Decolonising the Commons: Fugitivity and Future Planning in End Times

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, even though I may have received assistance from others on style, presentation and linguistic expression.

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They say the global proliferation of colonial and neoliberal (ir)rationalities and the techno-managerial enclosure of the ‘commons’ (Hardt & Negri 2000; Harvey 2004) has resulted in a ‘foreclosure of politics’, prompting calls for a renewed technocultural hegemony for a post-capitalist future (Srnicek & Williams 2015) or a return to the revolutionary party (Dean 2012). Departing instead from (fugitive) theories and practices of (under)commoning from peoples (presumed to be) excluded from ‘modernity’ suggests however there is much more and less to the picture than is often presented, and perhaps, following Benjamin (2001[1940]), it’s the past to (and from) which we should look in our efforts of and for futurity. Cautious against the often totalising and universalising accounts that constitute much of ‘radical left’ (or whatever) thought, this thesis instead recognises those insurgent and inventive intensities that remain elusive(ly everywhere), fugitive and excess yet never forgotten despite the serial efforts of (the) settlement. By centring the unsettling and unsettled, this thesis hopes (against hope) to offer a decolonial intervention in left discourses of the commons, media communication technologies, and futurity—namely via the examples of Cooperation Jackson, Open Source Gender Hacking, and Indigenous Ranger programs—emphasising the insurgent generativity of diverse local contexts in (de)forming and (un)settling fugitive modernities from the ‘bottom-up’ (Mignolo 2009; Smith 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Moten 2018). Moving with and from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s (2013:28) visionary call to “inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts”, this research suggests ultimately ‘a way forward’ is not only (im)possible but (always) already everywhere underway.

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contents

((noun.) 'things contained' in something (a stomach, a document, etc), from early 15c. Latin *continere* 'to hold together, enclose', from *com* 'with, together' + *tenere* 'to hold' (from root *ten- 'to stretch'))

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The Common(s) Story (As It Might Be Told)

A machine is eating the planet. Seated at the helm and in the furnace, humanity seems besieged, seized and sick, inflated with incomplete memories of conquest and contradiction. The machine ploughs the dirt and disturbs the life therein, creating an illusion of movement, distorting sound and light. In the torn earth that it claims and claims to see, the machine sees nothing but atoms of individual value, relating and exchanging with ever growing but never unmanageable complexity. The machine feeds on this process as it encloses it, staggering across the earth with a fitful urgency, every step heavy, absolute, lacerating. Factories and institutions are forged in the open wounds, networks of capture and conversion stitched into and across trauma, and agents of the machine are dispatched to stimulate growth and goodwill. Having almost exhausted extraction, the agents—the knowers and fixers, the fixed and faithful—reap the harrowed fields of affect and cognition, seeking and seizing fugitive meaning to regurgitate it as policy and profit, labouring the thick, analeptic, effervescent feculence of raw life itself, its dregs, its deaths, its data.

We¹ tell stories sometimes of another time, but over time the racket becomes unbearable and the haze makes us drowsy, and in the overbearing revelation of the machine—a revelation of reason that revels nonetheless in a virulent irreverence for existing reality, ravaging every known history and horizon to revive this unholy procession it calls progress—all we can hear is this story. Seemingly surrounded² and forced to forget otherwise, we retreat to “pockets of resistance” to collect ourselves, and then to politics to

¹ The ‘we’ here is, as much as we feel and follow it, the ‘we’ of the undercommons, that (non)place of refusal and refuge, the always already commonunderground of and with the broken, black, poor, and improper.

² Harney & Moten (2013 18-19): “The hard materiality of the unreal convinces us that we are surrounded, that we must take possession of ourselves... In the trick of politics we are insufficient, scarce, waiting in pockets of resistance... so that one day, which is only never to come, we will be more than what we are. But we already are. We’re already here, moving. We’ve been around.”

correct ourselves, determined to discern a position against encroaching enclosure—
 endorsing, often absent consent or intent, the exerted incursion of imperialism's exhaustive
 and exhausted empiricism, modernity's mantled and etiolated episteme ensnaring us and
 all in the frenetic, feverish stasis of the here-and-now.³

Armed with the incisive yet nonetheless imprecise language of critique, we say the
 machine must be something called capitalism, because look: Capitalism really is eating the
 planet, enclosing all that was ever common⁴ and polluting every horizon⁵, privatising the
 ocean to sustainably retain it, every field razed and readied for extractive investment and
 prison labour.⁶ Rotting and revolting, the university reconstructs itself as a knowledge
 factory, the artist and the activist and the intellectual and the innovator all converting
 earnest exuberance to the exhilaration of enterprise, everyone always in pursuit of the

³ Moving with Michel Foucault's (1972) archaeology of power/knowledge, Edward Said's (1978) pointed elaboration of said discursive (de)formations to reveal the Orient(/Occident) relation, and Stuart Hall's (1992) subtle yet pressing slant to the 'West and the Rest', Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012 32) recognises the representational regimes of 'the modern world' as (having been constructed through)"research through imperial eyes"; Sylvia Wynter (2003) employs similar methodologies to (un)cover a (historically, epistemologically, theologically, ...) deeper and longer story, the "present ethnoclass (i.e., Western Bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" (260), which appears (dis)continuously through its reconfigurations, all of which "remain inscribed within the frame-work of a specific secularizing reformulation of that matrix Judeo-Christian Grand Narrative" (318).

⁴ From the Parliamentary seizure of common lands in 15th-19thC England for private benefit (Marx 1867[1999]; Monbiot 1995) to the contemporary privatisation and corporatization of environmental, intellectual, cultural and other 'commons' via what David Harvey (2004) calls 'the new imperialism: accumulation by dispossession'; Ian Shaw (2017 883-889) takes us to the clouds/Cloud, recognising the increasingly "atmospheric" and "technospheric" spatialities of enclosure, whereby (police, commercial, military, private, ...) drones enable "new regimes of state power, capital accumulation, and violence... materialising intimate and pervasive colonisations of local, national and international airspace".

⁵ The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports only a dozen years to keep warming under 1.5C, beyond which "will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people", and that "urgent and unprecedented changes" are requisite (Watts 2018); Mayer Hillman (2018) follows countless in reading between the lines of the IPCC report: "fossil-fuel dependent economic growth is the prime cause" and "we must lead our lives within the planet's means".

⁶ In 2016 the NSW Corrective Service Industries had revenues of \$113 million and profits of \$45.6 million with almost 85% of inmates working (Brook 2017); Love and Das (2017) report the (US) Federal Prison Industries programme "pays inmates under one dollar an hour... [generating] \$500m in sales in 2016 with little of that cash being passed down to prison workers"; see Justice Action 2016 for an analysis of prison privatisation and corporatisation on this continent, and Liburd 2017 for US context.

latest and greatest solution.⁷ The profit motive has long been the only motive, industrial extractivism just one of its ugliest masks, but today's market is smarter and faster, evolving with its technologies and publics to claim and capitalise every relation and identity, claiming itself as the mediator of all things material or otherwise. Neoliberalism emerges as contemporary counter-insurgency, eviscerating every public institution and intuition to redistribute resources upwards for private enterprise, every subject and relation reduced to pure economics.⁸ The hospital is slashed to its most basic, industrial, alienating processes of exchange, with endless hierarchies of management hooked on pharmaceutical money, all addicted to the audit.⁹ Buckling under its immense power and prestige, the university likewise does deals with the devil, foreclosing the future to throw faith instead to the council of fossilised stakeholders, the whole place infected with an unholy kind of urgency.¹⁰ These examples are intentional, the university promising study and the hospital

⁷ Edu-Factory Collective (2009) roughly follows autonomous (post) Marxism (Hardt and Negri 2000; 2009) in recognising diverse self-education initiatives as forms of "struggle for cognitive workers in contemporary capitalism... [involving] conflict over knowledge production and the construction of the common, the struggles of precarious workers, and the organisation of autonomous institutions" (2), suggesting the contemporary "double crisis" (of knowledge production and global economic (dis)order) presents opportunities for autonomous organisation (15); Harney and Moten (2013 26) further (un)settle the story, (ap)posing its terms: "Worry about the university. This is the injunction today in the United States, one with a long history. Call for its restoration like Harold Bloom or Stanley Fish or Gerald Graf. Call for its reform like Derek Bok or Bill Readings or Cary Nelson. Call out to it as it calls to you." With(in) and against the disciplined discourse that "goes on upstairs, among the rational men", the "subversive intellectual" evades enclosure, refusing to be reasonable, "and on top of all that, she disappears... into the underground, the downlow lowdown maroon community of the university, into the undercommons of enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong."

⁸ Ong (2007 5) cautions against overly deterministic or structural conceptualisations, privileging an "analytics of assemblage" to frame neoliberalism as a "migratory technology of governing that interacts with situated sets of elements and circumstances", united by a common goal to induce enterprising and calculative subjectivities and tendencies in the context of a "fast-expanding information industry".

⁹ Amy Corderoy (2016) recognises the outsourcing and privatisation of public health as an insidious imposition of a "profit motive to the operation of hospitals that are already expected to provide more than they can afford", resulting in reduced quality of care, neglect and abuse (of workers and patients alike), and harm and death, from considerable evidence including Duckett 2013; Baum et. al's 2016 study of neoliberal reforms on Australian primary health care services found "considerable uncertainty, more directive managerial control, budget reductions and competitive tendering and an emphasis on outputs rather than health outcomes"; see also Mayes et. al 2016.

¹⁰ This year 32 Australian universities are participating in the Defence Science Partnerships program and last year the "Department of Defence partnered with the US Department of Defence on the Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative... [providing] grant funding to Australian universities willing to produce"

promising care. If even these—immaterial, affective, social—commons are not safe, is anything?

Art and academia, philosophy and physics, land and life; all that was once common falls prey to this now global machine, which everywhere appears irresistible in its reach, reconfiguring and replicating in response to whatever input. As medium and method, process and product, capital certainly seems a technology in its own right, its uncanny array of increasingly automated appendages advancing across and through every surface, every screen and sensor a tentacle, accumulating all under its algorithms, its endless abstractions of extraction.¹¹ Programmed primarily to produce profit, the machine pursues and consumes every viable site of resistance or recourse, revising crisis to then thrive in crisis, reviving it thereafter indefinitely.¹² Once upon a time, power was checked and balanced by institutions like the university and the library, the gallery and the coffee house, abstract publics brought together by a radio broadcast or literary journal—supposed intermediaries between the political system proper and the private lifeworld of the citizenry, public arenas to push ‘common concerns’ “from the periphery into the centre of the political system”.¹³ But the public sphere had always already been compromised by the market, the free flow of information and ideas inescapably inhibited by economic imperatives and other a priori

designated research with potential defence outcomes (Edney-Browne and Ruff 2018); see also Furze and Lim 2017; consider also the Fossil Free Unis 2017 campaign’s exposure and pressuring of Australian universities to divest from dirty energy.

¹¹ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2004) frames software as (mimicking) ideology (and its critique), recognising the “obscurity” of “seeing through transparency” (44) assumed by the interface, which, far from transparently representing reality, arbitrarily (un)veils (im)material abstractions of the actual machinery that it obfuscates as it also reveals, circulating and perpetuating gendered/colonial “notions of seeing as knowing, of reading and readability... conflating executable with execution, program with process, order with action... [disciplining] its programmers and users, creating an invisible system of visibility... a compensatory mastery built on hiding the machine” (27-28).

¹² Brian Massumi (2011) on Naomi Klein’s ‘disaster capitalism’: a vicious cycle of “draconian and ill-advised” responses to “a threat environment whose dangers the response only contributes to intensifying”; see Klein 2017.

¹³ Habermas 1997 255, 284-285.

exclusions.¹⁴ Mass media is not only mediated but also mandated by the market, by policies and presumptions of scale and scarcity, competition and convention, depoliticising discourse and diminishing public communication and sociality more generally.¹⁵ Cultural production anticipates and reflects this decline, the expressions of the imagination dissolved into their dialectical relation with reasonable debate and sensible economics, captured by the culture industry to be processed and consumed, finally and forever, as cultural commodities.¹⁶ Determining everything from livelihood to leisure, ensnaring education in entertainment and preservation in politics, the machine nestles itself and all else in the "well-worn grooves of association"¹⁷ of commodity fetishism, insulating everything from the imaginary and fantastical, the hope or possibility of otherwise. Postmodernism blows its triumphant horn as all the old borders, whether imperial or epistemological, biological or ethical, dissolve into the incessantly de/reterritorializing, global techno-capitalist sovereignty of Empire¹⁸, ushering in the end of (the end of) history as we know it.

The hegemony of the machine—the global scale of its extensions and intensities, its disturbing propensity for indifference and adaptability, its non-consensual conquest of consent and consciousness, of community and the commons—has never felt so palpable than in the contemporary context, never so difficult to navigate and resist than when facing this dizzying ubiquity of information and data, networks of abstractions manifesting momentarily as interface, everything enmeshed in endlessly expanding and increasingly

¹⁴ Habermas 1997 286-287; see Fraser's (1990 77) feminist critique of the Habermasian public sphere, recognised as not only historically illusory and exclusionary but also conceptually inadequate for "the critique of the limits of actually existing democracy in late capitalist societies".

¹⁵ Habermas 1997 287.

