EDITORIAL - RESEARCH REFUSAL.

Writing in 1965, Mario Tronti's claim was that the greatest power of the working class is refusal: the refusal of work, the refusal of capitalist development, and the refusal to bargain within a capitalist framework. One can see how this "strategy of refusal" has been utilised in all sorts of instances by social movements, but how does this play out now in the context of wider struggles over autonomy today – not just in terms of labour power and class struggles; but also intersectional feminism and queer politics; race and decolonialism, geopolitics, populism, environmental concerns; and the current pandemic? In what ways does a refusal of production manifest itself in contemporary artistic, political, social, cultural, or other movements? And, how might refusal of certain forms of production come together with a politics of care and "social closeness"? The transmediale festival announcement puts it this way:

From the small acts of refusal that reside in the mundane and everyday, to tender forms of resistance that allow us to repair collective infrastructure, transmediale 2021-22 will map out the political agency of refusal, examining its potential to form new socio-political realities grounded in care, hope, and desire."

This newspaper presents the outcome of an online workshop (organized by Digital Aesthetics Research Centre, Aarhus University; Centre for the Study of the Networked Image, London South Bank University; and transmediale festival, Berlin) with the participation of nine different groups located at different geographical locations, some inside and some outside the academy. Each group was selected on the basis of an open call and has taken part in a shared mailing list, creating a common list of references, and discussing strategies of refusal, and how these might relate to practices of research and its infrastructures: What might be refused, and in what ways; how might academic autonomy be preserved in the context of capitalist tech development, especially perhaps in the present context of online delivery and the need for alternatives to corporate platforms (e.g. Zoom, Teams, Skype, and the like); and how to refuse research itself, in its instrumental form?

Following the workshop, each group has been asked to produce a section of this newspaper that in different ways represents the group's abstractions on the subject. The design has been developed by Open Source Publishing, a collective renowned for a practice that questions the influence and affordance of digital tools in graphic design, and who works exclusively with free and open source software. The intention behind this publication has, in this way, been to explore the expanded possibilities of acting, sharing, and making, differently – beyond the normative production of research and its dissemination. Importantly, it has also been a means to allow emerging researchers to present their ideas to the wider community of the transmediale festival in an accessible form. The newspaper is distributed at the festival's various physical events in Berlin, as well as being available for download as part of the festival's electronic Almanac (https://transmediale.de/almanac) and at the publisher's website (http://darc.au.dk). Following the workshop and publication of this newspaper, all participants have been invited to submit extended versions of their research to the online journal, +A Peer-Reviewed Journal About. Research Refusal+ (http://aprja.net), published Summer 2021.

Christian Ulrik Andersen & Geoff Cox
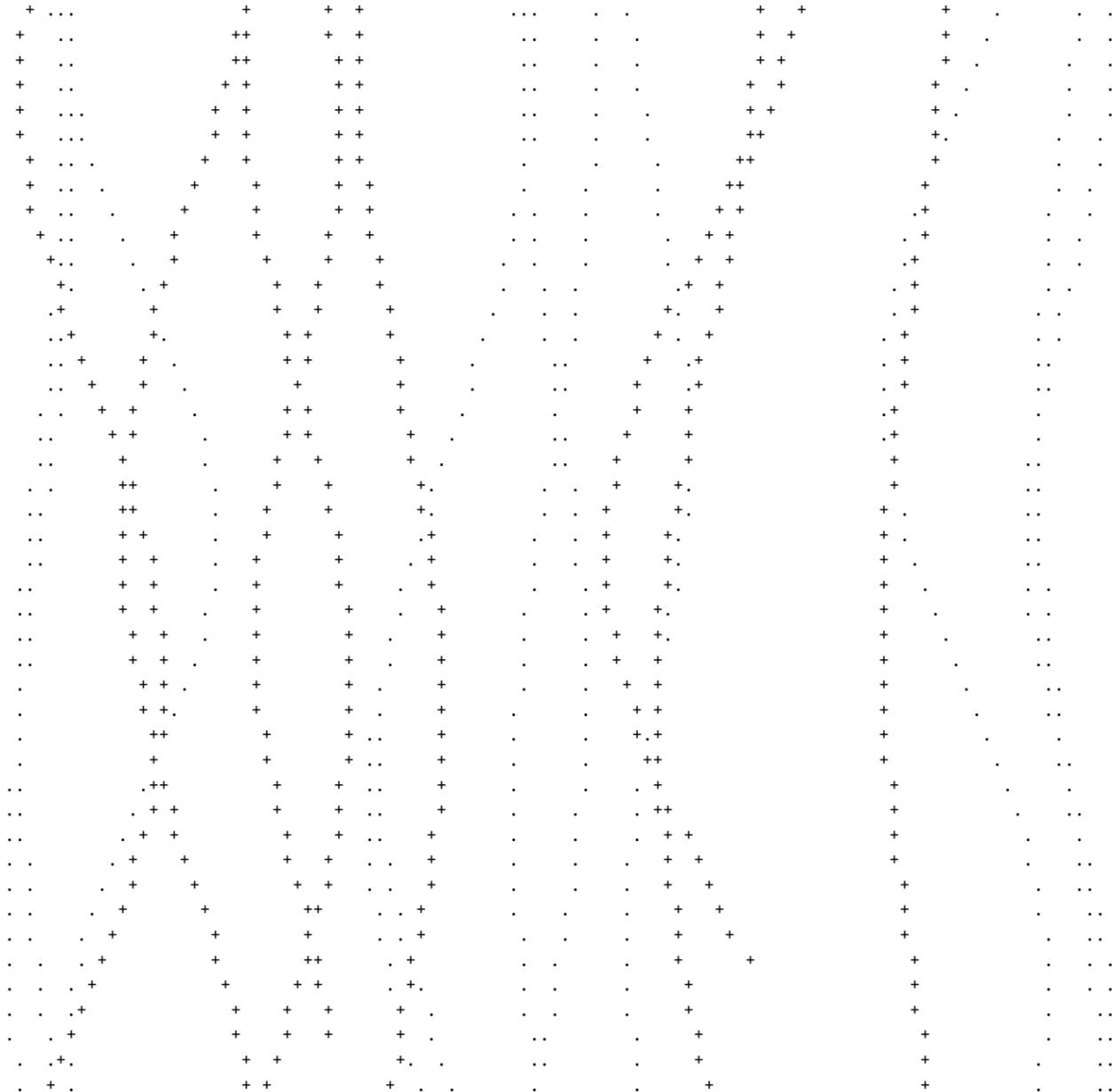
DESIGN NOTES
- - - -

This publication has been designed in a.
browser using plain text, javascript and git.
To include images, HTML and CSS were used.
The generated PDF was made ready for print
using ghostscript, pdftk and mutools.

The design tool developed for this .
publication continues on two research
tracks. First html2print, a research.
developed by Open Source Publishing where
graphic design for print is produced using web
technologies: a browser, HTML, CSS and
sometimes javascript. Second the asciiwriter
library, developed by Manetta Berends and Gijs
de Heij. This experimental Python library draws
patterns and non-rectangular layouts using plain
text. To allow the library to run in a browser it
has been ported to javascript.
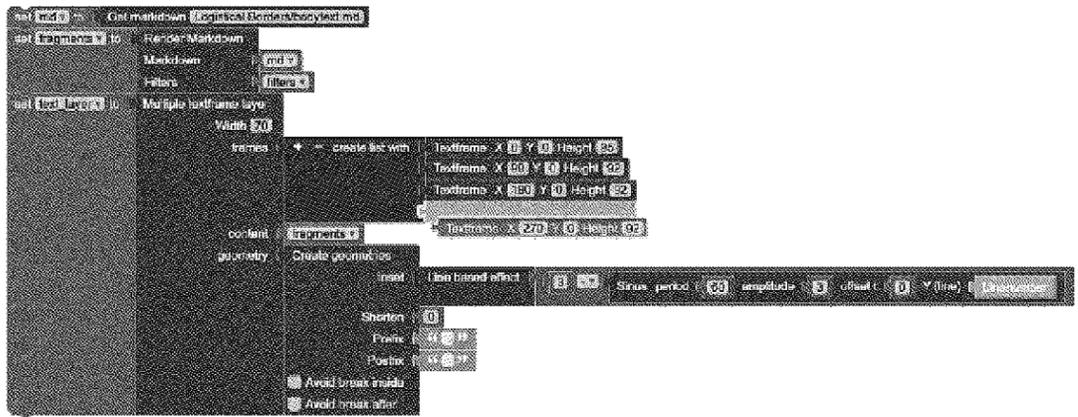
As the tool is web-based the editors can .
contribute to the layout. To open up the process
to more the blockly library was used to support
'visual coding'. The layout is defined through a
series of blocks, influencing the text frames,
but also their geometry. The material in the
publication is retrieved from the git-repository
used by the contributors to work on their
material.
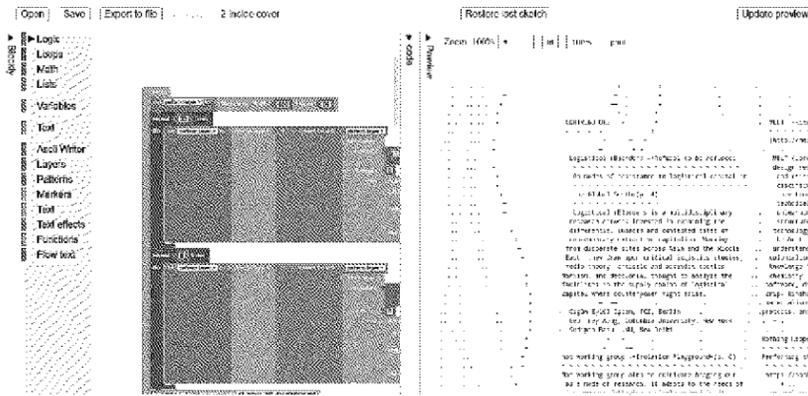
Open Source Publishing is a design collective
based in Brussels. In a refusal of .
proprietary software they use only Free /
Libre Open Source tools (F/LOSS). This
refusal allows to research +what+ a graphic
design practice can be too. They focus on+
the relationship between the work produced+
and the affordances of their tools, and the
relation between the makers of tools and how
these tools are used. Tools shape practice,
practice shapes tools.

F/LOSS shifts the relationship between the
user and producer. By explcitly allowing users
to study the software, and inviting.
contributions to the object, the user becomes
part producer and responsible for the tool.

OSP is interested in what kind of design can be
produced when designers take back control over
their toolbox and extend it at will.

CONTRIBUTORS.

Logistical (B)orders - +Refusal to be refused: On modes of resistance to logistical capital in the Global South+ (p. 4)

Logistical (B)orders is a multidisciplinary. research network invested in examining the differential impacts and contested sites of contemporary extractive capitalism. Working from disparate sites across Asia and the Middle East, they draw upon critical logistics studies, media theory, artistic and activist tactics, Marxism, and decolonial thought to analyze the faultlines in the supply chains of logistical capital where counterpower might arise

- Özgün Eylül İşcen, ICI, Berlin
- Geoffrey Aung, Columbia University, New York
- Sudipto Basu, JNU, New Delhi

not working group - +Isolation Playground+ (p. 6)

Not working group aims to cultivate hanging out as a mode of research. It adapts to the needs of its members following a simple principle it learned from the gambling industry: When the fun stops, stop. Not working is always open for collaborations and was joined by @afffirmations for this year's transmediale newspaper. New members are always welcome: isolationplayground@gmail.com.

@afffirmations is your Daily Refill of Positive Affirmations on Instagram. With Quotes for the Heart, @afffirmations inspires a growing number of followers around the globe everyday. Don't forget to check out. @afffirmations Instagram for Official Merch.

- Alan Diaz is an architect and theorist based. in Mexico City with a research focus on critical philosophy, philosophy of technology and media theory.
- Lara Scherrieble, Goldsmiths College, is a. researcher in the field of pop-culture and. resistance and co-founder of the queerfeminist collective and dj-label FAM_.
- Lukas Stolz is a PhD candidate at the Sociology department of Goldsmiths College interested in post-progressive radical imaginaries in the Anthropocene.

Governance - +Special_Intellectual_Zone+ (p. 8)

[https://gvnc.tv/]

GOVERNANCE is at once an collaborative audio-visual noise performance project, and an experimental tactical media collective. Through performative interventions, lectures, and multimedia publications, we view the works of Governance as an exaggeration of the performativity of knowledge production; an. investigation of the gestures, affects and. embodied dispositions that are culturally legible as 'knowledge work' and imbued with a veneer of 'objectivity."

- Rebecca Uliasz is a media artist and PhD Candidate in the department of Computational Media, Arts and Cultures at Duke University and holds an MFA from SUNY Stony Brook.
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- Brett Zehner is a Ph.D. candidate at Brown University in Performance Studies and Computational Media and he holds an MFA from UC San Diego.

MELT - +Rituals Against Barriers+ (p. 10)

[http://meltionary.com/]

MELT (Loren Britton & Isabel Paehr) are arts-design researchers who engage games, technology and critical pedagogy. Tuning to material-discursive conditions of tech infrastructures, they trouble patterns of agency in socio-technical systems through queer play, unlearning and leaking. Their work crumbles. structures, unbounds materials, dissolves technology and makes collectivities. Turning up the heat they read Denise Ferreira da Silva to understand how heat links climate change to. colonialism, from there they un-discipline knowledge from transfeminism, computation and chemistry. MELT is shaped by ice, freezing,. software, disability justice, moving at trans-crip- kinship- time, Black feminisms, materialisms, de-colonisation, gifs, climate protests, anti-racism and dancing.

Nothing Happening Here - +Nothing but Debts:. Performing the Neo-Institution+ (p. 14)

https://nothinghappeninghere.work

Nothing Happening Here is an art-research . collective formed from the Speculative Sensation Lab (S-1) at Duke University in 2020. Currently, we are based in Berlin, Athens and Durham, NC. Our work involves nothing, bad debt, refuse, stitching, credit, experiments, machine performance, and instituting otherwise.

- Kelsey Brod is a PhD student in the Computational Media, Arts and Cultures program at Duke University.
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- Katia Schwerzmann (PhD) is a research and teaching fellow at the Bauhaus Universität Weimar.

