

from

culture beside itself
as a part of issue #11



Newsletter

Reading Room

#1
April 2019

Reading Rosa, pink and other colors
<http://terracritica.net/readingroom>

Terre Thaemlitz,
“Deproduction Part II: Admit It’s
Killing You (And Leave) Sound/reading
for Gay Porn”

Rosa Luxemburg, “Women’s Suffrage
and Class Struggle” (1912)

Hortense Spillers Lecture
“shades of intimacy”

Gowri Vijayakumar,
“There Was an Uproar: Reading
the Arcane of Reproduction Through
Sex Work in India”

ReadingRoom is a semi-autonomous project at the margins of the academic humanities and art institutions, a collaboration between *Terra Critica* and *Casco Art Institute*. The group might be defined as a porous affective collective, dependent for its continued existence on the generosity of its attendants. Simone Weil once said that attention is the purest and rarest form of generosity - and in that spirit, we have built something together that offers time, space and community for an attentive engagement with text and world, eluding the limited imagination of neoliberal institutions with their myopic fixation on quantifiable outcomes.

In its current, fifth season entitled *Reading Rosa, pink and other colors*, ReadingRoom grapples with the analysis of the complex, interweaving systems of what we call Capitalism-Patriarchy-Colonialism or simply “CPC”: the oppressive logics defining both of our own time and of those fragments of history that lie within the spans of our ancestral memories. In exploring the tensions between projects of strategic politicization, radical resistance and collapse, we struggle to imagine something outside of the frameworks we’ve all internalized - a project that can’t be conducted alone.

We ask ourselves: is there a way to discuss & collectively “produce” theory—within and without institutions and formal academic bodies—that does not rely on pre-existing patterns of production, labor, value? How can these limits be incorporated into the practice of criticism and theory, if at all? What is at stake by questioning or foregrounding these immanent conditions?

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ReadingRoom is dependent upon all people involved, returning to it, engaging with thought and showing it. It is non-autonomous but entirely relational. Institutionally, it is hosted & affectively made possible by all involved, some tangentially and others faithfully. It is at the margins of, or parasitical to the institutional places it touches on - the art institute, the university. And it escapes, a little bit, the imaginations of the neoliberal-CPC institutions. Reading is an engagement with the world - especially corporally, as shared conversations that arise from the readings.

If CPC co-opts new certainties, we need to move across multiple strategies. Breaking what counts as moral or immoral is a necessary start. An example is rendering sex work unexceptional, as a strategy. Cutting blood relations at the locus of moral, legitimate family is another - if [radical] promiscuity is also outside the logic of reproduction, it can become a start for immoral kinships.

A take away, for me, regarding today's session concerns understanding the contradictions that these texts trace throughout societally prescribed manners of existing / having intimacy / relating to one another, etc. as starting points for imagining differently. These contradictions, which can so easily be found through even the most gentle forms of analysis, provide insight into the potential for our societal conditions to operate differently, especially in the face of CPC. As was said in today's session, we can consider imagination as a political project and these contradictions are perhaps a starting point for imagining the potential for livable futures that somehow do not coincide with the conditions put forth by CPC.

Hell is the other (Sartre)
Hell is the ego?
Hell is the family? (Terre T.)
No Heaven in sight.

I do think collectivism is going to be the inevitable outcome of extreme individualism... especially that of the US, which is a society that is individualistic to the core. Internet and social media promote collectivism and are a platform for all nuanced identity politics, but identity politics become so nuanced that they're individualized from one person to the next.

Would the end of CPC and a new collectivism arise when all borders, even the nuanced ones, are melded into such a small, almost molecular level, where there's no choice but to turn the focus to more universal identity commonalities?

What would be the condition for cultivating aloneness not as individualism but as a safe, liberating and healthy space?

Under which logic of appropriation and dispossession is reproduction secured?

"Through cultural & legal endorsement of the parental ownership of children, and conversely the traumatic youthful awareness of being owned by one's parents, we internalize the notion that all of us are possessions owned by someone." (Thaemlitz 44)

Is there a way to discuss & collectively “produce” theory—within and without institutions and formal academic bodies—that does not rely on pre-existing patterns of production, labor, value?

How can these limits be incorporated into the practice of criticism and theory, if at all? What is at stake by asking or foregrounding these immanent conditions?

If as a collective we are invested in the analysis of oppressive, interweaving systems of CPC, the question we are often left with is: what now? What might we do beyond analysing and coping, and how? Our coming together certainly gives us time and space outside of institutions in which thought and art become sucked up into a capitalist, neoliberal purpose which diminishes the radical anti-fascist and anti-colonial aspects of our work. But still, what else than time and space is offered by *Terra Critica*?

Undoing the family: what could come in its stead? Reinventing kinship, affective community through ties of affinity... ReadingRoom is a place to be together with people who share a project of emancipation, to explore tensions between projects of strategic politicization and radical resistance or even collapse...

The struggle to imagine something outside of what we've all internalized can't be conducted alone. It happens where theory meets politics, art, speculation, but above all generosity.

Being-outside and -other-wise: we are not a collective but purveyors of a queer punk individualism.

What would be the condition to allow pluralization of “aloneness” & fragmentation of different possibilities for healthy families (that are not only tied to blood relations)?

What I found interesting in our discussion is how the text of Thaemlitz speaks to Spillers' lecture. Spillers beautifully elaborated her point on the impossibility of the conditions of intimacy by emphasizing that the problem of the logic of intimacy is the need to save intimacy for the mere purpose of saving humanity and this ontological reality makes touch and hapticity connoted with ownership and violence. This reflection on the logic of intimacy speaks to Thaemlitz's call to destroy the logic of family. I see their call as a starting point for asking the right political questions that take us to possible liberation.

In this season of ReadingRoom, we have arrived at the unfinished conclusion that the logic of family is a main incubator for what we are calling CPC. The cocktail of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism. We arrived to this via Rosa Luxemburg but also unsettling disposition that one of the letters of CPC is always dropped out. Intimacy, family, and property relations complicates everything. (Don't we already know that?) We discuss over various readings and this session in particular was very thrilling. We hope everyone gets the chance to speak if they want to, also ok if not! Honestly ReadingRoom is a beautifully collective experience = full on shared pleasure over text and the reproductive act of reading.

To me, the discussion around the difference & connections between what conditions us, and how we experience and live these realities at the same time, which all texts address, is what stays with me after this RR. (...)

Most significant to even glimpse the possibility of somewhat effectively tackling CPC (or fascism) because I'm fully with Spillers here when she responds to one of the questions: “can we know enough about the circumstances of a specific time to approach the concept itself?”

Thaemlitz: Children are the property of parents.

Me: But is this not also true the other way around in (as) women's reproductive labour?

We are our children's property. Our bodies are our children's property.

Think of anti-abortion discourse—the mother's body is the property of the fetus (child-to-be).

Even pro-choice discourse is grounded in the rhetoric of private property.

“My body is my choice”

How can we think this relation otherwise?

If the texts we heard/read for this session don't necessarily focus on empirical reading but on the underlying systems of oppression at play, where exactly can we draw the border between “empirical reality” and the individualized systems of oppression? Aren't these two entities intertwined?

How to build community based support & care structure for people dealing with mental health issues that isolate them from real world?
> Think through how to translate individual “mad” experiences of perceptions of the world as something that can be shared as knowledge instead of something to be dealt with in a psych's office, individualizing the experiences completely.