¹⁶ Jameson 1991 3-9.

¹⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer 2002[1947] 124.

¹⁸ Hardt and Negri 2000.

integrated global circulations of culture/politics/communication/content-as-commodity, production and consumption unfolding as and in circulation all at once, everywhere and always.¹⁹ Communicative capitalism says this is a good thing, that we've never been more connected and have never had more access, and if we all just had more of all of it then we'd all be better off. Democratic values like "access, inclusion, discussion and participation"²⁰ are subsumed by the machine, then spat back out for the public to execute only ever through the intensification and circulation of the network, through more content and contributions, more conversation and innovation, more access and affordability—through an investment, that is, in the utopian promises of technological salvation of luxury-automated-communism and Silicon-Valley-singularity alike.²¹ Sensing discontent, communicative capitalism captures communication and promises democracy (at the end) of information, relieving "top-level actors" of whatever remnants of responsibility to respond they might remember.²² Politics on the ground is finally foreclosed in finality, the hyper-individualised, deeply depoliticized, flat and fragmented companions of communicative capitalism handed to the cold and spooky grasp of the algorithm²³, subjects biopolitically reconfigured in situ by neoliberalism's ever-present enterprising project, everything circulating seamlessly, a stable connection ensuring steady transmission. Feeling out of options, we opt out of feeling, scrolling endlessly until the sky inevitably falls, resigning the

¹⁹ This "strange merging of democracy and capitalism" is what Jodi Dean (2013 53-55) calls 'communicative capitalism', naming the current configuration of global capital wherein technology promises communication and democracy, but "the proliferation, distribution, acceleration and intensification of communicative access and opportunity, far from enhancing democratic governance or resistance, results in precisely the opposite."

²⁰ Dean 2013 89.

²¹ For an idea of the stakes/scope, consider Bartlett 2017 on crypto-anarchism; Baldwin 2018 on decentralized network fetishism and "how ultra-modern digital networks conceal very traditional consolidation of power and capital"; and Swartz's 2017 in Castells 2017 incisive interruption of the dreams of futurity, decentralisation and disintermediation, and autonomy and automation that sustain such digital/network fetishism; and Galloway's 2014 similarly irruptive critique of 'Brometheanism'.

²² Dean 2013 89.

²³ The hold of algorithms, Mackenzie

future to anyone brave or powerful enough to carry it. “Driven by a tremendous faith in speed, volume and connectivity”,²⁴ the successful self-as-brand and the entrepreneur-as-influencer emerge as the privileged subjects, the ideal neoliberal self²⁵ of the ‘cool capitalist’, agentive and future-facing, oriented to the immediacy, abundance, and openness of the (market) network of the new knowledge/information society.

Sensing defeat and fearing the worst, some still dream of the communist horizon, calling for a return to the party, a unified front to loosen the fantasies of capital.²⁶ They say the communicative circuits are too powerful and capital has got us captured, that the freedom we thought we saw in the digital was just another delusion, and the only way we’ll find the collectivism that we (think we) lost is to collect ourselves as comrades. Others see such resignation as weakness, just the latest defeat in a series of accepted failures and assumed folk-politics, a fetish for the familiar that keeps us frozen (in the fracture). Throwing faith, ironically perhaps, to (modernity’s) resurrection, this new breed of champions of the future suggest diving into the contemporary chaos of cyberspace, to strategically accelerate some of its processes while obstructing others, to excavate the buried potentials of our exploited (digital and material) labour.²⁷ We just need better technology, they say, better theories and better subjects—and what better time than now, with all this information in our grasp, all this technology at our disposal? From the privileged position thrust upon us by history, everything is at hand, and so—in the face of fragmentation and fracture, flooded in ecologies of fear²⁸ and fabricated facts, flattened and exhausted of all imagination and intuition, left inescapably to induce ethics from politics—

²⁴ Dean 2013 89.

²⁵ McGuigan 2014.

²⁶ Dean 2016.

²⁷ Srnicek & Williams (2015 85): “Modernity presents both a narrative for popular mobilisation and a philosophical framework for understanding the arc of history... Modernity must be contested, not rejected.”

²⁸ Davis 1999.

surely there is still hope? Tracing the 19th Century shift from machine-as-tool (“which the worker animates and makes into his organ with his skill and strength”) to machine-as-system (“which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker... with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it”), Karl Marx also saw some other thing in the machine, a spark or splinter perhaps of another dream, some labour that escaped as (im)possibility “under the total process of the machinery itself... which confronts [the workers and their] individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism”.^[F] As ‘fixed capital’, Marx saw that productive machinery was the realization of not only capital’s dream but the workers’ as well, released at last from the trouble of labour, free to “idle time and time for higher activity”. In the frenzy of the here-and-now, surrounded by such speed and dynamism, the promise of automation and post-work democracy (always) just around the corner, that communist dream that Marx told us all so much about... We strain ourselves to stay determined, to stay facing forward and fixed on our feet, claiming to see everything—convinced if we don’t we might miss something.

Eyes closed for a moment and we feel the stillness seep (out)—an a priori indeterminacy that was always already everything other than silence, holding us in this unsettling embrace, unsettling the dark ground that could never be settled anyway—shimmering with splinters of otherwise and all the dreams we’ve (yet) seen. Eyes open and blinded by the light again, every sound distorted by the force of a former forgetting, we find a way somehow to stop and wonder (away): why has the future *never* worked?²⁹

²⁹ Srnicek & Williams (2015 85) follow (the inherited) history in looking forward, declaring “the future isn’t working”. As we will (have) see(n) however, it is always the past that guides us and to which we ought to remain allegiant—which is anything but a dismissal of the future, for it is the past that gives us futurity.

The Other (Black) Thing(s) Inher(it)ed in the Hold

“What if,” asks scholar and poet Fred Moten, “there remains that facticity of blackness which cannot be understood within the context of this genesis?”³⁰ Certainly, (critique of) hegemony construed in the totalising terms elaborated thus far appears uncertain, if not for its epistemic insularity then for its analytical impotence—dissent often articulated at the same, absolute altitude that it ascertains in what it takes for granted as its enemy, resolved to meet it on its (impossible and incoherent) terms, fated therefore to dissolve into a dialectic of inescapable immanence, even if inflected with a treacherous kind of intersectionality that assumes all too much of its subjects and terms, their positions and borders, the empty and universal plane in and with which they engage. The impulse to refuse, to resist and dissent suggests however that there is something always already there, (a trace or track of) an “affirmation in and through negation, situated mobility, and differentiated presence”³¹, something that is not nothing nor a thing—yet from and against this becomes discernible a “movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure”³². If we follow Moten in thinking refusal—the always already existing “runaway anarchic ground of unpayable debt and untold wealth”³³ from which it emerges—alongside blackness—as and in its “para-ontological distinction from those given (to) a privileged understanding of it”³⁴—then its facticity irrefutably remains (irrefutably fugitive). “The corresponding task”, Moten continues, inher(it)ing the insurgent “tradition of no-traditions” that is the Black Radical

³⁰ Moten 2018 20.

³¹ Ibid xii.

³² Moten 2008 179.

³³ Harney & Moten 2013 47.

³⁴ Ibid mayb.

tradition³⁵, “entails not only a consideration of that remainder, not only a critique of that origin and of origin in general, but also a disruption of the regulative methodological hegemony of understanding.”³⁶ Refusing reduction to the rhetorical while remaining with(in) its reach, writing with(in) and against the hold(s) of modernity, of empiricism and idealism, of language and labour and law, Moten gestures to the hold(s) of the world as we (un)know it, those by which we hold the world and those by which the world is held.

Refusing, however, the imposed compulsion to contain that which remains (elusively, fugitively, (ante-)anti-essentially³⁷ uncontainable), the hold (and its incalculable excess) unsettles the category of the concept and the concept of the category. “Indeed, what if regulative, regulated understanding is that indelibly modern institution that responds to a condition that not only precedes it but also calls it into existence?”³⁸ The generalised deployment of the hold’s irreducible specificity across differently specified holds over space and time—from the hold of the Transatlantic slave ship to the holds of the plantation and the colony, from the hold of the patrollers and protectors to the ministers and managers, the director and the dean, the holds of law and administration and the academy and the economy,³⁹ those that hold and are held by every place touched by colonial governance,

³⁵ This thesis owes much to this etc

³⁶ Moten 2018 20.

³⁷ Sexton 2012.

³⁸ Moten 2018 20.

³⁹ Writing with(in) and against what Saidiya Hartman (2008 6) calls “the afterlife of slavery”, Assata Shakur (1978) refuses to forget her “great great grandmothers who were slaves and... Cherokee Indians trapped on reservations”, recognising the hold(s) of incarceration as extending the colonising violence co-constitutive of “amerikan government and amerikian capitalism” (14), where “the cells are not much different from the tenements, the shooting galleries and the welfare hotels... locking us into the futility and decay of pissy hallways that lead nowhere”; Stephen Dillion 2012 follows Shakur’s theorising of the “relationship between the carceral, the market, the population, and the body”, framing the market “as a powerful extension of various technologies of capture: chains, shackles, bars, prisons, and ships... an expansive grid of captivity engendered by race and commodification”, suggesting therefore the ghosts of slavery have “intensified, seduced, enveloped, and animated” contemporary technologies of power, particularly those of the ‘neoliberal carceral state’; see also Hadden 2003 for a history of US police’s emergence from antebellum slave patrols and white private militias aka Ku Klux Klan knight riders; for Australian context see Moses 2000, Nettelbeck 2014, and Nettelbeck et. al 2016.

capital, neoliberal or soviet statism, Britishness, the individuated possessiveness of whiteness and its innumerable imperial frontiers and fossils, resonances and resurrections—suggests that the common(s) story (as it might be told) remains inescapably framed with(in) another frame, held in the hold(s) of whiteness and modernity, commonly compelled to claim there(after and there)fore to have transcended a (pre)history that nonetheless remains forcefully and urgently in the present. "Seized from home, sold in the market, and severed from kin," writes Hartman, "the slave was for all intents and purposes dead" and yet "slavery persists as an issue in [black] political life... because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago."⁴⁰ By ignoring or obscuring this history, much work aspiring towards radicalism and concerning itself with power, struggle, freedom and futurity, labours considerably only to pose problems and postulates that have long involved—in ways that unsettle and exceed "the context of this genesis"—those communities and knowledges that remain elusively and fugitively on (and as) the (eternal and internal) outside,⁴¹ the prophecies of self-preservation for those practising an ongoing planning to be possessed "beyond the settlements, out beyond the redevelopment, where black night is

⁴⁰ Hartman 2008 16.

⁴¹ This Fanonian formulation is elaborated in Mbembe's (2007 11-13) recognition of (blackness/the black as) "the Remainder—the ultimate sign of the dissimilar, of difference and the pure power of the negative... in excess of all signs" therefore unsettling every theory and function of representation or reason, and that to read Fanon today is to continue his project (161) and (pre)serve that thing "in every human subject... something indomitable and fundamentally intangible that no domination... can eliminate, contain, or suppress" (170); and by Moten's 2018 gesturing from and to "the immanence of a radical informality that precedes" (and unsettles) every form and distinction, (ap)positioning (blackness as) "dangerous internal difference... domesticated by way of a cycle of projection and importation; exoticized and eroticized as an object of irreducible difference, attraction, incorporation, and exilic hope; or theorized as an interdicted and invisible view" (5), resonating with the interminability of Fanonian (im)possibility, "the shudder/shadow of death held in the struggle where reciprocal recognition is staged, as it were, with and by an irreversible reluctance... [which] doesn't mean that struggle (and its accompanying modes of organization) is unnecessary; [just that] it is neither sufficient nor originary" (13).

falling, where we hate to be alone... as the common embrace, right inside, and around, in the surround."⁴²

And so while recognising blackness—remembering, listening to and departing from its (an)originary generativity—amply generates critique of something like ‘contemporary radical left politics and its inherited terms, traditions, and technologies (of whiteness)’, critique alone is not (necessarily or primarily) the aim of this thesis, which is offered in a spirit of mutuality and study. “You have to step to it in a different way.”⁴³ Indeed, the inherent sociality of innovation and the incessant intellectuality of ecological living initiates and is initiated by our irreducible commonality, our inescapably common concerns and shared stories, our mutual debt to each other, to life and all—unsettling any uncomplicated assumption of an a priori (white and/or anthropocentric) wholeness or omnipresence of opposition, its supposed productive primacy, and the (im)position(s) stipulated by all this. “What’s at stake,” writes Moten,” is the possibility of a general movement that then gets fostered when we recognize these... independent irruptions of a certain kind of radical social action and thinking.”⁴⁴ Moving with and against critique, to which much of this is indebted, this thesis (that is to say the debt that sticks to it and that it sticks to) might be most generatively construed as an interdisciplinary and (ante-)anti-disciplinary elaboration of this most unmanageable of matters, the mutating matter of our mutual and mutant debt, the “tradition of no traditions”, which is not but nothing other than blackness (and its unbearable costs and incalculable gifts). Recognising this is to recognise the hold, how we

⁴² Harney & Moten 2013 19.

