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Re-situating Precarity in Times of Crisis: Interdepend- ence and Displacement across City-sites

by Manuela
Zechner¹

PART 1
(RE)SITUATING
OURSELVES
IN PRECARITY

Precarious (adj.): 1640s, a legal word, "held through the favor of another," from Latin precarius "obtained by asking or praying," from prex (genitive precis) "entreaty, prayer"[...]. Notion of "dependent on the will of another" led to extended sense "risky, dangerous, uncertain" (1680s). "No word is more unskillfully used than this with its derivatives. It is used for uncertain in all its senses; but it only means uncertain, as dependent on others"

Online Etymology Dictionary, 'Precarious'

A thing has as many meanings as there are forces capable of seizing it.

Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy

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Precarity in (the) crisis

It looks like 'the crisis' – in its overlapping economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects – has brought the word 'precarity' back to its root. We can let go of some of the more uncomfortable autonomist affirmations of post-fordism and the liberties of the cognitariat and take our understanding and hoping about our precarious conditions elsewhere, to the sphere of social reproduction, of need, is this needed? networks of support. In the European peripheries shaken by economic crisis – the so-called PIIGS, or indeed even the eastern peripheries that are in permanent crisis – these shifts have been underway for a while.

The policies of neoliberal experimentation known as 'crisis' in Europe have meant such fast and wild welfare dismantling that to speak of precarity now is no longer the same as in 2004. Since 2008, poverty again came to be visible in the homes and streets of the European continent, particularly in the most affected peripheries, and in many places politics has thus come to be about needs as much as about desires. This has, though we witnessed it quite unwittingly, liberated us from the extolling politics of desire that grew with the various neoliberal bubbles in the 90s and early 2000s. Both in everyday economic life and in politics, the sky stopped being the limit, credit stopped promising quite so much, and everyday and material relations got a lot more real and gritty. With this, precarity also could be returned to its etymological starting point: uncertainty and/in dependency on others.

Not just a vague sense of uncertainty, or a concrete malaise about exploitation and unemployment, but a sense of dependency. On one another, in society, in streets, in neighbourhoods. That was 2011. Dependency on one another

also in homes, not only in the romantic sense of 'having to stick together' but also in the sense of rising domestic violence and women bearing the burden of austerity. The withdrawal of state support and the quick rise of unemployment means that with our everyday, our paradigm of life and survival changes. Moving from precarious employment – flexible, insecure, exploitative – to possibly no employment at all implies a deep shift. A new politics of social reproduction was born after 2013, with a strong sense of the importance of **mutual** support and care in the everyday. We started working on projects on Radical Collective Care², on Social Reproduction³, tried to rethink the relation between need and desire⁴.

A new set of problems and challenges came to be important, to do with ways of organising life in common: questions that precarity movements hadn't raised quite so directly and explicitly. In speaking about precarity, discussions shifted from work to life. From making a living to surviving. For many, unemployment and economic impasse became a hard reality; for many others, a very real and scary possibility. Our gaze as a precarious generation shifted, in those years after 2011. Emmigration, returning to live with the family⁵, borrowing money – all those showed how much we needed others, emotionally, materially, socially.

The movements of the Juventud Sin Futuro ('Youth without a future', networks of Spanish Emmigrés abroad) and Marea Granate signalled that for many people of the so-called X and Y generations (born between the 80s and the 2000s), mobility isn't what it used to be. Not study abroad or Erasmus programmes, but the relatively choiceless decision to go elsewhere to make a living: migration. 'When the door shuts behind you, you know you are a migrant' (Precarity Office

2 The Radical Collective Care Practices Project

<http://radicalcollectivecare.blogspot.com.es/>

3 Manuela Zechner and Bue Hansen (2014), Social Reproduction and Collective Care, *The Occupied Times of London*
<http://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=14000>

4 Social reproduction between need and desire: a reading group. Murmuræ @ La Electrodómica, organised by Bue Hansen.

<https://murmurae.wordpress.com/proyectos/social-reproduction-between-need-and-desire-reading-group/>

5 See Shiv Malik (2014), The dependent generation: half young European adults live with their parents. *The Guardian*, march 2014.
<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/24/dependent-generation-half-young-european-adults-live-parents>

Vienna).⁶ We organised around that, around that transnational precarity and the need for new networks of care and solidarity that it called for. Tens of thousands of relatively young people abandoned the hardening outer crust of the European Butterbrot and told their own stories, made their own political claims, built their own networks.

So precarity stopped being all about employers, working conditions, contracts and laws and started to be more about the other we depend on. What and who to rely on once you've been swept from the doorsteps of what looked like a prospective middle class life, to a future of precarity? When the idea of a job or of a contract sounds like an abstraction, slightly unattainable? The processes of de-classing that economic crisis and austerity has meant in Europe are deep in terms of their subjective and social implications. Instead of asking what to go by, many of us also asked who and what to rely on in building a life. This latter question rang particularly relevant in the ears of generation X, those moving into their 30s and towards a phase in life where youth stops being the paradigm to go by. Maybe indeed youth would never have stopped being our paradigm, without this crisis – we might be working away on slogans for bullshit marketing and lifestyle industries still, sipping lattes and talking about the creative industries. What a nightmare.

This crisis was about ecology and collectivity as much as economy and finance, the world soon noted. In that sense, precarity came to be about an art of life in a new way: not as the fanciful art of lifestyle, but rather as an art of looking after life, caring for oneself and others, minding one's interdependency in as meaningful a way as possible. Art in the sense of learning, practice, skill, suitability, preparation, manner/mode, fitting together (as indicated by etymology), as ongoing articulation with something at stake. If pre-crisis precarity was an optional way of viewing one's life, the new precarity appears as more of an inevitable reality: couched less in the lamenting of privileges that will be lost, rooted more strongly in a sense of interdependence and fragility.

6 See the 2014-15 events of Precarity Office Vienna <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Precarity-Office-Vienna/441185905996710>

As this was happening, precarity ceased to be a buzzword or watchword – I say this from the viewpoint of the social movements I passed through in England, Austria and Spain particularly, but I'm pretty convinced that this dynamic affected many other places shaken by economic crisis too. In the Euro-Mediterranean, where Mayday movements initially took their start around 2004, the precarity discourse changed character quite soon after the economic crisis hit. In the European centre, where precarity organising emerged later, this shift took longer and is possibly still in process as I write in spring 2016. I write from between those European geographies here. Inspired scholars can do a discourse analysis to prove or disprove me here, for sure there is much to be said about the nuances of this shift or transformation of precarity in different texts and movements.

What I am pointing to here is the new cycles of experimentation – political as well as existential – that we've seen take off on the crusty old continent (and possibly beyond, but someone else needs to tell those stories). These stem from of displacement in the triple sense of mobile-migratory, class and professional shake-up. A lot of shifts in biographical and existential referents and vectors, accompanying shifts in the dominant mode of re/production and in geopolitics. Of course austerity didn't just happen, it is a way of restructuring this very social fabric and its imaginaries. A social fabric and imaginary building on post-war welfare states and social democracies, particularly in the centre/south of Europe. The social model of austerity seeks to drive down wages, fragment and divide society, increase competitiveness, and it achieves all that. But it also produces counter-movements and counter-gestures, that we think differently about who we are in relation to others.

Goodbye middle class?

A brief (hi)story and cloudy horizon

We can speak about these developments in terms of de-classing, of a broad tendency of downward social mobility. Ups, we thought social mobility only went upward! Reading the fine print of the package insert, we can now see that's not

the case. There was always also downward, and now the package itself is all about that.

Camille Peugny describes three interconnected levels of declassing, pointing to how these concretely play out in people's lives.

- (1) Familial or intergenerational declassing (loss of status, unemployment)
- (2) Personal or biographical declassing (uprooting)
- (3) Educational or meritocratic declassing (devaluation of human capital)⁷

These imply saying goodbye to certain expectations: of having a pension, of having social security, working towards one's own house⁸, of driving a (new) car, building a family or starting a business. The expectations that were shattered are the expectations of the middle class, expectations shared by that class as much as those below it: the middle class has been the telos of economy and society in Europe since after the great wars. Everybody had to go with it, even if that meant faking to be better or worse off than one really was.

The middle class and the welfare state are deeply linked in their beginnings and also in their contemporary decline in Europe. The middle class in Europe provided not just a strong base for markets and economies since the industrial revolution, but is also a pillar of democratic and subjective forms. The middle class had its big boost during the European post-war economic upturn in symbiosis with the welfare state: this strongly shaped the lives of the generations entering the labour market between the 1950's and the 80's. Those twenty years of glory, growth, near-full employment, rising wages, social security and baby booms were formative to the generation of my parents. They were the 'normal' (real or projected) that most Europeans grew into or grew up with in the latter half of the 20th century. But

⁷ Camille Peugny (2009), *Le déclassement*. Paris: Grasset.

