

conditions

Situating
ourselves
collectively, and
the problem
of displacement:
by way of
an introduction.

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#neoliberalism
#precarity
#subjectivity

#positionality
#composition
#mobility

#translation
#micropolitics

DISPLACEMENT AS A SHARED PROBLEM

When we launched the call for an autumn workshop in 2014, we departed from concerns that felt very intimate and abstract at the same time. Displacement, as an embodied verb, a felt fact, a new affect, was something we felt we shared as condition – as condition of possibility as well as shared impasse. We wanted to address the experiences, forms of subjectivity, and material realities generated by displacement within neoliberal capitalism, starting from our own trajectories. As transient subjects – caught between mobility and migration, between precarity and flexibility – we noted that displacement sometimes becomes a form of identity for us. It constitutes a form of subjectivation (production of our subjectivity) and subjectification (capture within a subjective paradigm) we feel ambivalent about, but know we cannot escape. So we decided to explore this ambivalent reality in a collective setting, to see if we can develop common analyses and find words to name our experiences, realities and tactics – within, against and beyond displacement.

On the one hand, on a negative note, displacement relates to the universes and universals of value of global capitalism, to neoliberalism, to liberal subjectivity and cultural relativism, to (neo)colonial (his)stories and to new and old modes of exploitation. Becoming a migrant, a refugee, an undesired or undocumented element; becoming a mobile subject, a bundle of human capital, a self-entrepreneur of life, a creative drifter. Histories of primitive accumulation, land grabbing and being driven away. Universes of relativism and exchange where any experience can stand in for any other, where we are adrift in an abstract space, often captured by a liberalism that converts any condition into a token. All these dynamics are characteristic of a logic of displacement that we think is key to neoliberalism.

Exchange value, logistics, migration, human capital, flexi-work, extractivism: we could draw a diagram of the lines

of force that run across these, and of how we each navigate within this field of contemporary power. Displacement implies all kinds of disempowering affects and existential disorientations: precarity, vulnerability, othering; unstable and contradictory relationships of belonging; loneliness, disorientation, anxiety¹. These experiences of displacement reflect the reality of global capitalism, of bodies being intimately caught in value chains and logistical circuits.

Within this biopolitical configuration, displacement however also has a positive meaning: it can mark a form of escape from those same forms of biopolitical control over our lives, a 'technology of self' that we appropriate in individual and also collective ways. We are also autonomous in our movements. Many knowledges spring from our experiences of moving – and with them many technologies, cultural forms, modes and platforms of relating that now shape our lives, from Facebook to Whatsapp, to Skype, etc – many knowledges and technologies respond to the global reality of displacement. Many attempts at hacking happen at this level. New transnational, translational and transductive sensitivities emerge from it, constituting new forms of agency and being political. The experience of living the elsewhere in multiple places and ways, of becoming other and outsider time and again, teaches us many a lesson about identity and subjectivity, and also about openness and solidarity. So we navigate a tension between cultural-economic liberalism and radical openings to (the) other(s).

INHABITING DISPLACEMENT

What can we learn about the ways in which we inhabit this condition, when do we affirm and when do we resist displacement? If neoliberalism ceaselessly mobilises, how

1 Anxiety: when there are no clear reference points to hold on to, no markers to navigate by, when the stars blur into a shifting night sky that we don't know how to read. Dizziness. Very different from fear, which always has a concrete object, which leaves us with a choice of fight/flight/faint. Anxiety escapes those tactics, it affects our whole being in the world from within. It acts on our vestibular and reproductive systems, amongst others, not just through the nervous or circulatory one. Anxiety and displacement go together.

and when and who do we mobilize? It makes a difference whether displacement comes disguised in a vast ocean of 'free' movements and precarious youthful mobilities, or comes slamming down as a form of control or discipline. The experiences, knowledges and tactics produced within these two polarities of displacement are different from one another. They produce specific forms of subjectivity that are often incompatible with each other, or pitted against one another: the migrant and the refugee, the precarious and the subaltern, etc. We situate ourselves in the attempts of thinking and acting across those. Of bridging the gaps that should keep us separate, of translating, situating, orienting, lending, hiding, trafficking, sharing, collectivizing.

The many stepping and stumbling stones via which displacement divides and rules – visas, permits, borders, non-rights, monolinguality, selective translation, short term contracts, conversion and cashing in – are also points of solidarity and struggle. Their techniques and technologies – encounters, chats, calls, marriages, money transfers, care networks – are deeply part of our everyday lives.

One of the functions of displacement is to make victims of us; another is to make heroes. Beyond these two, and admitting a certain level of blurring and polyvocality between different experiences and conditions, we start from ourselves here, from an encounter in the Europe of the crisis. The idea here is to make the thin membranes between our existential, geographic and political territories touch and resonate. To think a micropolitics of displacement.

We are shaped by realities of dispersed friendships, families, relationships; scattered education and work trajectories; transits between different movements, collective spaces; attempts at translating across different local histories... These conditions come with a series of effects. The skype-ification and whatsappification of relationships; the normalization of distance; frequent travel; applying for permits, jobs or grants in several continents at the same time; not quite knowing where to project ourselves; or when to know that we've 'landed'; the fragility and loneliness of being in a new place; the power of the networks that surround and hold us; the struggle to cultivate knowledges that come from

different places; relearning how to inhabit relations of power and privilege; life-long language learning; etc.

SHARING QUESTIONS

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We came to these questions as newcomers in Barcelona, having just set up a feminist space in a small group – with the hope of establishing continuity and grounding ourselves collectively in a place and practice.² Therein we organised the autumn laboratory, which in turn attracted many newcomers, returners or escapees from other places. The texts you find in this publication are records, testimonies, echos and mirrors of the problems we addressed in this laboratory, written by participants and workshop facilitators. We departed from questions which many texts here respond to:

↘ What do politics and ethics mean in the context of frequent displacements? → How do we understand and give account of our positionality and trajectory as itinerant subjects?

↗ What tools do we have for

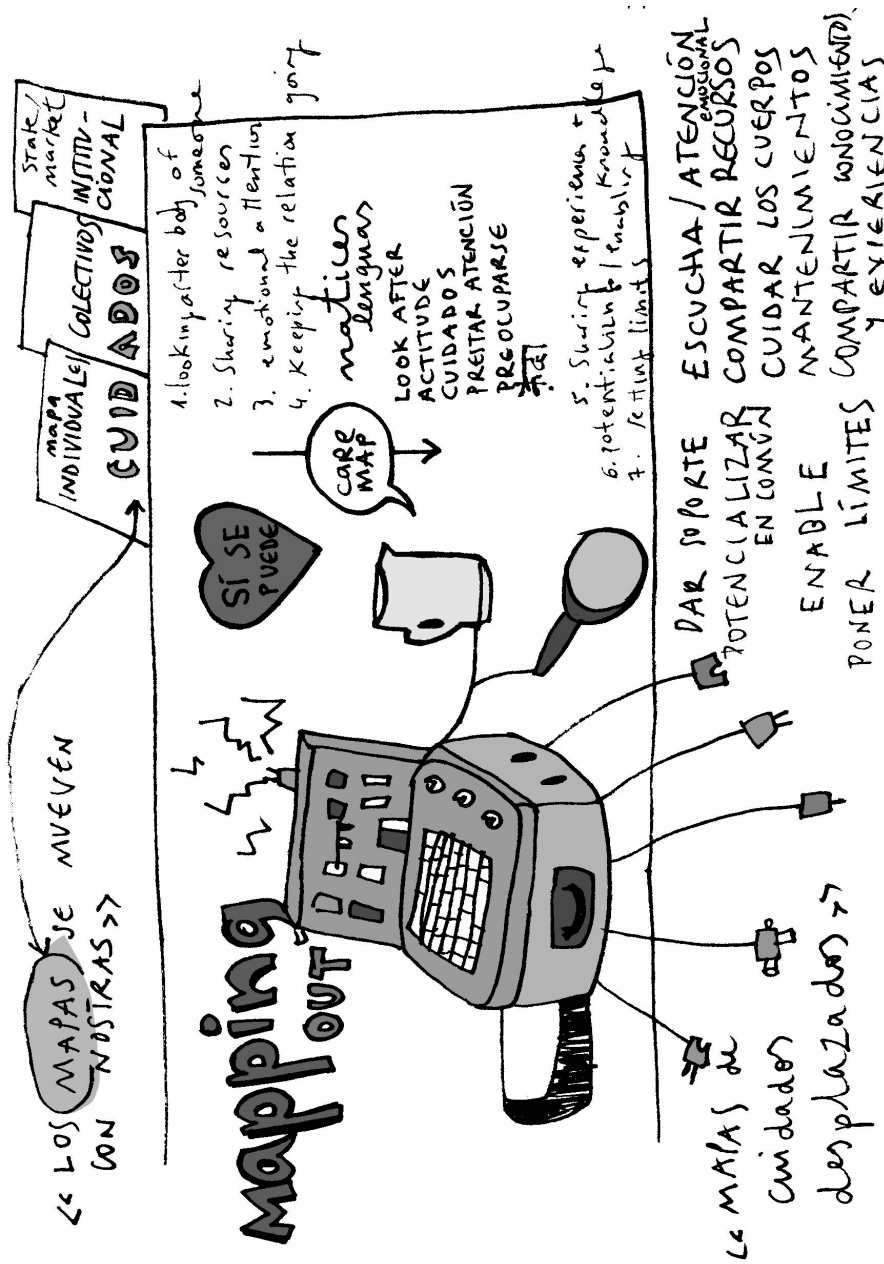
2 The 'Electrodoméstica' was a space we collectively rented in Barcelona in 2014, aiming to set up a feminist cooperative to matching our lives and labours in new ways. A space for reproducing our lives in close connection with our communities, politics and material needs. This corresponded to a generational moment of exhaustion: having gone past 30 and still being on the move, unsure, without secure income. Our attempt failed. Not least because we each inhabited the space with different notions and stakes concerning 'reproduction': a tough lesson that taught us that it's not just reproduction that matters, as a radical buzzword that attracts us amidst a profound sense of unsustainable forms of life, but that the deeper political question is 'reproduce what'?

orienting ourselves in new contexts, for mapping out stakes, problems and possibilities of relating? ↖ What does it mean to struggle against precarity, globalization and neoliberalism in embodied terms? ↙ How do we forge networks of care, post-national struggles and solidarities in our everyday?