⁴³ Refusing to disavow a kind of disciplinary debt collection while yet recognising the broader project of black radicalism, Moten says in conversation (study) with co-author Stefano Harney and comrade Stephen Shukaitis, reflecting on the absence of black voices in theorisations of freedom, struggle, and futurity: “You start to feel pity for his ignorant butt, but then you also understand the deep structural connections between ignorance and arrogance, so then you get mad again... But this is not a personal injury. You have to step to it in a different way.”

⁴⁴ Ibid 153

hold it and how it holds us, framing and forcing (un)certain (im)possibilities of the here-and-now. But this is not to destroy or escape it—but what if this was not our goal? What if escape really was (im)possible?

Following theorist and filmmaker Frank B. Wilderson III (who follows those who remained before him) Moten asks not only what it might mean to recognise and refuse the hold but also what imaginative and improvisatory (im)possibilities might be found—felt, forged, formed and/or de-formed—by “remaining in the supposedly viewless confines of the hold”.⁴⁵ Moten throws his thinking to the sorrow songs and soul songs, the stealth of the stolen ones who refused to move when moved on, who moved in refusal of stillness, stolen to and from the New World as they forged and formed its (fugitive) wealth, stealing (away) to not only (or always) survive imposed deprivation but also (always) to move, sing, plan, dance and dream in ways that escaped (without escaping) the hold, finding and (de)forming life in (social) death.⁴⁶ Denied the sociality they generated that nonetheless demands, in and as its radical mutuality, to be shared, the echoing evidence of this excessive and incalculable debt (of untold and unimaginable wealth) resonates in every memory (of itself), the (black) debt at a distance that is always already ours, this debt that cannot be paid but only (for)ever elaborated, in, and as, love and togetherness and futurity, or, following Moten and co-author and comrade Stefano Harney, what we might just call study.⁴⁷ This bad debt that we seek and that seeks us, that moves (through) this thesis as its generative “anarchic

⁴⁵ Moten 2018 200.

⁴⁶ Sexton 2011.

⁴⁷ Harney & Moten (2013 47): “These other ones have a passion to tell you what they have found, and they are surprised you want to listen, even though they’ve been expecting you. Sometimes the story is not clear, or it starts in a whisper. It goes around again but listen, it is funny again, every time. This knowledge has been degraded, and the research rejected... But if you listen to them they will tell you: we will not handle credit, and we cannot handle debt, debt flows through us, and there’s no time to tell you everything, so much bad debt, so much to forget and remember again. But if we listen to them they will say: come let’s plan something together. And that’s what we’re going to do. We’re telling all of you but we’re not telling anyone else.”

ground”,⁴⁸ but also that which makes possible “knowledge of freedom”,⁴⁹ that which made (and makes) modernity and (the) settlement and therefore the present, the past and the future possible. What must be recognised, writes Moten, is “not just that there are flights of fantasy in the ship’s hold but also that such fantasy calls into more refined and brutal existence every regulatory structure through which we identify the modernity of the world”.⁵⁰ The assumed primacy, centrality, and originality of whiteness, its colonies and stories and strategies, is effectively turned upside-down and inside out. Gramsci’s narratives of the oppressed suddenly seem oppressive, offering the ‘marginalised victims’ no option other than resistance or recourse, reform or revolution, history disarticulating forcefully to reveal its eternal, internal black heart.⁵¹

Recognising this debt is, in other words, to recognise and affirm the primacy and generativity of that insurgent and inventive refusal, which, as Spivak reminds us, is the first right.⁵² “This openness, this dissonance, this residual informality, this refusal to coalesce, this differential resistance to enclosure, this sounded animateriality, this breaking vessel and broken flesh,” writes Moten, “is poetry, one of whose other names, but not just one name among others, is blackness.”⁵³

“Brushing history against the grain”⁵⁴, against and beyond the “hard materiality of the unreal”⁵⁵ that claims every day to surround us, might indeed sound mad, infected with a dangerous kind of optimism. From the settled position of those seeking to settle, this would

⁴⁸ Harney & Moten 2013 47.

⁴⁹ Moten 2018 1; also the title of the essay.

⁵⁰ Moten 2018 200.

⁵¹ Fanon 2008 [1952] 164: “European civilization is characterized by the presence, at the heart of what Jung calls the collective unconscious, of an archetype: an expression of bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage and the black man who slumbers in every white man.”

⁵² Paulson & Spivak 2016.

⁵³ Moten 2015

⁵⁴ This formulation is from Walter Benjamin, whose historiography will be studied in the following section.

⁵⁵ Harney & Moten 2013 18.

not be inaccurate—depending on how we think of ‘madness’ or ‘danger’, this is hardly an inaccurate reading at all. Settlers and insurgents alike know of the generativity of blackness—the incendiary inventiveness of its imaginative and improvisatory intensities, “the lawless freedom of the melodramatic imagination, its constant irruptive and disruptive escape from the system it engenders”⁵⁶—even if, of course, they know of it differently, incongruently and incalculably. What is irrefutable for both and for all is that it is refusal—(in and as) fugitivity: fantasy, futurity, flight—that generates, then and now, the imposed necessity of regulative structures and technologies of governance, from the slave(r)s’ chains to the badge of the cop, from Christ (in)to Capital, of the plantation to (the) settlement to cyberspace. Holding at once the non-linearity and (a)historicism of the hold and letting it hold us, and avowing the ante-anti-normativity of its fugitive generation and flights of fantasy, unsettles not only the history we are presumed to inherit but also every co-constituting concept and category: subjectivity, statehood, struggle, politics, recognition, knowledge, truth, identity, law, language; everything is on the table.

⁵⁶ Moten 2018 28.

Modernity's End(s) & the Messianic Present(/Presence)

Writing in 1940—in a short essay that was to be his last, figuring freedom months before taking his own life, fleeing the holds of war and Nazi capture, dying (and living) at the border(s) and relaying stories in (and of) exile and transit⁵⁷—Jewish German philosopher Walter Benjamin imparts a history and historiography that refuses the “empty and homogenous time” assumed by modernity, calling instead for “a procedure of empathy” grounded in “the heaviness at heart, the acedia, which despairs of mastering the genuine historical picture”.⁵⁸ Exploding the flat, fractured fragility that held his present, Benjamin invokes theology and allegory through the Angel of History, who sees the past and wants to stay, “to awaken the dead” and make amends, but the storm of progress is “blowing from Paradise” and caught itself in the Angel’s wings, forcing them with their back turned “irresistibly into the future”. Benjamin is gesturing from and towards something else, something framed imprecisely as the “fine and spiritual”, the metaphysical, affective, immaterial—but never less real, however, for we can never deny the ceaseless tides that flow through and from the past and present, like “tradition”, a “secret protocol” that carries and claims us in “the here-and-now, in which splinters of messianic time are shot through.” We inherit the dreams and dispositions of the past “as confidence, as courage, as humor, as cunning, as steadfastness in this struggle”, and through these splinters the music and madness spills into (and as) the present(/presence) felt and followed in the here-and-now, given and taken in what Moten recognises as “the cultivated nature of this situated volatility, this emergent poetics of the emergency in which the poor trouble the proper”⁵⁹. For Benjamin, the traces and tracks of that fugitive sociality similarly reach “far back into

⁵⁷ Benjamin’s life.

⁵⁸ Benjamin [1940]2001; unless noted otherwise all citations are from Dennis Redmond’s 2001 translation.

⁵⁹ Moten 2018 155.

the mists of time”, emanating as the sparks of hope from the past and calling into question every victory that has ever been won by the rulers”. Every enraptured refusal is a rupture.

Benjamin’s historiography, taken as a complication rather than a repudiation of historical materialism,⁶⁰ unsettles any easy, linear, causal relation of ‘the past’ and ‘the present’, refusing also the assumed primacy of production in the great play of life and living. Benjamin refutes the secularised, materialist, Hegelian historicism that infuses modernity and Marxism alike, refusing (non-theological) determinism to recognise history as “the object of a construction... which is fulfilled by the here-and-now”. The “zero-hour” of the present, Benjamin’s antithesis to the “empty and homogenous time of positivism”⁶¹, reveals “rupture[s] between messianic redemption and the ideology of progress” that move (us) “from a time of necessity to a time of possibilities”⁶². Frustrated by the sclerotic ‘professional intellectuals’ and the cowardice of the Social Democrats by whom he and his contemporaries were betrayed, Benjamin denounces the “vulgar-Marxist concept” of labour that “recognizes only the progress in the mastery of nature, not the retrogression of society”, requiring as “its logical complement” a profoundly devalued concept of nature that is ‘there for the taking’. Not only do such materialist economic preconceptions “[bear] the technocratic traces which would later be found in Fascism”, they also efface the possibilities of otherwise, alternative theorisations and manifestations of labour or value, perhaps even something like what Marx, describing wealth, envisioned as “the thing realized in things... the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through universal exchange”,⁶³ what Moten and Harney call “the massive and incalculable

⁶⁰ Fritsch 2005 13-30.

⁶¹ This note is from Dennis Redmond:

⁶² Löwy 2005 102.

⁶³ Marx 1973 487–88.

range of laboured living”⁶⁴—or, for Benjamin, “a labour which, far from exploiting nature, is instead capable of delivering creations whose possibility slumbers in her womb.”

The task of the Benjaminian historian—hacker and artist, designer and dreamer, planner and programmer—is to redeem (“a revolutionary chance in”) the suppressed past, to rescue (and be rescued by) “a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger”. That is to say, following Benjamin, that we must wrest ‘the past’—its untold and/or veiled traditions and technologies and dreams and designs, honouring the messianic splinters that pierce the here-and-now, claiming and guiding us—from those who sought and seek to settle it. For indeed, warns Benjamin, “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.” Held in and holding this fractured and fateful relation of the past and the here-and-now, torn as “constellations overflowing with tensions”, we take our task to fall through and with the splinters of an otherwise, to find and follow the feeling, the futurity of the fugitive public that refused to conform and instead turned, by what Benjamin calls a “secret kind of heliotropism”—a kind of insurgent and inventive refusal—towards what he denotes as “the sun which is dawning in the sky of history”—in the sky, we’ll say, of the decolonial horizon(s), where ‘freedom’ really was always just a funny, forgotten story.

⁶⁴ Harney & Moten 2013 47.

(Un)Settling History: The Ongoing (De)Colonial

While Marxist, feminist, poststructuralist and other ‘modern’ critiques fruitfully interpret and interrupt history and its present(s), such discussions are not new or unfamiliar to Indigenous (and/or Black) people who remain present, then and now, as their (presence as and in their present) histories are erased, “dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people”.⁶⁵ Recognising the primacy of Indigenous erasure to the ongoing and historical colonisation (of ‘the rest’ by ‘the West’⁶⁶), Māori (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) professor of education Linda Tuhiwai Smith discloses coloniality’s stories and structures and their co-constitutive (mis)conception of time “alongside imperial beliefs about the Other”⁶⁷, a corrosive contraption composed from and against an imposed, imaginary b(l)ackdrop of non-white savagery, indolence, abjection and excess.⁶⁸ Geonpul woman and scholar Aileen Moreton Robinson similarly attends to the ongoing denial (of Indigenous sovereignty, of the violence of invasion, of the insecurity of settlement) that constitutes the foundation and structure of Europe’s imperial project, tracing a fractured nonetheless fixed continuity of the individuated and possessive (il)logics “at the very heart of the white national imaginary and belonging”,⁶⁹ from their gestation within and emergence from Europe’s Dark Ages, through their crystallisation in the colonies and plantations of the New World, to their 18th Century arrival upon and occupation of Dharug, what is claimed as Sydney.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Smith 2012 32.

⁶⁶ Hall 1992.

⁶⁷ Smith 2012 31.

⁶⁸ The projection of imposed (white) meanings (onto/through the black body) has been thoroughly analysed in critical race and identity discourses; see Smith 2012 x, Mbembe 2007 x, Mignolo 2012 x, Moten 2018 x.

⁶⁹ Moreton-Robinson 2015 18.

⁷⁰ Moreton-Robinson’s (2015 1-40) generative account is mostly localised to this continent; Wynter’s (2003) scope is perhaps the broadest.

Indeed, as far as Smith and other First Nations (and/or Black) scholars, artists, activists and communities everywhere are concerned, imperialism never stopped its march, it “still hurts” and “still destroys and is reforming itself constantly”,⁷¹ throwing into stark and blinding relief every claim to have transcended this suppressed nonetheless present history, every unfounded presumption of the ‘new’ that fails at once to acknowledge any of what has already been and continues to be, remaining underground and underfoot, making the thought of the ‘new’ (im)possible. The imperial machinery of history employs techniques and technologies distilled and concealed over centuries “to deny the validity of indigenous peoples’ claim to existence”, obstructing “self-determination” via continued dispossession and appropriation of Sovereign “land and territories”, “languages and forms of cultural knowledge”, and “natural resources and systems for living” with(in) complex and dynamic environments.⁷² It is through and from this genocidal agenda of accumulation that modernity and (the) settlement come to (un)know themselves, that settlers come to assume their status as subjects, that whiteness comes to convince itself of its universality. It looks like dispossession and desecration for industry and investment,⁷³ forced removals of children and disruption of family and cultural life,⁷⁴ political and economic disenfranchisement and neglect,⁷⁵ deaths in custody arising out of a total lack of justice or

⁷¹ Smith 2012 20.

⁷² Smith 2012 1.