⁸ See this article by Jenn Ashworth (2014), *Generation rental*. *The Guardian*, march 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/16/generation-rental-housing-crisis-shortage>

already in the course of the 70's, neoliberalism's biopolitical paradigm began to transform economic and social systems, the lives of those who entered the labour market post-80s were increasingly shaped by falling wages, a shrinking public sector and welfare state, insecure contracts, the dismantling of pension schemes...the social contract of growth by welfare and consumption gave way to the neo-liberal one of growth by competitiveness and debt. By the 90s this started to mark a clear paradigm shift, and by 2010 it had run itself ad absurdum in financial and debt-related crisis. So here we are.

Those of us who grew up with post-war parents, the generation in pre-millennium EU accession countries, grew up to expect a middle class life. Middle class child-raising is notorious for its emphasis on education, civil citizenship and stability. Many of us pre-millennium kids had a great time studying, enabled by our parent's employment, public education and family support. By the time we graduated to enter the labour market, post-millennium, we however found a very different set of possibilities than those our parents had. Study, find a stable job, get a car, buy a house, have children, work until your pension kicks in, then have a calm last few decades at home or travelling: for most of us, this is no longer really in the cards.

For those in a precarious or working-class position, buying into the middle-class dream has largely meant accessing credit, and largely resulted in poverty. Poverty has risen quite starkly after 2008 in Europe⁹, but the future is still being sold to people with scarce means: sub-primes and dodgy credit cards have not gone away. Mortgages are a key bubble dispositif for selling middle class life even when real wages make such life impossible (in the UK, over 60% of underline have mortgages)¹⁰. The telos of middle class life has been shaking, but to be able to reject its promises,

9 In 2010, poverty (earning less than 60% of national median income) was between 17–20% in peripheral countries such as Portugal, Italy, Spain, Greece, Poland, Romania or the UK. See this study by Inequality Watch for example <http://inequalitywatch.eu/split.php?article99>

10 Julian Knight, First-time buyers on poverty 'knife edge', BBC News, august 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4081596.stm>

there need to be other structures and resources to draw on for survival and self-valorization.

In this sense, struggles around housing and mortgages, such as the Spanish PAH¹¹, the London E15 mothers¹² or Kotti und Co¹³, are not just key struggles around social reproduction, but also full-blown laboratories for de- and re-subjection. Forced to drop the same old catalogue of individualist consumer desires, people find collective strength in struggles and convivial experiments, building new common infrastructures. Powerful social struggles are always about becoming something else collectively and individually; in this case, it is middle class life they question and put in crisis. Their force in propelling broader social change lies in their ability to subvert the identification with middle-class values. They do this in a double movement: scandalizing the failure of middle-class security nets (bank loans, rising wages,...) is the superficial side thereof; powerful modes of collective organizing and composition, through mutual support, care and struggle are the deep end thereof. They transform the very subject of politics, not just the subject matter of claims.

Citizenship and cities sites of struggle beyond the middle class

To think about the possible futures of these movements, it is useful to go a bit further back briefly, in the history of the middle class and citizenship. Indeed the growth of cities, as enabled by a new class of merchants growing between the peasants and the aristocracy, goes hand in hand with the growth of the bourgeoisie, leading into middle class urban populations. This class has been key to forming our contemporary images of citizenship, of what a 'normal' citizen is supposed to be and what rights and responsibilities (s)he

11 See for example this introduction to the PAH which I wrote for the Radical Collective Care Practices blog.

<http://radicalcollectivecare.blogspot.com.es/2013/08/the-plataforma-de-afectados-por-la.html>

12 The Focus E15 campaign <http://focuse15.org/>

13 In Germany, the Kotti und Co struggle is a vital one.

<http://kottiundco.net/english/> as well as the popular legislative campaign for rent controls <https://mietenvolksentscheidberlin.de/>

is supposed to have (needless to say, the model was the white male professional). It is the subversion of this model that is at stake in working towards a post-middle-class horizon, towards other ways of thinking belonging and inhabiting.

Cities are key sites for the negotiation of belonging and inhabiting. They matter a lot more to most people in my generation than do nations, particularly to those of us who feel we belong to several places at once. Many people's modes of inhabiting European cities have changed in recent years: neighbourhood organizing has become possible again; squares, streets, public spaces and institutions have been occupied and reshaped; movements for urban commons and food production intensified; powerful new municipal movements have emerged to reclaim the city as space for democracy and commons.¹⁴ The downtrodden middle class plays a significant role in driving this, channeling their anger into new platforms of struggle.

These struggles will likely last as long as there is an existential horizon of insecurity and loneliness, and a need to find one another. At the institutional level, they will almost certainly produce a new political class that eventually will content itself with the security it created (hopefully not just for itself but also for others). Already now, in 2016, notions of having overcome crisis and reached economic growth again are quite familiar, and certainly these will keep returning in different cycles of the years and decades to come. If the assumption that capitalism will inevitably undo itself in its current form, sooner or later, is correct, then these ups and downs will only be temporary however. The key question will still be that of social reproduction, and of undoing the middle class telos. One key vector of these struggles to come is care.

Goodbye liberal autonomous subject

Across many struggles, a new ethics of care has emerged to address interdependence from a viewpoint beyond the welfare state, starting debates and instituting infrastructures

¹⁴ Barcelona en Comú: the city as horizon for radical democracy. A text I wrote for Roarmag in early 2015 <http://roarmag.org/2015/03/barcelona-en-comu-guanyem/>

of social care. Solidarity clinics and kitchens in Greece, Spanish movements revindicating care work and feminist economics¹⁵, translocal movements of solidarity economy and transition, cooperativist movements, housing struggles, campaigns against fracking and waste dumping, refugee solidarity movements have kept European elites on their feet in recent years. The political subject these struggles depart from is in fact one of interdependence and of care, not the male autonomous one.

If, as the etymological interpretation at the beginning of this text claims, 'precarious' particularly means 'uncertain' in the sense of being 'dependent on others' – dependent on asking, begging, praying – then it points to a subject beyond the liberal notions of autonomy and freedom. The gesture of asking, of addressing the other with a request, defies the very subjectivities upon which our Western societies have been built, whereby every 'man' tends to his own business and fends on his own, managing his own resources and opportunities, claiming his very individual rights.

While being dependent on others may indeed have been the norm for most people at most times, necessitating respectful and caring relations that allow for reciprocity and support, liberalism has us believe that independence is the norm. Neoliberalism then takes this to another level of atomization, turning every soul into a little business, closing every body in on itself. At the same time, those privileged enough can universalize themselves, consider their individual position as universal. When it becomes clear that independence and liberal universalism are a symptom of privilege and geopolitical and cultural isolation, new possible starting points for subjectivity and struggle emerge.

Montserrat Galceran recently reported that indigenous women in Ecuador, when asked about what model of state and forms of rights they want, said they didn't want to be independent, that they were happy being dependent. What they want is a *buena vida*, a good life, rather than an *estado de bienestar*, a welfare state. Interdependence

15 For instance the Fira de Economia Feminista in Barcelona, a gathering of grassroots feminist movements and thinkers <https://firaeconomiafeminista.wordpress.com/>

as a dignified way of life that respects nature and its resources, that can do without the fabrication of illusions of autonomy via the state or market, but rather demands to depend on others in well-becoming ways.

When did it ever occur to us that dependence on others could be the most rich and dignified way of existing? And, if we go with that general idea, what criteria and compasses do we need in order to invent ways of navigating interdependency in our first-world contexts? Our indigenouness has been sucked out of us hundreds of years ago in Europe, little is left of an intimate relation to the land (beyond spooky nationalisms); our families are in tatters, little tempts us to return them to their original (patriarchal and/or nuclear) ways. So where can we start from in affirming and sustaining interdependency?

Here is where precarity can be one possible point of return. If we take a bastard etymological approach to the word 'precarity', or indeed more of a phonetic one, we may say 'pre'-care'-ity'. In fact precarity is a state of pre-care: the precarious are those not quite in a position to care and support in a sustained way, those who have to keep holding out their hand, unstable and insecure enough never to know they'll have enough to pass it around. Precarity, as a proletarianized form of interdependency, is also about being unable to give, to host and offer to others.

And yet the precarious are ever-exploited, ever giving and offering themselves to the labour market, pushed into badly paid jobs, in a sort of transcendently infantilizing dynamic. With the crisis, the aspiration to make it to that stable place from which one can give (which perhaps most poignantly crystallizes in our inability to sustain another life, be it to have children or to care for our elders, because we have too little money, too little security, too unstable a schedule, too scattered a life) comes to center somewhat less on the wage and increasingly also on self-organized support structures and ways of working.