↓ How do we think consistency and sustainability?

↗ What terms serve us to think an ethics and politics of displacement – situated/adrift, local/global, intimate/alienated, individual/collective, independent/interdependent, coming/going, flight/promise, transversality/intersectionality?





↓ When do we resist displacement and how do we resist through displacement?

→ What are the ways in which contemporary practices of displacement are produced by the neoliberal paradigm and embedded within structures and systems of governance?

↘ What are the relations between mobility and migration? ↓ How can we struggle across different regimes of displacement?

We often inhabit uprootedness and mobility in very naturalised modes. The contradictions and normalisations of displacement are hardly ever addressed in collective ways: because they come with fear and guilt of losing the other, of infidelity, instability, loneliness, betrayal, abandoning a collective process or space. So displacement tends to be addressed in individualised, victimizing or psychologizing ways. His or her choice, his or her privilege, his or her misery, his or her problem. How many relationships and collectives have we seen suffer from and yet not deal with the fact that people are itinerant or leave? How few tools do we have

to talk about the material, social and cultural forms of power that displacement mobilizes? What do we do with the loneliness, guilt, loss of vitality or confusion that come with the instability of displacement, and with the forms of social and cultural capital, non-commitment and relativism related to being on the move?

We mostly inhabit the paradoxes of transnational life without resolving them: or let's say, we resolve them in singular and particular ways that are never complete or universal. This booklet – following on from our laboratory – explores tactics and strategies through which we resolve the contradictions of displacement, testing if they can be collectivised and politicized. One key desiring question for us is: what can it mean to 'settle' across more than one position or place, having gathered a baggage of translocal knowledges and relationships that commits us to two or more referents? Is there such a thing as an 'open relationship' with place/space? What can it mean to be 'faithful' or 'complicit' in collective processes across places and contexts?

The knowledges and forms of resistances we build in experiences of displacement are hard to speak about – because they're traversed by power as well as emotion – and yet they are crucial to our realities. We choose to call the resistant side of these knowledges and practices situatedness.

This project has served us for situating some of our experiences in our bodies and in social and historical context. We see how economic bubbles, exchange programmes, the Schengen and similar agreements, the cultural-creative industries and peak oil shaped our forms of life and subjectivity. We see how waves of (primitive or not) accumulation – of present and past crises – have shaped movement and care networks beyond the geopolitical and economic 'centre'. Somewhere, sometimes, often in uncharted territories, even in one and the same body, these different conditions and experiences meet. Or indeed across bodies. Many texts here speak to these encounters and crossovers of regimes of displacement.

SITUATEDNESS AND COMMON NOTIONS AGAINST UNIVERSALISM

Our interest is tactics and experiences that may open new political-compositional horizons. We want to create knowledges and practices that liberate – beyond the freedom of ‘whatever’ or the freedom of critique, beyond the usual liberal or enlightenment expressions of a universal subject. An embodied critique – there is too much consciousness and too many illuminated people around – that can help us subvert our own lives, ‘so that the world cannot be the same any longer’³. Neither free to choose and be whatever – *je ne suis pas Charlie* – nor free to reject and dissociate ourselves from whatever – *ich sehe das aber kritisch* – : beyond the world wide web of disembodied speech and the blackmail of identity, with a politics of being somewhere, arriving somewhere, situating ourselves in relation to others and together with others. The somewhere of nowhere, and the nowhere of somewhere, also the now.here need to be taken into account for that.

One problem with displacement is the (neo)liberal subject that puts itself easily into the place of any other, speaks in the name of any other, assumes and subsumes any ‘knowledge’ in its machine of equivalences, doesn’t recognize that difference can cut deep and that not everything can be said from everywhere equally. Which ignores that subjectivity is largely about articulations with power, meaning that where you can speak from, how you relate and what you embody is to do with power. Subjectivity is about power even when it is about care and gestures of commoning – rather than being about a happy-go-lucky puzzle game of constituting one’s identity or lifestyle (as many anglo-saxon readings of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari have it).

That same subject position often affirms art as a universal language of technique and ideals within which any gesture goes, any statement is fine, any speculation valid. Or that

3 Marina Garcés, *Encarnar la Crítica*, Espal en Blanc – our translation, our emphasis.

‘freedom of speech’ matters more than situated, embodied, listening and respectful ways of speaking. That there is such a thing as a right to be universal, that freedom is about affirming this privileged position. We’re interested in crystallizations that generate new self-positionings, new references, forms of enunciation beyond this; in processes that enable action, praxis. There’s no such thing as a subjectivation that’s adrift – there are adrift subjectivities alright, but no such thing as a process of whatever subjectivation.

So part of the answer to the question of overcoming the liberal condundrum has to do with situated embodiments of knowledges. Akin to the situated knowledges Donna Haraway speaks of in her critique of the scientific paradigm⁴ of partial knowledge, we want to critique the liberal paradigm of total knowledge and its cyber(dis)embodiments. This is not about rejecting technoscience, technopolitics or research, but about developing radical and situated practices in sustainable ways. Radical meaning not so much unshakably ooted as solidly grounded perhaps. Grounded in collective subjects and in embodied ways of knowing and inhabiting.

How do we construct a collective narrative that breaks away from the hyper-individualized narratives of displacement that we see on our screens and in our communities – from the spectacle of displacement as migration or mobility? This project has been a space for us to experiment with situated and intimate articulations beyond the immediate spectacle of social media, to which so much of our time goes these days. The texts in this publication explore narratives and articulations in the first person, singular and plural. Yet we have flirted with social media. We leave you some profile pictures from friends in our social networks.

4 Donna Haraway, (1988) *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. In: *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575–599.





Some motions and meditations on displacement

by Laura
Lapinskiene

In the middle of a collective jam session in an underground punk club "Kablys" in Vilnius in 2011, G. stops playing his sax, picks up a microphone and screams in Lithuanian: *Lietuva jau laisva, galit daryt ka norit su ja!* ("Lithuania is already free – you can do whatever you want with her!"). This pronouncement blends in with the noise of drums, guitar, synths in a stream of consciousness, and rather poignantly expresses the feeling of the moment: these are the times when you are "free" to choose your identity and your lifestyle according to confrontational, "alternative" culture, like punk, metal or vegan, or just be a good citizen-consumer-subject, whatever! However, the structural processes of dispossession and displacement are going on without much public contestation, while corrupt local elites can do whatever they want – since "Lithuania is already free!" Free Lithuania was one of the most publicly pronounced slogans during the "singing revolution" of the 1990s. G. recalls that he and many of his artist friends participated in these contentious events, highly anticipating the promised change. However, over subsequent years of freedom he, like many others, was deeply disenchanted.

With political independence, came confusion, obscurity, uncertainty and non-functionality (Balockaitė 2008).¹ The only thing to replace dead communism were capitalism and democracy achieved by means of voluntary westernization. The economic development of Lithuania since the restoration of independence in 1990 has not been linear. Immediately after 1990 there was a rapid decline in the economy, following the restructuring of industry, the initiation of land reforms and the privatization of state companies. Such shifts kicked off a wave of migration with many people dispersing around the globe in search for better conditions. After Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, the processes of emigration greatly accelerated: in the period between 1990

1 <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-05-08-balockaitė-en.html>

and 2006 nearly half a million citizens left the country². In 2010, the number of emigrants reached unprecedented heights: 38 500 people left in 2009 and in 2010 this number doubled (83 157)³, leaving less than 3 million remaining in Lithuania. So 2.97 out of a total 3.6 million Lithuanians live scattered around the globe⁴.

Citizens of this place have increasingly voted with their feet and left to work in the prosperous Western countries, instead of voicing their concerns to local or national politicians. Their disillusionment was augmented by the high expectations of a better life that struggles for independence had promised to realize. What does it mean for Lithuania and its people? From the perspective of political rhetoric, such migration tendencies pose great challenges in terms of ageing of the population, anticipated labour and skills shortages, brain drain and imaginary danger of a disappearing nation. This discourse reinforces dichotomies by accusing people who leave (betrayal) and instilling a sense of pride in those who stay (commitment). On both political and individual levels, there is a lot of resentment coupled with patriotism – only a stone's throw from turning into nationalism – when it comes to Lithuania's outmigration. But on the other hand, there are powerful networks of informal social support and the sense of waiting for returnees with the new skills, better attitudes and fresh enthusiasm. Migration opens an ambivalent field of feelings, discourses and be/longings, marking the very private as well as public spheres.

As a consequence of mass migration, the public sphere was found to be shrinking: the absence of visible public participation has been often referred to as a "non-existing civil society" in Lithuania. Whether such claims only reproduce the myth of passive masses⁵, which is created and sustained through hegemonic discourses and daily practices, remain the point of inquiry. However, it is clear that the ones who stay

2 <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=3032>

3 The Department of Statistics (2014).

4 The Department of Statistics (2014); <http://db1.stat.gov.lt/statbank/SelectVarVal/saveselection.asp> (2014).

5 See article by Noah Brehmer [Lithuania: Myth of the passive masses](https://libcom.org/library/myth-passive-masses) (<https://libcom.org/library/myth-passive-masses>).

within the national borders for extended periods of time are trying hard to make sense of everyday realities, deal with the broken promises, precarity and even poverty, cope with individualized misery, challenge lack of collective attempts and political will.

Sometimes it is pretty hard to determine who is staying and who is leaving. Some of those who were determined to "stick to the place" are now some thousands kilometers away from Europe. Many of us are just moving around, living "in between" places, being everywhere, or rather nowhere. In current neoliberal terms, we have become "mobile experts", "freelancers", "world citizens", "global nomads" who might in certain cases translate into "precariat", "non-belonging", "forced migration", "dispossession", and most certainly – "displacement".

The following photo-dialogues seek to illustrate people's attempts to articulate and make sense of their precarious situations and ambiguous states of being, trajectories perceived as choices, decisions or spontaneous moves, confrontations and critiques expressed through music, art and movement, in every sense of the word.





L HOW DO YOU FEEL?

G How do I feel!? I feel the way I look. I try 'to be' as much as I can. What else is there left for me – 'not to be'? I want 'to be' if I already 'am'.⁶ However, many things keep bothering me. I have no money to pay for gas, electricity. Small problems. That's why I'm playing, beating my drum – in order not to think about these problems.

L AND HOW DO YOU LIKE LIVING IN KAUNAS?