⁷³ See Barta 1987 on Australia's ~200 year history as “a genocidal society” and the economic imperative driving its expansion as one concerning the land; see also Jabour 2013 for a contemporary example, suggesting Barta's (249) statement from 3 decades ago remains as true now as it did then: “the relations of genocide are alive”; Goodall's 2008 critical history of the “invasion to embassy” of Indigenous insurgents is also invaluable.

⁷⁴ The Australian Human Rights Commission in their 1997 ‘Bringing them Home’ report found significant over-representation of Indigenous children in every welfare arrangement, urging for culturally-appropriate Indigenous-run welfare services; “Twenty-one years on,” Evershed and Allam (2018) report, “government data shows Australia has failed to curb the rate of child removal from Indigenous families, and has gone backwards on a commitment to place children in care that connects them with Indigenous family and culture”;

⁷⁵ See Moreton-Robinson 2017 on ‘Citizenship, Exclusion and the Denial of Indigenous Sovereign Rights’

compassion or even due process,⁷⁶ and many other explicit or implicit forms of exclusion and violence that irrefutably amount to state-sanctioned genocide.

This constitutional, continual unholy union of possessiveness and individualism—the property contract/fantasy of ownership dictated almost entirely by disavowal and is otherwise known as whiteness—is socio-discursively reconfigured (and re-centred) in the wake of capital, the nation-state, globalisation, and other ‘contemporary’ circumstances of the here-and-now, such as the emergence of neoliberalism, populist protest and identity politics, worldwide information networks of circulation and surveillance, and much else. Whiteness constitutes, then and now, (the thin, reflective surface of) the discursive and ideological foundation of every institution and industry, every idea and innovation of the modern world order. ‘History’ in this colonised form—totalising and universal, telling every story absolutely, detached and disinterested yet coherent and containable, constructed upon classifications, categories and collections of facts said to speak for themselves, progressing chronologically with the self-actualisation and societal advancement of Man, who is Himself foundationally and fatefully contingent on illusory binaries of inside/outside, modern/primitive, white/black⁷⁷—therefore emerges (and extends and endures) as “the story of people who ‘were [and are] regarded as fully human’”,⁷⁸ the irruptive enlightenment of civilisation erupting from and against a time (imagined and forgotten) before and outside of (colonised modern) time: the slow, black, unproductive time of the pre-historic, the primitive and poor.

⁷⁶ Much like the persistent stolen generations, the carceral system’s ongoing systematic failings seem only to accumulate, with 407 Indigenous people dying in custody since the 1991 royal commission, most of which were preventable and caused by lack of access to basic care or medical treatment, see Allam et al 2018, Guardian 2018.

⁷⁷ This is a summary of Smith’s summary of several scholars’ summaries of colonised history, see Smith 2012 31.

⁷⁸ Smith 2012 20.

This co-constitutes a hostile social environment as institutions and organisations such as schools, hospitals, businesses, broadcasters, governments, charities, churches, and all their many and varied publics, implicitly inherent and elaborate this infective, exhausted, and ultimately inhumane discourse of anti-blackness, good intentions notwithstanding—which unequally nonetheless ultimately makes victims of us all, the corrupting (castration) complex of whiteness corroding all from the inside in its caustic containment of us and all things, a disarrayed display of (dis)advantage whose disparate discourses serially obscure the blackness that remains their (un)ground and condition of (im)possibility. Whiteness denies not only the historical formation of such poverty, which is to say the theft it continues to commit, but also the historical formation of itself as a(n illegitimate) legitimating discourse. Both are taken as confirming each other, normalised as the underlying—unquestioned and unquestionable—fabric of settler psyche, the relation between whiteness and coloniality in a nutshell. This constitutes a cardinal and continuous denial, writes Smith, of Indigenous “claims to humanity, to having a history, and to all sense of hope”,⁷⁹ relegating this continent’s First Peoples to the status of the (white) settler’s conceptual Other. The ‘progress’ of the latter is therefore irreducibly tied to the erasure of the former, a process that keeps (the) settlement on high alert, surrounded by ghosts and whispers, (n)ever ready to react and repress.

⁷⁹ Smith 2012 4.

Indigenous Sovereignty & the Black Before/Beyond

Far from the story being settled, the ongoing omnipresence of Indigenous Sovereignty—the plurality and diversity of its histories, stories, languages and knowledges, its contextuality in culture and country, unfolding (from and with) a heterogeneity that is nonetheless in harmony with ecology, a singular and eternal harmony embedded in a deeply interwoven and interrelating eco-philosophy that affirms the primacy of land and its language(s) in order not to make a claim to it but instead to recognise its claim on us and on all⁸⁰—presents a total alterity to the totality of whiteness, an unassimilable and uncontainable reality that continually, indifferently yet inevitably, unsettles whiteness (and its nation(s)), “haunting the house that Jack built, shaking its foundations and rattling the picket fence”,⁸¹ calling into question every moment in its forceful, frenzied, nonetheless fabricated history. “The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization,” Smith writes, “but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope.”⁸² This resistance, as blackness, is a point of departure, as (an)originary refusal emerging from an always already existing, universal and total ecology of life/Earth, which is, to put it imprecisely, the ground(s) of Indigenous Sovereignty, a totality of ecology at the heart of diverse onto-epistemologies.⁸³ *Decolonising Methodologies* would not be the magisterial and irrefutable

⁸⁰ Moreton-Robinson 2015 11-17.

⁸¹ Moreton-Robinson 2015 31.

⁸² Smith 2012 4.

⁸³ Moreton-Robinson 2015 11-12: “Indigenous people’s sense of belonging is derived from an ontological relationship to country derived from the Dreaming, which provides the precedents for what is believed to have occurred in the beginning in the original form of social living created by ancestral beings. During the dreaming, ancestral beings created the land and life, and they are tied to particular tracks of country. Knowledge and beliefs tied to the Dreaming inform the present and future. Within this system of beliefs, there is scope for interpretation and change by individuals through dreams and their lived experiences... These experiences illustrate the way in which the spiritual nature of the world is incorporated into one’s connection to place, home, and country. The spiritual world is immediately experienced because it is synonymous with

interruption of the imperial that it is if Smith did not believe beyond belief what she does, devoting the majority of the book to what she identifies (and celebrates) as “the greater project [of] recentring indigenous identities on a larger scale”.⁸⁴ In other words, recognising the (im)position of the (colonial) centre is given and taken in refusal of the spatio-discursive denomination of ‘the margins’, the numerically inaccurate (and innumerable anyway) rank of ‘minority’, and the assumed primacy of ‘resistance’ (to an imposed order), a refusal articulated with polemical nonetheless precise passion by Moreton-Robinson: “it takes a great deal of work to maintain Canada, the United States, Hawai’i, New Zealand, and Australia as white possessions.”⁸⁵ Constantly called to reassert its illusory legitimacy, the nation-state, their adherents and whiteness more generally, exerts considerable effort “through a process of perpetual Indigenous dispossession” to reproduce itself and its (real or imagined) borders, employing techniques and technologies that reproduce and reaffirm “sets of meanings about ownership of the nation, as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions.”⁸⁶

After (and before) all, Indigenous Sovereignty lives as and in its black, unsettled and unsettling, decolonial and decolonising refusal(s)—which is to say, by any metric other than the basest intensities of force, in the face of (80000+ years of) Indigenous Sovereignty, it’s (~500 years of) whiteness that won’t go back to where it came from.

By unveiling the illegitimacy of the imperial narrative—its incoherence, incompleteness, the tears in its fabric, its unholy origins (from) and (against) the other

the physiography of the land. In the life histories the reality of spirituality is a physical fact because it is experienced as part of one’s life. Indigenous women perceive themselves as being an extension of the earth, which is alive and unpredictable. Hence their understandings of themselves, their place and country, also reflect this view”; see also Pascoe 2014 125-144.

⁸⁴ Smith 2012 100.

⁸⁵ Moreton-Robinson 2015 *xi*.

⁸⁶ Moreton-Robinson 2015 *xi-xii*.

things that leaked and escaped, the excess left out or behind but nevertheless remained, forgotten by some but remembered by so many others—the decolonial imperative also discloses “messianic splinters” that cut the present moment(s), repressed but nevertheless ever-present (im)possibilities that remain, perhaps only slightly out of frame, under and around and sometimes within the hold(s) of the here-and-now. This suggests an explosive immanence, an immanent explosive at the heart of (any) enclosure, the (im)possibility of otherwise always already there, under and around, before and beyond the aberration of the normative imposition and its assumed totality. Retelling the (present) history of New World slavery, professor of African American literature and history Saidiya Hartman elaborates a Benjaminian methodology to “brush history against the grain”,⁸⁷ attending to “forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry or appropriate or adequate sources for history making” and the urgency of “attending to the cultivated silence, exclusions, relations of violence and domination that engender the official accounts”. Her focus on “small acts of resistance” is not to simply reject ‘the big narratives’ or avoid the difficult materiality of such histories. Rather, she continues, “these pedestrian practices... illuminate inchoate and utopian expressions of freedom that are not and perhaps cannot be actualized elsewhere”. These enraptured expressions and the rupturing refusals they preserve and elaborate instead find improvised and incomplete (dis)articulation “in quotidian acts labelled ‘fanciful’, ‘exorbitant’, ‘excessive’” primarily because of their unsettling and unsettled excess (of “the frame of civil rights and political emancipation”). Hartman departs from here “in pursuit of the sublime, struggling to repeat the unrepeatable, to present the unpresentable” as indeed it is from and against such

⁸⁷ Hartman 2010 11-14; unless noted otherwise all citations are from this source.

(im)possibilities that futurity emerges, as if from and as splinters of messianic time, fugitively in excess of itself.

What's revealed might be described as a totality of non-totalities that might indeed be remembered finally as that (totality) of our (under)common and interconnected (non-total) becoming(s) with (and as) the Earth and all its and our timeless, irreducible interrelating. What's taken (for granted) as crisis is not the totality often presumed—rather the last ~500 years of 'modernity' disarticulates to appear as the greatest deviation thus far from the always already existing cosmology of ecological living, omnipresent in and as Indigenous Sovereignty and its continued presence on Country before and beyond any human agency, therefore elaborating endlessly in every direction, in art and activism, scholarship and study, poetry and story and political strategy and much else that remains eternally elusive, felt yet in moments of scandalous commonality, elusively and fugitively in evasion of enclosure. Recognising the primacy of life and preservation is to recognise the totality of interrelational ecology as the order to honour, as the decolonial horizon(s) we stay facing (from), therefore remembering struggle and resistance as contingency, preservation and celebration as primary—often given and taken, of course, all at once.

If this sounds like madness then we must be moving. Following it we fall into some elsewhere entirely, a place outside of history which is where we've always been, here and everywhere, now and forever. Falling out of step with history is no accident and hardly a choice. It seems often those with the luxury of choice choose to continue sleeping, to continue dreaming of no dreams, waking up when the alarm rings and accepting the call even if sometimes it disturbs us so deeply that we forget how to sleep, and we remember so much that sometimes it becomes too much, so we accept our diagnosis as disordered, as broken and restless and in need of some rest, some discipline and direction and hope.

Hoping to find hope where we last lost it, we fall back into the abstract to convince ourselves that the answer is somewhere out there, somewhere out there always, something always wrong out there and something always not quite right here, something always not quite right with ourselves and ours, our unrest and uncertainty, our dreams of otherwise, and all our plans we keep putting off, for another day, for the day that never comes because every day is another day, and another day means what it means so we do what we can with what we have, finding and forming meaning if and when we have the means, always just not quite enough means, meanwhile sometimes forgetting the ends, or that the ends sometimes seem endless, sometimes endlessly distant, sometimes seemingly to no end.

In the end, at the end of the day, we end up asking: How did we end up here?

Another question with always endless but never enough answers.

This seems like another dead-end.

The Decolonial Horizon(s): Refusing the World (for the Earth)

Decolonisation refuses the world, which is to say the world as we (un)know it, the hard materiality of this stark unreality that, at present, occupies us as we occupy it. We are given (to) this general refusal specifically as and from the stealth of the stolen and the wealth of the wretched, the inventive and insurgent refusal (of those) written (off) as black, broken, incapable of and left behind by modernity. Theirs (and ours) was (and is) not only a refusal to be 'left behind' but also a refusal of that colonial, colonising notion of progress itself, the brutal illusion of a backwards and a forwards and the callousness that connects them. Refusing the temporal and spatial anchors of white coloniality, the fugitivity of the decolonial horizon(s) (came and) went running (from and) to an elsewhere and elsewhere for and through which we are still looking, to and from which we are always already running, trying to be with them, to see and feel (with) them, if only for a moment (of forever). This undercommon refusal to be in common with the colonial and (un)conscious is replenished as it is inherited, held as it holds us in this appositional embrace that must be nothing other than a madness, a madness that inevitably but indifferently unsettles that which is thought as fixed, whole, settled. Decolonisation is, in every sense, unsettling, (re)surfacing as this disassembling ensemble of generative refusals given and taken as and in fugitive movements through, around, under and over the frame(s) of the world as we (un)know it, this world that must be (coming) undone.