So the questions we must ask with a post-middle-class horizon in mind concern ecologies of inhabitation, networks of care and economies of the commons. Not as a fashion or religion, not as a new telos, but as lived and felt questions and

practices to always return to. As places to draw strength from and breath towards, with every blow of failure, disappointment or repression. Because these horizons are not achieved in quick struggle, they are not built in speedy experiments, they are assembled bit by bit and constantly subject to reframing, dismantling, rebuilding. We will not have our new societies, our new institutions and our new subjectivities in a flash: because they don't yet exist, nor does a perfect plan for them exist. They hinge on our attention and care at every moment, in tune with our bodies and their capacities.

How do we want to enter into a position where we can care, where we can give to those around us? How can we care without slipping into subaltern roles (housewives) or power games (fatherly or motherly control)? Precarity infantilizes us when we have no tools to develop collective support: it turns us into children who merely depend, without being able to give. I think/feel that this problem affects us as a generation. We struggle to get to the 'care' part because of precarity, then we either take the nuclear family route to care, or often remain somewhat lonely. Our liberal rights and liberties are of little help in the face of this problem. This is a challenge that requires us to situate ourselves: to face the current moment of class displacement (and all the other facets of displacement too) with subjective and collective intelligence. How might we situate ourselves within a paradigm of interdependency, against and within the displacement that shapes our lives today?

PART 2 SITUATING OURSELVES IN DISPLACEMENT

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? When do we resist displacement and how do we resist through displacement? 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? What are the ways in which contemporary practices of displacement are produced by the neoliberal paradigm and embedded within structures and systems of governance?¹⁶

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Where is home?

For precarity to give way to care and sustainable forms of everyday reproduction, other kinds of pacts and relationships must become possible. And so we must re-imagine not just other relationships but also other territories; to situate the where of our relations, the common frameworks and reference points, common routes and places of dwelling. To be less essentialist and more pragmatic about our coexisting and co-belonging. Without territorial and habitual reference points, we are left to anxiety, cutting us off from the world around us. Reference points can mean shared places and routines as well as common notions and practices, shared histories and narratives.¹⁷ In times of displacement, of itinerancy and passing through, the challenge is to find such new referents together with others.

Displacement and disorientation, as key neoliberal dynamics, operate across many scales, from intimate relations

16 Opening questions of the 'Situating oneself in displacement' autumn lab at La Electrodomeística in Barcelona, October 2014. Written by myself and Paula Cobo-Guevara. <https://laelectrodomestica.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/situating-oneself-autumn-laboratory/>

17 A recent study found that tattoo culture has boomed in the past ten years, particularly with young US millennials (people born between 80s-2000s), a majority of which has tattoos apparently). The study concludes that tattoos function as 'anchors' within which people inscribe their memories and experiences, stabilizing a sense of identity in a world that rapidly changes and offers them little stability. James Cook's sailors began to keep tattoo souvenirs from their journeys through the south pacific in the 1700s, reminders of beautiful encounters but also spiritual anchors for precarious ventures far from home that often came close to death. Anchors, reference points, signposts, reminders: they calm our anxiety, that sense of being adrift and lost in a world that moves too fast or wildly (anxiety, unlike fear, has no clear object). Gilbert Simondon describes anxiety as the loss of points of reference, which can lead to a disintegration of the subject (Simondon, *L'individuation*).

to housing and migration. Without wanting to conflate different experiences here, I will work through 'displacement' as broad concept to touch on some concrete instances. How to inhabit and dwell, if we can't find ways of relating, of knowing and trusting? How do we end up embodying displacement? A friend recently posted this on Facebook:

"Where do you fly in from?" the lady at the airport asks me. It takes me a few seconds to remember and utter the name of the n^{th} connect flight airport I flew from over the last few days. But her next question gets me even further off guard "Where do you live?" she says dryly with her schooled rigor and suspicion. I look into her eyes, embarrassed, I don't even know where I am, and having lived in 7 countries over the last 5 years doesn't help me too much. And then the saving word "Here. I live here!"¹⁸

These are not the words of a jet-setting businesswoman, but of a young researcher from Eastern Europe, subject to the laws of academic 'mobility', struggling to find stable employment at any university, compelled to follow a chain of grants and short-term contracts in different places.

The airport is where precarity, displacement and individualization often meet. A friend from London, an Italian migrant academic in her early 30s, points out how this conjunction relates to time horizons:

[...] all of us were quite individualized, all of us in the group of friends in London, because we weren't committed to anything long term; we didn't have family responsibility, we didn't have older people to care for, we were quite a good prototype of the neoliberal self-entrepreneurial individual: critical and self-reflexive but absolutely free to reinvent ourselves all the time, without commitment, responsibility. And so the fragility of this is more than the

fragility of a more traditional way of owing to each other and being part of the same family, of having social duties almost because of your role, because of your family position. But at the same time, there were commitments and we did create other forms of expectations between colleagues, between friends, between people sharing political projects maybe. But it is still a kind of commitment that will always forgive...

the fact that at some time you will go. It is your choice, you're always free to leave eventually, and actually maybe people would envy you if you manage.¹⁹

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And so precarity leaves us fending for ourselves, even if we wish to stay loyal and put. In the end our decisions will only be made in relation to ourselves, at most with a partner and only rarely with children attached. This may be seen to be even lonelier than the nuclear family, or indeed preferable to the nuclear family as it opens to other modes of thinking co-responsibility and care. Precarity, as well as the demise of the middle class, is an ambivalent phenomena; problematic but also opening onto new possibilities.²⁰

This has led many of us to think about commitment, inhabitation and situatedness beyond both the nuclear family and the opportunistic network: neither the individualization of a small normative reproductive units folded in on themselves nor the hyper-connected individualization of networking and entrepreneurial competition. In the 'old' paradigm of precarity, this was a moral standpoint and lifestyle choice: now it's more of an everyday question, banal and inevitable in its requiring a solution. In my experience, this mostly means working through different experimental constellations of

19 Interview with Gabriella, London 2012. Taken from my Phd thesis, 'The world we desire is one we create and care for together'. Queen Mary University London, 2013, not yet published.

20 I talk about that here: Precariousness beyond creativity: some inflexions on care and collectivity, in: *Maps of Precariousness*, edited by E. Armano, A. Murgia. Bologna, Odoya, 2012. <http://describd.com/doc/218594343/Mappe-della-precarieta-Volume-2-pdf>

commitment; trying and failing with building sustainable relations and commons.

Precarious care networks in the city

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The city is a key site in this respect. Not just because more and more people keep moving to cities, but because the question of post-welfare precarity within which I am situating this text is a very urban one. Our networks of everyday life, care and support are mostly within cities; our trajectories run between cities. Our cities grow (mostly). What, then, is the meaning of the constitutive parts of the city for the creation of commons and support/care?

A quick anatomy of city immediately yields terms like neighbourhood, district, transport lines, zones, outskirts, centre, rent, speculation, distance, population. We can dive even in deeper to get to streets, spaces, homes, institutions, histories, languages, dialects, identities, struggles. And if we think of our everyday networks, we can get to flatshares, dinners, parties, public events, parks, cafés, occasionally streets, but also to Skypes, time zones, instant messages (Whatsapp and the like), everyday snapshots or selfies of friends and family, homes in other cities. The recent golden age of displacement has meant many circuits of care are geographically dispersed, from friends (the old ones from 'home', the ones from studying, the ones from here and there, the current ones) to family (the ones at 'home', the ones who moved). It can be interesting and useful to make maps of displacement relating to generations of family and friends, and maps of our care networks in the city and across cities.²¹

21 I've been developing techniques of care network mapping for a while, for instance in the [Nanopolitics Handbook](#) where you can find a text about militant families and an instruction for mapping exercise. Recently, in a course on 'The city, Care and Infrastructures of the Commons' we adapted those to specific urban territories, mapping forms of interdependency and sharing resources at an individual as well as collective level. Such experiments can be quite useful for visualizing and analyzing the singular and recurrent configurations and problems of care networks in the city, and across cities. See here for the [Nanopolitics Handbook](#) <http://www.minorcompositions.info/?p=590#more-590> and here for the [Care/ Commons/City](#) course: <http://nocionescomunescn.net/2014/11/15/curso-como-cono-se-sostiene-esto/>

At a broader level, the city is itself a product of displacement and has many processes of displacement occurring internally. It is important to have those in mind when situating oneself in (trans)urban territories, since displacement is one of the major incisions in systems of reproduction and networks of care. People who leave may be replaceable by others in certain functions relating to the commons; the closer we come to care however, the more singular the relations and the less possible it is to substitute one person with another (one of the key points in discussions about care work). When people move from close constellations of support, especially when there is strong interdependency (material and/or emotional), they remain referents. We can see this in care chains (when mothers migrate to work as care-givers abroad for instance) as well as in what we might call 'chains or networks of mobility'.

