system in Europe. By the end of the fourteenth century, the mass revolt of the peasantry against landlords was, as Federici notes, “endemic” and “frequently armed.”⁷ There were struggles not only over access to land, but over ever increasing taxes, over a 24-hour workday, and over the obligation to provide military service. Open rebellion and infrapolitical resistance were the norm and some of these struggles became legendary. For example, in 1377, the cloth workers in Flanders took up arms against their employers, angry and fearful after hundreds of weavers had been banished, leading them to flee to London for work. For three years between 1378 and 1382, the *ciompi*—today we would call them day laborers—in the wool industry rebelled and eventually took power in Florence, the leading banking center of Italy, where they installed a democratic government.⁸ In 1381, the radical priest John Ball and rebel leaders Wat Tyler and Jack Straw marched a peasant army from Essex and Kent to London, where they destroyed the houses of government and demanded the abolition of serfdom.

Of course, these political struggles did not look or sound like ours today. Their language was religious, in the register of heretical millenarianism, filled with prophecies and apocalyptic judgments, harboring older pagan sympathies and deeply influenced by female mysticism, as was evident still two centuries later during the German Peasant war in 1524–1526 and the subsequent attempt to establish a communal government in Münster in 1533. As Federici notes, “the aspiration to a more egalitarian society” was expressed in the language of “the exaltation of poverty,” “the communism of goods,” and the evil of war.⁹ Whatever the vocabulary, the demand for the radical democratization and equalization of social life and the overturning of an oppressive order—of which work and conscripted military service were crucial parts—was very clear. Thus, these movements and the individuals associated with them were severely persecuted and violently repressed by the state and the Catholic Church, the most centralized authoritarian institution in Europe at the time.

This ferment is the background to the systematic campaign of enclosures and the large wave of dispossession that reaches its height in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, producing large-scale movement of people, and that inaugurates our modern regime of property: private possession as the medium of economic wealth, political agency, and bodily integrity. “Enclosure” was the term used to describe a variety of strategies used by landowners to confiscate

as private property land and other resources (natural and human) that were not owned by anyone, to eliminate communal property as fact and concept as well as common rights to private property, thereby expanding their holdings, increasing their power, and commercializing and eventually industrializing agriculture. These strategies included ending the open field system, fencing off the commons, eviction, rent increases, indebtedness through taxes and tithes, and organized starvation. The scale, scope and rapidity of this assault on the commons, broadly speaking, is notable. By the mid-sixteenth century, land privatization has become routine in Europe. Federici notes that two thousand rural villages had been destroyed in England before the Reformation.¹⁰ By the mid-sixteenth century, European merchants had already expropriated much of the land of the Canary Islands, for example, and turned it into sugar plantations, worked by enslaved Africans. In Africa, the loss of land from slave-raiding was massive, as it decimated tribal social structures, and formed the cartographical infrastructure for the continent-wide colonial occupation that accompanied capitalism’s first and second industrial revolutions. In the Americas, by the turn of the seventeenth century, already one-third of communal indigenous land had been forcibly expropriated by Spain or Portugal, which enabled and was soon followed by widespread militarized settler colonization by the British, the French and the Dutch, and the installation of a plantation system throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

Marx had identified the enclosures as a crucial stage in the creation of industrial capitalism: the mechanism by which a population of people newly displaced, disgraced, and desperate became available to be accumulated as labor power. This original or what he called “primitive” accumulation was, in his view, a singular event. But Marx was wrong in two ways that the continuing history of enclosure, broadly conceived, has made abundantly clear. First, he was wrong about the significance of the English enclosures. Though they were extraordinarily destructive for English peasants and of traditional rural life, they were not sufficient for the development of a world capitalist system. Capitalist expansion would have been impossible without the African slave trade and the colonization of the Americas, which were both multinational efforts. Marx was also wrong to think that once this “primitive-original” (Adam Smith’s term) accumulation process was complete, it would not repeat. Primitive accumulation—the original constitutive violence of capitalism—repeats and is a permanent feature of it. It is not a one-time process. In setting the term on this path of constitutive violence, “primitive” came to refer not only to the barbarism or savagery at the heart of capitalism but also to the centrality of the very division of the world into “primitive” and “civilized,” “developed” and “undeveloped” that was so important to imperialism and to the various forms of neo-colonialism that followed it.

7 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 25.

8 The *ciompi* were the most radical of all the groups involved in the insurrection remembered in their name—“Revolt of the Ciompi.” They were the leaders in agitating against a guild system that excluded them and in demanding greater equality among all workers. They led the occupation by the lower classes of the government and replaced it with one that represented them. Unfortunately, the new government did not implement their demands and they were eventually defeated, their newly acquired guild status abolished, thus returning them to economic and political disenfranchisement.

9 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 42. See also Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism*, who emphasizes the significance of female mysticism. Most of the pamphlets and manifestos issued by the Diggers in mid-seventeenth century England and primarily written by Gerrard Winstanley, including the most famous one on the occasion of the occupation of St. George’s Hill in Surrey in 1649, explicitly linked the evils of private property to militarism and undemocratic government. See Winstanley, “A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England.”

10 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 70.

The economic and social function of the commons was to create a web of local cooperative relations, what Marx and Engels called primitive communism, within a system in which little land was owned outright.¹¹ A noble had property rights given to him by a monarch; a tenant had user rights to cropland and common land and those rights were passed down from generation to generation. Lord and tenant were bound to the land in service and obligation. Eviction was a serious breach of this obligation just as free movement was not permitted for the tenant. The concept of land as a commodity to be bought and sold—land understood as individual private property—led to the demise of the open field system and to the social system in which it was embedded.¹² Dispossession and expulsion produced a breakdown in social cohesion, unprecedented movement of people, and a peasantry increasingly polarized by economic inequality. This stratification was exacerbated as displaced peasants, now a cheapened mobile labor force, fled to cities where they were used to break the urban guilds and destroy the artisans' independence. The wage, which at one time would have been viewed as an instrument of freedom because it entailed a commutation from indenture and servitude, increasingly became viewed not as an instrument of freedom but of enslavement. Gerrard Winstanley, a radical Leveller, who along with his fellow Diggers occupied George's Hill in Surrey in 1649, called the wage simply "a terrible thing."¹³

So, the struggles against enclosure, land privatization and commercialization of agriculture on the European continent continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and in some places into the eighteenth century. Cutting down (i.e. levelling) the hedges and fences were common forms of protest that could turn into mass uprisings. For example, in 1549, 16,000 rebels in Norfolk, taking the name of Robert Kett, the rebellion's spokesman, defeated the state's army of 12,000, capturing Norwich, the second largest city in England at the time. They issued twenty-nine demands, and the first demand was: No more enclosures.¹⁴ *Omnia sunt communia!* Everything belongs to everybody! Open rebellion, food revolts led by women, poaching, vagabondage: there was an incredible ferment and movement, political and otherwise, throughout Europe at this time. In France, between the 1530s and the 1670s there were an estimated 1000 uprisings; in England, Spain, Italy, Germany we see a similar pattern.¹⁵ There was, in effect, a general uprising against the old forms of mastery and the new ones being imposed. Here, I am only describing what is happening in western Europe. The extent of this general uprising against the new order becomes even clearer when we take into account the armed

resistance by indigenous peoples to the genocidal wars against them and the resistance of Africans, Asians and others to enslavement and indenture during capture, on the ships, and on the plantations in the Americas. It will take a great deal of violence, repression and damage to install the capitalist world we take for granted as progressive, inevitable, civilized, the best; a world in which it is still not possible for millions of women and men to go where they please and where they have need, in peace and welcome.

All these social struggles, in their ragged disarray, involved not merely resistance or opposition to privatization, hierarchy, bondage and misery. They also involved efforts to protect existing and to produce further alternatives to this private property regime. These alternatives were crucial because they challenged the cloak of naturalization and inevitability that all-powerful people and systems wrap themselves up in for protection, and thus they posed a danger to the existing authorities, a danger which had to be contained (enclosed) or destroyed. Of course, containment never fully succeeded because the need for the alternatives remains and we keep the struggle for them alive, under the conditions of our time, thus continuing some very old struggles to this day.

MEANS OF CONTAINMENT

The means of containment and destruction of these alternative and older ways of life in Europe during the time we are discussing are many. Three that are important for our story are: changing racial regimes, the witch-hunt against women, and the criminalization of poverty and autonomous movement. It is not possible to discuss these properly in the space available, but I will touch on each briefly.

The incorporation of Africa and Asia into a world system of merchant capital in the fourteenth century, which marks the end of the then existing eastern and Islamic centered world economic system, and the subsequent expansion of European colonialism through the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century is accompanied by a new racial regime that produces first the "Negro" and, by the nineteenth century, white nationalism and what WEB Du Bois called "the wages of whiteness."¹⁶ This new racial regime had momentous consequences, including undermining the possibility of solidarity the earlier struggles promised and destroying ancient cultures and relational modes of knowledge. We are familiar with this disastrous racial regime and its profound anti-Blackness because we live in the aftermath of its ongoing iterations. But it would be unwise and misleading if we take it to be the origin of Western racism.

11 See Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*.

12 See Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

13 The Diggers, or the "True Levellers" as they called themselves, were anarchist, communist, radically self-governing commoners who appeared among a series of radical groups, including the original Levellers and the Ranters, who were active during the English Civil War in the 1640s and 1650s. They were called Diggers because they believed in equality of persons—in the leveling of inequalities and indignities between rich and poor and between the powerful and the powerless. And because they formed cooperative communities to prevent the enclosure of common land and the privatization of property in England. They dug up

common lands to create growing fields, the produce of which they would give away for free, inviting others to join them. See Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive*, pp. 124–133.

14 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 73. Sampson's novel, *Tombland*, offers a remarkably thorough and mostly historically accurate rendering of the peasant rebellion against enclosures that ended with Kett's condemnation for treason and hanging from the walls of Norwich Castle. Social historian Peter Clark offers a succinct 50-minute lecture on "Down with the Fences: The Kett Rebellion" at <http://www.brh.org.uk/dwtf2008/kett.html>.

15 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 82.

16 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*. See Robinson, *Black Marxism* and Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule*.

European racism is not, in fact, modern. It neither emerges as a post-hoc rationalization of modern slavery nor is it the result of a kind of specular trauma produced by the European encounter (not its first by any means) with Africans in the sixteenth century. As Cedric J. Robinson pointed out years ago in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, capitalism is a product of western civilization, not the other way around. This civilization was never egalitarian nor free. And it was already highly racialized well before Europeans entered the trade in African slaves, and would remain so, as demonstrated by the rise of Chinese indenture in the wake of the waning fortunes of the slave trade and the rather flexible but persistent racialization of peoples throughout its history.¹⁷ Hence the meaning of the term racial capitalism as Robinson used it. Not to put too fine a point on it, the ancient Roman and Viking-era Danish empires were highly racialized slave societies. The English honed their racial thinking on the Irish and the Scots and in fact used the colonization of Ireland as a laboratory for the plantation system it subsequently exported to Barbados, Jamaica, and North America. The transition from feudal to capitalist Europe doesn't introduce a previously absent racialism into Europe, it modifies existing forms. It is in these ancient and pre-modern forms that we find the genealogy for racialized figures that have prominently returned in our time: the barbarian, the savage, the infidel, the stranger, the foreigner.

"Racial regimes are ... unstable truth systems ... in which race is proposed as a justification for relations of power."¹⁸ In Robinson's words, racial regimes, which "masquerade" as natural and unchanging, in reality are "unstable" and "fragile," and they shift over time. Racial regimes are unstable and fragile because they construct, rank and ontologize (or essentialize) what are artificial differences among people. Because in doing so they exclude an ever-present noisy repressed reality (we're not that!) which is always threatening to destabilize the justifications. Racial regimes shift over time not only because of their inherent instability but because the power needs that they serve change over time. Thus, the Irish ceased to be a barbarous people and became white when skills in rice planting and indigo production became more valuable to English colonists and a white landowning minority needed protection against its large, unfree, very highly skilled, and very angry African workforce.¹⁹ Thus, you see continuing and mutating efforts to develop ways and means to do the racial ordering work states have formally outlawed in a post civil rights or multicultural context. Today, that primary form is criminalization, a very old technology, and one notably tied to the making of racialized subjects.

Just as Western civilization was racialized, so too it was gendered. As Silvia Federici shows in *Caliban and the Witch*, the great witch hunt in Europe played a crucial part in the primitive accumulation necessary to the emergence of capitalism. "Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from communal land," she writes, "the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies," creating a new and devalued sexual division of labor, in which women would "function as machines for the production," not of children, but of labor power itself.²⁰ Federici provocatively argues that the human body is the first machine developed by capitalism—not the steam engine nor the precision clock—and the long history of slave labor bears this out. The witch-hunt was a war against women: against the midwife, the healer, the sexually independent woman without children, the prostitute, the rebel. It was a means to destroy their social power, their knowledge (of herbs, of contraception, of secrets, secret doors, secret lovers and so on) and take whatever land or possessions the women held. The witch hunt was "the first unifying terrain in the politics of the new European nation states."²¹ At the time, it was the most important laboratory for the systematic use of torture on political enemies, and it produced an elaborate legal infrastructure for the criminalization of independent knowledge systems and disobedience.²² In short, Federici argues, it was one of the most important events in the establishment of a mature capitalism. Why? The campaign of terror against women—thousands tortured and spectacularly murdered—"weakened the resistance of the peasantry to the assault launched against it ... at a time when the peasant community was already disintegrating under the combined impact of land privatization, increased taxation, and the extension of state control over every aspect of social life." It "deepened divisions between men and women," taught "men to fear the power of women, and destroyed a universe of practices, beliefs and social subjects whose existence was incompatible with capitalist work discipline."²³

In my view, this is key. The witch hunt was designed not only to create sexually submissive female subjects, but to eradicate an entire mode of existence grounded in communal life with residual vestiges, kept alive mostly by women, of an animistic, polytheistic, relational view of the world. This so-called magical view of the world—so frightening to monotheists—appeared as an illicit and competing form of power to the one God, for it touched and was touched by the force in all things seen and unseen, dead and alive. It also embodied a profoundly anti-capitalist principle: "everything is in everything," later evoked famously by both Jacques Rancière and the singer Lauryn Hill.²⁴ The witch who necessitated elaborate trials, iron chains, and burning by fire to determine her relationship to the Devil did not appear until the mid-fifteenth century, precisely in the midst of the ferment and crisis I've

17 See Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*; Christopher, et. al, eds., *Many Middle Passages*; Hannaford, *Race*.
18 Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, xii.

19 See Carney, *Black Rice* and the series of articles by Tinde van Andel on rice in Surinam and the memory of African botanical knowledge in the Americas over 350 years.
<https://www.sapiens.org/culture/african-rice-new-world/>

20 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 184, emphasis in original.
21 Ibid. 169, emphasis in original.
22 See Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*.

23 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 165.
24 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*; Lauryn Hill, "Everything is Everything."

58 been discussing. And when the job was finished in Europe, the witch trials came to an end there and were exported to the Americas by settler colonists where they were used to break the resistance of local indigenous and enslaved populations in campaigns designed to force work and destroy autonomous knowledges and societies. There was, Federici ominously notes, a “cross-fertilization” across the continents whose origins become in time mystified, as Europeans forgot that the “heathen savage” and “black devil” were their own issue and not something strange and foreign they discovered in faraway lands.

The great expulsion of peasants from the land, the disintegration of the feudal mode of production and governance, and the secularization and appropriation of Church wealth and property produced, as mentioned, thousands of poor, dispossessed, and displaced persons on the move all across Europe. Some, deserting in anticipatory flight to the cities, found unregulated work, prostitution, or took up begging. Some, families in tow, desperately moved from village to village, squatting in woods and fields, taking day work harvesting, reaping, and gleaning when not banished as unwelcome, threatening strangers. Still others found in the breakdown of bondage to place and master the freedom not to serve, not to soldier, not to work oneself into the grave, and not to create families, setting the countryside alight with true and fabulous tales of bandits taking expropriation and redistribution into their own hands and “masterless men” defying all attempts to bring them into line.²⁵ Yet others were collectively organizing, gathering mobile men and women, wrecking machinery, stopping work where it was taking place, and as Eric Hobsbawm put it, generally trying to bargain collectively by the only means available: riot.²⁶ These men and women were not called migrants or refugees or asylum seekers. Along the lines of these escape routes, those in flight received new names—vagrant, vagabond, idler, beggar, thief, wayward—that marked their place in the new order and organized the moral panics of the day.

Allen Feldman has written that “arrest is the political art of individualizing disorder” and indeed criminalization, punishment, confinement, and forced labor were the responses to the ferment of unauthorized movement.²⁷ The first laws that placed restrictions on the movement of workers, beggars, and self-defined “free” persons and criminalized both poverty and the refusal to work, in the process creating the crimes of vagrancy and idleness, were written in the fourteenth century and then honed throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries amidst this ferment. In 1555, the first House of Correction, the prototype for the workhouse, is built at Bridewell in London, giving the generic name to the workhouses in England and later

65 the United States. The first workhouse in Germany opens in Hamburg in 1618, after the success of the *Rasp-huis* in Amsterdam, opened in 1596, itself belatedly following the publication of Martin Luther’s detailed and venal instructions for catching vagrants and wanton women in the 1528 *Book of Beggars*.²⁸

In England, where the criminalization of poverty was most advanced and poaching was a capital offense, once the workhouses and houses of correction were bursting at the seams with the poor, banishing or transporting the new criminals in conditions of indentured servitude to the colonies solved two problems at once, as the English, like the Europeans, had not the manpower needed to do the work necessary to settle plantation economies as they conceived them. As Scott Christianson shows, from 1718 until 1769 more than 70% of convicted felons in Britain were banished to America, making transportation the leading punishment for “serious” crime. Indeed, there was a large and profitable trade in human prisoners starting in the late fifteenth century, which included convicts, sailors, indentured servants, slaves, and kidnapped poor children and adults. This trade in prisoners was crucial to the so-called discovery and colonization of the Americas.²⁹

Weaving, spinning, sewing, tailoring, beating hemp, knitting nets, stockings, and blankets, spooling silk, carding, dying, hackling, twining, making canvas marble sausages shoes gunpowder, polishing glass, and of course rasping or grating wood to produce dye. The workhouse was a prison whose punishment regime centered on brutal work. The purpose of the workhouse was both more efficient and profitable production of cloth or dye and more efficient and profitable production of capitalist subjects. Through work and intimidation, the workhouse taught discipline, obedience, order, and the acceptance of imposed conditions of work and life. It was designed to create docility, to “suppress a world of productive capabilities and instincts,” and to “smash a radically counterposed underground popular culture which combined forms of the old peasant way of life with new methods of resistance.”³⁰ Thus, the endless rules stipulating forms of dress, methods of hygiene, and so on; the prohibitions against swearing, reading, writing, singing ballads about Münster or Jack Straw, and using nicknames. Not surprisingly, the most severe punishments were reserved for the refusal to work. Preparation and training for the total impoverishment of factory life is how Melossi and Pavarini describe the purpose of the workhouse.

Resistance was the only alternative and it was rampant among those the magistrates called “idle blockheads,”³¹ perhaps one origin or point of identification for the stone-headed figure who, as silent witness, wanders through the films that prefaced and accompanied Sadr Haghigian’s Pavilion in Venice. Resistance occurs by any means

25 See Beier, *Masterless Men*. Julius Scott uses the term in the Caribbean context in his riveting book *The Common Wind*. The first use of the term “masterless men” to describe those sixteenth and seventeenth century men and women who were the “victims of enclosure and who were on the move from disintegrating controlled spaces, many of whom were squatting on commons and in forests,” belongs to Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*.

26 Eric Hobsbawm, “The Machine Breakers” (1952) in *Uncommon People*, 9. See also E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*.
27 Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, p. 109.

28 Much is condensed here in this section. See Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience*; Melossi and Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory*; Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*; Gordon, “[the workhouse]” in *The Hawthorn Archive*.

29 Christianson, *With Liberty for Some*.
30 Melossi and Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory*, pp. 39–40.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

necessary: spontaneous, unconscious, criminal, organized. Refusal to work remains foremost, but escape, riots and organized revolts are common, sometimes all together, as at Newgate prison in 1780, where the prisoners, having had enough, escaped, burned to the ground the building first erected in the twelfth century, and joined rioters elsewhere in the city.

FUGITIVITY

The language of resistance keeps common cause with the perspective of individuals forced to cross borders illegally and critically questions the presumptions and divisions that dominate state policy and the popular media, whose terms are signified in the state-sponsored identities “illegal immigrant,” “economic migrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker.” To see migration or movement from South and East to North and West as a “mode of resistance” is to see it, as the artist Bouchra Khalili noted, as “lived expressions of political positions that refuse state control and power, and the restrictions of nationalisms, regionalism, and ideology.”³² It is clear that illegality is completely woven into the long history of movement within Europe and into the seams and sinews of the movement of people from Africa and Asia to Europe and the Americas. Today, for people lacking means, social standing and state authorization, it is fair to say that there is no “migration,” no movement across nation-state boundaries, that does not involve becoming a fugitive. A fugitive from the law, a fugitive from the nation-state, and possibly also a fugitive from the whole geopolitical order that structures markets for labor and politics for governance through national citizenship.

In the African-American Black radical tradition, resistance through escape, flight, and illegal movement embraces the language of fugitivity. It embraces the language of fugitivity because it is a radical tradition built up from and still tied to the vantage point of the enslaved who were, in even imagining themselves as themselves and not merely as slaves, in violation of the law and social order which construed them as property belonging to another. Everything about enslaved life was bound up with parsing what was permitted and what was forbidden, with living in the seam of illegality. Recall that in slave-holding societies like those in the Caribbean and in the United States, the slave was treated as a complete non-person—a non-human human being—and was legally prohibited from free association, from kinship and all other civil and political rights, from reading and writing, from thinking their own thoughts, from strategizing collectively, from keeping secrets, and certainly from travel without permission and the paperwork to prove it.

Fugitivity was a general condition of the life of the enslaved in at least two senses. First, the slave, in not being the property they were presumed and held to be, was always already a fugitive from this private property regime with its elaborate legal and social rigging, always already running away from it, always already against it, always already an outlaw in the eyes of the law. Second, even in Brazil and the Caribbean countries where there were great slave revolts and large, well-organized, self-governing runaway or maroon communities, which was not the case in the United States, the most common resistance to slavery was self-emancipation and flight, even if this just meant escaping to the woods or to town for a little peace and quiet for a couple of hours or a couple of days. In this way, fugitivity became an epistemology or even an ontology of Black resistance as everyday life, which also bound this resistance up historically with illegality and criminality, a bind still very much operative. The current brutal policing regime along the U.S.’s southern border is not unrelated to the history of the treatment of fugitive slaves who were, everywhere in the Americas, hunted down without mercy. In fact, the capture of Mexicans and Central Americans fleeing towards the United States by state police and white militias resembles nothing so much as the old slave patrols, the origin of the police in the United States.

In his book *Freedom as Marronage*, Neil Roberts writes that freedom is grounded in “acts of flight that are at moments evanescent, durable, overlapping.”³³ I’ve been especially interested in changes in political consciousness and changes in the political mise-en-scène that running away produces or that happen in flight; that happen in the interval between the no-longer and the not-yet, the no-longer putting up with what is and the not-yet something better.³⁴ Sometimes what changes is that episodic flight, what Roberts calls truancy, becomes more durable.

In the United States, as Du Bois showed in *Black Reconstruction*, it was the mass flight of the enslaved from the plantations that ended slavery and won the Civil War for the North, whose objective was not, as we’re instructed, the abolition of slavery or the emancipation of the slaves, but unification of the nation state around industrial capitalism rather than a plantocracy. There were around four million Black slaves in the South alone at the start of the war. When they walked out of the fields, the workshops, the kitchens and their living quarters, at first gradually and then en masse, when they inaugurated what Du Bois called “the general strike of the slaves,” they abolished the system of plantation capitalism that relied on their bonded labor by abandoning it. Du Bois is describing a revolution by flight: “This was not merely the desire to stop work. ... It was a general strike against the conditions of work ... [that] involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the

plantations. ... The slave entered upon a general strike against slavery by the same methods that he had used during the period of the fugitive slave. He ran away to the first place of safety."³⁵ For thousands the first destination were the Union Army camps where the runaways received a new name. "Contraband of war" or confiscated property is what the Army officially called this mass of poor, starving, mistreated strikers, who were put to work—digging latrines, cleaning weapons, building housing for white soldiers, cooking, taking care of horses and so on—and who were eventually legally emancipated, it must be emphasized, only once they were armed and a major fighting force.³⁶

These fugitives had plans for a way of life without enslavement, disenfranchisement, and racial subordination. For a brief moment, the reconstruction plan which Du Bois called "abolition democracy" seemed possible and flight or fugitivity was a necessary preparation for it. Its failure set the terms for the militarized racial capitalism we confront today in the United States, just as it bequeathed to the word abolition, once the "byword for finality," a usable past and gave to abolition its current meaning of total "urgent democratic social and political change."³⁷ If we presume that fugitive migrants, in varying degrees of militancy and political planning, have entered upon a general strike against the conditions of work and life in which we are all entwined, then the question becomes not how to manage this movement or create more welcoming laws to accommodate it or even merely to master a critical understanding of it. The question then becomes what would constitute the terms of the abolition democracy for which we would join that strike and together collectively struggle.

THE SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

I will defer that question and conclude by narrating some of what happens in Togolese writer Kossi Efoui's beautiful short novel, *The Shadow of Things to Come*, which is very much a story for our time and one to which I often return.³⁸ I feel that it keeps good company with Natascha Sadr Haghghian's project and, in its own way, pays homage to the refugee activists like Aino Korvensyrjä, David Jassey and Rex Osa who have been an integral part of Sadr Haghghian's project and her life. In *Tribute to Whistle*, Sadr Haghghian asks: "Politics needs emotional intelligence. How does it take shape?" This is a difficult question to which Efoui's novel suggests something of an answer in an intelligence, without a "whit of vanity," forged in the bonds of solidarity that fugitive movement from Africa to Europe requires. I do not wish to interpret the novel or analyze it so much as leave something of it as trace evidence, in story, of the accumulated weight of the crisscrossing history of the plantation and the prison as it confronts its oppositional past, present and future.

Set in an unnamed country after the "Time of Annexation," and the "Times of Dispersal," as the state euphemistically records its history, the novel begins with the unnamed narrator waiting in the dark telling the time by the movement of the moon's reflection across the floor on which he is sitting. While he is waiting for something we will learn later, he remembers when, at the age of five, his father, carrying his saxophone and "already a shadow moving off into the distance," was arrested and taken away to the labor camp known as "The Plantation." He also remembers his mother, deemed insane, who wanted nothing more than to transform into a bird. The removal of his parents finds him living with twenty other children, under the care of Mama Maize. One of the children is Ikko who plays an important role in creating a language of words and lines that can secretly communicate to those in need what happens when you are sent to fight, "along routes of future pipelines" in the counterinsurgency war that is not called a war but a "frontier challenge" against the people living in the forest, called the border people. For a century, the forest people have fought the efforts to penetrate the forest, to mine it, and to contain them. Ikko returns, "having put off his old body," and covers the city with words and images that speak of what's forbidden to name: war, combat, enemy. He tries to explain invisible enemies shooting shooting shooting dead birds. They tell him to shut up and he refuses. For the crimes of vagrancy, spreading rumors of war during peacetime, and "aesthetic sabotage" he is sent away again.

I cannot tell you the whole of this extraordinary story, but our narrator's father returns "ferociously" silent, never to speak, although the young man witnesses a most remarkable scene in which his father finds his voice one last time to sing to his mother, now a bird. And he makes friends with bookshop owner Axis Kemal, estranged son of a wealthy Egyptian businessman, who was and still is a member of the underground liberation movement. Kemal introduces our narrator to his friends, the young crossdressing men who work by day as porters, hairdressers, and ambulance drivers and at night live otherwise, and who make the underground function, in part owing to their skills in disguise and stealth.

By the end, the twelfth movement, when the reader is returned to our unnamed narrator sitting in the same moonlit room in which we first encountered him, we understand that he's been called up to report to the war in the forest and will not go. He's become a "deserter in peacetime," a fugitive, and for the past days has been moving from one house to another, picked up and taken in by strangers and members of the Nameless Brotherhood who don't give their names and ask him to forget their faces. When he asks why they're helping him they look surprised at the question. He is waiting for the men known as the crocodile men, so called because they live on an inaccessible island with crocodiles. Like other maroon societies, they trade on the mainland and help prisoners escape from the

35 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, pp. 67, 57.

36 As David Roediger writes in *Seizing Freedom*, p. 78: Frederick "Douglass skewered the new language...finding 'contraband' to be 'a name that will apply better to a pistol than a human being.' ... seeing in the policy the preservation of the norms of slave property even if it opened

new possibilities to resist bondage."

37 Fanuzzi, "Abolition." On abolition democracy, see Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*; Lipstiz, "Abolition Democracy and Global Justice"; Davis, "Abolition Democracy" in *Abolition Democracy*.

38 Efoui, *The Shadow of Things to Come*.

64 plantations, which is how Kemal first met them. These are the only men who can sail the Atlantic sand bar, cross the abyss of swirling waves and get our narrator out. There is no whistling, only the anticipation of four rhythmic knocks made by a friendly hand (not two pounding knocks made by the police), the ritual of remembering the last writings by Ikko the narrator had received—*This hut is not of this world. But I am delighted to share the neighborhood*—and the ritual of forgetting the last name the identity papers assigned him. The four knocks come and he, along with twenty others, is welcomed by smiles that translate the language they do not share. The twenty vow to take on the smell of the men who rescue them so the crocodiles will recognize them.

The last words of the book are these: “I’ve long known there’s no magic formula against the roaring of storms, that there’s no prayer that will calm the furious sea. There’s just the intelligence of mind of an expert at the helm, who is master, at every second, and amazed too at each of these seconds that he was not smashed to pieces long ago. Though perfection is not of this world, I have no other word, not one, says the speaker, but perfection for each of these seconds into which no whit of vanity enters.”

WORKS CITED

- Anievas, Alexander, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu. *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press, 2015.
- Beier, A. L. *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640*. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Best, Stephen, and Saidiya Hartman. "Fugitive Justice." *Representations* 92, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 1-15.
- Bhandar, Brenna. *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land and Racial Regimes of Ownership*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Carney, Judith. *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Christianson, Scott. *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998.
- Christopher, Emma, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker, eds. *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons and Torture*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. New York: Free Press, 1998. First published 1935.
- Efoui, Kossi. *The Shadow of Things to Come*. Translated by Chris Turner. London: Seagull Books, 2013.
- Engels, Frederich. *The Peasant War in Germany*. Translated by Moissaye J. Olgin. London: Allen and Unwin, 1926. First published 1850.
- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, 2004.
- Feldman, Allen. *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Fanuzzi, Robert. "Abolition." *In Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, 7-9. New York: NYU Press, 2007. www.keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/abolition/.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi.

- Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Gordon, Avery. *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Hannaford, Ivan. *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Hill, Christopher. *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*. London: Temple Smith, 1972.
- Hill, Lauryn. "Everything is Everything," track 13 on *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, Ruffhouse Records and Columbia Records, 1998.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1959.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. "The Machine Breakers" (1952) in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*. New York: The New Press, 1998.
- Linebaugh, Peter. *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*. 2nd ed. London: Verso, 2006.
- . *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Lipstiz, George. "Abolition Democracy and Global Justice." *Comparative American Studies* 2, no. 3 (2004): 271-86.
- Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Melossi, Dario, and Massimo Pavarini. *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System*, 40th anniversary edition. London: Palgrave, 2018.
- Nawi, Diana. "Other Maps: On Bouchra Khalili's Cartographies." Ibraaz platform, January 8, 2015. Accessed at: <http://www.bouchrakhalili.com/the-mapping-journey-project/>.
- Ranci re, Jacques. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Translated by Kristin Ross. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Roberts, Neil. *Freedom as Marronage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *An Anthropology of Marxism*, 2nd ed. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. First published 2001.

- . *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- . *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 2nd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. First published 1983.
- Roediger, David. *Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All*. New York: Verso, 2014.
- Sampson, C.J. *Tombland: A Shardlake Novel*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2018.
- Scott, Julius. *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2018.
- Spiereburg, Pieter. *The Prison Experience: Disciplinary Institutions and Their Inmates in Early Modern Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Winstanley, Gerrard. "A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England." Pamphlet. Reprinted in *A Common Treasury*, by Gerrard Winstanley. Edited by Andrew Hopton, 27-38. London: Verso, 2011. First published 1649.

TENUOUS MONOPOLY OVER MOBILITY: WEST AFRICAN CRITIQUES OF EUROPEAN BORDERS



A sign by the International Organization of Migration (IOM), with the logos of the EU and the Dutch government, advertising the possibility to interrupt a Europe-bound migratory journey. The sign was located next to a bus station in Agadez, Niger, from which pick-ups leave to Libya. By offering food, shelter and medical assistance, the IOM transit centers in Agadez and other Nigerien cities aim to persuade transit migrants, mostly from West African countries, to return home with the IOM assisted voluntary return program. Besides this function as de facto deportation camps, the centers temporarily immobilize migrants and collect data on them. February 2019.



A sign with the French text "Warning! Traveling without an identity document or a visa makes you vulnerable," with the logos of the EU and the Nigerien National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling. The sign was located next to a bus station in Niamey, Niger, from which buses leave to Agadez, the gateway to Libya. In the recent decade Niger became a key transit country for Europe-bound journeys of (West) African migrants. February 2019.