Consider again the unsettling (ins)urgency of Smith's unsettled methodologies, offering something of the decolonial horizon when she tells us "the intellectual project of decolonizing has to set out ways to proceed through a colonizing world."⁸⁸ Recognising the

⁸⁸ Smith 2012 *xii*.

generative violence central to (de)colonisation and the primacy of life and its preservation, Smith refuses the framing of the ‘sciences’ in which she writes, their foundations in Enlightenment Rationality and that brutality of imperial history that forgets all but what it wants to remember, only knowing how and what to remember as a function of what it actively and violently forgets—which remains blackness, always already preceding and prompting any (im)position of order. Smith tells this story, staying with “the vantage point of the colonized”⁸⁹ and so her refusal is not escape or total, refusing (to leave) the colonial epistemology as it strains to contain this excess, to settle her terms and call her into its order. Smith might be writing *within* those sciences, but her refusal is, perhaps more than anything, to be *of* those sciences, co-constituting her celebration of all that she already writes for and as and with—and this is what she really brings, what she receives and gives and maintains, which indeed can never be contained, not by the world as we (un)know it. Recognising imperialism’s historical, continual self-reinforcing across its institutions and modalities, Smith’s refusal excavates those regulative, legitimating codes that structure—or the structures that code—the here-and-now. Quoting Fanon, Smith reminds us that decolonisation, intending to change the world order, is “obviously, a programme of complete disorder.”⁹⁰

Fostering an attunement to the fugitive spatialities—musicality, vitality, hapticality⁹¹—of being and becoming (with) in and against, around and beyond (the) settlement reminds us, with all the assurance of an inheritance that didn’t need to be written down, that what might appear overwhelming in its totality is in fact an incoherent, contingent assemblage, (dis)articulating into and onto, through and beyond the physicality

⁸⁹ Smith 2012 1.

⁹⁰ Fanon.

⁹¹ Harney & Moten

of our bodies—revealing innumerable sites of contestation and conflict, blindspots and limits where refusal is given and taken in and as something other than silence. Colonisation is ongoing and non-total, widespread yet incomplete,⁹² and so our decolonial and decolonising thinking and action should similarly be humbled by a commitment to plurality and play, fantasy and futurity—a commitment, that is, to a “radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place.”⁹³ At stake, which is to say the task, is not only a refusal of (the) settlement but also a refusal to settle or be settled, an ongoing decolonial refusal of individuation and possessiveness and the ceaseless call to perform for and as the always white, regulative figure of Man, unsettling his seat and his crown.

The fluidity and fugitive indeterminacy that we are given (to) is what we refuse to forget, refusing to forget ourselves even as we remember each other, as we stay running through and around and beyond the world of the here and now, that forever trails us, straining to settle the terms we’re (so given to) unsettling. Refusing (the) settlement is to celebrate all that always already surrounds it, our irreducible communality and unmanageable difference in and as the interconnectedness and fluidity of all life, which threatens (the) settlement, indeed has it besieged, constantly called to reassert an illusory image of itself as whole, impermeable, fixed. Giving ourselves (to) this generative interplay of refusal (of that which we aren’t and don’t want) and celebration (of that which we always already are and have) is to remember ourselves in and as the surround, in and as that “radical occupied-elsewhere, that utopic commonunderground of this dystopia”.⁹⁴ It follows, if we wish to fall into and with that Black optimism of, for, and as which Moten

⁹² Colonisation is structure not event

⁹³ Smith 2012 *xii*.

⁹⁴ Harney & Moten 2013 51.

writes, that we persist “in thinking that we have what we need, that we can get there from here, that there's nothing wrong with us or even, in this regard, with here.”⁹⁵ Strained against this world that strains itself to call us broken, a strange world that only knows itself through (its reactive governance of) our brokenness, we delight in dwelling in the brokenness of the surround, this stupendous study of and as statelessness that we stay with, refusing, (an)originarily and finally and forever, to be fixed or fix.

Felt and heard, held and shared, given and received as and in the “voices of the future in the past, the voices of the future in our present”,⁹⁶ refusal elaborates the always already existing reality of undercommon futurity, a decolonised and decolonial futurity for the black, broken, poor and improper, daring to still dream and see the human beneath, before and beyond Man. “In the absence of amenity, in exhaustion,” writes Moten, “there’s a society of friends where everything can fold in dance to black, in being held and flown, in what was never silence.”⁹⁷ Refusing this world is to believe, (not so) simply, that we can and must do better. Such optimism “always lives, which is to say escapes, in the assertion of a right to refuse”,⁹⁸ moving from and towards another place and time altogether that we might not always remember but must never forget. If the improvisational imperative that we find and follow in(to) undercommon refusal wants anything, it’s to see and be with each other in love and study, to be not simply among our own but “among [our] own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything”.⁹⁹ This is, for now, to ask how to be in this strange world but not of it, within the world but for the Earth, for life and for each other, for futurity

⁹⁵ Moten 2018 160.

⁹⁶ Moten Case of Blackness/Black Op draft.

⁹⁷ Harney & Moten 2013 97.

⁹⁸ Moten 2018 160.

⁹⁹ Harney & Moten 2013 96.

and fantasy from and of that world we still hope to see, that world we have always already seen, before and beyond the long shadow of the hold.

Politics of (Mis)Recognition (or: Abolish Everything)

If politics suggests a move towards self-possession within the predetermined terms of normative democratic struggle, then what might an alternative look, sound, feel or move like? Not an alternative politics, but rather an alternative modality of moving, listening, feeling, dancing, laughing, loving, and studying with and within, against and beyond the political, the struggle for representation and recourse, even, the inherited notion of the subject, of the individual, of the human? Having recognised as illusory the recognition offered by these inherited grammars of colonial subjectivity, the state's recognition in turn appears unrecognizable, betraying an absolute inability to ever really recognise (us, itself, or anything).¹⁰⁰ We therefore refuse recognition and in doing so refuse the regulative (il)logics that made possible such an arrogant assertion of authority at all. Indeed, the imperative to make oneself intelligible holds (at least the trace of) a colonial and colonising move, the imposed order assuming itself as an origin predicated on a disavowal of what was already and always there—as if any person or thing did not matter until presented as (a) matter that matters. We lean into and away from, moving through and around, bending and breaking these inherited grammars, whether found in the classroom or the prison, the boardroom or the bathroom, in an academic conference on radical Marxist utopias or a panel of experts on the latest innovations in extractive economics, whether it's the borders drawn on the soil or the soul, those that define money or marriage, care from work, law

¹⁰⁰ Coulthard 2014.

from lore, prescribing and proscribing what is considered appropriate and intelligible and passable for the housewife and the sex worker, the trans hacker and the military man, the artist and the audience, the doctor and the junkie, the cyborg and the human, the professor and the student, the cop and the crim.

What would it mean, for us and ours, to refuse such calls? What would it mean to accept instead the call to disorder, which quickly reveals itself to have always already been there, circling and shadowing every scant statute of order, every arrogant assumption of authority? What would it mean to recognise that we are always already in the wild and unsettling, imaginative and improvisatory and irreducibly collective call (and response) of undercommon (dis)order, that the call (and response) is always already within us?

Attendance to these non-spaces of transitivity and fugitivity that surround and unsettle the frame, these wild and prophetic movements that produce the conditions of possibility for the or any frame, is given not only in celebration and reclamation of ourselves and all of that which was deemed excessive, disordered, or dissonant, but also in the timeless truth of that most mundane but nonetheless vital cliché: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Put simply, whatever ‘the future’ means or looks like, it’s not something we can ever picture or describe, and even if our utopian visions have somehow covered all bases and can guarantee a good life for all, we’re certainly not going to ‘get there’ using the same tools, languages, stories, theories, or whatever else that got us ‘here’.

And so we must fall into this madness, these disordered and disordering, unsettling and unsettled movements of the fugitive public, to trace and follow those movements and join them, knowing that to do so is simply to believe in the world and to want to be in it, to want to be in it all the way to the end of it because we believe in another world in this world

and we want to be in that.¹⁰¹ The world we believe in is maybe not ‘a world’ at all, but it might have something to do with the Earth, with life, with love and imagination and togetherness, and in any case it takes its cue from something quite old-new. This is the decolonial horizon that we stay facing, that we stay running from and for, guided and humbled by what we sometimes can’t remember but can never forget, which keeps us from slipping into the meaninglessness of an anarchism with no regard for life or a liberalism with no regard for history. Struggling against and beyond normativity has never not involved a kind of madness, a madness that has never not had something to do with the irrepressibility of the imagination, its insurgent inventiveness, which has never been and can never be contained. The unsettlement given in and as refusal and fugitivity was and continues to be the condition of possibility for modernity, for the world order, for resistance and preservation and so much more that we don’t or can’t (yet) know, so let’s stay there, which is here, which is everywhere and nowhere, in the hold, in the break, as if entering this broken world again and again and again.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Moten says in interview, Harney & Moten 2013 118.

¹⁰² Harney & Moten 2013 94.

(Im)Possibilities of Escape

But the weary watchmen of the unreal, never too far behind, (mis)hearing our wild and weird, unsettled and unsettling dream(ing)s from and for the Earth, call us back into line to remind us of the world, this unreal world that forgets the Earth and all of us in order to (re)call itself, again and again and again, as and into a violent yet illusory whole, populated by and assuming itself to be sovereign over numerous but never innumerable individuals with interests. And of course, despite failing to see what's really (un)real, when they tell us to get real, to get a real job and to get on with it, we know what they might be trying to say. As Smith tells it, we must “proceed through” the unreality of the colonised present. We must, however and whenever and wherever we can, live and love anyway, finding and forging ways to survive and navigate this world that (de)values life differently and prioritises the primacy of production over the preservation of the planet, of plurality and play—the risk of death never far in a world afraid of itself. We cannot be naïve about the hard materiality of (the) settlement and the violences it does to us, to ours, to all, nor can we delude ourselves into believing exodus was ever viable, “as if there was a space you could carve out of the terrorizing state apparatus in order to exist outside its clutches and forge some autonomy”.¹⁰³ We can't help being with(in) capitalism or (the) settlement, the university or the hospital or the city—we can't avoid the hold(s) of language and subject, of nation and skin and class and gender.

Escape in this absolute sense, for now, remains impossible, and so to live anyway, not naïve to the brutality of the normative while refusing to acquiesce to it, refusing the snare of recognition while noting its inevitability, is to live appositionally and impossibly, as

¹⁰³ Hartman & Wilderson 2003.

if from and as a kind of internal outside, the irreducible fugitivity of flux and flight as it gives and takes refuge in the under and around and beyond of the unreal of the here and now. Fugitivity is therefore always a movement, in movement, this impossible yet constant “movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure”.¹⁰⁴ Accepting this and insisting on that “fugitive impulse to rely on the undercommons for protection, to rely on the honor, and to insist on the honor of the fugitive community”¹⁰⁵ is to hope against and beyond hope, where the latter is that which is offered in the hold of state recognition, in the hold of an adequately intelligible colonial subjecthood, in the hold, that is, of (the) settlement. Our refusal of that hope is self-preservation, in so far as we understand that the ultimate hope of that hope is total assimilation and integration, which is not but nothing other than the final notes of genocidal conquest. We refuse to leave however also in self-preservation, where what is being preserved is not just us and ours in the here and now but also that fugitive public, the “general inheritance of the shipped, the impossible tradition of those without tradition.”¹⁰⁶ We hope only to find and follow that fugitive public, moving through and around these holds, reaching for and from that sublime otherwise that cuts through “the public and the private, the state and the economy.”¹⁰⁷

The refusal at stake here is therefore also a refusal of the thinking that frames such wild and wide-eyed disavowal as unthinking or unserious, a refusal of that which frames such refusal as inaction or exodus. When what is being refused so often relies on, finds coherence around, is made possible by the fugitivity that is generated in and as that refusal,

¹⁰⁴ Moten Case for Blackness?

¹⁰⁵ Harney & Moten 2013 40.

¹⁰⁶ Harney & Moten 2013 150.

¹⁰⁷ Harney & Moten 2013 61.

and when that refusal is given and taken in and as the appositional movements of “that internal outside, that unassimilated underground”¹⁰⁸ then the question of disengagement falls apart. As Aria Dean puts it, “the black is always already mutually co-constituting capital and subjecthood simultaneously.”¹⁰⁹ It follows then that the state that deems itself an authority to grant us recognition in the form of “an illusory right to what we do not have”¹¹⁰ is itself illusory and permeable, finding coherence only ever when called to regulate away the black plans and fugitive labour of the undercommons. The dichotomous proscription to either reform the state or overthrow it, to restore the university or flee, to save the institutions or burn them down, dissolves into a distraction as we come to see that revolutionary thought and action, which would better be described, if at all, as decolonial thought and action, or as fugitivity in and as decolonial futurity, is always already possible in every place that has been touched by colonality, which is seemingly almost every place, including and perhaps especially ourselves, our own beings and becomings, our own epistemological, ontological, political and other assumptions, the language(s) by which we are able to say or know any of this and the grammar(s) by which such enunciations are able to make any sense at all.

Refusing the world and not the Earth, refusing to acquiesce and refusing to leave—surely this is (im)possible, just the absurd sermons of the pathologically optimistic? To be sure, at stake are certain (im)possibilities at the heart of (the) settlement, the untold and uncontainable, always already existing reality of “fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic.”¹¹¹ We feel and follow this fugitive

¹⁰⁸ Harney & Moten 2013 31.