As those who move, our relation to such reconfigurations of care systems tends to be deeply ambivalent. It always comes with letting people down. It's hard and sometimes impossible to make this a collective process – displacement individualizes. Our entanglement with processes of capitalist extraction and urbanization is something we bitterly feel as mobile/migratory subjects. The search for sustainable forms of life and community can be full of contradictions, particularly in neoliberalism.

In what follows, and to conclude, I will briefly think through three topologies causing displacement within the of city that effect our ways of inhabiting together: travel, gentrification and urbanization. These all come with specific affects: loneliness, guilt, escapism, melancholy, anxiety.

Travel / the city as lonely island. Sometimes we pass through the city without touching base with anyone, inhabit our own cities like passengers or consumers. We can do that even if our stay there is long – the figure of the expat comes to mind – not speaking to neighbors or friends, sticking to the internet. Sometimes it's easier to inhabit the virtual space and relations of the internet than to land where our bodies are at. The bigger a city, the more it offers itself for drifting through as if it were a deserted an island, making no contact with people beyond the exchange of money or rudimentary information, becoming itself a kind of virtual, abstract space.

Urbanization / the city as telos. The city, even though imperceptible to many a traveler's eye, is also marked by displacement from the rural to the urban. Besides the jumping and jet-setting between cities, there is a steady inflow of rural bodies that arrive to make up the underclass, notably at the margins of cities (suburbs, peripheral zones, slums, banlieues, favelas, worker settlements). Displacement from the rural to the urban, from non-industrialized to industrialized (for there is no city without industry, and no industry without urbanization) has a long and partially exhausted history in Europe, but it still marks the geographies of the city. How to interact with this telos of the city, and the peripheries it draws from (and produces)? This is an important question if we are to step outside the horizon of the urban middle class and build new solidarities.

John Bellamy Foster points out²² that the conflict between the city and country can be seen as equally powerful as the one between labour and capital (the latter being internal to the city). The city is a result of violence: a good part of the people moving from the country to the city do so because they are forcefully displaced and can see no future there in terms of employment or social life. Between 62-84% of world poverty is rural (in Europe, 62,8% of poverty is rural and 37,2% urban)²³. Cities are growing at vertiginous speed. Abandoning them in an act of voluntarism is not an option for most people, yet it remains interesting to contemplate the possibility of weaving new continuities across the rural and metropolitan. Many new and old practices of co-inhabiting, economy and production point this way: squatting land, local agricultural coops, agroecological networks, shared convivial spaces in the countryside, reviving depopulated villages as experimental micro-municipalities, etc.²⁴.

22 John Bellamy Foster (2013) Marx and the Rift in the universal metabolism of nature. *Monthly Review*, Dec 2013 <http://monthlyreview.org/2013/12/01/marx-rift-universal-metabolism-nature/>

23 See these statistics from 2014 for instance <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Poverty-In-Rural-and-Urban-Areas-Direct-Comparisons-using-the-Global-MPI-2014.pdf?0a8fd7>

24 Including not just organic food coops and agroecological networks (the Italian rete GAS or Genuino Clandestino networks for instance), but also rural squatting and collective experiments in buying old rural spaces for open use (eg. Mühle Nikitsch/AT, Performing Arts Forum Reims/FR).

Gentrification / the city as marked by property. This leads us to one of the most intense internal displacement processes in neoliberal cities, emerging with the financialization of spaces, habitats and infrastructures as 'assets' open for trading and speculation. Rising rents and property prices, construction sites, new condos and empty flats, fancy neighborhoods, organic food, cupcakes; these all seem to revolve around the middle class as agent of acquisition and conquest. Cities may indeed, to some extent, be playgrounds for the upper middle classes, but for most the playground is inaccessible spectacle: for you need capital to speculate, and subaltern and precarious city dwellers have no access to credit, not even to the world of sub-primes, for lack of legal or stable work.



The affects in this dynamic are guilt, anxiety, depression and anger, for most precarious dwellers. For gentrification begins with precarious trendiness and goes via the upwardly mobile to the upper middle and then shamelessly rich classes. From migrant or working class communities to squatters and bohemians, to the cultural folk, to the yummy mummies and young professionals, etc.... What to do about being cannon fodder of capitalist accumulation and investment?

It's hard to combat this massive redistribution of wealth when there is no local resilience; speculation and fast-transit inhabitation make them very hard to build. Still only common struggles can channel the disempowerment, ... sad affects into anger, rage and solidarity. We wrote about this in relation to London, in the Nanopolitics Handbook²⁵, and experimented with ways of collectively inhabiting our fast-changing neighborhoods. We also began to wonder about what we project into cities and what keeps us there – from 'making it' career-wise, to being in a certain scene or circuit, to being close to certain people or places, or having certain kinds of safety and resource.

25 See Nanopolitics Group (2013) Un/making sense, moving together: nanopolitical experimentes in the neoliberal city. In: Nanopolitics Handbook, pp.19–39. <http://www.minorcompositions.info/?p=590#more-590>

Figures of Fragility in Displacement: Situating Ourselves in Displacement

by (some)
Grupo Esquizo¹

¹ Nizalá Cassián, Raquel Sánchez, Miriam Sol, Lucía Serra.
Text translated from Castellano by Paula Cobo-Guevara

* Parts of this text correspond to some working notes and a loose transcription from a schizo Barcelona-session carried out at the Laboratory. The notes and exercises are placed in chronological order. Each block will be headed by a short text describing the subject matter that we addressed in each of the exercises. This text is divided into three parts
Alice, La Güera, La Puente.

PART 1
ALICE.
'BEING SO MANY
SIZES IN A DAY IS VERY
CONFUSING'

We are constantly moving between contexts, cities, jobs, collectives, relations. And every time we arrive into a new place or situation we are faced – implicitly or explicitly – with all these questions: who are you, what do you do, where do you come from; from which country, but also from which discipline, from which collective or political trajectory?

In this session we would like to work around fragility in displacement. The fragility involved in being constantly flexible, adapting, with the feeling of waves and earthquakes under our feet. What kind of narratives can we experiment with to turn this individualized fragility into a collective matter? A matter of concern and a matter of care.

We like the word 'matter' because it addresses both a concern, an issue, something to be problematized. But not only as a rational, logocentric or discursive thing. It is not enough to think or reflect around it. Fragility as a matter of concern and a matter of care means to give account of the material and embodied conditions in which we experiment it and the wisdom, strategies and jury rigs we create to deal with this fragility in our networks and collectives.

We want to propose here a question as the starting point of this matter of concern and care: Who are you? What are you?

This is a question that is actually quite present in our everyday life. Not in a transcendent or existential way, but as a very concrete and embodied demand. Those who are in movement – in between, abroad, coming and going – are always in the need to introduce themselves. We think that we can all relate to this experience in some way.

Let's read a fragment from Alice in Wonderland addressing this question:

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I-I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.' 'What do you mean by that?' said the Caterpillar sternly. 'Explain yourself!' 'I can't explain MYSELF, I'm afraid, sir' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.' 'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar. 'I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly,' Alice replied very politely, 'for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.' 'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar. 'Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; 'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis – you will some day, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?' 'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar. 'Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,' said Alice; 'all I know is, it would feel very queer to ME.' 'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are YOU?' Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation.

What we get from this passage is that 'who we are' is a quite authoritarian and violent demand. There's certainty an

ambiguity within this question; let's look at it in a two fold way: A mode of subjection, or normalization; those who are outside the norm or the normal are in a constant demand of identification and explanation of who they are. Here we would talk about identity and the construction of subject categories that actually subject. A disciplinary dispositive of normalization and individualization. What Foucault calls the confessional dispositive brought into psychiatry but also into penal practices and many other social and institutional environments.

However, there's another side to this twofold experience. There is a powerful and strong gesture in the affirmation of who are. Civil rights movements have taken this strength as a place of dignity: Chicano, black, queer movements. The affirmation of who we are becomes a performative, strategic and productive gesture, which defends and builds the rights and territories of existence of this singularity.

Saying who we are, sometimes provides us the feeling of belonging to a certain territory or community. It helps us situate ourselves: I am a feminist. It is also a performative strategy of reappropriation and contestation: Soy bollera (I'm a dike). But we have the impression that quite often, one ends up with the feeling that these enunciative categories per se are quite limited. Not only limited to 'tell the truth of who we are', but limited in actually building the territories where we can be, and be with others. Saying 'I'm a feminist' doesn't build the conditions of possibility for new distributions of reproductive labour, for example. How then, do we give account of this embodiments and practices that constitute our everyday singularities and their territories?