G F*** Kaunas! I really hate it here! This city is ruled by thieves! And it's full of chamas⁷, too. I'm desperate to get out of here!

L WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO?

G I don't care, to the forest, to nature, to the cosmos, whatever! Really, this is not the question – where. Of course, I want to go there and there; now I even got a new permit to

6 In 2012, the leading country for suicide was Lithuania, with a suicide rate of 34.1 per 100,000 inhabitants. It is particularly high for men around 40–50 years of age. It can be a struggle to hold on to life. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3367275/>).

7 Chamas is a common "nickname" in Lithuania, apparently derived from a word *chamstwo* used in Poland to describe rude behavior in public space. These small violent ways people relate to each other in urban public space become part of the daily routine and go largely unnoticed. However, it becomes striking after living abroad for a while or starting to reflect on your personal daily encounters. As Kacper Poblocki (2010) nicely puts it, "not direct violence, but all the small things that make the urban experience enervating, stressful and unpleasant." (see Poblocki, K. (2010). *The Cunning of Class: Urbanization of Inequality in Post-War Poland*, PhD dissertation; pp. xii).

go to America and have a place to stay there, but my current concern is to solve those financial problems.

L SO NOTHING HAS CHANGED MUCH
AFTER INDEPENDENCE?

G Sure, there was change with 'freedom of movement' and 'freedom of expression', but it mostly brought 'freedom to grab whatever you can' during the transition to the free market economy. I think it is even worse now for the artists and majority of people in Lithuania than it was during Soviet times. In those times, you at least had a common enemy – an alien government – something to fight against. Now, everyone is interested only in his/her own thing. You cannot point the finger at anything – where the hell is the enemy really? You feel dispossessed and out of place, but whom to blame?

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A When I hitchhike in Lithuania and people ask me where am I from, I tell them I am from Lithuania. But of course, then I have to explain myself. I have to tell them that I am born in one place, live in another, study, work, spend holidays and do shopping in yet other places. Each activity takes place in a different city; I live my life on a Lithuanian scale.

L BUT NOW YOU ARE DEPARTING
TO ANOTHER COUNTRY?

A Now I am departing to another country. I do it because I have to.



L WHY DO YOU HAVE TO?

A Because of my Karma.

L DO YOU FEEL DISPLACED?

A Sometimes I feel so out of place! I want to live on the land, in the countryside, away from the city. And yet, I am imprisoned in these urbanities – between the walls, physical and imagined. [...] You know, I wanted to make a hole in the wall in order to connect two rooms, so I took a big hammer and did it. I think I will hammer my way out of here...

J After the last high-school exam I left the classroom, went to the yard and asked for a cigarette to contemplate the occasion. My whole body could feel the change of balance towards something very heavy. I can recall the moment I recognized this and started thinking: I've grown tired of doing a constant countdown. When will it suffice to suffer? Two months until the Christmas holidays. Three days until the weekend. Two classes until I can go home. Twelve minutes until the break. Three years before I take my exams... I am tired of this countdown. What happens if time starts to pass in a natural course without counting it down? I could feel an infinite excitement.

L HOW DO YOU FEEL
IN LITHUANIA?

J I realize that I have the best knowledge of social space as it is in Lithuania. However, now I feel that it does not necessarily benefit me. The form of existence and communication that is there is not satisfactory. I start getting a certain feeling of loneliness, while my connection to this place gradually weakens.

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L WHY DO YOU THINK
THAT IS?

J Many people are leaving; or at least moving all the time. It is easy to lose connection when you are not present. I mean, being constantly on the move distances you from places and people. Sometimes it's like a vicious circle: I am distanced from here due to movement, but the more I am distanced, the easier it gets to move, to go somewhere again. And naturally I start asking myself, 'What the hell am I doing here?'





L WHAT MAKES YOU MOVE?

R I would not say that I move much. I think I am the kind of person who doesn't like/ need too much mobility. I just changed few places (countries) over the past 10 years, that's all. You know the saying 'the grass is greener on the other side', and for me it is the opposite – I think that I need to find the way to live in the place where I am at the moment. I can't say I necessarily love the place I live in, but I need to handle it the best I can.

L SO DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU FOUND YOUR PLACE?

R No, absolutely not. I don't think there is such thing as 'my place'. I think I consciously chose a path, which does not require or even allow for having or finding one's place.

L DO YOU FEEL IN ANY WAY DISPLACED, THEN?

R I wouldn't say that either. I feel that I have never been 'placed', I never had my place as such, and so I can't really feel the displacement.

R Sometimes, it is even hard for me to imagine that a place could be interesting. It happens that if I go to some place else, I always meet the same kind of people, and have the same kind of conversations, which brings me back to the same conclusion that it is not the place that really matters.

L WHY DO YOU KEEP MOVING?

S I haven't found my place yet and, maybe, I don't want to find it. You stay in one place for a while, and then you want to move and stay in another. We have countless possibilities and I want to use them. In order to settle down in one place, there must be something to bind one to a certain place in terms of geographical location, isn't it? And it's not the things or people that does that, but rather the state of mind. And so it happens that I am not bound to a certain place. I have no land. Besides, the world is big and I want to see it.

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L DO YOU FEEL DISPLACED?

S Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't, like everyone else, no? There are times when I don't want to go anywhere or to do anything. But at other times, for example, I want to do things. Now I want to travel. And sometimes you can feel very lonely while travelling. But you meet people when you are away from home.



^S Home is the place to which you can return, lie down on your bed and sleep tight. Where there is a bed and it is not cold. Not necessarily, but it's good if it's not cold. Well, yeah, it's basically a pleasant place to return to. Home... Perhaps, your friends live there. And dogs... In fact, 'home' used to designate a place, when I was a child and had my home where I grew up. But now it's more about people, about the ones I feel attached to. Anyhow, even at home you feel good and bad...

L WHY DO YOU KEEP MOVING?

^U When I see examples of people who are close to me, and observe the lives of my family – my mom, dad, grandparents – I realize I don't want such a destiny that is bound to constant, sedentary existence, which at the end becomes total seclusion and there is no more contact. In my opinion, there is no more meaning to such life. Perhaps that's what makes me move, travel, search, meet people. But I cannot say that there's only one major reason why I keep moving. It's a search for knowledge, love, passion, money and the lack of all those things.

L HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR PLACE?
DO YOU FEEL DISPLACED IN ANY SENSE?

^U For me, there is no 'my place', because there are many places that I feel connected with. What connects me is the people who stay in those places and memories that I carry in my head. As well as future plans. Although I would very much love to say that my place is simply the place where I am

at the moment – but I guess I can't say that 100 percent. It's not that I travel to any corner of the planet and feel comfortable and secure, I always need some time to feel attached to a place. I think my places are the ones that no longer require time to feel attached to. So yes, I feel displaced, but I like it to a certain extent. It gives me more ways to look at the places that I'm connected to. Sometimes I feel displacement just because I can't afford the plane tickets back to Lithuania, for example. It's too far, and the tickets are too expensive. Sometimes I have no time to come back. Sometimes I wish I could have time, and then I feel that friction and displacement.



L WHAT MAKES YOU MOVE?

° What makes me move? Normally, the call of the heart, and even if I'm already 'moved' all the places that I have seen, all the roads I have travelled still come up in my mind as day dreams. So sometimes I have a week where I walk down the streets here in Guatemala but my heart is on an Estonian island or on the ocean shores, or in Portugal... Then, I remind myself that I am in such an amazing place and that one day, I will be daydreaming of Antigua's central park and the volcanoes...



L DO YOU FEEL DISPLACED?

° I do feel displaced. This was, probably, why I kept on going...and going...no matter where I went. I feel good in Lithuania, but something inside me feels like I don't have a place there. Once I came to live in Guatemala I had that same feeling and what I did was that I said to myself 'you have the right to live here just like anyone else. You have the right to walk and you have the right to have your favourite bookstore'. Now I feel better and I feel that I can 'occupy the space'. But still! I want to travel and see other places, and live in them, and discover other bookstores and other shores of the same ocean...(It is always about the shore...)

L WHAT MAKES YOU MOVE?

A Interesting things, people, landscapes...The fact that I am a curious duck helps me move away from Kaunas. And also the fact that even though I could maintain a stable monthly income here to buy potato chips, elsewhere it seems easier. But at the end of the day, all roads lead to Kaunas, so we will meet there, you will see!

L DO YOU FEEL DISPLACED?

A I don't really feel displaced in terms of geographical location. However, I feel displaced from the futures that might have happened. Not so much from the concrete places and times, but more from the zones of intensities and magic.



Colonial and Cannibal Orientations

by
Bue Rübner
Hansen

ROBINSON CRUSOE AS GUIDE AND MYTH

Cyclones, capital investments, career opportunities. War, drought, and floods: the nomadic and the sedentary are increasingly swept along or overflowed by translocal and global forces. How to orientate oneself when you are adrift in a tempest or when the ground below you shakes in an earthquake? Such processes lead to a problem of orientation. How to orientate oneself in displacement, when one is not a part of a stable cosmos, social order or life world? While we cannot presume that this problem was inaugurated by European modernity (as if “pre-modern” people somehow lived homeostatic, circular, organic lives), it is true that European modernity – with its colonisation and capitalist globalisation – has continually posed the problem of orientation with urgency, overflowing and uprooting people across the globe.

To understand the emergence of the problematic of orientation in modern western philosophy, one must turn to narratives of geographical disorientation in the meeting between modern capitalist Europe and its others. Here, at the beginning of the bourgeois epoch, we sense that orientation is always more than geographical. The aim of this text is to clarify the modern problem of orientation through a reading of one of the great modern myths of western man, namely Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Looking back, this novel can be read as a modern myth describing the historical construction of the individualised, male, western subject, which became the hegemonic form of orientation in capitalist modernity. The book, however, did not only express this orientation, it contributed to it. Translated in more than a hundred languages, published in innumerable editions, and inspiring a great number of narratives, the book’s influence is indisputable. And its influence is more profound than its spread, for books are often read and forgotten by millions, while *Robinson* was a pedagogical orientational manual for the readers, a veritable dispositive of subjectivation.

Robinson Crusoe expressed and participated in the creation of the still hegemonic form of orientation within the modern problem of displacement, and it entails a certain articulation of need and desire, a certain relation to the other and to nature. The deconstruction of this model of masculine individualism, which this text seeks to contribute to, opens for a consideration of other orientational responses to the displacements of capitalist modernity.