Migration control is a colonial project. It is a project to take away people's lands.
—Osaren Igbinoba

Indebtedness drives Africans to exile. And with a charter plane the rich creditors send back their debtors who had arrived here [Europe] in search of work, in order to nourish their families who stayed at home.
—Madjiguène Cissé

¹ Quoted in the film *AKABA - Masken und die Festung Europa* by Mehrandokht Feizi (2013), documenting the 2010 Caravan Festival in Jena

² Cissé, Madjiguène. *Parole de Sans-Papiers* (Paris: La Dispute, 1999), 47.

The monopoly over the international movement of people passes today as a self-evident dimension of state power. Yet its current form emerged only quite recently, in the nineteenth century practices of European states, white settler nations, and colonies. It solidified in the following century.³ In her text in this volume, Avery Gordon shows the significance of much older forms of state-sanctioned mobility control: Forced (im)mobility and outlawing autonomous mobility were always elemental to racial capitalist practices of dispossession and forced labor.⁴ From early on, such control was selective—only certain types of mobility by certain kinds of people were classified as excessive and dangerous.⁵ When the nation-state consolidated as a political entity in the nineteenth century, citizenship and the passport were gradually institutionalized and nationalized. “Migration control” emerged as a central field of state activity concerning “foreigners”—in the context of global empire this occurred in parallel and partly overlapping with the control of “natives”—and sovereignty was associated with the claim to fully control cross-border movement.⁶ The nation-state became an apparently universal political form with the mid-twentieth century end of colonialism as a formalized global system.⁷ The expanding state control of movement would, however, in different parts of the world become attached to very different meanings and practical capacities. At the same time it became more entangled with asymmetric transnational, supranational, and non-governmental institutions and logics.

Remarkably, the increasing appropriation and concentration of the legitimate means of movement⁸ under state control remains highly contested. Every day, the claim to legitimacy is challenged in practical ways by people whose movement has been denied state authorization. In moments of collective organizing, these people have produced vital critiques of territorial sovereignty as mobility control.

In this short essay, I introduce ideas developed by two influential grassroots groups or movements that emerged in the 1990s, as the European Union border

3 Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order. Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Radhika Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire. A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4 She mentions the enclosures of common lands in England, the colonization of the Americas and the mass kidnapping of Africans to the Americas. Gordon, Avery, *In the Shadow of The Plantation and the Prison* (in this book), 2020.

5 Hagar Kotef, *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

6 Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order. Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*; Radhika Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire. A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State*; John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*.

7 Radhika Mongia (2018) and many others have cautioned against assuming universality, highlighting instead the colonial and imperial genealogies of the current system of states.

8 John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*.

regime was taking form. They were both initiated by West Africans, and provided important insights on the operation of (Western European) migration control within global racial capitalism. In France in the 1990s, the Sans-Papiers (literally “without papers”) became an iconic protest movement of West African migrants fighting for their residence rights. The VOICE Refugee Forum was the first self-organized network of asylum seekers in Germany. It was founded in 1994 by four West Africans in an East German asylum camp, and soon enlarged its base to include refugees and migrants of any nationality. These two movements generated a lasting—if sometimes underrecognized—influence on critical thinking and practice concerning European borders as sites of contestation. The VOICE and different groups of Sans-Papiers inspired generations of activists and several waves of Europe-wide networking, and continue organizing today.

In 1996, the Sans-Papiers, as the protesters called themselves, occupied several churches in Paris. Mostly migrants from West African countries formerly colonized by France, they were fighting for the restoration of their residence permits and social and economic rights in France, which had been revoked by a series of laws, particularly the so-called Pasqua laws in 1993. The occupation of Saint-Bernard in August 1996 by about three hundred Sans-Papiers was closely followed by national and international media. People in France, Europe, and in the whole world could learn from the protesters that “illegality” is not a natural condition but something produced by laws and government policies. The new, harsher regulation of migration emerging in France and elsewhere in Western Europe was shaped—and in turn reinforced—by resurgent, unabashed state racism. The Sans-Papiers fought against the many shapes it took—all connected to the lack of a residence permit—including labor exploitation, criminalization, and deportations.⁹

But the protesters not only demanded residence rights and freedom of movement. “The struggle of the Sans-Papiers has to go beyond obtaining our papers and must address the underlying questions, not only in France but also, especially, in our countries of origin,” as Ababacar Diop, spokesperson for the group, put it.¹⁰

9 Madjiguène Cissé, *Parole de Sans-Papiers*.

10 Madjiguène Cissé, *The Sans-Papiers: A Woman Draws the First Lessons* (London: Crossroads Books, 1997), p. 40.

74 **Madjiguène Cissé, fellow spokesperson, connected these underlying questions to European neocolonialism in Africa, manifested in the continued French military presence and political influence in West Africa, in the French-controlled West African currency CFA, and in French economic policy protecting French companies doing business in or with West Africa. Cissé also analyzed the debt crisis and the structural readjustment programs as a process stage-managed by the rich creditor countries since the 1980s to extract profit from African countries. The austerity programs they imposed created the conditions that led to the rise in migration out of West Africa.¹¹ In Western Europe, these migrants were faced with increasing illegalization.**

The VOICE Africa Forum started in 1994, in the aftermath of an “asylum debate” in the Federal Republic of Germany. Since the mid-1980s, West German right and conservative parties had led a campaign to limit the right to asylum, which culminated in 1992, when the number of persons seeking asylum in the newly unified Germany sharply increased. The period was marked by deadly right-wing attacks on migrants and other racialized groups, and by draconian new policies against asylum seekers. The VOICE activists identified politically as refugees, refusing official state definitions of deservingness and of refugee status. When the group later opened its activities to all nationalities, it changed its name to The VOICE Refugee Forum.

The VOICE saw the struggle as having two interlinked fronts. Fighting against deportation and other forms of institutionalized anti-migrant and anti-refugee racism, the activists also raised awareness about the situation in their countries of origin. Their campaigns demanded the closure of isolated, derelict camps in which asylum seekers were warehoused for years without the right to work or study, and protested racial profiling and police brutality. They engaged in civil disobedience to challenge the *Residenzpflicht* (German for “residence obligation”), a law confining asylum seekers to stay within the district (in German: *Landkreis*) of their local immigration authority. They denounced its similarity with laws and regulations that restricted the movements of native inhabitants in German colonies in Africa and those of foreigners under the Third Reich regime. The activists

11 Madjiguène Cissé, *Parole de Sans-Papiers*.

52 **also called attention to the unlivable conditions in their countries of origin caused by military dictatorships, armed conflicts, the plundering of resources, and other factors. The VOICE and their sister network Caravan for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees used the slogan “We are here because you destroy our countries” to point out the connection between the two fronts of struggle.¹²**

The VOICE activists often emphasized historical continuities, for example by referring to deportation as “colonial injustice.” In the words of Sunny Omwenyike, long-time activist with The VOICE and the Caravan, the “colonial injustice” of migration control began “with the occupation, exploitation, and the enslavement of our people,” and continued in our times when “descendants of these people, or people from these regions are not thought to be acceptable here, ... are being told that they cannot stay here, that they have to go back. They are not even allowed to cross the borders to come here.”¹³

These militants, like many other West African organizers, have drawn from the region’s long memory of European oppression, first as the region worst affected by the raids that supplied Africans for the transatlantic slave trade, and then, in the late nineteenth century, as a region divided, colonized, and exploited by Western European powers.

West African activists have not been the only ones to consider the European Union an heir and continuation of colonialism, particularly in its relation to Africa. The ideologues and key practitioners of European postwar integration were guided by the geopolitical imaginary of “Eurafrica,” according to which European countries were to collectivize, among themselves, their African “possessions.”¹⁴ In the 1950s, large areas of West Africa were subjected to this colonial European integration. When the 1957 Treaty of Rome stipulated the right to free movement for workers in Europe, Africans under European rule were not designated as its beneficiaries. European leaders envisioned them as producers of cheap raw materials and agricultural products, and as consumers of European goods. Even after many African colonies gained formal independence

12 This echoes the phrase “We are here because you were there” that A. Sivanandan coined for the 1970s postcolonial Black movement in Britain.

13 Quoted in the film *AKABA* by Mehrandokht Feizi.

14 Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica. The Untold History of Integration and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2014).

in the early 1960s, the association agreements with the European Economic Community ensured continued access to raw materials and markets for the old colonial masters.¹⁵ Moreover, the citizens of the new African nations were now subjected to migration control when traveling to Western Europe. Until the late 1960s, migrant workers were instrumental in helping to complete the post-war European economic reconstruction, but from the 1970s onward Western Europe started to severely restrict immigration. The 1980s Schengen Agreement institutionalized the current, double logic of European borders regarding so-called third-country nationals: Policies and practices of border internalization disperse the border across the EU territory in the form of unequal, hierarchical statuses and ubiquitous policing, while border externalization extends European borders far beyond the geographic limits of the EU territory, particularly to Africa, to contain potential migration to Europe.¹⁶

The Sans-Papiers and The VOICE denounced the increasing appropriation of their mobility as a neocolonial project of the old and new masters. As outlined above, they showed the connection between migration control and other types of appropriation. As The VOICE put it, in line with Cissé's and the Sans-Papiers' analysis, "we all know that Europe and the United States are the ones that prop up the dictators in our countries, arm and train those who oppress us in our own countries and finance the wars they wage in and on our countries ... it is their economic policies, which are now coming back to haunt them, which have destroyed our economies and raped us of our resources with reckless abandon. Through the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, the Western countries also forbid governments in our countries to provide us with, for example, the right to education."¹⁷

When she lived in Nigeria in the 1980s, Silvia Federici observed widespread struggles against an ongoing new cycle of enclosures or primitive accumulation. Evolving in Africa in the 1980s, as well as in Asia and Latin America, this cycle took the guise of a "debt crisis" bringing with it emergency management by international financial institutions.¹⁸ This was a new phase of "dispossession, expulsion, and theft of land,

15 Ibid.

16 Enrica Rigo, *Europa di confine. Trasformazioni della cittadinanza nell'Unione allargata*. (Rome: Meltemi, 2007), pp. 130-149.

17 The VOICE Refugee Forum, "On Colonial Injustice and the Continuity of Barbarity in Germany" (2009), accessed April 30, 2020. <http://thevoiceforum.org/node/1279>.

18 Silvia Federici, "The Debt Crisis, Africa, and the New Enclosures," *Midnight Notes* 10, (1990).

bodies, and knowledge," recurrent in the history of global capitalism.¹⁹ Thomas Sankara famously called it "a skillfully managed reconquest of Africa," where "each one of us becomes the financial slave."²⁰ Writing in the same decade, the Nigerian writer Chinweizu saw his native country turned into "a financial protectorate of the IMF," where a "debt trap peonage removes our economic sovereignty and hands the piloting of our economy over to our creditors."²¹

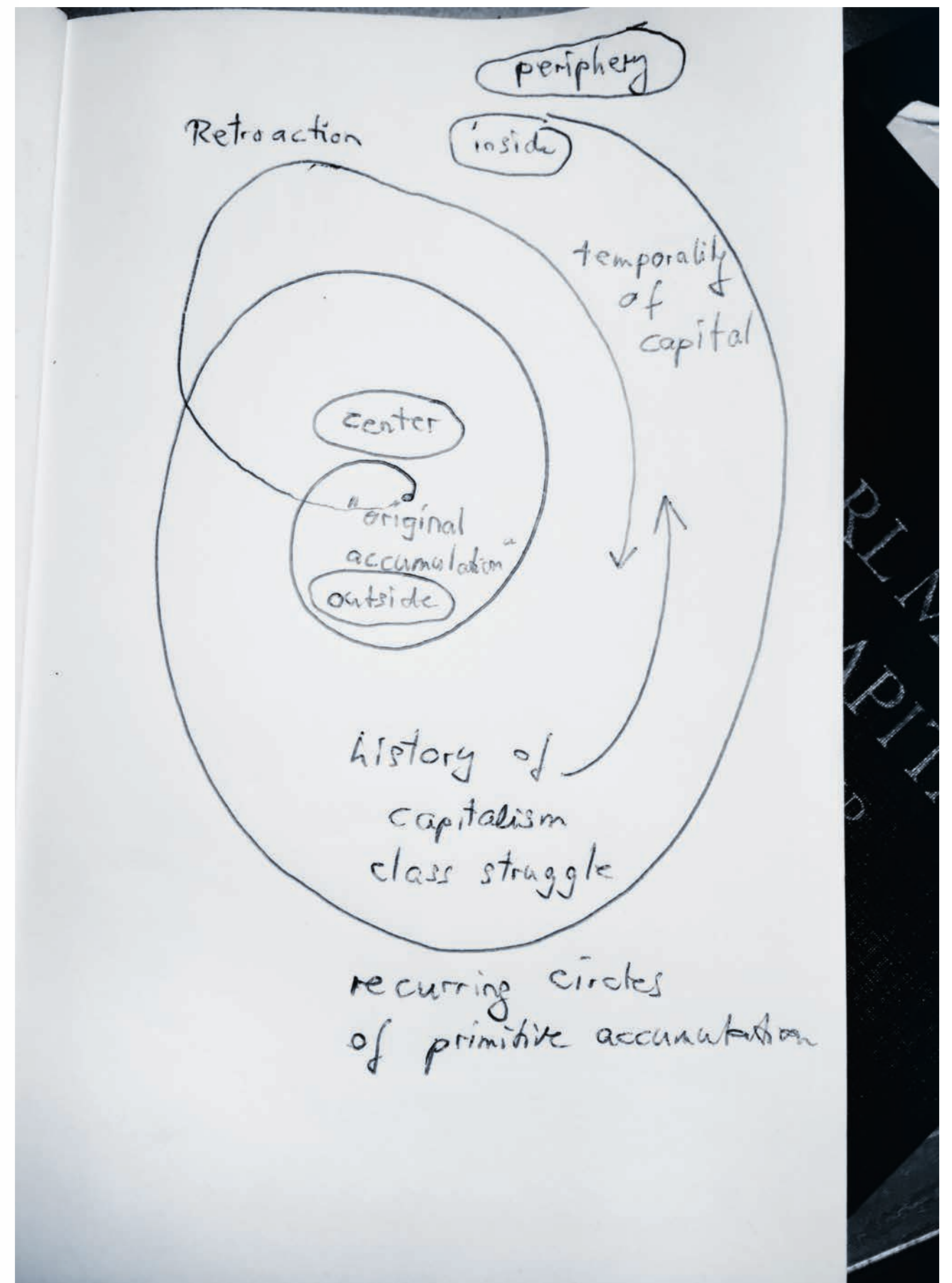
To Avery Gordon's analysis of the plantation and the prison as key technologies ensuring accumulation in racial capitalism, the West African movements add a third one: the border. Closely connected to the plantation and the prison, the border matures as a technology of control and appropriation in the twentieth-century world of nation-states. West African movements questioned the border's claims to universality and legitimacy by exposing the asymmetrical, racialized appropriation of mobility in connection with broader processes of dispossession and accumulation. They underlined a historical, Euro-African power imbalance at play to contest contemporary arguments for national sovereignty as border control. Today, this analysis and the struggle from which it emerges are as acute as they were in the 1990s, if not more so. The journey from (West) Africa to Europe has by now become the deadliest in the world, and the destination increasingly hostile as well. And yet, young (West) Africans still leave their countries for similar reasons. The call to connect struggles across continents maintains its significance for us today, across racial, national, and geopolitical divides.

20 Thomas Sankara, "United Front Against Debt," *Viewpoint Magazine* (1987), accessed March 15, 2020. <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/united-front-debt-1987/>.

21 Chinweizu, "Debt Trap Peonage," *Monthly Review*, vol. 37, no. 6 (1985), pp. 21-35.

19 Gordon in this volume, page 71.

THE PERPETUAL RECURRENCE OF PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION: READING KARL MARX WITH ROSA LUXEMBURG



This essay is based on a seminar held on the islands of Lido and Le Vignole June 18-19, 2019 within the framework of the *beyond repair* study gathering. The essay is accompanied by annotations edited by Ernest Ah, derived from the seminar sessions' audio recordings. Unless indicated otherwise, the speaker is Sami Khatib.

Once upon a time or time and again? Strangely, the logical temporality of so-called “primitive accumulation” cannot be mapped as the historical genesis of capitalist relations of production. There remains something unhistoricizable in the historical origin of capitalism, which escapes a merely historicistic reading of capitalism as a historical epoch (developing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the Italian city-states and establishing a new social relation whose “uneven and combined” histories of violence are known as the ongoing history of colonialism, enslavement, enclosures, expropriation and destruction of non-capitalist civilizations and, later on, earlier formations of capitalism). Primitive accumulation does not designate a primitive stage of capitalism, which took place “once upon a time.” Of course, in a historical sense, primitive accumulation refers to the disruptive transformation from feudal to capitalist society, the violent separation of labor power from the means of production by way of expropriation, expulsion and brutal force. In the case of Europe, this violent history took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the German Peasants’ War (1524–1525), the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) and the late medieval and early modern so-called witch-hunts (as Silvia Federici has shown) are sites of the initial phase establishing capitalism in Europe through the production/separation of labor power. However, this separation functions as a primal scene of the capitalist world market without which today’s valorization of “abstract labor” as “surplus value” is not possible. In other words, the entire theory of capital is at stake when theorizing the historical and logical origin of this social form and mode of production. *Capitalism’s original accumulation is not in safe historical distance.* It is repeated in the space of the present. This mode of repetition, recurrence attains to a non-historicizable kernel of capitalist regimes of exploitation and accumulation. Repetition is to be read here as both temporal and spatial. In today’s capitalist world almost all of its earlier historical stages coexist next to each other: uneven temporalities are rendered as uneven space. While the sites of slavery, so-called “Manchester capitalism,” and capitalized modes of feudalism are constantly

In the beginning, capitalist history assumes the logic of myth, of a tale.

But if you could tell the historical origin of capitalism in a linear way you would need to know when a society is capitalist in the full sense, and you cannot know that. Because the very distinction between what is capitalist and what is non-capitalist is internal to capitalism.

I cannot tell you when Venetian city-states in upper Italy were considered capitalist. I cannot tell you because capitalism itself (re)produces its outside and inside and what counts as capitalist and non-capitalist.

Speaking about so-called “primitive accumulation” in the Marxian sense today also implies repeating Marx’s critique of classical political economy: How can the riddle of the beginning be restituted? How to tell the history of capitalism from its mythical or tale-like origin? The political economists of his time would have said that there is no problem, you can just tell it from the beginning and start with “once upon a time, there were ...”

How to reconstitute the problem of the beginning as a riddle—the riddle of theorizing in categories whose historical origin you are criticizing. How to reflect the social formation that enables you to write without using its ink?

GEWALT

It’s important to keep in mind that *Gewalt* covers a variety of asymmetric meanings: violence, power, authority, and force. It is in this sense that *Gewalt* is always on both sides of the law. It’s the same force that erects a law—everything is lawful on the surface on the market—and the *Gewalt* (force) that fights this peaceful semblance in class struggle; at the same time, it’s also the violence that instated the law in the first place and put the law in power.

Capitalism is totalizing as a trajectory but never accomplished, never fulfilled, it can never map itself onto itself. As movement and uneven and combined development it’s non-identical.

The relation of labor and capital is a relation of non-relation, of a-symmetry, *Gewalt* you may call it.

The binary has to be produced. And that’s the original violence that perpetuates itself as “primitive” accumulation.

VIOLENCE

Every global transaction of capital and every act of commodity exchange is a congealed remainder of the original Gewalt, violence of “primitive” accumulation. This violent process is still present, yet repressed from the seemingly peaceful surface of the market. With the rise of capitalism, the direct physical violence of “primitive accumulation” remains in place—in certain places—yet in its historical center is displaced, transformed into a less visible web of systemic violence of the capitalist working day and the domain of the reproduction of labor-power through racialized and gendered housework. By the end of the nineteenth century, in Western Europe the daily class struggle of the workers against the capitalists becomes more and more regulated by defining the limits of what is considered as the normal working day. In twentieth-century Western postwar societies, eight hours became a political goal and normative standard, enforced by the wage system of labor and its disciplinary regulations. This standard, however, has been subject to violations and attempts to increase the amount of labor time and exceed the duration of the working day towards its absolute: “the ‘constant continuity’ of a 24/7 capitalism that had always been inherently global.”² Besides its individual violations, the juridical and administrative regulations of the normal working day contain violence in its systemic dimension: The increased exploitation of labor power, that is the extraction of surplus value as surplus labor, is ensured, regulated and normalized by the legal framework of capitalist wage system, entrepreneurship and competition. Strikes and other forms of

¹ This paragraph contains reedited passages from Sami Khatib’s essay “No Future: The Space of Capital and the Time of Dying,” in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), pp. 639–652.

² Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014).

sabotage can be regarded as subjective forms of resistance against this form of objective violence which the normal working day contains. In this way, subjective struggles become the site of objective solidarity—a solidarity mediated by and through objective relations of production.³

While the intensification of the normal working day raises the relative surplus rate of capital, the absolute surplus rate can be increased by destroying older or different forms of social relations and employing them in an advanced regime of capital accumulation. Capitalism can never run “smoothly” on its own terms and conditions, it needs its internal exterior, its “other” so to speak, in order to stay alive. In this sense, the violence of colonialism and imperialism is an integral part of global capitalism’s history and present. It does not fade away in presumably “higher” stages of capitalism. Rather than suggesting a linear narrative from pre-capitalist to fully developed capitalist societies, Rosa Luxemburg argued against the mainstream of socialist and social-democratic theorists and politicians: “The existence and development of capitalism requires an environment of non-capitalist forms of production.” However, as she adds: “not every one of these forms will serve its ends. Capitalism needs non-capitalist social strata as a market for its surplus value, as a source of supply for its means of production and as a reservoir of labour power for its wage system.”⁴

HISTORICIZATION

Rosa Luxemburg’s insight points us to the temporality of capitalism. The theoretical challenge of “primitive accumulation” has to engage with the methodological aporia of an assumed *historical* origin of a society that appears *logically* always beyond this origin. In this way, what was before capitalism becomes its prehistory and persists only as an achronical

³ This paragraph contains reedited passages from Sami Khatib’s chapter on “Society and Violence,” in *Sage Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Vol. 2*, eds. Werner Bonefeld, Beverley Best, Chris O’Kane, (Newbury Park: Sage), 2018, pp. 607–624.

⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

In *Capital, Volume I*, Marx differentiates between absolute and relative surplus-value: “I call that surplus-value which is produced by the lengthening of the working day, *absolute surplus-value*. In contrast to this, I call that surplus-value which arises from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day, *relative surplus-value*.”ⁱ

ⁱ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes, (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 432.

THE REAL ABSTRACT

Marx is particularly relevant in terms of this question: is there a social relation that can be theoretically isolated, which distinguishes capitalist relations of production from other social formations? And furthermore, is capitalism a social formation that reduces social relations to one particular relation, an abstract, yet really existing relation, specific to capitalist reality (not just in the theorist’s mind)? How, then, to isolate the capitalist relation in order to politically attack, change, abolish it?

Conventionally, we tend to think the abstract is universal and the concrete is particular. However, could we also think of a concrete universal? Explaining the peculiarities of the value form, in the original 1867 edition of *Das Kapital, Band I*, Marx introduces this perfect image: “It is as if alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals, which form when grouped together the

remainder, residual place and enclave within the space of the capitalist world market. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx highlights this methodological problem when discussing the teleological effect of linear historiography: “The so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself, and, since it is only rarely and only under quite specific conditions able to criticize itself ... it always conceives them one-sidedly.”⁵ And likewise, every attempt to fully historicize the origin of capitalism remains one-sided. A one-sided or non-dialectical presentation of history as linear teleology always disintegrates into the binary of either logical necessity or historical contingency. The logical presupposition of categories necessary for the theoretical presentation of capitalist relations of production can only retrospectively be mapped onto an original historical event which practically gave birth to these very categories. Such binary presentations of history cannot reconcile their logical arguments with the chronological time frame of historical development that they apply. So, what is “primitive” about capital accumulation and why can capitalism never move beyond the “event” that allegedly set it in motion in the first place?

MARX’S CRITIQUE OF “SO-CALLED PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION”

What is the aim of Marx’s book, *Capital, Volume I*? Understanding the basic logic of capital accumulation and grasping the trajectory of capitalism as a historical formation of class struggle. Right from the start, Marx’s critical project interweaves the historical genesis and logical validity of capitalist relations of production without reducing them to either side. The task of presenting the *logic of capital and the history of capitalism* in a critical, dialectical way points towards change, abolishment. Unlike his socialist predecessors and earlier “romantic anti-capitalists,” Marx does not merely moralize about capitalism and its violent relations of production.

⁵ Cf. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993 [1857/58]), p. 106.

Here, Marx's critical project contains a Hegelian scandal or provocation that might have prompted the moralizing accounts in the writings of his contemporaries and epigones: Marx understands that the abysmal negativity of capitalism is productive ("creative destruction" in Joseph Schumpeter's words); and it is this revolutionary productivity on which he bases his transformative wager on communism. From a moralist perspective, Marx seems to repeat the liberal scandal of turning a state of moral evil (using your neighbor as a mere tool for your own success) into the staging ground of its opposite, the public good. However, for Marx it is not possible to fully historicize the speculative kernel of this wager and to delegate it to "objective historical laws." It is impossible to deduce the necessary steps of capitalist development from current capitalist accumulation regimes and then establish a hierarchical teleology of lower and higher developed capitalist modes of production before communism can be realized. In this respect, Marx changed his views in the 1870s, departing from his earlier more Eurocentric take in his 1853 article on "The British Rule in India" to his later views on Russian revolutionary movements after the publication of *Capital I*, fully exploring the trans-eurocentric scope of his critical project.⁶

6 Here, I rely on Kolja Lindner's excellent article "Marx's Eurocentrism: Postcolonial studies and Marx scholarship," *Radical Philosophy* 161 (May/June 2010), pp. 27-41.

various kinds, species, subspecies, families etc. of the animal kingdom, there existed also in addition *the animal*, the individual incarnation of the entire animal kingdom."ⁱⁱ But what is the point about the as-if-existence of "the animal"? It exists along and next to the all these really existing animals. How is this "animal" (which designates the value dimension of a commodity, expressed by its exchange value, and, ultimately, money) real and abstract at the same time? "The dual character of the commodity, pertaining to both use-value and exchange-value, creates a seemingly autonomous sphere of value relations which have cut themselves loose from the sensual world of concrete commodities and the dimension of their use-value. This autonomy, however, is not merely intellectual or ideal as in the sphere of religion where "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own" Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, p. 165. Rather, it is *as if* the mode of abstraction, namely value, has a real material existence of its own independent of the human mind. As one real existing animal encounters another existing animal within the animal kingdom, in capitalism it is *as if* concrete sensuous objects encounter their mode of abstraction in real life. Following the logic of this image, the incarnation of such abstraction is in fact *real*; it is not the result of a subjective intellectual operation but rather the effect of an objective and actually existing relation."ⁱⁱⁱ

The whole point of this is that it is about social relations that are really existing as value relations between people; one could also say they are symbolic relations structuring the social order. Following Marx's terminology, these relations could be called "sensuous supra-sensuous" relations—a third type of relation, neither merely sensuous (like relations between sensuously intuited objects), nor supra-sensuous (like imaginative relations between

ii Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band*, Hamburg 1867, in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der KPdSU und der SED, vol. II.5.1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1983), p. 37, trans. mine. I have discussed this image in my article "'Sensuous Supra-Sensuous.' The Aesthetics of Real Abstraction," in *Aesthetic Marx*, eds. Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle, (Newbury Park: Sage, 2017), pp. 49-72.

fantasies or imaginations): these relations as value relations are real abstract relations; they assume the form of a conceptual abstraction but they are produced in reality through and in practice and action (commodity exchange).

RECURSIVITY / RETROACTIVITY

I would like to isolate this particular moment of retroaction, which otherwise is more familiar in the discourse of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, here I only focus on it in a heuristic sense. That is to say, original accumulation functions like a primary scene that has to be repeated always again to keep it going on. The strategy of this symptomatic reading is to show how the Marxian text positions itself against both positions himself against both the liberal bourgeois tradition of political economy and so-called scientific Marxism, a flat vulgar Marxist discourse of the nineteenth century that believed in presumably scientific "laws" of history.

iii Sami Khatib, "'Sensuous Supra-Sensuous.' The Aesthetics of Real Abstraction," *Aesthetic Marx*, eds. Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle, (London: Bloomsbury), 2017, p. 49 f.

SEPARATION / DIVISION

Let me briefly outline Marx's introduction of the term "primitive accumulation" and its conceptual place within his writings on the critique of political economy. In his political-economic manuscripts of the 1860s, later published as *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx already grasped the basic feature of primitive accumulation, that is, separation and division.

"... primitive accumulation ... means nothing but the separation of labour and the worker from the conditions of labour, which confront him as independent forces. The course of history shows that this separation is a factor in social development. Once capital exists, the capitalist mode of production itself evolves in such a way that it maintains and reproduces this separation on a constantly increasing scale until the historical reversal takes place."⁷

RECURSIVITY

Marx stresses the continuously ongoing character of this separation: once it is produced, it needs it be reproduced. The original production of the separation between labor power and the means of production can only appear as original from the historical standpoint of this ongoing reproduction of separation.

"Accumulation merely presents as a continuous process what in primitive accumulation appears as a distinct historical process, as the process of the emergence of capital and as a transition from one mode of production to another."⁸

Only in conditions where labor has already acquired an independent existence in relation to the worker and to labor itself, the historical act of original separation can appear as the historical genesis of capital—as the *historical* process of separation which transforms the conditions of labor into capital and labor into

7 Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: *Marx and Engels Collected Works 1845-48, Volume 32* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p 405.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 406.

wage labor. From the standpoint of the result of this historical process—the capitalist world market—this result retrojects itself as the basis of its historical process. Put differently, the recursive logic of linear presentation has to assume a historical starting point that lies beyond its own logic.

SO-CALLED, (PUBLIC) SECRET

In *Capital I*, Marx chose a telling chapter title to criticize how classical political economy conceived of the beginning of capitalism. In chapter 24, entitled *Die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation*, later translated as “The So-Called Primitive Accumulation,” Marx not only distanced himself from the classical political-economic tradition by adding the phrase *sogenannte* (so-called). Moreover, he introduced a term that undermines the historical imaginary of evolutionary or linear development proceeding from primitive to civilized stages. By choosing the adjective *ursprünglich* (“original”) he suggests a different reading that alludes to an “uneven and combined” development and non-linear, recurring temporalities. Let us also consider the title of the first subchapter, *Das Geheimnis der ursprünglichen Akkumulation*, “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation.”

As Marx already made clear in the earlier chapter on “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret,” whenever he is announcing a “secret” this secret will only reveal that the functioning of this secret relies in the fact that there is no secret. Secret is only the appearance of a form, the commodity form, as naturalized essence: abstract social relations take on a concrete body, endowed with value. In the chapter on the so-called primitive accumulation this basic inversion takes on the shape an aporia: logical continuity and historical break. Logical continuity becomes the appearance of a historical cut—the logical deduction of the origin of capitalism is presented as a historical event outside of this logic.

In Marx’s words in *Capital I*:

“the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value; surplus-value presupposes capitalist production; capitalist production

INVERTED COMMAS, SO-CALLED, SECRET

Marx isn’t actually proposing a theory of primitive accumulation. He gives a *critique* of what appears as the fantasy of bourgeois economy of its own beginning. Marx says this field of knowledge has produced the necessity to assume a starting point before its own starting point: capitalist historiography produces the fantasy of its own pre-history.

And let’s remember: what was the secret of commodity fetishism? It was the secret that there was no secret. So, the whole point of assuming that there is a secret that could be uncovered creates the effect of ideology.

presupposes the availability of considerable masses of capital and labour-power in the hands of commodity producers. The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out of by *assuming a primitive accumulation (the ‘previous accumulation’ of Adam Smith⁹) which precedes capitalist accumulation; an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.*”

Indeed, the capitalist point of departure is always departing and never arriving. Quite counter-intuitively, the categories of time and space (what Kant called the transcendental pure forms of intuition) are not given here, time and space are not neutral empty forms for historical development and logical causality; rather, they are fractured and interlocked.

ORIGIN

It is not by accident that Marx, with cutting irony, invokes a theological “primal scene” when referring to Adam Smith’s understanding of the starting point of capitalist accumulation. Marx’s translation of the English term “previous accumulation”—a term of the political economy of his time, introduced by Adam Smith—is not accidental. Choosing the adjective *ursprünglich* (original) Marx does not simply suggest a linear historicization of Adam Smith’s ahistorical solipsism of the economic agents. Rather, he injects a recursive logic: The origin—*Ursprung*, which literally means “primal-leap”—has to be repeated always anew in order to keep capitalism alive. Here, repetition is not temporal and linear but circular and spatial: it refers to the displacement of the origin from one place to another.