Throughout this session we would like to work around this issues: identity, singularity, positionality. We are 'so many sizes in just one day' that we end up not knowing who and with whom we are. How do we give account of the trajectories that constitute the multiplicity of those many that we are? How do we deal in our collectives with the fragility of being constantly in the move, being so many sizes? How do we deal with the fragility of certain marks on our bodies?

PART 2 "LA GÜERA"

We would like to work now with some figures of fragility in displacement. The figure we propose here is "La Güera." In this tension between who we are and where we belong to, we think some narratives from Chicana feminism can be quite inspiring. We will be working with the text 'La Güera' and some poems through out the session. La Güera is a text by Cherrie Moraga, a Chicana feminist that together with Gloria Anzaldua, published in 1981 a compilation called This bridge called my back. Writings by radical women of color.

Reading together
La Güera, part 1.

[mestiza, border, the non purity of our flesh,
bodies in displacement]

- (1) Take a moment to read the first two pages of the text 'La Güera'.
- (2) Underline particular phrases that call your attention or that some how resound for you.
- (3) Choose a couple of sentences or words that evoke transit, shift, turn or displacement. How are trajectories, singularities, positionalities marked on the body?
- (4) We'll take now a few minutes to share our impressions in groups of 3 – 4.

Here we share a few paragraphs we discussed in groups.

'I am the very well educated daughter of a woman who, by the standards of this country, would be considered largely illiterate. My mother was born in Santa Paula, Southern California [...] she was the only daughter of six to marry an Anglo, my father. I remember all of my mother's stories, probably much better than she realizes. She is a fine storyteller,

recalling every event of her life with the vividness of the present [...]

I was educated, and wore it with a keen sense of pride and satisfaction, my head propped up with the knowledge, from my mother, that my life would be easier than hers. I was educated; but more than this, I was "la güera": fair-skinned. Born with the features of my Chicana mother, but with the skin of my Anglo father, I had it made. No one ever quite told me this (that light was right), but I knew that being light was something valued in my family (who where all Chicano with the exception of my father).

I experience, daily, a huge disparity between what I was born into and what I was to grow up to become. Because, (as Goldman suggest) these stories my mother told me crept under my "güera" skin. I had no choice but to enter into the life of my mother, had no choice. I took her life into my heart, but managed to keep a lid on it as long as I feigned being the happy, upwardly mobile heterosexual.

It wasn't until I acknowledge and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mothers oppression -due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana – was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings.

With this first part of the text we wanted to start with a few basic ideas. Who we are is not a matter of purity, neither is it something static. Who we are is not a matter of will or

voluntarism. We are inhabited by our life trajectories, by the marks on our bodies. We don't 'decide' who we are in a logocentric sense, but we enact it and embody it through flesh and practices.

Body Map – Who are you?

Exercise

[body marks, traces, categories embodied on our flesh]

How are all the singularities or labels that define ourselves, embodied in different parts of our flesh? Where on our bodies do we inhabit the terms, identities and positionalities by which we are (self) defined, named by others or interpolated by the context? To work around these questions, we are going to make a cartography of a collective body.

- (1) Instructions:
Let's sit down in a circle on the floor.
- (2) Bring a pen and a notebook.
We'll make a short list of the terms that you have used to refer, identify, present or situate yourself. They might be terms related to your present life or some others that were very present in the past. Think also about those labels or categories that have been used by others regarding you, to name you or by which you've been identified:
 - a There can be general categories regarding age, gender, the place where you come from, sexual preference, i.e. lesbian, gay, hetero, european, latin, young, woman, a nickname regarding your physical appearance – like 'la güera'
 - b Regarding kinship and affective relations, ie: grandmother, son, partner
 - c Related to your profession or the work that you perform
 - d Terms in relation to the collectivities and/or communities to which you belong.

- (3) Write them all down and pick out those five that seem the most significant: the ones that particularly resound in you or that have marked you the most. There might be those that cause you some kind of tension, terms you have already problematized in your life, or those that give you joy and a sense of belonging.
- (4) Write each one of them on a post-it. If you had to point out one part of your body where each one of this five terms inhabits or is incarnated the most, where would it be? Take a couple of minutes to locate them, where do these terms reveal or disclose themselves more intensely on your flesh? Place the post-it on that part of your body or write it down directly on your skin.
- (5) Let's walk around the room and take a moment to look at each other's marks.
- (6) Now we are going to go from these embodied categories placed on our individual bodies, to transfer them on to a collective dimension, or collective body.
- (7) Let's take some white tape to trace a silhouette of a body on the floor. Together we have to decide the characteristics we want to give to this outline: its size, shapes and volumes.
- (8) Now, by pairs take out the labels that are right now covering your body and place them on the collective silhouette on the floor.
- (9) Let us take some time to observe the different labels placed on the body and we'll take 10 minutes to share some thoughts about them.

"La Güera that is
not that blond"

We will continue with these figures of fragility in displacement. The figure we propose now is 'La Güera that is not that blond'. Cherrie Moraga talks about 'click' situations that

put into question the stability or ‘purity’ of our embodied positionalities. We would like to continue with another fragment from the text. It will help us think how in certain moments of our lives and trajectories, these categories, labels, ‘identities’ or subjective enunciations become unstable. Destabilized. Take a moment to read pages 4–5 from the text ‘La Güera’. We have taken a few fragments from the text that maybe can inspire us to think about our clicks.

At the age of twenty-seven, it is frightening to acknowledge that I have internalized a racism and classism, where the object of oppression is not only someone outside of my skin but the someone inside my skin. In fact, to a large degree, the real battle with such oppression, for all of us, begins under the skin. I have had to confront the fact that much of what I value about being Chicana, about my family, has been subverted by anglo culture and my own cooperation with it. This realization did not occur to me overnight. For example, it wasn’t until long after my graduation from the private college I’d attended in Los Angeles that I realized the major reason for my total alienation from and fear of my classmates was rooted in class and culture. CLICK.

Three years after graduation, in an apple-orchard in Sonoma, a friend of mine (who comes from an Italian Irish working-class family) says to me, “Cherrie, no wonder you felt like such a nut in school. Most of the people there were white and rich.” It was true. All along I had felt the difference, but not until I had put the words “class” and “color” to the experience, did my feelings make any sense. For years, I had berated myself for not being as “free” as my classmates. I completely bought that they simply had more guts than I did – to

rebel against their parents and run around the country hitchhiking, reading books and studying “art” [...] But I knew nothing about “privilege” then. White was right. Period. I could pass. If I got educated enough, there would never be any telling.

Three years after that, another CLICK. In a letter to Barbara Smith, I wrote:

I went to a concert where Ntosake Shange was reading. There, everything exploded for me. She was speaking a language that I knew – in the deepest parts of me – existed, and that I had ignored in my own feminist studies and even in my own writing. What Ntosake caught in me is the realization that in my development as a poet, I have, in many ways, denied the voice of my brown mother – the brown in me. [...]

The reading was agitating. Made me uncomfortable [...] I felt that I had to start all over again. That I turned only to the perceptions of white middle-class women to speak for me and all women. I am shocked by my own ignorance.

Sitting in that auditorium chair was the first time I had realized to the core of me that for years I had disowned the language I knew best – ignored the words and rhythms that were the closest to me. The sounds of my mother and aunts gossiping – half in English, half in Spanish – while drinking cerveza in the kitchen. And the hands – I had cut off the hands in my poems. But not in conversation; still the hands could not be kept down. Still they insisted on moving.

'A 'click turn'
Exercise

['click' turn, tactile reminder, trajectories,
stability – trajectory]

We will take a few minutes to think about a situation where we've lived a kind of 'click' turn like the ones Moraga talks about. An experience or a moment when something happened to us that destabilized, confronted or put into question our position, identity or the ground where we were standing regarding the terms we identified in the first part.

Instructions:

- (1) (2) Think about a 'click situation'.
Identify what was your avenue or tactile reminder. What was that affect/effect in which that click took place as an embodied displacement?
- (3) Write one or two short sentences to give account of that experience.
- (4) If anybody wants to share, we can take a moment to read some of the experiences and we will situate this click turns on the collective body.

PART 3
LA PUENTE.

With this exercise we have thought about very singular or somehow individual experiences. What we want to explore now is in which spaces are we having the possibility to talk, to share and to experiment with this clicks. Are we breaking through this problem collectively or are we taking care of it, individually? We would like again to start with a poem that talks about another figure of fragility.