Through an investigation of the disorientation and reorientation of the Robinson myth, the aim of this text is to provide a materialist and existential concept of orientation that avoids the usual understanding of Robinson as the literary exposition of human nature, or as purely ideological figure. Discussing the conditions of the strength of the Oedipus myth, Deleuze and Guattari quoted Jacques Lacan's precise statement, which goes against any Jungian idea of invariable Ur-myths: "a myth cannot sustain itself when it sustains no ritual".¹ This attunes us to how the effectivity of the Robinsonian myth, in turn, relies on the rituals it supports. This is an insight that will be extended in two directions. Firstly, if the effectivity of myths is materially grounded in rituals, rituals in turn rely on broader social pragmatics, composed of needing and desiring bodies. The question then, is not merely what the meaning of myth is, but what role a myth plays in sustaining certain pragmatics. Secondly, no matter how fantastical and removed its narrative content is from the everyday social pragmatics, myth must share a common form with social practice in order to sustain it. The myth must be orientable, to be source of orientation. What matters is not the concept of myth as a map, but that it shares cartographic coordinates with social practice. Thus the study of Robinson Crusoe will help us understand the existential and practical stakes that continue to give life to the Robinsonian man, who Derrida humorously called *Homo Robinsoniensis*.² Many readings of Robinson Crusoe remain satisfied with deconstructing Robinson's anthropocentrism,

1 Lacan in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New Ed (London: Continuum, 2004), 83.

2 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 198.

colonialism, possessive individualism or masculinity; in this text, the focus on Robinson as a dispositive of orientation will enable us to raise the question of other possible orientations in relation to displacement, alternatives to being or becoming Robinson.

ROBINSON CRUSOE, THE TEACHER

41

The cultural and historical meaning of the Robinson Crusoe narrative is well established, and it must be understood in its profound ambivalence. In 1857 Marx noted that this novel was written in "anticipation of 'civil society', in preparation since the sixteenth century and making giant strides towards maturity in the eighteenth" (1857 Introduction). Similarly, in a lecture at the Popular University of Trieste in 1912, James Joyce also describes Robinson Crusoe as a literary prefiguration:

The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence, the sexual apathy, the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity. Whoever rereads this simple, moving book in the light of subsequent history cannot help but fall under its prophetic spell.³

In his seminal study of individualism in early modern literature, Ian Watts notes that while the individualist figures of renaissance novels such as Don Quijote or Don Juan were ridiculed and punished for their individualism, Defoe celebrates and rationalises Robinson's.⁴ Just as Joyce's and Marx's commentary this suggests that Robinson Crusoe bears witness to the emergence of what Raymond Williams has called a change in the structure of feeling. It is, following Williams, a text which expresses an emergent form

3 "Daniel Defoe" James Joyce, Occasional, Critical and Political Writing, ed. Kevin Barry and Conor Deane (Oxford University Press, 2000).

4 Ian Watt, Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

of life, whether it is prefigurative of, contemporary with, or an imminent successor to other widespread changes in the social formation.⁵ Marx and Joyce show how the book's is an expression of its epoch, its protagonist a personification of the abstract social forces of capitalism and colonialism. The route, then, is short to show how Defoe's positive rendering of Robinson provides a literary apology for those forces. However, Robinson must be understood as more than a reflection or representation of something that exists. Like the distinction Marx draws between vulgar economists and political economists proper, Robinson Crusoe is not merely a vulgar and superficial apology, but an answer to lived problems. Thus, Defoe's novel is a meditation on the problem of the displacement of the modern subject. It is a narrative rendering of how a displaced subject can find its bearings through the submission of subjectivity, territory and others to its plan, a veritable catalogue of orientating techniques.

Like political economy, Defoe's discourse avoids both the crass empiricism and abstract romanticism that characterises vulgar economics and regular romance novels. They both construct logical fictions, a kind of speculative realism starting from simple atomistic premises such as the rational action of the isolated individual. Defoe carefully renders the otherwise exotic adventures of Robinson believable, and avoids any alienation of the reader through fantastic descriptions, while insisting that the story is "true". It is true, as is revealed in the third volume of Robinson Crusoe, not because it actually happened, but because it describes how an individual must act in order to survive in separation from others, i.e. as an individual. Defoe focusses on the practical challenges facing Robinson, rendering him trustworthy through the honesty of his confessional moments. The use of auto-biography invites the reader to identify with Robinson. The text does not present Robinson at a distance as a character to observe, instead the act of reading becomes the reproduction of Robinson's monologue in the form of the reader's inner voice. Further, Defoe goes through great effort

5 Raymond Williams, *Structures of Feeling*, in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

to make the reader empathise with the practical and psychological problems Robinson faces, and the enjoyment of reading comes from the pleasure of seeing these problems resolved through pragmatic ability or moral self-questioning. Robinson Crusoe not only reads as a guide to the conquest of unknown lands and subject populations, but as a guide to the conquest and improvement of the habits and soul. The broad appeal of the book does not lie so much in its apology for the powers of capitalist modernity, as much as in its realism and pragmatism, which build on Defoe's research into the oral histories of mariners and travellers to the new world.⁶ It is often claimed that Defoe drew on the narrative of the cast-away Scottish mariner Alexander Selkirk who survived four years on a pacific island, but Defoe's research went deeper, and included interviews with seamen and, as Tim Severin has shown, a possible personal acquaintance with Henry Pitman, who had undergone events very similar to Robinson.⁷

The pedagogical character of Robinson Crusoe was already noted by Rousseau, who in his famous pedagogical tract *Emile* stated that the book was the only piece of literature necessary for the education of an autonomous, practical individual. To support this use, Rousseau suggested that the book should be cut down to the parts that deal with Robinson's years on the island⁸ which would purify the conception of Robinson as a self-made man, who has to develop his own skills from scratch, and overcome the alienation of the social division of labour. Later, Marx noted that Robinson Crusoe is a narrative of unalienated labour: Having no boss, Robinson controls his own labour process and the products of his efforts.⁹ Thus Defoe did not only eulogize colonial bourgeois subjectivity, he created a morality

6 Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Beacon Press, 2014), 34.

7 Tim Severin, *In Search Of Robinson Crusoe* (Basic Books, 2009), 328.

8 Thereby the narrative would have come closer to one of Defoe's inspiration's, the 12th Century tract *نظامي نب ي ح* (Philosophus Autodidactus) written by the Andalusian polymath Ibn Tufail, a narrative of a feral child which is raised by a gazelle on a desert island and discovers truth without human contact.

9 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 170.

tale about the value of hard work and the pleasure of its fruits, which was to resonate with exploited proletarians and landless peasants as well as bourgeois entrepreneurs and settler colonists (and tempt some of the former to strive to become the latter).

Thus, Robinson's fictional auto-biography provides a basic phenomenology of orientation within the capitalist epoch, starting from displacement. It deals with the practical challenges of satisfying bodily needs in new or changing environments, the development of new techniques of navigation and production, the separated individual who must desire to become productive to survive. It understands the cartography of orientation as a mapping of resources, possessions and territories, as a technology of appropriation and exclusion. This phenomenology of the castaway's orientation reveals a new political economy and geo-politics of orientation that has – to a large but contested extent – shaped the world in which we live, and the ways in which this reduces the other to trading partner, enemy or servant. As participants in that globalised 'civil society' we can call capitalist civilisation, we are all to some extent Robinson, and especially those of us who have been shaped or are shaping ourselves in the image of "Man" – white, independent, mobile. This is not necessarily because we believe in Robinson, identify with him, but certainly because Robinsonian techniques are forms of orientation that continually propose themselves as ways to deal with displacement.

A VERY MALE REBELLION OF DESIRE

In Robinson Crusoe, the eponymous protagonist recounts the narrative of how he survived 28 years shipwrecked on a deserted island. From the beginning we learn that Robinson comes from a secure middle class family, his father a very "ancient", wise patriarch. While Robinson came from the mother's family, Crusoe was a corruption of his father's German name Kreutznaer. Kreutznaer advised the young Robinson to stay in his place and follow the middle path of life, which was

the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part of mankind.¹⁰

Robinson is born into a profoundly content middle class, which is neither slave to need nor to desire.¹¹ But, as Minaz Jooma has pointed out, Robinson's guaranteed sustenance within his father's household is also a submission to patriarchal command. Kreutznaer goes as far as threatening Robinson with the withdrawal of subsistence if he disobeys him, like his brothers did.¹² Robinson soon tears himself out of the grasp of the family and the safe patriarchal place of guaranteed reproduction. Even if he does not consider this fact, he can tear himself away from the family because he is not caught up in its responsibilities the way that his mother is. Is it possible he only needs to tear himself away to seek freedom, because it is the father rather than the mother who dictates the terms of participation in familiar consumption? When speaking of leaving the family, Robinson continually uses the world desire, both when he speaks of the reasons for his brother leaving (which got him killed in war), and to describe his own motives to go to sea, which consists in pursuing "a rash and immoderate desire of rising faster than the nature of the thing admitted".¹³ Robinson and Defoe

10 Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years All Alone in an Un-Inhabited Island on the Coast of America, Near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having Been Cast on Shore by Shipwreck, Wherein All the Men Perished But Himself: With an Account How He Was at Last as Strangely Deliver'd by Pyrates*. Written by Himself (W. Taylor, 1719), 3, henceforth "RC".

11 During this period, middle class referred to the class below the nobility and above the common people. Thus middle class referred to the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. What is interesting in our context is not the economic definition of this class and the transformations of the semantics of "middle class", but to study the subjective orientation of Robinson's middle class, through which we can create a genealogy of subjectivity today. "Middle Class" in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Routledge, 2011).

12 Jooma in Kristen Guest, *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity* (SUNY Press, 2014).

13 Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*, 43.

clearly understand desire as a force of displacement, an orientation that pushes the subject beyond inhabitation, beyond sedentary forms of life. But this desire is already a male, patriarchal desire. He does not merely seek the freedom to sustain himself or sustain himself with others, but to “rise”, that is to gather the resources to create a household of his own with the dependants that this entails.