This meaning gets lost in the English

⁹ Smith writes: “This accumulation must, evidently, be previous to his applying his industry for so long a time to such a peculiar business. As the accumulation of stock must, in the nature of things, be previous, to the division of labour, so labour can be more and more subdivided in proportion only as stock is previously more and more accumulated.” (Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, Book II, Introduction [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], p. 277.)

version of *Capital I*. Ben Fowkes, translator of *Capital I*, wrote in a footnote: “We have preferred ‘primitive accumulation’ to ‘original accumulation’ as the phrase has become established by now as part of the English language.”¹⁰ However, as Rosalind Morris rightly notes, “the failed translation of the Marxian concept is itself a translation of Marx’s rendering of Adam Smith’s English phrase ‘previous accumulation’. And it is this spectral presence of an exorcised liberal economics that threatens to come back with the translation that would have been preferred had convention not dictated the rendition of *ursprüngliche* as ‘primitive.’”¹¹

OUTSIDE / INSIDE

For Marx, it was clear that the capitalist world market has no geographical “outside.” The outside, the frontier, the periphery is at its heart (at Marx’s time: colonialism). The historical topology of capitalism is curved and uneven, the extimate is inside. Capitalism’s pre-history appears as extimate space, waste-lands, underdeveloped zones of depravation, while its future proceeds as a spatialized extension of its present. It is under the capitalist conditions of the spatialization of time and the temporalization of space that the unhistoricizable and, in this sense, repressed origin of capitalism always returns by taking on the temporality of myth and theology.

From Marx’s *Capital I*:

“This primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us

¹⁰ Marx, *Capital I*, p. 714.

¹¹ Rosalind C. Morris, “*Ursprüngliche Akkumulation: The Secret of an Original Mistranslation*,” *boundary 2*, no. 43: 3 (August 2016), p. 33.

UNMAPPABLE VOICES

The point I’m trying to make here is that we should avoid mirroring the ideology of (neo)liberalism and naturalize our position on the societal “stage,” our contingent position within the symbolic order, and take our skin, face and language as the natural expression of the rules of the game that we have been assigned to.

If you embody an unmappable voice, it speaks to no one directly, at first glance. Rather than the players, you are attacking the rules of the game. An unmappable voice without a clearly assigned place creates an echo, a resonance on the societal stage, and it is the inverse of that resonance, so to speak, that makes visible the symbolic structure which we otherwise call capitalist real abstraction.

So, I would be very interested in looking at radical discourses from the ’80s and ’90s and particularly revisit Spivak’s call for strategic essentialism because in the initial phase of the neoliberal discourse the integration of heterogeneous, non-assimilated, excluded identities in capitalist society posed a problem; therefore, insisting on the incompatibility of certain identities proved to be a powerful, successful strategy but not something she believed in as such. This strategic political moment is totally forgotten today—along with the struggle to which this discourse attached itself in the beginning: global Marxist class struggle.

INSIDE / OUTSIDE

I don’t think you can have a historical account of the precise moment when a social formation became part of the inside of capitalism and when it was outside. In the same vein, I would argue that capitalism can never exist as such, as purely “capitalist capitalism.” There are always non-capitalist strata within capitalism, that’s a systemic necessity. Already the name of the epistemic field that Marx is criticizing is indicative here: There is a political economy— and there is a religious economy, a libidinal economy and so on, but there is no such thing as an economic economy. This simply doesn’t exist.

CONTINGENCY OF POSITIONS

There is a permanent flux of social symbolic positions; the class struggle of the rich against the poor depends on making convincing ideological claims on the justification of the rich class’s entitlement to wealth. The rich will claim that only a certain portion of society should intersect with a certain socially high position in capital accumulation regimes.

But no one should accept the naturalization of symbolic positions within capitalist relations of production. Ultimately, capitalist relations of (re)production function through and with contingent character-masks, embodiments of social characters; and there is a flux of different positions on the stage of capital—a stage that needs faces but systemically does not rely on a particular face.

certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins.”¹²

¹² Marx, *Capital I*, p. 873.

STRATEGIC UNIVERSALISM

This notion can be put this way: the proletariat functions as a negative universal, or as the unconscious subject of capitalist history. The proletariat, as Marx had it, has nothing to lose except for its chains, and has a world to win—yet it has no particular traits, it is performed by many, has many bodies, many languages—it is not reducible to one empirical group or the One in a structural sense; this makes it dangerous. The proletariat's empty or negative universalism is a universalism of the split, of the gap, of the not-all, of the refusal to be One, to be identical.

It is a very dangerous and totalitarian neoliberal fantasy that I could be the sovereign master/creator/analyst of my symbolic position within the social relation. I don't have a total perspective from where to see myself within the totality of relations. I cannot position my perspective without relating to actual relations of power—I cannot see myself position myself. I don't know what my social perspective is, because I am inside the web of the social order from where I see.

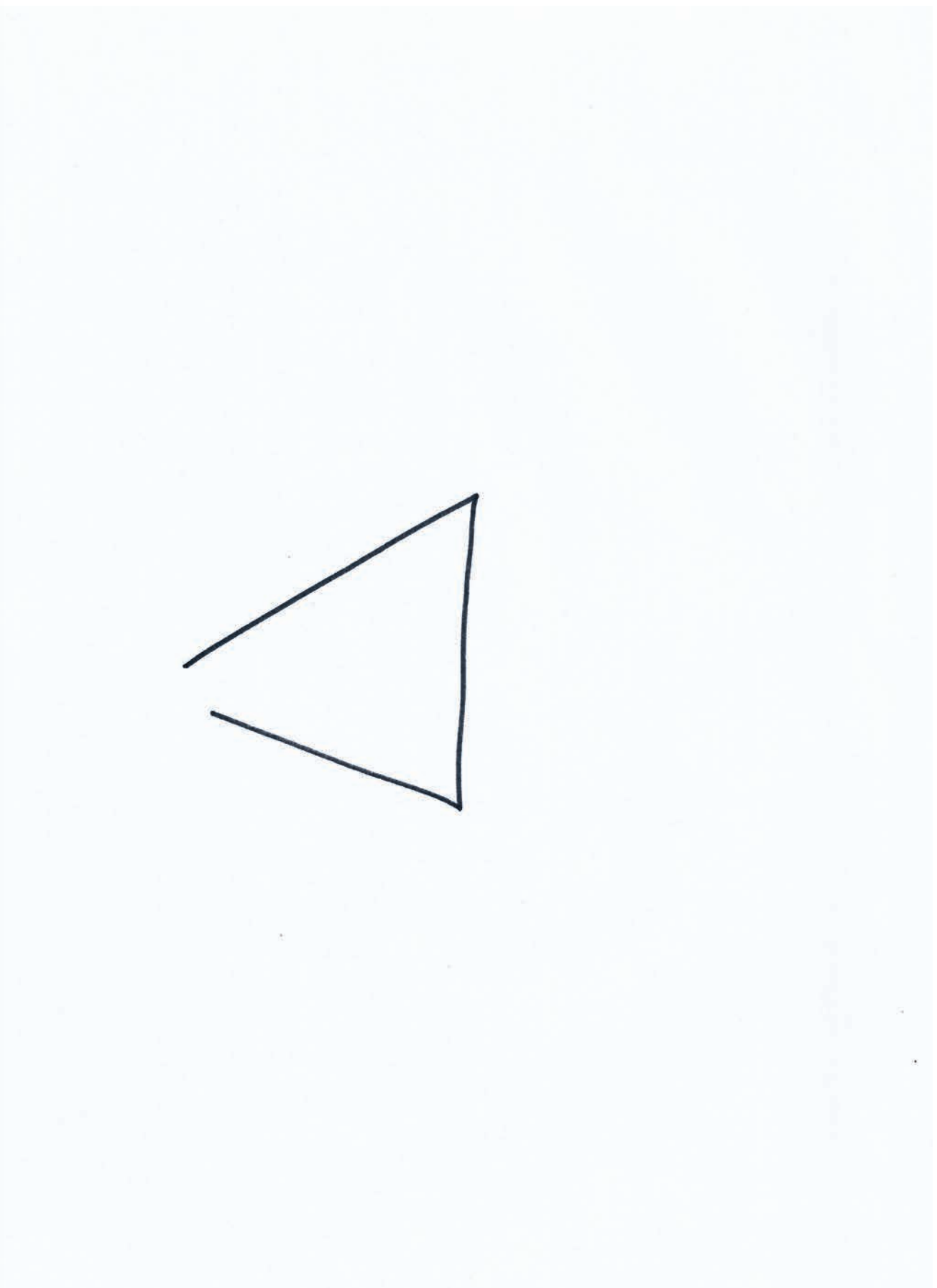
Natascha: If you look at it through a certain lens, then you would say you identify with it, if you look at it through another lens, then you would say for example it moves you. or it touches you, why does it touch you?

You're the asymmetric, diffracted echo. You're the resonating body but you're not making all the sound. You are neither the sound system nor are you in control of it. That's why you never fully say "that's my personal perspective only"—the fantasy of individualism. So why is it so difficult to admit that you don't own your own desire? What touches you deeply you are not the source of; rather, you are the resonance body that amplifies it. And there you are in it. You're never an individual atom or monad that owns your feelings exclusively.

Ultimately, we have to forget, to unlearn what seems the most natural thing to us: the individual, the neoliberal self. Particularly, in political organizations, how can you be a comrade when it's only about the self?



98 **today the study group is many. they begin with a round that goes “i remember having been named...” i remember having been named ursula. i remember having been named fred. i remember having been named ayşe. i remember having been named friend. punk, faggot, freak, homo. other unspeakable things. but also sibling, lover, comrade, queen. feelings surround acts of naming: i love having been called that, i feel proud, ashamed, angry. there are those who remember having lost or having rejected a name and engaged in the pleasure of claiming another. for many, the memories only emerge long after the round has finished. all the next days, more names are being remembered and told, in passing, over dinner, to notebooks and birds.**



Time Travel, or an Outside that is Inside

SOME ANNOTATIONS TO THE WHISTLE IN THE VOICE

A.

This text is a composition of annotations written primarily in relation to another text. The first text appears—unindexed—on page 214 of *Ankersentrum (surviving in the ruinous ruin)* accompanying Natascha Süder Happelmann's presentation for the German Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale. The second text appears here, around a year later, in a follow-up context. One precedes the next. But is the writing of the second conditioned on the first having been written? And will that one have to be read for this one to make sense? Regardless, the first came first. And in so doing, it might seem to possess an always already inherent capacity to claim both real and symbolic priority.

B.

In 1492—the same year Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue—a dazzling omen was observed in the skies of Alsace: a triangular meteorite, soaring like a fireball, crashed into a field of wheat just outside the moat around the walled town of Ensisheim, not far upstream from Strasbourg. People gathered around the heavenly detritus, peered into the scorched crater it had made in the earth, and attempted to make sense. What did the event portend? The question was debated in nearby Nuremberg. The episcopal courts were still adjudicating suits of debt beyond their jurisdiction and their abuse of the laity had been mounting. The clergy was continuing to revel in ecclesiastical privilege even as peasants were being driven off the land and severe hunger had taken hold. A sure sign of wrath from above, provoked by the wretched immorality of contemporary Christendom, the celestial stone was preserved in a local church and consolidated an explanation for a whole wide range of societal woes—including the humiliation of political defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

C.

I wrote about the dancing plague that occurred in the medieval city of Strasbourg during the summer of 1518 as disrupting the rhythm of daily life through rhythm itself. I claimed that the event was a fatal expression of what could not be said and was being repressed in a way of life squeezed from both sides of the emerging Christian and class divides at the dawn of modernity. What I felt I had found was a structural inscription of a collective resistance that could never have been organized in advance. By transgressing a limit within themselves and thus going beyond their selves, the dancers, I declared, had produced a space under duress that was out of the control of anybody else.

D.

Triggered by the bodily movement of a single woman one fine day in July 1518, a growing group of men and women living in the Alsatian city of Strasbourg took to the streets, dancing uncontrollably for days on end. Most of them were poor and pious and they don't seem to have conferred with each other nor for that matter with themselves that this is what they were going to be doing. Over the course of a month, according to one set of chronicles, they numbered up to 400, and some of them kept on until they died from dancing—this was not a state of joyous ecstasy they were displaying. The nobility could not comprehend the situation but did not want to concede authority to the bishop and turned instead to the guild of physicians who diagnosed the condition as a natural one caused by hot-bloodedness—the term “choreomania” would enter into circulation. Together they tried all sorts of things to help the afflicted, to contain the epidemic, but for the most part no one could figure out a remedy. Ultimately, they yielded to the religious sentiment in the air that this was a case of possession and punishment—a curse and a cure, all at once—known as “Saint Vitus' dance” on account of the dance's patron saint. By late August or early September, those who were still in a frenzy were escorted on a long and arduous journey to Saint Vitus' chapel in the town of Saverne some thirty miles away. A mass was conducted by the priests over there and in an unconventional gesture, each of the accursed was gifted—along with a cross—a pair of red shoes anointed with oil. Red was not just the most expensive of pigments to procure at the time: the color runs in and out of a longer history of dancing spells that occurred at this critical juncture in European history and might be relevant in more ways than we are able to decipher today. Shoes to protect and heal their bruised and bloodied feet makes sense, but what was this about exactly? Hans Christian Andersen's very strange fairy tale called “The Red Shoes” about a girl forced to dance continually might contain a clue. The detail is crucial to what we have lost in how meaning was made.

E.

To be sure, there are lines to be drawn situating this extraordinary episode of choreomania into relation with local conspiracies in and around Alsace at the time, namely the Bundschuh uprisings generally dated between 1493 and 1517. Not quite a movement—too sporadic in occurrence, too disparate in aims, and too heterogenous in composition, it has been claimed—the Bundschuh got its name from the laced peasant's boot displayed on the banners of more successful attempts, five decades prior, to defeat lords along the upper Rhine. Just the same, these radical episodes of organized armed resistance intended to do nothing less than destroy the feudal order of church and monarchy. As a form of religious protest, they were fiercely anti-clerical in their ideological demand for divine justice. But they

also went to the core of shared social and economic grievances that were emerging—around the closure of the commons for instance—in what we now understand as the transition to early capitalism, and they entailed at least the potential to unite town and country in a broad alliance against the rich. For this reason the authorities were threatened, thrown into a panic even, every time they got wind of a Bundschuh. A point of contradistinction to the dancing plague that might be relevant to make without taking anything away from these popular rebellions—significant in and of themselves, and eventually culminating in the German Peasants’ War of 1524—is that each was quelled as, if not before, it actually took shape. Essentially, this was despite the fact that they were planned in utmost secrecy. The insurgent leader Joss Fritz went underground in 1503 for an entire decade developing his base steadily and plotting his next move from somewhere deep in the Black Forest—no news of him reached the authorities during this period. And yet these attempts at insurrection were always given away. Someone inevitably ratted—one time it was an artist in Freiburg approached to decorate the flag who had first alerted the council the summer before an attack was to be initiated. But the case to make is not about who betrayed what, and why exactly. Rather, that the possibility of betrayal itself—regardless of oaths given and measures taken—was contained within the very constitution of such resistance. Not least, this has to do with the question of legibility. Unlike the dancing plague, wherein intention was not apparent even to those who were actually doing the dancing, the Bundschuh uprisings wore their demands on their sleeve—as much as they tried to operate in the shadows of the night and beyond the edges of detectability, there was nothing ambiguous about what the peasants had wanted to achieve.

F.

Let me try this differently: At whatever point it may have been that a serf turned into a rebel, she crossed a line inside herself, and when she took a secret oath with others, she externalized her allegiance and made common cause through this articulation. There is resistance written all over this. And these individual instances of internal transition turning into the potential for collective action carried out over prolonged periods of time—this is what struggle means. Finding form in the world for a subjective disposition of indignation against the objective injustices of a society that produced it but disavows it. Along the entire continuum of il/legibility on which it variously operates, struggle as we know it is consistently faced with the condition of its own exclusion, while carrying within it the critical capacity to compose other ways of being. Let nothing I say take away from it.

G.

Sami Khatib suggested to me that the popular rebellions of the medieval era, such as the Bundschuh uprisings, instigated a regime of knowledge production from which the unwritten pre-history of police intelligence in Germany begins. Troubled by the tight-knit nature of the local conspiracies, whose operations they had no way of controlling, the councils started to gather as much information as they could about each and every individual that comprised the general population, namely the poor. The term Sami mentioned was *Polizeiwissenschaft*, a discipline intended to decipher the horde, oriented towards the meticulous regulation of the public sphere. Conceived as a science of the internal order of a community, it only came into being as a medium of instruction two centuries later, in 1727, under Frederick William I of Prussia—with chairs in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt and Frankfurt. A cursory look online indicates that this inaugural discipline of “police science” incorporated earlier and much broader notions of what both those words mean—police as deriving from polis, or as in policy and science as akin to management, even. Primarily oriented towards strengthening the state, the pedagogy was part of a then prevalent economic theory of central administration known as *Kameralismus*. Closely connected to the development of bureaucracy in the early modern period, and pertaining to the surveillance of a wide range of public and private domains of activity, the department of *Cameralia Oeconomica* and *Polizeiwissenschaft* was disbanded in the mid-nineteenth century and its science of policing was subsequently differentiated from the formation of newer disciplines—forensics, for instance—around police work proper today. But rather than a rupture in a course of study, the continuity in the nature of the anxiety that has driven the scope of intelligence activity since the transition to a civil state under capitalism must be considered in order to historically situate the kind of terror that lies behind the police raids occurring in high-security refugee camps across Germany.

H.

A friend of mine proposes that now I am writing history. I maintain that what I am doing is in every sense nothing other than thinking with and through the artwork that was presented at the German Pavilion in Venice. I’m not yet sure exactly why it is important for me to insist on this, but it feels of something. Natascha has noted the simultaneity of two events: the police raid on the refugee camp in Ellwangen and her being invited as an artist with a migrant background to represent the country. She has claimed—to me in conversation, and in public talks she has given—that there is nothing insignificant about this concurrence. By flagging a system of reward and punishment, she is making an equation between state-sponsored culture and state-sponsored violence. These are not two poles in opposition, as in two different faces of the state—they are the same face.

I.

During the early hours of May 3, 2018, hundreds of officers full-fledged in riot-gear stormed the migrant reception center in Ellwangen without warning. In a military-style operation, they broke down doors that could not be locked, tore people from their sleep, put them in handcuffs, and dragged them outside. Through the flashing of flashlights in the middle of the night, many of the residents feared that a large-scale deportation was underway. A handful were taken into custody, found themselves sentenced with parole and penalties and prison, but the jury is still out as to whether the raid was legal in the first place. Lauded at the time by mainstream media and politicians alike, the raid was staged in retaliation to a spontaneous political protest that had taken place in the shelter a few nights prior, one that succeeded in temporarily impeding the “transfer” of a 23-year-old Ghanaian-born Togolese refugee to the streets of Italy—his first country of entry to the EU—as per the highly criticized Dublin Regulations. Faced with an “unprecedented” situation, so they felt, the authorities were brazen enough to exclaim that “the rule of law was being trampled on by its guests” and that “such behavior had to be tackled with the full force” of it. The raid, however, was not singular in its occurrence and has become a common feature in camps across Southern Germany. The brutal intimidation tactic is part of a larger culture of deportation working to criminalize any modicum of dissent and break down every single possibility of collectivity. Of all the asylum seekers in the facility, it was the Black Africans that were targeted. The operation reeked of structural racism.

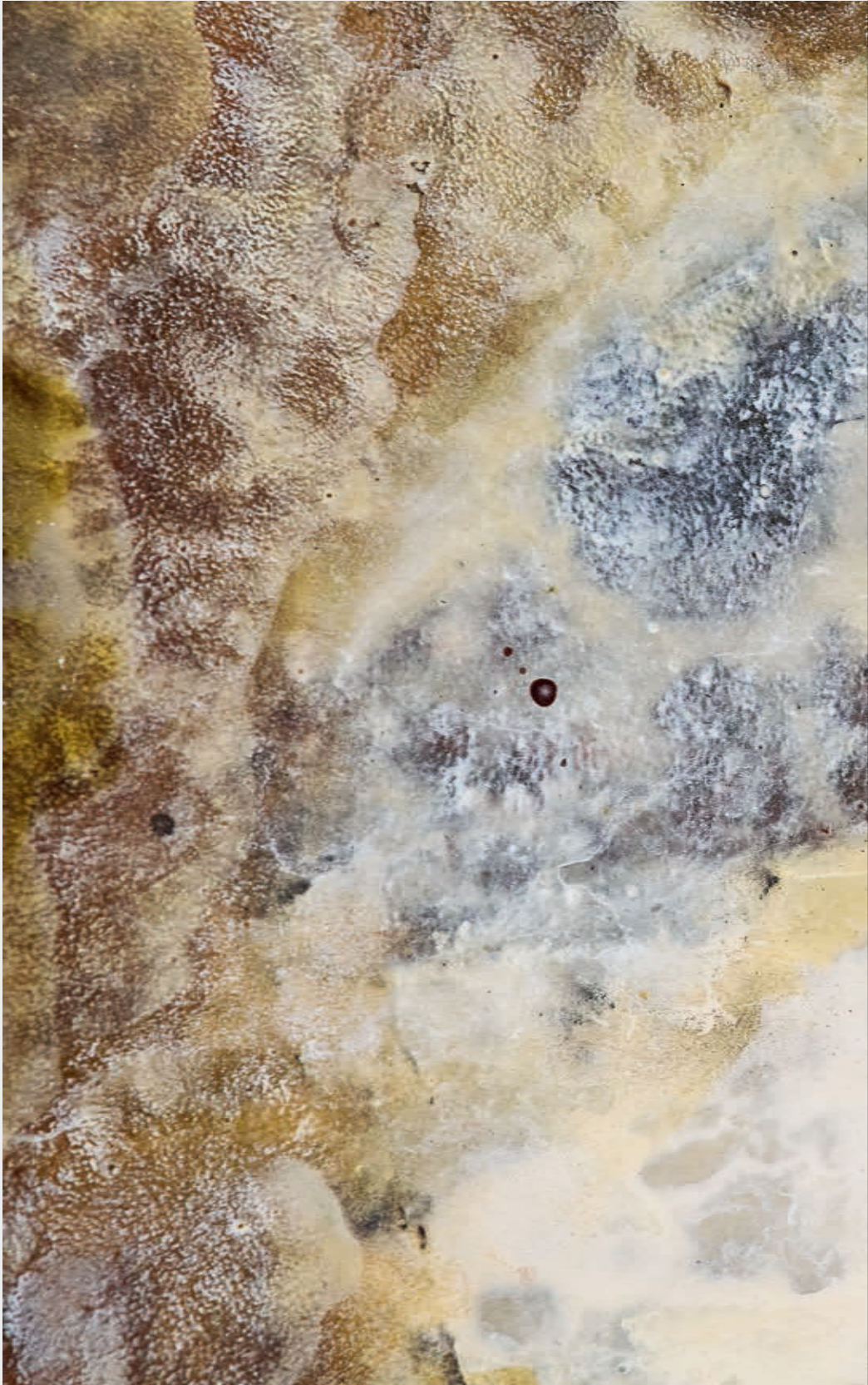
J.

Wikipedia tells me that in 1588 and between 1611 and 1618 around 450 people were killed in witch-hunts in Ellwangen. When I find this bit of information I make a note that reads: There is violence embedded across this landscape, like a repressed memory that the state hasn’t dealt with, because it concerns its very function, to secure a mode of production and maintain a property regime. One of the videos that Natascha released in the run-up to the opening of the Venice Biennale is shot in Donauwörth, Manching, Bamberg, and Ellwangen, all southern German towns with refugee camps that the police violently raided in 2018. Not too far away, across the river Rhine in France, Strasbourg is where the European Parliament sits. I remind myself that I do not know this terrain, I am not of its history. Yet I am of the conviction that the event of choreomania that occurred there in 1518—exactly five centuries before the raids—has a bearing in no small measure on the situation of people coming to Europe from Africa today.

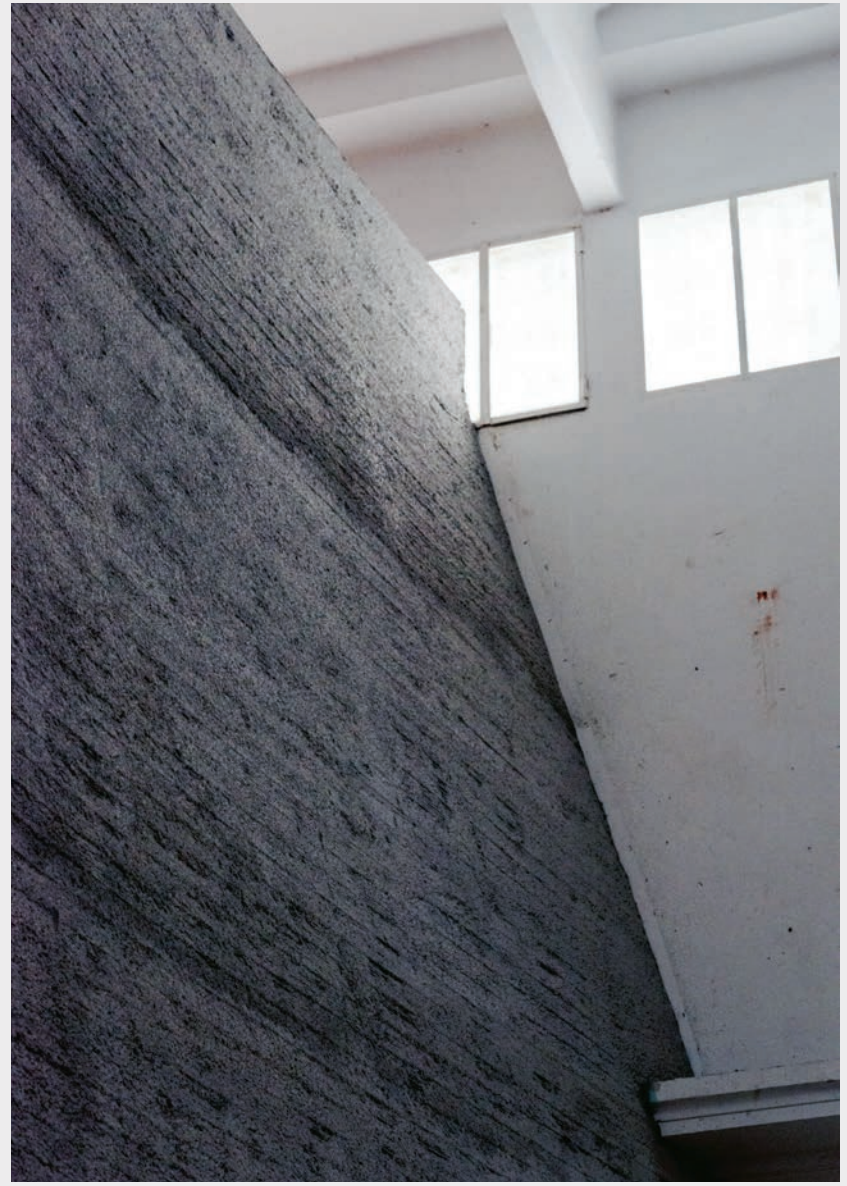
K.

After the raid in May 2018, the vice-president of the Ellwangen police regional authority had assumed the position that they had acted out of concern that “a lawless area with organized structures” had been developing in the camp. The articulation of this anxiety surrounding un/known and il/legible allegiances, and the subsequent measures to intimidate and outlaw the tumult, if you will, connected the present moment to the criminalization of resistance across centuries. The task of this text as I had seen it was to make explicit some missing links not drawn out in that previous text—between the lynching of Sam Hose by a mob in Coweta County, Georgia in 1899 in no small part due to police negligence, the murder of Blair Peach in Southhall, London in 1979 by a member of the Metropolitan Police, and the immolation of Oury Jalloh in a police cell in Dessau, Saxony-Anhalt in 2005, for instance. From here I had wanted to eventually dwell on the transatlantic drift in the discourse of the Black radical tradition. But as soon as the witches arrive on the scene something starts to break and I can no longer contain these annotations. Ellwangen keeps me for days on end, though I can’t seem to get to where this could be taken, at least not yet. Details reveal themselves piecemeal, don’t add up initially, but are far too incredible to dismiss. Such as the fact that the building around which the cityscape of Ellwangen seems to have been shaped is a twelfth-century basilica dedicated to no other than Saint Vitus, the patron of the dancing plague. One thing leads to the next and soon there are entire books to be read. Like on the witch-hunts of Ellwangen, which introduced a legal paradigm that was adopted by the great witch trials of southwestern Germany. Just as the 2018 raid in Ellwangen was of national consequence: it was pivotal in legitimizing the enforcement of harsher deportation policies, and became the reference in judicial proceedings surrounding raids carried out in refugee camps in the region that year. I keep vacillating between trying to return to what I already knew I had to do, and contending not just with my wonder and disbelief at what is emerging in the process, like when the truth of the matter you are composing gets stranger than fiction, but also with how the writing might do right by it. In the heat of the moment, I feel compelled to narrate every step of how I encountered every bit of material as I am encountering it, and moreover to ensure that the fact that I had not known what I now know when I began is properly conveyed, for this is significant for the notion of writing as mediumism, and if it isn’t made to register onto the surface of the text, it would seem as if I must have. The question of what makes it into language and onto the page, what remains unsaid or implicit, and what is left outside the boundaries of it is not separate from the concerns that the text is dealing with. Is the study gathering to which this publication is referring a part of the artwork presented inside the walls of the pavilion? How far do the boundaries of the work extend? Whether or not it is mediated into meaning, the material is there, exerting pressure onto a membrane that is fundamentally porous.

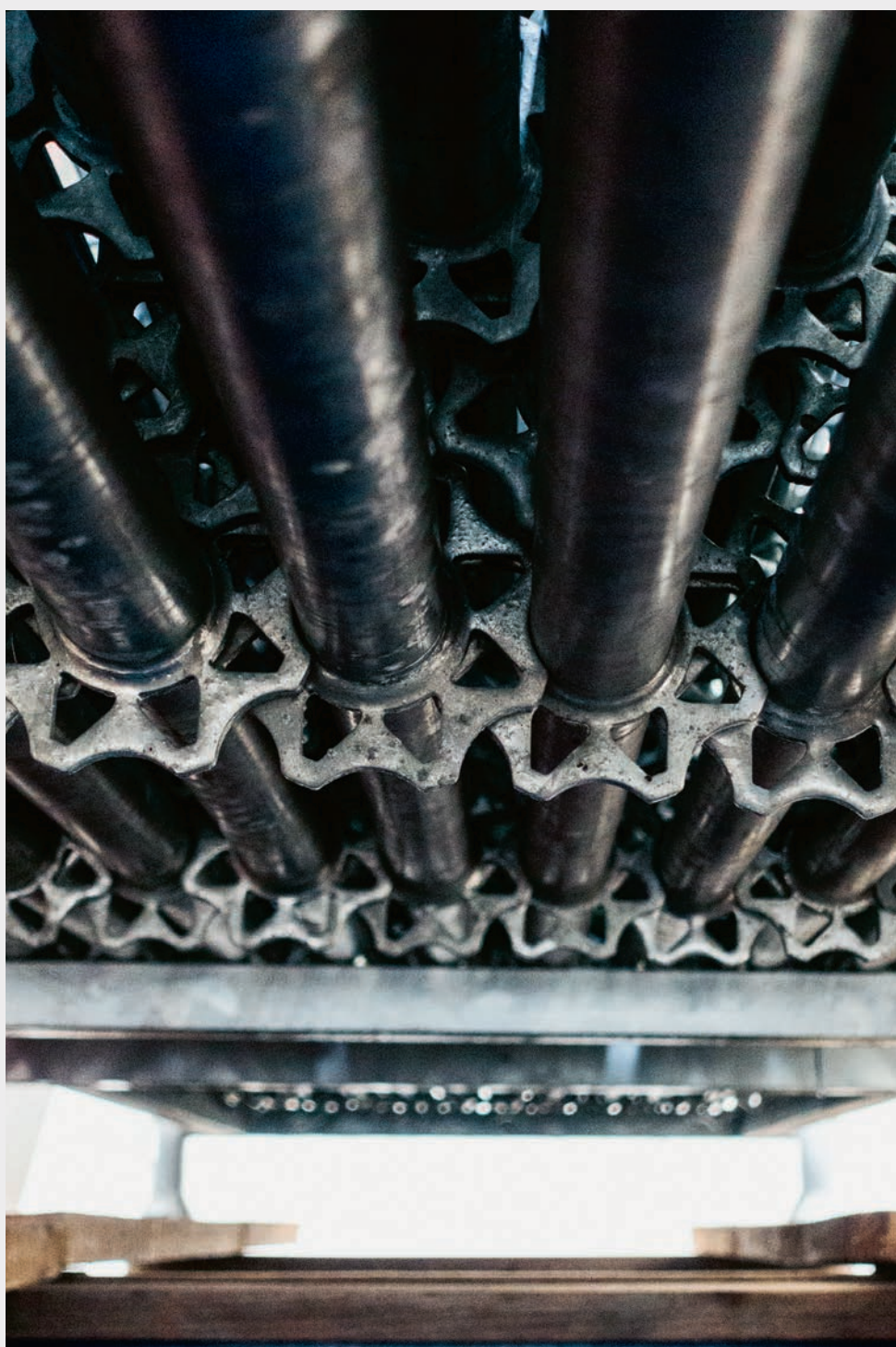




















134 The following excerpt is based on the transcript of a discussion sparked at the workshop “Art in Ruins,” part of the *beyond repair* study program, with Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri. The workshop took place on June 27, a hot summer day, at the San Nicolò Monastery with students from Luav di Venezia and HfK Bremen. The rise of far right parties and their policies, in this case Salvini’s Lega Nord, has meant that openly xenophobic speech acts and the revisionism of fascist history also enter public spaces and institutions. Thus, the climate of Salvini’s far right policies and its reach into the university had a profound effect on the intense discussion which emerged during the workshop.