Bad Bitch Link Up - +How Can I Live? Only in Refusal+ (p. 16)

[https://blackfemmetransmediale.wordpress.com]

Our research group consists of four anti-disciplinary artists and scholars navigating refusal across mediums and fields of study both. within and without the academy. Together, we aim to highlight enduring lineages of refusal while attending to contemporary moves towards . redress and reparative justice. We're inspired by the sustenance of the quotidian, the exponential facts of Blackness, and the ancient futures of non-colonialism, which all undergird our refusals and calls for UBI & . reparations. All members are graduates from. UCLA:

- alea adigweme is a multidisciplinary Igbo-Vincentian cultural worker based in Tovaangar, the unceded Tongva land commonly called Los Angeles.
- Catherine Feliz is an interdisciplinary artist born & raised in Lenape territory (NYC) to parents from Kiskeya Ayiti (Dominican Republic).
- Kearra Amaya Gopee is a multidisciplinary visual artist from Carapichaima, Trinidad & Tobago, based in Los Angeles, CA.
- A.E. Stevenson is a Ph.D. candidate in Cinema & Media Studies.

Bucles - +Embrace No Certainties: or, How to Refuse Capitalist Realism+ (p. 18)

[https://Bucles.info]

Bucles is an in-process, independent and transdisciplinary research group working in. the intersection of media studies, media theories, and critical theory, with an open and ongoing interest in philosophy of technology, media aesthetics, and the history of science and cybernetics. While originally formed in 2017 as an informal unit of inquiry, dialogue, and thought in Santiago, Chile, our current geographical separation has pushed our actions to resort to telematic conversations, literature discussions, and paper assessments – all of which in turn informs our own individual processes.

- Diego Gómez-Venegas, PhD researcher at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Media Sciences)
- Joaquín Zerené, PhD researcher Universidad Austral de Chile (Human Sciences)
- Dusan Cotoras, Research Assistant at "Ciencia Chile Contemporaneo" group (STS)

DARC (Digital Aesthetics Research Center) - +Interfaces of Refusal: Critical Technical (Research) Practice+ (p. 20)

[https://darc.au.dk].

DARC is located at Aarhus University and functions as a shared intellectual resource that identifies, analyses, and mediates current topics in digital art and culture. Our aim is to provide new knowledge about the relationship between art, culture and technology. We focus on forming research projects, collaborations and international networks. We publish newspapers and a journal, arrange PhD seminars, internal research seminars, research conferences, and organize public exhibitions and events with digital media artists and researchers from around the world. Besides contributing analytically and theoretically to the field, DARC also engages in practical experiments, and often in collaboration with artists and practitioners.

- Malthe Stavning Erslev, PhD Researcher
- Gabriel Pereira, PhD Researcher
- Emanuele Andreoli, PhD Researcher
- Søren Pold, Associate Professor
- Winnie Soon, Associate Professor
- Magda Tyżlik-Carver, Associate Professor
- Christian Ulrik Andersen, Associate Professor

CSNI (Centre for the Study of the Networked Image) - +A Partial Lexicon of Delinking: a pluriversal exercise of fragments and multiple positions+ (p. 22)

[https://www.centreforthestudyof.net/]

CSNI (Centre for the Study of the Networked Image) is a research centre based at London South Bank University. It brings together researchers from cultural studies, contemporary art and media practice, and software studies, who seek knowledge and understanding of how network culture transforms the production and circulation of images. Our aim is to broaden the discussion of the networked image to address planetary scale computation and wider ecologies including the non-human.

- Marloes De Valk, PhD Researcher
- Rosie Hermon, PhD Researcher

R E F U S A L   T O   B E   R E F U S E D :   O N   M O D E S
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O F   R E S I S T A N C E   T O   L O G I S T I C A L
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C A P I T A L   I N   T H E   G L O B A L   S O U T H
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Proposition 1: Refusal in the networks of logistical capital is
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intimately tied up with the prospect and fear of becoming refuse
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or social waste.
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What Martin Danyluk calls "capital's logistical fix" to the
problem of overdevelopment involves a constant remaking of
the geographies of circulation and production, such that new
territories can be constantly opened up for valorization.
This repeats the violence of primitive accumulation: existing
lifeworlds are reformatted and their inhabitants ejected as
surplus populations from the circuits of care and social
reciprocity, essentially abandoning them to general precarity
if not outright social death. We ask whether these racialized
and gendered surplus populations — as reservoirs of surplus life
— might also be grasped as the "life supports" propping up
logistical capital. At stake is the question of the relation
between capitalist accumulation and surplus populations, a
relation that grounds our understanding of refusal in the first
place.

+International Workers' Day March in Beirut. April
30, 2017. Photo credit: Ezgi Durmaz. Source: Anti-
Racism Movement (Lebanon) FB page.+

On August 4, 2020, a small fire near Beirut's port
(Lebanon) led to a nuclear bomb-like explosion,
causing more than 200 deaths and 7,500 injuries
while leaving an estimated 300,000 people homeless.
The explosion was caused by 2,750 tonnes of
ammonium nitrate left unattended in a port
warehouse, which locates the roots of the disaster
in both global networks of maritime capital and the
abject failure of the Lebanese government, steeped
in clientelism and corruption. The blast ripped the
city to shreds and devastated the residents who were
already suffering from an economic collapse with
shortages of basic and medical supplies amid a global
pandemic. The condition was worse for the most
vulnerable segments of the city. For instance, migrant
domestic workers were abandoned by their employers at
their embassies' gates. Due to the lack of necessary
measures taken by hosting and sending governments,
various grassroots organizations mobilized for the
evacuation of migrant workers by raising financial and
legal support via social media platforms. Over a decade,
these groups have allocated their efforts and resources,
alongside migrant workers, to advocate a change in the
social and institutional systems that perpetuate the
exploitative practice of the kafala (sponsorship) system,
and ultimately, its abolition. Indeed, the kafala system, in
force in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Lebanon,
and Jordan, is what underlies the growth of the Arabian
Gulf, exemplified in the case of Dubai (the UAE), which
profits off devalued non-citizen labor, stratified by class,
race, and gender. While building upon the coupling of
automation technologies with its repressive labor regime,
Dubai's multimodal logistics platforms have led the UAE's
economic diversification. For instance, Dubai's Jebel Ali
Port and its rapidly internationalizing state-owned
operating company Dubai Port World led the city to become a
strategic node within global supply chains. Consequently,
maritime logistics in the Arabian Gulf manifest the
polarized wealth accumulation and social hierarchies with
their underlying colonial histories in a larger region.
Nonetheless, the ongoing urban struggles, aligned with

anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial agenda, affirms
the possibility of new political subjectivities and
alliances.

Proposition 2: The power of refusal derives from the fact
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that logistical capital is spread thin and wide across
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diverse geographies of extraction, production, consumption
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and waste in sometimes counterintuitive ways to drive up
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profit margins.
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The logistics revolution is a shift to lean, flexible
production models since the 70s which relies on low
stockpiles; where volume of production can be scaled up and
down according to changing demands and circumstances. This
hyper optimization and pressure to produce and move things
just-in-time, therefore, relies on a vast reservoir of living
labor and material conditions — on "forms and practices of
human cooperation and sociality" and the peculiarities of
geographical "niches" — external to capital to achieve its
goals. For Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, extraction as
the dynamic of logistical capital "highlights the relevance
of capital's relation with its multiple outsides." This is
good news in the sense that, spread thin and wide, capital
renders itself vulnerable to disruption because of
multiplying choke points. The task of refusal is to figure
out where vulnerabilities lie, how to turn capital's use
of social and material frictions against it.
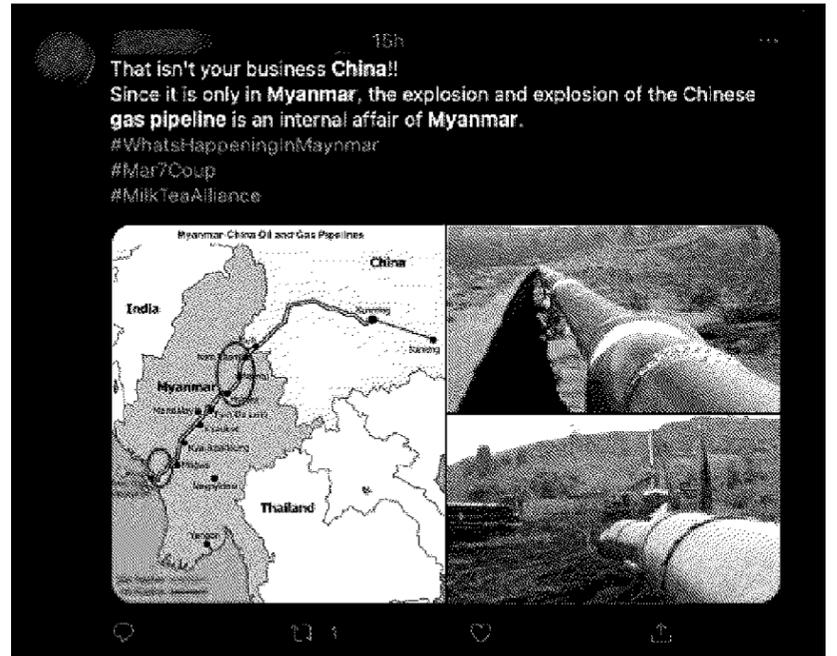
+As frustration has grown about China's perceived backing of
the military coup, calls to destroy the Myanmar-China oil and
gas pipelines have become increasingly common. Source: The
Irrawaddy, 8 March 2021.+

Since the Myanmar military launched a coup in
February, mass resistance has rippled throughout
cities, towns, and villages across the country.
Mainly this resistance has taken the form of
large-scale demonstrations moving through, or
occupying, urban centers. Barricades, tear gas,
smoke bombs, and gas masks have become de
rigueur as this "revolution without
revolutionaries" has fought cops and soldiers in
the streets. These tactics already display an
intuition about logistical vulnerability: urban
centers are sites of dense logistical circulation
and coordination, and in many cases, massive
demos have simply shut them down. All of this has
occurred against the backdown of Myanmar's broader
general strike. But other strategies targeted at
logistical systems have emerged, too. In Yangon, so-
called "breakdown protests" have seen cars left
unattended, supposedly broken down, in order to clog
city streets, helping to impede logistical circulation
— and indeed slow the movement of cops, soldiers, and
their vehicles. In Mandalay, shipyard workers eagerly
joined the general strike, slowing the shipping sector.
In the northeast, truckers left their vehicles to
blockade a vital trade route to China, disrupting the flow
of goods across the border. In the south, Myanmar's most
important gas pipeline saw its security workers — villagers
from nearby — pledge support to the resistance, themselves
joining the strike. And protesters have repeatedly
threatened to blow up the dual oil and gas pipelines
connecting western Myanmar to southern China. Logistics, as
we know, is closely bound up with the militarization of
economic and political life: from the shipping routes and

port infrastructures of the Persian Gulf – heavily shaped by the weight of US empire – to Myanmar's pipelines moving oil and gas to Thailand and China – closely tracked by the Myanmar military's brutal counterinsurgency campaigns. There can be little surprise that as Myanmar's generals seize power once again, logistical capitalism has become an important site of resistance to military rule. In no small part, to refuse military rule is to refuse the generals' hold over contemporary logistical capitalism in Myanmar.