¹⁰⁹ Dean 2018 ‘Blaccelerationism’.

¹¹⁰ Harney & Moten 2013 18.

¹¹¹ Moten Case for Blackness?

poetics through the undercommons of the here-and-now, its constant and unmediated escape from and unsettling of every imposed order to appear for a moment as something called “social life”, whose “relation to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction nor bare transgression”.¹¹² What is that “fugitive art of social life” that is “practiced on and over the edge of politics” and “beneath its ground” —how does it feel, how does it move? Of course, the point is we already know, that we have always already known, that we practise this every day that we can find and be with each other, every moment that we can remember that there is nothing wrong with us or ours, every night we rest in the embrace of our dreams that are as real as anything.

¹¹² Moten Case for Blackness?

'Cooperation Jackson': Solidarity Economies and Black Self-Determination

Returning to face the machine, which shifts and spreads ceaselessly across the globe, accumulating and disposing (the disposables, which increasingly seems as a category to increase), refusal seems a certain (im)possibility.¹¹³ Not naïve to the enemy, knowing its illusory incoherence, reminded all too often of the hard materiality of its unreal impositions, the decolonial insurgent refuses capitalism in service of a memory of something else, refusing to forget the (im)possibility of autonomous and shared living—refusing to forget, that is, what remains evident everywhere around them, the irrepressible interconnectivity and cooperation that remains both before and beyond (always under and around) enclosure (eternally as its condition of possibility, as that which enclosure follows to (fail to) enclose). Illusive though the enemy might be, it persists with force and fabrications of fatalism, false desires and fake stories that for some reason won't fade away, foreclosing the future for those who thought they saw it first, frozen forever in the hold(s) of the here-and-now, the flat and frenzied fever-dream of neoliberal techno-capital. Refusing capitalism and the coerced and cursed containment it carries over all, the dominance it assumes over seemingly every facet of life and living, the commodification and territorialisation of all things it brings relentlessly—seems indeed to require more or less a step away (and towards) the world as we (un)know it. No wonder (for) the West, as the critical histories

¹¹³ Mbembe 2017: "The potential fusion of capitalism and animism presents a further implication: the very distinct possibility that human beings will be transformed into animate things made up of coded digital data. Across early capitalism, the term "Black" referred only to the condition imposed on peoples of African origin (different forms of depredation, dispossession of all power of self-determination, and, most of all, dispossession of the future and of time, the two matrices of the possible). Now, for the first time in human history, the term "Black" has been generalized. This new fungibility, this solubility, institutionalized as a new norm of existence and expanded to the entire planet, is what I call the *Becoming Black of the world*."

articulated at the outset assert irrefutably: no wonder. Denying before all else (the all but lost wonders of) his own insurgent and imaginative interiority, Modernity's weary Man wandered out (from itself), emerging from Europe's Dark Ages on an awakening predicated primarily upon consumptive constructions of whiteness and purity, on virulent ideologies of fungibility and flesh—that is, on anti-blackness—that came before and variously found their ways into Marx's early and magisterial but nonetheless narrowly-conceived theorisations of capital, accumulation, labour and exploitation.

Put differently: if decolonisation remains our horizon, it is insufficient to refuse capitalism only to affirm communism, leaving untouched and unthought the hold(s) by which Marx was held, those by which our inherited Marxisms continue to hold even the idea of communal or shared living at all. Marx got a lot right, but he didn't discover the idea of collectivism. Held by modernity, historical materialism, the universalist assumptions of bourgeois Europe, and the dream for better, Marx remains one of the most incisive observers of capital. His ideas have found widespread articulation, inspiring and overlapping with the freedom struggles of 'colonised' and 'oppressed' peoples around the world. However, his theories remain incomplete—worse, the exclusions at the heart of Marxism remain invisible, the unthought spectre of the Black (slave), the primitive accumulation of slavery that had kicked off years before the first capitalist.¹¹⁴

Forged through decades of radical Black organising and class struggle in the Deep South, the Jackson-Kush Plan follows innumerable forerunners and forebears “from the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM) in particular and the BLM [Black Liberation

¹¹⁴ Wilderson 2003 unsettles the canonical 'left' works of Gramsci and Marx via the black/slave, “vital to civil society's political economy: s/he kick-starts capital at its genesis and rescues it from its over-accumulation crisis at its end... Civil society's subaltern, the worker, is coded as waged, and wages are white. But marxism has no account of this phenomenal birth and life-saving role played by the black subject”; see also Robinson 2000.

Movement] in general”.¹¹⁵ The self-determined and collective efforts of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) were central in instigating the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund in the face of total government neglect and indifference to the (predominantly Black) death and loss following Hurricane Katrina.¹¹⁶ The insurgent invention of the Jackson Human Rights Coalition in the 1980s¹¹⁷ was similarly pivotal in organising against police terror, white segregationist politics, and the other violent signs of the “the plantation bloc’s restoration” in the contemporary South.¹¹⁸ Reflecting on Cooperation Jackson, the solidarity economy component of the plan, co-founder and co-director Kali Akuno references “eclectic sources of inspiration—Mondragon worker cooperatives in Spain, Zapatistas, cooperatives in the South going back 200 years in the Black community, projects in the early days of Tanzania, Algeria, Guyana.”¹¹⁹ The People’s Assembly, the model of democratic social organization at the heart of the plan, follows its roots “from the spiritual or prayer circles” of “enslaved Afrikans”, who (dis)organised in stealth to sustain and find each other and themselves, (de)forming community and resistance from the brutal (im)possibilities of the hold, an irruptive and eruptive refusal that evidently resonates today in the dreams and designs of Jackson’s Black, working, and poor communities.¹²⁰

The deep and dark cuts of such broad (an)origins—which to be clear, even staying within the Black South, predates the birth of Karl Marx—gives the Jackson-Kush Plan not only its vision, but the vision also to recognise that in order to achieve that dream of self-determining, radically democratic, autonomous living that moved Marx and Malcolm alike, a “critical break with capitalism” would be essential but insufficient without “the dismantling

¹¹⁵ Akuno 2013.

¹¹⁶ Katrina .

¹¹⁷ Jackson HRC .

¹¹⁸ Clyde 1998 x.

¹¹⁹ Akuno and Day 2017.

¹²⁰ Akuno 2013.

of the American settler colonial project".¹²¹ This is not simply to reorient our political and ethical focus, although indeed this is often necessary; rather, it is the Jackson-Kush Plan's explicit (ap)position with(in) and against the "American settler colonial project" that is of most significance (to their organising, to this thesis, to all of us). The plan's historical (and ecological and spiritual) scope and all the struggles and memories and traditions that it holds and is held by is key to its visionary, unsettled and unsettling demands as it affords to the communities and individuals working from or towards the plan the fugitive standpoint (of no and every standpoint).¹²² In other words, in recognising the illegitimacy and illusion of (the) settlement, the Jackson-Kush Plan discloses the (im)possibilities that eternally remain internal, under and around the hold(s) of (the) settlement, gesturing from and towards the ruptures in (the past that fracture) the here-and-now, suppressed socialities and runaway dreams of communal living that continue to pierce the present with splinters of hope and (im)possibility, (in)complete plans of productive fugitivity and fugitive productivity.

Self-described as a "vehicle for sustainable community development, economic democracy, and community ownership",¹²³ Cooperation Jackson emerged in 2013 from the vision(s) of the Jackson-Kush Plan to develop a (re)generative solidarity network in Jackson, Mississippi (and everywhere else) across and through four interconnected and interdependent institutions: a federation of local green worker cooperatives and mutual aid networks, a cooperative incubator and sustainable development centre, a communal school

¹²¹ Akuno 2013.

¹²² Robinson 2000 121: "Marx had not realised fully that the cargoes of laborers also contained African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality... African labour brought the past with it, a past that had produced it... the embryo of the demon that would be visited on the whole enterprise of primitive accumulation", forming the ground of slave refusal/revolt.

¹²³ Cooperation Jackson 2017.

and training facility, and a community-owned and controlled bank. The cooperative is maintained democratically through a People's Assembly, a model of participatory self-governance and Black (and brown and poor) self-determination, organised without hierarchies via democratically determined agendas and working bodies.¹²⁴ Linking with already existing regional and national solidarity economy networks (like the Southern Grassroots Economics Project and the US Solidarity Economy Network), and drawing on a wealth of theory and praxis elaborated in struggle through the 1980s and 90s in Latin America, Cooperation Jackson works for (and through and with) the multiplication of solidarity networks of mutually reinforcing cooperative initiatives. It seeks “a regenerative economy.... that not only restores and replenishes the resources it extracts from the earth, but aids in the actual restoration of our earth's ecosystems”.¹²⁵ What it might (and indeed in places like Detroit, New York, and Atlanta is already beginning to¹²⁶) look like is a regenerative network of mutually reinforcing yet interdependent and localised eco-villages self-sustaining via community production (of energy, food, life, and so on), enmeshed with urban and regional farms, farmers markets and community land trusts held by and holding communal financing and collective and ecologically-constrained enterprise, eventually evolving an autonomous public sector providing communal health care, transportation, education, housing, and whatever else the people themselves decide they want or need, according to (democratically determined and ecologically constrained) ability and need—elaborating and embodying an unsettling, dynamic, “all-embracing and class-oriented” model of community and worker unionism, centring the need to “build genuine worker

¹²⁴ Akuno 2017.

¹²⁵ Akuno 2017.

¹²⁶ Examples

power from the ground up... as the core transformative force to democratize the local economy and society”.¹²⁷

Not afraid to push the vision to its (im)possible limits,¹²⁸ Cooperation Jackson has already started towards what Akuno describes as “a critical initiative to own and control the means of industrial production”, which are increasingly represented by digital and automated—3D printing, quantum computing, procedural and artificially-intelligent—production technologies that are distributed and decentralised yet collectively and democratically owned and operated by “members of geographically and/or intentionally defined communities”.¹²⁹ These ideas—described broadly as Community Production—serve as the foundation for Cooperation Jackson’s ultimate campaign to transform Jackson into “an innovative hub of sustainable manufacturing and fabrication”, a kind of model “city of the future”¹³⁰ guided by “zero-emission and zero-waste”¹³¹ principles, a ‘Transition City’ anchored by not only cooperative ‘fab(rication) labs’—able to produce “build-to-order, high quality, high volume 3D-printed products... from toys to medical aids and tools” as well as serving “essential production needs”¹³² of the community such as green housing or other services—but also an education division to train local workers and community members in distributed fabrication, open-source design and coding, and sustainable development. This is all guided by a commitment to democratising technology in general but particularly those

¹²⁷ Akuno 2017.

¹²⁸ Akuno 2017.

¹²⁹ Akuno 2017.

¹³⁰ Cooperation Jackson Community Production Initiative 2017.

¹³¹ Akuno 2017.

¹³² Akuno 2017.

technologies that increasingly constitute means of production, (pre)figuring such collective and visionary efforts as “a prelude towards the democratic transition to eco-socialism.”¹³³

Indeed, this might sound like the communist dream, but it remains a dream, an impressive but nonetheless impotent economic plan of reform so long as we remain held “within a capitalist framework of social production governed by a bourgeois social order”.¹³⁴ Cooperation Jackson therefore recognises the strategic necessity of what they call ‘dual power’, differentiating between autonomous power—the collective efforts of building solidarity power “outside of the state” primarily through People’s Assemblies and Solidarity Economies—but also strategic and fugitive engagements with “electoral politics on a limited scale” in refusal of its legitimacy and with the goal of subverting its logics and social relations, diluting its strength, and containing “the dictatorial power and ideological influence of monopoly capital”.¹³⁵ In ‘dual power’ we see an unsettling and unsettled site of contradictory and compromising movements, a fracture in the walls and halls of the state, through and from which fugitivity flows, under and around the hold(s) of the here-and-now, moving to and for a different kind of beat altogether.

Cooperation Jackson are certainly awake to not only the changes and challenges that characterise the contemporary moment—the dominance of the tech giants and their unholy union with the state and the police, their violent and impersonal imposition into every inch of our lives—but also the fugitive potentials that such technologies disclose, revealing contradictions that appear on the surface like splinters to be exploited and exploded. In its unsettling embrace of what might be called ‘fugitive development’, given and taken in their wild and wide-eyed plans for a future city amid a regenerative network of productive and

¹³³ Akuno 2017.

¹³⁴ Akuno 2013.