133 Natascha: One thing that fascism seems to do is promise that it can repair things; this often happens in a very violent way, and it is suggested that this violence is necessary, but at least, for example, things could be repaired that modernity has broken. Of course this is a flawed promise, but it is a promise. The idea of *beyond repair* is to acknowledge an irreparability—while urging reparations for colonial violence and injustice—and at the same time also think and imagine beyond that; beyond repair. To think beyond making something whole again, towards living and thinking and feeling an otherwise, through the brokenness.

I see two figures or two notions in the ruin or the ruinous: one is the individual and the other is the community. The ruinous formation of the individual emerged in a certain phase of modernity. The word individual itself means that a collectivity is broken up into the last piece, which cannot be divided further, and the result is the ultimate subject. This is what was believed throughout the twentieth century; that we can find ourselves as individuals and that there is a truth to this. But then at some point we found out that maybe there is nothing at the core of the individual other than a gaping hole, a big void, and the need for belonging. That we need to belong to something or somewhere.

The second ruin is the community, a formation that is charged by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Who belongs to the community and who cannot? Who might be able to work their way into the community, and what is required for that? In Germany the word “integration” marks this process. It stands for the promise that if you adapt and assimilate according to the values and definitions of the community you will be accepted. You might even be granted citizenship. And this promise of inclusion is only possible if there also is an exclusion, because not everyone can belong, right? Otherwise it’s not a community. In other words, “community” is a violent process in which those “inside”—often represented by a proxy or the law—decide who can belong and who cannot. And my urgent question is, how can we think of belonging—maybe we’ll even find a different word for it—without thinking of the individual, the true self, or the community?

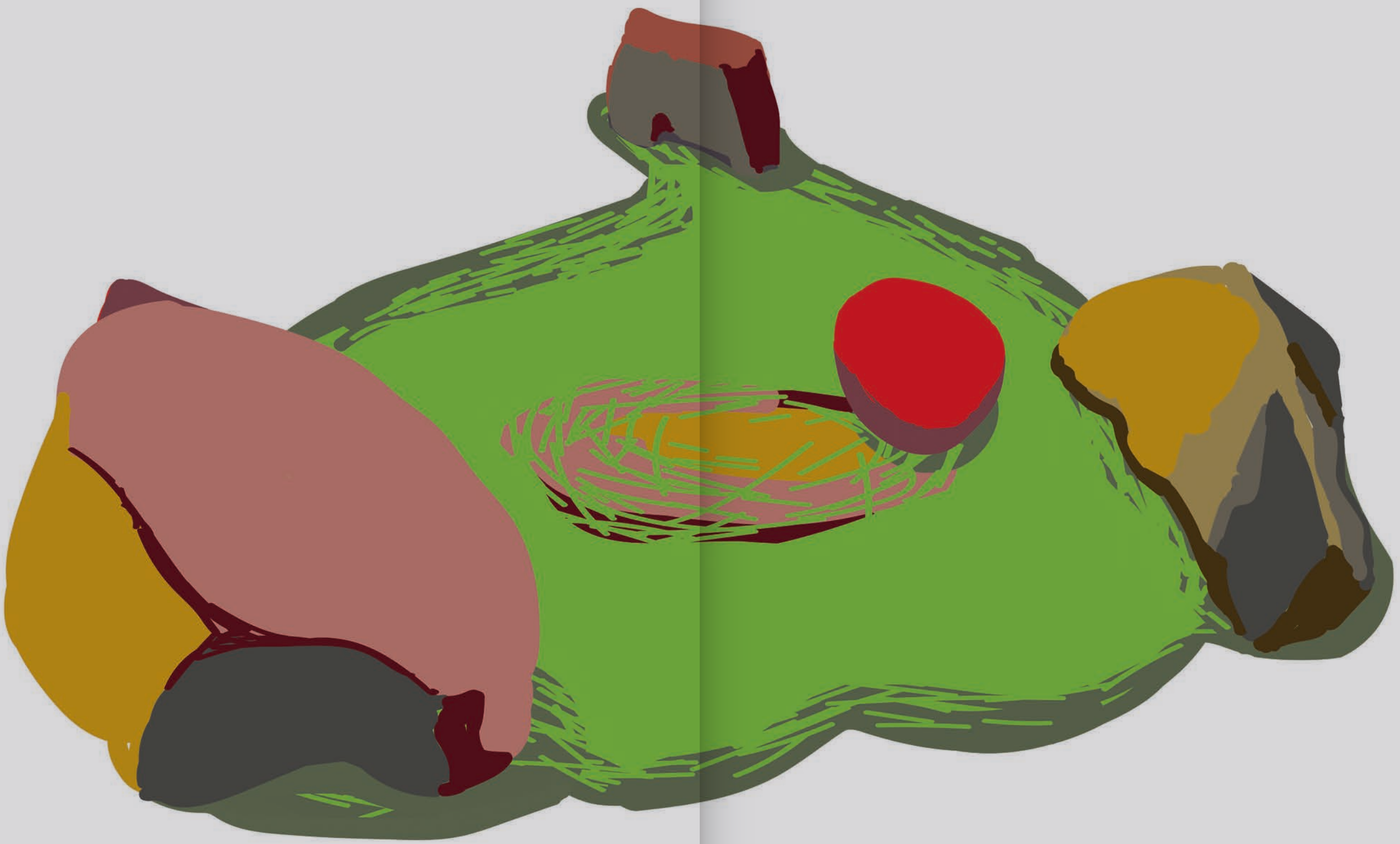
***These comments are in response to a student who spoke about the “good intentions” of her grandfather working as an educator in Italy’s colonial expansion into Ethiopia during the Fascist period.**

Rene: Enlightenment is seen as a project—to put it very simply—that promoted a kind of universal citizenship, meaning that everyone would have rights, everyone would be entitled to belonging to the universal community, and everyone would have some kind of equality within that. Now, fascism is commonly seen as an anti-enlightenment project. It wants to put an end to this and says: “No, there are actually some people who really belong and should have rights and there are other people who are less than human or even a threat, we should kill them.” Communism could be seen as an extension of the enlightenment project, claiming that the promise of universality is failing because of capitalism, but we want to extend it, really, to its promise. We want everyone to have this promised equality and capitalism is what’s blocking that.

I am actually deeply skeptical about enlightenment, because I think enlightenment is crucially connected to colonialism and its destructive force. Enlightenment, just like fascism, was the justification for all kinds of expropriation, mass killing, genocide, ethnocide—think about all the atrocities committed against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, Australia. There were a lot of people killed in the name of this idea that “we have rationality, we’re educating, civilizing, we’re doing better.” I’m not saying that there weren’t “good teachers,” there weren’t “good priests,” there weren’t people who even wanted liberation. Some of them may have been the “nicest people,” but it’s not about that.* It’s about the bigger structures of what is really going on. And I’m actually deeply skeptical of this enlightenment. And yet fascism is also seen as an anti-enlightenment project.

And so the question that I have—maybe it’s really my most sincere question—is this: Where do I situate myself within that terrain? I am deeply skeptical of modernity, of all the shitty promises of a better life, development, etc. I know that it has meant a great deal of destruction. I’ve also lived in the violent results of the effects and hidden costs of these ideas and promises. To me, if we are really thinking decolonially and resisting this type of universalism and all of its hidden prejudices and violent impositions, there are some moments where we actually appear to be taking positions that share the company of certain tendencies historically associated with fascism. And the question is, how do we begin to unravel this knot, can we imagine a decolonial communism, an anti-enlightenment idea of community that isn’t based on producing exclusions? Do we have to abandon it completely, like Natascha is saying, “beyond repair,” and find another word?

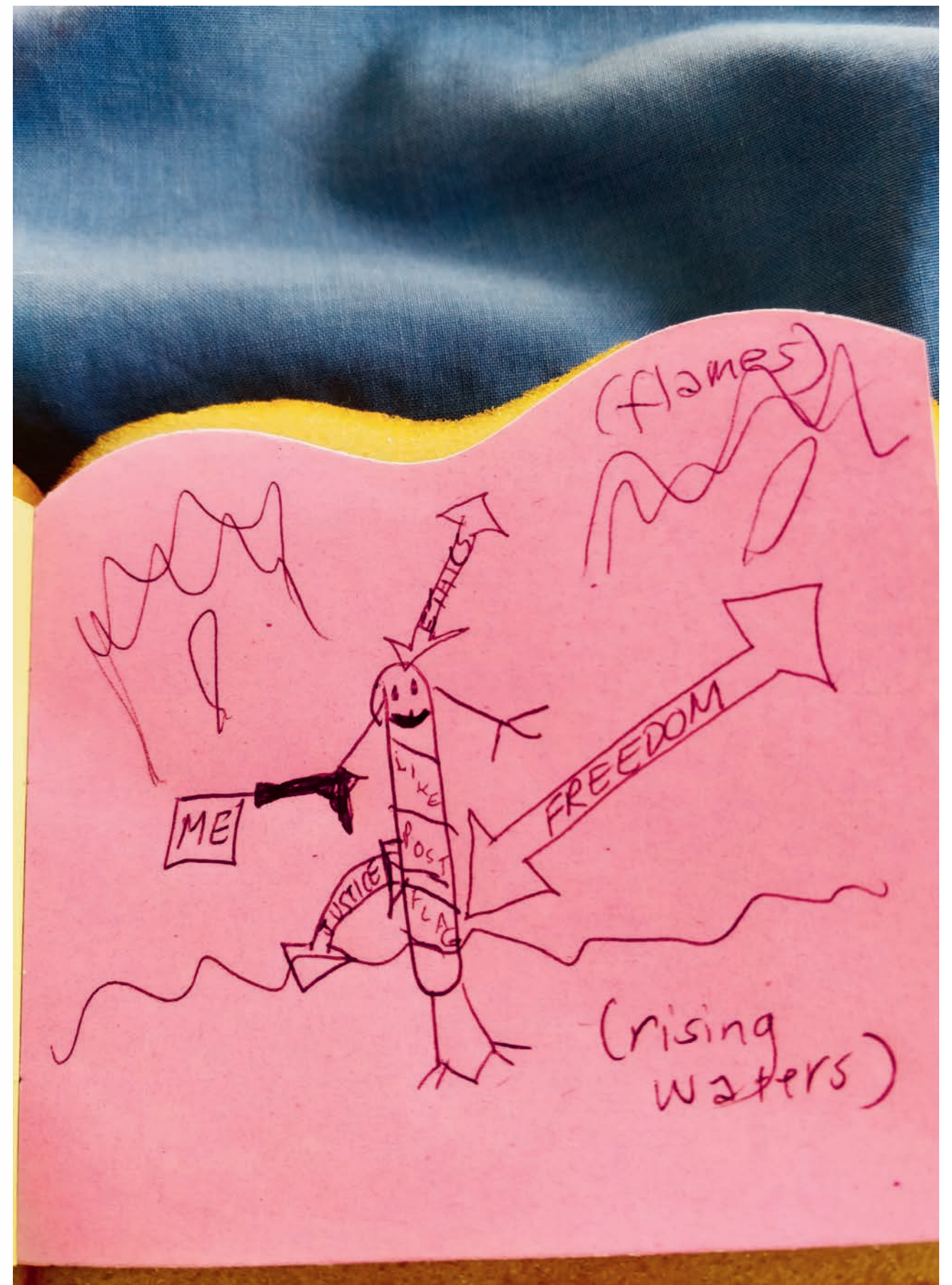
Ashkan: As a prelude to a break, let's try and displace this more traditional narrative of where people come from, where people belong, how they understand all of this, and think of a general condition of displacement as something that colors our subjectivity in this contemporary moment. Displacement from ourselves, from our emotions. Displacement from our traditions, our backgrounds. Displacement from our futures. A general condition of being thrown out into a confusing space between a past and a future, even in work—what is our work going to be in the future, how am I going to make money, we all are encountering this feeling of displacement. Displacement is becoming a quality of contemporary subjectivity and it can be effectively rerouted into, let's say, more traditional categories of belonging, identity, nationality, origin, all of this stuff. As for political ends, it can become fascist. So we need to actually think about displacement as a phenomenon that we all are affected by and touched by and moved by in order to begin to change language beyond "where do you come from," "how do you negotiate being Iranian-American-German," "is that confusing for you?" Those are questions of the past. We really have to ask questions coming from the future into the present.



NEW RUINS

“Our moment is defined by extraordinary ideological fusions and transpositions; technological ultra-mediation of subjects and cultural milieus premised on supremacy [and] multiple enactments of social hatred, discursively performed as well as violently actualised on anyone who qualifies as socially abject.”

—Angela Dimitrikaki, *Antifascist Art Theory: A Roundtable Discussion*



It might sound like a truism, and if so, an introductory paragraph is definitely the place for it. Nonetheless: it's fair to say that aspects of experience that may seem proximate to one another in the moment can diverge sharply when it comes to the analysis brought in to grapple with them. Theory may be judged to depart from history, or the empirical from the intuitive, the rational from the affective, and so on. Such divergences condense both years of methodological debate in critical theory and the up-to-date reifications of academicism-at-large on our screens. However, in so doing they also point to something real, insofar as experience is now mapped out along such divisions which surface as we attempt to make sense of them, even if it didn't feel like they were there "at the time." The analytical gulf that seems to open up between a structural critique and a critique of ideology can be included in this question, as neither can subsist without the other: structure without ideology is an uncommitted description, while an unreflexive ideology critique missing the structural imperatives that create the context for the ideology in question is no different from the figuratively or literally automated glut of opinions "on our screens." As we will see in the next paragraph, culture—here a possible shorthand for "ideology"—is as structural as it gets. This is a solid materialist point that my current academic location in a discipline whose touchstones are Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams supplies with easy reference points. Yet the truisms have to stop somewhere, and that is when they start to block the more reflexive consideration of method which tries to find and deploy new combinations. Thus the following should be taken as an attempt to probe into the structural functioning of the liberal individual as a social and historical artefact. The fetishism of the sovereign individual finds in "him" the source of all biopolitical value, moral authority and cognitive credibility. This points to a primary route (and root) of fascisms contemporary as well as historical. Clearly this is a somewhat counter-intuitive proposition since the mythology of "Fascism" is that it annihilates individuals in favor of triumphant, brainwashed "masses." There is that moment to it, and it is substantial, even at times an overpowering one, which is why it dominates so many narratives of fascism as a socio-political episode or tendency. Yet we can't discount the Theweleit / Deleuze and Guattari insight about the "fascist" or the "cop" in your head.¹ Any moment of deeply felt endogenous purity/valor/intelligence hostage to its own fragility and driven to project this inadequacy onto others can flower into fascism in the right conditions. It should be clear that these "conditions" are what mark the line between this psychosocial conception and an idealist "psychologist" conception, and it would be slapdash to confound them. The psychosocial, then, is another way of explaining why the ideological and the structural do not yield analytic value in their separation but only in the manner of their combination.

On a less general note, this text is a lightly re-worked version of a talk given in June 2019, and reflects the preoccupations of that time and the preceding couple of years, at most. Some of what it has to say about fascist tendencies in contemporary society would have to be revisited in light of the intensification represented by the necro-economical exigencies of our new "cower-at-home" (Mike Davis) world. This text, edited in the UK of April-May 2020, is dedicated to everyone who is *structurally* unable to cower at home due to the *ideology* that has transformed the world into a death trap for ("essential") workers.

This essay is based on a lecture held at Palazzo Badoer, luav in Venice, June 25 2019. The essay is accompanied by annotations edited by Ernest Ah, derived from conversations following the lecture, on site and via skype. The speaker is Marina Vishmidt.

Alberto Toscano and others have written on present-day fascisms principally as cultural rather than political phenomena (without disavowing the extent to which what is called "historical fascism" located in the interwar European space was also indebted to both residual and updated cultural agendas).² The relationship of this idea to Walter Benjamin's "the aestheticization of politics" can be noted, even if that familiar idea should always be understood and unpacked anew.³ The cultural dimension of fascism is hardly separable from any historical experience of fascism as a political phenomenon. If the concept of fascism is to be applied to multiple social and historical contexts, we are charged with the double task of understanding how their differences are politically salient and how these differences may reflect back on the concept itself.⁴ In this undertaking, a consideration of aesthetics, especially as it constructs and interpellates the fragile ego of the sovereign individual, can give us insight into the "structures of feeling" that, whether ambiguous or partisan to the extreme right, can normalize or mystify fascism.⁵ Hence, to understand certain forms of fascism as something "merely

¹ Theweleit is an apposite reference from another angle, as the stance of at least the US lockdown protesters recalls his discussion of *Freikorps* ethics in *Male Fantasies*: there is no greater freedom than exposure to death. Of course the difference is that the Freikorps soldier glorifies his own death, while the lockdown protester glorifies death *in general*, including that which may be visited on someone else due to the actions of the protester. See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies; 1, Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

² Alberto Toscano, "Notes on Late Fascism," *Historical Materialism* blog, 2 April 2017, <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/notes-late-fascism>. See also Ana Teixeira Pinto, "Irony and the Alt-Right: The Transgressive Masks of Reactionary Anti-Futurism," *springerin | Hefte für Gegenwartkunst*, no. 4 (2017). Ana Teixeira Pinto and Kerstin Stakemeier's "A Brief Glossary of Social Sadism" particularly draws attention to the imbrication of far-right positions and contemporary (white, male) fragility. See Ana Teixeira Pinto and Kerstin Stakemeier, "A Brief Glossary of Social Sadism," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 116 (2019).

³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version)," *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et. al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 122.

⁴ A useful consideration here is Ian Hacking's writing on the "concept" as being a "word in its sites." See Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 17.

⁵ One of the early elaborations of "structures of feeling" in Raymond Williams' work comes in his *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 64.

cultural,” which is to say, unthreatening, is an obvious miscalculation. As Toscano notes, even if current far-right nativist trends and movements constitute a “pseudo-insurgency,” we need to keep in mind that “a pseudo-insurgency was in many ways what the murderous fascism of Europe’s interwar period embodied,” insofar as it never really threatened but rather empowered the status quo, up to a certain point. Many would argue that even the world wars and their industrialized annihilation ended up doing much the same.⁶ Fascism could be defined minimally, then, as a commitment to finding some socio-historically ascribed groups more worthy of survival than others and the willingness to act on these beliefs—and, at maximum, as the political-military implementation of these beliefs as a technology of governance. In the latter case, we also need to extend the reach of the category “fascism” in time as well as in space. This would reveal that both the structural and arbitrary types of violence characteristic of white supremacy are by and large the same as those that characterize fascism, including social consensus (enthusiastic or passive cooperation with social violence) and systematic and sanctioned devaluation of certain groups considered unworthy of the social contract. For a number of reasons, however, anti-black white supremacy has generally not been registered as “fascist” in Western political theory or historiography. Yet the mobilization of one “race” to dominate and exploit another “inferior race” is the fascist current that unites chattel slavery, bonded labor, Jim Crow, contemporary carceral capitalism, and the devaluation of indigenous lives in the settler colony across the span of its existence, and it is well-documented that institutional white supremacy in the United States was inspirational for Nazi “race thinking,” although eugenicist race theories had held sway over the imperialist world for centuries already.⁷ We would also need to consider contemporary fascist tendencies outside the West, such as the current Indian regime of violent theocracy coupled with

6 Toscano, “Notes on Late Fascism.”

7 The archive for this historiography is extensive but an initial selection can include Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003); Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2003); James G. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

neoliberalism, or how the Burmese or Chinese states oppress religious and ethnic minorities through secular eliminationisms legitimized by arguments of national strength and purity.

Likewise, some commentators writing in the last few years have reminded us that aspects of fascism are “baked into” the competitive, possessive subjectivities and policies of neoliberal capitalism.⁸ Far-right tendencies, especially the libertarian alt-right ones, are already widely diffused and accepted in the guise of corporate-state governance, technological solutionism, the social Darwinist precepts of the app-based gig economy, and the broader results of neoliberal stagnation turning more and more of the population and the earth into the “waste” of capital accumulation. Crude state repression has over the last decade become the norm in many parts of the world, not just the parts liberal imperialism has not yet reached. To venture a political reading of this repression in terms of the structurally “fascist” character of neoliberalism is trickier. Discerning the point when “extreme” or unleashed capitalism tips over into fascism continues to be a challenge to categorical thinking. For example, is it up till the moment that those aspects are expressed in a newly articulated combination of the ideological, the cultural, and the political that roughly aligns with the particular historical fascist playbook of xenophobia, expansionism, and the unrelenting suppression of internal enemies? Is it business as usual, so to speak, for the past five hundred years, which have been the era of structural as well as expressive racism, until racism becomes overt public policy, and then we can say, oh, we’re in fascism; but equally well we can say, oh, we’re in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth-century United States, or any settler-colonial state in the past few centuries, or twenty-first-century Israel, or so many places and times that are left out of “universal history” but can be read differently from the standpoint of those in the struggle against not just destruction but erasure, then and now.⁹ Why is fascism only named as such when it is whiteness that splinters

8 A few recent essays on this point include Éric Fassin, “The Neo-Fascist Moment of Neoliberalism,” *openDemocracy*, accessed August 10, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/neo-fascist-moment-of-neoliberalism/>; Ana Teixeira Pinto, “Capitalism with a Transhuman Face: The Afterlife of Fascism and the Digital Frontier,” *Third Text* 33, no. 3 (2019); and the special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* on “Neoliberalism’s Authoritarian (Re)Turns” (118, no. 2, April 2019).

9 On the notion of a “universal history” of fascism, see Angela Dimitrakaki, Larne Abse Gogarty and Marina Vishmidt, “Anti-fascist Art Theory: A Roundtable Discussion,” *Third Text* 33, no. 3 (2019): 451.

This idea that everyone has an equal chance to succeed while they don’t come from equal circumstances, “the level playing field,” invariably leads to extreme social hierarchies. The production of capitalist subjectivity is intensified and made extreme and murderous in fascism, but those patterns are already set in liberal democracy, or rather neoliberalism in the last decades.

into lives worthy of life on the one hand, and the death or deportation of other newly or newly forcefully dehumanized whites, as in the Second World War and the Holocaust—but not recognized in the consolidation of whiteness against its predetermined others that constituted and continues to constitute the modern polity? From that vantage point, fascism comes to seem like simply the intensification of the long-engrained lethal tendencies of the existing mode of production and governance. Capitalism without a filter, the grinning face of more and more people rendered surplus on a global scale, which now also includes the planet being burnt in the furnace of accumulation. Nationalism, again, is part of this normalization, a very important part, since it's about the valorization of affects of purity, tradition, and exclusion of harmful, dirty others who are poised to menace "our" way of life.¹⁰ All of these are connected, structurally and libidinally. As many historical analyses of fascism have stressed, it's about how threatened the current state and organs of power feel—whether they are threatened by a large working-class movement in the 1920s, or by the prospect of climate and war-induced migratory movements now—while working to prop up the increasingly fragile architecture of financial stability and extraction at home. So it's not so much about identifying a dominant or definitive crisis tendency that can blossom into a new face of fascism (now rebranded as "ethnonationalist" identity politics) as it is about mapping the relationships between many tendencies. The old question of the relation between structure and history in critical analysis might also be revisited here: What is the analytic weight of the empirical-historical in the formulation of concepts, and, conversely, can historical phenomena only be made sense of using already available concepts that themselves (often implicitly) carry a sediment of historical knowledge?

But moving more closely into the orbit of the central question of the "individual" and the ruins thereof, some more specific outlines of this individual should be established. In the West, the individual as a liberal democratic subject and point of departure for aesthetic experience remains central in the space of art. This emphasis on the individual is (besides its umbilical relationship to the "cord of gold" brandished by High Net Worth Individuals and their tax shelters) what renders that space structurally right-wing, as Morgan

¹⁰ This has latterly spectacularly recrudesced in the Trumpian idiom of the "China virus" to refer to Covid-19.

Quintance has observed in another context.¹¹ This fetishism of the individual holds across the "liberal" public sphere. In the contemporary art world, global at the level of the marketplace but Western in ethos, the individual is unaccountable due to their special creativity and insight, while in civil society they are unaccountable due to being a free citizen / taxpayer / man / member of the white race. In both sites, the individual is the ground of all authenticity, and the realization of your authenticity is generally as far as your individual responsibility goes. In the space of art, however, this notion of individuality as authenticity is admixed with the residual glamor of artistic autonomy. Suhail Malik has also approached the ideology of free creativity in the space of art as the last resort of the otherwise ridiculed and disavowed "art religion," as Adorno called it, of artistic autonomy.¹² The reactionary notion of autonomy never really went away, and it was resilient to all types of critique, not least institutional critique. Every time an artist is given a free pass to "question" or "problematize" without any consequences, regardless of their own ethical or political beliefs, it's a feedback loop between the sovereign individuality of the artist and the sovereign "free zone" of the institution of art. Certainly, this is a notion of autonomy that has been comprehensively deconstructed at the level of discourse, but this makes no difference so long as the institution of art is maintained through, and affirms the sovereignty of, capitalist accumulation through its practical existence as a "space apart." This happens not only in art spaces with little or no public funding—NGOs are part of this economy, albeit with some different mediations depending on site and point of insertion into global networks. The fetish of the individual (artist or citizen) and the sanctity of the individual's property rights to their speech and creative imagination should be seen as both a result of and a compensation for the suppression of thinking in terms of community, collectivity, or trans-individual responsibility that decades of neoliberal ideology, as enforced by the conditions of everyday life, have established as the absolute bedrock of whatever social contract we can still talk about. Fascists mobilize the fetish of the sovereign individual to organize wounded individuals who feel their rights are being infringed. Similarly, some artists reject calls for boycott or critique because they

¹¹ Morgan Quintance, "The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World's Performance of Progression," *e-flux conversations*, October 2017.

¹² For one instance of this discussion, see Suhail Malik, "When is Contemporary Art?" *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016)

The shared material struggle is one that traverses the institutional site and goes beyond it, like think about the role of *Decolonize this place*, that was not immanent to the art field in the Whitney Biennial boycott, or the whole organizing process. Rather than just pinning it down to boycott around Kanders and

What are the class, race and gender implications of an art world that runs in great part on the private capital of the ruling class, that owes its existence to power of the "ruling ideas"—whether they're soft liberal or white nationalist—even if it would dissent from them on the level of content? This is also becoming more and more the case for the university, again, in some places more than others.

154 border control and Israel Palestine and weapons manufacturing, this is a question about how cultural institutions are sustained. It is not just about “bad apples.” And not just cultural institutions of course, but ultimately all the structures that they are a part of and perpetuate.

consider these to impinge on their artistic freedom or their structural super-precarity, depending on how they choose to wield the trope of “privilege.” In recent years, the idea that the working conditions of artists have a specifically de-politicizing effect has come to constitute a common notion in the field, as I will discuss later.

The untouchable sovereignty of the individual as a monad with rights can be found in the liberal blind spot when it comes to recognizing far-right ideologies in the mainstream, as well as in anarcho-libertarian concepts of the subject that can invisibly shape the ultra-reflexive social norms of the activist left. Meanwhile, the atomized individuals of the far-right call on authoritarianism to help them organize, as observed plentifully both in the movement fringes and in parliamentary politics across the world in recent years. Importantly, the individual conditioned to assert hyper-sovereignty in an unbroken line from consumption practices to social hatred is not an ahistorical “ideal type.” The structural conditions for hyper-individuality are very particular in an era when individuals seem to objectively lose centrality in their own narratives. Social theory tends toward the posthumanism that converts coherent individuals into bundles of affects, while the ongoing effects of Deleuze’s diagnosis of a shift to “dividuals” is manifested in the collection and operationalization of data and the increasing influence of machine intelligence in organizing our individual and collective lives. The sovereign individual is both threatened and fundamentally shaped by those conditions of emergence and the fear of being rendered surplus, of being rendered unnecessary and redundant—a failed consumer, a bad debtor, a non-“influencer.” The rational human subject, made superfluous by machine intelligence and political-economic disempowerment alike, clings to technology to assert their cognitive excellence—what else is the driving mythology of the chan boards and incel gamer cultures, not to mention wider afield?¹³ The individual goes into hyperdrive, radiating animosity as they break down and disintegrate: the individual as a radioactive ruin. This individual’s individuality is largely determined by the need to eclipse and repress the trans-individual conditions of their coming to be (and to die) in this particular hyperbolic form, that is to deny others, and to deny the “other,” with a degree of exaggeration that departs from the defensive instincts of the normative liberal individual in degree, rather than in kind. This “undeath” of the individual—so much like the flourishing

¹³ For a recent mapping of these subcultures, see Florian Cramer, “Meme Wars: Internet culture and the ‘alt right,’” filmed March 2017 at FACTLiverpool, video, 55:19 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiNYuhLKzi8>.

undeath of artistic autonomy—in this specific form of society is what must be dissembled at all costs in the sovereign individual’s violent spasms of hyper-assertion.

The role of technologies (in the broad as well as the narrow sense of cultures of the digital) as the amplifier and vehicle of these tendencies would need to be precisely mapped. In employing the lens of “technology,” we’d also have to examine the level of capital as an immanent as well as historical logic of modernity. In so doing, we could suggest that the individual was always an ideological alibi displacing the homogenous disposability of abstract labor. Here we would have to understand the prevalence of discourses of technological improvement as the unique path to social improvement, the ideology of Silicon Valley (which attends any project, whatever its stated politics, that takes specific forms of technology as the carriers of its social or political objectives) as precisely the mobilization of tropes of emancipation and transgression—now conventionally “disruption”—which mediates the post-human elite capitalist utopia. In this, it shares the supremacist impulses of the far-right, but also provides fodder for the right’s antagonism to the social abstraction and cosmopolitanism that superficially seem to characterize such universalist visions, and lead some ideologues to characterize market-friendly techno-optimism as “globalist,” that all-too-perverse rejection of neoliberalism (in the name of something constitutively “worse”).

In such technological determinisms, whether they proceed through the modality of glorifying violence, or through propagating app-optimism, it is a professed neutrality that allocates their social credibility to them. This neutrality dissociates the historical from the social, which gives the discourse of technology a distinct utilitarian advantage over ideology. Consequently, it serves as a more effective instrument for far-right agendas, given the mainstream legitimacy that decades of neoliberalism have conferred on technological determinism. Its mantras of the “new economy” or the “knowledge economy” have been a reliable source of alibis for the disposability of the majority of people. In the world of para-academic critical theory, commentators and theorists such as Benjamin Bratton propound the idea that politics are irrelevant when the earth has been subsumed by technological infrastructures. This is a softer version of the “neo-reactionary” thesis of Nick Land, Mencijs Moldbug, and related trolls, but it is insidious because it de-legitimizes any direct political action

The entrepreneurialism, the perfectionism through technology that usually is spoken about in the Silicon Valley or data-capitalist ideologies, just intensifies the fascist tendencies that are built into normalized individualism. There is a kind of optimism about technology being good for everyone—everyone taken in a very homogeneous way, without considering the actual intensification of inequalities that, for example, the gig economy produces. But there isn’t a way within techno-optimism to understand those inequalities. That can only be understood from the standpoint of specific kinds of collective politics, especially labor politics. So the connection between fascism and techno-optimism is really this idea of a success-ideology, which is supposed to apply to everyone equally, but doesn’t talk about the non-level playing field for the competition that data-driven capitalism actually intensifies.

156

framed in terms of solidarity and the dismantling of powerful structures of exploitation as being retrograde and dogmatic.¹⁴ One of its manifestations is the contradictory elevation of the skilled engineer as the ultimate sovereign individual—a much invested-in character mask for those plagued by the fear that the very systems they build and endorse are rapidly making them redundant. This is the palatable, technocratic face of the impulse to fetishize a crude notion of rationality, as it doesn't overtly commit to far-right ideologies. But the mythology of the skilled engineer as the ultimate sovereign individual is more effective at normalizing far-right ontologies than ideologies that are more explicit at championing social hierarchy based on the degree of disposability of human lives, because technology is neutral, it is realistic, it is only concerned with what *works*.

The counterpoint to these kinds of pseudo-rationalist modalities, at least as it can be observed in the spaces of online sociality and in general cultural parameters, seems to take the form of a reassertion of concreteness, cultural specificity, and vulnerability. Admittedly this is a suggestion predicated on quite a crude schema, which is reproduced by the flattening multiplicity of online socialization and its cultures of "debate," but is far from universal. Without discounting the performative play and tremendous organizing potential that can be located in these spaces, they are also spaces that encourage nihilistic reductivisms, amounting to hyper-ironization (the plausible deniability engaged in by far-right culture warriors) and a draining of inflection and ambiguity, not so much of "regardless where you locate yourself on the political spectrum" but as the building blocks of that spectrum itself, set up as it is for the commodification of individual data assets.¹⁵ The inescapability of both semantic flattening

14 For a recent example and a critique, see Benjamin H. Bratton, "18 Lessons of Quarantine Urbanism," *Strelka Mag* (April 3, 2020), <https://strelkamag.com/en/article/18-lessons-from-quarantine-urbanism> and Godofredo Pereira, "How Technocrats Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Quarantine," April 15, 2020, <http://kim.hfg-karlsruhe.de/how-technocrats-learned-to-stop-worrying/>.