Proposition 3: Refusal is a question of understanding the
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affordances and constitutive frictions in the networks of
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logistical capital.
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Because logistical capital "hits the ground" in often singular contexts, despite its best attempts to homogenize and scale with seamless precision, "capital must continue to wind in and out of scalable relations." The big picture is a certain alignment and operationalization of material, technical and social forces – an alignment that might be wired up in other, unproductive ways. Indeed, the act of refusal can take various forms (strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc.) and scales (e.g., transnational) while accommodating short or long-term mobilizations. The strategy of refusal also raises the question of who can afford its implications: such as losing a job, what risks might be taken, what backup plans exist. Refusal also needs a concrete, intuitive awareness of the affordances of the machines and technical assemblages with which one works. A great advantage of the networked form of logistical capital is that a key disruption can create ripple effects across the system. Plug it into another desire, another assemblage, and a tool can turn into a weapon.
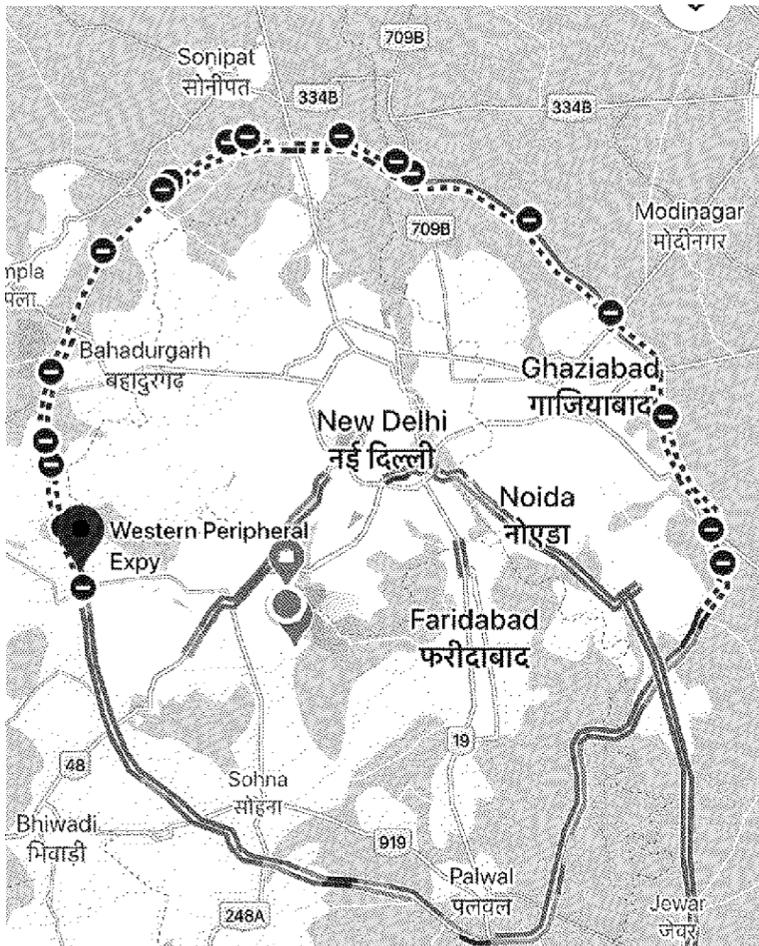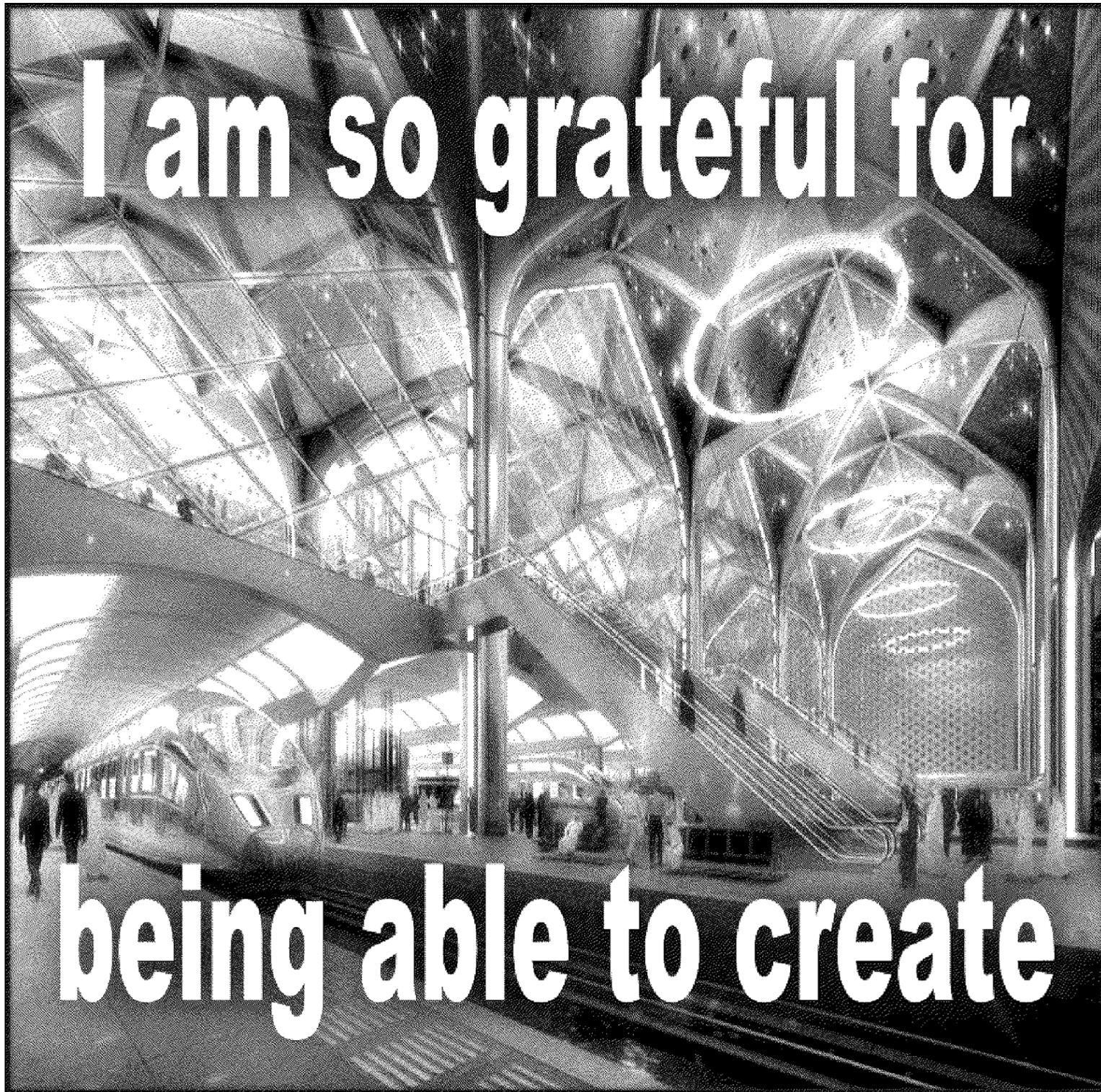

+On the hundredth day of the protests, farmers blocked the KMP Expressway, encircling and stopping traffic flow in and out of the city. Source: Harteerath Singh's IG, 6 March 2021.+

Hundred-thousands of Indian farmers have been blockading Delhi since late November in protest against three farm laws. These laws deregulate the agro-economy by removing price and stockpiling protections, allowing big private conglomerates like the Ambanis and Adanis to circumvent price controlled markets. The protests signal two nested crises: of growing surplus populations in an economy where the state has deserted welfare; and of a deepening crisis in Indian agriculture. Yet the roots of the current protests lie in the Green Revolution of the 1960s, whose purported success solved India's food shortage. The high yield seeds introduced by US foundations in west India demanded high inputs and capital investment to boost productivity. In the long run, the extractivist design of these seeds poisoned and leeched

the soil, depleted groundwater, made crops less resilient. All but large landholding farmers fell into heavy debt. Smaller farmers, most often from lower castes, had to sell lands to become farm laborers. With liberalization in the 90s, things turned worse. Limits on crop imports were removed and India integrated into volatile global markets. The state's food program – the major erstwhile buyer of foodgrains – was dismantled, support prices frozen, so that farmers failed to recover costs even with good harvests. Trapped in debt without exit, many took their lives. The new farm bills remove the few safeguards left. In the hands of private players, one will see an unjust model of contract farming that decimates all but the largest landholders. Pegged to global markets and export quality, crop prices can be manipulated citing market volatility and low standards. The 'backward' agri-sector is now at the crosshairs of the nexus of extraction, logistics and finance which Mezzadra & Neilson see as the driver of new frontiers. Sensing their coming precarization, even Punjab's relatively prosperous farmers, beneficiaries of the Green Revolution, are out on the streets alongside small landholders and landless laborers. Women protest in record numbers, as do children and the old. These coalitions are remarkable since they bridge deep fractures of caste, religion, gender and ideology. Clan-based village councils – the backbone of agrarian social order in North and West India – have taken oaths to defeat the BJP party-state, holding protest gatherings in districts numbering into the millions. The fragile solidarity of the protests has persisted despite the state's attempts to vilify, divide and diffuse. Huge community kitchens are run by men and women across caste lines; landed Jats welcome the leadership of Dalit laborers they usually dominate; there is debate on symbols and slogans used. If borderization is used by logistical capital to segment and regulate its constituents across diverse scales and spaces, we see possible dissolutions of old borders buttressing the extractivist agrarian order. But borders reappear in another sense at the protest sites. Since farm union leaders decided to surround and block circulation into the capital, the state has erected barricades and barbed wires at highway entry points into Delhi. With protests extending into four months, it is to be seen how the balance of power shifts. It is certain though that the protesters refuse to go back until the farm laws are repealed. Many want nothing short of regime change.

Proposition 4: Refusal often takes the form of collaboration
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that disregards and transgresses the partitions – what
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Mezzadra and Neilson call borders - instituted by the
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imperial order of logistical capital to reproduce social
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hierarchies of race, gender, citizenship, and geopolitics.
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As Charmaine Chua puts it, "International labor is materially connected today but subjectively fragmented." Thus, the social-technical affordances for and of the acts of refusal are necessarily entangled with the (problem of) formation of political collectivity across multiple sites of global supply chains, transgressing the limits imposed by distinctions of manual and mental labor. The intensified fragmentation of labor as well as expropriation of the commons (e.g., the general intellect) have made it harder to grasp one's situated positionality in relation to the bigger picture of value formation and capital accumulation. Elsewhere, we have argued that the interface is the privileged mode of relation by which this heterogeneous social totality subtending logistical capital is both connected up and occluded: which is to say, operationalized. Ultimately, the politics of refusal is tied to the question of coalitions that seek alternative political commons by the way of redistributing socio-technical affordances and forming alliances across diverse social classes, professional ranks and organized efforts.

Ö z g ü n   E y l ü l   İ ş c e n ,   G e o f f r e y   A u n g ,   S u d i p t o   B a s u

I am so grateful for being able to create

ISOLATION
PLAYGROUND

ISOLATION
PLAYGROUND

ISOLATION PLAYGROUND
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Are you feeling overwhelmed lately? Do you have difficulties falling
asleep? Is Instagram showing you ads for gravity blankets,
acupressure mats and meditation apps against your rising levels of
stress and anxiety? Did you already try out one of these products?
Have you become a creative worker because you didn't want a 9 to 5
job and now you work 24/7? Do you start doubting your life
decisions?

This is for you.

This is about refusing feelings of personal shittiness.

You are not an academic impostor.

You have read more than enough.

It's time to share your abilities and to create.

The "Hot take machine" invites you to effortlessly create the title of
your next hot paper or presentation. It unleashes your flow of
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deep archives of the last decade of transmediale curatorial statements.
Just insert your name, your star sign and date of birth, and you will
find out immediately which title will get you the most cultural capital.
If you want, you can now easily become next year's transmediale keynote
speaker on the main stage. You will be the glowing centre of art and
theory world's attention.

On isolation playground, creativity is abundant.

🔥HOT🔥TAKE🔥MACHINE 🔥

first letter of your first name	your date of birth		first letter of your last name	your star sign	
A refusing	1-2	refusal	A as a site of resistance	aries	towards speculative practices
B re-producing	3-4	virtual infrastructures	B as failing compatibilities	taurus	in societies after globalization
C acknowledging	5-6	our present digital culture	C outlining gestures of knowledge-production	gemini	within activism and politics
D reclaiming ecologies	7-8	the possibility of emergence	D - mobilising counter-cultural dreaming	cancer	in emerging machinic
E re-imagining	9-10	the legacies of critical net culture	E as a radical mulitplicity	leo	in post-socialist utopias
F destabilizing networking	11-12	political imaginaries	F as embodied agency	virgo	against ubiquitous
G mapping	12-13	speculative thinking	G as modes of cultural	libra	opening up rich spaces of cultural negotiation
H deconstructing	14-15	techno-utopias	H as new forms of care and solidarity	scorpio	in today's algorithmic filterings
I exploring	16-17	the multiplicity	I - a textual experiment	sagittarius	for futuristic high-tech
J contesting	18-19	the desire for digital emancipation	J - a radical social architecture	capricorn	between trash and treasure
K interrogating	20-21	the densification of information	K to promote auto-criticality	aquarius	beyond a marxist transhumanism
L investigating	22-23	new vocabularies and sensibilities	L - possible new ways of resisting	pisces	against the anxieties of late capitalism critique
M articulating	24-25	the productions of crisis	M as a mode of relation		
N re-examining	26-27	human spaces of mediation and agency	N as artistic intervention		
O unlearning	28-29	the dark sides of network culture	O - e-waste dumps as starting point		
P re-tracing	30-31	digital stimulation	P as temporal superimposition		
Q emphasizing			Q of our present digital culture		
R unveiling			R using digital technologies		
S reproducing			S - artistic sense-making and speculative scenarios		
T decentering			T - a self-reflective collaboration		
U re-envisioning			U as paradoxical nostalgia		
V unarchiving			V - decolonial projections		
W evoking			W in an intersectional framework		
X re-framing			X - the black mirror of data		
Y navigating			Y - transversal practices		
Z accelerating			Z - a meditation		

Alan Diaz, Lara Scherrieble, Lukas Stolz

SPECIAL_INTELLECTUAL_ZONE
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1. What is the Special Intellectual Zone (SIZ)?
~ ~

It is the very position from which we can theorize and critique the "special economic zone" (SEZ) as an operation of neoliberal capitalism without the acknowledgement that we are not only part of it, but essential to its production. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang theorize that all knowledge production, in the Western academic tradition, becomes settler-colonial knowledge. They point to the relation Western sociopolitics holds between knowing and owning, between seeing and dominating. To know the other, or to create an imaginative or technical representation of the other, is the unavoidable first step in projects of neo-colonial, protocological control.

We follow many scholars (Aihwa Ong, Keller Easterling, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson to name a few) in defining the Special Economic Zone as a place where common law is suspended in favor of programming new rules and taxation structures through spatial logics. As Easterling has explained in what she calls extrastatecraft, the zone is a topographic form that works as a tool for developing countries to enter the global market by incentivizing investment from foreign capital through tax cuts and cheap labor. Zones permit mutations of state governance in the pursuit of the clear flow of global capital-- she calls the zone a form of "spacial software"-- with infrastructures and topographies that foster or inhibit certain ways of moving about. This software has the ability to change, reprogram, multiply, and modulate its rules of operation in pursuit of objectives oriented by the vector of global capital. The zone manifests as both extra-legal privilege and disproportionate reward masquerading as meritocracy, but also as the space of the potentially infinite disposability and exploitability of human life. The zone is the abstraction whereby the husk of Western democracy, poisoned at birth by racial division and finally hollowed out by corporate feudalists, expresses sovereign power without recourse to divine right, and without the corporeality of the kings and tyrants of eras past. The zone is one means amongst many the world order has developed for evading accountability and responsibility, cloaking unbridled self-interest in a veneer of legalistic, scientific and mechanical objectivity.

Zones have often manifested as science and industrial parks with the growth and expansion of the knowledge economy. North Carolina's Research Triangle Park (RTP) was originally envisioned by academics at Duke University and North Carolina State University in the early 1950s to create a space to "cooperate in their research undertakings" and "hold on to the schools' highly educated graduates". It is the largest such zone in the United States and houses the likes of GlaxoSmithKline and Cisco Systems. The 7,000 acre park is complete with its own zoning and tax laws. Historically, RTP emerged in the post-war era to bolster the NC economy, which had largely depended on agriculture, and attract a new class of elite (white) tech workers to an area previously known for its black owned local businesses and liberal politics. The destruction of the historically-black Hayti neighborhood, retroactively lionized as "Durham's Black Wall Street" in the meritocratic imaginary, was deemed necessary due to so-called "Urban Renewal" policies and the construction of NC 147, the expressway that connects Duke and downtown Durham to RTP. In other words, as scholar Alex Sayf Cummings shows, the zone acted like a multiplier that expedited the growth of the white suburban middle class and the "creative economy" in the post-war era in the politically vacant name of innovation. The zone is more than territorial (although many historians have shown the links between academic-military expansion and settler colonialism in the US). The zone is also an epistemic project. For example, the project of artificial intelligence in the US has long used the zone to reproduce its research agendas by issuing what Halpern, Mitchell and Geoghegan call a "smartness mandate" to justify its necessity to governments and markets, while also keeping the spirit of hacker meritocracy alive and well. The zone is both model and simulation-- it works as a transposable abstraction of normative operations that can colonize epistemic domains, while also simulating knowledge production towards the pursuit of "smartness." If the economic zone expands outward to recapitulate its goals in the name of development, how do zonal operations translate inside the academy?

