COLLABORATIVE INCUBATOR

AN ENTRY POINT TO A STORY...

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COLLABORATIVE INCUBATOR: AN ENTRY POINT TO A STORY...

Curated and produced by the **Beyond the Now** collective (in the context of Re-framing Migrants in the European Media), the Collaborative Incubator Toolkit is the result of a long-form conversation in which journalists, digital activists and socially-engaged artists draw on their own experiences of migration and forced displacement to inform their criticisms of the way migration is represented by legacy media.

The European legacy media (television and newspapers) overwhelmingly represent migration as an unresolvable form of emergency, rather than acknowledging, for example, that migration contributes to democratic and open communities and forms an integral part of European history. There is arguably an institutional crisis in the legacy media, connected to the changing ways that audiences consume news and the way that advertising revenue is distributed. This crisis makes the task of reforming media representation a difficult one, although there is important work being done in this area by pioneering journalists.

Significantly, narrative frames used to explain migration in mainstream media frequently fail to investigate the responsibility borne by the wealthiest nation-states for climate change, wealth inequalities created by capitalism, alongside the historic legacies of colonialism, collectively constituting contributory factors shaping patterns of migration. Depictions of migration in the media typically employs stereotypes that are dehumanising, or that disempower or further marginalise migrants who are trying to rebuild their lives while undergoing the most difficult circumstances.

The Collaborative Incubator brings together practitioners and actors, many of whom have lived experiences of migration or are diversely shaped by inter-generational histories of displacement. The goal of the project has been to set up a transdisciplinary dialogue, with the potential to shed light on the ethical, aesthetic and practical questions raised by the dominant representations of migration. It explores how perspectives and practices might be shared in pursuit of new kinds of collaborative storytelling.

However, not all the contributors included in this toolkit focus solely on migration. We were also interested to learn from the investigative method and the skills associated with sustained inquiry and reportage as a way to expand the potential for socially engaged storytelling. To this end, the collaborative incubators documented here comprised provocations, discussions and workshops, opening a space for collective listening and mutual exchange, with the aim of identifying areas of commonality, together with constructive differences between the practice of artists and journalists.

The first two incubators took place online in November and December 2022; the third over three days at Wolf Kino in Berlin, January 2023.

In Berlin practitioners met to shape their thinking toward a series of commissions, which were finally undertaken by four participants following a fieldtrip to Palermo in April 2023.

Why bring socially engaged artists into a collaborative conversation with investigative journalists?

Embracing the concept of a 'pilot' programme and opening a space for experimentation, we began this conversation by positing the notion that socially engaged artists are often agile at accessing spaces, developing relationships and engaging with communities on the ground and at the margins. Artists use a variety of innovative place-based methodologies and skills to nurture participation and cooperation with communities and audiences: these include among others, the process of deep listening; the implementation of visual, oral and performance ethnography; in addition to the use of drama and non-fiction conventions developed through a mix of art forms and media, including social media and digital curation.

We simultaneously posited the notion that investigative journalism uses complimentary methods that are systematic and in-depth, resulting in original research and the reporting/unearthing of information that has been concealed to the public. The journalistic method often pioneers new techniques in its embrace of digital platforms and data. Investigative journalists use public records, social media and data with a focus on social justice and accountability and a form of storytelling characterized by depth and the need for accuracy. Generally, the journalistic method is reliant on primary sources to test hypotheses by way of rigorous fact-checking and verification of sources.

We were interested to juxtapose and unsettle the place-based skills of socially engaged art practitioners with the forensic skills of journalists and the storytelling practices of digital activists - to think and reflect together, to (un)learn practices and ways of working with the aim of collectively imagining the scope for a series of commissions.

The premise of the 'Collaborative Incubator' has been to facilitate experimentation and risk-taking (mixing methodologies and approaches to storytelling), for new creative and political alliances to be formed.

What does Incubator 1, 2 and 3 contain?

As a pilot project, the Collaborative Incubator has been focused on scoping the terrain, to understand where points of intersection and productive difference exist between investigative journalists, digital activists and socially-engaged artists.

Challenges and themes explored here include:

- Ethics of representing migrant experience and addressing trauma in socially-engaged art and in investigative journalism
- Conceptions of storytelling and investigation in journalism and the arts
- Alternative conceptions of truth in journalism and the arts; the role of fiction and drama in exposing social realities
- The role of the legacy media in reproducing amnesia about the social and historical causes of migration in an era of growing environmental crisis
- The relationship between language, images and practices in the representation of migration in the legacy media

A key goal of the Collaborative Incubator has been to move beyond narrowly humanistic stories (often presented as individualistic morality tales) about migrants and community displacement; in so doing, to research, map and communicate a more interconnected, systemic story about displacement - one shaped by multiple points of entry across a complex ecosystem, featuring many actors, places, creative approaches, emotions, structures and sectors.

Our strategy at the outset of each incubator was to invite practitioners to respond to the questions through the prism of their own practice. Each session was

followed by open discussion, integrating different yet complimentary ways of working, exchanging methodologies, evidence, content and different forms of media, including social media and virtual platforms.

1

In **Incubator 1**, we posed a series of questions about different modes of investigative and socially engaged research; what it might mean to work over time with people and place alongside communities together with what is entailed in trauma-based storytelling.

2

In **Incubator 2**, the questions pivoted around history and the politics of reparations, and on ethics and truth-building, linking questions about racial and environmental justice with concepts of the public sphere and the challenge of curating in contested spaces.

As we moved through these incubator conversations we began to gradually build a picture and overall taxonomy of the investigation, capturing methodologies, discrete practices and the potential for diverse models of storytelling.

3

Incubator 3 took place in-person at Wolf Kino, Berlin, with approximately 20 participants feeding into an immersive session. We drew upon the findings formulated in Incubators 1 and 2 via a mix of presentational formats, including thought-pieces, provocations, long-form case studies and workshops - allowing for a range of contributions to help shape the following areas of inquiry:

- Investigative practices and trauma-based storytelling (case studies of mixed methodologies)
- Place-based socially engaged art practice (case studies of situated knowledge and neighbourhoods)
- The relevance of history - European colonialism and migration (reparative perspectives)
- Digital platforms and open source (case studies of current practices)
- Amplifying stories and new digital platforms (case studies of current practices)
- Truth-telling and the crafting of new narratives (sources, verification, and evidence)
- Embedding evaluation as part of the storytelling process
- Archive of mixed practices (who is doing what and where?)

4

Palermo, Plymouth and the Pilot Commissions

The commissioned artists and practitioners chose Palermo as a place to meet and together think through their response to the dialogue from the collaborative incubators.

Situated at the edge of Europe, Palermo has long been a gateway at the crossroads of Africa and Europe and the Middle East. It is a city straddling the 'black Mediterranean' – a term first coined by Italian academic Alessandra Di Maio in 2012 inspired by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993).

As a port city, Palermo is a city transformed by successive waves of migration. Three of the commissions draw inspiration from the immediate historical layers and archaeologies of this place reflecting on what is currently happening (and might happen) in a city where migrant communities are challenging dominant migration narratives, whether via a regeneration of neighbourhoods through a critical mix of community activism or grassroots infrastructure-building culminating in increasingly dynamic practices of urban citizenship.

Taking inspiration from Palermo and re-locating to the port city of Plymouth (UK), one of the commissions chose to unsettle the idea of the archive, using a decolonising montage method, recombining fragments of television news footage as a way to work against the grain of the mainstream narratives of migration.

The four commissions respond to the dialogue from the collaborative incubators in decidedly different ways; what they have in common is they do not envisage that the most productive direction for this form of research and practice is to instruct mainstream media outlets as to how they should alter their representation of migration.

Instead, the four commissions and the conversations that fed into them explore how migration might be understood through alternative narrative frames than those that news media typically deploy. They negotiate and straddle the borders between investigative journalism, socially engaged art and digital activism in a way that is necessarily experimental and speculative, directing us to a form of collaborative storytelling that can imagine and materialise much more 'equitable futures' (Dana Olărescu) in relation to the multi-dimensional human experience of migration.

What is your first instinct when you begin a project – how do you begin to move into a 'story' – how would you describe your way of working (method). Do you draw on 'instinct' or 'research'. How do you move into and orientate yourself to the people and the place where you think the potential storylines or situations lie?

Ismail Einashe
Investigative Methods and Ways of Working

As an investigative journalist, you often work alongside and with communities and people who are vulnerable and in some instances traumatised because of displacement. How does an awareness of human trauma play a conscious part of your method and mode of storytelling?

INCUBATOR

As an investigative journalist, do you think you have anything to learn from and share with methods practiced by socially engaged artists and digital designers and activists?

Dana Olărescu
Place-based, Socially Engaged Artist and Designer

As a socially engaged artist, how do you define the notion of 'place' when working with and alongside people and communities who have been displaced? As an artist working in a socially engaged context and methodology, what is the relevance (or not) of place and 'displacement' in your work?

As a socially engaged artist, do you think you have anything to learn from and share with methods practiced by an investigative journalist or digital designer?


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What is your first instinct when you begin a project – how do you begin to move into a 'story' – how would you describe your way of working (method). Do you draw on 'instinct' or 'research'. How do you move into and orientate yourself to the people and the place where you think the potential storylines or situations lie?

I will start with a story I have recently worked on dealing with the exploitation of migrant farmworkers amid the climate change that has been happening in Sicily, which is the epicentre of Europe's heat waves, where a 48C temperature was recently recorded. In October, I spent several weeks in Palermo, visiting an area in the southwest of the Italian island where they grow a variety of olives called Nocellara del Belice, the lovely plump green ones found in delis and supermarkets everywhere.

The exploitation of migrant farmworkers in Europe is not new. Italy is one of the leading food producers in Europe, for example, responsible for 53% of all tomatoes in Europe. About 500,000 migrants are estimated to work in this industry according to the UN, mainly from Africa, from The Gambia, Senegal, Tunisia and Mali, but also from India, particularly Punjab, and Bangladesh. These workers have contributed to the Italian food system for decades.

As an investigative journalist, I always start with a nugget of information – a lead – but I also think about place. In this story, I needed to convey the experience of migrant workers in Campobello di Maraza, where the olives are grown. My mission is partly to reveal exploitation, but it is also about conveying the experience of migrant workers to people who enjoy the olives they produce. In Campobello di Mazara, olives are usually picked between September and November. Around the farms, there are encampments or informal settlements. They are called ghettos. The one I was reporting from is usually home to several hundred migrants, primarily from Senegal, The Gambia and Tunisia. This place is horrendous. I am now based in East Africa but originally from Somalia. I grew up in the UK and have been in many risky areas, and I can tell you that being in Campobello di Mazara was shocking.

Often when people talk about migration at the periphery of Europe, they will say, 'Can we afford to take them?'. But migrants are key agricultural workers, feeding Europe and providing this olive in Campobello di Maraza, posh and lovely. And most consumers do not know that the olive comes from places of exploitation.

The camps in Campobello di Maraza are spaces of conflict. There are hundreds of migrants, some teenagers, nearly all undocumented. They work from 6 am to 6 pm and earn as little as about two to three euros an hour. Black-market gangmasters recruit them on behalf of the farmers; the gangmaster system is illegal in Italy but is a widespread practice.

Farmers in Campobello di Maraza have cultivated this variety of olives here since ancient times. It's an excellent variety of olives that has to be picked by hand. To get these olives to the table in Amsterdam, or delis in London or Paris, you need lots of people to grow and harvest them: the labour cannot be mechanised easily. So, here in a sense, the exploitation of migrants is part of the logic of the capitalist system of exploitation.

The effects of climate change have worsened the experience of migrant workers in Campobello di Maraza. Migrant farmworkers are working in the scorching sun without sanitation and no access to water or electricity where they live. They work during the hottest part of the day between 12 to 4 pm. In the last seven years, more than ten migrants have died because of heat stroke or fires in informal settlements in Italy. It is by no means easy to draw attention to these stories. As an investigative journalist who is a freelancer, I need to get grants to fund investigative work like this because journalism has little money.

One of the things that I am thinking about with these types of stories is to make the facts come alive. I'm thinking about agency and control and turning a spotlight on dark places, where people are often unaware of what is happening. And one of the things I'm thinking about when I start researching a story is: why now? Answering this question allows me to orient myself in the story, but it also allows me to access funding to tell the story, as well as to convince an editor to publish it. Editors always say: 'These stories are not new'. As I have already said, this is true, every story has been already told somewhere, and migrants have been exploited in Europe for many decades. However, in the case of Campobello di Maraza, it has been essential to tell the story about climate change, which helps editors to see why it is urgent and topical.

I also think about approaching the story like a police detective, as a prosecutor building a hypothesis. So, in the Campobello di Maraza project, we will try to follow the money. We have spoken to some people on the ground. Still, also we need to understand the whole production of the olive, including the intermediaries and the middle companies: basically, the supply chain between Germany and the Netherlands. This side of the work is about social justice and shifting the narratives around migration.

As an investigative journalist, you often work alongside communities and people who are vulnerable and sometimes traumatised by displacement. How does an awareness of human trauma play a conscious part in your method and mode of storytelling?

That is a pretty good question. I think it is crucial to bring a trauma-aware approach to research, storytelling, and the aftermath of the story. This means working with and not on people who are the subject of a story, which is an approach advocated by the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, where I have done much work developing guidance relating to working with people with experience of displacement.

Sadly, it is normal for journalism to be viewed as a way to extract something from somebody. In this journalistic work, I consider the investigation process a collaboration instead of an extraction. During the research, a trauma-aware process is about protecting our sources and protecting ourselves, doing no harm, and giving agency and control to people. One of the ways I do that is by introducing myself as a journalist, saying what I do, and showing people the work I've done in the past. Trust should be earned and not just given. People in places like Campobello di Mazara are living in a challenging situation. Often, they do not know the difference between a journalist and a humanitarian worker. So, it is essential to be clear about who you are and upfront about the limits of what you can do. I often tell people I interview that speaking to me will not improve their situation. Still, it might allow people to understand the experiences of undocumented migrant workers on olive farms.

Trauma-informed journalism must be sensitive to language and terminology. It is essential to avoid metaphors and nature cliches, such as 'swarm', 'flood', and so on. Removing unhelpful language can be difficult because stories always pass through an ecosystem in the journalism industry. An example is the language used to refer to undocumented migrants. I prefer to describe them as irregular migrants, but editors in the British press now commonly describe them as 'illegal' migrants. I always have to argue with editors because to say 'illegal' suggests criminality, which is just wrong: it is a sign of aggressive discrimination. We should not use 'illegal' to describe people on the move. But often, what happens is that after I have sent my copy, I will see the article published, and the word illegal would have crept back in.

This demonstrates so clearly that there exists in the media deep-lying frameworks that shape how migrants and refugees are depicted.

One of the things that I find very difficult is the story's aftermath. People do not usually think about the aftermath. What happens when we do the story? What happens to that community and that individual whose story is told? We're like, what is our responsibility? How do we have closure? These questions take time to answer.

As an investigative journalist, do you think you have anything to learn from and share with methods practised by socially engaged artists and digital designers and activists?

Of course, the big answer is yes. And that is why this process is so important. We can learn a lot from each other.

Number one, it is crucial to think about place: where is the location of the work? Next, artists can learn from what I discussed about consent: what does meaningful consent mean? There is a difference between someone saying, 'Okay, I agree to be interviewed', and somebody truly understanding the consequence of speaking, particularly in countries where freedom of expression is curtailed. And finally, I would be interested to see how artists might engage with tools of investigative journalism, such as testing theories, verifying facts, following a trail, and analysing.

I am also interested in the limits of investigative journalism, where we, as journalists, can learn from artists. In the last few years, I have done work with the acclaimed artist Tania Bruguera. You all know that Counterpoints Arts played a part in Tania's show in the Tate Turbine Hall in 2018. Tania wanted to talk about migration and refugees, but she also wanted to bring investigative journalism into the space of art. This worked well, and we were able to take a more empathic, nuanced and creative approach to migration stories. And often, in the stories that I do, I probably only end up using very little research because I am producing a 900-word, or if I am lucky, maybe a 2,000-word article, from which I then move on. However, there are many ways in which socially engaged artists can collaborate with investigative journalists to try and bring a visual element to some stories and, especially, to use the data left out of news narratives. I have loads of data, reports, and lots of content that can be utilised on my laptop.


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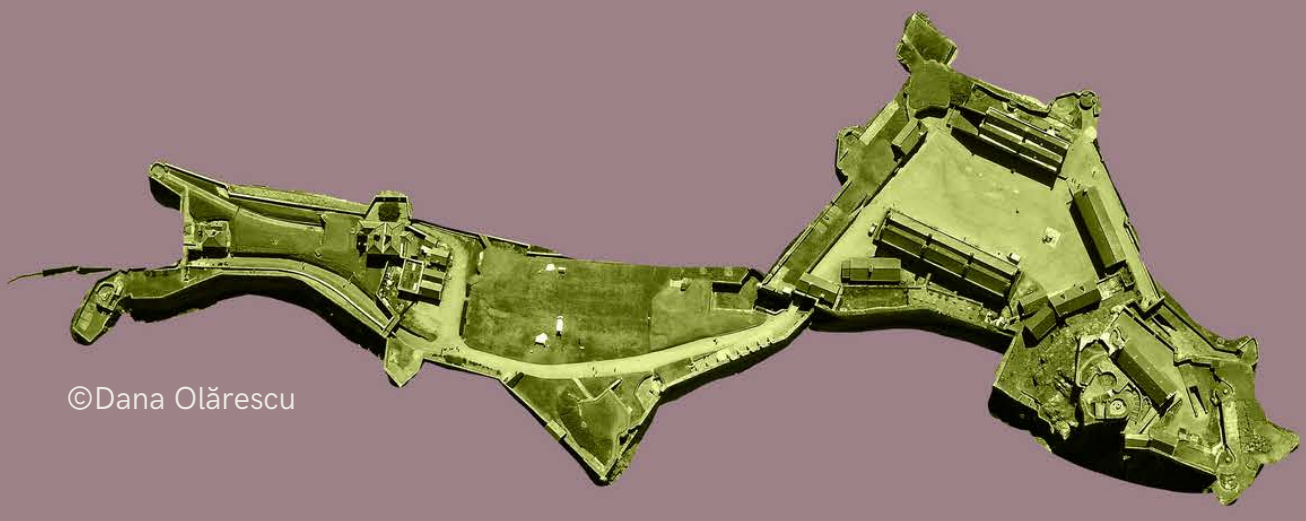
NO BLACKS
NO DOGS
NO IRISH

1960s Britain



PLACE-BASED, SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE AND DESIGN

What is your first instinct when you begin a project – how do you begin to move into a 'story' – how would you describe your way of working (method). Do you draw on 'instinct', or 'research'. How do you move into and orientate yourself to the people and the place where you think the potential storylines or situations lie?