¹³⁵ Akuno 2013; see also Akuno 2014.

cooperative local enterprises, Cooperation Jackson refuses capitalism as it unsettles it from within, from underneath and around and beyond, strategically leaning in to the language and (il)logics of the enterprising ‘developer’, however for goals explicitly opposed (and apposed) to those of neoliberal extractive capitalism. By assuming this unsettling (ap)position of the fugitive entrepreneur, the forerunners of the Jackson Kush Plan recognised not only the productive potential of the working class population, but also the ‘untapped’ industries and interests in and through which they hoped to thrive. In the face of the economic, industrial, and infrastructural neglect that characterises many cities of the Deep South, Cooperation Jackson instead sees this as opportunity, the “relatively sparse concentration of capital in Mississippi” affording a degree of “breathing room on the margins and within the cracks of the capitalist system”, in which a radical and visionary project of self-determination for Black and working-class people might manoeuvre, experiment, and thrive, building upon “a tremendous degree of pent up social demand waiting to be fulfilled”.¹³⁶ The potential of ‘green energy’ and sustainable development is similarly viewed, identified as an opportunity to “get ahead of the curve” amid an increasing awareness of the viability of renewables.¹³⁷ The explosions of the Internet and the digital era more generally revealed certain (im)possibilities of connection and communication with(in) the hold(s) of the here-and-now, the contradiction of feeling so alienated in a world so connected, bringing fugitive communities together across distances previously unimaginable—but the progression of (capital and its) technology notably also reveals, as it did to Marx so many years ago, the very real possibility of working less, of working differently, of working not at all or for or with or as something else entirely, “making a

¹³⁶ Akuno 2017.

¹³⁷ Akuno 2017.

dramatic new orientation to work and labor possible”.¹³⁸ These are the contradictions identified by Cooperation Jackson that they work to exploit, unsettling the circuits of capital from within and against the hold(s) of (the) settlement, guided by a commitment first and foremost to “regenerating the bounty of life on our planet, in all its diversity” but yet nonetheless welcoming “non-extractive, patient capital to move on many fronts”,¹³⁹ such as by investing in the future of cooperative, ecologically-constrained solidarity initiatives. This suggests the emergence of potentially unusual alliances and contradictory movements, navigated strategically and dynamically with a view towards the decolonial horizon, unsettling any coalitional interaction or exchange it moves with—the invocation of ‘patient capital’, for example, suggests an interesting refusal and reconfiguration of taken-for-granted ideas about the role, value, and meaning of capital.

¹³⁸ Akuno 2017; see also Weeks 2011.

¹³⁹ Akuno 2017.

'Open Source Gender':

Hacking the Human (For) and (From) the Trans Sublime

The fugitivity of queer and trans reality has refused and unsettled the imposed and illusory heteronormative reproductive regime of colonial modernity since before Europe even became Europe.¹⁴⁰ Innumerable peoples around the world before (and after) colonisation recognised and celebrated genders other than 'male/female', while many others didn't have a 'gender system' at all or lived and understood 'gender' in ways that can't be contained by our (or any) received grammars—countless continue to do so everywhere, eroding away at the inflicted incoherence that is Man's normativity.¹⁴¹ Much can also be said about the weaponization of this binary in the context of the burgeoning empires of modernity as well as the many historical and ongoing sites of struggle and celebration that coalesce around notions of gendered being or becoming,¹⁴² suggesting fugitive sites and (de)formations of strategic essentialism.¹⁴³ In any case, before and beyond all this, trans reality—the a priori indeterminacy and fluidity of all life that it reveals and affirms and that reveals and affirms it—refuses neat and total categorisation into any label or acronym, instead gesturing towards, from and as the uncontainable and "unimaginable infinitude precipitated by transgender proliferative excess",¹⁴⁴ unsettling any assumption of a heteronormative and/or deterministic gender order, which appears suddenly as the insufficient auxiliary it always was, following and failing to frame the enraptured eruption

¹⁴⁰ See C. Riley Snorton 2017 for a critical history of blackness and transness—rather, a "set of political propositions, theories of history, and writerly experiments" organized around "occasions for bringing both signs— blackness and transness—into the same frame".

¹⁴¹ Pre colonial gender

¹⁴² Witch Frederici, see Lloyd 2005 13-53.

¹⁴³ This is Spivak's formulation, as elaborated by Lloyd 2005 55-71.

¹⁴⁴ Singer 2011.

of representational failure, the excessive and proliferative rupture(s) that fugitively (dis)appears in and as the “trans sublime”,¹⁴⁵ splintering the here-and-now of the Man and his modern world order.

Refusing to forget the boundless sublimity of trans being and becoming that pre-dates and precipitates the colonial (im)position of gendered subjectivity, and recognising therefore the ever-present (im)possibility of escape, trans and queer artists, workers, stoners, hackers, planners, activists, dreamers and scholars continue to find and forge(t), follow and (de)form fugitive ways through and beyond the hold(s) of the here-and-now, of the institution(s) and language and representation, unsettling them from within and around and moving always for and from the preservation of uncontained, uncontainable life. What this means or looks like for those whose realities are strained against by the unreal of the normative, who feel the brutality of cisheteropatriarchy straining against them and what they know to be real and right, is a question with innumerable answers, each inevitably inflected by the many intersections of race, language, class, family, religion, ability, and so on, that are held by and that hold the context in question. The plurality of gendered (or otherwise) ways of being and becoming also make these generalisations appear clumsy and incomplete, and this is always to be expected. These holds that we call order, language, theory, will always be playing catch-up—and so the acronym grows.

One possible question that departs from and is made possible by this queer and trans refusal, that moves and imagines (for, from, as) the life and vitality generated by the proliferative and transformative, uncontainable and unsettling excess of trans sublimity, is the question that begins and fames the collaborative and interdisciplinary research

¹⁴⁵ Singer 2011.

project—the fugitive plans, the queer, black, trans study—of Open Source Oestrogen: *What if it was possible to make estrogen in the kitchen?*¹⁴⁶ The assumed totality of the biomedical-industrial complex and the colonial and colonising narratives of biological essentialism, cisheteronormativity, and scientific mastery that sustain it and that it sustains might make such a question seem unthinkable. Even many who recognise or celebrate or even embody trans or queer reality might hesitate at the idea of anyone, regardless of identity or whatever, attempting to synthesise biochemical products ‘in the kitchen’.¹⁴⁷ At stake are the ‘black-boxes’ of scientific (bio/necropolitical) knowledge and of hormonal and biological (re)production and their most precious and powerful of “politically assisted procreation [technologies]”,¹⁴⁸ that being cisheterosexuality and its co-constituting (binary) imaginaries of (once) pristine and impermeable (white) bodies—which must yet be remembered as the imposed (dis)order emerging from and against the a priori reality and vitality of (gender)fluid indeterminacy.

Refusing all of this (that was refused to them), gender hackers and queer projects like Open Source Oestrogen and Open Source Gender Codes¹⁴⁹ embrace the always already existing “toxicity” of the here-and-now, resonating with Donna Haraway’s 1990 refusal of the human in way of the cyborg¹⁵⁰, taken and given in (to) the untold and ever present (im)possibilities of queer and trans being and becoming amid a “queering landscape... [and] an increasingly alien world”. In their recognition of bodies as media(ted), mutable, and unstable—in their refusal, that is, of the colonial (and colonised and colonising) figure of Man grafted to the flesh of the body, straining endlessly to contain it—trans hackers, queer

¹⁴⁶ Tsang 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Pushback?

¹⁴⁸ Preciado 2013 47.

¹⁴⁹ Paul 2015; Open Source Gendercodes 2016; Hammond and Pivnik 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Haraway 1985.

dreamers and gender insurgents of all or no inclinations disclose the incoherence of (eco)heteronormativity to reveal its many violent materialities.¹⁵¹ The 'black box' of the body itself is exploded open and unsettled to reveal its excess, its incoherence and messiness, its irreducible (fugitive, trans, black) refusal to be a single being.¹⁵² This similarly reveals the colonial, modern-scientific, technological, and bio/necropolitical structures and agendas that continually "regulate and pollute" our bodies and the bodies of nonhuman species and the Earth more generally, disturbing attempts to discipline the disorderly and disturbed. It is however (im)precisely this always already existing disturbance and the fugitive and generative ways that it disturbs us and all that remains the condition of possibility for any (gender) expression or representation, and so in celebration of the disturbed and in preservation of our mutual disturbance we refuse shame for "toxic embrace" of all that we are, have been, are yet to be and forever will be.¹⁵³ Elaborating the molecular sense-making of semiosis, the inherent malleability and plasticity of the body invites autopoietic interactions with "a queering landscape, because adapting, not barricading, is how it [the unstable body] builds resilience for a toxic future".¹⁵⁴

To be clear, the promise of affordable and accessible hormonal products delivered via distributed networks of open source design and production is of most significance to the many for whom these products signify safety and wellbeing, for the many whose multiplicitous realities and lives are trailed by the forceful imposition of the normative. Access to hormone replacement therapy in the form of hormonal supplements or blockers is often limited, expensive, and behind long waiting times.¹⁵⁵ Such exclusions are imposed

¹⁵¹ Hormonal environmental toxicity.

¹⁵² Moten 2018.

¹⁵³ Tsang 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Tsang 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Necati 2018; Metastasio et al. 2018; Rotondi et al. 2013.

alongside the exerted incursion of modern science and its coercive classification and accounting (of genders, bodies, life(s) of all kinds), the medical industrial complex emerging as overseer, evolving into and enmeshing with the contemporary convergence (amid what some call the “pharmacopornographic era”¹⁵⁶) of the psychiatric-carceral-industrial-complex, biopolitically and necropolitically regulating, infecting and surveilling every body it encloses, each relegated to a position of differential proximity to (the risk of) death and disposability. This is all to say that the bio/necropolitical (re)production of the figure of Man and his co-constituting codes of (eco)heteronormativity—like (the) settlement in general—requires continual work and maintenance, persistent policing of its (im)position, patrolling uncertain borders to protect an illusory sense of self as whole, a reactionary violence of self-renovation at the expense of an elusive excess. Man, at base, relies on the basest of senses, prioritising grasp if not his gaze; and so, out of reach, that which most confounds his viciously narrow and violent view is, as it were, the most visible, threatening in its vital and fugitive excess—which he moves with urgency to extinguish to settle himself once more.

In other words: there is no time to be naïve—and certainly then such terrible and totalising terms must be refused. Recognising this, the question that opens Open Source Estrogen asks about much more than the fugitive production of hormonal products. What if it was possible to make subjectivity in the kitchen? What if it was possible to make life-saving medicine in the kitchen? What if it was possible to study and care (for and with), preserve and create (our lives, our beings and becomings) in the kitchen? Given (to) such unsettling and unsettled, (trans)generative questions, the fugitive potential in distributed technologies of self-care and self-making—black and toxic technologies of hacking (away)

¹⁵⁶ Preciado 2013.

the self—unseats the imposed order that prohibits the care and communication it can not contain, the always already common underground of fugitive care, queer love and trans life. Elaborating a tradition of “biotechnical civil disobedience” routed through the fugitive potentials of crowdfunding and speculative design, distributed and decentralised in the spirit of free software and ‘kitchen’/‘workshop’ amateurism, the vision of distributed networks of care cuts through that which ceaselessly circumscribes our study, our attempts to see ourselves and each other as we could (and do), to dream and design and make plans to preserve the life and vitality that we hold and that holds us. By “gaining access to and appropriating tools of science for queer agendas”,¹⁵⁷ stealing and sharing (as it was always already all of ours anyway) the technical knowledge and material resources to produce biochemical products of all kinds, such insurgent initiatives signal an ongoing preservation and planning within and against the hold(s) of the institution, from the hospital to the university, the lab to the library, following the fugitive queer public, the black (trans)generativity from and through which emerges the messiness of our mutual and queer, toxic, trans futurity.

¹⁵⁷ Open Source Gendercodes 2016.

‘Country Needs People’: Indigenous Rangers and Refusing (the) Settlement

As recognised and remembered by Moreton-Robinson, Smith, and so many others, Indigenous Sovereignty remains, escaping its naming, living in and through the “presence of Indigenous people and their land”, eternally unsettling and “haunting the house that Jack built”.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the settlers built not only their homes but also their schools and churches on grounds they fatally (mis)understood—grounds on which they claimed to see nothing, failing therefore to see just about everything—sealing the fate of their endless (un)settlement. For what they failed to see—and what was perhaps impossible for them to see given how they saw (and continue to see)—was (and continues to be) the complex, interrelating, (im)materially-embedded vitality of Country, the deep, ecological, spiritual and cultural network of relations that the land holds and by which the land is held, holding all of us and everything, every life and other thing, giving the lie to the colony and to all categories of this kind.¹⁵⁹ In attempting to settle all of this *empty land*, the settler is endlessly and inescapably unsettled, ontologically disturbed by the omnipresence of Indigenous Sovereignty,¹⁶⁰ which eternally remains despite the settler’s serial efforts of settlement, the persistence of his (im)position that strains to name and contain the uncontainable in order to say something about himself—that is to say that Indigenous Sovereignty remains the condition of (im)possibility for (the) settlement, refusing (the)

¹⁵⁸ Moreton-Robinson 2015 31.

¹⁵⁹ Deborah Bird Rose 2013 100: “[Country is] all sentient, communicative, relational and inter-active... the way you live... the way your knowledge arises and is worked with... the context of life and the emergent result of life being lived... through looped and tangled relationships. Country has a past, a present and a future, it gives and receives life... a matrix of communicative inter-action... there is no outside place of knowledge, and no outside place where one is exempt from participation... an entangled mix of multispecies situatedness.”