2. Research as the Zonal Operation
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We think of the university itself as a type of "spatial software" that recursively redefines the limits of its own operations through the pursuit of 'intelligence', 'knowledge', and 'innovation'. This software is both the code and its capacity for self-modification. The traditional humanities, science and technology studies, feminist studies, post-colonial and critical race studies have all argued that dominant epistemologies maintain hegemony through the performance of power. However, critique, modes of resistance and subordinated ontologies are often co-opted by the project of neoliberal expansion within the academy and out. In recent years in the US, the humanities have been reorganized around projects to advance digital methodologies, program hyper-interdisciplinary scholarship, and axiomatize modes of humanist pedagogy that take innovation and technology as harbingers of progress. These projects revolve around the application of techniques of quantification, analysis, and optimization to the scholarly project in order to lock the humanist scholar into cycles of self-justification. Importantly, these scholarly cycles must both originate in innovative new work, while at the same time reading as aesthetically legible within the academic circuits they traverse. There is an optimal relation between expectation and novelty that must be calculated by the scholar each time anew.

Intellectual zones exist within the logic of the enclosure. For Locke, the enclosure was the necessary step toward the colonization of America. It bound race and capital. Feudalism and indentured servitude produced endless training programs and intellectual pursuits as enclosures. It also reinforced the ontological divide interdicting any kind of solidarity across the race divide, obfuscating capital operations. States and corporations create enclosures of all sorts to redefine the performativity of social codes, to scramble and re-assemble them elsewhere. For example, early mining corporations set up enclosures of extraction to exceed their own limitations. The same persists with digital oligarchies. The neoliberal university merely hybridizes this enclosure mentality. The laboratory feeds off the general intellect of the common, innovates, and exceeds its own enclosure as surplus value – cultural capital. All the while, we can't call each other on our shit, on reproducing the enclosures, because we are ever so polite.

Ultimately, the SIZ is the space where issues of life, death and social inequity are converted into research subjects and objects of analysis as part of the logistical circuit of academic production. A global protest movement, a capitol riot, an unceasing pandemic each become akin to shipping containers; empty signifiers for us to perform abstract epistemological operations on to show our proficiency. There's no better time to fill your CV with line items that demonstrate your commitment to social justice.

Intellectual life in the university proceeds like a semiotic chain that propagates upward from the individual and downward from the sociotechnical ensemble that constitutes the university itself. This concretizes into a recursive series of SIZs across scale. By establishing pockets of lawless "innovation and economic experimentation," zones can establish everything they do not yet contain as outsides ripe for 'disruption'. Here, the norms of research as developed and deployed are applied largely only to the 'outside.' On the 'inside', disciplines can be functionalized into a variegated set of special programs, initiatives and financialized benefits. The logic of the zone proliferates through a gentle recursion that defies predictability but remains near the confines of a given discourse network. This operation happens, in part, through the performative gestures that we all participate in, and that separate us from one another and from the possibility of community. Instead of working through differences to find the common, the 'common' is predetermined in the form of intellectual mediation. We all end up doing the same kinds of things, but in isolation, and in service of our own careers.

When we operate from within the confines of the SIZ, our research must define an outside that we de-privilege in order to use as raw material for extraction. In this way, we reproduce the same dynamics we critique in exploitative techno-capital. Research mediates, repackages, re-presents, encloses, hierarchicalizes. Insofar as the university sets the rule of what counts, and what counts for what, methodologies of critique must be mindful of the "black box" effects of knowledge enclosure. Instead we have to ask: what genealogies continually reproduce the special intellectual zone across institutional form, state apparati, and corporate business parks? How do we keep remaining so polite about it? What enables us to perform acknowledgements of the stolen ground we stand on while the extraction continues?

3. Refusal of Research Recursion
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   Academic posturing falls under the category of the speech
   act. This seems to be a bad object or a bad term for media
   theorists so into new materialism, old materialism, and
   vanguard vogue. Too often we think of ourselves as 'inventing
   concepts' and 'probing methodologies' but really we are all poets
  and our poems are shit because they always carry an awful tune of
  institutionality, meek reformism and petty bourgeois desires thinly
  veiled as dress-up leftism. The importance of a speech act is
  clear. A court room creates incorporeal changes that are not
 material but are transformative. A judge pronounces someone guilty
 and creates a profound sociogeny. It doesn't matter if it is true, it
 matters that it satisfices, it brute forces whatever logic into the
 real. However, there is a very real material and situated specificity
to how speech acts operate. In +No Selves To Abolish+ we see a
courtroom where a freed slave is being tried for murdering her master.
There is a transformation of +being+ forced to withstand the violence
of the law and then granted sovereignty over the self as property to
speak in a room where incorporeal change is possible. Let's not forget
this. In the academy, the +who+ still matters. What exactly is it that
we are refusing? When we experiment with concepts, where are we
dragging our settler colonial mindset? Who is erased from the
possibility of our petty refusals? The most academic thing in the
world would be to have a conference on refusal where we all still
show up and work.

Refusal sets limits on the kinds of knowledge the university is
 suited for, or what research is suitable for. Research is forced
 to contend with its own particularity. This is achieved through
 the agency, sensitivity and coalition-building of the singular
  researchers that comprise it. We refuse the impetus to call
  art research, for example, or the drive to conflate activism
  and social practice with research, because the work of art in
  practice, the given social action, and the actual research
  project are all particular. We refuse to hierarchize the
  modes of knowing that emerge from each. We recognize that
   translation between these domains is only ever limited,
   partial, incomplete, and that hybridizing them produces new
   particularities that never fully settle into existing
   categories. Categories inform the discourse around and
    influence the creation of particularities, but none of them
    can account for the fullness of any actual particularity. We
    can hybridize methodologies without collapsing new techniques
    into the norms of the general imaginary, because all
     methodologies are all more-or-less hybrid in their execution.

   Tuck and Yang suggest that a mode of 'refusing research' is to
   turn the methodologies of critique and analysis the university
   has honed in on itself—to consider its own aggregate subject
   position in a kind of introspective examination. This is a
   necessary beginning for social critics, but it is not enough for
   us to turn a critique of neoliberalism, of racial capital, or of
   the operativity of sovereign power toward 'the university' or
   'the institution'. First, because the logics of optimization and
   resilience in which we operate already include and preclude it,
   critique comes to serve as an advance warning system for the
   present hierarchy. Second, because the institution is only a
   general category, it becomes too easy to conflate the social
   condition with the individuals operating within it, and to
   thereby reproduce non-relation while precluding the possibility
   of coalition. The proliferation of intellectual zones through the
   disciplines +within+ the academy allows a facile 'othering' to
   masquerade as self-critique.

  According to Jean-Luc Nancy, communication and community require
  an acceptance of certain aspects that we have come to associate
 with noise: failure, mistranslation, privacy, inoperativity. The
 proliferation of subject positions. Otherwise relation is
 precluded by a simple immanence; a non-relation, or
 relationship of command. The problem of research is that it
seeks to make all knowledges immanent to itself, to disavow
those that don't fit into its prescribed templates, and is
regularly operationalized into projects of empire and settler-
colonialism. The university's very claim to universality marks
its failure to recognize itself as a particular knowledge
community. This failing precludes its ability to enter into
relationships of productive difference with communitarian modes
of knowing. Refusing to integrate our particular vectors of
subjection back into the universal epistemic model merely
creates an ouroboros of all our best intentions. And worse, any
experimentation that ignores our own points of subjection
reproduces the enclosures that benefit the already powerful.

Rebecca Uliasz, Quran Karriem, Brett Zehner

RITUALSAGAINSTBARRIERS BY MELT

NON-NORMATIVE ACCESS PRACTICES & ACCESS AS PRACTICE, NOT AS SOLUTION

Access as a practice is not value neutral and can be, depending on whos knowing-making is taken into account and whos is not, assimilatory or a practice of solidarity and love.

In the Crip Technoscience Manifesto Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch conceptualize access as inherently frictional: "While historically central to the fights for disability access, crip technoscience is nevertheless committed to pushing beyond liberal and assimilation-based approaches to accessibility, which emphasize inclusion in mainstream society, to pursue access as friction, particularly paying attention to access-making as disabled peoples' acts of non-compliance and protest." (p.10) Quoting from Lifchez and Winslow they give the example of "an image of a powerchair user wheeling against traffic on a street without curb cuts" (p. 11) which they describe as "not an attempt to integrate (as in the liberal approach to disability rights), but rather to use technology as a friction against an inaccessible environment." Friction creates heat and movement, and for us this shows the potential of refusal as a generative force. We wish to uphold the knowledge that access for disabled people has not happened through the benevolence of institutions, but the continuous protests and inventiveness of disabled people. When it comes to access, we ask: Does a given approach to access position disability as a way of knowing-making or does it understand disability as something to be "overcome" so that a legal requirement can be checked? Does an access practice transform the space or institution, for example because everyone is allowed a break?

Another access framework, in which the knowledge of disabled people is centered, is understanding access as love, which is what Mia Mingus, Alice Wong and Sandy Ho propose. In their work, access making is potentially exciting, unsolvable and full of potential.

RITUAL FOR DOORS
You can perform this ritual when you are standing or sitting in a door frame. Trace the frame and dimensions of the door with your eyes or hands. Ask, depending on bravery, situation and voice, loudly or in your head: "Is this door open for" + "X". For X, choose or add: disabled people, wheelchair users, trans* people, Black people, neurodivergent people, poor people, people of color, queer people. If not, make a commitment to open it.
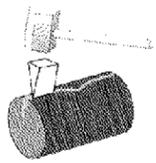
QUESTIONING COLONIAL ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Who gets to produce knowledge? Why are the people who do where they are? We are thinking about access in and into institutional systems that are built upon and upholding colonialism, militarism, imperialism, and injustice. These violences are hard coded into institutional processes of all sorts, which continuously uphold and stand in for what Sylvia Wynter describes as "universal généralisant": the unquestionable reason, value, and authority that is the illusion of all colonial constructs (1989, 87). As Hamraie & Fritsch write in the Crip Technoscience Manifesto, we must: „locate the conditions and transformative power of crip knowing-making under these systems." (p. 20) We wish to unsettle and remake institutional practices — instead of only calling for access into a field built on epistemic violences, we wish to engage access knowledges to imagine otherwises and transform institutions.

RITUAL FOR QUESTIONING INS
Next time you are at an institution of any
medical, juridical, transport take note of
What are they doing? Who isn't there? Wh
missing people were there too?
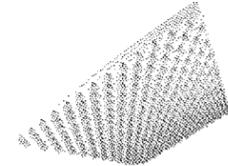
REFUSING LINE
We are thinking about access with Crip a
Samuels writes, "is time travel. Disability
us from linear, progressive time with its n
wormhole of backward and forward acce
intervals and abrupt endings." (2017) Qu
tes, emerges from the tangibility of mate
to a nonlinear framework where past, pre
chromonormative time that underlines m
and Trans* time refuse chromonormativi
as a material practice we wish to unlearn
catastrophies (as though everything is ha
lism (as though there is no collective kno
though the only way to survive is to furth

RITUAL FOR SLOW TIME
We have set up a „world of text" – a brow
collaboratively and in a spatial, non-linea
you to respond to these questions: When
given to you? What happened when you
does not fit your needs? https://www.you
Feel free to answer in as much detail as y
questions in one place or scatter your ans
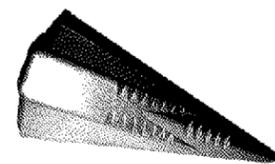
REFUSING CARC
DIVESTING FROM

The Abolition & Disability Justice Collecti
olitionanddisabilityjustice.com: „Prisons
systems. Investing in social work and psy
"alternative" to policing and prisons. But
carceral and punishing. At the hands of th
systems, people who are Neurodivergent
nonconsenually subjected to violence, in
also excluded from shaping decisions dir

We are thinking about the actions propos
refusal as a noun. To begin we listed a flo
strip, resist, make space, boycott, practic
refuse, divest, refuse, resistance, say no,
exclude. What would it mean to divest fro
shared practices?

TITUTIONS

sort: academic, immigration,
who is present. Why are they there?
at would be different if those

AR TIME

nd Trans* time. Crip time, as Ellen
and illness have the power to extract
ormative life stages and cast us into a
leration, jerky stops and starts, tedious
eer/Trans* time, as Reese Simpkins wri-
rial embodiment operating according
esent and future comingle and evade
uch of human experience (2016). Crip
ty and productivity time. Engaging time
linear notions of time that produce
ppening for the first time), individua-
wledge of survival), and separation (as
er racial socio-economic inequalities).

ser environment in which one can write
r way. This ritual is an invitation for
have you refused a timeline that was
did? Is there any current timeline that
urworldoftext.com/Meltionary
ou like. You can either answer all
swers along the page.

ERAL SYSTEMS AND
M REFUSAL

ve write on their website https://ab-
and policing are not the only carceral
chiatric agencies is often framed as an
mental health systems are also
hese so-called "gentler" policing
and/or Disabled are simultaneously
carceration and discrimination, and
ectly impacting our lives."

sed by divesting as a verb, as well as
w of words connected to refusings:
e otherwise, refusal, resistant, to
rituatals of refusal, disposess, remove,
m abelism as a commitment of our

RITUAL FOR ABOLITION
Make a list of ways to address harm and conflict in your everyday life that do not relate to punishment or incarceration.