I think there are a lot of parallels between art and investigative journalism already apparent from Ismail's talk. I'm going to start with the first question, but I will preface it by giving a bit of context about my work because I know that not many people know what I do.

I will begin by saying that I moved to the UK in 2009. I am Romanian and in 2011, I co-founded a performance company called There There, with a friend who is Serbian. We decided to create this company in response to the political discourse of that period. Some of you might recall Nigel Farage, the British politician, telling everyone that if they were to move next door to a Romanian family, they would be in deep trouble. In response to this weaponised prejudice, we were interested in reclaiming the meaning of Eastern European-ness in the West. We wanted people to understand what Eastern European-ness means to us. And also, we wanted to support people to become more critical of the harmful stereotypes they were reading in newspapers and the media, about Eastern Europeans, and also about all migrants.

To do this, we developed performances and installations and theatre pieces, mostly collaborating with other Eastern European artists and performers. The reason I am sharing this is because it illustrates why it can be challenging to address the representation of migrants in cultural institutions. Most of our work happened before Brexit. At the time, many representatives of cultural institutions told us they thought our criticisms were perhaps a bit harsh. The general view seemed to be: surely, life in the UK is really not that difficult, especially because you are white? Appearing white does protect someone from encountering some forms of racism, or racialisation. But the fact that whiteness sometimes operates in this way should not be used to downplay the violence instigated by anti-migrant rhetoric directed against Eastern-Europeans, or other minority groups who are targeted by discriminatory media representation. It is important to take lived experience seriously. And so, we became quite tired of having to explain to cultural institutions why it was important for them to think about the experience of migrants. It was also tiring to have to argue that showing a specific piece of work in an arts institution would bring a different demographic; that demographic would most likely bring new perspectives, perhaps challenge preconceptions, and it would also bring new institutional values.

Then Brexit happened. And afterwards, the phone started ringing. Suddenly, cultural institutions realised that we were not just joking about discrimination. The lived experience of migrants in the UK was something else. So, we decided to stop there, because it was just a bit too much. It took us a while to recover from that burnout, from the effects of structural violence.

What I learned then, speaking of instinct and research, was that research had to be the first thing on the table when I was having conversations with cultural institutions about discrimination. If I reported only my own experience, it was easy to deflect. The typical answer was 'you're a bit too sensitive to these microaggressions; just get a sense of humour'. I mention this point because research is now a new religion. Of course, research is important for socially engaged art, but it has to be done carefully. Research is counter-productive where it undermines lived experience. It can put communities in a position where, unless their traumas and exploitation are backed up with evidence, their experience is not taken seriously. When I develop research as part of a project, I am careful to be sensitive to participants' accounts of their experiences. However, verifying that experience doesn't have the same gravity in socially engaged art as it might have in investigative journalism.

One of the aims of socially engaged art is for participants to take ownership of the project. With this goal in mind, I started with the idea that everything needs to come from the people I work with, but over time I changed my thinking. I began to introduce design elements, which provide a structure that allows the project to have a beginning and an endpoint and to give the participants security, relieving some of their anxieties. Beginning with workshops, we start making things, and prototyping. I start fabricating, and I always involve participants in that process. I tell them what we are making, and I get their consent, which is something we always talk about very seriously during the workshops.

When it comes to fabrication, things might be changed a bit as the project develops.

I think it is important that I keep a few elements of surprise because this is an element that attracts people to the launch of a project. An element of surprise brings people to the final event because they want to know what they participated in, but they also like the idea that there's an element of magic. After the work is made, we have a launch or a party, where I always invite people to come in and contribute. They can speak if they want, they can perform, they can show something, they can exhibit. The types of participation are decided in relation to the circumstances of the group, in a particular place. Finally, accountability is an important

concern for every project. I write evaluation pieces and reflections, which are obviously for commissioners, and for participants, but also notes to myself. I want to know what I am learning throughout and how I might incorporate this learning as a form of accountability.

As a socially engaged artist, how do you define the notion of place when working with and alongside people and communities who have been displaced? As an artist working in a socially engaged context and methodology, what is the relevance or not of place and displacement in your work?

To answer this question, I will talk about Arthouse Jersey who invited me in January to work with the Romanian community, which is the third largest migrant community on the island.

If you have over a million pounds, you can easily enter Jersey and have a free run of the island. The situation is quite different if you have to spend five years working in customer service. To control population, Jersey operates a system of registration which restricts the right to live and work on the island according to certain requirements:

- new migrants need permission to work and can only do so in the hospitality or agricultural industries
- five years are necessary to become 'entitled to work' anywhere else
- ten years are required to be able to buy property, or permanently settle on the island.

Portuguese migrants used to come to Jersey in the 1970s, for example, and they were not allowed to live in houses; they had to live in shacks. Women would get deported if they got pregnant. This treatment of Portuguese migrant workers only stopped in 1992 when Portugal entered the EU. So, this history is within living memory and within the second generation of children who now live on the island.

In this project, I learned how amazingly flexible the idea of place can be. For example, I found that Jèrriais, the native language of Jersey, is hardly spoken anymore, but two ten-year-old Romanian girls have won awards for speaking it. It is this kind of understanding of place, and migration, that I was trying to get people to reflect on in this project. This is quite an uplifting story, but there were also more difficult things that I wanted people to acknowledge. I learned, for example, that customer service workers, for the first five or ten years, are not allowed to have children on the island. Now, no law says migrants cannot have children, but if you are a migrant, you can only rent from certain landlords. These landlords have a policy which says, 'no children, no pets'. And for me, this policy echoed

in an unsettling way some of the explicitly racist housing policies around housing that used to exist in Britain up until the 1970s.

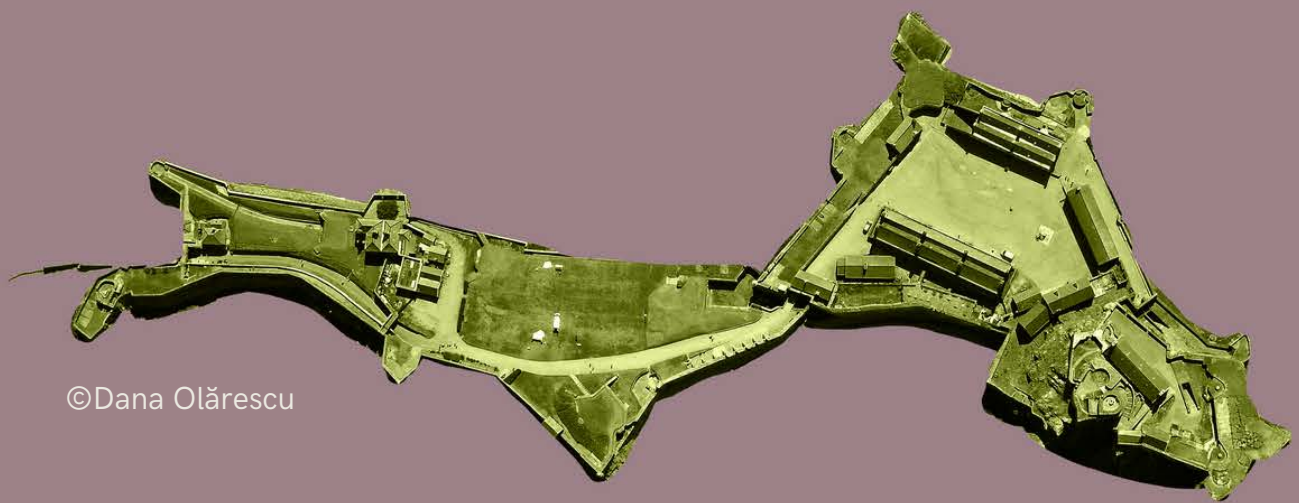
Some of the people I was working with on the island did not want to look at it like that. When you are a guest in a place, you want to be seen as an equal, a strong individual who can easily navigate policies irrespective of their discriminatory nature. And when I displayed a 'No kids, No Pets' poster next to another one saying 'No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish' in the final exhibition, a few local people came to me to say, "You're making us feel incredibly uncomfortable". They did not know what to do with it. My work does not aim to shame people. It simply asks them to sit with discomfort and reflect on the elements of their society that might not be apparent to them. The work reflects on the deep unjust systems that govern our lives irrespective of the places we inhabit. It analyses how certain xenophobic, racist, sexist, homophobic, or ableist institutions, people, or policies affect the health and well-being of people.

As a socially engaged artist, do you think you have anything to learn from and share with methods practiced by an investigative journalist or digital designer?

In answer to the final question, I want to note that independent artists have very little power. If I approached an institution or an organisation with an idea for a project on my own – the idea wouldn't go very far as I'm an independent artist. For this reason, I always collaborate with academics or with larger institutions: for a good idea to be taken seriously, many people must back me up. Having said that, I have been immensely privileged to have worked with incredible individuals from whom I have learned a lot. None of the artworks I have produced so far would have been possible without their contribution and guidance. So, this is one important reason why it might be beneficial for artists to collaborate with investigative journalists. In one project that I worked on with young people who had been displaced, we tried to work with Mark Townsend from the Guardian to expose sexual violence in the hotels where asylum seekers were housed. This is an example, then, of an important collaboration with an investigative journalist, that developed in part through a socially engaged art project. The young people were resistant to the idea as they did not think anything would change. They have been too scared by the system to think that anything will bend it. But we still hold hope that, through gaining trust and through exposing how investigative journalism can push a little more than art alone, we may be able to meaningfully collaborate.

NO KIDS
NO PETS

Jersey, 2022



How do you navigate the spaces between fiction and non-fiction in your practice (whether art production, writing or curatorial) and by association the concept and notion of 'truth' and process of 'verification'?

Ashish Ghadiali:
Reparative Stories

As an artist and activist, what role does history, displacement and 'reparative justice' play in your writing and storytelling?

Kim Charnley:
Boundaries of Fiction/Non-Fiction

What do you perceive to be the 'ethical expectations' surrounding notions of 'truth' and the phenomenon of displacement in relation to socially engaged art?

INCUBATOR 2

How does the intersection of racial and environmental justice inform and shape how you tell the story of a space or place (or the concept of the planetary)?

How do the institutions that govern the relationship between art and the truth differ from those that govern investigative journalism? How, for example, is fiction licensed as a creative strategy in the space of socially engaged art?

Dominik Czechowski:
Curation and Contested Spaces/Places

What role might the concept and logic of a public sphere play in curating stories of migration and displacement?

What are the challenges (opportunities) of curating in contested spaces - spaces and places shaped by (at times hidden) colonial histories and everyday experiences of migration and displacement?

How do you navigate the spaces between fiction and non-fiction in your practice (whether art production, writing or curatorial) and by association the concept and notion of 'truth' and the process of 'verification'?

Two key paradigms are central to my thinking about that. One is the notion of the planet and what we do, culturally, whether factual or working through fiction in whatever medium, via performance, writing, or filmmaking. Or what we might think of as 'culture' in Raymond Williams' sense of that term, you know, not just as structures of 'high art' necessarily but also as the activities that bring us together and shape our identities - playing darts in the pub as a form of cultural expression.

Whatever cultural form we might inhabit, we exist within a planetary framework. And we do so now in a moment of planetary crisis that is man-made. All of our cultural behaviours in whatever form they take are factual within that frame of reference. This central premise enables me to find my political bearings in whatever I do, whether that is policy work or academic research, making a film or curating an event. Everything feels relevant within that planetary frame.

This question landed for me in a conversation that we had at the end of 2019, one which Áine brought me into around the intersections of climate justice and creative practice. I have long been teasing out the question about how you act at a planetary level, and, at the same time, local. Trying to make sense of where that agency lies and sensing its presence not just in the context of behaviours and within cultural forms, but also in the faculty of the imagination. This is at odds with the commonplace assumption of the planet as something 'out there', a conception that has been part of the popular imaginary since at least the Apollo space missions and that iconic image they produced of the earth seen as a single entity, the earth as a blue marble. This is the notion of the planet as derived from the perspective of an astronaut and it also informs the influential thinking behind James Lovelock's Gaia theory, for example.

I think there is also a counterpoint to this notion of the planet, which is the understanding that the planet also lives within us. I began to think about this in the context of a conversation I had with the American poet, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, about work that she had written for her book *Undrowned*. In it, she explores connections between marine mammals and black lives and while reading it, I imagined Alexis as a writer constantly seeking the connection that she describes in the outer world. But when we spoke, I discovered that she doesn't do that at all and I was surprised. She doesn't swim with seals (something I've been known to do). She writes (something I wish I did more!). And she imagines that connection that she writes about, which is her connection to the planet. Following on from the work of Audrey Lorde and June Jordan, she is

enacting, through her poetry, a planetary engagement that arrives to her in her house in Durham, North Carolina, while she is reading, thinking, and meditating. The planet exists for her as an imaginal space.

It struck me, as I digested that conversation, back in 2021, that the imaginal realm is the 'real' space of our interaction with the external world. I had another conversation recently with a historian of Jung, Sonu Shamdasani, where he describes the dream as the mediator between the person and our wider environmental existence. Thinking in those terms, the notion of 'truth' as something that is profoundly internal begins to become quite clear and a sense of imagination, and dreams emerges as a force for mediation between interior and exterior worlds that do not always know how best to recognise one another.

As an artist and activist, what role does history, displacement and 'reparative justice' play in your writing and storytelling?

At a personal level, it's everything. Much of my creative impulse emerges from a sense of unease, which has been lifelong within the narratives of the dominant cultures of England. England is where I've grown up and there's a desire I have to inhabit the present here and to look positively towards the future here. Yet this also comes with a sense of looking back and trying to understand the misalignment between dominant narratives that shape the culture here and the fragments of other truths that I see all around me. Over time this has become a methodology, a means of self-preservation. And, in time, it has the potential to become a cultural driving force, I believe. I would also call this a pathway towards reparative justice. I think the question of reparation also resonates with what I've just said about different forms of truth and imagination. I wonder whether justice and reparation can ever really exist other than in a relentless process of seeking balance and realignment within ourselves.

I have also been exploring the question of reparation in relation to climate finance in dialogue with people like Avinash Persaud, Mia Mottley's Economics Adviser in Barbados, Saleem Huq, who chairs the Expert Advisory Group of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and Imani Jacqueline Brown who, for Forensic Architecture was considering, in an investigative project they were undertaking with the Herero people in Namibia in 2022, what reparation looks like in a context of widespread environmental destruction that goes back at least a hundred years. Does it mean going back to the past and trying to replace what was lost in the sense of a one-to-one replacement; or, does it mean moving progressively into the possibility of a shared future?

How does the intersection of racial and environmental justice inform and shape how you tell the story of a space or place (or the concept of the planetary)?

For the last five or six years I have been adjusting to life within a very specific landscape in South Devon. An unexpected move brought me to a landscape well-known for its second homes for the well-to-do. This is a landscape that might be understood in the cultural imagination of the UK as beautiful but also very white. I call it a repository of 'whiteness'. I ended up in South Devon not exactly out of choice but out of circumstance and living there has initiated a slow process of doing what I've described in other parts of this conversation: of trying to find my cultural bearings in a landscape that feels alien or in which I feel alien. The questions that are running through that for me are about self-doubt and ultimately held within frameworks of histories of race, empire, and migration.

A basic cultural strategy for me is to look for that line between myself, my subjectivity, the narratives, and the histories that I'm bringing to this place and the cultural myths that have their own hold over our collective perception of the landscape.

I work to cut through received mythologies and to experience a direct sense of the planet that lies beyond, which, as I've said, already exists in me, if I can find it within myself. One strategy is to think through the structures of imperial time and into the realms of geological, interplanetary time.

This process begins so organically – through literally 'being' in the landscape and what Keats would have called – I'm sure Keats said something like this – living in uncertainty or living with uncertainty. I can't remember the exact phrase! But it's important to me to sit with the contradiction of things, to sit with the different stories that press themselves upon you and to be able to hold yourself in relation to those stories; to allow those stories to present themselves as they are for you; to start to discern the edges of those stories and see what lies beyond them.

I've been working through this process in the guise of different projects that have brought people into this landscape – artists, academics, activists – generating the kind of public gatherings that allow us to collectively disrupt and dismantle what I understand as the structures of empire – its ecologies. We disrupt and dismantle the ecologies of empire that have shaped this landscape, and which in so many contexts we often mistake for nature itself.

In reality, we can never really know nature. We can only explore and investigate what nature is in relation to our own subjective experiences of it. I am currently exploring different ways into those experiences – through film installation and writing a book. The aim is to start to unpack and share methodologies of how we might decolonise on foot and, through the human eye by inhabiting landscapes that are always so much more than what we thought they were.

How do you navigate the spaces between fiction and non-fiction in your practice (whether art production, writing or curatorial) and by association the concept and notion of 'truth' and process of 'verification'?

Socially engaged art (SEA) is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of activities, some of which are very close to other fields, like social activism, political organising or social entrepreneurship. The 'art' in SEA tends to be identified with something invisible and intangible, but nevertheless real: the collaboration between a group of people over time and the capacities that are unlocked by their shared activity. I have long been perplexed about how art criticism engages with socially engaged art. On the one hand, art critics have played an important role in framing debates about this type of work; on the other hand, art criticism stands outside of the experiential dimension of socially engaged art, for the most part. Writing about SEA tends to be theoretical and speculative, when the actual work of motivating people to engage in a project, and to take ownership of it, is not like that at all. So, I can't help but think that art criticism fictionalises socially engaged art, to some extent.