15 The technological and social infrastructures of social media are unfortunately not in the purview of moralistic critics such as Angela Nagle, whose "blame the left for the right" discursive strategy is characteristic of red-brown apologists through the ages. Her *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Aldershot, Hants: Zero Books) was much discussed in 2017 when it was published in the aftermath of Trump's election. Similar "anti-PC" "from-the-left" chestbeating can be found in the published works of Mark Lilla a.o. This is the tendency that in the UK context rather infamously culminated in the right-wing libertarian formation Spiked, which started—as did a surprising number of Tory government advisers that it's produced—in the Revolutionary Communist Party.

and moral polarization within digital platforms and IRL (if such a distinction still holds water) scrambles positions of resistance as part of the corporate logic which shapes every layer of their design. This scrambling can be most easily understood as the violence of "self-branding." The inescapability of individual definition and self-ownership defines these spaces and the modes of interaction both afforded and rewarded by them. The liberal individual is perpetuated as the fount of moral authority, even if the positioning is around a collective politics. For this reason, these spaces of sociality can fall back into the archaic "rationality" vs. "corporeality" split in ethical terms that seem to make sense in the cartoon violence of Twitter wars, if not providing a reflection of most participants' "real" position. However, what it does reflect is a broader phenomenon still, in the political common sense of the present, which can be gleaned from the currency of terms such as "bodies" as a new ontologization of what earlier activist or academic vocabularies might address as subjects, or, more prosaically, "people" or "folks." More expansively, uppermost in the current moment is a "politics of vulnerability," which, as some have noted, features the "self-assertion of the body in a politics of recognition" but which "risks a merely symbolic resistance, posturing and new moralisms."¹⁶ This further deepens the inescapability of the liberal individual as the nucleus of moral authority in social media spaces, since notions of a collective body or a social relation get boiled down to a named individual and their followers; the building and extraction of human capital. It can't of course also go without mentioning that the main instigators and mobilizers of the "politics of vulnerability," and "identity politics" in general, are the far-right and the neo-fascists, which is a depressing outcome of a process that Judith Butler identified as seeded in 2011 with Occupy and the movements of the squares. The cultural currency of this tendency has become established over the past few years, though the affective modality has been around for a while, and has certainly informed some of the more visible practices in the "post-internet" landscape, whether of the "ironized" (2016) or "woke" (2017) variety. On a slightly distinct note from this, particularly the constant return to the feeling of implicatedness, or complicity, the passionate "cruel optimism" of inhabiting and profiting

16 Christopher Chitty, "Reassessing Foucault: Modern Sexuality and the Transition to Capitalism," *Viewpoint*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/04/20/reassessing-foucault-modern-sexuality-and-the-transition-to-capitalism/>.

157

Individualism is structurally reinforced when you are constrained or compelled to brand-build on social media, which means you have to take these really simplistic positions in order to even gesture towards alliance or solidarity, which ends up reproducing individualism and the blur between "uniqueness" and USP (unique selling point). You see this at extremes in crowdsourcing for medical expenses and crowdsourcing for rent. It's all part of the same thing, other infrastructures of support get dissolved and destroyed, so you are forced to individualize in that way. This is structural to social media, and social media is structural to a particular phase of accumulation.

One of my questions, which is maybe a really basic question that can be dealt with in the work of Judith Butler as well as others, such as Athena Athanassiou, on the politics of assembly, is whether there is any kind of necessarily emancipatory politics of vulnerability or if it can just as easily be the kinds of politics of vulnerability we also see manifested in far right nativism and victim identity politics of the right.

I guess I want to find out where this notion of vulnerability acquires its content, how it acquires its content in that thinking and in that work, and I feel like that question about its coding by the right or the left or whatever is to an extent dealt with in that work, but I am still trying to find out. So the idea that vulnerability when collectively enacted is necessarily progressive or emancipatory is maybe what I have a problem with. It's not a basis for political subjectivity.

from violent structures while denouncing violence in a sort of intensely affective and subjectively dissociated way—abstractly—is something I have been thinking about under the rubric of “reproductive realism,” and like the techno-positive/ist orientation, it is an insidious set of mannerisms that lead to the narrowing of political possibility. “Reproductive realism” can be understood as a spin on “capitalist realism,” pointing to the same kind of closure, but a closure gained via the embrace of, rather than the disavowal of, certain forms of critique. It implies a discourse that takes the prioritization of survival and collective struggle integral to “social reproduction” and turns it from a politics into an object and a strategy. It is often adopted on behalf of, rather than by, people with marginalized identities, and turns these into a set of alibis for personal advancement. Here, survival is reified and problematically opposed to political commitment when these come into contradiction, or is itself framed as the central political commitment. Meanwhile there has been a subtle but important shift from “survival” to “keeping your head down,” from the embodied politics of moving together to the representational politics of making it. This may come couched in an individual or a communal key (and the distinction is crucial), and is clearly far more complex a set of debates than can be set out here; a “politics of survival” is the communal or social expression of resistance in structurally racist and misogynist realities, whether or not it becomes a tag for individual agendas. The point specifically is a motivated misreading of social reproduction feminism’s emphasis on survival as being antithetical to critique, and thus in many practical contexts, becoming not just indistinguishable from opportunism but actively erasing the possibility of revolt from the horizon, along with the actual lives, subjectivities and histories of those in open struggle and resistance against oppressive and extractive authorities, protocols and institutions.

“Reproductive realism” is perhaps better described as conformism. This is how the techno-positivist (or “rationalist”) stance and the vulnerability stance are linked—at least as a duality of reified positions, upheld by protocols of sociality and the emergent objects of cultural common sense. More precisely, it underscores the trend of propping up the individual as the nexus of distinctive and marketable affect. The power to resist or organize, both on a collective and individual level, seems to be suppressed the more the individual is affirmed, programmatically, as no more than a behaviorist bundle of such affects and data, while the processes and the specific racialized,

gendered, and accumulative conjunctures within which such an individual comes to be are neglected. As with techno-positivism, the tendency to emphasize the individual as the ground of moral authority acts to deflect critique. Techno-positivism designates critique as a refusal of complexity; reproductive realism too but identifies critique as an expression of privilege. These are two sides of a broad cultural tendency that propagates conservatism in the guise of solidarity. A recent example from the UK: In a debate over a regional literary festival that is receiving counter-extremism funding from the state and the police, some were calling for a boycott, while others opposed a boycott with the argument that “having principles is a privilege not everyone can afford.”¹⁷ The historical novelty of such positions, however, should not be overestimated. It is more of a background hum.

So it becomes clear that there are structural forces that push the performance of self either as rational individual or as affective individual. Technology creates the milieu in which these structural forces take this particular form. In terms of symptoms, both kinds of tendencies—the pseudo-rationalist and the pseudo-affective one—are just different ways of escaping the social or trying to avoid thinking about social abstraction and the role it plays in our experience, artistic and otherwise. In that light, technology and corporeality are both fantasies of imputed concreteness which offer an escape from all politics but the most metaphorical. In this light, does an attentiveness to the political performativity of negativity, or a diffractive unknowing, have some potential to suspend the kind of self-affirmation common to both of those kinds of politics? This would be precisely insofar as they both work by consolidating identity against the threat to sovereign individuality posed by both the prevailing techno-economic conditions and by collective politics. With regard to the second tendency, it has become rather common to default to “self-care” as a way to help alleviate contradiction or “feeling bad” on the systemic as well as the personal scale.¹⁸ This risks disavowing the imperative to reconnect affect and analysis along different lines, rather than reject one in favor of the other—an imperative which is presented by the contingencies of both study and struggle. The

17 Saima Mir, “Does Bradford Festival’s Counter-Extremism Funding Warrant a Boycott?” *Guardian*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/24/bradford-literary-festival-counter-extremism-funding-boycott>.

18 Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Class and Race in the Age of Trump* (London and New York: Verso, 2018): 101-102.

subjective cultivation but also a practice of solidarity. It’s a misconception that the individual can somehow be an ethical bulwark against structural forces rather than embodying them.

The basic premise is that negation should not be thought of as an individual or aesthetic act, that it is something that emerges as part of a collective process and that it’s a desiring process, as well as a process of withdrawal. That has to be understood to be a productive—not productivist, but productive—dimension to negation. That practices of antagonism are also creative, that they create new forms. But this shouldn’t evacuate the aspect of bad feelings, the aspect of how feelings of defeat and worthlessness do not get extinguished by organizing or collective practices, they’re always present as well. So seeing a more dialectical relation between care and bad feelings in thinking about negation as a kind of political practice. Just having a more developed understanding of negation as a practice, rather than as an attitude or a simple kind of anti sort of thing. It’s negativity in the material

160 sense of being productive, in the dialectical sense of being productive, but not being exclusively productive in the affirmative sense. That we consider negation as social. Once again it comes back to: How can we imagine the social concept of negation that is already productive when it becomes a collective practice? Whereas when it's individual it's just kind of an impoverished concept of negation which can also be aestheticized very easily and then recaptured, the aestheticization-of-politics thing. Collective forms of negation can also be fascist. It's not just that they're collective that makes them politically progressive or critical. There has to be something else than them just being collective.

performativity, or the praxis, rather, of negation has the capacity to work to suspend the overdetermined space of who can perform as a critical subject or an aesthetic subject by taking on the contingent effects (emotional and political) and burdensome affects of working in solidarity, rather than affirming a fantasy rationality as the authentic criticality. This also encompasses the possibility that cultural spaces cannot tolerate too much reflexivity about their own material and ideological conditions. In that sense, practices of negation might end up risking the conditions of possibility of their own inscription into the excluding spaces of the cultural, aesthetic, and academic and experience the pressure to build long-term and liveable structures on other principles. This is not just an issue of negation, but of pitching the critique one is developing at an infrastructural (enabling and extending) rather than institutional (preserving and legitimating) level.

With regard to the more generic performativity of the sovereign individual in online social spaces, and how this is reflected in the rancid collectivities of the far-right, it is useful to recall that the "possessive investment in whiteness" also features largely in the "culture wars" undertaken by some white activists who position themselves on the "traditional left." Thus, it is also the unchecked claim to the universal, the claim to criticality, and even the claim to cultural transgressiveness that rails against these emancipatory legacies of "the West" being degraded and rejected by those pathetic leftists derided as being obsessed with social justice and intent on abasing themselves to the level of the "invaders." These are the distortions wrapped up in the fascist conspiracy theory of "population replacement" that informs ethnonationalist politics in the US and in many parts of Europe.¹⁹ These ethnonationalist projects emphasize their libertarianism as the heritage of Western "universalism" in contrast to the "brown hordes," as Jasbir Puar has clearly articulated in her work.²⁰ Concomitantly, the practices of "pinkwashing" in the politics of queerness enlist some queer people to play a part in the hegemonic axis asserting its

19 For an overview of theories of the "great replacement" and their functionality in murderous far-right conspiracism, see Rosa Schwartzburg, "The 'White Replacement Theory' Motivates Alt-right Killers the World Over," *Guardian*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/great-replacement-theory-alt-right-killers-el-paso>. For a striking instance of anti-migration polemics from the "left," see Angela Nagle, "The Left Case Against Open Borders," *American Affairs* 2, no. 4 (Winter 2018), <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2018/11/the-left-case-against-open-borders/>.

20 Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 2nd edition (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

power.²¹ These discourses solicit selected sexually non-normative subjects to understand their investment in whiteness as a license to perform deviance and blast their critics (e.g. Milo Yiannopoulos in the US). And what is the "God-Emperor" Trump to his supporters if not an opportunity to de-sublimate fascism imagined as deviance; as criticality becomes a language only available to white men (cf. Jordan Wolfson, or, to be more site-specific in Venice, Christoph Büchel in the institutional art world), often associated with spectacular and solipsistic, capital-intensive self-loathing or bathetic political irony.²² I am interested in how artists who function in systems of oppressive power based on ascribed identities, as well as within historical and contemporary movements (such as the Black radical tradition), are reclaiming a critical language of abstraction and negativity as an immanent and material force of critique, associating it anew with affect and complexity, not only in their artistic work but often also in grassroots politics. Notable examples are Sondra Perry, Cameron Rowland, Simone Leigh, Diamond Stingily, and others. For me, this kind of negativity contests the universalism at 1:1 scale that lends such a powerful quality to possessive, and often ingenuously assumed, investments in whiteness. Sylvia Wynter's work is particularly relevant here, and her insistence on human as a "genre" defined by the overdetermined historical accident of white supremacist patriarchal capitalism (with the understanding that there's never been any other kind, so the redundant descriptors are unpacked for a reason) is something yet to be dismantled in our praxis, as a matter of urgency. Regarding techno-cultures, it's worth returning to those admittedly canonical Haraway essays on standpoint methodology and the *Cyborg Manifesto*. These texts help to disaggregate the sedimented understanding of the human insofar as it legitimates domination over everything situated outside the jealously policed boundaries of "human." For Wynter and others, this disaggregation is the crucial task of socialist feminism and scientific practice alike. Going back to the ruses of rationality, and

21 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2017; Jasbir K. Puar, *Queer Tourism: Geographies of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Julieta Paredes, "The Neocolonial Queer," in *The Global Trajectories of Queerness: Re-thinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South*, eds. Ashley Tellis and Sruti Bala (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

22 Alexandra Stock, "The privileged, violent stunt that is the Venice Biennale boat project," *Mada Masr*, May 29, 2019, <https://madamasr.com/en/2019/05/29/feature/culture/the-privileged-violent-stunt-that-is-the-venice-biennale-boat-project/>; Diana Hamilton, "Who Likes Jordan Wolfson?," *frieze*, 6 December 2019, <https://frieze.com/article/who-likes-jordan-wolfson/>; Pinto and Stakemeier, "A Brief Glossary of Social Sadism."

commentators who situate themselves on the left yet cement their claims with appeals to exclusion and normativity (and more recently, strong borders as a socialist project),²³ I am always struck by how politically oblivious such calls are, and how incredibly overdetermined. Universalism is defined nostalgically as a norm whose racial and gender politics, whose historical conditions of possibility, are constitutively disavowed. The bad object of “identity politics” on the other hand is identified as the irrational, divisive, and narcissistic source of all disaffection with emancipation, inviting a backlash from fascist cultural politics. Rationality is always the red herring here—as if the contest over what constitutes reason and its others were not the very fulcrum of political antagonism. I also detect this kind of complacency in discursive formations like “xenofeminism,” which fall some way behind Haraway by invoking “science” and “alienation” as a positive resource for an emancipatory gender politics without attempting to define those terms, either from the history of feminism or any other anti-systemic political project, not least communism.²⁴ Meanwhile, it is mainly white men (and a few right-wing white women, like the artist Deanna Havas or, leaving the “art world,” Katie Hopkins and alt-right fembot hosts of the Red Ice podcast) who are grandstanding for “free speech” online and elsewhere. They claim universalism but rather transparently clamor for more space for themselves and others like them, often to express or support violently reactionary attitudes under the flimsy cover of “debate.” The claim to “diversity” of opinion underpinning the sad “debate me” trope levels all real-life disparities in both power and access to a contest of legible articulation. In doing so it evacuates the space of debate, which makes it such an effective diversion from the actual connections between far-right discourses. This is why the alt-right’s use of Pepe the Frog first seemed like inconsequential meme culture, but came to be a symbol of white supremacist hate that filtered into the Trump presidency’s racist policies. Among the most obvious manifestations of the gendered and racialized insulation of whiteness, especially white maleness,

23 Angela Nagle, “The Left Case Against Open Borders.”

24 See critical responses to the XFM Manifesto from Isabel de Sena, “Stirring the Embers: Preliminary Critical Notes on Xenofeminisms,” in *The Beautiful Warriors: Technofeminist Praxis in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Cornelia Sollfrank (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2019); Annie Goh, “Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism,” *Mute*, 29 July, 2019, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/appropriating-alien-critique-xenofeminism>; Jules Joanne Gleeson, “Breakthroughs and Bait: On Xenofeminism & Alienation,” *Mute*, October 19, 2019, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/breakthroughs-bait-xenofeminism-alienation>.

is the notion that there is zero connection between far-right discourse about destroying other people and actual—systematic or punctual—violence against them. The enthusiasm for this dissociation that continues to abide in the white liberal public sphere is like a juddering reflex of the actually undead. I am thinking here of the uninformed defenses of the now-defunct alt-right art gallery LD50 in London in the name of diversity of opinion, but also how the institutional space of art is particularly prone to such positions—that never really go away, regardless of the political situation, precisely due to the undead glorification of the sovereign individual as creative genius, and the natural alliance between their interests and the liberal “society” that “must be defended.”²⁵ The violent state suppression of migrants and migrant solidarity movements under the “horseshoe” theory is another example. This theory posits that the so-called extreme left and extreme right must both be brought to heel lest they trigger social chaos. In practice, the focus is always on the radical left, given the pervasive support for far-right ideologies among law enforcement agencies. This theory has been absorbed and mobilized not only by the ruins of liberal democracy across the Western world, but also Russia and many other regions.

Such passionate, affective commitments to possessive whiteness (and maleness, as Klaus Theweleit and others have detailed) are in line with the ostensibly neutral legitimacy afforded by discourses of technology to what are often *de facto*, if not *de jure* (as championed by Peter Thiel, Nick Land and everyone who still toils in the propaganda fields of “dark enlightenment”) enthusiastic forms of the elitist social Darwinism of the libertarian capitalist mindspace that valorizes the meritocratic sovereign individual above all, as discussed earlier.²⁶ This then forms a logical extension to the competitive turn that exemplifies the shift from liberal to neoliberal homo economicus, as Foucault, Feher, and others

25 For the Shut Down LD50 campaign, see <https://shutdownld50.tumblr.com/>. For some typically complacent responses, see JJ Charlesworth, “The Strange Case of the ‘Alt-Right’ Gallery,” *Art Review*, March 3, 2017, <https://artreview.com/opinion-3-march-2017-the-strange-case-of-the-alt-right-gallery/>; Jonathan Jones, “No one should demand the closure of galleries—even for far-right artworks,” *Guardian*, February 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2017/feb/22/art-galleries-free-speech-ld50-dalston>. For more recent “free speech” handwringing, see the debates in and in response to the “Cancel Culture” event held by Spike Art Magazine in Berlin, May 20, 2019.

26 Patrik Hermansson, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall and Simon Murdoch, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

The use of identity politics is very contentious. I think we really should retire this term unless we’re talking about white nationalism. Because it’s really just a way of dismissing struggles as not class struggles that are class struggles—class considered as any form of collectivity: women as a class, queers as a class, Black people as a class, as well as a working class—material, economic, and social struggles over resources, survival, and dignity.

164 The reason we might still be interested in universalism is that it allows us to identify with each other over difference, so it's an anti-particularity dynamic, but not an end in itself. For instance in a discussion of how so many people spontaneously turned out at JFK against the Muslim ban, which is Asad Haider's case study. None of these people necessarily have any existing political alliances, but they somehow all knew that it was important to organize together for this reason.

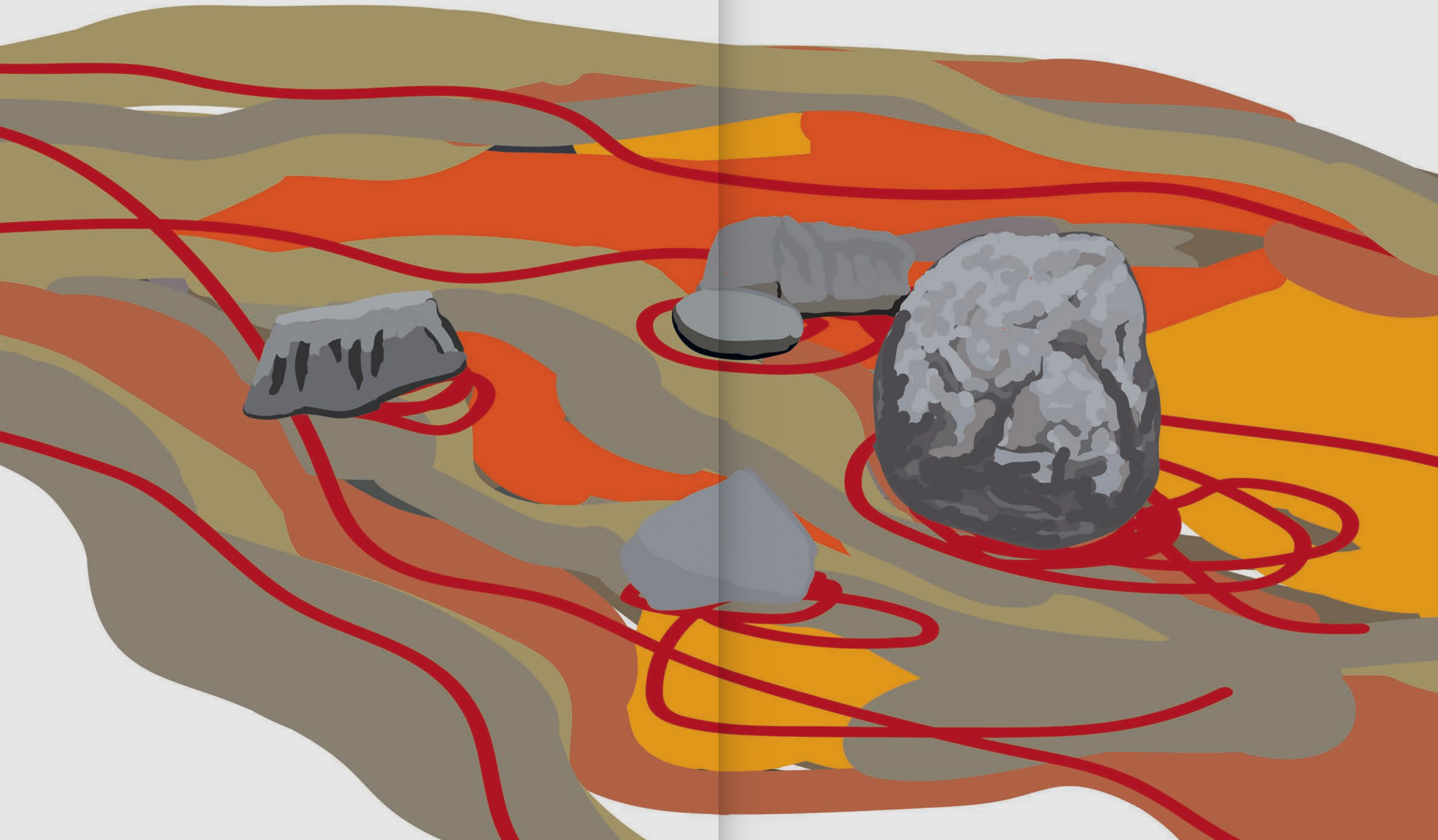
have outlined.²⁷ As Asad Haider has written, if there is to be any revolutionary (or for our purposes here, non-fascist) use of universalism, it has to be in its capacity to create identification across alterity and not in the subsumption or erasure of difference into an ascriptive or aspirational norm—when that difference itself is reinforced by the relentless sorting operations of structural violence that operate precisely through the attachment to norms.²⁸ Here we should consider the “prefigurative” and its ambiguities, i.e. the often-challenged desire to live as if society had already been transformed. While it does carry the risk of complacency, that kind of paradoxical temporality also seems inextricable from the intimate register of any transformative politics. If you can't relate that transformation to your own daily experience, then the given order certainly seems far more immutable, unassailable, and “natural.” Without a strong link to political praxis, accelerating the decomposition of the sovereign individual is an idealist project. The aesthetic is, however, useful here, as there's no such thing as “mere culture,” whether it's the class-stratified spaces of contemporary art or the less determined spaces of music or style cultures. We also have to recall philosopher David Lloyd's analysis that the aesthetic subject, as formulated by Kant, has always served as the ethical condition of possibility for the bourgeois individual. This ethical power has cemented the link between freedom and necessity which has made this subject almost impossible to overturn since it gained legal and economic reality in capitalist modernity. This is also heightened by this ethical power's empty, formal, and thus infinitely flexible character, whose wholeness is restored in aesthetic experience, despite civil society having split it between formal and substantive “rights,” notional and actual freedom. Lloyd also remarks that this split in the subject is echoed in the state when it sublates the contradiction between its universalism and the violent defense of private property by means of culture and the aesthetic. The bourgeois individual, doubtless, though still feeding off the global majorities who could never attain that subjectivity, is facing a long biopolitical period of decay. Only that this time the main threat is not posed by the rise of mass movements, authoritarianism, and industrial capitalism, but extractive, authoritarian, and now,

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1970-79*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Michel Feher, “Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital,” trans. Ivan Ascher, *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009).

²⁸ Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity*.

literally viral threats to social and bodily integrity. The degree to which this individual feels existentially menaced is the exact degree to which emancipatory discourses are captured by the right. And this is also why once again it is only solidarity and non-identity combined with material struggle and materialist analysis that will have any traction on such a terrain for those contingently referred to as “us.” But we may yet find that compelling new narratives of collective emancipation can hold off the recrudescence of the ruin once known as the individual for only so long. Maybe it really is the thing that cannot die, even if it wanted to.

after years of being pushed around the people of mortville had enough so they got together and stormed the palace... class traitor princess coo-coo loved herbert the garbage man, she threw away her throne, joined the others and rallied in the streets... rallied, vomited, lost her mind for good (to rabies), for the liberation of all... the crowd did a whole job: the queen is dead on a skewer LEZZ EAT HER welcome to the sanctuary of mortville, sewer town of inverts broke folks and nudists where sex change lesbianism lottery grow rampant home to those who killed their husbands, the discreet nightmare of the bourgeoisie, ever urgent, ever to be quelled: poors and perverts pooling their powers... beyond repair! live up to yr bad reputation bitches



ALL SOULS OF THE QUEER DEPARTED

A Note:

I initiate this text by calling forth a lineage that locates a particular chain of transmission—how this death ritual practice came to me, the “who” and the “how” and the “where.” There are, however, other interlocutors in this text I do not directly address but who nevertheless speak to, through, and within me, without whose words I am speechless. The languages of transmission are multiple, the voices many, my writing only possible as deep listening. I hear Larry Mitchell’s *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (1977) and *The Terminal Bar* (1982); I hear Terre Thaemlitz, Silvia Federici, Elizabeth Povinelli. I am an interpreter. Translation occurs in the resonance between *their-languages* and *my-stories*: traces of imaginary relation, signs of unnatural kinship, a performative genealogy composed by affinity, intention, and intensity. I write-with-them.



176
This is a practice transmitted to me as part of an oral tradition.

It is a death ritual practice.

It was transmitted to me by Jassem Hindi,
and it was transmitted to him by Keith Hennessy,
and it was transmitted to him
by people whose names I do not know.

It is imperative
to state these routes of transmission,
to acknowledge
how I received it,
to know
that it has passed through others,
that it expresses a displaced inheritance.

It resonates from the margins,
moving around,
and sounds different
depending upon where you are standing.

It takes its shape from the
faggots,
their friends,
women,
people of color,
indigenous folk,
an expansive ancestry
of all those
who feel the energy of oppression,
thinking about what it means to be alive, *'cause ain't nobody free.*

These are the people who maintain
its ongoing, uneven transmission.

Their voices are dissonant,
their sounds irresolvable.

It is a practice to learn something from,
a workshop,
a study,
but it may also be (and has been)

177
a ceremony,

a demonstration.

It is especially suitable for when times get bad,
when empires are disintegrating,
the healers go into invisibility
and the streets of the men fill with plunder and destruction.

An important part of this practice
is to first describe a few things
about where I am
and some of the movements
that have led me here.

For a long time,
I have been listening
to the stories that gay men
in the devastated cities of the North-West
have told me
about what constitutes freedom.
Stories of liberation
modeled on an ideal
of pleasure as transgression.
A permission to the self,
authorized by the Self,
to transcend the political altogether
in a libidinal embrace of lavish expenditure.

Love for Sale.

I sought out this promise of the beyond,
on dancefloors and in darkrooms,
with substances and through sexuality.
It was a restless stirring and searching,
throughout which I suspected
that this particular story about freedom
didn't actually make much sense.

I sensed *a dis-ease,*

a memory in my bones
moving me to explore
the limits of my living body,
to seek out secret knowledge
in my desire for heterotopia.

I call this sense melancholia.

I am aware that in the language of therapy
this term is often used to describe a depressed state
that results from unprocessed grief—
mourning suddenly and swiftly interrupted.

In theory, the process of recovery would necessitate
laboring the loss,
giving sense to the *dis-ease*,
allowing it to pass through
and flow out of the body.

As sorrow lets go of the flesh, transformation occurs.

In this clinical sense,
though melancholia is an undesirable state,
it nevertheless portends a process
that has a powerful potential to heal.

I am also aware
that melancholia implies a certain aesthetic state,
a distinct experience of embodied knowledge.

It is a porous,
heavy,
thick
position

in which a certain antagonism is desirable,
even necessary,

in order to make sense out of one's environment.

This is an aspect of melancholia that I would describe as poetic,
in that it is a way of envisioning
that which cannot be seen.

I would also describe it as performative,

in that it brings out
an irrepressible doing
with the body,
in the body,
because of the body.

It doesn't happen in the head.

It's a sense that hits you,
and it hits you hard.

Perhaps it is within the sensorium of the ruinous that melancholia arises,
and to stay with it means
to maintain the necessary vigilance needed to survive.

The *dis-ease* hit me hardest
on the dancefloor.

I found myself in a club
where the music was far too loud,
drowning out any difference,

making it impossible to hear other voices,
a cacophonous silence.

I felt my body moving differently
than those around me,
expressive and colorful,

but somehow
this made me all the more invisible.

I felt I was celebrating a life-world,
but I found myself moving
through a rotting-world,
spiraling faster and faster

into the feverish,
deathly dance
of the men.

I was in crisis.

How to recover?

I began to seek out other stories,

**stories that didn't announce freedom,
 rather imagined its resolution
 as never-ending.**
I read a story about an end-of-the-world party.
The city is abandoned by its residents.
**News of a nuclear meltdown nearby
 has caused everyone to flee,
 escaping imminent environmental catastrophe.**
**The queers, however, stick around
 to dish it out,
 do it up,
 and get down.**
**They either don't have the means to leave
 or they simply don't care.**
**They're used to the ruin,
 they know how to transform it,
 they have accepted
 the passing-away of
 this existence
 into another.**
It's the new disaster look.
**This story was written during the AIDS crisis,
 but there is no mention of the disease.**
**It's not that the story avoids talking about AIDS,
 it's rather that the crisis isn't where it seems.**
**The drama of life and non-life
 takes place within the body of the earth.**
**Contagion,
 planetary outrage
 against white geology
 and the age of the men.**
**In this story,
 the *dis-ease* is the memory of the earth's turbulence,
 an inhuman eruption,
 a symptom of a corrupted ecology.**
A chthonic Caliban



must shake off Prospero's airy enchantments,
recovering the lost wisdom of a sorceress mother,
her death unmourned.

The death-cult that officiates colonial-capital
must be met with death rituals.
Knowing this, the faggots have gone into occultation.
There, they can practice.

The first time I came across this practice
was at the start of last spring,
when I was on a dance residency.

That morning, Jassem gathered the group,
six people from very different backgrounds,
and told us all a story.

This wasn't the first time he was telling the story;
the words coming out of his mouth had most certainly been uttered elsewhere.
I imagine the story might change each time he tells it.

"There are connections to various practices around the dead," he said.

"Practices by the living with regard to death," he said.

"Not knowing, we can only pretend," he said.

"All rules will be stated; we must make some decisions," he said.

"Before we start, we need somebody who will give their body for death," he said.

As I took notes, I realized the story was already changing.

I struggled to write as fast as he was speaking.

I caught some bits verbatim, while others escaped me.

I struggled to remember and pay attention at the same time.

As the words flowed out of him, his story entered me.

I gave myself over to the transmission.

He told us that

it is important to know

where this practice comes from.

Its origins go back further in time than one would imagine.

Its origins go deep, reaching down into the earth.

Nothing can defeat the spirit of the earth!

He told us about San Francisco,
about the mounds

that guarded the Bay

long before the colonizers arrived.

These were Indigenous burial grounds.

The graves were adorned with shells
that had piled up high over the years, forming large hills.

When the Spanish ships sailed into the Bay,
the Ohlone people native to the area,

allowed the Franciscans to settle onto this site.

For them, it was inconceivable why one would wish to inhabit a cemetery.

He tells us this story,

so we may remember that

the city's foundation lies in death,

in the endings of worlds,

in the disappearance of peoples.

The city had long attracted the queer and the marginal.

People would come and go, leave their mark, and vanish.

The city's stories consisted of these concatenations of presence,
outbursts of activity would be followed by a gradual fading.

There had been:

the House of Hippies during the Summer of Love,

Sun Ra lecturing on the Black Man in Space at Berkeley,

Native Americans occupying Alcatraz Island,

Neo-pagan witches drawing down the moon,

Queens on acid in the woods with a bag of wigs,

Faggots cruising the Castro on a warm summer night,

Faeries building hidden sanctuaries,

a colorful mix of fabulous fuckups,

dreaming fearlessly.

When AIDS hit, many came to the city to live out their last days.

A crisis erupted around the bodies of the dead and dying;



hospitals did not know how to look after the sick, while funeral homes refused to accept the corpses of the departed.

In the absence of care, there was great suffering.

Many turned to suicide, overdosed on drugs, or were left to waste away in secluded hospital wards, where no one was allowed to visit, let alone touch them.

Care for the neglected and the abandoned became one of the main concerns for those affected by the disease.