CRIP FAILURE & NEUROQUEER REFUSAL

In their article Bad Listeners, Johnathan Smilges develops a neuroqueer theory of bad listening. In feminist discourses, rhetorical listening is politicised as valuable, leaving out or implicitly describing the listening practices of neuro-divergent listeners as failure. Smilges reads bad listening, which they connect to sensory or social overwhelm, as not simply failure, but as a starting point to imagine and practice other forms of listening. „Following M. Remi Yergeau's description of neuroqueers as those folks who "perform the perversity of their neurotypes," I invoke the figure of the Bad Listener as an example of neuroqueer resistance, as a person who honors their neurodivergent demand for perverse forms of listening, which regularly fall outside nondisabled norms for what is good, productive, and appropriate communication (27)." Here, refusal is a way of accepting neither the logic of pathologization nor the compliance with norms that were never created with disabled ways of knowing-making in mind. We ask: How much room is in academic spaces for bad listening and which norms of listening or showing attentiveness are exposed through the practices of bad listeners?

RITUAL FOR BAD LISTENING
Take a piece of paper or your smartphone and for 5 minutes, write down every sound that you hear (the humming of the heater, the chirping of a bird...). Alternatively you can write down everything that you sense (the temperature in the room, the brightness of the light). Repeat this ritual in different settings if possible. When and where are you comfortable with listening/sensing? Do you listen /sense deeper with time? Are any of the things you hear/sense an access barrier for you or for someone you know? You can use this ritual as a way of checking in with a new space.
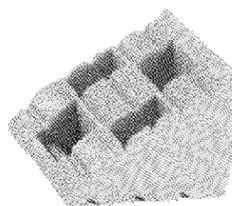
TUNING TOWARDS THE "NOT PERCEIVABLE"

We are thinking about access with varying permeable interfaces instead of the binary of „barrier" or „barrier-free". Some interfaces make systems, subjects and organizations meet and interact, while others evade access towards one side or misscommunicate in all directions. Along interfaces, that manifest for example as membranes, exchange happens between different structured and differently structuring materials. These materials co-constitute each other through the specific configuration of their interface's permeability. Permeability is oftenti-mes too small or not vocal enough to be perceived by human senses and especially by human eyes. What kinds of permeabilities make access possible? Does accessibility require categorical or medical knowledge, or, asked different-ly: If one refuses to make oneself known as trans* or disabled or neuroqueer but asks for access, what kinds of access practices emerge? What kinds of ‚reachings' and ‚seeings' make for leaky, concrete, textual, embodied, ancestral, whispered, haptic, drawing based accessibilities?

RITUAL FOR TENDING TO THE "NOT PERCEIVABLE"
From Undrowned by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, spend time with the question: „What becomes possible when we are immersed in the queerness of forms of life that dominant systems cannot chart, reward or even understand?"

Loren Britton, Isabel Paehr

R I T U A L S   A G A I N S T   B A R R I E R S
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Working with refusal and the Crip Technoscience Manifesto by Kelly Fritsch and Aimi Hamraie, we have developed a project called +Rituals Against Barriers+. Below, we answer some questions about this emerging work.

What is +Rituals against Barriers+?
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+Rituals against Barriers+ is built on the multiple practices of survival in the face of oppression which take the form of ritual practice. Rituals in our poster on the next page offer space for perceiving, questioning, dissolving and transforming barriers. Rituals are a Black, trans* and crip transformative survival means. Rituals can create a moment in which oppressive dynamics are not the main focus of attention, or the ritual itself acts as a resistant practice to deal with normative conditions.

+Rituals against Barriers+ are a research, design and sharing project that collectivizes practices of refusing barriers.

What is a barrier? What is normative space?
~ ~

A barrier in this work is a structural condition or unreflected habit that prevents people from entering or being in a space. These can include so called 'obvious' barriers like stairs, but also can include less 'obvious' barriers like smells.

In normative space, otherness is measured against a presumed "corporeal standard" (Campbell 2001) of cis, able-bodiedness, heterosexuality and whiteness. This paradigm appears as though there are no alternatives; this is what we work against. Working with trans* and crip knowing-making from the intersectional framework of Disability Justice (Sins Invalid 2016), we connect refusal to non-normative access practices to refuse assimilation into normative orders.

What are rituals?
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Rituals exist throughout all cultures: from cripritual.com, we read "Disabled, crip, d/Deaf, Mad, and Sick people face a lot of barriers and stigma. One way that we deal with these barriers is through rituals. Rituals can be things that we do to create accessibility, mark important moments, or to be in community with others who have similar experiences." This resonates with us as we engage ritual as a method, and practice it nearby the work of Tina Campt. In Listening to Images, she describes rituals as "...practices that are pervasive and ever-present yet ocluded by their seeming absence or erasure in representation, routine or internalization." and continues, these are "practice(s) honed by the dispossesed in the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life [...] [the] quiet and the quotidian are mobilized as everyday practices of refusal." (p. 4)

Rituals can invite a stepping away from whatever normativities and can allow entry into practices such as:
refusing to ignore a feeling, refusing to not listen to your body because doing so would make apparent the ableism of any space, refusing to speed up even if that is the normalised tempo.
Rituals are often a pathologized aspect of a lived disability experience. One example of this is stimming, the repetition of movements or sounds that one finds calming or joyful - rituals, rituals, rituals. Rituals can be moments of joy, of refusal, of collective practice, of uncomfort and of unlearning.

What is access?
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Access is a process of reducing a barrier which allows for people to enter a space. But what are the terms upon which people can do so? Sometimes, people are required to conform with normative standards as a prerequisite for gaining access. This makes access a frictioned term, meaning that depending on how access is understood and practiced, it can bring joy or harm to marginalized people.

Access, like care, is something that cannot be determined in advance and is an ongoing process. Often, access in (some) laws is defined as including a ramp, gender neutral bathrooms, closed captions or sign language interpretation. We work with processes of access intimacies (Mingus), which challenge us to understand the contextual specificity and ongoing instability of any accessibilities. Access is never self-evident or value neutral.

How does this relate to refusal?
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Crip Technoscience describes "practices of critique, alteration, and reinvention of our material-discursive world." (p. 2), it is also a "field of knowing" (ibid.) With the term crip, Hamraie and Fritsch point to "the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world". (ibid.)

Refusal, for us, starts from a political understanding that disability is an important and not to be 'corrected' experience. Disability is something we want to be part of the world therefore we refuse any 'access' mechanisms that impose normative standards: this refusal divests from solutionism.

Why wedges and what do they do in this work?
~ ~

We think from ritual, because a ritual often says something about how people work within and around given conditions. The concept of "misfitting" (Garland-Thompson 2011) describes how deviances from a normative standard can become a source of knowing-making. Our knowing-making method is tied to misfitting as our rituals provoke moments of questioning who and what fits. On the next two pages you will find that our rituals are accompanied by images of wedges. A wedge is a triangular shape or cone that has a thick tapering to a thin edge. It can secure or separate objects such a door and a door frame, or one piece of wood into two or more. Wedges that hold some doors open in varying angles and shut others are interesting for barrier reducing work. Not every wedge can create access through every door. The wedge is a difference making device, and a hacking device in two ways: it rough cuts materials, and it makes possible to gain unauthorized access into closed systems. Thus the wedge picks up access as both attack and contact.

By driving a wedge into systemic practices that ignore difference, our rituals: attend to differences, make soft hard systems (and structures), render things as processes (through repetition) rather than as static, make immediate change and amplify changes that are already ongoing.

C R I P   T E C H N O S C I E N C E   M A N I F E S T O,   A I M I   H A M R A I E   &   K E L L Y   F R I T S C H,   2 0 1 9
- -

In their +Crip Technoscience Manifesto+, Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch describe crip technoscience as "practices of critique, alteration, and reinvention of our material-discursive world." (p. 2) as well as a "field of knowing" (ibid.) With the term crip, Hamraie and Fritsch point to "the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world". (ibid.) Crip technoscience centers the work of disabled people as knowers and makers, is committed to access as friction and builds on interdependence and disability justice.

L o r e n   B r i t t o n,   I s a b e l   P a e h r

N O T H I N G   B U T   D E B T S :
- - - - - - - - - - - -
P E R F O R M I N G   T H E   N E O -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - -
I N S T I T U T I O N
- - - - - - - -

Our original proposal to the Research Refusal CFP was titled "Nothing Happening Here: From Research Refusals to Studying Together." Yet even after we submitted, the provenance of our title was not entirely clear to us. "Nothing" made sense, since we'd worked on nothing together before. In "Happening," there seemed to be a gesture towards 1960s "Happenings" and perhaps a future promise of performativity. But what about "Here"? Where did that come from? Where was "here," and what did it signify?

We began the conclusion to our first listserv email with: "This contradiction between togetherness and individuality is something we will explore further in subsequent provocations, but for now, let us make our own position clear..." (11/30/2020). Yet despite striving for clarity, in the preceding sentences, we qualified these same we's, us's, and our's. In short, we attempted to recognize the disparity of our varying positions by writing:

· We are all in this together. Or we should ·
· say, we are each in this together. Because ·
· we also want to acknowledge our ·
· differentiated positions: first within our ·
· group, and then across all nine groups, and ·
· finally amongst the organizers. We want ·
· to problematize the too-easy use of the ·
· word "we." We ask you to be suspicious ·
· of those who say "we"—including us! ·

Even our own internal "we" remained protean. Our five positions shifted, open and fluid, over discussions in email, Whatsapp, Zoom. We continued to turn over and over where we each stood: with each other, with the other groups, and with/against institutions. We even struggled to agree on a collective definition of the word "institution" and whether this word could be applied to transmediale.

In the new year, we tried yet again. We took up the question of heres in letters, a chain of messages spanning several days and many more timezones. Our unfixable heres continued to ask for some address, though our multiplicity was irresolvable. In our writing, the contours of our multiple heres became more clear, but this raised further questions. What about the heres shared amongst the nine groups? And what about the entirely unknowable here of transmediale itself? Unknowable since none of us would travel to transmediale this year, meaning the here we were hoping to both partake in and refuse was an absence, a nothing. Here never settled anywhere.

™ as a Neo/Non-Institution
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Transmediale (hereafter abbreviated ™) brings to light a form of institution that is distinct from the public institution Athena Athanasiou sees as imperiled by its neoliberal privatization—even while being publicly funded. To take on Athanasiou's call to perform the institution "as if it were possible" (p. 682), how to "resist", "reinvent", "reform", "re-institute" something that does not offer any grip?

In the past five months, the nine groups selected by ™ produced a significant amount of outputs in the form of texts exchanged on the ™ listserv, presentations, and a brilliant zine. The generosity in sharing, the depth of thoughts, the individual engagement, the richness of the exchanges—all of it is something I had never experienced before. Yet, the names of the participants—those proper names by the citation of which an institution can, at least symbolically, recognize the unpaid labor of its subjects—are nowhere to be found on the ™ website. After a request for clarification, an organizer (here O) responded "Full credits will appear at that time [the time of the publication of the newspaper], including on the transmediale website. We are simply waiting until the outputs are made

public to do this." What is implied here is that the research done, the work accomplished, and the knowledge shared up to now do not deserve public recognition, until the institution decides otherwise. In other words: not before yet more work has been done. However, the work has to be conceived of as "an opportunity, not an obligation."

™ is the most slippery object imaginable. Try to catch a wet fish! ™ doesn't provide a structure to support the performing of (research) refusal. If refusal means—following Tuck and Yang—to "turn the gaze back upon power" (p. 241), how to refuse something that invisibilizes its power either by its being oblivious to it or by its refusal to take the responsibility that comes with it?

Careful however: this is not an attack on individual O, themselves taken in the slippery nets of the structure. Instead, this text is an attempt to make the flimmering, glittery structure of the neo/non-institution visible. Refusal is our ethical and political responsibility and this attempt is the closest we will come to refusing ™, for now.

We are irritated with each other that we have complied in writing this, but we agree that to not comply "won't mean much." This irritation turns into responsibilization of each other, as we assign ourselves tasks of editing, writing, designing—work we all love to do—but not for nothing! We, the group Nothing Happening Here, have arrived at the neo-institution of ™ to find nothing already here—except for the responsibilization to become something.

We comply because ™ provides the conditions for our assembly, and we cannot do what we want to do, say what we want to say, assemble how we want to assemble without reinforcing the conditions we assemble against. As Judith Butler writes in +Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly+, "None of us acts without the conditions to act, even though sometimes we must act to install and preserve those very conditions. The paradox is obvious, and yet what we can see when the precarious assemble is a form of action that demands the conditions for action and living" (p. 16).

Here, this newspaper, is both a condition for our precarity and an enactment against the neo-institution. In this very moment that you are reading we assemble to say: The neo/non-institution does not break. Made from a silicon-like material, very smooth to the touch, like a cake mold, it can be baked at high temperature and won't melt. You can deform it. But it will take back its shape as soon as you release the pressure.

Performing Our Debts Together
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~
The nine Research Refusal groups gathered in Zoom a second time in late January. This was the closest we would come to sharing a here—yet one more reminder of how over the past year, such disaggregated gatherings have become the numbing norm for realizing being-together. When we presented our research, we focused on acknowledging our debt to the other eight groups, recognizing their contributions to our thinking. We thought of this as a performance of both debt and collectivity. At the close of our talk, we addressed the assembled groups and took up once more the unsteadiness of our assembly, the uncertainty of our varied positions:

· We hardly know each other, after all. ·
· And so, how can our interests become ·
· common? Especially given our brief time ·
· together and the globe-spanning array of ·
· different heres that have been gathered ·
· here today. ·

Of our twenty allotted minutes, we held the last eight for a survey. Twenty-one people, including us, participated and everyone present in the Zoom session shared eight silent minutes that otherwise would have been Q&A. Even the chat became a space for critiquing and defending the survey as a means of assembly and a form for thinking with each other.

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+Seven researchers, from two different Refusal groups, not working and doing nothing together over Zoom.+

We had already accepted that we could not yet claim common experience with our fellow refusers. Yet against the backdrop of the impossibility of building common interests within our various heres, we held out for small moments of community and sharing. As Athanasiou suggests in "Performing the Institution 'As If It Were Possible'":

· The conditions of possibility for being-in-   ·
· common are being destroyed by the   ·
· institutional forces of dispossession that   ·
· underlie the contemporary regime of   ·
· neoliberal rationality. And yet, induced   ·
· precarity can serve as an ethico-   ·
· political resource for effecting   ·
· responsive modes of being-in-common,   ·
· whereby a certain impossibility of   ·
· being-in-common might also be shared.   ·
· (p. 680)   ·

These institutional forces of dispossession come in many forms: racism, sexism, neoliberalism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy being some of the most visible and destructive. But dispossession also makes itself felt in more insidious ways, especially among purported equals. Sharing a here with someone is hard when there are unspoken hierarchies, unchallenged norms, and unreflected positionalities—in other words, when you don't actually share a here at all. But among those who are dispossessed, whether in ways large or small, Athanasiou promises a potential "being-in-common," even as she recognizes its very impossibility.