On the other hand, SEA perhaps needs this theorised element, even if it is fiction because it is not at all easy to say what SEA is. Yes, SEA happens in real-time and it is worked out between people. Yes, it happens in concrete social situations. But every conceivable social activity fits this description and SEA is more complex than just a simple encounter. It involves diverse stakeholders, who may each see the same project quite differently. It often involves negotiation with legal regulations that are abstract, although they have real effects or with representatives of institutional bodies. Furthermore, SEA can be opaque to those who are involved in it, as well as to those who are not directly involved. This means that questions about the truth and veracity of socially engaged art cannot always be answered in straightforward terms: they need to be unpacked in a theoretical register.

In 'A Lexicon of Usership', the theorist Steven Wright explores some of the puzzles created by SEA, which is sometimes so difficult to distinguish from community activism. He states that:

To perceive such practices as art requires some supplementary theoretical information, something that lets us know that the initiative, whatever it may be, is both what it is, and a proposition of what it is; some external knowledge letting us know that the initiative's existence does not exhaust itself in its function and outcome, but that it is about something (Wright 2013 p.6)

I think that there is something in this. Theorised art criticism is sometimes a kind of a side-room where we can reflect on what it is that socially engaged art is about, over and above the specific circumstances of any individual project. In this sense, it is an attempt to get at a kind of truth.

What do you perceive to be the 'ethical expectations' surrounding notions of 'truth' and the phenomenon of displacement in relation to socially engaged art?

It is difficult to generalise about SEA. Each project will be successful in a very different way because it works in a specific situation, though there are often things that unsuccessful projects have in common. This is perhaps because all SEA works have to negotiate similar contradictions, always with ethical implications. For example, socially engaged artists typically want to create genuinely empowering works, so they have to pull off the trick of engaging their participants, without actually determining how their participants engage. They want participants to take ownership, which is not at all easy. Even trickier is the fact that a SEA project is rarely entirely visible to all of the participants, except perhaps the artist, or artists, at its centre. To foster trust, socially engaged artists have to be ready to answer difficult questions, such as: Who benefits from the project? What kind of legacy will it leave? These questions often arise in complex settings where wider social provision is absent or failing. This work demands enormous commitment, and it is also risky for all participants, in different ways. So, in a sense socially engaged art is entirely shaped by ethical problems. For me, that is what makes it so interesting.

In another incubator, Ismail gave a powerful account of what it takes to get news stories published about the exploitation of migrants. He describes that for some editors, the fact that migrants are being exploited is not necessarily news. This implies that the public already knows that the exploitation of migrants happens and that it is business as usual. News stories about migration always require a new angle to be 'news' and this is one of the criteria that shapes the flow of information from the press, and its status as an industry. This is a key point of difference between the news and SEA. SEA does not have to present a new angle. It can open out complex ethical problems that are not just relevant to a specific project but are foundational to social experience. This is also a kind of truth-telling. Of course, there is always the risk that a given SEA project might misrepresent the experience of participants. Everyone knows that it's very easy to make art in this way. And that's why we're talking about *not being extractive* and about what might be done to address this problem.

Another way of thinking about the relationship to truth is via 'facts'. Facts have taken on a prominent role in recent public debates about the media since everyone has become keenly aware of how 'fake news' can be so powerful. Media institutions are typically careful about facts, especially because there are legal and financial consequences for publishing false information if it displeases someone with economic and social power. As Ismail and others have pointed out, however, strict adherence to the facts does not necessarily mean that news media always tell the whole truth. Narrative frames can always skew the facts in one way or another and it is clear that news reports about migration might be factually true, but still distort reality.

In SEA, facts have a different status. They are not necessarily pieces of information, but instead, I think that shared spaces and experiences have a kind of facticity. Simply being an individual and a participant in a shared endeavour, in dialogue with others: this is an important kind of fact. SEA also provides a space where different truths can be heard. The idea that there might be different truths is, of course, troubling in an era of post-truth media, where 'alternative facts' and deep fakes, take on a terrifying potential. Is it still possible to say that many different truths are equally valid if that gives us a version of QAnon or some other conspiracy theory? But equally, the answer cannot be to accept that there is only the truth as it is told by powerful institutions. In this dilemma, the ethical focus of SEA is significant, because it creates space that is partly public, but also partly protected, in which testimony can be shared, nurtured and amplified.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt has an interesting way of talking about facts in her essay 'Truth and Politics'. She writes:

The chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim indeed; it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever. (Arendt, 2000 p.248)

She goes also says, however:

That facts are not secure in the hands of power is obvious, but the point here is that power, by its very nature, can never produce a substitute for the secure stability of factual reality, which, because it is past, has grown into a dimension beyond our reach. Facts assent themselves by being stubborn, and their fragility is oddly combined with great resiliency – the same irreversibility that is the hallmark of all human action. (Arendt, 2000 p.570)

I think that SEA, because it has an ethical focus, is the kind of space in which it might be possible to nurture facts and their stubborn resistance to power. Perhaps, also, the kind of space which might fashion narratives about migration that allow the facts to speak different truths.

How do the institutions that govern the relationship between art and the truth differ from those that govern investigative journalism? How, for example, is fiction licensed as a creative strategy in the space of socially engaged art?

Both art and the press originate in the eighteenth century as institutions of the bourgeois public sphere, and both played a key role in the emergence of modernity. In different ways, both institutions are shaped by capitalist society, which is most obviously in their relation to the market, and its demand for a narrowly defined kind of novelty. The news is a product, which is one of the reasons why it repeats established, easily recognisable narratives and why progressive journalists have to work so hard to tell different migration stories. It is difficult for press institutions to step outside of narratives that they know will be recognised by their audiences because instant recognition is what pays their bills.

Art is also subject to the pressure of novelty, although SEA is an unusual kind of art in that it actively resists producing a product that can be sold in the art market. Admittedly, this does not mean it is free from financial pressures; SEA is always dependent on funding from various kinds of funding bodies. This relative insulation from the demands of the market can make a big difference in regard to time, however. Whereas news language is lucid and efficient, it is also strictly governed by the temporal demands of the news cycle. Socially engaged art can have a relationship to time that allows a different space for experimentation.

Another difference between the institution of the press and that of art is that art is normally given license to be fictional. Perhaps this relative license makes it possible to respect facts but think about them differently, as I have tried to show here.

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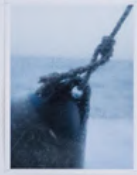

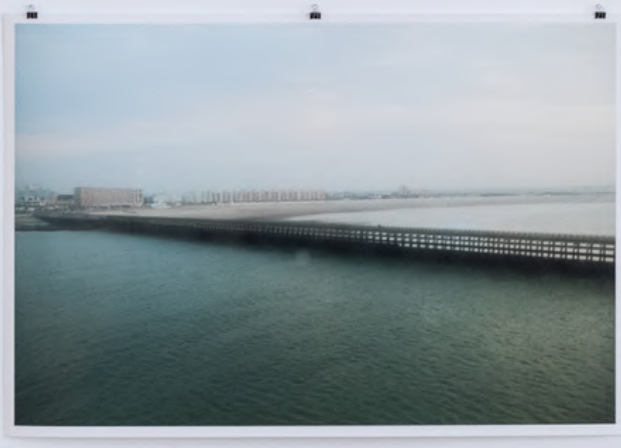

How do you navigate the spaces between fiction and non-fiction in your practice (whether art production, writing or curatorial) and by association the concept and notion of 'truth' and process of 'verification'?

I want to answer this first question by presenting a case study of a performance by artist Sława Harasymowicz which I curated as part of a year-long three-exhibition project. It explored the complex relationships between images, conflict, memory, representation, the archive, and autobiography. Begun at Centrala in Birmingham in winter 2015, further developed through a live performance at the Freud Museum and an exhibition at Narrative Projects in London (summer of 2016), culminating at the National Poetry Library (winter 2016-17), the entire project was episodic in structure and fragmentary in nature. Conceived as a fluid interrogation that harnessed the inherent tensions between images, words, contexts, and historical records, it delved into the personal and political consequences of what remains one of the biggest yet obscured WWII maritime disasters.

On 3 May 1945 in Neustadt Bay near Lübeck, the British RAF torpedoed three anchored German ships. Unknown to the British pilots, the ships were populated by thousands of primarily Polish and Russian prisoners evacuated from the Neuengamme concentration camp. A group of prisoners there were 'employed' to construct miniature detonators for anti-aircraft rockets using tools that included magnifying glasses and tweezers. Poignantly and ironically these timed mechanisms proved futile in the face of the fighter-bomber planes.

The middle chapter of the project – the exhibition 'Radio On' at Narrative Projects in London – was a multimedia installation that attempted to unpack the significance of the event that had remained publicly obscured for many decades. The artist utilised drawing, print, found footage, archives, newly commissioned writing and sound to create a multi-layered audio and object installation in which distant voices and buried stories competed for attention, as the audience was unpacking the richness and density of the material. One of the ship detainees was Marian Górkiewicz, the artist's maternal great-uncle. There were no photographs of him – a member of underground resistance in Nazi-occupied Kraków, a recently married poet and a violin teacher. Only his diary from the time before he was arrested survived. It captured the close reality of war and contained his poetry, an essentially immaterial form.

The artist and I decided to use fiction as a method to bring Marian's story back to life and to imagine his last days on the ship. We chose Sigmund Freud's former study at his last home in London because his work on trauma, dreams, fiction and desire were all important points of reference

for the project. Upon the invitation from the Museum to inhabit Freud's study (however briefly, or impermanently) and by using fiction as a tool of investigation, we aimed to break down the monolithic, colonial, empire-led notion of history and truth and to unearth a story that had been completely repressed and unwelcome. We hired professional and non-professional multilingual actors to re-enact a fictional radio programme through a collaborative, out of hours / non-public live performance. The programme was inspired by the one in which the prisoners on the boat and in the camp were engaging clandestinely. During the nights, a group would gather in prohibited collaboration to create 'radio programmes' using the structure of real broadcasts – including news bulletins, weather forecasts, sports commentary and reportage – as a way of blocking out the surrounding reality of war, incarceration, displacement and the terror of the unknown. The inmates would recite poems and present different forms of news to each other. We decided to write up and perform a fictionalised script in Freud's study.

The final result presented an aural collage of performed testimonials, poetry, scientific research, experimental writing and sound distortions. The competing (conflicting) narratives reverberated and overlapped, homing in and out on the war prisoners' ordeal whilst further interconnecting the artist's (hidden) family history and continuing a serious political enquiry into buried events. The recording became a sound installation played in the Narrative Projects gallery on an hourly basis. The power of fiction and speculation paired up with imagination and creative writing allowed us to weave the so-called 'facts' and pure fiction based on the abstracted and elusive work of memory. Such a mix of methods was crucial to present the story to the public – an illusory aural archive endlessly insisting on its present and relevance.

Going back to the main question and the notion of truth, the process of verification in this context was a process of validation. It was about honouring and respecting the bodies lost and the stories that were/are unwanted. The body, performance and fiction were intertwined to access a lost or unsolicited piece of history. There simply was no other way in.

It also brought to light contemporary histories of people who are lost and displaced, especially in the wake of Brexit and the rise of nationalism globally. Using fiction and (the lack of access to) archival record as a form of political re-enactment also worked as a tool to decolonise a dominant historical narrative and stranglehold upon a particular part of that history.

What role might the concept and logic of a public sphere play in curating stories of migration and displacement?

I will use the example of an exhibition I curated with British photographer Julian Edelstein in 2021. It took place at the National Library of Lithuania in Vilnius, comprising sets of distinct photographic series depicting migration and displacement both historically and contemporarily. Edelstein photographed migration in 2015 and 2016 in the refugee camps of Calais (the infamous 'Jungle') and on the Greek island of Lesvos, originally commissioned by UK-based organisation Counterpoints Arts. In the exhibition, those images were juxtaposed with personal photographs taken by Jillian when researching her family history in Ukraine and Lithuania – drawing upon the family's experience of displacement before WWII – as well as more recent personal photographs taken during Jillian's stay on the Italian islands of Linosa and Lampedusa in October 2020. The scenery of these sunny Mediterranean isles with beautiful beaches became for the artist a site of (a visual) archive of objects, debris and traces left behind by the recent waves of migration.

The notion of the public sphere was important because the exhibition coincided with the dramatic events happening on the border of Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus. Specifically, the humanitarian crisis on the Poland-Belarus border was happening at the time with severe ill-treatment of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers by border forces on both sides. Hundreds of people from countries including Iraq, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Cuba attempting to seek asylum in the EU ended up trapped in the inhospitable border area between the two countries, with a series of violent to-and-from 'pushbacks' across the border.

So, the exhibition took place in Lithuania but within the wider 'fortress Europe' context. At the time, as we were making the final selection from the printed images and then hanging the show, the media images of the 'pushbacks' were everywhere. Such a horrific political context and geographical proximity in which we were working not only highlighted our privileged position in a potent and contested territory but also raised the question about the 'bourgeois public sphere', as Kim mentions – the concept of a singular and conservative public sphere by Jürgen Habermas.

The venue of the Lithuanian National Library was a challenge. It is set in a 'public space', which represented the sphere of dominant political and social discourse in its very physical architecture. We decided to use the library's generous but a white cube-like rather conservative exhibition room to do something different. We were inspired by one of Jillian's photographs from Lesbos of a refugee from Syria who flatly refused to be photographed. It was the conflictual notion of the public sphere and this

very image which I found arresting. We chose an abstract way of dealing with the subject of displacement to highlight repeated waves of history and resonances of human movement that were projected onto a politically charged contemporary context, resulting in an exhibition which presented scenes and landscapes of exile and migration that were completely devoid of people. To create the notion of counter-publics within the public sphere; or what Nancy Fraser describe as a subaltern counter-public – that of landscapes, stillness and absence.

In choosing such an approach, we wanted to convey a different notion of history and of time, of an embodied experience of loss that we felt might be a more sensitive and potent way of dealing with the subject. In Edelstein's powerful work, we encountered the stillness of nature bearing witness to the hardships and sacrifices involved, the scars that mark the land and sea following the continued desperate journeys of refugees, but also the treacherous beauty, tranquillity and mystery of the seemingly innocent landscapes of present-day Eastern Europe, charged with suppressed and repressed traumas.

The exhibition became a catalyst for us to think differently about the framing of such projects about migration and displacement – an attempt at avoiding extractive ways of seeing and representation to prevent the unintentional reproduction of dominant discourses and practices against the unforgiving logic of the oppressive public sphere.

What are the challenges (opportunities) of curating in contested spaces – spaces and places shaped by (at times hidden) colonial histories and everyday experiences of migration and displacement?

To answer this question, I will present a socially engaged project in the area where I live in South Tottenham in London. This is a location adjacent to the mental health hospital of St Ann's, near Harringay Green Lanes. It is a project that taps into what Ashish has said about racial and climate justice and the current environmental crisis. The area around St. Ann's Hospital is known for being a green lung in a Borough mostly deprived of green spaces. The woodland runs along the southern border of the hospital grounds adjacent to the railway line. It forms part of the Tottenham Railsides Borough Grade II Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), a substantial area of relatively undisturbed habitat which is part of a recognised ecological corridor indicated in the Haringey Biodiversity Action Plan 2009.

A range of local people – resident group members, activists and educators – have been fighting to prevent over 100 trees – true service trees and rare species and bushes – from being felled by developers. To raise funds for renovations, particularly to its residential mental health

wards, in 2018 the hospital was forced to sell 60% of the site to the Greater London Authority (GLA) for housing development. Private developers are currently working onsite, selling the story of 'affordable' – albeit unaffordable – housing to people.

I'm involved with local people to activate the area to create a series of public programmes (e.g. participatory nature and arts workshops on subjects such as green space conservation, climate emergency and resource scarcity, making the project accessible to a wider community), to involve artists in bringing awareness of what's happening to the site, to evoke the history of migration and displacement in and around the area, given that the hospital has been in this location since Victorian times.

The serious outbreak of scarlet fever in 1892 brought historical relevance to the COVID pandemic when we started working on this project in 2020. We knew from the beginning that this site was a contested space and place. The seeds of many of the species of trees, bushes and hedges had been carried by migrants to the area after WW1, during which and until 1919 the hospital was used by a Denver, Colorado unit of the American Army to treat casualties. Doctors and nurses travelling from overseas to work with the Americans were invited to bring seeds of therapeutic plants or trees from their countries as there was a fear that medicines and drugs could be in short supply. The flora and fauna and natural landscape have thus mirrored the diversity of the population of the area.

Yet local people living there now are not listened to, nor invited to crucial meetings so that they can be civically representative. We were never consulted about tree losses at St Ann's, despite the developers' claims to be 'putting nature at the heart of the development'. This makes a mockery of local co-design and ignores the work of community groups struggling to make Haringey a greener place to live. There's a huge discrepancy happening between the history of the past and what's going on right now in the area, for example, the affordability of the housing and the regeneration or whitening of a public space that mainly comprises communities of Turkish, Kurdish-Iraqi and Cypriot heritage. It is a very rich and contested place in a whole range of ways.

So, we've been advocating for the space to be saved via a series of events including public walks and 'connect with nature' participatory workshops, engaging with local and national festivals and activating people. In this context, the role of curation has changed completely, at least for me. I'm an organiser and facilitator – and one of a few. I'm a fabricator of truth, and sometimes I'm a storyteller. I'm an archivist in relation to a growing archive, which is forming alongside as we try to tap into stories of migration, displacement, un-belonging and inequity.

Documenting and preserving the history and lived memories of the hospital site seems even more vital than ever – an archive and the collective memory can perhaps be the best learning tool to create a better future. Conjuring a notion of 'conflictual aesthetics', to borrow a phrase from Oliver Marchart's *Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*. Marchart argues for a straightforward engagement of political theory and activism and proposes an aesthetics of agitating, propagating and organising on a simple level. He's not ashamed of activism or political propaganda or being on the street protesting. He explores the performative enactment of public art and public meetings together with the curatorial to achieve re-politicisation and re-democratisation of public spaces. To return to the question, I think there are many challenges but also opportunities to reach out directly to people and to be on the ground in the everyday practice of curating.