¹⁶⁰ Moreton-Robinson 2015 46.

settlement, therefore generating (un)settlement. Always (an)originary, refusal in the view of invasion is a decolonial refusal, taking the form of armed frontier resistance and guerrilla warfare, strategic engagement with colonial politics and culture, protest and petition and performance, art and activism and academia and much else—as Smith notes, refusal of coloniality “is embedded in our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, story telling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history”, emerging from and expressed in “the lived experiences of imperialism and colonialism”.¹⁶¹

‘Indigenous Sovereignty’, or rather that which this name strains to contain, exceeds any such representation, gesturing to and from and as a decolonial and decolonising fugitivity that eternally remains under and around every demand made from a compromised, colonised, (im)possible (im)position. The demand for Indigenous Sovereignty is, in other words, something of the sound of a decolonial and decolonising demand made from within (and around and under and beyond) the hold(s) of (the) settlement. Revealing the (im)possibilities of (de)colonisation, First Nations people refused (the) settlement, the white lie of terra nullius that proclaimed their non-existence, then ongoing generations of policy and practice circumscribing their incapacity for ownership or anything—refusing to forget themselves and something quite otherwise to what the white man thought (he saw) and thinks (he owns), refusing to forget responsibility and relation and the tens of thousands of years of knowledges, stories, and practices by which they knew this, by which they claim Sovereignty and by which Sovereignty claims them. This refusal, then and now, given and taken in celebration and preservation, in strategy and struggle, moves through and under and around every circuit of (the) settlement, in places that might

¹⁶¹ Smith 2012 20.

at first appear strange, such as in the government-funded, economically-oriented Indigenous Ranger programs.

Emerging in 2007 through the now defunct Working on Country Program alongside the older Indigenous Protected Areas federal funding framework, Indigenous ranger programs are ‘officially’ mandated to “create meaningful employment, training and career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in land and sea management... [support] Indigenous people to combine traditional knowledge with conservation training... [and develop] partnerships with research, education, philanthropic and commercial organisations to share skills and knowledge, engage with schools, and generate additional income and jobs in the environmental, biosecurity, heritage and other sectors.”¹⁶² The overwhelming preoccupation with having a steady and respectable occupation in the context of global neoliberal capital infects what otherwise might sound like an okay idea. The highly compromised nature of the situation is reflected in the government’s official 2014-15 report on “How Indigenous Ranger and Indigenous Protected Areas programmes are working on country”, which continues to grant primacy to technical and economic outcomes, not failing to maintain the colonial and capitalist myth that country is something to be ‘worked on’ and ‘managed’ (something wild to be tamed/made productive). The foreword of the report—written by Minister of Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, whose commitment to the wellbeing of Indigenous communities remains to be seen¹⁶³—concludes by praising the programmes, “which strike a balance between providing jobs for Indigenous people, environmental management and opportunities for commercial development”.¹⁶⁴ In the context of ongoing colonisation and dispossession, appropriation and commodification

¹⁶² Working on Country 2017.

¹⁶³ See Hunter 2016 and Hutchens 2018.

¹⁶⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2016.

of traditional knowledges and practices, privatisation and patenting of genetic and other natural resources, and much else of concern to the health and wellbeing of First Nations people (and all of us)—there are certainly many reasons to be suspicious.

Framed instead as “a contemporary expression of the unbroken and ancient connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to this continent”,¹⁶⁵ the programs seem also to suggest certain (im)possibilities within “the house that Jack built”,¹⁶⁶ (im)possible splinters through which we might find and follow Sovereignty (and its fugitive excess) as it moves (through) the here-and-now. This description is given by the non-profit, non-partisan campaign ‘Country Needs People’—a name that puts Country first while recognising the vitality of its People, reversing and unsettling the official frame of ‘Working on Country’. By centring the richness of First Nations “traditional knowledge” and the primacy and generativity of “connection to country”, while not dismissing the technologies and “techniques of modern science”, Country Needs People recognises first and foremost that Indigenous rangers “represent the frontline of much of the necessary work to protect nature across Australia”, citing as successes “the protection of biodiversity across vast areas of Australia, turning around damaging trends in habitat degradation and species decline... preventing wildlife extinctions, controlling wildfire and limiting the impact of feral animals and invasive weeds”.¹⁶⁷ Individual case studies are diverse and span the continent, each responding to the unique challenges and opportunities of its local context by “providing locally skilled teams of workers able to both remediate and prevent specific environmental threats”. From the KJ Martu Rangers restoring the health and biodiversity of the western deserts by combining sophisticated mosaic burning techniques developed over thousands

¹⁶⁵ Country Needs People 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Moreton-Robinson 2015 31.

¹⁶⁷ O’Leary et al 2017.

of years with contemporary mapping and planning technologies like satellite imaging and aerial ignition, to the Warddeken Daluk Rangers preserving and maintaining significant cultural sites, working with the next generation to share and celebrate culture through song and ceremony as well as motion sensor cameras and specifically designed databases—each program moves relatively autonomously and independently, always “with consent, support and active leadership of their local communities and senior Traditional Owners” and therefore maintaining an unbroken line of Sovereignty. The programs emerged after all through initiatives by Indigenous landholders in the 1980s to “re-establish themselves as owners and managers of their traditional estates”.¹⁶⁸ As the nation claims the ‘world-leading’ status and success of these programs, we ought never to forget where the real work is (and has always been) happening.

The contextually-situated nature of these cases and their sensitivity to local environments and communities, as well as the consequent ‘success’ of such strategies, all speak to (and from and with) traditional knowledges that have been developed over tens of thousands of years of evolving practice in and with local environments. This knowledge is always contextual, spatially and temporally dynamic, interwoven and inseparable with traditions of song and story that recognise the primacy of the land and the complex web of interrelations that it holds and by which it is held, and so it is also the knowledge that is centred and celebrated, inherited and maintained, through the work of Indigenous Rangers. As Sovereignty moves (through, under and around) the work of Country Needs People however, with(in) the compromised (im)position of modernity and (the) settlement and its federally-funded and monitored programs of conservationist enclosure, potentially unfamiliar and unsettling situations are engendered, (de)formed and (dis)figured. Not

¹⁶⁸ O’Leary et al 2017.

forgetting the (an)originary, generative primacy of Indigenous Sovereignty demands first and foremost the rejection of any attempt to contain it, which means among many things the rejection of its relegation to a pristine, 'natural', 'pre-modern' past. While the specific materiality of the contemporary unreal of capital is by several measures more intensely and forcefully destructive than much if not all else the Earth has seen, it nonetheless pales into insignificance against the (historical, ecological, spiritual) continuity of Indigenous Sovereignty—which is also to recognise that First Nations peoples have been managing and manipulating the environment for tens of thousands of years through spiritual and cultural constellations of knowledges-as-stories-as-technologies-as-becomings. To recognise and depart from this reality is not to reposition or re-essentialise First Nations people as belonging to or having some inherent connection to the past and its assumed wildness; on the contrary, this is to recognise the unreality of (the) settlement, which really was and continues to be nothing other than an invasive force, having 'won' by quite literally no other measure than this basest of barbarisms, that being the physical strength of the grasp, the forceful edge of its violence.

Refusing to forget Sovereignty, the inter-relational multi-species entanglement that holds and is held by Country, Country Needs People recognises the social and economic benefits of the Ranger Programs in the context of this broader vision, a dynamic vision towards and from the decolonial horizon that is not naïve to or dismissive of the materiality of the here-and-now, a strategic vision that hasn't forgotten history and so knows what needs to be said and done to secure funding/futurity beyond the hold(s) of the here-and-now. The programs' economic successes—which include high levels of employee retention, increasing demand from Indigenous communities for more ranger positions, and consistent educational and training outcomes—do not preclude the recognition of Indigenous

Sovereignty. What are reported as “spillover benefits”—which include improved health outcomes and behaviours and determinants of health, strengthened family and community relations, improved income security and financial independence, reduced alcohol and substance abuse, reduced crime and incarceration, and therefore reduced government costs from lower expenditure on public services—remind us that nothing is reducible to the individual or to economics, that the past and its legacies are always with us in the here-and-now, and regardless these are all still successes worth celebrating. The programs, representing a “contemporary story of opportunity and hope based on practical outcomes and alleviation of economic and social disadvantage”, indeed seem to be successful “where many other approaches have failed”, but the reasons for this are crucial: provision of meaningful and flexible employment, focus on cultural heritage and environment, and Indigenous ownership and leadership.¹⁶⁹

The challenge is therefore always to remember, to refuse to forget, the historical and ongoing imposition of that “economic and social disadvantage” that the Rangers’ work alleviates, a forgetting that fails to fully articulate in the work of the Rangers but nonetheless trails them in the hold(s) of representation and (the) settlement, in the policies and institutions through which their work is channelled. In the documentation from both *Country Needs People* and *Working On Country*, there is no such acknowledgement of the ongoing legacies of colonisation and why seemingly so many Indigenous people struggle to find meaningful employment or education—but comparing this absence in each example might suggest a trace of fugitivity, a strategic absence in the former example, awake to its compromised (ap)position as it moves so near the institutions of colonial governance and capture, indeed relying directly on its funding and consent, perhaps choosing to stay quiet

¹⁶⁹ Bueren et al 2015.

on the revolutionary rhetoric and deferring to the longer game of fugitive preservation and refusal, throwing and finding faith in its excess, in all that which remains uncontainable and so becomes elaborated in the great (ecological/spiritual) debt of Indigenous Sovereignty. In the latter example of Working on Country, this blind spot might be in service of invoking other colonial relics, like the 'Noble Savage' assumed to hold an inherent affinity with nature, or the presumption that Indigenous people are passive and therefore more prone to being manipulated by political or economic pressure, and the paternalism and distancing that drives these and all racist representations. Similarly problematic is the funding framework itself, which is "based on a competitive, criteria-based assessment"¹⁷⁰ and therefore presupposes something like a free market of exchange in which different claims are made and valued against each other and the nation-state, which is of course interested in itself and its heritage, its natural wonders and world image.

The many positive accounts from Indigenous Rangers suggest these worries might be overexaggerated, and the decentralised and semi-autonomous nature of the programs mean that the stated (economic, technical, normalising) "governmental aims are not neatly transposed". In any case, such "contradictions", "unstable relations" and "unusual alliances" constitute much of what Indigenous scholar Martin Nakata has called the 'cultural interface', and as Jon Altman writes of his long friendships and anthropological work with the Kuninjku People, "living in an [IPA] is not as straightforward as some might think or idealise; it is a form of being that is riven with contradictions, tensions, political conflicts and difficult decisions."

¹⁷⁰ Bueren et al 2015.

Follow(ing) the Fugitive Public (Forever)

And so, it seems, the fugitive public moves through the hold(s) of the here-and-now as an open secret that is always already ours, (dis)appearing momentarily in and as these acts of refusal. Such movements, noises, imaginings, plans and dreams escape confinement or description, existing in the underground and outer space of the institution, unsettling its foundations and borders. The call to order, that call to an order that never seems able to fully cohere, nonetheless recognises fugitivity, indeed is only made possible by its (mis)recognition of the fugitivity that moves through and around it. They recognise each other but in a way that doesn't map out dialectically. Order follows fugitivity around like its awkward and incomplete shadow, forever failing to fully cover its tracks. All of its assumptions of order wouldn't (know how to) exist otherwise. Wherever we find or feel the hold, we also always (fail to) find fugitivity, always already a step ahead, unsettling and staying forever fugitive to even the fugitive.

And what about technology, the raw materials of the here-and-now? What might other technologies of refusal look or feel like? How can other existing technologies be strategically engaged, hacked and unsettled in service of the decolonial horizon? What madnnesses are invoked, what flights of fantasy and prophetic projects are hatching in light of this scandal of fugitive innovation and development? If those questions are asking something about the technologies of the undercommons, then what's the undercommons of technology, the wild beneath and beyond that gives form to the (un)real of technique and tech? Techno-utopian fantasies aside, we must still at least consider the potentialities that remain buried in the machines before us.^[aa] What remains fugitive to the machine, in or under the code, before the algorithm, before the archive, before the alpha?

A shared and ongoing commitment to the decolonial horizon, whatever or wherever that might be—this is what must always be remembered. The fugitive landscapes considered here share this commitment to life and living before and beyond the unreality of the here-and-now, beyond and around the mediation of the market and the academy, the hospital and the machine. Refusal is always irreducibly twinned with preservation, where what is being preserved is also always something other than ourselves, a fugitive remainder, an elusive and eternal excess. These fugitive visions and black plans move from and towards and as that life and vitality that was (im)possible then and remains (im)possible now, revealing itself in splinters and sparks of refusal, unsettling (the) settlement. That decolonial horizon is where we always (hope to) walk, where we look for and from, driven by a delirium that delights in disturbing the dignified and disciplined, inevitably yet indifferently disclosing deliverance. This optimism is hope against and beyond hope, cut with the harsh materiality of the unreal, which we will never forget is killing us, even and especially in our mad and wild celebrations of the otherwise.

So the fugitive falls, again and again and again, out of step with history, refusing to be settled, single, steady in space and time, refusing to forget the prayers she learned from everybody. And she won't stop singing, calling us in, dancing the "war of apposition" to the rhythm of that antiphonal, broken, black beat, gesturing from and to and as that non-world of ceaseless rupture and (im)possibility, "the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure". We try only to trace her steps, then and now, here and forever, to follow her into and with that fugitive public, that underground society of friends, the eternal refuge of refusal that is given and taken in the undercommons of the institution, of the modern order, of the brutal, beautiful, black here-and-now.

"Can't you hear them whisper one another's touch?"

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