Donna Haraway expressed a similar sentiment in "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." Amidst a debate between deconstructive relativism and what Haraway called "a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world" (p. 579), she proposes a balancing act similar to Athanasiou's stance on the institution. Haraway describes the self as "partial in all its guises… always stitched together imperfectly" (p. 586). Yet because of, rather than despite, these sutures, Haraway holds on to the possibility of being able "to see together" while leaving open space for difference. As she says, "location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure, finality" (p. 590). Thus, our uncertainty around heres, combined with our commitment to holding these different, sometimes vulnerable heres together, is an effort toward being-in-common. As Haraway says, "Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The

only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular" (p. 590). In the past year, we shared the experience of being scattered across innumerable particular places—all while striving to maintain our communities and, perhaps, build new ones.

In this spirit, we return to the survey on debt we did together, as nine groups, on January 21. Although we weren't all there that day and although not everyone who was there took the survey, we still understand this (partial) collective exercise as an imperfect moment of when we were joined in expressing our mutual, yet individual, debts. The five questions of the survey and the twenty-one responses can be found below, their shimmering presence reflecting our struggle to find a here and the fragility of our shared hopes for instituting differently.

Nothing Happening Here, March 2021

Recognizing Our Debts - Survey
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   - Do you feel in debt to the members of your group?
     If so, how?

   - Do you feel in debt to the other eight groups in
     Research Refusal? If so, how?

   - Do you feel you are in debt to transmediale
     (™)? If so, how?

   - Do you feel these people, these groups,
     and/or these institutions are in debt to
     you? If so, how?

   - How might we re-order our relations of
     debt to each other and within
     transmediale?

   Anonymous survey to recognize our debts to
   each other, 21/01/2021. Collected responses
   can be found at <https://gitlab.com/osp-
   kitchen/aprja.research-refusal/-
   /blob/master/Nothing Happening
   Here/Recognizing_Our_Debts_-
   _TM_RR_NHH_01.22.21.xlsx>

K e l s e y   B r o d ,   A l e x a n d e r   S t r e c k e r ,   J o r d a n   S j o l ,   K r i s t e n   T a p s o n ,   K a t i a   S c h w e r z m a n n

HOW CAN I LIVE? ONLY IN REFUSAL

I'm pushing these words out in conflict with my mind that refuses to write, refuses to squeeze. Or is it something different? I'm feeling resistant to authentically engaging with this digest. A deep exhaustion of expressive sensical labor that persists like an army under water even as the threads of human life and the so called US political life are pulled apart. Re-fractured life goes on within a pandemic that rages across Los Angeles and as white supremacist terrorists plan armed rebellions across the colonial capitals. So in my refusal I pleasurably lounge around my kitchen and I also return to one of my favorite movies, +Chocolate Babies+. I recommend watching after reading and in reflection of Saidiya Hartman's piece +The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner+. For Black life has always refused because we've had no other choice if we dare to live.

· +In the direct action of the collective of friends in ·
· the film, "black faggots with a political agenda", we ·
· can feel reflected back to us the creative imagination ·
· practicing freedom in "a common tongue".+ ·

The refusal to be worked is the art of living for Black, Queer, Femme, Poor, Differently Abled, Undocumented, Overly-documented lives that survive in mutual aid and shadowed kinships. When Lady Marmalade says to a hidden crowd at a club "I got AIDS dammit and I got it by sucking dick and fucking sticking needles in my arms and the government doesn't give a shit", she refuses her marked disposability that have funneled countless others into social death. I won't spoil the film for anyone so I'll stop there, but leave you with these set of questions posed by Hartman reflecting on riots at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in 1917 and several years to follow: "What to make of the utopian impulse that enabled them to believe that anyone cared about what they had to say? What convinced them that the force of their collective utterance was capable of turning anything around? What urged them to create a reservoir of living within the prison's mandated death? What made them tireless?"

Warmly,

Catherine Feliz
alea adigweme
A.E Stevenson
Kearra Amaya Gopee

BBLU

alea adigweme, Catherine Feliz, Kearra Amaya Gopee, A.E. Stevenson

EMBRACE NO CERTAINTIES:
- - - - - - - - - - - - - -
OR, HOW TO REFUSE
- - - - - - - - - - - -
CAPITALIST REALISM
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We think that the current times, given the conditions they have put in place or revealed – broad and pervasive weaves of social turmoil derived from a silently unfinished financial crisis, from ongoing environmental disasters, from a pandemic that has brutally shown the cracks in our system of development –, signal the inevitable end of an epoch. A conclusion that must be navigated through an ocean of uncertainty whose horizon may lead, as some have dared to +imagine+, to the still not clearly discernible territory of post-capitalism.

Precisely because of that, the seemingly tireless and hegemonic commandments that seek to keep blocking the deployment of any space of imagination that can open a road beyond the prevailing capitalist reality – the frigid echo of the Thatcherian "there is no alternative" –, must be confronted with redoubled strategies of emancipation – strategies where academic research can and must play a relevant role. In other words, we call to embrace an active, if not activist, vindication of imagination; an action of political commitment which understands imagination as a technology that, informed by critical and analytical surveys of the real, can boost the emergence of new methods to discern forthcoming worlds, as well as collective modes of existence – that is to say, the emergence of a techno-aesthetics that is also a techno-politics.

Embracing such vindication implies facing the many times invisible presence of at least two obstacles: a) in research – but also in most activities of contemporary society – the broad and finally triumphant unfolding of +capitalist realism+, since the 1970s onwards, brought about the imposed acceptance that we can only acquire knowledge about reality by reducing uncertainty; which led, in turn, b) to the fragile, although persistent constitution of hordes of +cynical subjects+ who received such imposition as the inevitable boundaries of their modes of subjectivation, and therefore as the only space for action – despite such space being, even within their own consciousness, just a too realistic farce.

Understanding the character of these obstacles, we argue, is therefore critical in order to unfold effective strategies not only to overcome them, but also to transit the epochal conclusion they hide, and all the more, approaching ourselves to shores where the limits of society – the limits of the real – can be permanently drawn as a reflection of the multiple, interconnected and ongoing processes of becoming part of the collective – of becoming a new whole.

The Cynical Subject of Capitalist Realism
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The massive pervasiveness and effectiveness of +capitalist realism+ – a term and an assessment we decidedly take from Mark Fisher – seem to emerge from within, to then spread horizontally. Put differently, instead of operating in accordance to the historically more common narrative saying that the oppressive powers of capital follow a top-down flux – perhaps an oversimplification of Marx's theories –, the commandments of contemporary capitalism – the enhanced version of Capital put in place from the mid 20th century onwards – work through the almost unstoppable power of subject-to-subject contagions. That is to say – what an irony –, +capitalist realism+ is tantamount to an always ongoing network of infections where each subject, acting as a node and as a vector, is critical for the operation to take place and remain effective. Of course, in order for that to be unfolded, Capital had to implant such commandments; which by itself constituted a whole stage of capitalism – i.e., colonialism, extractivism, early industrialization, world wars, cold war. After that, however, the system works with a fair degree of autonomy, given that the infrastructural, technological, and operational framework through which the system operates has already been deployed, reaching levels of maturation and ubiquity that make it inevitable – it

is only then that the "there is no alternative" can be actually uttered. From that moment on, what begins is the psychic stage of capitalism; a global multimedia enterprise whose only purpose is to convince every human being that the only mode of subjectivation lies within the limits of this +reality+, which is equivalent, as +they+ insistently repeat, to oneself's limits – that is how the subject of late capitalism is constituted, but is also how +cynical subjects+ are born.

While the former is a disciplined fully convinced subject whose processes of subjectivation proceed without disturbances as a sort of positive feedback loop that always returns to the self, the latter is one whose subjectivation is in effect driven by pure noise; their position is based on the acceptance that, although they are not happy with the way things are, and they are actually +critical+ of their current condition, they anyway assume that "there is no alternative". In a way, +cynical subjects+ are artificially impotent ones, who refuse – as a sort of strategy of survival – to imagine other possible futures. Thus, the +existential atmosphere+ in which this cynical subject inhabits is precisely what Fisher described as +capitalist realism+; a particular kind of +realism+ connected to an ironic distance – rooted in a void aesthetics and spectacle, rather than in true belief and commitment – that is supposed to keep us safe, away from the ideological fanaticisms of the past; a pervasive hallucinatory atmosphere in which subjects perceive the possibility of change as a mere illusion. In other words, the understanding that to live in the +real+ world is tantamount to accept that capitalism is not only the better system, but the only possible one.

It could be said, therefore, that this +cynical subject+ is an +idiot+ – perhaps in the more classical sense of the term. This may emerge as actual evidence when we examine the most extrinsic elements of the territories conquered by capitalism – as we have done elsewhere. Thus, among the expressions of critical discourse, we find the production of an aesthetics characterized by slowness; one that takes refuge in the realm of intimacy right there where beliefs have been replaced by an axiom that remains indifferent to criticism's declared good intentions. An aesthetics governing those who prefer to close their eyes to the structural effects of the context in which they operate, to retreat themselves into the content of their private thoughts. Prey to indecision, +cynicism+ is also the melancholy of those who remain immobile in the face of the loss of an object they are unable to identify among the certainties of the world surrounding them. A modern mind in an exhausted useless body – as Antonioni warned –, that prescribes itself an object for-itself, while the march of the world passes out-of-itself.

The Uncertain Object of Post-Capitalism
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By insisting that our social experience responds to knowing an already objectified world, the capitalist mode of production reveals that it is not only capable of subsuming labor into capital, but also that it can absorb the potential for imagining a different world; the set of knowledge Marx called +general intellect+. Here lies the core of our critique of contemporary academic research – the point of departure of our endeavor to +research refusal+ –; in the fact that research itself may have become one of the most influential communities of +cynical subjects+ – one of the key modes through which the aforementioned +contagions+ operate. The main question at this point, however, refers to the methods and techniques by which these communities were able to keep insisting that the only serious and thus realistic mode to know reality implies researching into its +objective certainties+.

Thus, a +certain object+ shall always be understood, as opposed to +uncertain+ ones, as objects whose margins are well defined; we know where to find them, and all the more, we know how to allocate them. They respond to clearly identifiable protocols of representation becoming then the objects that give certainty and stability to our world – the stability of the markets, the cohesion of societies, the rule of law, etc. In other words, they condition our

imagination, inscribing their margins on it.

Alternatively, by affirming – following Deleuze and Guattari – that "desire belongs to the infrastructure," we reject any dualism or asymmetry that divides the world between a knowing subject and a known object; between a superstructure where the contents of knowledge are registered and an infrastructure derived from the forms these contents acquire in the real world. Instead, we propose to navigate a different type of ocean; one through which a more discerning observer may find uncertainty where his fellows, with open cynicism, assert only clarity. Similarly, Heisenberg proposed, through his +uncertainty principle+, a methodological premise to clarify how fuzzy our attempts to measure the location of an entity can be. Thus, we look for radical uncertainty as a way of bracketing the potential of an object to become a key agent of history.

Daring to advance an explanation that may still remain unbalanced, we shall say that by following the method sketched above we do not only find the sign of every past, but also that of the futures that are open to contingency; a finding that outlines the basis of an +infra-language+ that is anonymous enough as to access the infrastructure of +atmospheres+ and +operating systems+, beyond the syntax employed by the superstructure's metalanguage.

	Cynical Subject	Uncertain Object
Knowledge	(+)	(-)
Power	(-)	(+)

Put differently, a double bind in a matrix of relationships defined by knowledge and power. While the classical formula of ideology aimed to reveal an alienated subjectivity among those who "do not know why they do it, but still do it," the formula of cynicism reveals the reality of those who – either because of their academic training or their instinct of self-preservation – "know very well why they do it, but still do it". Thus, as the scheme above shows, +cynical subjects+ develop an open or rather positive (+) connection with knowledge, while insisting on harboring a negative (-) or rather silent attachment to its potential for action; to its potential for power. It is in this situation of impotence that the +critical+ spirit fostered in academic institutions can be found. In an always increasing confidence in its achievements, academic cynicism can only know its objects of research through principles of universal equivalence (impact factor, indexing systems, standardized syllabi). The fetishism that binds it to objectivity makes it forget that these metrics and their objects were also built, and therefore, that nothing prohibits us to modify them – nothing, except a state of generalized certainty that paralyzes any opportunity to affect or be affected by the world around it. What remains unknown (-) or rather silenced by the cynics, however, are precisely those +uncertain objects+ through which the potential to power (+) will unfold freely; those which – where malaise is accumulated, as in Hong-Kong, Chile, or elsewhere – will trigger events that will be labeled as unpredictable and incomprehensible by those attached to the official and certain version of the facts.

Therefore, we argue – following Lazzarato and Berardi – that contemporary theories need to assume that the political economy of capitalism is primarily a machine that, above all, produces modes of subjectivity. Hence, the constitution of the self always ends up being an invention, and political action, accordingly, remains an ethical and aesthetic question that must be unfolded in relation to imagination and the configuration of +aesthetic atmospheres+ – and those (or that) able to control such an aesthetic space would be in turn able to (re)configure +the real+. Ironically enough, therefore, the conditions for a post-capitalist turn are at our disposal: they require us to refuse the machinic standardization of subjectivation, to then subvert its network potential in order to release and intensify other vectors for individual and collective subjectivation – the replacement of positive feedback loops by negative ones. This

begins by imagining other fictions for our lives, but must be continued as the actual hacking of the techno-aesthetic fluxes of +capitalist realism+. Generating the conditions of existence for post-capitalist subjectivities is not enough; we must generate modes of subjectivity capable of shaping a post-capitalist world.