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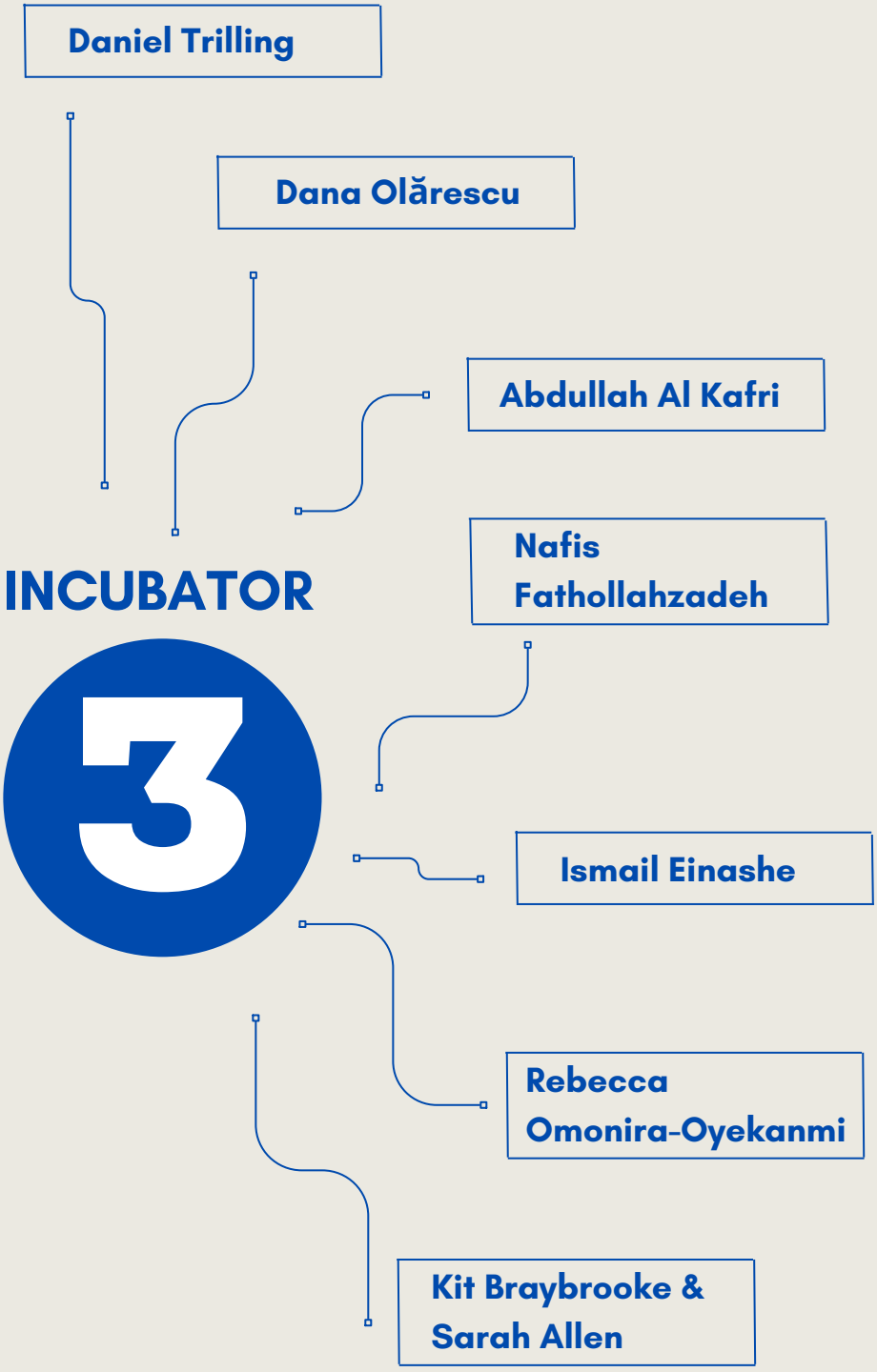

Our aim is to formulate questions for practice…as propositions and prototypes to be explored, developed and challenged in commissions that will follow from this incubator.

JOURNALISM AS AN ENCOUNTER: THE USES AND LIMITS OF REPORTING

Daniel Trilling

I'm a writer and reporter, and my journalism often focuses on migration, borders and right-wing nationalism. Between 2013 and 2017, I reported on the experiences of refugees at Europe's borders – during a period that came to be known as the 'refugee crisis'.

When I'm talking about this work in public, I often show a picture taken by an Italian photojournalist in Sicily in 2014 for the agency AFP. It was taken in Augusta, a port on the east coast of Sicily that was frequently used by ships carrying people rescued from the Mediterranean during those years. I spent much time in Augusta, watching ships come in, and they always followed the same ritual. Before people were allowed to disembark, all these various agencies – branches of the Italian police and security services, health officials, and international organisations – would make checks for diseases, weapons, and other forms of contraband. In particular, white-suited officials wearing protective masks and goggles would check the ships and hose the deck down before people were allowed off.

The photo captures a look between one of these white-suited officials and a young woman, perhaps a teenager, who has been rescued from the Mediterranean. It's ambiguous – is she looking suspiciously at the official? He, in turn, a representative of Europe, is dressed like the young woman may be a threat. Yet at the same time, he is there to protect life, part of an operation to save the lives of people fleeing danger.

That, to me, captures the confusion of Europe's response during those 'crisis' years. But there's a third player in the picture – the photojournalist who took it. It's easy to miss the role of journalists in shaping our perceptions of an event or even in the way responses to that event play out.

The encounter between journalist and subject is always uncertain, even confrontation. For me, that happened rather more literally in the early days of my reporting on migration. In 2012, I went to Athens to report on the effects of Greece's economic and political crisis. I heard that far-right gangs particularly threatened Afghan refugees in one Athens neighbourhood, so I went to meet an Afghan family who lived there. The mother, Hakima, confronted me directly about my role. What can you do for us, she asked. She said she was sick and tired of journalists coming to her neighbourhood, asking her and her neighbours for their stories, and then seeing nothing change. The far right was a threat, but so were the Greek police, who harassed them, and the EU's asylum system, which had effectively trapped them in Athens in poverty.

I've thought about what Hakima said often in the years since. The best answer I can come up with is that journalists can't help change anyone's

immediate situation – or if they can, it's only very rarely. Instead, they can help put all the pieces of a complex picture together to explain how a situation has arisen in the hope that people will use that knowledge to do better in future.

For me, it was essential to show how all of the invisible systems at work – border policy, asylum policy, and so on – contributed to the hardships faced by the people I met. I was also struck by the fact that even when the subject attracted intense media attention, there were people who remained unseen – because they were from the wrong place, or because their stories didn't fit the media's chosen narrative frame, or often because their stories were too complicated to fit into the usual journalistic formats. I felt that in much media coverage, people's complex lives were being squeezed into simple morality tales. An outstretched hand in need of Europe's help if the portrayal was sympathetic; an unidentified threatening mass if the report was hostile – that's an oversimplification on my part, but not by that much.

I tried to find other, more satisfactory ways to represent my encounters, so I ultimately chose to write books and long-form journalism. At those lengths, where one has a greater degree of control over one's writing than in quickfire news reporting, I could render my encounters with the complexity they deserved – to try and show people whose lives are governed by these vast national and international systems, but who are trying to retain control over their own lives and make choices of their own.

I don't mean to pretend I did that perfectly or that I escaped the constraints of the media industry entirely. Any journalist, even a freelancer like myself, needs to work as part of a team that includes editors, picture editors, and headline writers, most of whom you'll never meet or engage with directly. Each of these roles has its conventions and forms of linguistic or visual shorthand – think, for instance, how the word 'migrant', which could, in theory, mean anybody who moves around the world, has come to denote people who move along informal refugee routes. You must work within a particular publication's editorial policy. And ultimately, you must meet your readers where they are, using language that resonates with their common sense understanding of the world, even if you want to lead them elsewhere.

I've found my own way of negotiating that territory. Recently, though, I've been more bothered by other, more fundamental constraints. I've been doing this reporting for years, often talking to people at length about life-changing, often traumatic experiences. My question now is: what do you do with all the incidental details you pick up along the way? Not just

the things you remember people saying long after the story is done, but the way they said it, where you were sitting when they said it, or whether a marching band was going by on the other side of the street. What if you start breaking the rules of journalism and mixing these different details from different contexts without explaining who, what, where, why, and when? What if you start adding new information from your imagination? Would that tell us anything about these experiences that journalism misses?


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SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART – DESPERATELY SEEKING SOLIDARITY

Today I will explore tools and methodologies relevant to socially engaged art, by talking in detail about one project. I would also like to reflect on what is missing in the sector, and particularly what sort of support is needed for artists and participants in socially engaged art projects, to create real solidarity.

The specific project under discussion here took place between 2020 and 2021, in London, at a grassroots organisation called May Project Gardens. May Project Gardens is run by people of colour, from the house of the founder, which is a council-owned house. It aims to democratise access to nature, by opening an experience of nature up to other people of colour. The back garden has been turned into a permaculture space open to everyone to learn about nature. May Project Gardens is based in Merton, a borough in Southwest London, also home to Wimbledon. But between Wimbledon and other neighbourhoods in Merton, there is a ten-year difference in life expectancy. This is because Wimbledon is predominantly home to white middle-class families, while the rest of the borough is home to people of colour on low incomes. The most disadvantaged neighbourhoods provide people with little access to green spaces, and more exposure to pollution than Wimbledon does.

May Project Gardens predominantly works with young people. In 2020, they were oversubscribed, and more and more young people wanted to use the garden, especially during the pandemic. Together with social designer Paulina Sidhom and carpenter David Murray, I was commissioned to design and construct a low-impact outdoor classroom. We were interested in the socially engaged aspect of building something together and were able to draw on support from a wider professional network inclusive of structural engineers who could support us with the technical side of the project. But I was personally interested in demonstrating that just like growing food for free in a council-owned estate, you could also build a house, for free, in a council-owned estate. We did this work under a regulation that is called 'permitted development', which means that by building a new classroom following certain guidelines, we didn't have to obtain formal permissions.

The new classroom was built using low-impact principles and natural materials. It was important not to damage either the permaculture garden or the planet, but also to embed the cultural specificities of the young people's backgrounds in the building process, so they would have the chance to shape the project as they wanted. We had around ten young people participating and all of them worked tirelessly on the project. They had all arrived in the UK without parents when they were about fifteen or sixteen years old as 'unaccompanied minors', as the official sterile term labels them. Participants were originally from Eritrea, Ethiopia and South Sudan, three countries ranked in the top ten of states deemed fragile because of the effects of climate change and conflict.

The building process lasted for about eight months and the participants were able to gain certificates to accredit their learning. This was very important because the curriculum for young people who arrive without parents in the UK is very limited. Typically, they learn basic English – even though most of them speak English already – and Maths, but they don't have access to any other learning opportunities unless they pay for them. Some of the young people were interested in working in the construction industry, so we teamed up with an organisation called Volunteer it Yourselves, to provide the participants with certificates in carpentry, health and safety and painting. Once the project concluded, this accreditation helped some to find work in the construction industry.

The classroom was made of straw bales, and all the materials that we used were sourced locally. We also strived to work with materials and techniques that participants might have encountered at home. All of them would have built their own houses with their fathers, probably when they were as young as five or six. This meant that they were able to teach us a lot about vernacular building processes, which was important because it made the learning experience a mutual exchange. We were trying to work with as few tools as possible and one of the boys would repeatedly say: 'Building is about using your brain, not just your muscles.'

The question of solidarity arose because all the participants were saying to us: 'We get stopped and searched by the police maybe seven times a day, probably by the same policeman every day. We are so tired of this'. They were exhausted to the point that they were ready to physically fight the police who stopped them. This became a central issue for us, as the project evolved. We asked ourselves: how do we build a safe space together? How do we also ensure that these young people arrive to this space safely? Most of them had to come from Croydon, which was quite a long way away.

One of the participants in the project was Jamal, who is from Sudan. Jamal, I'm pretty confident, will be at some point the next prime minister! We learned an enormous amount from Jamal. He is nineteen, I think now. He lived in Germany for a few years and then he moved to the UK. He teaches children how to play football. He teaches English to young people who are newly arrived in the country. He is studying to become a doctor, and he volunteers with as many organisations as he can because, for him, the idea that he would just have a standard life as a teenager is simply out of the question.

Jamal also lives in care. He called us one day to say he had had knee surgery, and he had asked his care provision to be transported back to them after being discharged. They refused as he hadn't booked a taxi

in advance. As a result, Jamal got on a bus, became sick on the way, and fainted. He got a blood clot and ended up at A&E again that same evening. This is just one example of the sort of incidents that were happening while we were building the classroom. The project became about more than simply building a structure together. For me, it became about how we might be able to expose all of these systemic failures in support of young people who have migrated to the UK. And this is what I mean by looking for solidarity. I wanted to use the project to find out what solidarity might mean: between me as an artist, the participants, institutions that commission socially engaged art, and other sectors.

It wasn't long until we started picking up calls from the young people, being contacted by them more than their key workers were. The young men on the project were not being taken seriously and they were constantly being seen as predatory, or being viewed without empathy. We ended up representing some of the participants in situations they encountered. I went to the police station many times. I stood in front of judges and the court making a case for why participants in the project should not be prosecuted. I was constantly speaking to key workers who would call the police at moments when some of the young people were having bad mental health breakdowns. They would call the police on them, and they would end up in prison. I would go to asylum-seeking hotels where some of the girls who joined the group lived, where they were being sexually harassed by the staff. And when I went to the police station to report these issues, some of the comments made by the policemen were no different from those made by predators inside those hotels.

There was far more that needed to be done than we could do. But I came to realise that it was really important that these young people should find ways to take up space in institutions, which was very hard for them to do because institutions were typically so hostile toward them.

So, the project became about the participants being able to take up space. Everyone participated in building the new classroom, and their physical imprints are on it; in the clay and the lime plaster. The building feels organic - the straw bales that were used to provide structure for the walls are not positioned perfectly. A resident of Afghani origin, who grew up around similar buildings, came to tell us that it is important for him to see buildings that don't look perfectly square. This was a way for participants to see themselves in their built environment.

We also looked to create opportunities for the participants to also take up public space. During the pandemic, we worked with the Barbican, for example. This work began with the participants being taken on a tour of the botanical gardens there. The last thing I did before I left the project

was to arrange an opportunity for participants to exhibit work at the Barbican. It took me eight months to negotiate with the venue; then they eventually said yes.

We gave other participants access to some platforms for recording podcasts, and they seized the opportunity. Cherif is from Niger and he's interested in making the links between forced displacement and climate justice. He was trained by Platform London and Tipping Point and delivered the keynote for the COP26 Climate Reparations March in Trafalgar Square. Now he is enrolled in the New School of the Anthropocene, doing a BA in Environmental Studies. Jamal now runs a project with the Blagrave Trust, where he is trying to hold the housing system accountable for the conditions in which they house young asylum seekers and refugees. So those were some of the things that came from this arts project.

The experience was difficult, though. There is little support in place for artists working with young people who are experiencing these horrendous life situations. The key institution that dictates how these young people live is the Home Office. Some participants did not want to talk about their experiences publicly. They had no confidence that talking would change anything. All of these young people live on £8 a week. And so many of them said: 'No, this is not for me. I don't want to speak to white people.' They did not want to expose themselves to the trauma of recounting their experiences for the benefit of those who might listen but would not be able to change anything now.

It is not easy to say what it would mean to have solidarity with these young people. The point I want to make is that art organisations and institutions need to see that they can do so much more than simply ‘allowing’ certain demographics to be physically present in a room. There are layers upon layers of failure in the social provisions that surround a project like the one I have described. I don’t think that arts institutions always see this. Socially engaged art can make a difference in other ways. But when the pressure created by border regimes and by failing social provision is so immense, artists risk being overwhelmed.


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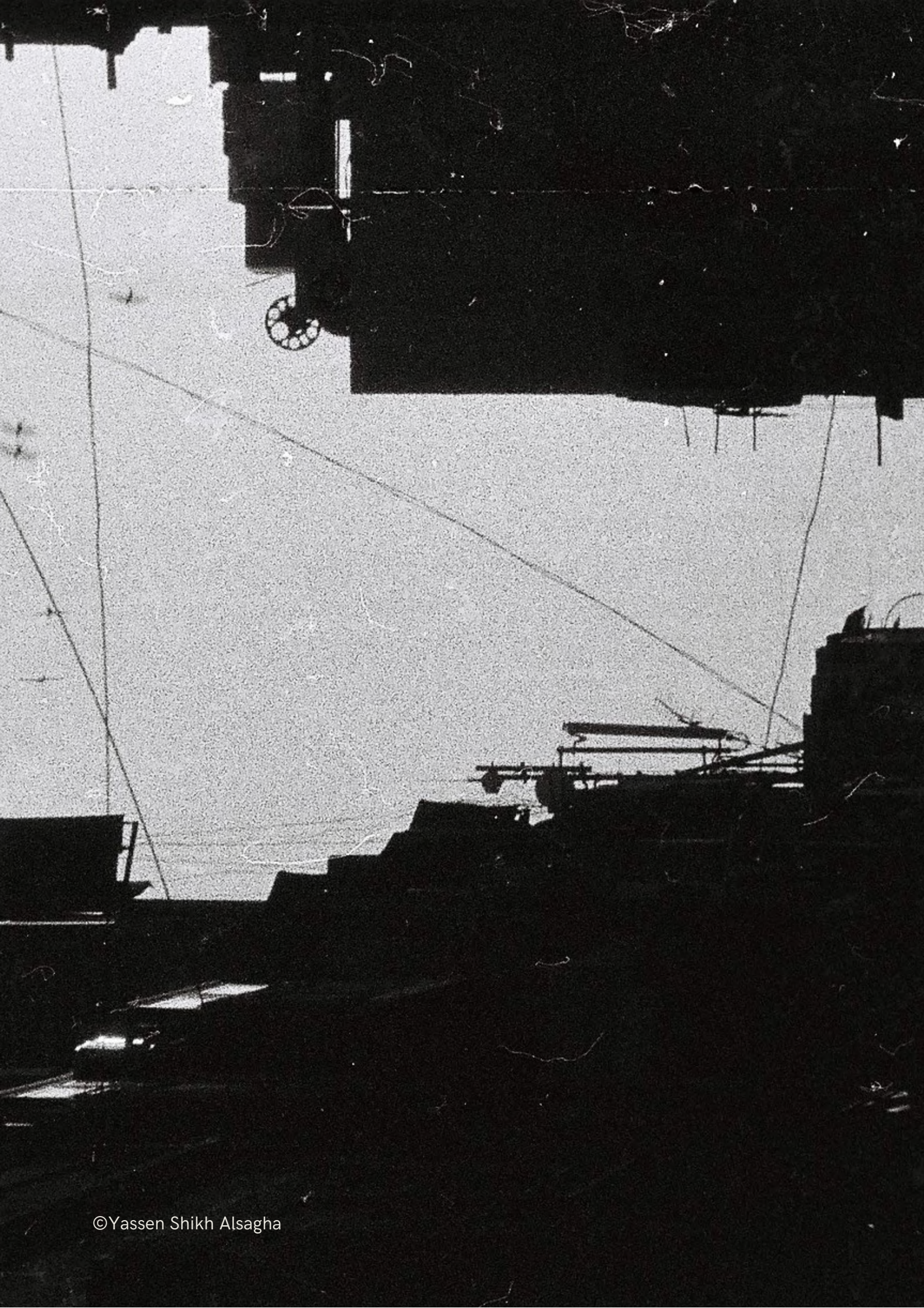

MIGRANT ARTISTS AS 'HISTORIANS, REPORTERS AND STORYTELLERS'

What is the role of dramaturgy in exploring (retrieving and re-imagining) values of democracy and freedom of expression? How does public storytelling in the form of performative and experimental methodologies counteract (challenge and critique) increasingly authoritarian discourses and regimes? What does freedom of expression mean in practice and for whom? To what extent have Syrian artists taken on the entwined role of 'historians, reporters and storytellers', as witnesses to a complex set of public spheres that are played out in an everyday reality beyond borders?