We are constantly translating, building and sustaining bridges, filling the gaps between those many that we are.

This bridge called my back

I've had enough
I'm sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge
for everybody

Nobody
Can talk to anybody
Without me Right?
I explain my mother to my father my father
to my little sister
My little sister to my brother my brother to
the white feminists
The white feminists to the Black church
folks the Black church folks
To the Ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the
Black separatists the
Black separatists to the artists the artists
to my friends' parents...
Then
I've got the explain myself
To everybody
I do more translating
Than the Gawdamn U.N.
Forget it
I'm sick of it
I'm sick of filling in your gaps
Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed
limitations
Sick of being the crazy
at your holiday dinners

Sick of being the odd one
at your Sunday Brunches
Sick of being the sole Black friend
to 34 individual white people

Find another connection
to the rest of the world
Find something else to make you legitimate
Find some other way to be political and hip
I will not be the bridge to your womanhood
Your manhood
Your human-ness
I'm sick of reminding you not to
Close off too tight for too long
I'm sick of mediating with your worst self
On behalf of you your better selves

I am sick
Of having to remind you
To breathe
Before you suffocate
Your own fool self
Forget it
Stretch or drown
Evolve or die
The bridge I must be
Is the bridge to my own power
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses
I must be the bridge to nowhere
But my true self
And then
I will be useful

Donna Kate Rush

'La puente' Exercise

Let's look at the map that we have made on our collective body. Do you feel related in anyway to those other categories that are not yours? Think on specific gestures that enable you to link different positionalities? Which spaces vincuhulate or link this positionalities; which of these links (or 'bridges') are weak or do not exist? In which spaces are you able to develop a territory for sharing, inhabit, etc? How are you effected by ie: being a feminist at the University, how does being a militant affect within your family? How do you deal with being a tom-boy/lesbian ('bollera') at your work? How do you deal with being middle/upper class in your militancy/activism? How do you deal with being a male within a your female partners in the context of a political collectivity?

Let's visualize the 'puentes' (links) between these spaces in a very superficial way...

Notes and reflections:

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We have tried to map which are the spaces in which we feel interpolated, challenged; which are those scratches in our bodies. This first part of the exercise allowed us to map those spaces in which we feel fixed?; also map our spaces of potency and subjection towards our identities and positionalities? Let's identify those positionalities, those subjectivities; they are immanently related to those physical and symbolical spaces that we inhabit; and go through some questions together: ↙ What are the most common scratches of our bodies? → Which are the relationships that constitute us? ↓ To what spaces do we set,

settle? ↗ What are those positions/positionalities in which we still feel uncomfortable, shaped (modulada); those spaces we choose to inhabit? → How do you fill the gaps between this (if) missing parts? ↑ Or how do you build the continuities?

↗ How to we make sense of what we are when, we – as Alice, have been form so many different sizes in only one day?

✓ Which are the translations, movements, transits that we have to make within and between this multiple territories?

← What are the tales and stories that we make in order to give continuity within this shifting/moving territories? ✓ How do we embody this minor becomings within our collectivities?

Memory Is The Virtual Is Duration

by Amit S. Rai

My dreams are so exhausting, full of monsters of an indeterminate variety. I can't see what contradictions they are working out. Omnes determinatio est negatio: "Everything depends here on the correct understanding of the status and significance of negativity," says Spinoza.

She lived in the Hackney marshes. By lived, I mean that whenever I would encounter her there it struck me that she was most comfortable in the marshes, she belonged there, thrived there. On a clear day, I would see her and Ginger, her dog, in the distance across the long stretch of football pitches, disappearing into the forest cover, wandering, as I thought then. My mother and I would follow her, slowly re-tracing the career of her play; my mother would be speaking. But I understand now that together we were gathering things, displacing them, re-orienting them and ourselves, intuitively following our actual and potential tendencies and capacities. Her name was Tara Singh, and she was unlike any twelve-year old British Asian girl I had ever met.

But that is just a dream, or a multicultural place branding advert, because this girl doesn't live in Hackney, she lives with her mother in Lahore, Pakistan. And my mother is dead. And so I begin with a confession: this is the outpouring of a failed narrative. I had wanted to write the story of one Tara Singh, resident of Bhopal's old city, whose family had lived there for generations, known mostly for the mathematicians and accountants in various universities and trades throughout Madhya Pradesh state. There was a famous relative from Sehore, who had mastered both chess and kabadi and was a university lecturer in knots. He and Tara, his niece, were very close, they spoke regularly. Tara Singh is also the great grand daughter of the last begum of Bhopal (abdicated circa 1951 – check date). The last female in her family.

But...wait for it...she doesn't know who her family is. That's it! It's exactly where the intermission would be in a Hindi masala film from the 70s.

Anyway, back to failed narratives. I have never been to Pakistan, although friends were helping me to get a visa. But

who can disentangle the contemporary anxiety of children going to school in Pakistan today? Lahore is not...I know, I know, and just last week in Lahore Cantt area a primary school was threatened with violence. In dreams that wake me I think I see drones cover the sky over Lahore. "They track our route to work, to school, to the market. We don't know what they are looking for, but there are so many of them over the past few weeks..." she tells me.

Tara Singh likes	Ice cream	
the marshes		being alone
drawing	dancing	singing
	dogs	tinkering
Ginger, her dog, likes		fish curry
frozen yogurt		
	well, any food, really	
running fast	sleeping	

To continue my confession: I aimed to write this dream as an unintended dance with indeterminate monsters, absent-presences that exert a virtual force on tendencies and capacities. I imagined something along the lines of a lost proleptic chapter in a planned but apocryphally printed volume on the ethology of Tlön. Was the ethology of Tlön a problem that could be solved by Borges's fictive humanity? In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx wrote: "A formation of society will not disappear until all productive forces are evolved for which it is wide enough, and new and higher systems of production will never be installed until the material conditions of their existence are hatched out in the very bosom of the old society. Hence humanity always sets itself only such problems it is capable of solving; since if you examine things closer you will always find that the problem arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution exist already, or are at least in the process of formation." Is the problem of a liberatory ecology of virtual-actual tendencies and capacities one that can in fact be solved by humanity today?

But then what happens when our problems start assuming the aspect of something more like the plotline of a dystopic science fiction novel? Every ten minutes Google made £150,000. That was about to change as well. Meanwhile, all Hollywood seemed to churn out week after week were variations on the zombie film. We were living in a time of an imperceptible control, our autonomous data unions used in massive marketing / spying/ speculation schemes, experiments in commoning the value of data repeating endlessly: extraction, value, measure, accumulation, logistics, exploitation.

Fifty years ago in the UK in January there would be 20 species of flower in bloom; today the number is closer to 300. Kobane, Syriza, Moditva, Islamophobia, Islamic state, "Je suis...? Je ne suis pa...?" What is a political ecology of identity? There are cold winds blowing in Scotland right now but it's the warmest winter on record. The oceans and their inhabitants are dying and super-exploited. And every ten minutes...

My dreams cut in and out of Hindi (and I wonder how Tara Singh writes Urdu, and which one). I hear Hindi-Urdu film songs in my dreams, dialogues, news reports, short story passages. The language is once again alive in me, it offers me another becoming. To write in Hindi, speak in Urdu: isn't that the dream?

But filmi clichés are all I can muster in the language at the moment. To think, to experiment, to dance in a language is to follow through its multiplicities: the plane of expression.

अतुल जी एक और बात बताने लगे कि अखिलेश ने जो लैप टॉप बाँटे हैं उससे कोई इंटरनेट नहीं चला रहा। सब फ़िल्म और पोरन देख रहे हैं। इंटरनेट तो फ़ोन में है। लैपटॉप बंकि तो रहा ही है लेकिन एक और धंधा चल पड़ा है। उनसे वड्डो करप्ट हो जाता है। वड्डो को ठीक करने के लिए दुकानदार तीन तीन सौ कमा रहे हैं। मामूली प्राब्लम भी आती है तो दुकानदार कह देता है कि वड्डो करप्ट हो गया है।

Ravi Kumar, बजिली नहीं ये बैटरी क्रांति है
[Not electricity, this is a battery revolution], Qasba,
<http://naisadak.blogspot.in/2013/12/blog-post.html?m=1>

[Atulji started telling me about one more thing; the laptop that Akhilesh shares is not used

for surfing the web. Everyone is watching films and porn. The Internet is on the phone. The laptops are still selling, but another trade has started: They “window corrupt” phones. To fix the window corruption a shopkeeper will charge 300 rupees. The shopkeepers turn even small phone problems into a case of windows corrupt. (My translation)]

In this scenario of jugaad (workaround in Hindi), the shopkeeper is a sinister kind of tinkerer. I dreamt Tara Singh as a tinkerer, but more like Adam Swartz. That she would develop a tinkerer’s knowledge of the world and its processes, an ethical know-how – but then am I able to disentangle a desire of and for myself from the dreams of this character? Is the essence of a character the capacities and interactions of definite tendencies? Which method brings forth the ontological limit of character in art – for instance, figuration in painting, architecture, photography, pop song, literature, film? Does the definition of the tendency require a kind of negation, a clear separation or distinction from other tendencies that remain relatively unimportant? What was the last novel you read in which the protagonist was a collective? Dostoevsky engages in this in *The Brothers Karamazov* in so far as each voice is always already multiple; Bruce Sterling does this on a less epic scale in a story of co-evolution, “Spider Rose” from *Schismatrix Plus*.