The darkness is for living together.

Care had to be self-organized and re-imagined.

It had to be practiced with vigor, insistence, creativity, and boldness. This was hugely important in the face of such major societal breakdown.

Indeed, the plague mood of the time, exacerbated by the media, had only brought to the surface the modalities of death that were deeply integral to how a specific form of power had long maintained its hold over life.

Death in the settler colony had always been displaced, made the problem of its others.

Its distribution was imbalanced, and its grounds were unstable. In the liberal phantasmagoria, a death-machine had been synched to the expansion and contraction of Empire's real and imaginary territories. Its method = war; its mood = perpetual crisis; its logic = exception.

The more the public sphere rejected the dying, willfully obfuscating the necropolitical, the more it became necessary to retreat into the private realm, in order to protect another vision for death.

"There was another way to die than to die alone. It was a way to die with people. There was a death ritual," he said.

"They're letting us die, they want us to die, so we will show them how beautiful our deaths can be," they said.
How we have always survived.

186

Death rituals began taking place all over the city.

Some were secret affairs,
at home, extremely private,
for only the closest friends and chosen kin.

Some were out on the street and in public,
a sudden ceremony in front of a bakery wall,
appropriating profane, everyday spaces
for improvised, queer rituality.

There were full-on death parades,
a form of nonviolent protest and assembly.
Futile to secure permissions from the State,
these gatherings were treated as illegal acts
and met accordingly with a police response: harassment, violence, arrest.

It's impossible to say who came up with this practice or when exactly it appeared.

Its authorship is multiple, fragmentary, and shared.

Its occurrence is then and now,
here and there,
sometime and elsewhere.

What's important within the death ritual is that
as a result of the various forms it takes,
so many ideas are disseminated,
spread amongst those who practice it.

These ideas cannot be contained,
they take unforeseeable routes,
they adapt and transform,
they infect and multiply.
Contexts shift, times pass,
the practice is able to hold
those who practice it.

Although many death rituals took the place of traditional funerals,
there were those who wished to practice it while still alive.

Of course, one can easily view the practice as a form of preparatory training,
a necromantic rehearsal for the unexpected,
both for the dying and for those left behind.

187

But one must also view this practice as a form of intensifying the present,
as a strategy between and amongst people
to process noise,
to create attunement,
and to express cohesion.

The practice is an open form,
it takes shape anew each time,
its colors, moods, and textures affected by both
the conversations leading up to it
and the irreducibility of its doing.
There are, however, a few basic elements
that must be considered.

These provide a holding structure,
what allows for a great range of expression inside.

As such, these elements may be written down,
as a record of starting principles.

Ultimately, they adapt to a given context
and their sense emerges out of the group's discussions.

There is a general question that resonates throughout:

What happens when bodies come together?
Responding to this means doing it.

Some may go through a lot, feel a lot, be visibly moved.

Some won't feel or show a thing.

No one can be forced into having an experience.

In any ritual, there are those who participate by not participating.
It is important to remember that everyone is having an experience,
simply by virtue of their presence.

We must decide who will be the one that offers themselves to the group.

This person will take on the role of the departed.

They are a gift to the group, so that the group may practice.

They are an offering so that memory can continue,
not a personal memory,
but the group's capacity to remember and to make memorable.

Their death is a service.

It requires from the one who is offering that they confront themselves.

They will be challenged with their own silence and stillness.

They will have to give themselves over to the touch and attention of the group.

They will relinquish control, direction, and decision.

**Though this may be scary,
it is important to emphasize to the one who is offering**

**that they will not be alone,
that they will be cared for.**

There must always be at least one person with them,

**There must always be someone in touch with them,
for the duration of the practice.**

Those who remain are the ones who will attend the offering.

They are the caretakers.

Their task is threefold:

PREPARE THE BODY

CELEBRATE THE BODY

LET GO OF THE BODY

These are to be discussed with the group.

**It is important to remember
that you are actually doing this,
you take on these roles,
this is happening.**

**There are no set techniques as to how to do it,
other than calling upon one's lineage.**

**You already know what to do,
without knowing it.**

**You are a medium,
transmitting forms and impressions
that haunt memory.**

**This is impersonal.
Soul must be recovered,**



called forth from its wanderings.

Make it soulful.

You are learning this for later,
so that the teacher may teach the teachers.

This practice suggests an exercise of intimacy
that makes it self-consciously not for "everyone."

Rather, it is always and each time for "someones."

It depends on the specificity of the when, where, and who of its doing.

As a performance,

it offers a process that,

however much one plans or prepares in advance,

cannot be fully controlled,

let alone repeated.

As a doing,

it generates an acute awareness of the present

and ethical *response-ability* towards presence.

This means that it must remain invisible.

It cannot be viewed from or shown to an outside,

there is nothing to gain from its display,

only everything to lose.

It ceases to be

the moment it appears.

Its challenge lies in this,

that it simply must be done,

for the practice to reveal itself.

It is a mystery.







200-09-97-84
同呢個新嘅名
嚟咗個新語言



humans pushed past me
as the moon fell
into the black water

as gillettii
verschiedenblattige Anubias

Anubias heterophylla
Verschiedenblattige Anubias
Westliches Zentralafrika
150.73-13-30/4
Araceae

I REMEMBER TO HAVE BEEN NAMED
I REMEMBER TO HAVE BEEN CALLED
I AM NOW CALLING MYSELF

“Did you ever tell her?”

“If we spoke about my queerness? No, never explicitly ... but I think she knew all along.”

“Yes, it wouldn’t surprise me ... your grandmother was already different herself.”

The ancestral village of the 曾 (Chan) family is 曾厝垵, 思明, 厦门市, 福建省, 中国 (Siming, Xiamen / Amoy, Fujian Province, China). The Chans are Hokkiens and have been in Singapore since the early nineteenth century. The patriarch and matriarch of the Chans were Chan Cheng Wah m. Chia Gin Tee (d. February 7, 1937). They had three sons and two daughters and were Peranakans in their lineage, dressing, and practices, especially in the traditions that they handed down to their children and grandchildren.

First, Chan Kim Hong Neo (d. March 1, 1934), who married Cheang Jim Juan. Second, Chan Koon Leong (d. January 14, 1948), who married Tan Chwee Hong. They had four sons and one daughter: Chan Chieu Kim Jimmy (m. Rosie Chan, who had one son and one daughter, Michael Chan and Janet Chan), Chan Chieu Yeam Willy (m. Puey Whatt Neo, who had two sons and two daughters: Chan Eng Kiat, Chan Eng Lin, Chan Eng Neo, and Chan Cheng Neo), Chan Chieu Kiat Robert (m. Lim Ah Leng, who had one son and one daughter, Chan Chieu Hwa m. Yip Poh Kuan who didn’t have children), and Chan Siong Neo (m. Wee Tiang Hoe, who had one son, Wee Ho Hup). Third, Chan Koon Bee, who married Mary Chan, a Japanese lady. They did not have any biological children, but adopted two daughters, Rosie Chan and Betsy Chan. Rosie married her cousin, Chan Chieu Kim Jimmy; Betsy also married and had a daughter. Fourth, Chan Koon Teck (d. April 3, 1953) who married Ong Chye Neo (d. October 9, 1956). They had three sons and two daughters, Chan Chieu Lim (m. Koh Thiam Eng Lucy, who had one son and one daughter, Chan Eng Hock Andrew and Chan Siew Neo Lily), Chan Kim Lay (m. Wee Teck Yean, who had one son and two daughters, Wee Liang Seng, Wee Liang Neo Nellie, and Wee Beng Neo Helen), Chan Kim Seah (m. Yeo Boon Leong, who had one son, Yeo Hock Leng), Chan Chieu Peng (m. Chia Bee Choo, who had one son and one daughter, Chan Eng Thai and Chan Eng Geok Carol), and Chan Chieu Eng Alan, who died unmarried. Fifth, Chan Chu Hong Neo (d. August 29, 1921) who married Tan Soo Jin; they had no children.

206

This last paragraph is an adaptation of Chan Eng Thai's efforts at constructing a family tree. This same person, together with a person named Fong Thin Foong, named me Chan Teck Guan Egan. My given name is comprised of 曾德源 (Chan Teck Guan) and a baptismal name, Egan. Chan Eng Thai's family were practicing Taoists until he decided to convert to Catholicism after being educated at Saint Patrick's School—one of the many Catholic mission schools that took root in colonial Singapore. Fong Thin Foong also converted to Catholicism upon getting married.

On July 4, 2019, Chan Eng Thai told me that his parents welcomed his conversion to Catholicism. There was a multitude of Taoist festivals that the family had to adhere to, involving extensive preparations and often laborious rituals. They thought that it was far more efficient to have to go to church once a week for an hour or so to continue to receive spiritual protection from a god.

My parents, amid circumstances unknown to me, were acquainted with a Catholic priest called Liam Egan (1925-1994). He had moved to Singapore from Ireland as a Jesuit missionary and passed away on April 7, 1994. On October 29, 1994, I was born into the Catholic church and named after him.

At the age of 16, I undertook a rite of confirmation into the Catholic church. As part of this rite, I adopted a new name, Xavier, after Francis Xavier (1506-1552), who co-founded the Jesuit order. He led extensive evangelical missions throughout Asia, from Goa to Malacca to Japan, eventually coming to be known as "Apostle of the Indies." He was the initiator of the Goa Inquisition, conducted by the Portuguese colonizers in India, that lasted more than 250 years and institutionalized the religious persecution and discrimination of Hindus, Muslims, and Bene Israel Jews. At least 16,000 people were put on trial for heresy against Christianity and many more were subjected to untold levels of torture and violence. Francis Xavier was preparing to embark on a mission to China when he died on an island off the southern coast of Guangdong province. I was not aware of any of

207

this then. I was encouraged to believe that he was a great saint who brought Catholicism (and god) near to all of us.

When I was 24, my grandmother passed away (1926-2018). Her name was 蕭曼兒 (Seow Mok Jee) and I renamed myself in her memory. Born in Guangdong, she escaped a Japanese attack on her hometown, first to Hong Kong and thereafter to Singapore where she eventually settled. We were not related by blood—my grandfather married her shortly after my mother was born and her biological mother disappeared / died.

兒 (Jee) translates to "child."

Popo, as I call her affectionately, continues to be an integral part of my life and identity. Shortly before my parents got married, she too converted to Catholicism and was given a baptismal name: Michelle, the French feminine form of Michel, which is rooted in the Hebrew name Mikha'el, which is in turn derived from the question "mîykâ'êl?," meaning "Who is like god?"





I WOULD LIKE TO SHOW YOU A PHOTOGRAPH

an afternoon in summer 1974. following the invitation of her son, the photographer comes out onto a clearing in the brushwood. she is using a compact camera. she has to estimate the distance between herself and her subject and then adjust the focus, using three small icons engraved on the zoom lens: a face for a close-up, a walking person for a medium long shot, and a mountain range with a group of trees for a wide shot. the photographed scene takes place somewhere between the first two given choices of distance, and the picture comes out a little bit blurry. only one photograph is taken.

the boy decides to separate himself from the photographer through a body of water, dissociating the photographed subject—himself and the nature he is siding with—spatially from the position of the onlooker's gaze. he turns his shoulder away in a self-confident attempt to ward off further visitations. maybe he borrowed this gesture from an anthropological visual vocabulary he might have subconsciously picked up from some of the book club coffee table books, the national geographic and other publications present in the family home that show foreign people or exotic animals and plants in their natural habitat. depictions of undisturbed subjects absorbed in their own matters, seen by cameras positioned outside of the context of the depicted.

or maybe the boy's pose, avoiding the onlooker's gaze, is his own spontaneous, instinctive enactment of an old gesture of occultation, invoking magic to summon his own non-presence. is it a combination of all of the above? is his refusal to return the gaze of the photographer—and consequently the future beholder of the image—an act of resistance against recognition and identification by the viewer? is it an attempt to escape registration?

the boy must know that his portrait's first destination is the next empty page of the family album, soon to be followed by newer entries, as time will progress. it will be just one photograph in a succession of images. snapshots of family members and friends, most of the time posing in front of various backgrounds both indoors and outdoors, usually looking at the camera or,

by way of exception, looking in the same direction as the camera, redirecting the gaze of the onlooker towards a sight worth seeing. this photograph is taken to become memorabilia in a collection that is also an inventory and an indicator of progress. it will be part of a narrative that unfolds hand after hand, picture after picture, constructing linearity, a sense of origin, belonging, and family history. a record of time passed as well as a means to predict the future.

musings over this piece of nature the boy decides to be together in an image with, he must be aware of his separateness from this nature. here, on the edge of the fast-growing swiss suburb where nature is thought of with disturbing ambivalence—one piece of land after another is wrenched from farmland, marsh, and forest for each new house with brute force by people, who do so to live close to nature—the boy chooses to be on the other side. he decides to be photographed with a vanishing place.

he might be longing for or empathizing with something untouched, wild, and solely natural. a time, place, and life he has not yet experienced but seems to remember. maybe because this longing is linked to a sense of loss—growing up and hence losing the ability to ever be wild and part of nature—he imagines the natural to be something embedded in the past. his fur-vested enactment of human wildness is perhaps an intentional but also still subconscious expression of a strong discontent with his present and foreseeable future.



044-17-74-83

with this new name
came a new language



Schon bei der Ankunft der Europäer in der Neuen Welt war die Rosettenstaude bei den dortigen Ureinwohnern als Kulturpflanze verbreitet. Die "Frucht", eigentlich eine Scheinfrucht, bildet sich aus verschiedenen Teilen des Blütenstandes, die bei der Reife zu einem fleischigen Verband verwachsen. Sie ist gekrönt von einem Blattschopf aus sterilen Tragblättern. Gekühlt lassen sich die Früchte längere Zeit aufbewahren und transportieren. Die Hauptmenge wird hingegen bereits in den Produktionsländern (vor allem Thailand, Philippinen, Brasilien) zu Säften oder Konserven verarbeitet.



165-01-13-80
 the cultivation of this plant
 was fundamental to the
 development of the
 colonial plantation and
 the enslavement of
 non-european people

Die 2 bis 5 cm dicken
 Zuckerrohre werden bis
 Besondere die unteren sind
 von zuckerreicheren. Nach
 10 bis 14 Monaten die Halme
 geschlagen, und ausge-
 preßt. Ein Zuckerrohr vor Ort ist
 notwendig. Zuckergehalt rasch
 ab. Rückstände aus Zellulose
 papier oder Preßholzplatten
 ist. Der Zuckerrohrsafte wird
 Kochen zu gelbbraunem Roh-
 zucker eingedickt, dieser wiederum zu
 Weißzucker raffiniert. Die Melasse, der
 zurückbleibende Sirup, dient als
 Futtermittel oder zur Herstellung von
 Rum. In den Anbauländern findet man
 frische Zuckerrohrstücke zum Kauen
 auch auf den Märkten angeboten.







a study group gathers for dinner. to begin, they say a praise of leftovers, which they consider by word and by concept to contrast decisively with anything right and rights-based, anything correctional, anything proper. people in the study group consent not to be single beings, to prefer poetry over property. the rest is the best. this continues to feel counter-intuitive to some, particularly the ones who were raised on leftovers and shame, who had to wear the neighbor's cousin's best friend's kid's hand-me-downs, who had to steal or go hungry. today they know that this shame is made up and intended to keep them in a place of disposability and bare survival. they know that nobody deserves to be kept in place by anyone or anything. but it's a long way from awareness to embodied knowledge. it helps that—as usual—the leftovers are delicious, accidental, prepared with love, and free.







UMANITÀ IN RIVOLTA (EXCERPTS)

The following text is a collection of excerpts from Aboubakar Soumahoro's book *Umanità in rivolta* (*Humanity in Revolt*, Feltrinelli, 2019), assembled by Luisa Eugeni and translated by Ana Ilievska.

My experience as an activist in various sectors (manual labor, housework, street vending, logistics), both in large urban contexts and in the countryside, has taught me that the defense of humanity requires the protection of people's material and immaterial needs. In this sense, the union's effort must aim to collectively assume a front-line role in defending the right to happiness for all. The first article of the Constitution states that "Italy is a democratic republic, founded on work," but ... we cannot talk about work without asking *who* the worker is. The worker is, first of all, a human being, not an *object* to be sold. We must think of the worker as a person, that is, as the expression of a plurality of belonging within the complexity of real life. Simplification cannot reduce those who work to a work item, that is, to a "workforce." (pp. 98-100)

I was around sixteen years old when my cousin, a student at the University of Alexandria in Egypt, wrote to me to tell me that during the holidays he would go to Foggia in Italy to pick tomatoes. ... After that letter I started to fantasize myself about a life in Italy. I began to follow everything that came from there and slowly fell in love with it. When the European matches were broadcast on Canal+, I was cheering for the Italian teams. ... I also started chatting with the Italians who ran a pizzeria in Abidjan, listening to Italian music, and keeping an album of clippings from Italian fashion magazines. ... When I finally left, at the age of nineteen, it was in order to travel to that album of mine. ... The first memory I have of Europe is the cold that turned my breath into smoke. ... The initial sensation was one of disorientation ... and placelessness, because I had left the land I knew for a land that was still foreign to me. I felt out of place because every day someone reminded me that I had no right to be where I was. (pp. 16-17)

When I arrived at the apartment, however, I discovered that there were fifteen of us staying there. I went in, tried to switch on the light, but there was no power. My housemates told me that we had to wake up at five in the morning and go to the Melito roundabout in the Neapolitan hinterland. ... It works like this: Those who offer work go there, take a look at the workers, and select some without agreeing on work hours, pay, or place of supply. It felt as if we were naked goods in the market of manpower, stripped of our humanity. ... A surreal scene, hundreds of people waiting and willing to accept any job and under any condition. On days when there was no work, we had to stay on our feet for hours, after waking up at dawn, and then go home penniless and with an empty stomach. (pp. 17-18)

I still remember the day when an elderly gentleman stopped at the traffic lights and "chose" me. It was a Tuesday, market day in Palma Campania, a town about thirty kilometers from Aversa. It was a busy day at the market. The job was to load and unload products from a truck. I don't know why he decided to call me Davide—perhaps Aboubakar seemed too complicated for him. At the end of the day, "the boss" was happy with me and my work. On the return journey, I asked him for the pay. He replied that he was very satisfied and that I would work forever for him starting the next day. Then he added, speaking in the local dialect, that I didn't have to worry about the day's wages because he would pay me for everything. That had been a kind of test day. As for the rest, he said to me in the Neapolitan dialect, "m' 'o vvech'je"—"I'll take care of it." Then he added: "Don't worry, I'll see you here at the usual time tomorrow." I couldn't believe it and felt overjoyed. Back home, I told my friends that I had been hired,

240 and offered pizza to everyone. The following day I woke up at dawn, so as to be on time for the appointment. I got on the bicycle and started pedaling at a good pace. I arrived at the square when it was not even six o'clock yet and was among the first people there. I waited until seven, nothing. Then eight, nine, ten, nothing. I refused to believe that "the boss" had tricked me, without paying me for the day, and was deluding myself with the promise of a safe job. What were his reasons? Saving that little money wouldn't have made him richer. He didn't show up. Neither that day nor ever. (pp. 19-20)

After a few months I had an accident on the construction site: A piece of the ceiling of the apartment in which I was working suddenly fell and almost sliced off my finger. I was in excruciating pain. Luckily, I was immediately taken to the hospital, where they put my phalanx back in a somewhat tattered way. I went home and was unable to work for a while. When my wages from the previous week arrived, I found that the days immediately after my injury weren't listed on the paycheck. I could choose to complain to my boss, knowing that I would risk losing my job altogether without even getting what I was owed, or I could keep silent and go back to work. At that moment, I really felt trapped in a corner. Alone, despite being in the same condition as millions of people. A corner where there are not only migrant workers, but laborers, drivers, porters, researchers, precarious journalists, and all the disempowered workers. That same corner risks becoming a black hole that will swallow up more and more people, because the reduction of protection for a category of workers creates unsustainable downward competition among the exploited. This situation will lead to generalized regression. Because labor rights are not guaranteed for everyone, they won't be for anyone. (p. 22)

Caporalato (illegal hiring) is ... a tool that effectively connects the supply and demand of labor. Instead of turning to employment centers to recruit workers, some farms use various forms of "intermediation," both formal and informal. Some intermediaries retain a portion of the workers' wages in exchange for the "certainty and continuity" of the job. This intermediation is one of the many forms of hiring. Another, more sophisticated model is that of the worker being "administered" or "rented" with an employment contract, another formula now permitted by law, through a private administration agency (as in the case of Paola Clemente). Workers are selected according to arbitrary criteria and individual contracts. Per the contract, the daily wages for a laborer employed for harvesting should amount to no less than 50 euros for 6 hours and 30 minutes of work. In reality, however, workers work up to 12 hours per day and their wage is cut by half. The worker thus ends up receiving 2 euros per hour, 24 euros a day, from which the transportation expenses necessary to reach the workplace must be subtracted, as these are not covered by the company. (pp. 84-87)

Let's return to the question we asked ourselves at the beginning: Who is responsible for the more than twenty thousand workplace injuries (according to official data only) that agricultural workers suffer? (p. 85) The blame is quickly pinned on the *caporali* (corporals), convenient scapegoats that allow us to avoid more complex questions.

241 We must have the courage to ask ourselves who really killed Paola Clemente, Mohamed Abdullah, Soumaila Sacko, Sekine Traore, Mamoudou Sare, Nouhou Doumbia, Mamdou Konaté, Becky Moses, Aladjie Ceesay, Amadou Balde, Moussa Kande, Ali Dembele, Lhassan Goultaine, Anane Kwase, Moussa Toure, Lahcen Haddouc, Joseph Avuku, Ebere Ujunwa, Baofudi Cammara, Alagie Ceesay, Alasanna Darboe, Eric Kwarteng, Romanus Mbeke, Djoumana Djire, Dominic Man Addiah, Jaiteh Suruwa, Moussa Ba, and the other invisibles. (p. 76)

242

This condition of exploitation has ancient roots, yet we continue to speak of “new slavery” as if we were dealing with an unexpected emergency. But it is a fundamental error to reduce the narrative of this complexity to an issue of “crime” and to understand it only in terms of the relationship between corporal and worker. In this economic system, the existence of a contradiction between growing profits and paltry wages is denied at every level. I find it “unusual” that, while the agricultural sector is an expanding billion-dollar economy, workers and their families continue to live just above the poverty line and often cannot meet their basic needs. (pp. 76-77)

Rather, politics today seems to have been almost taken over by transnational financial-economic powers, and, because illegal hiring eludes any other analysis, we are aware of only part of the problem and don’t see the economic and socio-cultural dynamics that underlie exploitation. ... The example of the province of Foggia is significant in this regard. 50,000 laborers are officially registered there. In the high season, another 5,000 workers called “migrant workers” come to Foggia. We must have the courage to understand what connects the two groups—the minimum-wage work in the fields for which the geographical origin of the worker is obviously insignificant. ... If we want to understand what our goal is, we must first precisely identify our real opponent. For example, it is strange that no one questions the bodies that grant ethical certifications to the companies in the supply chain and that every day establish that there are no cases or episodes of exploitation (there are 440 certification models to ensure that no one is exploited in the production of fruits and vegetables). The one who is undergoing inspection, and is actually the commissioner, pays the inspector to certify the production process. (p. 78)

There is an important debate concerning the contributions of the PAC (Politica Agricola Comune / Common Agricultural Policy), which in this last European programming cycle (2014-2020) amounted to around 41.5 billion euros. Additional 10.5 billion of national funds are added to this sum, totaling an annual average of 7.4 billion of public funds transferred to the agricultural sector. This large amount of resources is destined for the agro-food industry and for intensive production, but because it is not distributed equally among all the players in the system, it ends up bolstering large producers at the expense of small companies. Most European resources (86%) are a reward for large companies and large territorial extensions, which end up with a fifth of the beneficiaries. The remaining four-fifths receive only 14%. (p. 80)

The sector is thus dominated by the oligopolistic groups of the food industry—often transnational ones like Ferrero, Lactalis, or Barilla, etc.—and by the GDO (Grande Distribuzione Organizzata / Large-Scale Distribution). In a system in which the financial market is more important than the real economy, these groups determine the outcomes of the lives of all the other players in the supply chain, from farmers to agricultural workers. ... Therefore, the condition of solidity and growth of the agro-food sector concerns companies, but not workers in the sector. ... To give an example, the last national collective agreement for agricultural workers and nurserymen, signed in June 2018 and valid until 2021, endorsed by the confederal unions Confagricoltura (Italian confederation of farmers) and Coldiretti (national confederation of direct farmers), has predicted

an increase of 1.7% for the minimum wages at each level for 2018 and an increase of 1.2% for 2019. This means that a laborer will receive a raise of less than one euro per day. (pp. 82-83)

Union intervention must be able, even in this unfavorable scenario, to immediately obtain concrete results that improve working life conditions and restore wages and dignity. For this reason, after a confrontation with the laborers in dozens of multilingual assemblies—if the new working class is mixed, we must learn to speak the languages necessary to make ourselves heard—we prepared a minimum platform of demands and struggles, relaunching the idea of a code of ethics for the entire agricultural sector. ... The first point is simple. It is a principle that should never be questioned: “Equal work, equal wages.” A decent job and fair pay, regardless of the worker’s geographical origin. The second point demands that employers are liable to guarantee and comply with wages, social security rights (i.e. agricultural unemployment), occupational safety, and transportation. All work hours and days must be recognized and must be listed on the paycheck. The third essential point concerns a reform that respects the rights of all. It demands the “regularization” of migrants and refugees; the repeal of the Bossi-Fini law; access to residence permits for social protection; and the breaking of the link between residence permit and employment contract. (p. 90)

244

While listening to Salvini's statements, my phone rang. I picked up; the voice I heard at the other end of the line was tense with anger, clearly shaken. It was Drame Madhieri, an activist from the Coordination of Agricultural Workers of the USB (unione sindacale di base / syndical base union) in San Ferdinando, in the plain of Gioia Tauro. Drame told me that Soumaila Sacko, a trade unionist, friend, and fellow warrior, had been killed: He had been shot by a "white man." (p. 56) The Prefecture's original narrative was that Soumaila had "likely" been hit by the shooter in an alleged failed robbery. Meanwhile, a coordination of the police forces had been mobilized to suppress the protests of the laborers in San Ferdinando. (p. 60) On June 23, together with citizens and many associations, we organized a demonstration in Reggio Calabria to keep alive the memory of Soumaila Sacko in our struggles. And we told everyone about our comrade. Soumaila was the son of farmers. He came from a region of Mali called Kayes and had migrated to Calabria at the age of 24 to do the job that his country no longer allowed him to do. (p. 69)

Soumaila Sacko, whose father had been a union organizer himself, had escaped these conditions brought about by the effects of climate change. His home village, Sambacanou, is part of the municipality of Gory in the administrative district Yélimané, in the Kayes Region of western Mali. All the infrastructures (hospital, school, mosque, water tank) are built with the remittances that migrants send to their families. Soumaila, breaking his back from sunrise to sunset harvesting citrus fruits on the Gioia Tauro plain (in the Calabria region of Italy), was one of them, just like the Italian emigrants who with their remittances contributed directly and decisively to the development of Italy. Tragically, Soumaila died without ever being able to return home. (p. 70)

Soumaila's remains traveled for nearly eleven thousand kilometers, retracing the route he had taken to Europe many years before, when he was still alive. When we arrived in Mali, ... I was shocked to see from up close the poverty that the inhabitants of this country so rich in gold had to live in. That nation had become a crossroads of multinationals looking for underground treasures but indifferent to the suffering of the local people. (pp. 71-72)

542

Abd Elsalam Ahmed Eldanf was born in Egypt and worked there as a high school teacher until he arrived in Italy in 2003. He settled in Piacenza, where he lived in an apartment with a dozen fellow citizens. ... In 2007, his wife Gihan and their children finally joined him in Piacenza. He had realized his personal dream of reuniting with his family, but didn't stop fighting for the rights of all workers. ... This struggle escalated the night between September 14 and 15, 2016, after negotiations for laid-off workers to be reintegrated and for the situation of precarious workers to be stabilized had failed. Thus, the gathering turned into a picket line. Abd Elsalam, who led the group of strikers, was hit by a truck and died. He was just 53 years old. Again, as in Soumaila's case, there were different versions of what happened. What is certain is that Abd Elsalam Ahmed Eldanf, an honest and generous worker and permanent employee, died in front of the GLS factory in Piacenza in the context of a struggle of the USB union to defend the workplace of thirteen workers. (pp. 106-107)

Outraged at Abd Elsalam's death, logistics workers went on a mass strike. This death is only the tip of the iceberg: In this sector, the denial of workers' rights is ever-present.

246

The story of Paola Clemente represents a tragic example of the “legalized” conditions of exploitation that many workers in the agricultural sector are forced to endure. Each day, Paola and her coworkers undertook a 150-kilometer commute lasting a couple of hours. According to her colleagues’ testimonies, Paola had felt unwell one morning during her commute to work. That day she had been at work at half past five already. Around half past seven, her condition quickly deteriorated. Shortly thereafter, Paola died. The parliamentary commission investigating the case stated that: “It is obvious that first aid measures are lacking (or worse, improvised) and that there is no access to emergency services. ... There is no real training, information, or coaching of female workers, nor real protection or first aid measures.” (pp. 73-74)

247

Alberto Piscopo Pollini was a young student at the Istituto Alberghiero Perotti in Bari. In the evening, he worked as a motorcycle pizza delivery driver. On the evening of December 1, 2018, Alberto was fatally hit by a car when driving his scooter for a delivery. He was only nineteen. Alberto was employed in the take-out food delivery sector, like thousands of other young people (the average age is twenty-five). These young workers who cross the city by bike or motorbike are emblematic of a form of digital and metropolitan labor: This is the era of the “gig economy.” ... The Italian sociologist Maurizio Ambrosini has described the characteristics of these types of jobs performed by immigrant workers with what he calls “the five Ps”: heavy (*pesanti*), dangerous (*pericolosi*), precarious (*precari*), underpaid (*poco pagati*), and socially penalizing (*penalizzanti socialmente*). But this is not all. An investigation by Francesca Sironi for *L’Espresso* has shown that food delivery companies use the GPS-tracking software Hurrier not only to monitor and control their workers during their working hours but also during off-hours. (pp. 110-111)

Aboubakar Soumahoro
Umanità in Rivolta

248 **There is a forgotten story that almost acts as a prologue to more recent tragedies. On August 25, 1989, in the ghetto of Villa Literno in the province of Caserta, Jerry Essan Masslo was killed during a robbery. ... He lived in inhumane conditions in that ghetto, a shantytown that had arisen spontaneously, a place without running water or electricity. He was a harvester, working twelve hours a day for very low pay, close to the poverty line. That evening in 1989, Masslo tried to intervene in defense of his coworkers, but he was shot and died instantly. ... On September 20, 1989, the first strike organized by migrant workers was held at Villa Literno, with three hundred people taking part. (pp. 61-63)**

692 **In those difficult times, I kept wondering how any human being could be working more than ten hours a day, actively participating in the production of "Made in Italy," yet be forced to live in sheet metal barracks unable to meet basic survival needs. How can these forms of slavery be tolerated in our century? ... In my opinion, the key to ending dehumanizing practices is the emergence of a collective consciousness, deeply rooted in human values, that aims to transform society and can be handed down from generation to generation. This collective awareness allows for shared leadership in the service of the needs of the community. ... However seductive and profitable the policy of border walls or closed ports may seem in the era of simplification, it can't keep a part of the world population from exercising its right to freedom of movement. ... Freedom of movement was not invented by migrants but has been practiced for thousands of years. Why then is this right considered unnatural today? (pp. 120, 64, 46)**

The Sans-Papiers movement consists of people without a residence permit but not without an identity. It has been demanding freedom of movement and residence for over twenty years. This movement erupted on television stations around the world on March 18, 1996, when more than three hundred men, women, and children occupied the Saint-Ambroise church in Paris. Their demand was the same as it is today: Regularization in order to rise out of invisibility. (p. 46)

We had to work hard to be able to speak for ourselves in political places and spaces. For a long time, many—in good faith—felt the need to speak on our behalf. ... I remember when an Italian activist, undoubtedly good and generous, was chosen to speak for us about migration during the Paris Social Forum in 2003. ... We intervened and stated that no one would ever again speak about us without us, because we felt mature enough to be the protagonists of our own destiny. ... We wanted to be active subjects and no longer observers. That experience became a fundamental moment for all of us. It was then that we left the periphery and decided to remain at the center of the political scene, to claim the right to freedom of movement, and challenge the paradigm of fear used by politics to close ports and build walls. ... Why can goods move freely but people can't? (pp. 49-50)

Therefore, we thought of organizing a march that crossed European borders, passing through the symbolic spaces of different countries. We would all go undocumented, like the Sans-Papiers: Even those who had papers would have to leave them at home. ... I remember a sign during a demonstration that said: "If I want to go fast I go alone, if I want to go far I go with the others." Out of this desire to go far together, the International Coalition of the Sans-Papiers was born in the following months. This collective would also come to serve as a vessel gathering the demands of the march and bringing them to fruition. ... The march lasted a month, from June 2 to July 2, 2012. It began in Brussels, passed through the Netherlands, Germany, Luxemburg, France, Switzerland, Italy, and ended in Strasbourg, in front of the European Parliament. ... When the day of the march's departure finally arrived, we all couldn't believe it. We were happy to see our dream, which had been born in the Place de la République in Paris, finally come true. ... We could say that from that day on, the march has never stopped. (pp. 50-54)

DELOCALIZATION ON THE SPOT—THE INJUSTICES BEHIND THE EU'S AGRO FOOD SYSTEM

The flexibility of the labor of foreigners without papers is total, since it is not subject to any rule. ... The delocalization on the spot and the labor of foreigners without papers are by no means marginal phenomena that only appear at the periphery of economic life and contradict its general tendencies: quite on the contrary, they are situated at the forefront of modernity.