What follows is a provocation about playwrights from Syria over the last twelve years, in the context of whether contemporary Syrian playwrights must be both storytellers and reporters. I find this question interesting when mediated through the perspective of artists but also from the perspective of journalism itself. I will explore it from my own experience of working with a range of writers and dramaturges, many of whom consider their main goal to be to 'tell the story' about Syria. Such a huge mission. How to tell a story about a country undergoing changes every minute or having to make drastic changes?

If we look at how things were in 2011 and where we are now in 2023, all the fiction and the skills of writers could not even imagine such a process. In January 2023 alone, the EU reported that Syria is one of the most complicated, complex situations in the history of humanity.

From day zero after the uprising in Syria, playwrights wanted to tell the story of what is happening on the ground. But the question is: how to bring a story to the public and what the story is about? Usually, artists consider fiction. It's part of the resource that they can experiment with and explore. But in the case of Syria, the situation on the ground is even more complicated than any fictional or dramatic action. What is the entry point to such a story and how do we bring this story to an audience?

One approach that has been made popular is to give a platform or to put on stage the victims or the people whose stories are not readily told or heard. With this method we have seen an abundance of interactive and documentary theatre, where there's a mix of verbatim performance; or where the people who have experienced first-hand the displacement of migration or torture or have had exceptional experiences, are placed on the stage to tell their story. But my question is: what is expected from the audience when they are listening or living through these stories? What do we really expect from this type of performance? To pose an ethical question: what role should the audience play when hearing these terrible stories? Even if we don't know the person behind the story, we feel that it is too much, too extreme and arguably there is no longer a desire or a threshold to engage with this story.

What, for example, is actually happening to a woman who was been tortured for a month in a prison? And, as an artist, I ask her to be on stage to present her story – not only once but repeatedly for two months or maybe even three months. To what extent do I have the right to do this? To what extent are art organisations and civic society organisations helping artists to raise questions about their practice – such as, what is to be expected from the audience and in what way might the audience react to such a context? To what extent is this story reflective of the reality of what is going on and of real actions; or are they interwoven within a set of fictional layers? What is the difference between fiction and journalism in this dramaturgy? How do we make sense of this when in Syria almost everything coming from the country is considered a 'document'? What, then, is the meaning of the documentary process versus the fictional context? How do artists have the right and the ability to deal with a re-presentation of the 'facts' that are taking place on the ground?

I shared these very questions with a Syrian playwright. His name is Wael Kadour. He moved to Aman for five years and then to Paris, where he's now working. He told me two things.

At the moment he is torn between decisions concerning his work. One way of writing about reality for him is to tell the story about what's going on via a return to memory. Because he left Syria twelve years ago, he's primarily writing from memory, and he believes that this is the safest place to deal with ethical questions. The country he now writes about is different. And then I ask him, okay, would you like to consider telling another story about Syria? Since you have decided to write about Syria, would you consider starting to think about some French elements? Your daughter is French, she doesn't speak Arabic. You live here. You are a French citizen. But he told me, 'I don't have the entry point yet and I don't know if I will ever arrive at that moment when I'll be able to consider that I have the ownership and authority to write about France in one way or another. I'm sharing this because I think Wael is one of a few lucky artists who can make this observation about their work and about the role that is expected of him as an artist. Especially now when 'Syria fatigue' has been taking place. Unfortunately, Syria fatigue is inevitable since the Ukrainian war is a priority of the news. For an artist, this is complicated, since they would like to tell a story that's still extremely relevant and hasn't yet been told.

The artist in this case believes that they are trying to bring out the 'real' story. Yet how can we as organisations work with this contradictory situation and provide a context for ensuring and maintaining the 'relevancy' of such stories?

I think one of the questions about telling a story from Syria today is, to what extent an artist is writing about a local story, a story in which they know all of the elements. Syria is a country where different locations were battle scenes for different parties. So, while I'm talking about a story, I assume we are talking about the many complicated layers of any one story.

I am reminded of a tactic explored by Palestinian artists working on documentaries and the concept of counter-archiving or what we might call the alternative archive, where artists challenged the way that the Israeli occupation dealt with their archives. Some Syrian artists use the same technique to tell a story that's not normally heard in mainstream conversations. It's a story that you will never find in the media or on Netflix or any mainstream platform. This opens a way to bypass the question of fiction/non-fiction. It's a way of saying, okay, this could be history but it's my point of view and I am bringing this story into history. I want to suggest that this is the entry point about how to have a relevancy to tell stories that are shaped by many different layers. To allow us to go beyond the notion of the fictional or the non-fictional. Is this happening in real-time or not? Is this a personal story or a story that could be personal, which I believe leads us to another key question about what is personal and what is intimate? This is interesting when talking about stories coming from migrants or from refugees - to what extent do I have the right to dig in and to know the intimate information about people's lives? Do I need the personal as a power-driver to be engaged with the story, since we always somehow seek a 'story'?

When we talk about a good film, we say 'I really enjoyed the story'. And we dig into more detail about character development and the narrative treatment. But unfortunately, at the moment, Syrians cannot agree on a story. Once they will be able to agree on it, they will probably be able to tell it. But in the meantime, I think the questions are really about what the entry point to any one story is and what ethical-political questions we need to consider while raising questions about different stories.

I was lucky to be able to discuss some of these questions with artists over the last two years when I engaged in a project called Reinventing the Margin. The idea behind this project was to create a space to discuss some of these questions while working on playwriting and Syria and migration. I invited different playwrights and theatre-makers to contribute to this conversation to produce creative pieces in different languages that could be distributed under a Creative Commons License. The project website includes contributions from artists from Lebanon, Iraq, the US, France and Syria. The idea is to add more and more content to the platform so that we can hold a space to explore the vulnerability of the performing arts in the context of dealing with the question of Syria and migration.

For me, one of the most beautiful things when it comes to art or writing a play or the playwriting process is the experience and condition of vulnerability, particularly in relation to what is expected from the artistic form. It would seem that it has become harder and harder to deal with the sheer complexity of 'reality'. How do we then position ourselves as part of the artistic process? I would simply say that we need to make sure that the playwrights themselves have the space they require to tell a story that they believe is relevant without having to feel that they always have to do 'more'. Because in playwriting, less is always more.

https://reinventingthemargin.com/about/

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Nafis Fathollahzadeh

TRANSFORMATIVE SPACE - 'MOMENTOGRAPHY OF A FAILURE'

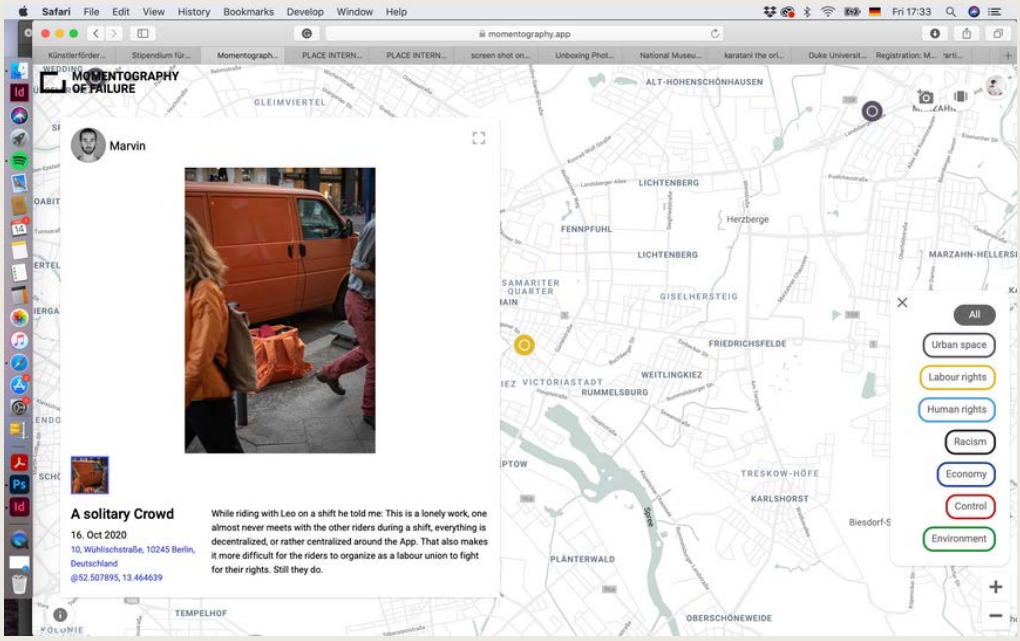
I'm not working solely with migrants. I'm a migrant myself and talk from that position, but don't have much experience in working with migrant communities. I will talk about *Momentography of a Failure*, a collective project that I am part of, and how and why it came about. As an artist who was based in Iran I had to think about how to develop an artistic practice that could work beyond the boundaries of a suppressive, authoritarian regime by plotting out a space for social engagement through collaboration. The starting point of *Momentography* goes back to 2009 when a series of protests started in Iran. It was a time when almost everybody was armed with a phone camera in their pocket. We were inspired by the great amount of the photographs and videos made from these streets during the demonstrations and the way the protests shifted the role of the citizen from an observer to a 'recorder' and changed the role of photography in animating political subjectivity and inspiring social movements. This phenomenon inspired us to explore how citizen journalism challenges political hegemony and media narratives which seek to impose one particular interpretation of events.

So, drawing on what I learned from this period, I focused on the methodology of producing collaborative counternarratives and developed a platform that could offer a participatory, critical and productive understanding of urban transformation as well as socio-political transformations.

We are now living in a world where arguably we do not need 'experts', like photographers who go to the frontline and bring the best stories or photographic compositions to us. And we may not need legacy media to take on this journalistic role either. I believe that everything is instead circulating in the cloud. The skills previously reserved for experts – such as visual artists, makers and videographers – are now widely accessible in the general population. So, I'm going to show you some work that draws on what happened in Iran and which continues to be developed right now.

The first question to answer is, why 'failure'? Is failure the deviation from expected and desired result, or the natural by-product of experimentation? There is a fine line between great innovation and absolute failure. Our work forms around the fluctuating wave field that exists between these terms to go beyond the binary definitions of success or failure. In the Iranian case, the question would be whether the 2009 uprising or 1979 revolution were failures? And our answer was that transformations are slow processes, encompassing both these historic political events. Failure is an 'alibi' that allows us to investigate those processes of change and *Momentography of a Failure* sets out to look at a series of transformations: urban transformation as well as socio-political transformation.

What emerged from the initial project is a mapping tool, developed gradually since the project has always been low budget. It took years to even have this page be accessible.



This is a mapping tool that we use in our collaborative workshops, to allow us to stay connected with each other. For example, when we come together in a workshop from different disciplines and backgrounds, we do our research. Like when we do daily research on a topic, we upload whatever we have onto the site. You can sign up here and you are given an account, enabling you to submit a video, audio or photograph or a text in any of the contexts that you find relevant. It can be a failure in an urban space; it can be a failure in labour rights (or anything else), which is marked with a colour allowing you to find it on the map.

This mapping tool gave us the opportunity to work together to see who did what at the end of a working day. And, little by little, a network of different artists, scholars, writers, local people started to come together and grow. The mapping tool facilitates reflection, highlighting different work and interventions in different places and setups. Through this tool, a network of artists and people from different disciplines could gather and reflect on possibilities and potentials of any one district in a city.

We started with Berlin, specifically East Berlin. I was interested in the post-Socialist structures that remain in the East and are segregated from the other parts of the city. After the collapse of the wall, social housing was either abandoned or was granted to lower income families or newcomers to the city. This space was one of the first places that we started working. Our group went door-to-door to meet and motivate

local people to engage with the project. But we didn't want to go with our so-called expertise and say 'hello', we are artists, a group of journalists and we want to see what's happening here. Instead, we wanted to engage people to come and lead this work, and luckily it happened. We met different generations who had lived in the area in addition to the relatively recent migrants who had arrived and who started to develop different stories.

We grow through collaborative research workshops and on the basis of the narratives from an international network of contributors, locals, artists, and urbanists who share their knowledge with each other and reflect on the possibilities and problems of their neighbourhood, recycle the collective memories of the space, and speculate on potential future narratives. So, when we talk about collaboration, we don't know what we will have at the end of this process. And this makes it exciting on the one hand and very risky on the other. Sometimes it can be a total failure and other times you have some nice results. That's what also happens in our projects: sometimes we fail and sometimes we have things to show at the end of the process.

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We then moved to other cities. We went to Gelsenkirchen, for example, which is a very small town in western Germany, a mining town. As you know, lots of mines were closed after the 1960s and the people who were working there had to leave. Again, it's a transitory space, which is what I'm interested in. This project is about the nature of transitory spaces. I also understand migration as a transitory space, and I'm interested in the potential of these spaces. There are lots of system failures, but we can also learn from these spaces. In Gelsenkirchen, we tried to bring different generations together who experienced the glory days of this rich mining town, which was gradually abandoned. When you now go to Gelsenkirchen, you encounter a sunken town. This town is an emblematic example of a post-industrial space.

So, in *Momentography* we move between different topics and approaches. It varies from writing to film to photography to mapping and goes from one place to the other. Our next workshop took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Ethiopian metropolis of Addis Ababa is one of the fastest growing cities in Africa. It has undergone massive changes in the last decade through industrialization and urbanization. A controversial master plan has resulted in newly constructed infrastructures, housing shortages and massive urban renewal projects which have shaped the urban landscape of Addis Ababa.

In our last edition we dealt with the controversial world of digital platforms and the counter strategies that emerge in response to them. The gig economy, information economy, surveillance economy and their many proliferations represent a shift of labour from the industrial economy to platform economy. We can also say that this is a shift in the mode of resource extraction that has introduced data as the black gold of the twenty first century, a shift from proletariat to 'precariat' that has brought unprecedented controversies and new forms of precarity to workers. Since the platforms are all around the world, this edition is called 'translocal'. We worked with contributors from different geographies from Latin America to Europe. For example, one of our colleagues, Tytus Szabelski, from Poland had been working on documenting the expansion of Amazon storages in Poland. Why? Because labour rights are not in good condition in these areas and workers can be more easily exploited than, say, in Northern European cities.