My sense is that Tara and Ginger are bound up in a collective narrative with the marshes. Except they are not living it as narrative, they are living it through composing together the capacities needed to experiment toward the creative life, that is the tinkerer’s life. Let’s imagine another world/ narrative then, not utopic, but hetero-logic. Like Tlön: a world in which extension is only a momentary limit of flux, and that space in itself has no reality, because it has no real duration. Everything is a verb: sunning, tinkering, negating ...negating?

“Spinoza ascribes to his inexhaustible divinity the attributes of extension and thought; no one in Tlön would understand the juxtaposition of the first (which is typical only

of certain states) and the second – which is a perfect synonym of the cosmos. In other words, they do not conceive that the spatial persists in time. The perception of a cloud of smoke on the horizon and then of the burning field and then of the half-extinguished cigarette that produced the blaze is considered an example of association of ideas (Borges, *TIön* 22 – 23).

The evolution of the ethology of *TIön* traversed innumerable enunciations, in which poets and physicists collaborated at a distance, tinkering in their distinct but connected media on the ethology of a possible world. Even as Borges' writings are haunted by negation-as-death, a wild inventionism celebrates another method of writing, of speculating an untimely becoming.

But there is no escaping it: vitalism as the discourse of an experiment in capacities seems to present ready made formulas (untimely becoming, intuition, affect, etc) for an ontological practice of affective compositions. Such an ontology would follow through on the fractal method elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, an $n-1$ method of exit toward the indiscernible. But one cannot escape the truth that to say goodbye to language, repeatedly, and that too within and against language, is always to understand the power specific to a cliché.

Perhaps they indicate another truth as well, which is that the indiscernible is not a state of being but a movement of becoming. This is not an extinguishing of racial, class, gender, sexual, ability-based forms of identity, becoming is not a sublation of difference, because becomings are formed from the molecular intensities of nonlinear ecologies. Rather, it is in the elaboration of styles of collective individuation that one affirms the changing capacities of the practice one assembles with. This is a matter of elaborating strategy and resonance together. Bergsonian memory is not the enemy. A politics of resentment is.

Does the concept of overdetermination move us beyond a Marxist dialectic, to a non-Hegelian dialectic? Macherey writes,

When Marx wrote the famous sentence, "Humanity only poses for itself problems that it can resolve," he was still completely part of the lineage of Hegelian evolutionism. The

subsequent history of Marxism would demonstrate exactly in the course of events that a question is not resolved simply by the fact that it is asked. But it is already something significant to pose a question, even if it can promise nothing as its answer. To read Spinoza following Hegel, but not according to Hegel, allows us to pose the question of a non-Hegelian dialectic, but we must also admit, and this is also a way of being Spinozist, that this does not enable us at the same time to answer it. (Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza)

Deleuze also wrote of this declaration by Marx. He took it in a very different direction, away from the lament of the failed answer. As Keith Ansell Pearson notes,

Deleuze offers a Bergsonian reading of Marx on this point. When Marx says that humanity only sets itself problems it is capable of solving this is not the empiricist, or rather, positivist, trap we might think, since the problems take us beyond what we think we are and are capable of. Marx's thought, therefore, is a vital empiricism. For Deleuze, the history of humanity, considered from both theoretical and practical points of view, is a history of the construction of problems (it is a history of over-humanity, one might say). It is in this excessive sense that we can say humankind makes its own history, and becoming conscious of this praxis amounts to a drama of freedom as the 'meaning' of human life and of its germinal existence (the fact that it lives on and survives only by living beyond itself). In a deeper sense, however, the historical character of human existence is an expression of the *elan vital* which marks life as creative: 'Life itself is essentially determined in the act of avoiding obstacles, stating and solving a problem. The construction of the organism is both the stating of a problem and a solution' (Deleuze 1966:5; 1988: 16; in Ansell Pearson *Germinal Life*, 23–24).

How then do we determine a well-posed problem? Are well posed questions to be determined, or are they the emergent limits of a practice? A question posed not from the telos of an answer but from the processes it attempts to diagram and experiment with? Is there a diagram in every question? Can methods of questioning follow a diagrammatic practice? Are diagrams of affects even possible? Possible, all too possible.

We can thus dispense with the word diagram, it is too riddled with the history of misogynist points, and mastered topographies. "The geometry of Tlön comprises two somewhat different disciplines: the visual and the tactile. The latter corresponds to our own geometry and is subordinated to the first. The basis of visual geometry is the surface, not the point. This geometry disregards parallel lines and declares that man in his movement modifies the forms which surround him. The basis of its arithmetic is the notion of indefinite numbers."

What compels a return to a political ontology in the time of the new vitalist materialisms of ANT and OOO? Perhaps one way to pose political ontology today is to consider the forms of political practices of such academic formations? The intuition for method draws its differently repeated patterns from the many revolutionary becomings in movements for economic and social justice, free education, and radical democracy. These becomings will have activated the memories and resources of decolonization, queer organising, commoning (long live Bethnal Green's Common House!), anti-globalisation, care, precarity, Anonymous, Guanyem-PAH, Embros to Greenpark in Greece, BlackLivesMatter, Why Loiter, BDS, Kobane? Objects are (de)fetishized of their processes, returning matter to both its morphogenesis and its logistical relations. The processes and dimensions of change of objects and their ecologies are well posed when posed together.

"Unbelievably, these refutations were not definitive." – Borges, Tlön.

What if Tara Singh's story is not bound up with a "silly" Hindi filmi reference (it is – the pehlvan [strongman] Dara Singh is her cinematic uncle, I remember him in *Anand* [1971], in a scene never shown, leading his charges in a game of kabadi, or group wrestling--the failed narrative is Bollywood derivative without experimentation)? What if her story were found in fragments in a house in which she eventually became a hacker ghost, after a life of 500 years, a kind of undead, and kind of Beatlejuice character. Mad, completely mad. Bonkers, throwing sporks at people all the time. The spork has to figure into the story. The invention of the spork.

"Their books are also different. Works of fiction contain a single plot, with all its imaginable permutations. Those of a philosophical nature invariably include both the thesis and the antithesis, the rigorous pro and con of a doctrine. A book which does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete."

In a review (2014, *Performance Research*, 18: 6, pages 130–32) of Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure*, J. Paul Halferty notes that Halberstam's quite optimistic approach to failure and forgetting is balanced with the understanding of the negative aspects and affects of failure and loss, such as unbeing, unbecoming, passivity and masochism. In a chapter titled 'Shadow Feminisms: Queer Negativity and Radical Passivity', s/he explores (following Bersani) what s/he calls 'antisocial feminism.' Through analyses of Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* and Elfride Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*, as well as the works of Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono, J. A. Nicholl and Kara Walker, s/he investigates feminist strategies that provide potential alternatives to liberal conceptions of womanhood. Many of these texts emerge out of queer, postcolonial and black feminisms and offer forms of feminism that are antisocial, anti-Oedipal and anti-humanist (Halberstam 2011:125–6). The forms of feminism Halberstam sees in these texts are those that think 'in terms of the negation of the subject rather than her formation, the disruption of lineage, rather than its continuation, the undoing of self rather than its activation' (2011:126). Citing

these works, as well as others, “Halberstam argues that memory and memorialization can provide uninterrupted and cohesive narratives that obscure the many breaks and contradictions of history and the many forms of passivity and unbeing that have formed difficult and uncomfortable modes of resistance” (131).

We are the gatherers of resistances, we will gather them together for all the Tara Singhs, all their extra-human permutations and all their actions’ permutations, to come. There is no resistance that can resist the universal appropriation of resistance by critical theory today. But what is the affirmation in this or that practice of resistance? What is resistant that is autonomously affirmative in Tara, Ginger, the ecology of the marshes – marshes we should keep in mind that were completely re-engineered during the “rehabilitation” (or the privatization of the multitudes’ commons) of Stratford for the 2012 Olympics? This question would limn the inhuman forces in her collective assemblage, where resistance is not anthropocentric but a strategy of experimenting with overdetermined, extra- and infra-human forces. We must compose assemblages of solidarity, as Franco Berardi reminds us about the current “crisis” of Greece and its seemingly ephemeral euphoria (crisis for whom – the bankers and the oligopolists?). If Ginger and Tara co-evolve in the marshes, what solidarities form, are made possible, or remain virtual through the explication of their mutual implication?