Those who dare to embrace such a process, starting by knowing and imagining (+), to then consciously unfold the power (+) of their actions in order to (re)shape reality, will become the +enactive subjects+ reaching the foreign shores beyond the ocean that still constrains our circumstances. By knowing (+) them without fear, and coupling their processes of subjectivation and actions to them, they will transform +uncertain objects+ into a whole new phase of power (+); a stage that will bring about – as it is already happening in those corners where malaise is accumulated – +operative objects+ that are tantamount to +enactive subjects+, and vice versa.

|	Enactive Subject	Operative Object
Knowledge	(+)	(+)
Power	(+)	(+)

Then, how could we overcome +capitalist realism+ without returning to the false hopes of our beliefs about the past? We believe that cultivating a model of subjectivity which is both entangled in and nourished by its own +milieu+, aiming to put knowledge into action, could be an alternative – an alternative to the conception of objectivity derived from the mere transformation of the material conditions of the world, that have proven to be effective only in cynical conscience. Thus, we argue, the dialectic that so far has kept the spheres of knowledge and power separated, will be overcome.

INTERFACES OF REFUSAL - CRITICAL TECHNICAL (RESEARCH) PRACTICE

The interface is commonly understood as 'the user interface', but our understanding draws on a wider notion in which the computer, more generally, may be perceived as a layered construction of interfaces not only between users and machines, but also between layers of software and hardware. Interfaces are designed with specific purposes, some very narrow and technically determined (as technical protocols), others more application and end user oriented (such as interfaces for reading, seeing, listening, communication and experience). In every instance, the interface functions as a relation between representation and computation, and also between cooperation and capital (which perhaps is of particular relevant in a platform economy) (Andersen and Pold).

· +How is the capacity to work and cooperate ('to
· interface') historically and culturally
· determined and materially organized?+ In reference
· to the idea of an autonomous cooperation, we seek
· to address the in and exclusions of interfaces
· and ask +what possible forms of cooperation or
· interfaces that have not been, or are not,
· disciplined (including our own research
· practices)? What are the (critical technical)
· 'practical' alternatives or 'refusals' to
· cooperate on cultural, social as well as
· individual levels? What are the (critical
· technical) practical responses and
· alternatives?+

In outlining and analysing these +interfaces of refusal+, we seek to draw theoretically not only on post- and autonomous Marxism, but a wider body of texts. However, Phil Agre continuously seems to reappear as a common reference. In the following we will therefore outline a couple of collective reflections (fragments) from his notion of a "critical technical practice" in relation to AI.
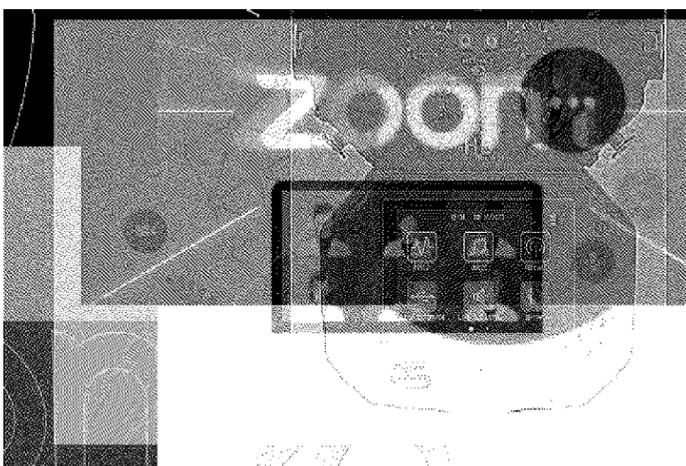
Realism as a symptom

The field of computing holds a sense of realism. As Agre writes:

· "computing has been constituted as a kind of
· imperialism; it aims to reinvent virtually every
· other site of practice in its own image." (Agre
· 131)

This is its symptoms - perhaps even relating to more general symptoms "of knowledge and the social that have been afflicted by a kind of nihilism"? (Vignola). If we want to build a system that can e.g. reason or plan, we need to understand what it means to reason and plan. Only then can we turn it into a program - an instruction that can be repeated and executed indefinitely (another utility). When using (meta)interfaces we often tend to forget this kind of 'dead labour' in the system, and rarely makes it an object of critique (critique often seems to be restricted to the purposefulness, experience or usability of a system). Planning and reasoning (as well as so many other things that computers are used for) are then no longer just understandings of the world; but, formalized in systems, they become mirrors of how things 'really are.' Critique of the apparatus that builds these realities is crucial for a diagnosis - and

diagnosis is needed to heal the social formation of collective reasoning.

The language of cooperation - the conflation of things and their representations

Agre's text is written in an autobiographical style that allows him to reflect on his own difficulties with critical thinking, his professional vocabulary, and how to explain his position to his professional peers. E.g. he writes about a "work ethics" where "building things was truly the end purpose of the hacker's work" which seems to leave out the critical edge if it only "works". Later he describes how his immersion in the field and its practices meant that he "had incorporated the field's taste for technical formalization so thoroughly" that he "insisted on trying to read everything as a narration of the workings of a mechanism." According to Agre, AI (and probably other areas of computer science) is simultaneously philosophical and engineering and this causes confusion, which "conflate[s] representations with the things that they represent".

With this, Agre points to a key aspect of interfaces: computing seems magical, because of the conflation between sign and signal. It solves problems through programming, however it risks losing the richness of language. In this sense criticism becomes hard to defend, if you can't build with it. And if you build with it, it stops being critical. And refusal is impossible, since you're always already enclosed in cybernetic systems. This is the conundrum of critical technical practice.

Agre's autobiographical, essayistic style renders his effort recognizable, when working in between computing and humanities/arts. In this sense, perhaps, a kind of refusal is taking this uncomfortable strangeness - the strangeness of the algorithmic sign and its contradictive combination of sign and signal - ad notam or even ad absurdum?
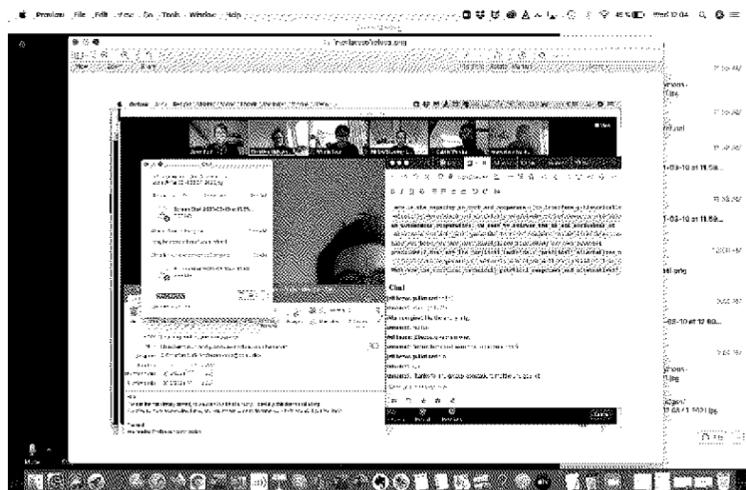
Reform or Refusal?

Agre speaks of a "reform" of AI, brought forth by practitioners that can stand critically-reflexively between computer science and social sciences. He thinks that there is a middle-way response, a way through which critics could operate from a quasi-hermeneutics, where the failures and problems of AI systems are critically examined and used to identify deeper and more systematic confusions. As Agre proposed critical technical practice as a reform within the same system, it was later appropriated by military AI (as acknowledged by Agre himself). AI research, and the critique of AI, have changed much (and not that much) in the past quarter of a century - critical research has been constantly incorporated into the creation of AI systems, and used to cover-up its evergrowing problems. The current moment of AI, where it is much more sedimented and growing in military-industrial circles, requires a shift in the response proposed by Agre. Thereby, another kind of AI criticism has been emerging, one that increasingly asks for, among other things, a rejection of the deeply problematic institutions/partnerships that make AI possible (see Katz); "civil disobedience" to deny machines power over us (see Gangadharan); and more care towards avoiding the co-opting of research by powerful actors (see Hamid). They point towards more radical alternatives, organizing, and institutions, and show that critical technical practice should be updated so that it is

also accompanied by a disposition towards rejecting AI as an institution and ideology. We need to abolish AI, not to make it less terrible. To break it apart, rather than to build it further. We need to reject hegemonic notions of AI as inevitable and magical, and continously denounce it as "snake oil." As Sarah Hamid concludes,

· "But isn't the goal to abolish these systems? ·
· That's the aspiration. That's what we work ·
· towards. But what we celebrate as wins are the ·
· pauses and the breaks." (Hamid) ·

Refusing the divide
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Agre talks about the different approaches towards technical practice (more precise and concrete towards technical formalization) and social/cultural practice (more vague and abstract towards discursive interpretation), and this points to a different way of developing critique/criticism in which both ends to learn from, and collaborate with, each other, to understand a wider range of phenomena in the world. Agre comes from a technical background and later on he was exposed to critical tools from other disciplines, such as literary studies, philosophy, etc, but he was troubled by the strong divide (what he called as "two polar-opposite orientation" (147)) between science and humanities. However, this might also be true the other way around in terms of the lack of vocabulary, tools and skills for working with precise technical subjects from humanities, and how the combination of precision and vagueness can strengthen critical analysis, reflections and various forms of practice. As Agre suggests critical technical practice requires a split identity in the craft work of design and reflexive work of critique, in which this may require an update that is no longer a split and we shouldn't reinforce such divide, but to think of ways to work across and learn from both of these modes (Soon & Cox, 146). One way of thinking about alternatives is how to unsettle our own discipline/territory to understand how different worldviews shape technology and human life forms.

(Critical technical) practice-based research
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

In our group we move to reverse the introspective 'waking up' moment that Agre describes. What 'reforms' are necessary within such "reflexive work of critique" that is based on the "craft work of design"? We investigate the possible 'reforms' or 'refusals' of our own critical work through +practice-based research+, thus constructing a stance that operates as the obverse (not the opposite) of Agre's perspective. This reciprocity of the critical-technical stance - where the 'critical' learns just as much from the 'technical' as the other way around - is already present in Agre's thinking (perhaps most vividly in his work on surveillance and capture), but is only implicitly expressed in the chosen text. The critical technical construction of alternatives must never be regarded as solely mounted on the technical context, but must in all instances be brought into the context of critique as well. Just as Agre's quasi-hermeneutic approach centers on failures, so too might practice-based research be inextricably tied to revealing and investigating the failures of critique.

· Which 'failures' - of critique and craft alike, ·
· or most likely of both at the same time - come to ·
· the fore, and which slip into the background, when ·
· situating such practice-based alternatives? ·

Intermediations - accounting for the everyday hassles
~ ~

Is Agre's dissident practice a form of refusal of the mindless appropriation of daily habits and routines into automated repetitive actions? In this way it is refusal of certain numbness to what often is considered unimportant and disrupting. He develops a daily practice to "remember and recount episodes" of some everyday activities, "hassles" that appear on the way of doing something. This method, defined as intermediation, suggests a desire and the need to develop some form of interference into routines that can easily be automated and unquestioned. This allows him to notice things which normally are immediately

corrected in order to return to the expected and undisturbed outcome. It is the minutiae and unimportant activities that are accounted for and remembered in detail to realise "the true functioning of everyday routine activities". Accounting for this allows him to intervene into convention of a 'blocks world' and to notice what is between the blocks. Such a practice forms an intervention into a discipline that would rather stay with blocks and modules that can be easily put together folowing a certain order. However, this 'intermediation' that is the working between the blocks, also partakes in determining which blocks can be put together and how.

Intermediations as Anti-mimesis
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Each operation of planning, made operable by the computational system in the form of 'block worlds', is based on insights into, and (mid)understandings of, everyday activities. Today, in the age of so-called 'machine learning', we are counting on discrete and highly operable algorithmic systems to construct those 'blocks' of activities and mental processes. If, as Nidesh Lawtoo argues, "humans are, for better and worse, imitative creatures" (722), it becomes apparent that AI - and perhaps especially machine learning - research is a scattered yet produundly aligned effort to imitate that same imitative nature of human beings. If it indeed is so, what can be gathered from Agre's intermediations - working 'between the blocks' - when we are now counting on computational systems to themselves be the contructors of these 'blocks'? In the face of such mimetic 'imperialism' (in Agre's characterization of AI, which is arguably only more true for machine learning), what 'failures' can critique highlight? Instead of using intermediations to overcome the failures of AI research, such intermediations could be a core segment of a refusal of AI's imperialist mimicry in the form of a performative, aesthetic practice of anti-mimesis (Egebak), pointing not forward, but sideways, in our current moment of intense reciprocal mimicry.

The questions
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

How (if so) is a critical technical practice a way forward? Does it expose the cracks, bridge the metaphorical islands, dispel the very-real myths? Or does it point to imaginary utopias that guide a way forward (or sideways)? Does it stop, refuse, break, or just complicate? Can it be appropriated, or is it already a re-appropriation? Our fragments show the many feelings, tensions, and tremblings of working through such questions in a time of research refusal.

M a l t h e S t a v n i n g E r s l e v , G a b r i e l P e r e i r a , E m a n u e l e A n d r e o l i , S ø r e n P o l d ,
W i n n i e S o o n , M a g d a T y ż l i k - C a r v e r , C h r i s t i a n U l r i k A n d e r s e n

A Partial Lexicon of Delinking: a pluriversal exercise of fragments and multiple positions

Rosie Hermon and Marloes de Valk

Delinking

Delinking as **refusal**; **Delinking** as a method of constructing the **pluriverse**; **Delinking** as **autonomous communal organisation** between people; **Delinking** as a spectrum of practices from thought to collective action; as acting, *DOING* and thinking; **Delinking** as struggle – in many cases armed struggle – it is not a rejection; **Delinking** as the struggle for disentanglement from universalist positions; **Delinking** as impossibility: 'how delinked could any culture become in this kind of ever more densely linked world?' (Harding, 2018, p.48); **Delinking** as thought – to prompt critical thinking and creative strategizing; **Delinking** as **decolonisation**; **Delinking** as Amerindian and peasant liberation struggles in Latin America; **Delinking** as anti-globalisation; **Delinking** as actively reconfiguring social and political structures by listening to and taking more seriously the knowledge of the oppressed; **Delinking** as refusal of centralised and monopolised technological **infrastructures**; **Delinking** as a strategy for more ~~sustainable technological infrastructures~~; **Delinking** as refusal of growth, development and progress and instead aiming for ÉNOUGHNÉSS; **Delinking** as refusal to be a USER of technology without agency; **Delinking** as para-institutional practices; **Delinking** as **infrastructural** actions; **Delinking** as alternative means of navigation and *orientation*; **Delinking** as the ~~zine~~, not the newspaper

Harding, Sandra (2018), 'One Planet, Many Sciences' in Reiter, Bernd (Ed.) *Constructing the Pluriverse*, Duke University Press Books, pp.39-62

DOING

Situated practices, not abstract theories!