In its implicit philosophy of desire and need, the text shows how closely the opposition between freedom and necessity correlates not only with the patriarchal logic of the *oikos*, but also with the anthropological machine that produces the difference between animals and human beings. That his father’s warning speaks of the lower parts of mankind as “mechanic” is not insignificant, but a reminder of René Descartes’ theorisation of animal being as purely mechanical. By birth Robinson is elevated above the animal concern to find water, food and shelter, he belongs to a section of mankind that orientate itself more “freely”, that is, as an independent existence. This, at once, makes him more-than-animal, but also opens for the emergence of disruptive desires. In the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, human need is always inscribed within the symbolic order. Thus, when a baby’s cry is interpreted as the expression of a need, the cry comes to signify the demand of an other: the baby’s cry orientates a breast or a flask towards its mouth. Demand, in this sense, brings need into a symbolic universe and articulates it with care and power. According to Lacan, desire on the other hand is “neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)”.¹⁴ Desire, thus, moves us beyond mere need, and tends to make itself infinite. Because desire bears no essential relation to need, it allows for the orientation of a subject beyond what it was, towards the risk of death. Also Robinson partakes in this narrativisation of desire as the path of death, both when he speaks of his brother, and when he describes his own desire as casting him “down again

14 Lacan, 1977 [1959], *Écrits: A Selection*. London: Tavistock., pp. 286-7.

into the deepest gulf of human misery that ever man fell into, or perhaps could be consistent with life and a state of health in the world" (RC 43).

Desire is productive, rather than reproductive, constructive rather than generative, a vector rather than a circle, cultural rather than natural. If animal need is profoundly ecological, the modern privatized conception of desire – with the whole familiar Oedipal setup – folds back onto need, and makes it recursive, private, limited to the home, family or individual, as that the need that must be satisfied to enable individualised desire. From the perspective of individual desire, need is rendered as the needs of an individual. Both desire and need are orientated towards objects, rather than within relations of care and desire. Based on these abstract determinations of need and desire, we can develop the following rudimentary graphs:

(1)

Need returns to itself, and
desire pushes beyond



(2)

When need is strong,
desire tends to become
weak or dreaming



The individual form of Robinson's break with patriarchal oppression, is clearly made possible by his secure station of life, which provides him with the minimal capital that gives him access to the displacing colonial capital flows, which allows him to break free as an entrepreneurial subject. For Defoe, this path of desire is intertwined with the risk of death, and the abandonment of the straight path of reason, which is defined in terms of the material and symbolic security of the home. Thus

... my ill fate pushed me on now with an obstinacy that nothing could resist; and though I had several times loud calls from my reason and my more composed judgment to go home, yet I had no power to do it. I know not what to call this, nor will I urge that it is a secret

overruling decree, that hurries us on to be the instruments of our own destruction, even though it be before us, and that we rush upon it with our eyes open. (RC 14)

48

We catch a glimpse of the ideal organisation of desire within Robinson's family (3) in the references to his father's advice, in which desire becomes sedentary. And Robinson's ventures into the world provide us with a very different graph of desire in which individuals who are responsible for their own reproduction join around a shared aim, in the form of a business venture (4):

(3)

Convergence of individual autonomy without interdependence of need:



(4)

Symbiotic need and interwined desire:



Orientated by a desire for wealth beyond his station, Robinson took to sea, established a plantation in Brazil and found himself a slave merchant off the West African coast. Yet Robinson's narrative is also a narrative of colonial expeditions gone awry. This drift perfectly mirrors the passage from the secure patriarchal existence of the British bourgeoisie into a more aggressive colonial phase. This early part of the novel forms a clear contrast to the central part on the island, in as much as it describes the world of colonial adventurism as contingent and violent, and irrationally and destructively at odds with the patriarchal order. Like the biblical Jonah, to whom he is at one point compared (RC 15), Robinson's defiance of the father ends up with a shipwreck. But contrary to the familiar moralism that Defoe affirms, Robinson does not return like the prodigal son to the communion at the family table. Instead, like a lucky rather than chosen Noah, he is allowed to build the world anew after

conditions

the waters have swallowed up the past. Thus, the central part of the book, the rational fiction celebrated by Rousseau as a pedagogical masterpiece, is interested in the methodical construction of a world on Robinson's island, and Robinson's own moral self-critique of the pride and excessive desire of his early years plays a big part of the inner monologue on the island. Here Robinson will no longer be subject to the play of necessity and contingency, between the necessities of the patriarchal family and the contingencies of the flows of globalising colonial capital, but a subject in charge of his own slowly accelerating powers of accumulation.

REMAINING ONESELF WITHOUT OTHERS

The heart of Robinson's narrative is, of course, his years on the island, after a tempest has swallowed up the rest of the crew on Robinson's ship and blown him ashore, alone on an unknown beach. Like a confused Noah that hasn't been warned of the impending flood, Robinson lands in a pristine land, void of sin and people. In the first moment of profound disorientation on the beach, Robinson is nonetheless orientated, as his body cries for food and water. A body, alone, orientated by its need to obtain the necessities of life. The stock of capital salvaged from the ship – food, arms, clothes, munition and tools – saves Robinson from a destiny as hunter-gatherer on the island, and equips him to take nature into his possession in a gentlemanly fashion. Defoe continues to describe the orientation of Robinson's movements in terms of need and desire: "...I had no need to be venturous, for I had no want of food, and of that which was very good too".¹⁵ Yet, as he writes elsewhere, "... I had a great desire to make a more perfect discovery of the island, and to see what other productions I might find, which I yet knew nothing of".¹⁶ Drawing on the bourgeois and colonial techniques he brought with him, his human capital as it were, he begins to map the island, and write an inventory

¹⁵ RC 128.

¹⁶ RC 115, Emphasis added.

of his possessions and the natural resources at hand, fortifying himself, and exploring and mapping the island. Robinson relates to the world as resource and possession, not as ecology. As Gilles Deleuze notes in 'Desert Island', instead of creating a new form of life, Robinson reconstitutes everyday bourgeois life from his little reserve of capital.¹⁷ And in this situation, he eventually establishes himself a comfort rather like that of his middle station, in which his desires are productive rather than hyperbolic, and in which his needs are satisfied:

From this moment I began to conclude in my mind that it was possible for me to be more happy in this forsaken, solitary condition than it was probable I should ever have been in any other particular state in the world; and with this thought I was going to give thanks to God for bringing me to this place. (RC 133)

This condition reminds us of the patriarchal sovereignty of the Englishman in his home, and indeed we can apply the word sovereignty here. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues, Robinson's kingdom can be understood as a model form of sovereignty:

In any case, there can be no doubt that Adam was sovereign of the world, as Robinson Crusoe was of his island, as long as he was its only inhabitant; and this empire had the advantage that the monarch, safe on his throne, had no rebellions, wars, or conspirators to fear.¹⁸

This sovereignty is not the sovereignty over other men, but the dominion over the world's beasts and plants. Just as Rousseau forgets to mention Eve – is he subsuming her within Adam's household? – Robinson's island might remind us of the ancient Greek oikos, in which women, slaves and children were not considered persons. Yet Robinson's condition is more radical, he lives in absolute solitude in a parad

continue underline to end.

17 Gilles Deleuze, Desert Islands: And Other Texts, 1953–1974 (MIT Press, 2004), 12.

18 Rousseau, The Social Contract, Book 1, Sec.2.

without relational, let alone political or sexual tension. Not only are references to concrete women absent in the island narrative, women do not even appear in the form of an absence, as missed or remembered. It is paradise before the creation of Eve, that male fantasy of bliss. The one point woman is mentioned it is in the form of a revealing analogy, describing the last remaining concern that Robinson has, the reproductive care for himself. While the reproductive efforts of Robinson could open towards a becoming-woman, this possibility is only revealed negatively, when he compares his failed attempt to make pottery, to the way "children make dirt pies, or as a woman would make pies that never learned to raise paste." Jacques Derrida remarks that the world of the book "is a world without sexual difference and without desire, without obvious sexual concern as such", but we might generalise this, and say without concern for the other, in so far as concern denotes a care for the other, whether human or natural.¹⁹ As Michel Tournier writes in *Friday*, his rewriting the Robinson myth:

...For all of us the presence of other people is a powerful element of distraction, not only because they constantly break into our activities and interrupt our trains of thought, but because the mere possibility of their doing so illuminates a world of concerns situated at the edge of our consciousness, but capable at any moment of becoming its centre.²⁰

For Deleuze, the meaning of a Robinsonade – both Tournier's and Defoe's – is simply this: A world without others.²¹ In his analysis of *Friday*, Gilles Deleuze argues that this solitude must necessarily lead to a radical erasure of Robinson's sense of self, to his "dehumanization".²² Without others, there is no one to confirm a shared horizon of possibility, and

19 Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 93.

20 Michael Tournier, *Friday, or the Other Island* (Pantheon, 1985), 360.

21 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, 0 ed. (Columbia University Press, 1990), 319.

22 Ibid., 303.

without others the Other – the symbolic order – starts to fall apart. This would then throw the individual into a profound state of disorientation, and expose it to the world without a schema of meaning. Deleuze's text becomes a radical inquiry into desubjectivation. Yet, unlike Tournier's Robinson, Defoe's does not become radically decentred. Instead, living without others and the need to care, Robinson enters a state of paradisiacal bliss. This blissful male is blissful because he lives without concern for the others that masculinity normally defines itself in opposition to, and which define and render the male ego unstable and not-all. Robinson's early sovereignty is that of a strangely pre-political world without subjects or enemies. But is this simply a result of refusal on Defoe's part, to think through the radical consequences of living in a world without others, a kind of fantasy of solidity that cannot, by definition, be realised? Certainly, Defoe is aware that Robinson must linger at the edge of madness or as James Joyce has noted that Defoe's characters are "reaching in two directions, backwards towards their **animal** origins and forward to their roles as historic prototypes".²³ Indeed there is something animalistic in Robinson's sovereignty, which bears a certain semblance to Georges Bataille's beastly concept of sovereignty, according to which "What is sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time".²⁴ The answer to why Defoe's Robinson does not become dehumanized like Tournier's, we have to understand its other side, where it touches on a historical prototype, the heroic individual.²⁵

is this necessary?

23 James Joyce quoted in chapter 4, note 7 of Robert James Merrett, *Daniel Defoe, Contrarian* (University of Toronto Press, 2013).

24 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vols. 2 and 3: The History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*, trans. Robert Hurley, Reprint edition (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 199.