So, we started conducting research on platform economies by focusing on delivery services and workers in that sector. At the same time, we also reflected on our working conditions as artists or people in the cultural sector, because the platform economy and cultural economy both exploit workers who are in a precarious situation. The whole project and the contributions are accessible online here: www.momentography.app

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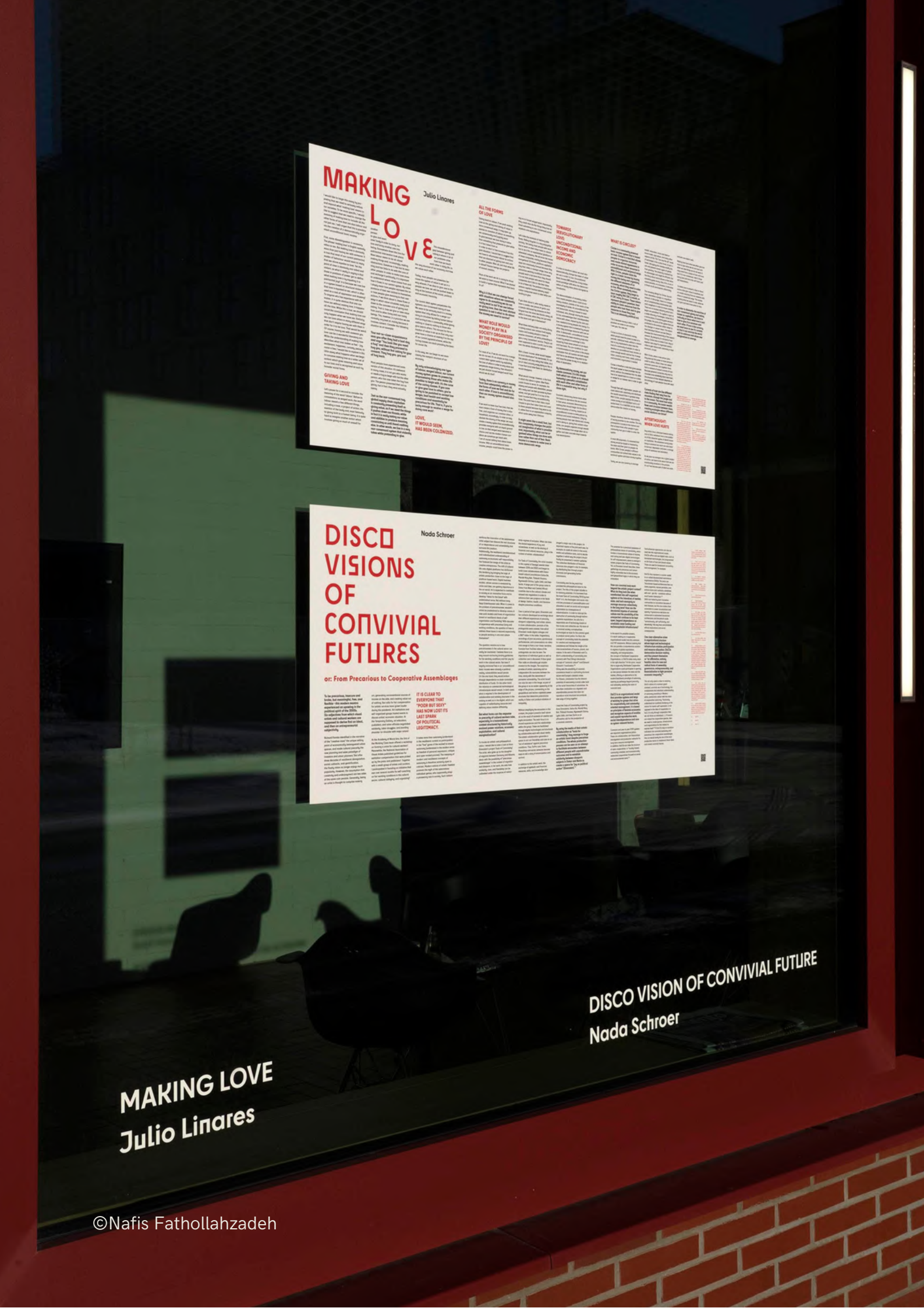
We try to balance our work between looking at failures and looking at potential. Yes, of course, there are lots of problems that a platform economy is causing for workers and that is why we are searching for the alternatives. The pandemic has intensified the precarious working conditions for freelancers, cultural workers and contractors, so precarity became a central topic within the network who contributed to Momentography, and also in debates that extend beyond this group. We need to work on alternative strategies to the state and private funding, and its unreliable resources, and think about the redistribution of wealth, accessibility, visibility, unionizing and self-organisation. In *Momentography*, DISCO VISIONS OF CONVIVIAL FUTURES, OR: FROM PRECARIOUS TO COOPERATIVE ASSEMBLAGES by Nada Schroer explores these problems and looks at emerging counter strategies. Starting from the observation of failures, we need imagination that can bring us somewhere else. For example, MAKING LOVE by Julio Linares promises living in an ecosystem powered by trust and love and introduces 'Circles' as a community-powered basic income system.

I would say that these platforms have markedly altered urban and social life, especially after the pandemic. In fact, it was during the pandemic that many of these platforms popped up. And they are now considered to be somehow normative, shaping the rules we adhere to and very much a part of everyday life.

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THE MIGRANT WORKERS ON THE FRONT LINE OF EUROPE'S CLIMATE CRISIS

Ismail Einashe

In the first incubator, I discussed investigative journalism methods about a story I worked on, exploring the experience of migrant farm workers in Sicily. The camp in Campobello di Mazara that I visited is home to migrants, mainly from Senegal, Tunisia, and The Gambia, who are now at the epicentre of climate change, working through record heatwaves, for as little as two or three euros an hour.

Some migrants have died over the last few years because of these conditions. Only last year, a young Malian was killed in June in Puglia in southern Italy, the country's largest tomato-growing region. Italy produces about 53% of all tomatoes consumed in Europe.

I will discuss some images my colleague, the photographer Kate Stanworth took during our visits to Campobello di Mazara. These pictures help to communicate the experience of people trying to survive in these conditions. I will also discuss how photographic documentation can form part of attempts to develop new investigative approaches to storytelling.

Around the town of Campobello di Mazara, beautiful olive groves stretch out into the distance, and you can see the Mediterranean right in the distance; on the other side is Tunisia. It is gorgeous in these fields. And then, just a short stroll away from the olive groves is something dark and frightful where hundreds of migrants are being exploited. Outside the town is a place they call a 'ghetto', an informal settlement home to hundreds of migrants. And it is not dissimilar to other such 'ghettos' in Italy. It's easy to find these places where people are forced to eke out a bleak existence.

The man in the above photograph is the butcher of Campobello camp. He is a migrant from Senegal. Behind him, you can see some materials used to build the camp, such as old furniture, mattresses, wooden frames, and doors. This is how they make these informal shacks where people live: they have no running water, they have no electricity, they have no sewage system, there is no medicine. There is drug dealing, and some camp residents are addicted to crack. There is also sex work going on in the camp. Most occupants are men who go out every morning to work twelve hours in the fields.

Below is a photograph of Boja, a migrant from The Gambia. He has lived in the camp for several years. We talked to him inside a shower room built from old wooden doors and bits of plastic sheets he finds on the streets. He has become the builder of the camp. He told us what it was like to live there, and he said that he felt unseen and ignored and that nobody


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cared about the plight of those who lived in the camp. He also told us about a fire in 2021, when the camp burned down, and a young migrant died. Hundreds of people were left homeless, and many of the shacks that Boja built were destroyed in the fire. So, he had to start from scratch again.

The photograph below is of Issa, a migrant from The Gambia who spent two years living in the Foggia ghetto in Puglia, the largest such camp in Italy. He's now working in a tomato processing factory in Puglia. I met him when he attended a march in Campobello di Mazara to commemorate the fire's first anniversary. He joined residents from that camp and activists to demand changes for the residents, such as water, medicine, and documentation, because many of these workers are undocumented. Therefore, they are ripe for exploitation. And Issa said that solidarity is essential for migrant farmworkers to connect with Italian activists. He is involved in a group they set up a couple of years ago in Puglia, which brings together predominantly African farmworkers and Italians to battle for better conditions and fight against the gangmaster system, which is illegal on paper, but the reality is quite different.

We know that migrant movements from Africa into Europe have been happening for a long time. But what's interesting about this is the climate connection. People growing tomatoes and picking olives are also fleeing the environmental crisis in their countries, such as Mali, Somalia, or Nigeria. Somalia is one of the countries that contributed the least to the ecological emergency. But it will be the second most impacted by climate change. In Kenya alone, five million people are at immediate risk of starvation. Therefore, many of the migrant workers in Italy fled environmental emergencies in their own countries of origin. Another Gambian activist, who represents the Gambian Association in Palermo, told me this. He said that Europe depended on its food production, on people who fled the environmental crisis engineered and created by the affluent West. Of course, also many of these migrants arrive in Europe because of conflict, in which Western powers have often played a role. Some people working to supply Europe with tomatoes, or Nocellara del Belice olives, were displaced due to the direct or indirect effects of the climate crisis. And if you look, legally, there is no protection for somebody fleeing their country because of climate change. No legal framework, such as the Geneva Convention, recognises the rights of those forced to flee their homes because of climate change.

The pictures discussed here play an essential role in investigative journalism because they help the reader connect with a place and the people whose experience is the story's subject. As we know, it is too common for refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and so on, to be


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represented as a threat. These people can rarely speak for themselves; instead, they typically have others speak for them. And stories about migrants often do not allow them to have their humanity: they're never able to have fully formed human stories. Pictures which help readers to connect with migrants like Boja or Issa can help to push back against the problematic features of the media representation of migration.

Pictures can also be essential in the research process, supporting new storytelling methods. For example, we are currently researching using maps and data to explore how climate change has affected Campobello di Maraza. There was a fire in the camp in 2021, and I took photos on my phone of some of the effects of that fire when I first visited. We were able to use GPS coordinates to connect these earlier images with photos that were taken from the fire in 2021. And then, we have linked these images to those that Kate took in 2022. In this way, it has been possible to give a sense of how Campobello has changed over time due to the fire and the rebuilding efforts of those who live there. And we can cross reference this information against weather patterns in that part of Sicily to see how climate change is playing out here. We have already visualised the camp in Campobello di Maraza using Google Maps and GPS coordinates to see how climate change may affect olive production in the region and migrants who work on these farms and live in these squalid camps. And now we're trying to do things in different ways to test our hypothesis and to try and bring an extra dimension to the story.

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Shine A Light's reporting on the 'accidental death' of young black Londoner Rashan Charles in the early hours of...

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ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF A YOUNG BLACK LONDONER, THE CASE OF RASHAN CHARLES

Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi

The following text is an excerpt from a presentation by investigative journalist, Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi who together with Clare Sambrook leads on Shine A Light, a UK-based investigative journalism project.

As Shine A Light puts it: *We produce systematic, in-depth and original research and reporting. Everything we publish is grounded in rigorous research.*

Mindful that investigative journalism's workforce is disproportionately privileged and white, Shine A Light promotes inclusion by persuasion, and we lead by example through our commissioning, teaching and paid-internship—see this Nieman Lab story. We teach and run workshops on investigations, writing and storytelling. We love to collaborate.

Underpinning our work at Shine A Light is a commitment to collaboration, comradeship and respect - with the people we're editing and commissioning, and the communities most affected by the issues we write about. We work with bereaved families, community organisers, activists, researchers and lawyers, people who have access to stories of injustice but need support in effectively getting their message out. We help them craft evidence of harm into compelling prose that inspires readers to action.

The investigative case study that I wish to focus on relates to an event that took place in the early hours of the 22nd of July 2017. A young man named Rashan Charles died on the floor of a Hackney convenience shop. The Metropolitan Police claimed that he was taken ill after trying to swallow an object. They said that the police had intervened and sought to prevent Rashan from harming himself. This official version of events appeared on the BBC later that morning. My colleague, Claire Sambrook, immediately noticed that something was amiss in the official reports. For one thing she was alerted to the phrases used, such as , 'taken ill' and 'became unwell'. These words rang alarm bells. Claire had seen these exact phrases in official reports and other restraint-related deaths in custody that she had previously investigated.

Okay, so now let's take a step back. There are many reasons for our initial alertness to what happened to Rashan. One was that we had been tracking stories that contained similar elements over several years. To us, what happened to Rashan was not a one-off tragedy. We saw it as part of the wider systematic injustice in British society not unconnected to historical events - the way certain institutions are run and how whole communities live and are impacted. For example, years ago when researching a piece on the subject of black mental health, I came across

a disproportionate number of blackmen dying after or during restraint by police and medical professionals. And it wasn't a new story then, it had been documented for decades and was, is, still a problem.

I revisited the subject again, a few years later, and this time spotted another issue. This was the disproportionate number of teenagers who died by suicide after mental distress and prolonged contact with the police.

Meanwhile, Claire had worked on stories about people who had died by restraint at the hands of state operatives in immigration detention centres and children's prisons. Like the 15 year-old who was four foot,10 inches and weighed 91 pounds when three adult officers restrained him for several minutes until he died in 2004.

Within 24 hours, a clip from inside the shop where Rashan died appeared on social media. Clare quickly got to work. She watched the grainy footage over and over, noted details and timings, and then we published Shine's first story. A clear, sober detailed report on what really happened to Rashan.

So what actually happened? Rashan walked into the shop a fit and healthy 20 year-old. He was thrown to the ground and heavily restrained by a police officer. A second man joined in the restraint, and, with the police officer, held him down until his body went limp and his face turned grey. Rashan stopped breathing and lost consciousness on the shop floor. Still, they carried on restraining him. In complete contrast to what the police said, Rashan died after being subjected to heavy use of force. Claire's early reports were the first to capture the truth, to cut through official lying and get at what happened. In the months following Rashan's death, we worked methodically to dismantle the official narrative piece by piece.

Part of our investigation involved making sure we paid proper attention to the inquest. In the UK an inquest is usually held at the end of an investigation into an unnatural or suspicious death. The process is presided over by a coroner. Inquests are legal inquiries into the cause and circumstances of a death answering specific questions: who died, where they died, when they died and how they came to their death.

It's closer to a fact-finding exercise than a court where someone might be found guilty and punished. But it's incredibly important for bereaved families in instances like deaths in police state care and custody or the Grenfell Tower fire inquests for example, because it's an opportunity to hold the state to account, identify poor policy and dangerous practice.

Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi

You can question police officers, prison and immigration guards, medical practitioners... That's why it's so crucial for journalists - you get an insight into how such institutions are run and how deaths like Rashan's can happen and keep happening.

At Shine we'd covered other inquests, into deaths in immigration detention, deaths of learning disabled and autistic people, so we had an idea of how valuable it would be in this case. Particularly as, with any democratic or judicial process, the integrity of that particular inquest varies depending on the quality of the coroner, the pathologists assessing medical evidence, the ability of the bereaved family to pay for lawyers... and so on. Scrutiny of this process really matters.

Much of the work published was influenced by members of Rashan's family. We built a comradely working relationship through our working commitment to the story ... If we hadn't invested the time, care and attention to this process, the official narrative would have held. There would be no public record of the damning witness statements revealing that when Rashan was handcuffed he was already losing consciousness, that early on during the restraint Rashan was having trouble breathing, that the police officer involved failed to take control of the scene and allowed a man described as a 'member of the public' to handcuff and sit on Rashan, while Rashan appeared to choke. One of things that we try to do at Shine is stay with the story and revisit the case, years later.

Having secured fresh CCTV footage we were able to find a fresh way to tell the story in the form of a short documentary

Rashan Charles: Accidental Death of a Black Londoner


well,
yeah.
©Kit Braybrooke

GROWING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND 'THIRD SPACES'

Sarah: Welcome to the Berlin Incubator, day two. I'm joined here today by Dr Kit Braybrook, an artist and researcher. Kit, would you like to introduce yourself and maybe share with the group something about your practice?

Kit: It's nice to be here. I am a multi-environmental artist and digital anthropologist. I work transnationally across Europe, Asia, and Canada. I have just moved back to Vancouver after ten years in London, and I was in Berlin for the last year at Technical University, on a project with the Department of International Urbanism and Design, building Living Labs for sustainable transformation with urban-rural communities in China and Germany. I also direct the feminist creative lab We and Us <studiowe.net>, which explores co-creation approaches for systems change and has been run by female-identified individuals since 2020.

Sarah: We're delighted to have your input into the incubator, in particular, because of the way your expertise spans the digital domain and socially engaged art. As I was reacquainting myself with your work in preparation for our discussion, I was very impressed with the way that it melds together a distinctive kind of digital, and in-person work. Would you be able to say a bit more about the 'Third Space', an idea that I know informs your practice.

Kit: Thanks, Sarah. A lot of my work is quite spatially informed, and it excites me to find others who are traversing between interstitial zones in their own ways. The idea of a 'Third Space' was, I believe, first used by the social scientist Ray Oldenburg, to describe public places that are not quite home and also not quite work, but somewhere in between. Oldenburg argues that these 'Third Spaces' allow us to make enriching communities. Examples of 'Third Spaces' might be cafes, salons, public parks and the library. When we meet people in places that feel safe, which aren't their home or their work, this is where social transformation and systems change can occur through various modalities of discourse, interaction and the encountering of difference. Gathering in such spaces frees us up to think about alternative futures and ways of being. And I would argue that it does not matter if these encounters are so-called 'online' or 'offline', especially because today 'third spaces' are increasingly blended. I think that this is a wonderful moment in more-than-human history, where we can blend physical forms and non-physical forms - our virtual identities - to try things out in worlds situated somewhere in between, which explore how pluriverses - or worlds where many worlds fit, in the words of the Zapatistas - can be built over time.

Sarah: How important is a sense of place in the digital realm?

Kit: Place is shaped by architectures of bricks and mortar, but it is also a social construct: that is, it depends on and is constructed from, social relationships. In the end, our minds often can't fully see the difference between a physical and a virtual place. The ambiguity that results can cause trouble, as it sometimes has done when we look at the history of the internet, but it's also caused all kinds of interesting opportunities and speculative environments to unfold. For example, some of the very first digital communities were text-only chat rooms such as LambdaMOO (multi-user dimension), where people would build a place, and build characters to inhabit it together, entirely through words alone. Not even voice was included in the early days. Those who participated in them described these text-only chat rooms as some of the most real and embodied worlds that they had experienced. Participants can still describe visually the kinds of space that they inhabited and shared there, even though these were exclusively text-based. I think there's something beautiful in the simplicity of that early kind of digital space, especially in our current post-Internet world, with digital screens surrounding us everywhere at all turns, and a push toward different kinds of augmented reality. The simplicity of the early internet reminds us that we can still build spaces of refuge, where we can feel safe and connected – even within the limited construct of this corporate, dark, worrisome internet that we're currently faced with.

Sarah: On the subject of spaces based largely on text, I would like to talk to you a little bit about your COVID Creative Toolkit, which is a resource that contains links for artists explaining how to transfer their work online, different platforms that they can use and places where they could find grants. When I first saw it, it was flying across multiple slack channels, email threads, and different newsletters as this emergent, slightly chaotic page, as people across the world shared and contributed to it. I wonder, could you explain a little bit more about what the toolkit is, why you built it and then where it is today?

Kit: Two-and-a-half years ago, in the early days of COVID, I was living in London, in Bloomsbury, surrounded by the grounds of beautiful global universities, which were all completely shut down. No public space was open. You weren't even allowed to sit in parks like Hyde Park. If you were sitting, then the police would come up and say: 'can you please move along, you're not supposed to be here'. So, there was a strong sense then that all of our 'Third Places', those public spaces that we had gained such nourishment from, were closing off in front of our eyes. And at the same time, there was a clear need for a space where creative practitioners who weren't already half-digitised would feel safe to come online, to

start putting their work online and perhaps start engaging with digital communities. The toolkit came out of a global community called Art Tech Nature Culture <atnc.persona.co>, which I co-founded, which serves about 500 socially engaged artists and practitioners and technologists who are thinking about what ecological regeneration can mean in our work, and how we can respond to the climate crisis through our practice. Even in a community of people like this, which is entirely based in the digital realm, I could see there were some struggles to face the new reality that we would have to be almost entirely online for an indefinite amount of time.