—Emanuel Terray, *Sans-papiers : l'archaïsme fatal*



This article was written in collaboration by the authors. In particular, Marco Omizzolo was responsible for the central paragraph on "The Punjabi community in the province of Latina" and the central two paragraphs of the introduction, while the rest of the text and conclusions were drafted together. Translation by Ana Ilievska.

Only recently, after more than thirty years of silence, has the exploitation of tens of thousands of agricultural workers in Italy begun to be addressed publicly. Research, journalistic investigations, and judicial sentences have revealed a situation that can be defined as "slavery." This situation is the result of several factors, not least a predatory production model that applies the capitalist approach of "economic growth" to agriculture. This implies compressing production costs and increasing the production scale of companies with their unfair and intransparent supply chain. It has come to light that in the food industry and large-scale retail, profit creation comes at the expense of the environment as well as the rights and well-being of both workers and consumers.

Since 2013, the so-called "migration crisis" (or Mediterranean crisis) in Italy has brought the issue of mass migration to public attention, eliciting extremely polarized reactions on all levels. Nevertheless, these reactions have rarely managed to frame the problem in its global and structural dimensions. Even today, many people who flee conflict and war or migrate due to dramatic socio-economic and environmental conditions continue to die in Libya, along desert routes and in the Mediterranean Sea. The mass of victims of this tragedy, which Europe turns its gaze away from, can be read as the Old World's refusal to face its responsibilities both past and present. It is evident that protecting borders takes priority over protecting lives. In recent years, those who seek to assist refugees by offering shelter, clothing, and food have been criminalized in a climate of growing populism; they have been accused of the "crime" of solidarity.¹ European Home Affairs ministers and border security officers, both on land and at sea, have frequently attacked, legally undermined, or politically isolated search and rescue operations conducted by individuals and NGOs. Some regulatory measures have moved towards legitimizing hatred, discrimination, and persecution against refugees, asylum seekers, and democratic processes. Italy is among the countries engaged in such actions, and the decrees of the former Interior Ministers Minniti and Salvini are considered central to them. They belong to opposing political fronts, but clearly share a similar view of the "migration problem" to which they responded by erecting walls and obstacles both regulatory and physical, inflicting serious damage on international law, constitutional law, and the principles of humanity on which all the most advanced democratic civilizations are built. For example, as Emilio Drudi² observes, African refugees in Libya are so desperate that some go as far as bribery in order to enter detention centers, the real lagers, in the hope of being included in a relocation program so that they can leave their war-torn country where laws have collapsed.

1 Liz Fekete, Frances Webber, and Anya Edmond-Pettitt. "Humanitarianism: The Unacceptable Face of Solidarity." Institute of Race Relations, 2017, https://www.irr.org.uk/app/uploads/2017/11/Humanitarianism_the_unacceptable_face_of_solidarity.pdf.

2 Emilio Drudi. "Qualche Disperato Paga Per Entrare Nei Lager Libici Sperando Nella Relocation. Ma La Relocation È Bloccata." *Tempi Moderni*, 2, 2019, <https://www.tempi-moderni.net/2019/11/02/qualche-disperato-paga-per-entrare-nei-lager-libici-sperando-nella-relocation-ma-la-relocation-e-bloccata/>.

The situation in Libya deserves to be studied in depth, but, to remain within the boundaries of essential data, one must remember that fourteen of the richest states in the world have offered to accept a total of 6,611 migrants, which is nothing in view of the tragedy that has been ongoing in Libya for years. Europe and the West are closing ranks by betraying their commitments: Currently, there are over 650,000 migrants in Libya—had the relocation plan been respected, there would have been over 100,000 transfers through voluntary repatriation and relocation. At the end of October 2019 however, that number had not even reached 30,000. More than half (18,871) are voluntary repatriations (especially to Nigeria), while about 6,000 "relocations" have been reported, and a few dozen repatriations were made based on bilateral agreements between governments. What already happened with the relocation plan from Greece and Italy to other European countries, which was in effect between 2016 and 2017, is now happening with Libya: From the 160,000 refugees that were to be relocated (100,000 to Greece and 60,000 to Italy), the number went down to less than 30,000 in practice: 20,066 to Greece and 9,078 to Italy.

Agreements are much more easily signed and willingly supported when it comes to securing the borders, as in the case of the 2017 Italy-Libya memorandum, signed by President Fayez Serraj and complemented by a full range of ships, patrol boats, helicopters, inflatable boats, ambulances, off-road vehicles, satellite phones, and infrared night vision devices. All that is still needed for the task is the anti-immigration gendarme, which Libya provides with great rigor and increasing efficacy. The results are evident and immediate. In the first ten months of 2019, 8,325 migrants were arrested, including 7,859 at sea and 466 on the ground before boarding. The doors of the Libyan concentration camps have been opened for everyone. Tripoli will not fail to claim these results as "merits" in order to secure more funding, support, and naval and land supplies from Italy and Europe.

The final act of this tragedy is the diktat issued by the Government of Tripoli cracking down on NGO-run sea rescue operations. It places these ships under the control, indeed almost in service, of the Libyan Coast Guard, which reserves the right to issue orders and directives, block operations, decide whether, how, and when to allow intervention, board the ships at any time, and seize the unit and crew if it deems that some arrangements have not been respected. The Italian government took notice of this without the slightest reaction or objection, an absurd silence perhaps due to the desire not to compromise the automatic renewal of the memorandum signed with Libya in February 2017, which occurred in early November 2019. Or, again, to avoid dealing with a specific chapter of the agreement that was signed in September 2019 in Valletta by Malta, Italy, France, and Germany, under the aegis of the European Union. This chapter reaffirms Libya's key role in controlling emigration on the central Mediterranean route, along with the mandate to prevent boats laden with desperate people from leaving or to block those that have already set sail.

Border rejection and defense policies, however, are only one aspect of a larger and more dramatic picture. Time will probably reveal to everyone what is already clear to many researchers and activists: The environmental, humanitarian, and global crises underlying the recent migratory waves are but the consequence of over a century of increasing aggression against the environment, with consequences that are now evident and particularly harmful to entire regions of the planet. The needs of entire populations have been systematically ignored in the name of economic growth, as has the environmental and social impact of growing competition set on achieving ever-intensifying production. The past decades have seen improvements in terms of rights, the fight against hunger, health conditions, and other areas, but also perpetually

growing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of increasingly narrow circles of decision-makers who can escape the control of politics and claims of civil society. In agriculture, as in other sectors, this has allowed a production system to be consolidated that is based on mild to severe exploitation and international trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation, consequently leading to marginalization and racism. These are linked to labor policies that have eroded the rights of workers, and in particular of migrant workers, reducing them to a mere manual labor resource controlled by a boss, a large-scale distribution company, or an agro-business. Exploitation is the key principle of a system that has undergone reform over the past few decades and is enabled by access to cheap workforce: An agro-industrial and financial system that transforms work into a commodity and agricultural products into industrial products.

The agro-food sector is emblematic of this process, being impacted by it enormously. It has produced a food regime dominated by multinational food companies³ since the 1980s, which allows these companies to accumulate capital and guarantees a reorganization and global division of labor and profit processes. A variety of factors caused the intensification of production and the expansion of intercontinental distribution networks—and subsequently of global value chains: the actions of finance (agro-finance) and the forms of neoliberal economic globalization that have redefined the system of production not only for industry but also for agriculture; the development of information, communication, and transport technologies; as well as scientific research and the change in consumption patterns. The imperative of obtaining high profits by standardizing mechanisms of production and distribution—while constantly lowering the final prices through economies of scale—has in fact befallen those with the least contractual power, bringing about the exploitation of producers and, among those, of the smaller farms and laborers. Even in the West, the latter often live in slave-like conditions. According to the research institute Eurispes, the agro-mafias' business in this sector amounts to around 25 billion euros per year. While illegal, this sector guarantees huge profits. The geographical delocalization of the agro-food systems that connect the peripheries, where production takes place, with the consumption centers was quickly followed by a process of “on-the-spot delocalization” through the exploitation of migrant labor.⁴

This phenomenon is particularly evident when looking at intensive fruit and vegetable production in southern European countries, which are the most important rural areas on the continent. The unbridled race to cut prices has made production highly dependent on exploitative labor. Migrant labor represents a low-cost resource through which production costs can be reduced, profits can be stabilized, and production can become competitive on the global market. This phenomenon affects not only large but also small and medium-sized Italian agricultural businesses. In particular, it affects production systems that are largely dependent on the plant protection (pesticides) industry and/or large organized distribution, to which they are linked through agricultural contract agreements or the large fruit and vegetable markets.

Worker's rights have been severely eroded, not only by the effects of neo-liberal capitalism, but by several other compounding factors such as the legal framework that regulates migration, the rules imposed by the GDO, and the lack of adequate social policies, as those in place have been weakened by years of cuts to public services.

3 As defined by Philip McMichael.

4 C. Collaca and A. Corrado, *La globalizzazione delle campagne*. (Milan: Franco Angeli), 2013.



Indian laborers in Piazza della Libertà, in Latina, during the strike of April 18, 2016.

For decades, measures intended to protect and include migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Europe⁵ have in fact produced a growing mass of people in conditions of illegality and precariousness that doubles as a reservoir of manpower for work in the fields,⁶ the service industry, and construction. The individual stories of many workers, be they Italian or foreign, attest to worsening working conditions in the countryside, but it does not stop there. Workers in the countryside endure many of the most extreme cases of exploitation, on top of the marginalization and isolation they are forced to endure. Situations differ depending on the workers' contractual conditions and legal status (e.g. people with temporary residence permits, undocumented migrants, people with pending asylum applications), and on each individual's conditions of integration and social network. In the most common situations, the labor force is intercepted by the so-called *caporali* who manage to impose a monopoly on human trafficking and on the intermediation of the workforce at the local level.⁷

Caporalato (illicit hiring) is based on functional complicity; in other words, the structural way in which it is organized responds to the current production system of different actors such as employers, intermediaries, smugglers, public officials, agro-industrial companies, governments, large-scale distribution, and, in some cases, domestic and foreign mafia clans. The relations between the actors involved vary according to historical, social, territorial, economic, and political conditions and contexts. Nevertheless, the pattern remains the same: In the climate of complicity necessary to ensure profit and power for the exploiters, the *caporale* (corporal—these names underline military-style power relations) negotiates the type of duties and work hours that are imposed on casual workers as well as their pay. These workers are the most disempowered link in the chain, despite being essential for production. From southern to northern Italy, the numbers of women and men, mostly migrants, that are victims of illicit hiring and labor exploitation are on the rise. Some unions and trade unionists, likewise some trade associations, push surprising narratives that consider these conditions episodic, marginal, peripheral, or as the expression of a simplistic exploitative gray-zone system entailing low pay and fraud. These narratives circulate widely in trade union circles, for instance in the Agro Pontino (Lazio), in the Piana del Sele (Campania), or in the Capitanata (Puglia) areas. We are talking about those narratives that are backward and revisionist, consolidating the phenomenon by trying to hide it, with serious consequences for workers and more just agricultural systems.

In 2016, after several hearings and an ad hoc commission, the Italian parliament adopted a law (199/2016) against this phenomenon, which, among other things, features specific measures for seasonal workers in agriculture and extends responsibilities and sanctions for *caporali* and for the entrepreneurs who work with them.⁸ However, it is still necessary to conduct analyses of and come to terms with the causes that make this intermediation necessary: An analysis of the environmental

5 Cf. law 92/2012 (Fornero law); law 196/1997 (Treu package), legislative decree 276/2003 (Biagi reform), law 286/98 (Consolidated Immigration Act), law 189/2022 (Bossi-Fini law), law 132/2018 (the so-called "Safety Decree"), legislative decree June 15, 2015 n. 81 and the delegation law 183/2014 (the so-called "Jobs Act").

6 Cf. <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2015/09/SPA-2013.pdf?title=La+struttura+delle+aziende+agricole+-+02%2Fset%2F2015+-+Testo+integrale.pdf>

7 According to 2014 data from the Placido Rizzotto Observatory in the FLAI CGIL trade union, there are around 450,000 exploited agricultural day laborers in Italy employed by illegal intermediaries, of which 80% are non-Italian and 100,000 suffer serious exploitation.

8 <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/11/3/16G00213/sg>

and social costs of the agricultural model that is being promoted and of the systems of protection and requalification of those who fight against the agro-mafias and agro-industrial systems that impose exploitation and marginalization.⁹

In Italy, about 100,000 workers live in conditions of serious exploitation in the agricultural sector alone. Research shows that 62% of seasonal workers lack access to any basic service, while 64% have no access to water. After the harvest, 72% of workers develop occupational diseases that affect bones and muscles. The academic community, together with the work of non-profit organizations and unions, has brought to light and reported several cases of death due to extreme working conditions. The fact that workers are trapped in isolation and marginalization is a typical expression of the exploitation "industry." Women are victims of abuse and violence, while men are often forced to use doping drugs and methamphetamine to cope with physical fatigue and exhaustion.

In Italy, especially in the south where working-class struggles have marked the country's history,¹⁰ the decline in consumer purchasing power after the economic crisis has probably exacerbated this phenomenon, prompting industry and large-scale retail chains to further reduce costs to make up for shrinking consumption. Rising poverty has therefore even had the perverse effect of making high-quality food a privilege of a small section of the population and framing the issue in terms of food justice. If farmers are burdened with excessive taxes, consumers are also affected, actually paying up to ten times the market price. Moreover, this distorted mechanism causes environmental damage and enormous costs to the community, also intensifying externalities such as water pollution, as well as declining soil fertility and biodiversity. Investigations conducted by one of the authors¹¹ during the summer of 2019 revealed deep entanglements between agricultural production in the Pontine Marshes in the Lazio region, the exploitation of Indian workers, and the consequences for the environment and on their health, as well as that of consumers and citizens. The investigations also focused on the use of pesticides and other chemical substances produced through a criminal alliance between various mafias (in particular Casalesi, Camorra, and the Sicilian mafia). These mafias purchase the chemical bases of these substances, which are then imported into Italy via the ports of Reggio Calabria and Naples, processed in clandestine laboratories managed by the Camorra in the Campania area, and then sold at night to various Pontine agricultural entrepreneurs who use them to increase and improve their local agricultural production, with serious consequences for collective health. Among the various toxic and illegal substances found were the trade names Cycocel and Adrop (from clandestine production), which were banned in Italy in 2009 and 2012 respectively for being highly carcinogenic."¹²

9 Cf. reflections of Bruno Giordano, cassation court magistrate, on law 199/2016, www.tempi-moderni.net/2019/10/30/mille-giorni-contro-il-caporalato-ci-vuole-coraggio/.

10 Cf. the farm worker revolt against the large estates and subsequently against the fascist regime of Michele Mancino and Giuseppe Di Vittorio.

11 <https://www.ilsalvagente.it/2019/09/16/linchiasta-svela-pesticidi-proibiti-usati-nei-campi-dellagro-pontino/>

<https://www.tempi-moderni.net/2019/09/16/fitofarmaci-illegali-tossici-e-cancerogeni-nelle-campagne-pontine-siamo-tutti-morti-che-lavorano/>

www.eurispes.eu/news/agromafie-e-pesticidi-illegali-a-tg1-omizzolo-sociologo-e-ricercatore-eurispes/

12 https://www.inmigrazione.it/UserFiles/File/Documents/87_DOPARSI%20OPER%20LAVORARE%20COME%20SCHIAVI.pdf



Piazza della Libertà, in Latina, full of Indian laborers during the strike of April 18, 2016.

The Punjabi Indian community has been present in the province of Latina since the mid-1980s, when globalization and modernization imposed intensive industrial agriculture, replacing traditional family farming. However, in the plains, greenhouse crop production still coexists with outdoor farms managed by cooperatives of different sizes. The ties between these different realities are growing stronger and tend to benefit the large centers of agricultural production and distribution.

Fruit, vegetable, and wine companies are supported by a system of collection and distribution of agricultural products for which the Mercato Ortofrutticolo di Fondi (MOF), the wholesale fruit and vegetable market of Fondi, is the main hub. MOF is the largest logistics platform for the collection, treatment, and sale of fresh fruit and vegetables in Italy; it is also one of the most important in Europe. It plays a key role in the exchange between North and South and is the point of reference for large retailers on the European and global markets. Many mafia-related investigations have been conducted concerning companies, such as Bilico and La Paganese, that engage with the MOF.

The community of Indian workers was originally just a group of a few dozen mostly young people from Punjab as well as other groups that had settled in Europe earlier. Today it comprises about 30,000 people, mostly residing in peri-urban areas where lifestyles, as well as social patterns and traditions typical of Punjabi culture are replicated, facilitated by the transnational relationships that residents have with their country of origin.

Over the years, the first generation of Punjabi migrants that arrived in the province of Latina in the mid-eighties has come to play an important role for the entire community, performing functions of representation and mediation between its members, the host society, and the culture of origin. They also are mediators and facilitators for newcomers from the Punjab region. They have gained advanced knowledge on how the Italian administrative system functions, on the needs of local agricultural entrepreneurs, and on some informal practices (such as corruption). In some cases, this knowledge has functioned as a bridge to some farms and agricultural cooperatives, creating a complex system characterized by exploitation, illegal hiring, and international human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation.

Despite national regulations, Punjabi workers in this area are often forced to work between 10 and 14 hours a day for around 4 euros per hour, including weekends. They often suffer pressure through threats and extortion and face various types of scams every day regarding residence permit renewals, false salaries and contracts, ever-changing wages, false schemes for document renewal, salaries paid with long delays or not paid at all, and physical violence. In addition, some women workers face sexual harassment and threats. One farm in the Pontine area (in Central Italy) hired only day laborers and paid them with a single rate of 3 euros per hour—less than half the legal rate of 9 euros per hour. In this case, as reported by Eurispes in its annual study on Italian agro-mafias, the Indian workers complained to their employer and demanded that their workers' rights be respected. The employer not only dismissed their complaints but also further lowered their wages as punishment. Older Indian workers are replaced with new, more compliant ones. The conditions created by a new agreement between the employer and the Indian *caporale* ensured that the new workers would be more docile.



Harbhajan Ghuman and Gurmukh Singh, Vice President and President of the Indian Community of Lazio on stage during the strike of April 18, 2016 organized by the Indian laborers of the province of Latina.

In collaboration with the Provincial Command of the Carabinieri (national gendarmerie) of Latina, the agents of the Labor Inspectorate, the NAS (a branch of the Carabinieri that investigates counterfeit goods and the health unit of the Carabinieri), working with some members of the former Parliamentary Commission against Occupational Accidents in 2016,¹³ discovered practices of serious labor exploitation in a large agricultural cooperative between Sabaudia and Terracina: About 130 Indian employees working in highly exploitative conditions were exposed to harmful non-regulatory chemicals used in production.

Indian workers are recruited in a variety of ways, for example through apps such as WhatsApp. They are then picked up in unmarked vans driven by the Indian caporale that transport the workers to the employer's agricultural fields where they have to work under harsh conditions. Work accidents are often not reported to avoid inspections by the authorities. Another common problem is the violence suffered by workers while traveling to and from their workplaces. Especially after payday, it is not uncommon for farm laborers to get mugged of their monthly wages by local criminals.

As years of exploitation and oppression take their toll, suicide rates rise. To these workers, suicide may appear as the only way to escape painful experiences, financial debts, or obligations towards their families in India. The labor is physically demanding on the daily and, as revealed in the study by migrant rights group In Migrazione, workers are forced "to take drugs to work like slaves."¹⁴ Some of them resort to methamphetamine, opium, and antispasmodic drugs to relieve mental and physical pain. This aspect also links the Pontine exploitation system to the various forms of organized crime in Campania. In their study on the most common payment methods in this context, MEDU (Doctors for Human Rights) and the ASGI legal clinic of the Roma Tre report that 80% of workers are paid minimum wage for long working days.¹⁵ About 67% said they were paid directly by their employer, 7% by an Indian intermediary, and 24% preferred not to answer the question. The study concluded that wages and employment contracts often appear to be legally sound but include incorrect or barely legible text. This opacity ends up benefiting the employer. A contract may state that an employee will work 12 to 14 hours a day every day of the month, but will only be paid for 3 or 4 days per month. However, this is written in lead pencil and in Italian, so that the worker cannot understand.

On April 18, 2016, In Migrazione, the Indian community of Lazio, and the CGIL with the Flai CGIL organized the largest strike of migrant laborers in Italy with about 4,000 workers who protested in front of the Prefecture of Latina to demand justice, legalization of their immigration and employment status, and better working conditions in rural areas. This protest accelerated the approval process of law 199/2016, countering undeclared work and labor exploitation in the agricultural

13 The "Parliamentary Commission against Accidents at Work" was the first official government commission to organize an inspection in the Agro Pontino to integrate the working conditions of Indian workers. The commission produced an institutional report submitted to the Senate. The report was also acquired as official measure by the judges in the cases where the farm was charged for the exploitation of the workforce.

14 <https://www.mediciperidirittiumani.org/pdf/Terraingiusta.pdf>

15 This definition refers to more than 8 hours per day, according to the law of June 24, 1997 no. 196 which, following the guidelines outlined in the collective bargaining practice, placed a limit on the weekly working time of a maximum of 40 hours per week and in 8 per day.

sector. It imposes criminal penalties for employers found to be engaged in the exploitation of irregular labor, up to the arrest of individuals and seizure of assets used in illegal activities, potentially the entire company.

HOW TO READ THE SIGNS OF A POSSIBLE EMANCIPATION

Despite the situation described, in the province of Latina the conditions for possible emancipation seem to emerge through social protest organized and expressed democratically. On April 18, 2016, more than 4,000 Indian workers held the first strike and a protest rally of particular importance, also due to the national media coverage and political visibility it gained. This initiative was coordinated by the cooperative In Migrazione, Flai Cgil, and the Indian community of Lazio. This same initiative was replicated on October 21, 2019 when more than 2,000 Indian laborers went on strike in protest of the violence inflicted on some of them by Italian bosses and Indian caporali in the rural areas of the Pontine region. In some cases, bosses threatened their Indian employees with shotguns and knives to force them to silently endure intense work schedules, including night shifts, and to tolerate the code-of-silence regime that ensures the longevity of the current exploitative agro-mafia system.

Numerous investigations and inquiries are being proposed. Using participatory action research (PAR) methodology, the research center Tempi Moderni has developed numerous investigations regarding the Indian workforce in the Pontine region.¹⁶ Researchers got themselves hired as laborers in some Pontine farms, which allowed them to follow various Italian bosses and Indian caporali for several months in 2010, then a human trafficker in India in 2011. Finally, in the summer of 2019, they observed recruitment and transport activities in the rural area of the Pontine region and specifically in the municipality of Terracina. The strikes were not only trade union or litigation initiatives but addressed social problems like racism and violent methods used by employers. The collaboration between the cooperative In Migrazione and the research center Tempi Moderni helped the Indian laborers gain more confidence and political awareness also thanks to the launch of advanced multi-service centers such as Bella Farnia. The laborers filed over 150 complaints with the local public prosecutor's office against bosses, exploiters, corporals, traffickers, and various mobsters. In about 20 percent of cases, Indian laborers became a civil party in the related trials, setting out on a path of struggle and resistance pedagogy that brought testimonies of lived experience to the courtrooms.

The Indian laborers continue to engage in a long process of training and information, still organized by Tempi Moderni, that aims to teach them the Italian language as well as key concepts of labor and constitutional law, in collaboration with the Indian community of Lazio and various other members of the Indian community who have come to assume qualified and responsible leadership roles within these processes that are not just service-oriented. The legal office in the Pontine territory, established thanks to the collaboration between Tempi Moderni and the association Progetto Diritti,¹⁷ makes it possible to file more lawsuits in attempt to reach justice through trials. Transforming the experience of learning and struggling into one of resistance and open-ended continuous training constitutes one of the turning points in the process of resisting exploitation and Pontine agro-mafias by Indian workers.

16 <http://www.tempi-moderni.net>

17 <https://www.progettodiritti.it>

266 This will be followed by courses on advanced management and agricultural cooperatives for laborers who had previously been severely exploited. This initiative aims at creating possible alternatives and sustainable agricultural models based on role reversal and on processes of economic and social redemption. These activities are in the process of being launched and include agricultural production that does not use chemicals and pesticides, traditional horticultural products (i.e. salad, zucchini, eggplant, pumpkin flowers, etc.), and experimental lines of agricultural products of Indian origin for consumption mainly within the Pontine Indian community. Cooperatives will produce these goods on abandoned land and on land confiscated from the mafia, taking advantage of article 416 *bis* of the Italian Penal Code that allows for confiscated land to be re-used for social projects. The distribution line will stay within the Indian community, in the local markets of Rome, the province of Rome, and the province of Latina through direct booking by interested consumers.

A direct marketing line between Punjab and communities of the Indian diaspora in Europe and worldwide is in the process of being organized. The goal is to go beyond the phase of denunciation and to, through legal procedures, put an end to illegal hiring and serious exploitation of Indian laborers—a phase that has passed through socio-political and trade union struggles. Creating completely legal job opportunities and autonomous employment that is sustainable in economic, entrepreneurial, environmental, and social terms requires a process of continuous training and awareness, so as to avoid the models and practices described above from being replicated. There are also experiments¹⁸ with a process of re-training aimed at including Indian migrants in work activities that are not traditionally agricultural, such as catering, commerce, third sector, etc. This could counter the widespread ghettoizing prejudice according to which both economic and forced migrants are destined, by nature or cultural vocation, to perform only marginal, dangerous, tiring, and manual tasks and activities.

Finally, advanced training courses continue to be organized by In Migrazione for the new generations as well. The goal is to direct them, where possible, towards an increasingly qualified university and post-university training, and at the same time towards an elaboration of the history and culture of their origins, to recuperate the native language, as well as a critical understanding of job placement paths that lead to the situation of exploitation.

Ultimately, the goal is to go beyond emancipation from labor exploitation, ghettoization, and segregation of an economic nature and to join the agro-ecological movement by building social and political alternatives to the current food system, seizing the opportunity to build a substantial and conscious collective emancipation. Some NGOs such as Terra Nuova are investigating the link between exploitation of rural communities and extractivist production practices in agriculture: These practices, they explain, very often contribute to the trends of migration increasingly shifting to urban areas in the Global South and subsequently to rural areas of the North. Even after having arrived in Europe, migrants often find themselves trapped in the same dynamics, dictated by the extractivist model itself, typical of food systems led by the agro-industry. Even developmental

18 We refer to experiments brought about by some engaged associations such as Libera Terra, Fair Trade and No Cap (www.nocap.it), which trade agricultural and food products ethically labeled as free from work exploitation.

267 policies, increasingly biased towards curbing migration,¹⁹ tend to design interventions on the basis of the narrative which sees rural areas as incorporated in a profit-driven industrial system. This is seen as a way of providing the expanding urban masses with cheap food and driving economic growth. Nevertheless, to think today that “development” solutions can pass through a system that considers “water, energy, biodiversity, soil, and human beings as faceless commodities”²⁰ seems dangerously outdated in the face of climate change and other limited natural resources. In 2018, the “Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas” was approved at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. It is a significant step towards recognizing how these rural communities have been victimized throughout the world. It emphasizes that their role has been central in producing basic necessities essential to life, such as food. However, very strong and structural powers, of which illegal hiring is only one aspect, have been blocking the implementation of concrete measures that would guarantee the rights of farmers and other people living in rural areas.

19 https://www.concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CONCORD_AidWatchPaper_Aid_Migration_2018_online.pdf

20 Felipe Bley-Folly, Andrea Nuila, Emily Mattheisen, and Daniel Fyfe “Echoes from Below: Peoples’ Social Struggles as an Antidote to a ‘Human Rights Crisis.’”

Albanese, Matteo. "The Appeal of Neo-Fascism in Times of Crisis. The Experience of CasaPound Italia." in *Fascism*, vol. no. 2 (January 1, 2013): pp. 234-58.

Berardi, Franco "Bifo." *La nonna di Schäuble. Come il colonialismo finanziario ha distrutto il progetto europeo*. Verona: Ombre Corte, 2015.

Bley-Folly, Felipe, Andrea Nuila, Emily Mattheisen, and Daniel Fyfe. "Echoes from Below: Peoples' Social Struggles as an Antidote to a 'Human Rights Crisis.'" *The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*, September 2017. <https://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/echoes-below-peoples-social-struggles-antidote-human-rights-crisis> (accessed July 2020).

Colloca, Carlo, and Alessandra Corrado eds. *La globalizzazione delle campagne. Migranti e società rurali nel sud Italia*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2013.

Fekete, Liz, Frances Webber, and Anya Edmond-Pettitt. *Humanitarianism: The Unacceptable Face of Solidarity*. (London: Institute of Race Relations), 2017. https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wpmedia.outlandish.com/irr/2017/11/10092853/Humanitarianism_the_unacceptable_face_of_solidarity.pdf (accessed March 2020).

Nocifora, Enzo. "L'avvento del lavoro paraschiavistico e le trasformazioni del mercato del lavoro in Italia," in *Quasi schiavi, paraschiavismo e super-sfruttamento nel mercato del lavoro del XXI secolo*. Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli Editore, 2014, pp. 39-82.

Omizzolo, Marco. *Migranti e diritti*, ed. Tempi Moderni, Macerata: Simple Editore, 2017.

Omizzolo, Marco. "Tratta internazionale nell'area del Mediterraneo e sfruttamento lavorativo: il caso della comunità indiana in provincia di Latina," in *Europe of Migrations: Policies, Legal Issues and Experiences*, eds. Serena Baldin, Morena Zago. Trieste: EUT Edizioni Universitarie di Trieste, 2017, pp. 307-328.

Omizzolo, Marco. "Il sistema bicefalo del mercato del lavoro italiano e il grave sfruttamento lavorativo: tratta internazionale, caporalato e doping dei braccianti indiani dell'Agro Pontino" in *Padroni e caporali - dopo la legge Collana*, no. 199 / 2016, e-book in "Il diritto in Europa oggi," Key ed., 2018, pp. 149-170.

Omizzolo, Marco. *Essere migranti in Italia. Sociologia dell'accoglienza*. Rome: Meltemi, 2019.

Omizzolo, Marco. *Sotto Padrone*. Milan: Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019.

Onorati, Antonio, and Mauro Conti. "Agricoltura italiana e agricoltura contadina. L'ingiusta

competizione tra modelli produttivi e sistemi distinti." *Agriregionieuropa* year 12, no. 45 (June 2016). <https://agiregionieuropa.univpm.it/it/content/article/31/45/agricoltura-italiana-e-agricoltura-contadina-lingiusta-competizione-tra> (accessed March 2020).

Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto. *Agromafie e caporalato*, Rome: Ediesse, 2015.

Parascandolo, Fabio. "Beni comuni, sistemi comunitari e usi civici: riflessioni a partire da un caso regionale," *Medea*, vol. II, no. 1 (June 2016).

Perna, Tonino. "Segni di rinascita nelle aree 'interne,'" *Scienze Del Territorio* no. 4, 2018, pp. 25-32.

Saxer, Marc, "Ten Theses for the Fight Against Right-Wing Populism." ed. Meyer, Henning *Understanding the Populist Revolt*. Brussels: Social Europe Journal, vol. 11 Spring 2017 <https://stocktaking-scenarios.blog.rosalux.de/files/2017/06/Understanding-The-Populist-Revolt-PDF.pdf> (accessed July 2020).

Terray, Emanuel, "Le travail des étrangers en situation irréglière ou la délocalisation sur place" in Étienne Balibar; Monique Chemillier-Gendreau; Jaqueline Costa-Lascoux; Emmanuel Terray. *Sans-papiers : l'archaïsme fatal*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1999.

Tondo, Lorenzo, "Attacks on immigrants highlight rise of fascist groups in Italy." Article, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/06/attacks-on-immigrants-highlight-rise-of-fascist-groups-in-italy> (accessed March 2020).

Vizioli, V., "L'agricoltura e la Politica: occasione mancata," *Il Gambero Verde*, February 15, 2018.

MIGRATION INFORMATION POINT—BUILDING A HOUSE FROM THE KNOWLEDGE OF MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

Transcript of a conversation between Rex Osa, Aino Korvensyrjä, and Natascha Sadr Haghighian on September 27, 2019 in Berlin

Aino: *Rex, you initiated Migration Information Point, MIP for short, a center for returnees and deportees in Benin City, Nigeria earlier this year. What was your motivation to start MIP and to network in West Africa again after twelve years of organizing mainly in Europe, Germany specifically? What and where are the struggles around migration today?*

Rex: I observed that the operational activities of the migration regimes have been shifting to the home countries of refugees in recent years. The very same measures we have been criticizing here in Europe are now being established in our countries to operate much more easily and effectively. International NGOs like the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) act in the interests of the EU, often hiding in the shadows of local civil society organizations.