25 In an autobiographical note, Freud expresses this strange bourgeois combination of comfort and heroism in a pure form: "...like Robinson Crusoe, I settled down as comfortably as possible on my desert island. When I look back on those lonely years, away from the pressures and confusions of today, it seems like a glorious heroic age. My 'splendid isolation' was not without its advantages and charms. I did not have to read any publications, nor listen to any ill-informed opponents; I was not subject to influence from any quarter; there was nothing to hustle me". Sigmund Freud and Carrie Lee Rothgeb, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 22.

As we have seen, Robinson's individualism has a specifically calculative character, and obsession with raising himself above the immanence of beastly existence. With reference to Max Weber's thesis on the protestant work ethic and the origins of the spirit of capitalism, Deleuze points out that Robinson's efforts are given meaning within a protestant logic of providence according to which "God knows his people, the hardworking honest type, by their beautiful properties, and the evil doers, by their poorly maintained, shabby property".²⁶ While Robinson does not partake in a social teleology of capitalist accumulation, he can interpret his private success as a sign of God's providence. His tribulations were all for the better, not because he was saved from the island (this would merely return him to the starting point), but because they brought Robinson closer to God and into the possession of the island. Without this theological horizon, Robinson's private labours would take him no further than the mere mechanical existence of the poor, proto-animal part of humanity or the circular, reproductive activity imposed on women.

But perhaps we should reverse Max Weber's theory here, which sees protestant theology as a belief that gives meaning and legitimacy to the private everyday labour of accumulation. To be in a world without others reverses the Weberian narrative. The latter shows how, within a community of believers, religion can be the spiritual foundation of everyday practice, because it is the social code that sanctions individual behaviour. But without such a community and its rituals, religion becomes abstract thought spinning on its own. That is, unless everyday practices – such as methodical labour, accounting, and time keeping – become rituals sustaining religion. In other words, Robinson does not merely believe in order to give meaning and direction to his work, nor does he work merely to survive: He works in order to sustain his belief, which is what keeps his symbolic world from disintegrating. Thus the measured, persistent efforts to optimize everyday activity becomes a condition of orientation, a way through which the isolated individual keeps madness at bay. Well aware of the risks of circularity or psychotic

swerving that the cogito opens up, René Descartes had already shown in 1637, that the individual must be firm and methodical in its actions to avoid the problem circularity opened up by individuality, or metaphorically by island life, where the straight path eventually becomes circular.

According to Descartes one must imitate

travellers who, finding themselves lost in some forest, should not wander about turning this way or that, nor, worse still, stop in one place, but should always walk in as straight a line as they can...²⁷

Robinson's theology gives him the straight path, and book keeping, calculation, exploration, cartography, production, etc., constitute the practical, methodical stride that escapes madness. Kant would later, in 1786, make the "practical need" for "rational belief" constitutive of his concept of orientation.²⁸ When orientation becomes an individual feat, the other as distraction soon becomes a threat not merely to the bliss, but to the sanity of the individual.

THE OTHER BETWEEN ANXIETY AND SUBJECTION

When one day Robinson discovers footsteps in the sand as he circles the island, he is struck by panic and flees from the trace. Hiding in his den, anxiety engulfs him. Even Defoe knows that within this paradisiacal solitude, Robinson must remain haunted by the spectre of the other. Not too long before Defoe, Thomas Hobbes described the state of nature as a state of fear of the other, in which no recourse to contract or law is possible. Similarly for Robinson, despite his loneliness, the other is first of all a source of fear. If before, death was the necessary risk that came with pursuing his desires to go beyond middle class self-satisfaction, it now reappears as a

27 René Descartes and Donald A. Cress, Discourse on Method (Third Edition) (Hackett Publishing, 1998), 13.

28 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," in Political Writings, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed.. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 237-49.

threat to his insular being, a threat of becoming reduced to a mechanical being, a human animal that might become the prey of cannibals. But since Robinson has no knowledge of the one that left the trace, his reaction must be understood as a paranoid fantasy. The other is not only a potential threat to his security, but much more radically, the mere trace of the other subverts his individual sovereignty. Worse than the concrete fear of a known other, the meeting with the traces of an unknown other provokes a profound disorientating anxiety in Robinson, "like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree", his imagination affected by "wild ideas" and "unaccountable whimsies", in a polymorphous search for a concrete threat which could focalise the anxiety into fear. Like Descartes' solipsistic cogito which fears it has been fooled by a demon, the solitary Robinson passes from a state of absolute security to absolute scepticism: might the devil himself have imprinted the naked foot on the sand? For Robinson, the trace of the other is sublime; overwhelming and unsettling, it pushes his imagination to its limits, into a state of pain.

50

Torn out of his everyday rituals, Robinson cannot confirm God and be confirmed, but instead God becomes a vengeful sovereign, punishing Crusoe for his sins. While he reports finding some consolation in religion, it provides no answer to his anxiety. The decentring concern produced by the other, is only removed by a negation of the other. Robinson finally settles for a theory that is commensurate with his insular subjectivity: the footprint must be his own, reencountered after walking full circle. Like Kant notes with respect to the sublime, the pleasure of the sublime is not given with the character of the object, but is produced by the mind itself in order to compensate for this pain. The disorientation caused by the sublime leads to a turning inwards to subjectivity. The evil of natural catastrophe (or of mathematical regress) is reversed into an occasion for the celebration of the good of human dignity and reason.²⁹ The absence of beauty and

29 Gene Ray, "Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 1 (2004): 9, doi:10.1353/yale.2004.0007.

purpose itself has a purpose: turning man towards his own inner teleology.

However, the damage to Robinson's self-enclosed security is done, and his mode of being changes radically:

In my reflections upon the state of my case since I came on shore on this island, I was comparing the happy posture of my affairs in the first years of my habitation here, with the life of anxiety, fear, and care which I had lived in ever since I had seen the print of a foot in the sand (RC 232).

The anxiety provoked by the unknown other is stronger than the fear provoked by concrete others. A concrete other transforms the anxiety into a contest of cunning and strength. We see this when he finally encounters a troop of cannibals, and helps the man he calls Friday escape. The cannibals constitute a clear enemy and a concrete threat and Friday is no true other who could threaten Robinson's sovereign kingdom. Instead, the encounter with both constitutes the beginning of the transformation of Robinson's sovereignty from a simple state of nature sovereignty to a proto-monarchical sovereignty. Starting from the claim of possession of a territory, we will see that others entering, even those that are not racialized, must be transformed into subjects or enemies, just as visitors to even the most generous hosts become enemies, if they do not respect the host's dominion of his premises.

Robinson easily makes Friday a subject, because he is too servile to be an enemy or a rebellious voice like Shakespeare's Caliban (with whom Defoe was familiar). In fact, Crusoe approaches Friday first as dog salvaged from a violent owner, then as a child, and Defoe lets Friday interpellate him as his absolute master. For Robinson this encounter is without anxiety, because in his arrogance and ignorance he (and his author) see only a "savage" without a name, someone to convert and christen. Friday is no Caliban, both because he desires submission but also because he can be symbolically inscribed into Robinson's world as a fellow if subaltern Protestant. Thus Robinson's pre-political

kingdom is transformed into a political kingdom, with enemies – the cannibals – and a subject.

Friday learns much from Robinson – “he was the aptest scholar that ever was” – yet he remains a servant; like Kant’s “roher Mensch” it does not seem that Defoe thinks it is within his nature to be able to go through a process of education, *Bildung*, by which he could learn to become an autonomous subject.³⁰ The obvious objection is this necessary? argument, of course, is that the problem is not Friday’s ability to learn, but that his racialization and dispossession means that he cannot be recognized as an autonomous subject within the occidental “civilizational” paradigm.

Robinson’s relation to the Spanish sailors who later arrive on the island is starkly different. He fears them as potential enemies, but ultimately lets them become his subjects under condition that their captain signs a contract leaving all claims of sovereignty to Robinson. Yet care must be taken not to reduce Friday to a victim of exclusion from a realm of contract and universality, which we would thereby confirm as an ultimate telos of humanity. Might there not be something in Friday that resists becoming an “autonomous subject”? Might we, without romanticising Friday as a noble savage, suggest that he knows ways of satisfying his needs and pursuing his desires that do not entail submission to the paradigm of possessive individualism? Creating a counter-fictional narrative of the ontology and subjectivity of Friday is a question of our capacity to imagine an overcoming of the Robinsons within us, to the point of following Deleuze in saying that “any healthy reader would dream of seeing him [Friday] eat Robinson”.³¹ This is the value of Michel Tournier’s novel and Deleuze’s essay on it.³² Tournier presents Friday as Robinson’s shamanic guide, a relation made possible only because Robinson has been radically dehumanised by his years of solitude. In these examples, the overcoming of Robinsonian man is conditioned on a radical erasure. Rather than an alternative answer to the

30 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 13.

31 Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 12.

32 Tournier, *Friday, or the Other Island*; Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*.

problem of disorientation in displacement, we find here a radical dissolution of the problem through an affirmation of disorientation or the cannibal consumption of the displaced individual. The eating of Robinson is a valid political proposition when he is seen as the prototypical colonialist or an ideological fiction. But this fails to understand that Robinson is not merely an agent of violence, obfuscation and legitimation, but an answer to a persistent problem of displacement. The task then becomes to think different answers to this problem, not merely negating one of its solutions. The point here is both to engage the disorientating challenge indigenous life and thought poses to European self-understanding and subverting Robinson's claim to be the universal representative of Europe. This can be done by returning to a counter-history of west-ward migration from Europe in sources that Defoe knew well but ignored.

ORIENTATING ONESELF WITH CANNIBALS

Below Robinson's middle state, there existed and exists a subterranean strata of subjectivities in Europe, which in many ways were submitted to a process of internal colonization and expropriation, even as some of them were becoming enrolled in the European colonization of the rest of the world. Through a brief encounter with these hewers of wood and draws of water, so beautifully brought to our memory by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, another conception of orientation might open up.³³ Like Robinson's this conception is an answer to modern displacement, but one which undermines possessive individualism as the privileged centre of orientation. Let's look at another kind of story of shipwrecks and stranding: those of the *Sea-Venture* and the *Bounty* for example.