The toolkit was at first just a Google Doc. I asked all the curators and creative people that I could think of to get involved. There were about twenty in the end who came on as its curators, who were mostly moderating people's additions because the page was completely open. I learned about so many communities on the fringes and on the margins of digital space that I'd never heard of. It is very easy right now to feel quite sad when harkening back to the old days of the early internet and to feel like the current internet is a corporate space where all of this spirit has died. This little toolkit reminded us all that there still are interesting, strange, radical spaces that are flourishing alongside the corporate conglomerated ones, but sometimes we just need to be reminded that these spaces are there. Now, the toolkit is a public archive. While its contents already look outdated, it captures that moment of hopeful energy.

Sarah: One of the beautiful things about the COVID Creative Toolkit is that it visualises a community. You could see it being edited in real-time, you could see all these little icons in this space, adding documents and making comments. It was emergent, but it was also a way of de-invisiblising a community that we could no longer see in face-to-face spaces at that point. What I'd like to ask though, is what part does trust play in an online place where contributions are anonymised?

Kit: There's a really big element of trust which is required. I would say that this is the case not only in online spaces but in all kinds of collaborative work. Socially engaged artists are ultimately trusting whatever publics we're working with: we're looking towards them in good spirits. In such collaborations, we're opening ourselves up, and creating the expectation for others in the project to be open in return. This is like saying: 'if you're going to participate in this with us, we're all going to have to risk a little bit, we're all going to be sharing a space, we're all going to be building something experimental that might not work out and might be just processional in the end. But you know, we're all here to try it out. Right?' And I think that's really beautiful about socially engaged art: it is so contingent. It's a bit wild: you never know what's going to happen.

And a lot of it's just about the vibration of the space at a moment in history; it's a bit of a timestamp. A lot of my work is extremely processional and hard to predict in advance, but I would say it's never been a net negative.

It has always provided me with wonderful interactions, even in the mosh pits of collaboration that occur when you bring diverse social actors together in one space. Lately, I've been experimenting more and more with bringing non-human actors into collaborative work too. This is in the context of socially engaged art that focuses on ecological regeneration through the lens of multi-speciesism and post-humanism, where algorithmic machines, vegetal machines, and animal agencies are invited as co-designers and as equal actors in an unfolding process. That makes things even more crazy and wild! But it is also beautiful because we learn so much about ourselves when we open ourselves to these kinds of new relations. Especially when we are in digital spaces, as there's an extra level of opening that can occur when we aren't showing our faces to each other. Of course, we all know the examples of where this has gone wrong. But at least in the communities that I've been involved in, I feel like the entities show up with their best selves, where they can. I think all of us who have engaged as avatars in a digital realm know what it feels like to be heard and then not feel safe. I think, therefore, we are especially conscious these days of ensuring that there is a sense of safety and nourishment and fellowship because otherwise there's no point in building such spaces unless we invite that kind of energy into the room.

Sarah: Thanks so much for these thought-provoking reflections on the nature of 'Third Spaces', Kit, and on trust and collaboration. They resonate very strongly with other contributions to the incubator, while also providing a very distinctive perspective derived from your work in the digital realm.


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COMMISSION IDEATION

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Kit Braybrooke &
Sarah Allen

How do we create a meeting ground? How might the commissions map out the fault lines - dig deep around the methodologies... enter a speculative space?

Moderators:
Áine O'Brien
Daniela Nofal

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW TOGETHER?
Daniel Trilling

NOTES ON PLANETARY IMAGINATION
Ashish Ghadiali

INCUBATOR

4

COMMISSIONS

THE GREAT DYING
Dana Olărescu

AFTER - IMAGES
Dominik Czechowski

NOTES ON PLANETARY IMAGINATION

Ashish Ghadiali

Towards the end of 2022, I was commissioned by The Box in Plymouth to deliver a 5-screen film installation, reflecting a personal exploration of the South-West Film and TV archive. My approach to the material was to be shaped by my interest in race as a factor relating to and running through landscapes of South-West England, something that had been a subject of contemplation for me since moving onto the South Devon coast in the autumn of 2017 where I saw histories of the triangular trade all around me and yet nothing living of the cultural interactions and human diversity that must have been brought in with those histories.

I wondered how that long erasure of black and brown lives had been enacted, and brought these questions into the work I had been doing with The Box, exploring, for around six months before the commission began, the challenges of decolonisation, thinking with and across the organisation about what this process is, what it's value is and how it might serve to strengthen the foundations of a more inclusive and more meaningful approach to culture in a landscape so shaped, as Plymouth is, by the memory of imperialist adventure. At around the same time, I was invited by Beyond the Now to participate in the Collaborative Incubator exploring the intersection of investigative journalism and socially engaged practice and strategies to reframe the representation of migration in the EU media. Those conversations, which extended over field trips to Berlin and Palermo in the early months of 2023, and the questions they provoked, informed the work that subsequently developed.

Questions about reframing migration, have been a central preoccupation of my work for some time now. Back in 2006, for example, I was part of the team that set up The Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp, in Palestine, where the generational displacement (the camp was established there in 1954) had fed a half-century of objectification, distortion and escalating political violence that had set the context in which we were establishing spaces for marginalised young people to gain tools for self-expression. In 2014, when I went to meet the former Guantanamo detainee, Moazzam Begg, in his home in Birmingham, pitching him the film project that would later become the feature documentary, The Confession (2016), my angle was that the film would restore a three dimensional representation to his public image, where the mainstream media had turned him into a cardboard cut-out figure - the Islamist, the bogeyman - to be wheeled on at will around tea-time before being shut back in its box.

Reconnecting Begg's experiences of the War on Terror to his own early years as part of an immigrant community in Sparkhill, Birmingham and as part of an immigrant history of Partition before that, emerged as a strategy for humanising his experience in the eyes of a wider audience and giving context to his story. In the long-run, it helped to restore some of his political agency too. Coming off the back of that project, I set

about a process of establishing grassroots editorial circles for people of colour in different cities across England, thinking deeper into methods for nurturing voice in community and then bringing it into view free from the pressures of the white gaze that dominates mainstream media editorial processes.

From the outset, life in South Devon was a disruption to this creative strategy of engagement around race and representation. Across Devon and Cornwall, a rural and coastal area that voted emphatically to leave the EU in the referendum of 2016, racial diversity remains significantly less than 4% and in the pub at the end of the row of sea-front cottages where I was living, there was only me to speak for decolonial perspectives on 100 years of coastal erosion that had been happening on the ground right in front of us, or on the transfer of a once inhabited sea-front into holiday lets or on the disastrous expense of red tape and confusion that was about to beset the British economy. As a holiday destination, the area seemed to me to serve as a space for the indulgence of nostalgia for an England imagined as free from the complications of urban multiculturalism and of empire and in that environment, and without a tangible community of colour around me with whom I could build up a voice of resistance, I felt myself often bending beneath the pressures of the white gaze, selecting my words, modifying my behaviours.

I'm sure we do this all the time and for many reasons other than racial identity too, but the experience sharpened a sensitivity that, as I began to dig through the archive, looking for accounts and traces of black and brown lives through the landscape we shared, would cause certain newsreels to jump out at me. An interview from the 1960s, for example, with Patricia Wright about discrimination in the job market, would reveal her squirming in response to the broadcaster's heavy-handed questioning. Footage of South Asian refugees arriving at refugee camps in Somerset, in the aftermath of their expulsion from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1971, seemed to articulate quite precisely the challenge for migrant subjects of holding ground between nativist projections of them as on one hand benevolent refugees to be helped at all costs and on the other hand as a crippling burden on the state and a threat to the domestic job market.

Striking was the fact that around these reels, the archive, built up largely from decades of local broadcast content, offered little by way of context about the situation then unfolding in Uganda, say, or the connection between Amin and the British Army, for whom he was deployed against the Mau-Mau rebels in Kenya in 1952 before going on to rise to the highest rank possible for an African officer at that time. Where I was


We haven't

looking for material that would provide historical depth and texture to the lives we could glimpse here, I found myself empty-handed time and again and the subjects of the footage remained, as they had been captured at the time, alien and disempowered.

The problem that presented itself read much the same as one that continues to play out through mainstream media representations of migration across Europe today, where representations of white saviourism in relation to the projected helplessness of immigrants can quickly pivot into evocations of threat, of crime and misdemeanour, all of which service the deeper imaginary fear of hordes from the global south that haunt the European mind in this age of climate collapse. Like so many aspects of the enlightenment, we tend to believe in our consumption of images and of data as pointing us in the direction of greater factual verisimilitude with the world we inhabit but observing the slow process of invisibilisation that followed the movement of Uganda's early refugees from event through mediation and into the archive, it became increasingly clear to me that it was less facts that had been amassed here as much as what would resonate with the native ignorance of the viewer at the time. Over time that material builds up. It becomes a reality. TV constructs it.

In response, a new sense of creative purpose began to consolidate around this work, which was above all about moving footage once intended for armchair viewers sat at home into the public space of a museum gallery, creating a space for ongoing reflection with the past and possibly for transcendence of it too. Instead of explaining the footage, leaning on history, I started to see how the footage could be transformed through strategies, like fiction, or like dream-making, of generating meaning through the juxtaposition of disparate images. Here, material that had once been created out of sentiments of nativist nostalgia would start to disobey their sources. Characters would speak across time and space. Unexpected connections and new framings would emerge and that in turn could shape a new reality.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW TOGETHER?

Cultural projects that aim to change narratives around migration, or the way that media organisations represent people on the move, almost always end up producing more media content. There are good reasons for this. If you want to show what's missing from a dominant narrative, the simplest way to do it is to describe as clearly as possible what you think is missing and why. If you think there are other ways of telling stories – or other people who could be telling the stories – then the most powerful way is to lead by example. Finding ways to put the means of production into the hands of people traditionally excluded from Europe's media institutions is an urgent task.

If these efforts only take place in the abstract, however – as one-off experiments, or pleas for media organisations to adopt better practices – they are unlikely to work. Neither are top-down initiatives. Claiming and holding physical space, whether that's an office where journalists have the resources they need to do their jobs, or neighbourhood institutions where a community can gather and express itself in more diffuse ways, matters just as much.

I've spent more than ten years reporting on people who come to Europe in search of asylum and in my opinion, the question of physical space matters here more than anywhere else. Because of Europe's restrictive border policies, people are necessarily forced to make fragmented, often hidden journeys that undermine their attempts to settle in any one place. What's more, European asylum systems use space as a weapon: sometimes they detain people in one location and sometimes they disperse them across scattered accommodation sites. Either way, these policies hinder people's ability to express themselves collectively or to interact with the communities around them.

That's why it's crucial to understand the ways in which people – groups who might share similar immigration histories, or people with very different backgrounds working in solidarity with one another – can work against the grain of the system. Claiming space and using it for self-expression, particularly when a larger system is trying to discourage you from doing so, is an essential first step to changing the dominant narratives refracted across our media.

Palermo, in Sicily, makes a useful case study in this respect. As the largest city on an island that has been the point of arrival for many people fleeing across the Mediterranean over the past decade, it has come to occupy a prominent position in Europe's immigration politics. Notably, the city's former mayor, Leoluca Orlando, tried to make Palermo a pole of resistance to the anti-immigration policies of Europe's far-right populists, drawing on the city's millennia-long history of absorbing the various cultures that have crisscrossed the Mediterranean.

It's also where some of today's most precarious migrant communities have been able to gather and carve out space. That's not so unusual for a European city, but there is something of a hothouse effect in the neighbourhood surrounding Ballaro, one of the long-running street markets at Palermo's centre. For these reasons, Ballaro has also been the focus of much attention from researchers, journalists (like myself), artists and others interested in migration. This means that community activists there have not only put a lot of thought into the immediate aims of their projects – those of a migrant community association, for instance, or of a legal advice and support centre – but the role these projects play in shaping wider narratives.

'We're challenging the narrative ourselves', is how a member of Palermo's Gambian community association put it to me. During Ramadan, Gambian and Senegalese community activists run an outdoor iftar solidarity kitchen near the Ballaro market. On an evening in mid-April, I watched several dozen activists cook stew and prepare food packages with bread and fruit in front of the Senegalese community association's headquarters, a former restaurant on a small city square. The activists I spoke to were keen to stress that the free food they handed out was for anyone who needed it – Muslim or not, recent arrivals or Sicilian-born.

It seemed to me that this use of city space served a dual purpose. First, it was an attempt to create a durable, visible point of contact. Many people from Gambia and Senegal have arrived in Italy via refugee routes. Those still in the asylum system can be housed in isolated extra-urban locations, subject to the rationing and legal restrictions common to asylum policy across Europe. Even people with status are not entirely secure. Italy's far-right government recently declared a 'state of emergency' after a recent rise in Mediterranean crossings: one of its proposals is to revoke the immigration status of some refugees. That's a

recipe for increased destitution. In this context, a self-organised welfare initiative isn't only about meeting immediate needs; it's a way for people to retain agency within a system that often tries to strip them of power.

Second, it's also a way of laying claim to the city itself. Not in an exclusionary way – but as a way of saying 'this is our home too'. The solidarity kitchen might only last for the duration of Ramadan, but as one activist described it to me it's part of a series of outreach efforts that they take part in all year round. For instance, some activists visit schools to give talks about migration, and directly counter the myths and distortions spread by hostile politicians and media outlets. 'Experience is the best teacher', the activist told me.

If a solidarity kitchen is necessarily serious, then there are also more playful ways to achieve similar ends. Giocherenda is the name of a Palermo-based collective who run a handcraft shop close to Ballaro. First-time visitors might mistake it for a souvenir shop, selling bags, garments and ornaments with a West African theme. But its true role is as a hub for an arts collective that makes games and objects intended to build connections between people through storytelling. Even their name is a play on words. In the Pulaar language, spoken in West Africa, 'giocherenda' means something like 'solidarity', 'strength through sharing' or 'the joy of doing things together'. It also sounds like the Italian word 'giocare', to play.

Founded by Palermitans originally from Guinea, Gambia, Mali and elsewhere, Giocherenda designs games that aim to unsettle a power dynamic familiar to many refugees. As one of Giocherenda's founders described it to me, in his first years in Sicily he was surprised at how often people would quiz him about his background, in ways he found impolite. As a journalist, I know that only too well: even well-intentioned reporting on people who've had difficult migration experiences involves a harvesting of stories. The decision-making power – about how to represent a person, a community, or a set of experiences – lies in the hands of the interviewer. All the interviewee can usually do is decide whether or not to take part. The demands of media institutions, such as news values, time pressures and editorial slants, prioritise certain aspects of a person's experience. Cumulatively, they risk reducing people to those experiences only. Giocherenda's games disrupt that relationship by creating a new, shared space between the storyteller and listener.

The Carte Acchiapparicordi ('Memory-Catcher Cards') game, for example, is based on a deck of cards. Each card bears a word such as 'challenge', 'fear', 'conflict', and so on – accompanied by an abstract collage. One way to play the game is by players taking turns to draw a card. Each tells a story about an episode in their life linked to the word they randomly pick. They could all be true stories, or the players might decide to mix fiction with fact. By introducing these elements of chance and uncertainty, the game creates a new, intimate space for storytelling – one that, in theory, avoids the usual binaries of interviewer and subject, or migrant and host. The games can be played anywhere, of course, but a permanent, inviting space in the centre of Palermo firmly links Giocherenda's projects to the patchwork of activism taking place across the city.

Carte Acchiapparicordi game, Encounter playing card designed by Giocarenda.

Grassroots projects are often transitory. Ambitions can outstrip resources and it's easy for collective knowledge to get lost. You might also say the same for situations where people are forced to be on the move, especially where state policies further destabilise their living conditions. Here, too, is where laying claim to space can be a way of retaining and building on that accumulated knowledge. Maldusa is a newly-opened Palermo cultural centre, a collaboration between several networks of campaigners whose work centres on migration. The project is an effort to bring together some of the self-organised migrant community networks – some of the people who run the iftar solidarity kitchen are also involved in running Maldusa – with activists who are not themselves refugees, but who have been involved in search and rescue efforts at sea, or legal support and other forms of solidarity on land.

At the moment, Maldusa's Palermo site (the project has another base on the Italian island of Lampedusa, another key point on migration routes from Africa) aims to be a relatively open venue for people to use in different ways: a co-working space, an information resource centre, perhaps even a venue for exhibitions and other cultural events. The hope is that this will support community networks in discussing and planning future projects. But as one of Maldusa's founders described it to me, the project is also deliberately aimed at changing some of the established narratives around migration. A key aim is to challenge the perception of migration across the Mediterranean as an 'emergency' situation. People often have urgent needs, not least those making dangerous sea journeys. But the language of crisis, which came to dominate after the events of 2015, not only feeds a populist backlash – it hinders thinking about longer-lasting ways to support people on the move.

Another aim is to break down the distinction between 'migrants' – people frequently perceived as helpless, or asking for help – and their rescuers, usually white Europeans. In practical terms, this might involve sharing knowledge and research on resisting the criminalisation of people who cross borders without permission (or of those who give them aid), or on ways to break the isolation imposed by European asylum policies. Just as Giocherenda's games create an imagined space where the usual relationships can be sidestepped, if only temporarily, so Maldusa aims to create a physical meeting ground. Its name is a portmanteau of Malta and Lampedusa, two of the most common arrival points for people making sea crossings – the suggestion of a nowhere zone in the middle of the Mediterranean, or perhaps a place that is yet to be built.

For the moment, since Maldusa is a new project, most of these ambitions remain to be fulfilled. Claiming space is the first step. Now people will have to hold it, which takes money, time and other resources. They will have to find effective ways of working together, of combining different worldviews and making space for people from many different backgrounds.

One thing that caught my attention, however, was that the organisers also want to make Maldusa a space in Palermo where journalists interested in migration can come and find out more about the subject – perhaps even pick up some training in how to do their jobs respectfully and without compounding the harm done to people who are made vulnerable by immigration policy. If done well, that to me sounds like the basis for a way of doing journalism differently – of telling stories in collaboration with the communities they arise from. I expect there are people with similar ideas in many different cities. What would it take to be able to share those ideas, and to build something new together?