Whilst we see **delinking** as a spectrum from thought, to small actions, to larger collective practices, we are interested in the **doing**, searching for the practices that are de-entangling themselves in some way, making choices about what is delinked from and how.

Para-institutional
Para- (prefix) 1: beside : alongside of : beyond : aside (Merriam Webster)

Para-institutional practices together with alter-institutional practices, form a 'fractured continuum of approaches' (Lütticken, afterall.org, 2015), from alter-institutional models that include trans-institutional and trans-local organisations, to **para-institutions** that are often identified with a single artist and usually collaborate with more 'traditionally established' institutions (Lütticken, 2015). These varied models create social assemblages of artists, activists and others that emphasise 'alter-academic new forms of knowledge, para-As forms of organisation that exist alongside and beyond the institution' (Lütticken, 2015). **institutional** spaces foreground accessibility, new forms of knowledge exchange and transmission, to 'move beyond the logics of extraction' (darkstudy.net, 2020). **Para-institutional** practices as practices of delinking?

Lütticken, Sven, 2015, Social Media: Practices of (In)Visibility in Contemporary Art, Afterall, Afterall.org, Accessed 2 January 2021: <https://www.afterall.org/article/social-media-practices>.

Dark Study, 2020, Dark Study, Accessed 8 January 2021: <https://darkstudy.net>.

'Maps are powerful cognitive instruments that control your imaginary and your feelings' (Mignolo, 2018, p.91). Maps have historically been weaponised as a means of asserting and maintaining the colonial matrix of power. A map of the **pluriverse** is impossible. We **delink** from cartography in search of other means of **orientation**.

But we question whether the lexicon isn't also a map?

Mignolo, Walter (2018), 'On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order' in Reiter, Bernd (Ed.) *Constructing the Pluriverse*, Duke University Press Books, pp.90-116.

Orientation

From 'orient' the word orientation is imbued with Western gaze towards the East and therefore towards the "Other.". We situate ourselves in and attempt to navigate the **pluriverse**, which **delinks** from east/west, north/south binaries.

The Pluriverse
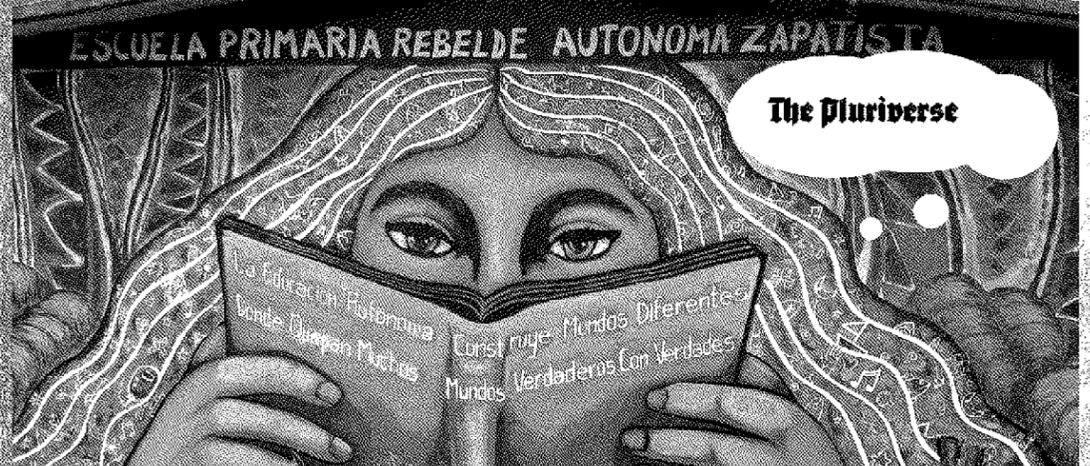
"Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos"

'Many words are walked in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and worlds that are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds that are truthful and true. In the world of the powerful there is room only for the big and their helpers. In the world we want, everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit.' – Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (de la Cadena & Blaser Eds. 2018, p.1)

'If worlds are multiple, then the possible must also be multiple' (Arturo Escobar, 2020, p.xi)

According to Walter Mignolo, the **pluriverse** is the 'horizon of all decolonial trajectories today' (Mignolo, 2018, p.94). The idea of the world as a unified totality should be banished and instead it should be viewed as 'interconnected diversity' (2018, p.x). **Pluriversality** comes from the ground up, through projects and social movements or "the emerging global political society" (as Mignolo describes these projects and movements). **Pluriversality** is distinct from multipolarity, which is the project of dewesternisation at the level of the national state and the breaking of the West's stranglehold on power – pluriversality advocates for **delinking** from the state, financial institutions and corporations through '**autonomous communal organisation**' (Mignolo).

de la Cadena, Marisol & Blaser, Mario (Eds.) (2018), *A World of Many Worlds*, Duke University Press: Durham.

Escobar, Arturo (2020), *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*, Duke University Press.

Mignolo, Walter (2018), 'Foreword. On Pluriversality and Multipolarity' in Reiter, Bernd (Ed.) *Constructing the Pluriverse*, Duke University Press Books, pp.ix-xvi.

Mignolo, Walter (2018), 'On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order' in Reiter, Bernd (Ed.) *Constructing the Pluriverse*, Duke University Press Books, pp.90-116.

Infrastructure

'When we in the West, or in the industrialized, technologized countries, congratulate ourselves on having an infrastructure... we forget the degree to which these have become protocols that bind and confine us in their demand to be conserved or in their demand to be resisted... (W)e need to think it far beyond the original Keynesian model of basic physical and organizational structures needed for the operation of a society or an enterprise, and towards the recognition that it has come to stand in for a set of prized values that continuously celebrate the achievements of the West.' - Irit Rogoff (formerwest.org, 2013)

Susan Leigh Star, in The Ethnography of Infrastructure (1999), describes a method that aims at exposing the master narrative of information systems, this voice which speaks from a presumed universal centre. She writes that "listening for this master narrative and identifying it as such means identifying first with that which has been made other, or unnamed."

Star, S. L. (1999) The Ethnography of Infrastructure, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43 (3). DOI:10.1177/00027649921955326.

Rogoff, Irit, 2013, Keynote Lecture: Infrastructure, Former West, Accessed 19 February 2021: <https://formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/Infrastructure>.

Refusal

While we do not refuse our globalised reality, we refuse its inevitability and the colonialist structures it perpetuates.

This lexicon refuses to be a newspaper article.

USER

The **user** is a mythical creature, a unicorn of sorts, that sprouted from the imagination of computer scientists at the dawn of the personal computer. The **user** was imagined in many different ways at many different companies and research labs. Have you ever spotted one in the wild? It is said they can only be caught by UX designers. Their tireless hunt for seamless interaction magically made computers invisible, transforming users into people and thus rendering the user a now very rare and endangered species.

Does the disappearance of the **user** mean demands for better software can no longer be made, as Olia Lialina warned in her 2012 essay Turing Complete **User**? Perhaps the **user** is more of a phoenix, arising from its own ashes, ready to take action. A growing number of people have transformed into **users** once more, refusing auto-play, algorithmically generated feeds and frictionless natural gestures and have taken to hand-crafting always under construction **homepages** served from homebrew servers, reclaiming their wild.

Lialina, O. (2012) Turing Complete User, *Contemporary Home Computing*. Available from:http://contemporary-home-computing.org/turing-complete-user/ [Accessed 1 March 2021].

'There there...'

user

NON-USER

A **non-user** could be anyone, depending on which tool is discussed, it might even be someone you know. The **non-user refuses**, or is unable, to use a certain tool. In the case of downright refusal, they are sometimes considered Luddites by those who confuse revolting against the exploitative labour practices of industrial capitalism with silly nostalgia.

In The User Condition (2020), Silvio Lorusso describes the **non-user** as the **user** with most agency, the only one that manages to escape the predetermined paths crafted by the other, the programmer. **Convivial computing** aims to break down this othering, and sees this distinction between programming and using programs as a major obstacle for the usefulness of computers (Fischer and Lemke, 1987).

Fischer, G. and Lemke, A. C. (1987) *Constrained Design Processes: Steps Towards Convivial Computing*. Colorado University at Boulder Department of Computer Science. Available from:https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA462123

Lorusso, S. (2020) The User Condition: Computer Agency and Behavior. Available from:https://theusercondition.computer/ [Accessed 1 March 2021].

Story

The Dutch word for **story** is 'verhaal', which has its roots in a repeating and recounting of events in words, but also in restitution, a righting of a wrong. The English word **story** is connected to the Dutch word 'weten', to know, through its Proto-Indo-European root weid-, to see. The telling of stories has something to do with counting, with what counts. What about what cannot be seen, cannot be known and cannot be recounted? Can stories, like the Dutch word verhaal suggests, right a wrong?

In our discussions on the APRJA mailing list, Saidya Hartman's Venus in two acts was mentioned as a beautiful example of how critical fabulation can bring visibility to the gaps and silences in archives, such as those of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Kathryn Yusoff, in A billion black Anthropocenes or none, exposes the colonial and patriarchal roots of the Anthropocene discourse, the erasure of endings of many Indigenous and Black worlds. Walter Mignolo writes about the need for **stories** to expose the "fictionality of what passes for reality", to explore the meaning and significance of pluriversality, as making it count (2018, p.110).

Hartman, S. (2008) Venus in Two Acts, *Small Axe*, 12 (2), pp. 1–14. Available from: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241115 [Accessed 1 March 2021].

Mignolo, Walter (2018), 'On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order' in Reiter, Bernd (Ed.) *Constructing the Pluriverse*, Duke University Press Books, pp.90-116.

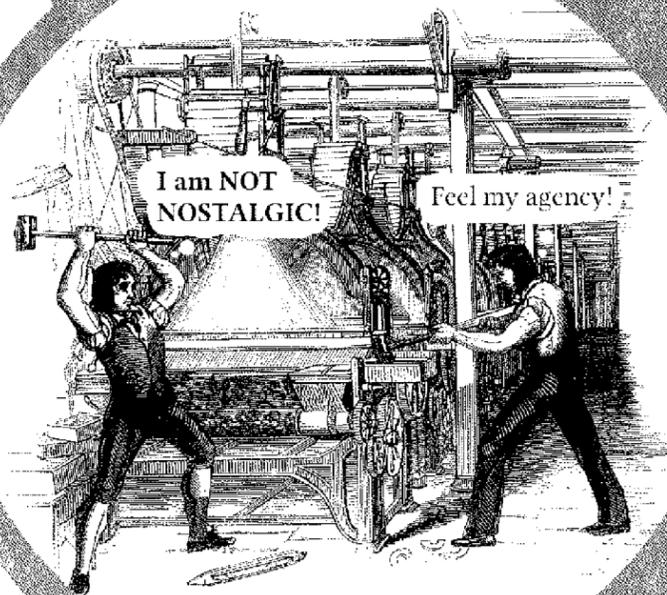Yusoff, K. (2018) *A billion black Anthropocenes or none*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

I am NOT NOSTALGIC!

Feel my agency!

Sustainable technological infrastructures

When I asked the Fediverse what a good umbrella term for technology aiming at a smaller environmental footprint and respect for privacy would be, I received a very rich collection of thoughts and words: permacomputing, **appropriate technology**, low tech, small tech, heirloom computing, retro computing, respectful computing, minimal computing, As Little Tech As Possible (ALTAP), solar punk, computing within limits, resource constrained computing, regenerative computing, sustainable computing, inclusive tech, little tech, degrowth, tethics, Minimal Impact Computing (MIC), efficiency driven computing, rustic computing, slow tech, User Centric Computing, smol tech, collapse informatics, tiny tech, non-coercive tech and **convivial computing**.

Cramer, F. (2013) *Anti-Media: ephemera on speculative arts*. Rotterdam: NAi010 Publ.

Zine

If the newspaper is both institution and centralised **technological infrastructure**, can the **zine** be its **para-institution** and site of **delinking**? It connects with the history of print publishing emerging from early pamphlets, as a way to circulate alternative positions. They embody personal exchange and circulate on a small scale, within the community that produces them. As Florian Cramer writes in Anti-Media (2013), DIY printmaking communities go back to where home computing began, and to **homepages** from the time when **users** still had a home. Zines are usually self-published, DIY, and can therefore be sites to express ideas, tell stories, take positions and amplify voices -- uncensored and falling outside of mainstream media. **Zines** can therefore articulate visions of culture, society and the world(s) emerging from the grassroots and dwelling in the border. **Zines** could be sites to articulate the **pluriverse**. We refuse the aesthetic and order of the newspaper in favour of the **zine**.

ENOUGHNESS

I came across the word **enoughness** in a description of **appropriate technology**, which is technology designed with care for the environmental, ethical, cultural, social, political, and economic needs of the community it is intended for. It was first articulated as 'intermediate technology' by the economist Ernst Schumacher in his book 'Small is Beautiful', in 1973. The movement declined in the 80s but is now making a resurgence through Open Source Appropriate Technology (OSAT).

Schumacher, E. F. (1973) *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: HarperCollins.

CONVIVIAL COMPUTING

This word is inspired by Ivan Illich's book Tools for Conviviality (1973), about the proper use of technology. A 1987 paper by A. C. Lemke and G. Fisher describes **convivial computing** as computing in which the **user** has control over the tool on multiple levels. Convivial tools should give a **user** a desired amount of control but shouldn't require that it be exercised. In their vision, convivial tools will break down the distinction between programming and using programs and see this distinction as a major obstacle for the usefulness of computers. Convivial tools encourage **users** to be actively engaged and to generate creative extensions to the artefacts given to them, releasing designers of tools from the impossible task of anticipating all possible uses of a tool and all people's needs.

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Fischer, G. and Lemke, A. C. (1987) *Constrained Design Processes: Steps Towards Convivial Computing*. Colorado University at Boulder Department of Computer Science. Available from:https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA462123

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