For Deleuze, Nietzsche “made an affirmation of becoming. We have to reflect for a long time to understand what it means to make an affirmation of becoming. In the first place it is doubtless to say that there is only becoming. No doubt it is also to affirm becoming. But we also affirm the being of becoming, we say that becoming affirms being or that being is affirmed in becoming. Heraclitus has two thoughts which are like ciphers: according to one there is no being, everything is becoming; according to the other, being is the being of becoming as such. A working thought which affirms becoming and a contemplative thought which affirms the being of becoming. These two ways of thinking are inseparable, they are the thought of a single element...For

there is no being beyond becoming, nothing beyond multiplicity; neither multiplicity nor becoming are appearances or illusions. But neither are there multiple or eternal realities which would be in turn, like essences beyond appearance. Multiplicity is the inseparable manifestation, essential transformation and constant symptom of unity. Multiplicity is the affirmation of unity; becoming is the affirmation of being. The affirmation of becoming is itself being, the affirmation of multiplicity is itself one. Multiple affirmation is the way in which the one affirms itself."

To affirm becoming is first of all to practice philosophy as a practice of joyous life, a dance of chance. This affirmation is also an excellent occasion to bring forth a non-dialectical difference. Difference as we see in the passages from Halberstam has largely been subsumed under negativity, negation, opposition, contradiction, and generally a bad conscience (slave mentality or representation, same dynamic). Affirmative difference suggests a continuous differentiation of intensive processes, gradients of functionality, rates of connectivity, and a multiplicitous mutation. This is difference as self-differentiation, given an ecology of far-from-equilibrium states and processes. This is the truth of being: becoming different. There is nothing but that, a constant becoming (even when rooted in habit, that "bad" repetition), that is what being is; a working and contemplative thought, the world is a unity of multiplicitous processes.

[Heraclitus] saw no negativity in becoming, he saw precisely the opposite: the double affirmation of becoming and of the being of becoming--in short the justification of being. Heraclitus is obscure because he leads us to the threshold of the obscure: what is the being of becoming? What is the being inseparable from that which is becoming? Return is the being of that which becomes. Return is the being of becoming itself, the being which is affirmed in becoming. The eternal return as law of becoming, as justice and as being. (Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy)

Tara is Orlando. Tara, her grandmother, my daughter, my mother/myself are a character in a failed narrative of care. Wolfe's Orlando is a collective character that is an intuition of the unity-in-multiplicity of durations, a series of vertiginous displacements separated by the long duree of hundreds of years or waves of nanoseconds.

We assemble with the powers of the false in any failure. It has its own ontological status does failure, and so its negation is only comprehended after the affective fact and material force of its intuition. Like a failed revolution – is there any other kind? Yes: a revolutionary becoming.

I found the intuition of Tara's story in a set of photos, but the more I thought of it the more they seemed to present a contradictory, anomalous figure. As if lost in a series of forking paths ("The house is a long way from here, but you won't get lost if you take this road to the left and at every crossroads turn again to your left." The Garden of Forking Paths), we see her in a fancy dress sari at a ball or formal event, uncertain what event, in an art deco hall of endless portals in Churchgate.

We return as if trapped in the bad repetition of a clichéd refrain. Isn't all marketing haunted by a constitutive exclusion? What event arrives from the outside that changes Tara-Ginger-marsh? Is it the violence of marketing (cf M. Cage, Marketing is Violence)?

What is marketing anyway?

So far, we have considered how marketing can be characterized as operating in either the consumer, business-to-business, or services domains. What is common to all these marketing contexts is that the marketer works to satisfy the needs of customers. However, more recently...there has been a realization that marketing also impacts positively and negatively on society. Let's consider how much the marketing industry contributes positively to society (we consider the negative impacts in Chapters 18 and 19). For example, Wilkie and

Moore (1999) describe the complexities of what they call the 'aggregate marketing system'. We can use the example of how marketing brings together the ingredients of an average European 'continental' breakfast. Consider the individual ingredients, for example, coffee or tea, together with Danish pastries, cold cuts of meat, salad and cheese, muesli and cereals, various fruits, the cups/plates and glasses, the oven to cook the pastries, etc. The distributive capacity of the aggregate marketing system is amazing, especially when we consider that there were over 504 million people in the EU in 2012, each of whom is brought their own unique mixture of breakfast offerings each morning (see CIA, 2013). Broadly, the aggregate marketing system in most countries works well. We're not all starving and we don't have to ration our food to preserve the amount we eat. Of course, there are certain countries in Africa, North Korea, and parts of China where people are dying of hunger, but these countries often experience imperfections in supply and demand because of political (e.g. war, dictatorship, famine) and environmental circumstances (e.g. drought). Therefore marketing plays an important role in developing and transforming society (see Market Insight 1.4). A firm which recognizes the important link between marketing and society and uses it to its advantage is the Italian firm Carpigiani, which makes gelato ice-cream makers. It set up Gelato University in Anzola Dell'Emilia near Bologna, taking in over 6,700 students from around the world. The course fees are low to cover the university's costs and include a voucher to purchase ice-cream-making equipment. Accordingly, over the last three years, Carpigiani's sales have increased by 23% to €113m... (Baines and Fill [2014] Marketing, Chapter One).

Follow the logic of the passage: it considers marketing's context-functions-contributions-effects. It posits both an instrumentality and an intrinsic value added to marketing: therefore, accordingly...What percentage of the British population is starving? There are news sources on Google up until 2014; after austerity many more thousands in the UK suffer through chronic hunger. Following Lazzarato, we see that the marketing system considers circulation a potentially strategic form of capital accumulation; the passage above even manages to make the relative lack of absolute starvation in Western Europe an achievement of marketing, itself figured through a telos of perfection between supply and demand. The very development and transformation of society is at stake. What affective atmospheres potentialise this passage, this translation from a standard Intro to Marketing textbook to a history of marketing practices in the UK? The 'object-Other' of empathy (the starving brown or black body) is invoked without being invoked, but even prior to that the question of whether self-interest and empathy are in fact contradictions. Today, the mirror neuron system suggest no contradiction between self-interest and empathy. The textbook covers over the neocolonial politics of (over)consumption willfully: the ecological and human disasters of capitalism haunt this passage – later in the text they refer explicitly to peoples in Africa as lower down Maslow's hierarchy of needs (i.e. in a state of arrested development struggling for subsistence and security) than more affluent societies of the global North. Today, if marketing can be said to have an ethics, this is the ethics of social control, human capital, and relationship management. Radical transnational solidarity translates market segmentation into the monstrous affects of feminist social reproduction.

Negation is necessary for orientation, is displacement necessary for politics? The question supposes we agree on this last term, but there is a paradox here: for there to be politics there has to be difference, sometimes of opinion, sometimes in representation, or in intensity. Marketing is always an event from the outside; when it captures or modulates, when it measures and typologizes, it is very much in the genealogy of Victorian anthropology. This is the event

that would potentialise the narrative forming in between Tara and Ginger, my mother and myself, and our bodies, this text, and the marshes; a negation of the resonances, or perhaps better a corporate affirmation of them in lifestyle categories. To each lifestyle, its own ecology of sensation: the contemporary craze for sensory branding is also an experimentation on the mirror neuron system, opening value channels of accumulation in the realm of affect, as Patricia Clough once said.

And the radical politics of emancipation is also an experimentation in different practices – practices of autonomous value, sense, joy, and radical infrastructures of care and resources. Too often, the pirate kingdom of bad repetitions, and rarely a sabotage of clichés, instead, Microsofts and Burrberrys everywhere. Radical political practices may very well be experiments in sabotage; there is often an assumption of class privilege in the discourse of experimentation, yet developing the bottlenecks in value as non-normative organisational behavior can also be captured as disruptive, intuitive innovation. Or poison the data streams: “like” everything on Facebook, immediately click through every advert, create hacking algorithms of automatic noise, exit through the noise.¹

1 The intuition for this affect-image came out of a conversation with Alexandra Joensson and Cliff Hammett, of the hacker collective Autonomous Tech Fetish based out of Bethnal Green’s Common House (<http://www.commonhouse.org.uk/>).

Where is Home

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by Julius

#displacement
#dis/orientation

#place

#body



working with
women

outs
of
nest

adventure
university

emancipation

people





3

5