For more than a decade, my engagement has been focused on raising awareness against the ignorance of EU society and improving the human rights standard for refugees in Germany. But the situation in my home country Nigeria remains unchanged. Nigeria is one of the main countries when you talk about migration out of Africa. I felt it was important to establish a functional transnational cooperation between our diaspora engagements in Europe and local activism in West Africa. It took me about four years of trying to meet different activist friends in the region before deciding to establish a structure in Nigeria. It was a process of learning from other activist experiences especially within the French-speaking West African countries, where there is a lot of awareness about migration compared to Nigeria. Realizing that this awareness is lacking in Nigeria, I decided it's my responsibility to contribute to developing it.

Aino: *I remember that before we started collaborating in 2015, you had already*

been traveling to the region, having group discussions and networking in French-speaking West Africa, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. So these trips have been formative in developing ways of organizing, meeting deportees, and connecting them with local activists?

Rex: I'm a community person; even in Germany empowering communities of refugees and migrants was always important for me. I went to Gambia and Sierra Leone in 2014 to document the situation of two victims of deportation who had been deported to the wrong country. The communities I encountered there were discussing how to create a structure for political discussion around migration, so that people who are deported can be empowered to tell their stories. Their shared experiences helped to communicate the realities of migration and of Europe. During this trip, I understood that there was a need to create a local network so that we can build a kind of bridge between the diaspora in Europe and people with migration experience in Africa.

Aino: *This is the approach you are also using in Nigeria at MIP, right?*

Rex: Yeah. Establishing a politically effective and sustainable migration platform in Nigeria depends on developing a strong community of people with migration experience. Like I mentioned earlier, I have always been a community person. We actually cannot do it alone in Nigeria, we need broader community networking, and that's what we've been trying to do: to empower people with migration experience. The official categories of "deportees" or "returnees" can be stigmatizing or dividing. Therefore our intervention was to refer to them as "persons with migration experience" (PWME for short), thereby creating an understanding that they are actually experts on migration. We want to create

an open platform for people to meet each other, share experiences and, in the long run, extend this information to people who may be interested in these topics so that we can start a critical discussion around migration.

We intend to create a center that persons with migration experience can identify as a space for themselves. Although we may not have much concrete help to offer at the moment, ensuring a space for them to hang out and interact with one another, as they gradually overcome the traumatic experiences and societal stigma, can be empowering. For the effective running of the center, active engagement of PWME is encouraged to promote a sense of belonging. Our task is to create opportunities that could help them re-establish a new life and understand their potential as migration experts with a unique perspective that cannot be ignored in any debate in which migration is a relevant factor. Often people who were deported from Germany prefer to express themselves in the German language. You can see them feeling happy to talk in German, to show that they lived there for some time. They could organize a German meal and cook Spätzle for everybody for example. We want to encourage different kinds of potential of the PWME to make them feel a sense of belonging in the center.

In the last year we've been very engaged in creating a coalition of returnees and deportees together. It's been quite a challenge, which is also understandable: Building up migrant organizing and empowering migrant communities in Germany also took a long time. It took years to create awareness in society and to activate the potential of migrant self-organization. So we need the same patience. People who are first of all hungry, who have been through traumatizing experiences need time to reset their minds and to start confronting

things politically. That is also why they are vulnerable to offering themselves for sale to different NGOs and their exploitative and unsustainable projects.

Aino: Could you explain what the terms "returnees" and "deportees" mean? And who the main actors in your project or in the network are, and how you are organizing with them?

Rex: These terms describe two groups of people: those who are returned from Libya and those who are deported from Europe. Most of the returnees from Libya arrive through the IOM, so they get support when they arrive and have to follow different programs. The deportees from Europe are dumped at Lagos airport and they either finally end up back in their home villages or get stranded in Lagos. The two groups are very divided, due to the activities of external actors and the public discussion. While the returnees from Libya dominate the public discussion about migration, return, and reintegration in Nigeria, the deportees are hiding, frustrated, feeling ashamed and stigmatized.

People who return from Libya and did not experience Europe tend to still believe that problems end with surviving the desert and the Mediterranean sea, that a life beyond them would have been better. We try to make them understand that the route to Europe and life in Europe are regulated by the same border regime, all the way through. From the desert to Libya and further in Europe, everything is regulated by the same border regime. But they have a hard time seeing it like that. Therefore the perspective of deportees from Europe is very important, because they know the reality of this border regime from inside Europe. It would be important to get them to speak out in public, like the returnees.

Returnees working with NGOs become the mouthpiece of the European



Image above: Members of the MiP coordination team in Benin City

Image below: MiP October 2019 Conference for the Coalition of Libyan Returnees. Deportees and researchers were present to facilitate the exchange.

narrative of “illegal migration” that frames traffickers as the main problem. They go around speaking in public, saying things like don’t take the risk, please travel legally or stay in your country, build your country. The question is: What is there to build? That is why we are trying to organize these two groups together, people who were in Libya and who were in Europe, even if it is challenging.

Aino: *Which European actors are present in Nigeria and how do they affect the conditions of migration or return there? The term “migration industry” has been used to describe the developments in Benin City right now. What is its context?*

Rex: The European actors themselves are not very visible in Benin City. The representatives of the GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit / German Corporation for International Cooperation) from Europe work through consultants. They have people who are employed locally and who monitor what the consultants are doing. They split up their activities into separate projects. Sometimes you cannot really identify who is doing what. The IOM is more visible. But they also work with consultants and local NGOs. So there is no real accountability, no real sustainability, and there is no coordination between the NGOs. This is also a result of the NGOs competing for international funding.

A telling example is that of people who return after years in Libya, who experienced detention centers and militia-run prisons, were traumatized by the violence and brutality of the situation. They return to Nigeria assisted by the IOM and on arrival are put in a luxury hotel for four days for a so-called “mindsetting.” These are people who have never been in a luxury hotel before and suddenly they are in such a place, given good food, and for four days they are “mindset” and then

sent away with transport money to go back to wherever, nobody cares.

Aino: *What is “mindsetting”?*

Rex: The aim is to “reset” your mind, to make you understand that you are now back in Nigeria to start a new life. It’s a weird mix of therapy session and entrepreneurship training. Then the participants are given contacts of different local NGO offices where they can go check whether they can get start-up capital or get more training. So most of the money that is invested is spent on hotels and “mindsetting” training events. The GIZ or IOM simply keep count of how many people fill the form. If the number is five hundred people, they will say that they were able to set the mind of five hundred people. There are no real checks and balances of what happens afterwards, no sustainability.

The people wait six or seven months for start-up capital in the hope that the IOM or the GIZ can help them. In the meantime, they are taken to different extra courses that can last four days, one month, several months. But the courses don’t help them settle in; at the end, they are still waiting for start-up capital. And while they don’t even know how they can feed themselves or where they can live, after six or seven months they have to pay transport fares to the NGO’s offices where they are asked to come. Those who receive part of the money will use it to buy a ticket and leave the country again. This is the problem with the reintegration programs. A lot of people are frustrated and a lot of people are protesting. But when you go shout, make noise about it, they call you to the corner, sort you out to keep your protesting down.

In my experience, people who are returned need a minimum of one to two months without even thinking about how to start their new life. They need a free space where they can come in, eat, play, just

forget themselves for a moment. You don’t need to give them special therapy, but just an environment where they can feel welcome, feel relaxed, see people like themselves, even if it’s just to have a coffee. In this atmosphere they start to reflect, they share experiences, share their situation.

Aino: *In Germany, a number of new so-called “voluntary” return programs have been introduced by different ministries and agencies. They are being advertised on the streets under bizarre names like “Perspektive Heimat” (Perspective Home). They suggest that (voluntary) deportation is OK now because going back to your country with the aid of such programs will give you a “perspective.” How do these programs operate in Africa?*

Rex: I would say that the effect of financial aid offered by international organizations like GIZ is rather cosmetic. In these programs people are not provided with the skills or the material requirements to start viable businesses. There is very little monitoring by the Ministry of Labor if nobody complains. Imagine a situation where thirty randomly chosen persons are thrown into a cooperative business together which in the agreements is set for maximum four people. A shop is rented, equipped with five sewing machines, and given 150,000 naira (350 euros) as start-up capital with a second installment of 150,000 naira paid about three months later. These people barely know each other and have no passion or skills for the craft, but they are compelled to accept what is available. In general, the empowerment programs are only directed at buying and selling or tailoring, barbering and farming. A trained welder for example with a passion for his profession is told he has only the option to get into buying and selling. The distance to where they live is not taken into consideration and there is no support for transportation expenses.

Natascha: *In contrast to the European-funded empowerment programs, it seems MIP’s approach is to first of all understand people’s real needs. To help them to find out and discuss what their situation really is, how they see migration issues, and also how they want to live their life coming back to Nigeria.*

Rex: If you want to talk about reintegration of people, you should first talk to the people who need this reintegration. This is what we really want to hit at: that the people should be able to decide on what reintegration means for them. The European government is giving out money for projects that do not actually have a positive impact on Nigerian society. And the Nigerian government actually has enough funds of its own to support the reintegration of its people. It is very important to address this and to re-imagine what reintegration could mean.

Aino: *I find it interesting that the meaning of “reintegration” can change a lot if it gets redefined by the people themselves. I am very critical of the term in its current political use, and I think you are too. In Europe it is often used to legitimize deportation. Can you say something more about the ideological role of all of these European-funded projects in Nigeria and about how your center and the knowledge of the people with migration experience can intervene?*

Rex: The initial idea of the MIP project was to bring the larger political context of migration into the discussion locally. But already in the first phase of establishing this process, we began to realize the challenges returnees and deportees are confronted with. Their stigmatizing situation made it difficult for them to grasp the actual problems. It was important to adjust our process to their situation, as they were the major actors. We also found out about the conflict among returnees resulting from divisive manipulations by the NGOs.



Inauguration of the Returnees and Deportees Coalition. Delegates from religious and other contemporary youth organizations across Edo state participated. May 1, 2019.

To address the conflict, the MIP team organized a meeting with coordination persons from the different returnee groups in Benin City in December 2018. Representatives of the conflicting groups could meet together for the first time to iron out their differences. During this meeting, they became aware of the dominant role of the NGOs who are actually not interested in addressing the actual problems returnees are faced with. When competing for funding, the NGOs try to recruit returnees to follow their agendas, typically crafted to suit their European funders' interests, for meager compensation. This then creates competition among the returnees.

Re-integration should mean re-connecting back to a system you have been away from for a while. It's more about creating a sense of belonging for them, especially given the societal stigma that is associated with their return. It is a question of who should integrate whom. The community of PWME can play a major role by building self-determination and confidence in themselves.

The future space of the MIP project could develop many different activities and functions, also to be economically self-sustainable. The plan is to organize a small printing section for producing different printed materials like flyers, banners, etc. Interested persons could get some training at no cost, which could help them earn a living in the long run. During the training period, they are expected to actively support the running of the center. Persons who undergo training with the center are allowed to carry out printing jobs of their own at much lower rates than elsewhere. So in a way, they are giving and taking. There has to be an understanding that you benefit from the house and you also have to give to the house, not just financially, but be committed to making sure that the house keeps existing.

My wish is that even European activists, researchers, and journalists who visit the center should be able to contribute to its running. We intend to make the center a central point for meeting people with migration experience (PWME). It will be available for organizing events to draw more attention to the critical situation of migration. All we need at the beginning is to bring people together; the social impact will come later.

Aino: I would like to ask you to talk a little more about how the European and international actors pose trafficking as the main problem concerning migration and channel everything towards that. You said before that the returnees are instrumentalized as anti-trafficking messengers. How can you intervene in this debate?

Rex: One of the major aims of MIP was to bring this political content onto the ground and create a civil society network of interested people. We need to spark critical reflection of the simple horror narratives of human trafficking, towards considering the concrete complex migration realities and understanding the European agenda. People need to first of all be empowered to understand this reality. It's a long process, it has been such also here in Europe. My long-term dream is that MIP becomes an autonomous political center open for all forms of political empowerment, not only migration. It would be the first of its kind in the region.

Aino: How are you dealing with the issue of gender and trafficking? Women are always portrayed as the victims of traffickers. And what is the importance of Benin City in the discussion on women and trafficking?

Rex: Yes, women with migration experience face stereotyping and stigma in Nigeria. Especially single ladies or single mothers



Image above: Construction at the autonomous migration center (MIP) as of October 2019

Image below: Outside the autonomous migration center (MIP) as of October 2019



Image above: Construction at the autonomous migration center (MIP) as of July 2020

Image below: Inauguration meeting of the Returnees and Deported Coalition on May 1, 2019. The presentation on the screen is by Ousmane Diarra from the autonomous organization of deportees AME (Association Malienne des Expulsés, Mali), a model for organizing as deported persons.

who migrated. They are portrayed as prostitutes, lazy, lacking morals, and as people who cannot support a family. Single ladies find it difficult to get an apartment, as many landlords refuse to rent to women without a husband. The migration of women is often connected with their desire to create a better life for their kids. Many have no option but to leave their children behind to make money for their upbringing. That is the situation that makes them vulnerable to being trafficked and ending up in forced prostitution. The business of human trafficking and forced prostitution is strongly linked to Edo State in Nigeria, which Benin City is the capital of. Edo State is in itself a destination and transit point for people who migrate from other parts of the country. Some end up being trapped there in conditions of enslavement for many years before they can continue their journey. Women are more vulnerable and often in a terrible situation. When they finally arrive at the European destination, they have to endure further exploitation and debt of sometimes tens of thousands of euros. So imagine a single mother being deported back to misery after many years of traumatic experiences. She is deported in handcuffs, with excessive use of violence, and her children are put through these traumatic experiences too. She and her kids are dumped at the airport with no form of assistance. They are left to their own devices. This is the story of many women.

We try to address the problem of being stranded in the airport area on arrival and we engage with the situation of deported women. We started collaborating with the project Single Mothers with Migration Experience (SMwME) based in Nigeria and the Supermum Charity initiative—a platform for single mothers with about 14,000 members across Africa. We have a team for Deportees Emergency Reception and Support, which includes ex-deportees, representatives of Supermum, Centre for

Youth Integrated Development, engaged journalists, and other local groups and individuals. We receive and offer support for the newly arrived women when a deportation charter flight arrives and we direct them to the SMwME project for further empowerment and support.

Aino: *How do you use the term “trafficking”?*

I have problems with it, because of the ideological connotations that we have been talking about. I suppose you refer not just to any illegalized way of traveling, but to being under the direct power of somebody, forced to labor for this person or organization?

Rex: Apart from a few exceptions, there is literally no legal way to come to Europe. For the journey through the desert, people are trafficked from Nigeria to Agadez, they are then sold out to so-called “ghetto owners” who force them into prostitution or other work so as to organize funds for the continuation of their journey. Then the ghetto owners put them on a HiLux truck to undergo a deadly journey while someone else is waiting to receive them in Libya—that is if they survive the desert. These people are working to fund their travel but are still made to feel like they are being sponsored. Unpaid or forced service work is the fastest way to pay up. The traffickers are not patient to offer other opportunities. Humans are now sold like goods and it continues until they reach Europe. Smuggling and trafficking are difficult to separate here. So long as the border and visa regime continues to deprive persons of their right to freedom of movement, the business of trafficking and smuggling will continue to flourish. The migration trail is also a profitable venture for the European government: Embassies are making a lot of money from the visa system. And traffickers have connections to the embassies. They can organise a fat bank statement to facilitate the visa process or different documents like employment and

invitation letters from rich companies where they have insiders who can vouch for the documentation. Therefore they have high chances to obtain visas that average, ordinary travelers are denied. Male travelers are often charged up to 1 million naira (2,500 euros) or more by the traffickers for the visa alone.

Keep in mind that nothing can stop the quest to migrate as it is a natural thing, a way of life. People will surely migrate with or without traffickers, as humans would always move, in search of a better life and dignity, especially with the projection of Europe as paradise. Outside traveling for leisure or business, people will definitively be forced to migrate due to insecurity, which could either be political or economical. And Europe profits greatly from the whole migration business including trafficking. Many of these trafficked persons end up enslaved or in bad working conditions in farms, factories, and the service sector (like logistics, cleaning, sex work, or domestic work) in Europe.



The picture was taken after a meeting with Germany deportees and Libya returnees with visiting guests from Brot für die Welt Germany, MiP Center October 2019.



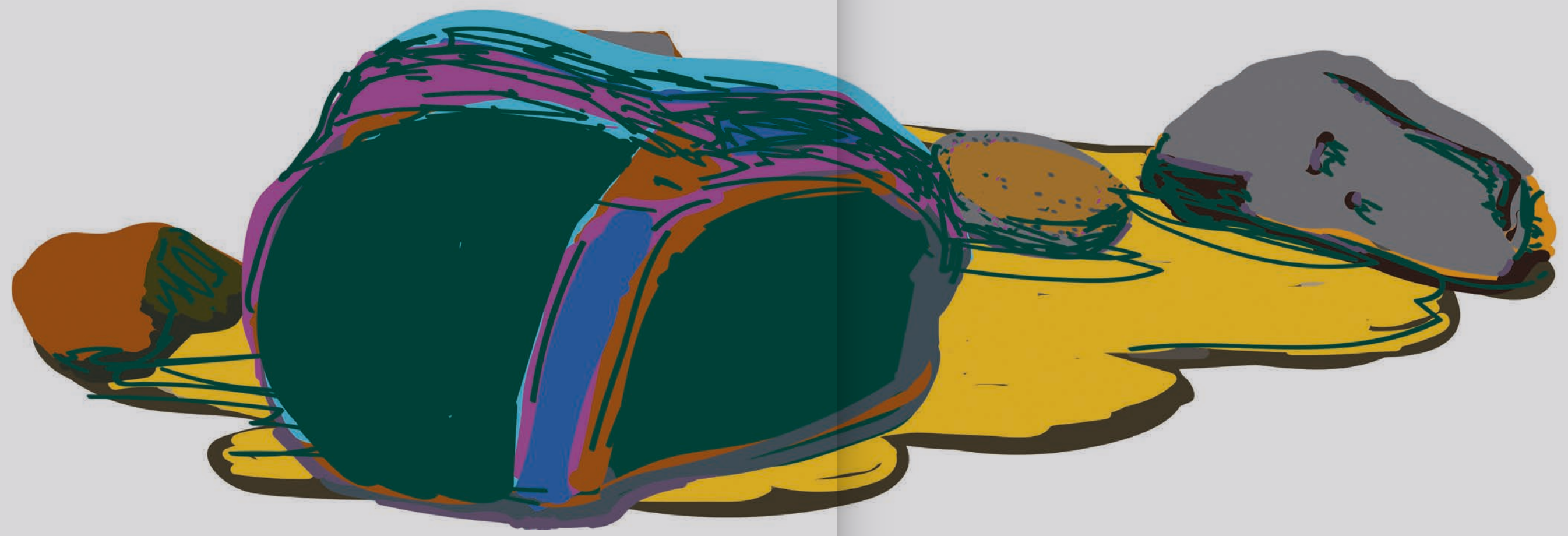
Banner depicting the MiP's partnership with the Supermum Charity Initiative in the project Single Mothers with Migration Experience (SMwME)

whether they are crammed together in cruel experiments of cross-contagion, or forced to risk their lives daily in order to eat and to ensure collective survival, or whether they are simply very alone. the dream returns and returns:

someone sits down and refuses to leave. hardly anyone notices. more and more people sit down. some, because they are tired, some because they are in pain, some sit because they are lazy, because they are heavy, because they can't stand upright any more. there are those who sit because they fucked up their feet, knees, or hips with heavy labor. there are those who only squat, always ready to rise. some sit for no particular reason or because they never learned to stand up for themselves. there are the depressed and passive ones, who mostly sit anyway. and there are those with sitting experience: who have sat through dangerous crossings, community meetings, blockades, holding cells.

by now they have become uncountable. they sit down around the same time, and thus happen to sit down together. under their butts property transforms into land. land sustains survival—where study is headed, where study begins. while sitting, they might take up a long and complicated series of conversations with crops, critters, compost, and each other. someone mentions the tyranny

of structurelessness, and someone else suggests that they write down their process—not because they love paperwork, but because they love each other. they slowly recognize what is happening, what they are doing. they begin to whisper to their neighbors, to raise their voices and wonder, what's next—can we make some plans?



a friend comes to visit the study group. the visitor is someone who has spent her life in study. she shares stories with the study group, stories of power and stories of pain. the power of struggle, self-organizing, remembering, reminding. the pain of state-ordered negligence, violence, racism, and personal loss. she reminds the study group of halit yozgat who was murdered in 2006 by a network of right-wing terrorists in kassel, germany. she talks about halit's father, ismail yozgat, who continues to demand remembrance, which, among other things, is the story of a naming, namely, the demand for the re-naming of a street. the demand stands until this day: halitstraße oder ich will meinen sohn zurück. halit street or i want my son back. the visitor describes ways in which ismail yozgat has over and over again made his demand in the face of state-sanctioned inaction and violence, perpetuated by the institutions that count. this involves an account of a day in court, in which ismail yozgat put up the sign with his demand for the re-naming of the street while he spoke as a witness, and, to answer the question how exactly he found his son's body, he got up from his seat, moved the high chairs out of the way and lay down in front of the judge: this is how i found him. as he shifted the room in a moment of study, a resonance could be heard (for those who listen) with these words by assata shakur:

and if i know anything at all, it's that a wall is just a wall, and nothing more at all, it can be broken down.

the son cannot be brought back. a street can be renamed.

the visitor gives the study group something more to keep, a relation that is spatial, but also spiritual. when it comes to solidarity and connecting in struggle, what relation of support can be conjured to someone who suffered an irretrievable loss, an irreparable cut into their life? it's rather simple, she says. go, stand next to them. not behind them, hiding, or in front of them, taking up space. stand next to them. this is all that is needed, and everything that is needed, to begin with.

you will recognize this relation if you attend a study group for feminist self-defense, this can happen in a garden, in a basement, on the street. here you will learn that when you observe someone under threat from an aggressor, often the best idea is to go and stand next to them. this will make them a more difficult target in the eyes of the attacker, and increase their confidence, because now they are standing next to you, they are not alone. besides, they have experience. they will handle the situation, and they will let you know what else they might need, beyond having handled it. people in the study group vow to remember to stand shoulder to shoulder, side by side.

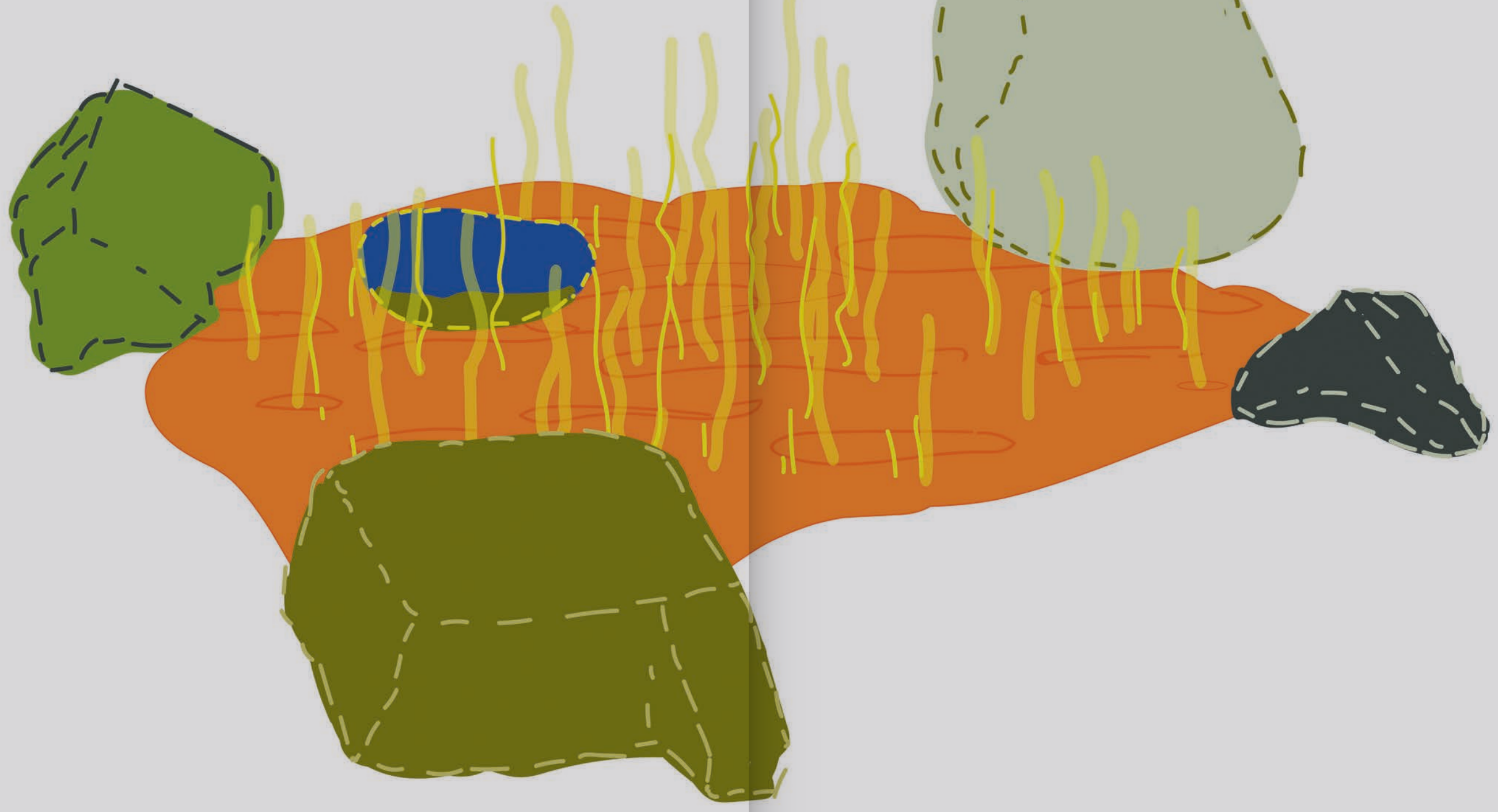


Image Credits

11 *Scaling as a Wing (Icarus*)* by Fritz Laszlo Weber
12-19 *mausevogelmausevogelmause* by Fritz Laszlo Weber**
26, 32, 38, 40, 96, 142, 170, 290, 294 *study group (beyond repair)*,
digital drawings by Natascha Sadr Haghghian
47 drawing by Avery F. Gordon
71 photos by Aino Korvensyrjä
81 drawing by Sami Khatib
103 drawing by Nida Ghouse
112, 123, 126, 129, 130 photos by Natascha Sadr Haghghian
113, 114, 116, 120, 121 photos by Jasper Kettner
118, 119, 122, 124, 125, 128 photos by Pola Sieverding
147 drawing by Marina Vishmidt
175, 181, 184, 189 drawings by Ashkan Sepahvand
195-201, 217-225 photos by jee chan and stefan pente
208 stefan pente photographed by evelina pente, 1974
211 jee chan photographed by mancini tan, 2017
231-233 stills from digital video by Luisa Eugeni
234-235 photos by Natascha Sadr Haghghian
253 *Earth Grabbing*, drawing by Mauro Ferrari
257, 260, 263 photos by Marco Omizzolo
275, 278, 280, 281, 283, 284 photos courtesy of MiP

* **Icarus: Short for International Cooperation for Animal Research Using Space. Icarus is a multinational project aiming for a planetary tracking of migratory patterns of animals using orbital satellite surveillance technology. Or: a mythological figure who fell from the sky when flying too high with self-built wings.**

** **Mausevogel: An animal last seen before the beginning of bird migration recordings. It was found in rural areas of Central Eastern Europe. There it was sighted in the form of a bird (Vogel) in summer months and in the form of a mouse (Maus) in winter months.**

The *beyond repair* study gathering was a three-week program consisting of seminars and workshops as well as public events. It took place on Lido and Le Vignole, two islands in the Venetian Lagoon, June 12–28, 2019 as part of the public program of *Ankersentrum (surviving in the ruinous ruin)*, Natascha Süder Happelmann's contribution for the German Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale. *Ankersentrum (surviving in the ruinous ruin)* spanned various activities and formats including videos, performances, print and online publications, parallel to a large-scale installation at the pavilion. The work traced and linked irreversibly damaged and damaging conditions and spaces shaped by extractivism and accumulation. Taking the awareness of irreparability as its point of departure, it focused on the tumultuous resonances generated by flight, resistance and self-organization—and the aesthetic and social processes they set in motion.

The print publication *Ankersentrum (surviving in the ruinous ruin)* was published with Archive Books on the occasion of the opening of the German Pavilion in May 2019 and is followed by the second print publication *beyond repair* (Archive Books) in October 2020.

The *beyond repair* study gathering was a collaboration between the German Pavilion 2019, Biennale Urbana, University of the Arts Bremen (HfK) and the University of Venice Graduate Program in Visual and Performing Arts; the program was kindly co-hosted by the Global Campus of Human Rights Lido, Conservatorio Benedetto Marcello, Polveriera delle Vignole and luav di Venezia.

Concept
Ernest Ah and Natascha Sadr Haghighian

Realization
Ernest Ah, Andrea Curtoni, Luisa Eugeni, Natascha Sadr Haghighian, Katrin Kappenberger, Andrea De Lorenzo, Giulia Mazzorin, Mona Schieren and Ingo Vetter

Documentation
Fritz Laszlo Weber

Contributors
Ayreen Anastas, Jean-René Bilongo, jee chan, Alessandro Dessí, Jessica Ekomane, Rene Gabri, Nida Ghouse, Avery F. Gordon, Natascha Sadr Haghighian, Sami Khatib, Hyunjin Kim, Aino Korvensyrjä, Asli Serbest and Mona Mahall, Angela Mengoni, Andreas Müller, Tisha Mukarji, Nuria Schönberg Nono, Marco Omizzolo, Rex Osa, stefan pente, Mona Schieren, Martin Schulz, Ashkan Sephavand, Elnaz Seyedi, Ingo Vetter, Angela Vettese, Marina Vishmidt, Biennale Urbana, and students from HfK Bremen, Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig, luav di Venezia, Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design.

The German contribution to the 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2019 is realized on behalf of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany and in cooperation with ifa (Institute for Foreign Relations).

This publication is an assembly of materials by some of those who spoke, performed, and shared their research at the public program of the *beyond repair* study gathering. It is intended to record and continue some of the conversations begun at the study gathering, to make them accessible to more, and move further.

The study group texts, cited as written by Ernest Ah, grew out of the *beyond repair* study gathering, and—in opening up to a larger web of thinking with and owing to—unsettle the importance of who it might have been that wrote. They borrow from (among others) Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, Föreningen JA!, Lee H. Jones, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Marlon Riggs, all name-changing queers, John Waters, the Dreamlanders, Caio Soares, Édouard Glissant, Short Mountain Sanctuary, t blank, Donna Haraway, Jo Freeman, The Folleterre Empowerment Through Cooperation Hand Book, Ayşe Güleç, İsmail Yozgat, Assata Shakur, Lowkick e.V., Dina Reis.

Editors
Ernest Ah, Natascha Sadr Haghighian

Design
Maziyar Pahlevan

Copy editing
Zoë Claire Miller, Nine Eglantine Yamamoto-Masson

Transcription
Ernest Ah

Image treatment
Paul Niedermayer

Instigator
Franciska Zólyom

Advisor
Chiara Figone

Printed by
hinkelsteindruck sozialistische GmbH

Bookbinder
Reinhart & Wasser Bibliotheks- und Verlagsbuchbinderei GmbH

Paper
Circle Offset Premium White

ISBN: 978-3-948212-42-1

Kindly supported by
The funders and friends of the German Pavilion 2019, Hochschule für Künste Bremen, Waldemar Koch Stiftung

Published by
Archive Books
Reinickendorfer Straße 17
13347 Berlin

Thanks to

All the coordinators and contributors of the study gathering in Venice for the generous exchange and curiosity, Katrin Kappenberger especially for her patience and for making things possible, Zoë Claire Miller for having our back, Paul Niedermayer for connecting the dots, Radio Angrezi for being good company, Angela Mengoni for sharing her knowledge generously, Fondazione Archivio Luigi Nono and especially Nuria Schönberg Nono for making our day on Giudecca, Centro Tedesco for hospitality, Aboubakar Soumahoro and Francesco for their openness, t blank for being a fiery comrade, David Jasey for delicious food in busy times, Dina Reis for the sisterhood, Penny for the grounding, Luisa Eugeni for her insistence, Fritz Laszlo Weber for the ping-pong, Franciska Zólyom for the spark, Ingo Vetter for his trust, Mona Schieren for reminding us of the somatic, Rex Osa—among many other things—for bringing Precious, Eileen and Amani, Tisha Mukarji for playing Bach, Manuela Benetton for an unforgettable evening at the Conservatorio, Michele Braga for always making the sun shine, Shahab Fotouhi, Başak Ertür and Alisa Lebow for beautiful surprise visits, Sina Ahmadi for knowing Lido, Haytham El Wardany for the color of the sky, the kind stranger who gave ten of us a ride when we missed the last boat from Certosa.

A very special thanks goes out to our dear friends at Biennale Urbana for making the impossible possible. Losing Caserma Pepe just days before the start of *beyond repair* they literally invented space over night, defying a broken system. Thank you Andrea, Giulia, Andrea, Linda, Jack, Nico and the others for sheltering us, cooking the most delicious food for eighty people every night and building piers, shuttles and solar showers, working around the clock in the middle of an eviction.