In 1609, some fifty years before the fictional character Robinson stranded on his Caribbean island, an English ship bound for the new colony of Virginia, sailed into a terrible

33 Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Verso Books, 2002).

tempest. Leaking and creaking in a three-day storm, the Sea-Venture and its crew seemed doomed to go under. Anticipating equality in death, the men and women aboard cracked open the casks and “drunk one to the other” without regard for station or rank. But with a luck greater than Robinson’s, the ship wrecked on the island of Bermuda without loss of life. Like so many marooned slaves and commoners before and after them, the men and women of the Sea-Venture set about living life in common on the island, collecting and producing what they needed. These did not come as Robinson with the existing social relations of England only inscribed on their inside, these also existed between them. But most of the shipwrecked were from the supposedly “mechanical” part of humanity, and they thus rebelled against the re-impositions of strict labour by their former superiors.³⁴ In many colonies black slaves and white European proletarians plotted rebellions together, while their masters tried to separate them with the imposition of racial hierarchies.³⁵ This is but a few examples of a historical possibility that escapes Defoe and all the readers who have taken his Robinson as a paradigmatic figure. Or perhaps this possibility did not so much elude Defoe as it was repressed in his writing of Robinson Crusoe (and thus also in the many immanent critiques of the book). Yet, as David Rediker has shown, Defoe was very well versed in the narratives of pirates and sailors, and he must have been aware that many stranded seamen only survived through collaboration with one another and with the indigenous inhabitants where they stranded.³⁶

Such ideas were also present in the literature of the preceding two centuries, from Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Michel de Montaigne’s *Of Cannibals* (1580) to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611), all of which served as inspirations for Robinson Crusoe. Both Montaigne and More drew upon oral tales from mariners who had visited the new world, and Shakespeare wrote his play upon learning of the story of the Sea-Venture. Shakespeare, despite being himself of the

34 Ibid., 30.

35 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004), 107.

36 Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, 75.

middle class and an investor in the colonial adventures of the Virginia Company, showed a sense of the struggles and aspirations of the commoners that are absent in Robinson Crusoe. The *Tempest* plays out after the protagonist Prospero, the “rightful” duke of Milan, is exiled on an island only inhabited by the rebellious Caliban and the spirit Ariel, who he takes as a loyal servant. In the play we find a moving speech by the king’s adviser Gonzalo:

I’ th’ commonwealth I would, by contraries,
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none;
contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty — ³⁷

Gonzalo’s discourse, like Montaigne’s and More’s, would have certainly resonated with the English commoners who in the 16 and 17th centuries were going through the first big process of dispossession. But the three conceptions are vastly different. Where More and Montaigne directly present their utopias as based on experience, Shakespeare’s lets a royal advisor, Gonzalo, express a colonial fantasy: “Had I plantation of this isle... And were the king on’t, what would I do?”. In the play, the king’s brother Sebastian immediately subverts Gonzalo’s “no sovereignty” by sarcastically reminding him: “Yet he would be king on’t” (II.i.152). In 1969 Aimé Césaire’s anti-colonial renarration of Shakespeare’s play *A Tempest* would draw out the implications of Gonzalo’s unwillingness to let the “savages” challenge that Europe, which Césaire just after the second world war had pointed out was “morally, spiritually indefensible”.³⁸

37 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest: Evans Shakespeare Edition*, ed. Grace Tiffany (Cengage Learning, 2011), 91; II.i.148–157.

38 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (NYU Press, 2001), 32.

I mean that if the island is inhabited, as I believe, and if we colonize it, as is my hope, then we have to take every precaution not to import our shortcomings, yes, what we call civilization. They must stay as they are: savages, noble and good savages, free, without any complexes or complications. Something like a pool granting eternal youth where we periodically come to restore our aging, citified souls.³⁹

Thus Gonzalo's position of enunciation betrays the falseness of his discourse, and points us in the direction of a critique of charity. To defend the authenticity of the colonized without challenging the coloniality of the relation amounts to maintaining dominion in the guise of paternalistic charity. This can be pushed in the direction of the Manichean conflict between colonizer and colonized whereby the desire for the colonized to eat their colonizers appear not as an affirmation of the authentic savagery of the colonised, but as the turning of the cannibalism of colonialism against the colonizers.⁴⁰ If the destruction of colonialism requires the clarification of antagonism, the problem of inventing different solutions to displacement requires the exploration of different relations to the other. Here it will be productive to look at the relation between indigenous and Europeans in the fluid state, prior to the crystallisation of this relation into a Manichean opposition. The aim is not to impose a category of universal humanity in order to show the sameness of the two, but to investigate a space of composition between or beyond the antagonistic poles of the colonised and the colonizer – to proliferate rather than negate their difference.

Shakespeare had taken the passage almost ad verbatim from Montaigne's essay, which in turn was based on the oral accounts of a man, most likely a servant, within

39 Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Ubu Repertory Theater Publications, 1985), 24.

40 Such Manichean anti-colonialism was famously affirmed at the beginning of Frantz Fanon *Wretched of the Earth*, while the nuances he introduced later in that book – the militant white anti-colonialist, the opportunistic and corrupted black leader, etc. – are often forgotten. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1st Evergreen Black Cat Edition (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

Montaigne's household. He had "lived ten or twelve years in the New World", including with the cannibals of the Amazon. Montaigne describes this man as a "plain ignorant fellow", too simple to lie in order to gain "the reputation of men of judgment".⁴¹ Yet his keen observations suggest that he is not as stupid as Montaigne suggest, but rather unlearned and uninterested in inventing evidence to satisfy the prejudices of his master. If we strip Montaigne's text of its suffocating classical references, which serve to create a common measure between Europeans and the cannibals, and put the latter in a favourable light, we see the contours of an oral history, told by a common man born in France. This man's narrative does not display Crusoe's colonial gaze upon the other, but rather testifies to an engagement. It is rather an example of a kind of lay anthropology, in a sense that comes close to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's thesis

that every non-trivial anthropological theory is a version of an indigenous practice of knowledge, all such theories being situatable in strict structural continuity with the intellectual pragmatics of the collectives that historically occupied the position of object in the discipline's gaze.⁴²

Long before to this call to decolonize the discipline of anthropology, Montaigne's essay documents a transatlantic encounter that refused to reduce difference to human sameness or the affirmation of a chasm. Montaigne was writing at the times of the European wars of religion, during which the rebels of Münster and Mühlhausen affirmed the communist slogan: *Omnia Sunt Communia*. Montaigne, who found himself at the court of Charles IX in Rouen, met three Brazilian cannibals, who noted the vast inequalities of French society, its two halves, and "they thought it strange

41 Michel de Montaigne and George Savile Marquis of Halifax, *Montaigne's Essays in Three Books: With Notes and Quotations. And an Account of the Author's Life. With a Short Character of the Author and Translator* (B. and B. Barker, 1743), 227.

42 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cannibal Metaphysics: Amerindian Perspectivism," *Radical Philosophy* 182 (December 2013): 18, <http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/cannibal-metaphysics-amerindian-perspectivism>.

that these necessitous halves were able to suffer so great an inequality and injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throats, or set fire to their houses".⁴³

The texts of Montaigne, More and Shakespeare show that in narrating the disorientating encounter with the "New World" an non-Robinsonian orientation was available to Defoe, a pragmatics of dealing with displacement that did not entail possessiveness, sovereignty and racialized enmity. This is also the case of the oral histories of the commoners of the Sea-Venture, and their rebellion against the return of hierarchical command and the fierce labour of the Virginia Company. Their orientation was that of embodied desires and needs to create lives in common, without masters.⁴⁴ While these commoners did not abide to the hierarchical world view of Crusoe, we do not know if they would have shared his colonial thirst of submitting the inhabitants of Bermuda had it been inhabited. Yet, we do know that many displaced English commoners, who had for centuries been colonised by the lords and the centralising state and expropriated by the enclosures, desired a form of life not too different from the life of the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands. Throughout the colonisation process, escaped slaves and indentured servants from Europe escaped the colonies to live among the indigenous or to form their own maroon communities. Such escapes were subject to fierce punishments and often death at the hands of the colonial authorities.⁴⁵ This was the case for the sailors who mutinied on the HMS Bounty on the 28 of April 1789 in the Pacific Ocean, less than three months before the people of Paris stormed the Bastille. The Bounty, as told by Linebaugh and Rediker, was on a planetary voyage to...to collect food (bread-fruit) from the pacific to feed people imported from Africa who slaved on West Indian plantations, where they made sugar to provide empty calories for the proletarians in Europe.⁴⁶

43 Montaigne and Halifax, *Montaigne's Essays in Three Books*, 239.

44 Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 21.

45 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (Routledge, 2013), chapter 1; Robert Chaudenson, *Creolization of Language and Culture* (Routledge, 2002), 87.

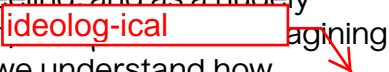
46 Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 277.

Usually the story of the mutiny is told as a story about rebellion against the unjust Captain Bligh, but this forgets that the men of the *Bounty* only rebelled after having spent five months among the Tahitians, forming many relationships with them, and experiencing a mode of life quite different from the poverty they knew from home and the harsh discipline that was universal in the British navy. After the mutiny, the men of the *Bounty* settled among the inhabitants of Tahiti without any project of conquest.⁴⁷ Ultimately, the British navy returned to persecute them, but they managed to escape to the remote Pacific island of Pitcairn, where they founded a desperately poor commune with a number of Tahitians who came with them. This commune exists to this day, despite the fierce difficulties experienced by its isolated inhabitants.

More often than not, the orientations of mutinous sailors and commoners were not orientated by ideas of the particular historical destiny of a people or by the universal history of humanity. If at all relating to such notions, they were on a line of flight both from the emerging “nations” at home and from the globalising machine that was imposing a certain vision of humanity through missionaries, gunboats and small pox. These imagined communities were of minor importance compared to the lines of flight produced by the displacements created by the colonial state and capitalism. In the case of many of the sailors and migrants on the *Sea-Venture*, their movements must be understood as extensions – sometimes forced – of the migration created by the enclosures, while Robinson’s free enterprising must be connected to the privateering merchant capitalism tolerated and sometimes promoted by the British crown in the 17th and 18th century. The mutinous sailors and commoners did not simply decide to autonomously pursue a line of flight, but to engage differently with the “objective” lines of flight, the displacement created by nascent capitalism and primitive accumulation. They did so by combining in a common struggle and life within their displacement, which also allowed them to compose with many non-European populations.

ROBINSON BEYOND IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

Today, in a world where almost all land is the property of someone and most commons have been expropriated or subsumed by capital, the orientational horizon for the movement of the displaced is profoundly altered. There are no desert islands, but we might begin to speak of the global island of capital. The sources of displacement today are many, and take the form of forces overflowing us or pulling us along, as well our own desires to move and change. It remains the case, however, that displacement is profoundly individualising, severing not only the familiar patriarchal power relations, but also the bonds of care and commoning that were there or might have been developing. In some sense, Robinson Crusoe seems almost naïve as a dispositive of orientation today, because it shows immediately what we only live in mediated ways. Robinson reduces his ecologies to a set of resources, and others to trading partners, threats or servants. When we do the same today, we do so in ways that are mediated by the market and opaque political and juridical systems. In Marx's terms, Robinson's life is a life without fetishism, while ours is rife with it. But this naivety is also reason that Robinson Crusoe can be seen as a matrix for orientation within contemporary displacement: it proposes a subjective relation to displacement, according to which displacement is not a misfortune and a loss of relationship, but an opportunity of a true self-relationship, in which the subject realises its full and hitherto unknown abilities through unalienated labour, discovery and conquest, self-development and self-discipline. In the absence of other strategies of living and desiring within displacement like the ones that were once developed by mutineers and maroons, the Robinsonian orientation will continue to suggest itself as a way to navigate this displacement and stabilise ourselves as displaced individuals, and continue to be a way to avoid disorientation, anxiety and the early individual death – mental or bodily – that always becomes a risk when relations of care and reproduction are severed.

My reading of Robinson Crusoe started from the idea that the book inaugurates the construction of modern, western male subjectivity, both as a literary expression of a profound historical shift in the structure of feeling and as a hugely influential technology of orientation **ideolog-ical**  imagining and working on oneself. As such, we understand how Robinson Crusoe is not merely a modern myth or an ideologi- cal trope. To understand the significance of Robinson on this level, it has to be related to the pragmatics of orientation, beyond two classical interpretations of the Robinson myth: firstly the liberal appropriation of the myth as a media- tion of the nature of the homo oeconomicus, and secondly, the classical critique of Robinson as a reflection of the partic- ularisms of European bourgeois ideology. Both focus on the fact that Robinson reproduced the orientation of his socie- ty when he landed on the island, and the fact that he didn't create something truly new.

The first explanation of this fact is taken as a proof of the innate naturalness of Robinson's orientation. Thus the Robinson myth is interpreted as a thought experiment which mirrors the isolated experiments that scientists were developing at the time. This experiment is supposed to demonstrate how the natural propensities of man emerge in splendid isolation. Thus the novel can be understood as a rational Ur-myth of eco- nomic man. The second explanation shows that Robinson's long discourses on repentance show that he stands at the brink between a backward-looking Protestantism and a forward-looking capitalism, at the overlap of the protes- tant work ethic and the spirit of capitalism. For this reading it is easy to dismiss the idea of Robinson as a true thought experiment. There was no rupture when Robinson landed on the island, he straight-forwardly reproduced the social relations and attitudes he knew from home. Thus the ideolog- ical character of the first reading can be revealed by show- ing how it rests on a continuity in the mode of production, or by reference to Robinson's class or nationality.

Both interpretations ultimately fail because they don't consider the contingency that marks out displacement. The interpretation that sees Robinson Crusoe as an expression of human nature fails because it over-stresses the rupture of

the shipwreck in order to see any continuity as a necessary expression of innate traits. Reversely, the interpretation that sees the book as a document of the protestant work ethic fails because it ends up with a concept of innate orientation, not as a matter of nature, but of class and national background. The first reading too readily universalises the Robinsonian subjectivity, the other particularises it too fast as essentially middle class or English. These narratives of continuity both pose the question of displacement in relation to disorientation, and the way in which it introduces contingency into orientation.

THE CHALLENGE IT IS NOT TO BECOME ROBINSON

Orientation, of course, has to do with both what a body-mind can do, and what it has learned socially. Yet, when we are dealing with situations of contingency and displacement we must understand the primacy of the pragmatic and existential question of orientation. Robinson's mapping, calculation, theology, constructions of fences and weapons, etc., are pragmatic and existential tools of mental orientation. Now it becomes possible to see why Robinson repeated the orientational strategies of his station British society. He did so because these strategies which he has learned and accepted at home were possible, effective and in some sense necessary as survival strategies in his isolation on the island. Had Robinson landed on the island without supply, and had he been taken in and cared for by Friday's family, his reorientation would not have taken the form of a return or continuity. He might have seen Friday as a fellow commoner and the island as an ecology rather than a collection of resources.

The point is not to excuse or condemn Robinson for being ideological or a product of his environment, but to understand how orientation is related to practical and existential strategies and tactics of life. These are ways to satisfy needs and construct or pursue desires. The simple negation of these strategies would result in disorientation or

debilitating anxiety, and ultimately death. As such they are not universally human, nor essentially English or middle class. Robinson Crusoe relies on the reader's ability to empathise with Robinson's separation from others, and the practical problems he faces, as well as the pleasure he takes from his own labour and autonomy. Robinson Crusoe can be and has been taken up far beyond its narrow cultural horizon not because it articulates an essentially human condition, but because it speaks to an experience of separation, which has become generalised through capitalist colonization and globalisation, and because it provides one seemingly desirable and practical way of constituting a stout and capable individuality in that condition of separation. This is the problem that we have in common with Robinson, and the reason the form of the Robinson narrative remains alive.

This also means that the Robinsonian orientation cannot be destroyed through critique alone. Because it is not simply an ideology it can only be replaced by the development of other practical and existential strategies and tactics of life, that is different, compositive ways of living displacement or by an abolition of displacement. No desire to overcome separation will in itself produce more than a new identity, an imaginary "we" to pave over the distance that tends to reduce any care to a care of the self. Desires for a we will hollow and abstract unless they are connected to collective strategies and tactics of life, and struggles against the forces that separate, displace and thereby recreate the rituals that keep the Robinson myth alive.

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Petrol Series

70

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#crisis
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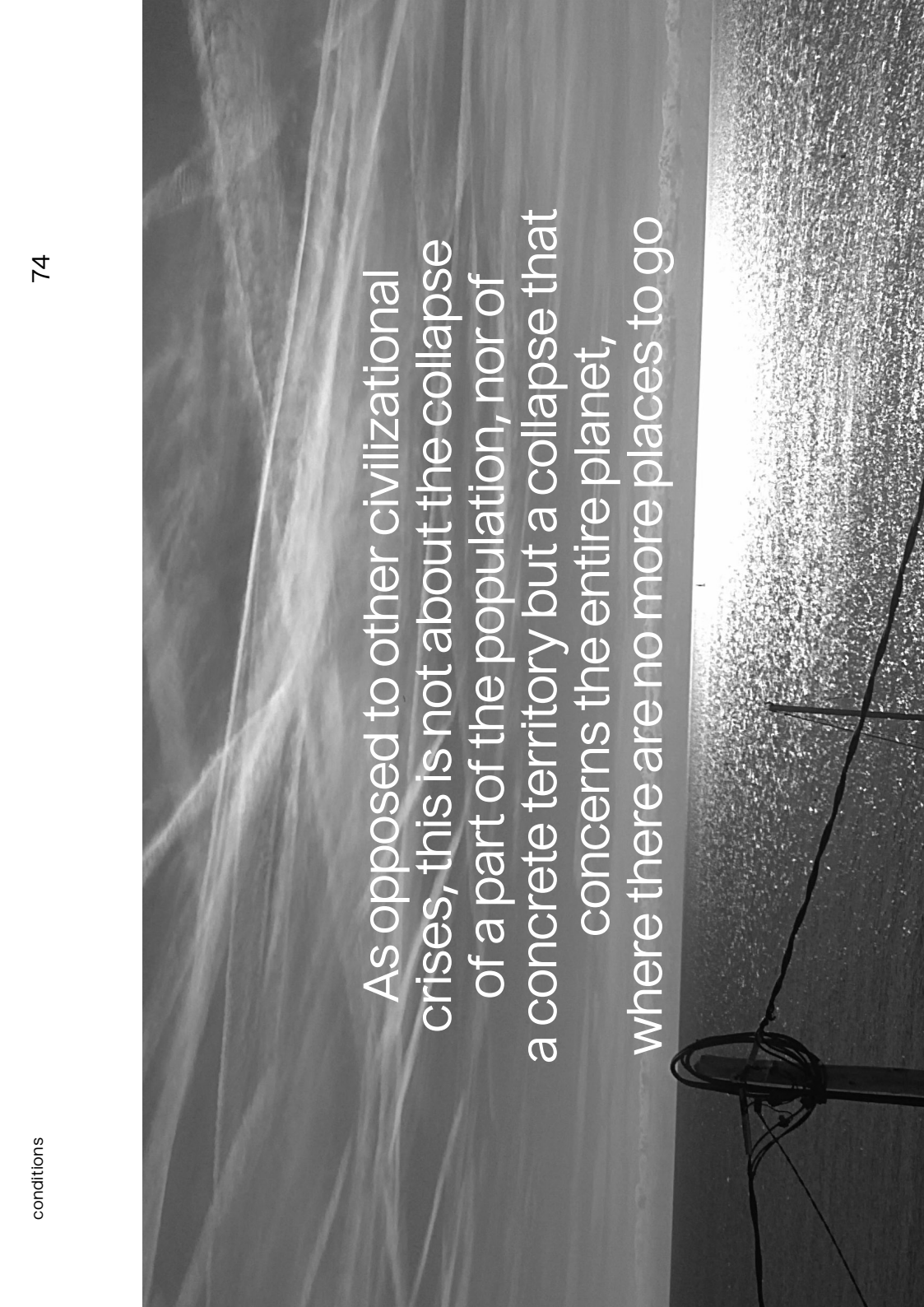
Peak displacement

Migration is when the door
closes behind you





The number of people registered
as 'displaced' by the UN has
never been as high as now since
world war II, and it keeps rising



As opposed to other civilizational
crises, this is not about the collapse
of a part of the population, nor of
a concrete territory but a collapse that
concerns the entire planet,
where there are no more places to go

Peak displacement – petrol picture series
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Peak displacement' follows peak oil.
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2. 'Migration is when the door closes
behind you' is a collective thought of the
Precarity Office Vienna from one of their
sessions on migration, mobility and crisis.
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3. 'The number of people registered as
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