SEA
WOMAN

THE GREAT DYING

Dana Olărescu

The following piece was born out of the radical hospitality of various individuals and groups I encountered in Palermo, who generously shared their time and ideas. I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to everyone at Maldusa, Salvadore Punturo at Teatro Massimo, and Clelia Bartoli and Samuel for their brave stances.

Some 250 million years ago, global warming led the Permian-Triassic mass extinction, – also known as the Great Dying – to wipe out around 70 per cent of life on land and 90 per cent in the oceans. Glancing into the future – say, to the year 2100 – it is predicted that, should global warming of 2.7 °C become a reality, almost '40% of humanity could be living outside of the optimal climate for humans'. Biodiversity loss levels are signalling the start of a contemporary mass extinction, with its incipient effects already being felt in various areas of the world. A second Great Dying could ensue unless significant preventative action is taken.

At the time of writing, the hottest area in Europe is Sicily; a temperature of 48.8 °C was recorded in the town of Syracuse in 2021. Simultaneously, since 2014, the island has become one of the primary destinations for people crossing the Mediterranean in search of humanitarian protection and in order to escape the repercussions of climate change. This Great Dying is man-made and renders certain areas uninhabitable, while human inaction and an obscene lack of compassion and solidarity ensures the deadliness of migrants' consequent sea crossings.

The United Nations' 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or political opinion. As climate refugees are not covered by this definition, they are not guaranteed to receive adequate protection. Sea levels are rising, and a 2.7 °C rise could result in changes which would render global landscapes unrecognisable, with numerous coastal areas submerged and millions of people displaced.

This will lead to social, economic, and political disruptions as people lose their homes, livelihoods, and access to essential services. With critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, buildings, and power grids unuseable, transportation and communication will be disrupted; flooding will create public health risks through the contamination of food and water supplies; the loss of crops and livestock will make alternative solutions for growing food necessary. This waterlogged future would require new and appropriate skills. Under these circumstances, rescues at sea are likely to become increasingly vital, with both those piloting the boats and those with lived experience of the crossing playing a major part. Yet, with media complicity, many governments promote fear and dislike of migrants, scapegoating them to misdirect attention away from domestic failings. For this reason, those currently piloting boats to prevent people from drowning at sea are at risk of being criminalised.

Maldusa, a cultural association with hubs in both Palermo and Lampedusa, has been recently founded by activists who aim to facilitate freedom of movement and support infrastructures for migrant solidarity, with a specific focus on Mediterranean sea routes. Its wider remit is the dismantling of ingrained top-down power dynamics, which create an unhelpful victim/saviour dynamic between those crossing the Mediterranean and their 'rescuers'. This approach counterpoints migrants' consistent depiction in European media as either dangerous perpetrators and potential burdens on social welfare systems, or vulnerable and desperate individuals with no agency. Maldusa's ethical reframing suggests that solidarity is a viable way to dismantle stereotypes created by those who initially brought about this situation.

Given the possibility of the Great Dying being accelerated, these narratives should be enforced to prevent further mass graves in the Mediterranean, and to strengthen alliances between those seeking new homes and those already living at their destination. The future requires skills rooted in generosity, co-operation, and care; the ability to pilot boats – which, as Maldusa explains, 'facilitate[s] freedom of movement' rather than 'rescue' – will become increasingly crucial. As the waters rise, incarceration of boats' pilots will only increase avoidable deaths.

However, this is not a plea for resilience, as resilience in the face of disasters will no longer suffice. Instead, it is a plea for the start of mass training, skill- and knowledge-sharing, and a rapid transformation of existing power structures. Non-dominating power should be the only way forward: power 'with' instead of power 'over' leads to meaningful collective action, teaches people to share power more gracefully, and repels the paralysing effect of climate panic. The work to make this changes has already been begun:

Researcher Clelia Bartoli lectures in Human Rights in the Department of Law at the University of Palermo; Samuel, one of her students, explained a workshop he organised as part of her course on enacting border dynamics. Law students performed the roles of both the state authorities and those attempting to cross the border, turning the class into a live experience. The stark gulf between how law is taught and how it is brought to bear on human beings moved the students to tears, making them demand a more just system. Through a simple act of co-operation-based training, these skills could be learned and practised in different communities.

In 2015, Leoluca Orlando, mayor from 2012 and 2022 and a champion of global mobility as a human right, wrote the 2015 Charter of Palermo: an impassioned case for the creation of 'solidarity cities'. To prototype this, he put forward the idea of a migrant children's choir: the Rainbow Choir (il Coro Arcobaleno). Taking residence at Teatro Massimo, the third largest opera house in Europe, and conducted by Salvadore Punturo, the initiative aims to use culture as a tool to democratise access to power, training, and opera. Over the years, audience demographics have changed and the children have grown. For Punturo, who uses music as an equaliser, it was imperative that they 'lived the theatre' and had the right to share the stage with classically trained opera singers.

What if the choir sang from a world-renowned stage about the urgency of mass training and skill- and knowledge-sharing, in order to promote alternative cultural values that oppose migrant stereotypes?

What if the choir provided the musical score to Samuel's workshop, which could be re-enacted on stage for large audiences to learn about the hostility of borders?

What if culture was used as a major tool to interrogate migration, and to enable the creation of more equitable futures?

What if the prospect of the Great Dying created the conditions for a long-term commitment to stamp out one-dimensional media representations of migration?

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AFTER - IMAGES

Dominik Czechowski

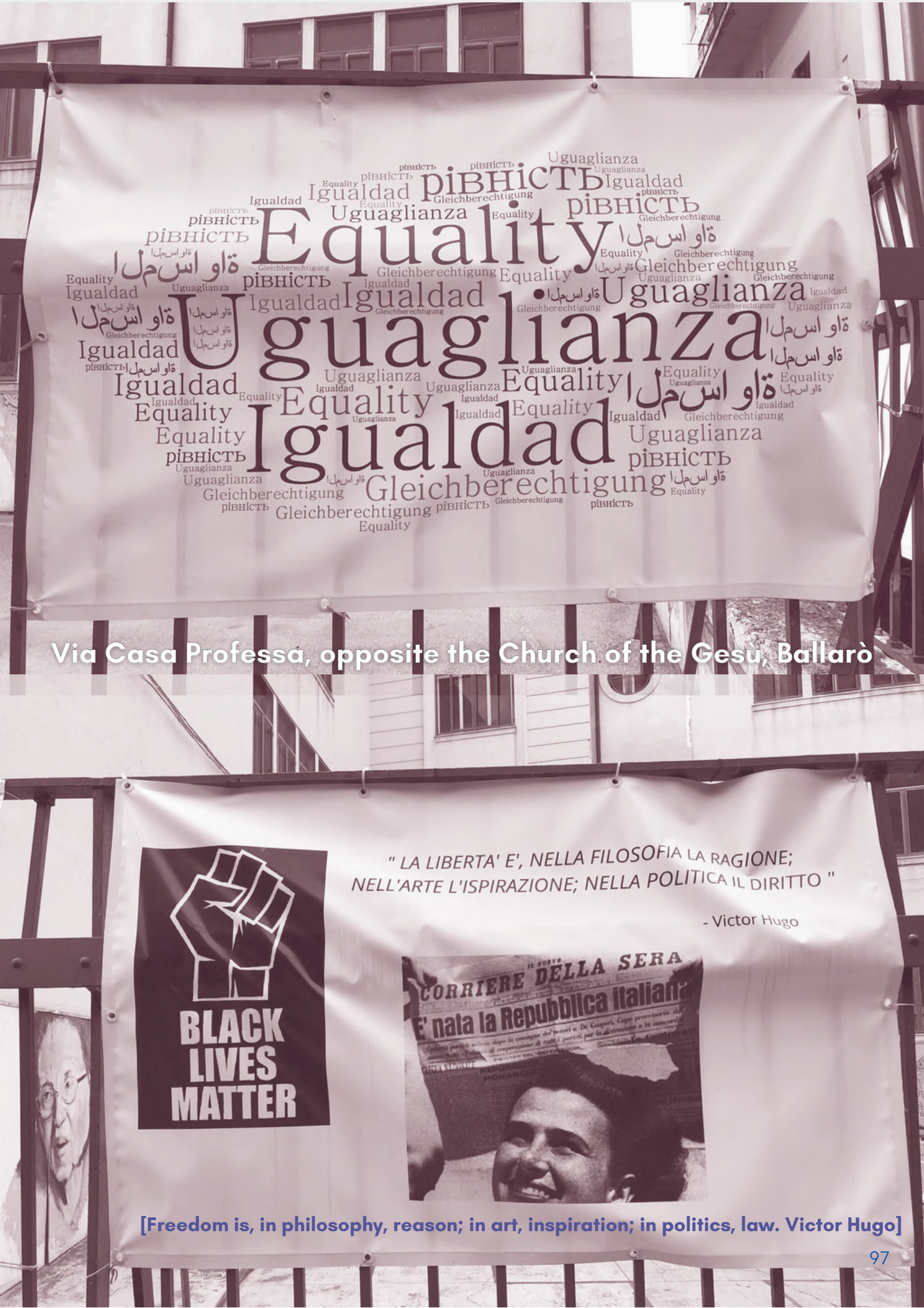
The idea for this piece was partly inspired by the German-Jewish art historian Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas. Composed between 1927-29, it presents history through a montage of images. This way of mapping the 'afterlife of antiquity' is dynamic rather than static, tracing recurring visual themes and patterns across time from prehistory to contemporary culture. The Atlas poses problems rather than solves them; works on short circuits and not linear narratives. Warburg was convinced that images are the best way to tell the history of culture in all its dynamics, and his concept of 'Bildwanderung', or 'the migration of images', was closely linked to the ideas of survival, heritage, and memory.

To read the present (but also the future) through a magnifying glass of emergency or crisis is a truly short-sighted approach. Through this visual essay, I look at contemporary displacement and the city of Palermo with its multiple epistemologies of hydrogeography in a broader historical and cultural context. This piece prioritises the work of images, predominantly my own photographs, in both their singular and collective meanings and, possibly, contradictions. In most cases, the accompanying captions act as fragmentary mnemonic excavations in the attempt to navigate issues such as forced migration, the legacies of colonialism and ecological crisis, and as a pathway toward pluriversality.

Why do certain images, historical (dis)continuities, mistranslations, and narratives insist on our seeing and hearing while others do not?

What new meanings, sensitivities, collective dreams, political imaginations, and future forms of solidarity and resistance can be found in the stories from Palermo, città aperta?

Palermo - Monreale - Nice, April 2023



Via Casa Professa, opposite the Church of the Gesù, Ballarò

[Freedom is, in philosophy, reason; in art, inspiration; in politics, law. Victor Hugo]

Sisterhood is Still Powerful

Next to Santa Chiara all'Albergaria, a church and former monastery located near the busy outdoor Ballarò marketplace, there is an abandoned turret, one of the city's best-preserved water towers, in Piazzetta Sette Fate. Its name is remembered in many popular stories and legends, including that of Giuseppe Pitrè (1841-1916) - an Italian folklorist, medical doctor, anthropologist, and senator for Sicily - which tells of seven beautiful women (Fate, 'fairies') who appeared at night to kidnap men (or women, according to their preferences), and take them to magical and mysterious places, before returning them home the next morning. They were women of flesh and blood but endowed with an astonishing power: that of leaving the body to wander in spirit.

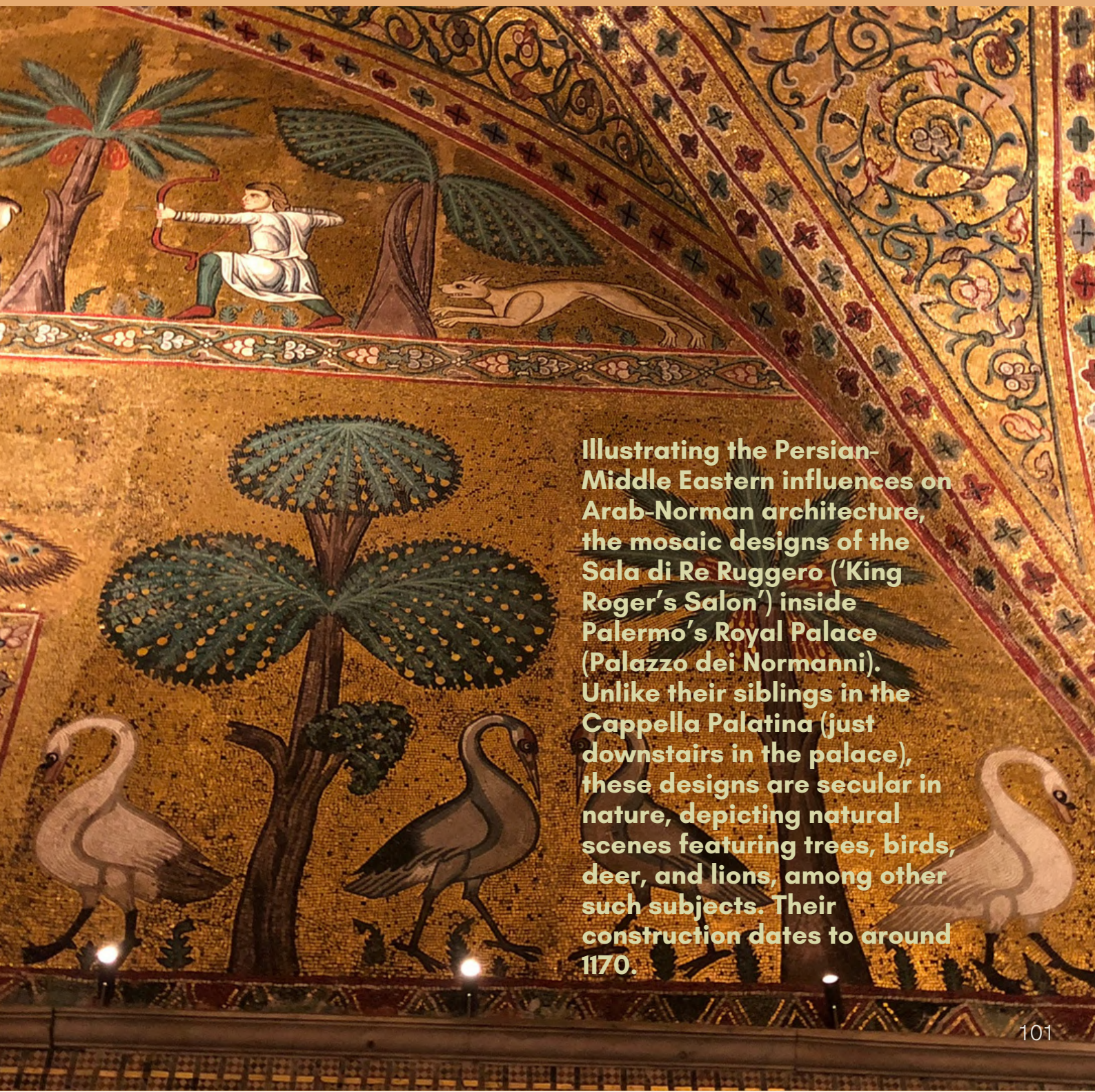
Blossoming *Erythrina caffra*, the coast coral tree native to south-eastern Africa, along the Foro Italico, a pedestrian path and park along the seafront of Palermo. The city's name derives from the Greek word *Panormos*, 'all port', which describes a town with a great harbour that lies between the mouth of two rivers.

Via Giuseppe Mario Puglia. A restaurant and cultural hub 'Moltivolti' (many faces), a place for migrant hospitality and inclusion, a space without borders. Palermo has a bit of everything in its unique character and history (Phoenician, Islamic, Norman, Swabian, Spanish, Austrian) and over the centuries has been the centre for migratory flows and journeys (of people, non-human animals, capital, goods, data, seeds, germs) from Africa to Northern Europe, from Indonesia to Gibraltar and the Americas.

Every spring, half a billion birds migrate from their wintering grounds in Africa to their breeding grounds in Europe, and every autumn they return the same way. It's one of the busiest corridors for bird migration in the world – only the Isthmus of Panama, which links North and South America, has heavier traffic.

The Rift Valley / Red Sea flyway includes the Jordan Valley down through Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, and then splits into three, with two routes crossing the Gulf of Suez then one passing down the Nile Valley and the other the west coast of the Red Sea (Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti), and a third route following the east coast of the Red Sea (Saudi Arabia and Yemen) crossing the southern end at the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb to rejoin the other two before continuing south to the East African Rift Valley.

This flyway is an area of global biodiversity significance. Some of the world's most diverse wetlands, steppes, deserts, and marine ecosystems are found along this flyway providing habitats for diverse assemblages of plant and animal species, birds in particular.



Illustrating the Persian-Middle Eastern influences on Arab-Norman architecture, the mosaic designs of the Sala di Re Ruggero ('King Roger's Salon') inside Palermo's Royal Palace (Palazzo dei Normanni). Unlike their siblings in the Cappella Palatina (just downstairs in the palace), these designs are secular in nature, depicting natural scenes featuring trees, birds, deer, and lions, among other such subjects. Their construction dates to around 1170.

A sizeable painting (oil on canvas, 2008), supported by an easel, in the hall of the Law Faculty at the University of Palermo. It depicts Paolo Borsellino and Giovanni Falcone, the famous judges who had become leaders of the struggle against Cosa Nostra and were both murdered in 1992 by mafia bombs.

Both men spent their early years in the same neighbourhood of the city. While Borsellino tended towards the right and became a member of the Fronte Universitario d'Azione Nazionale (FUAN), a right-wing university organisation affiliated with the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, Falcone drifted away from his parents' middle-class conservative Catholicism towards communism. However, neither joined a political party and although the ideologies of those political movements were diametrically opposed, they shared a history of opposing the Mafia. Their different political leanings did not thwart their life-long friendship.

Via Castrofilippo, near the seaport district La Kalsa. Giovanni Falcone happens to have been born in a house on this street.

**[The government also kills in the summer
630 dead in the Mediterranean in June alone]**

Domenico Pellegrino, I'm the Island, 2019
Wood, LED and neon lights, acrylic enamel painting, 140 x 100 cm
Collection Assemblea Regionale Siciliana

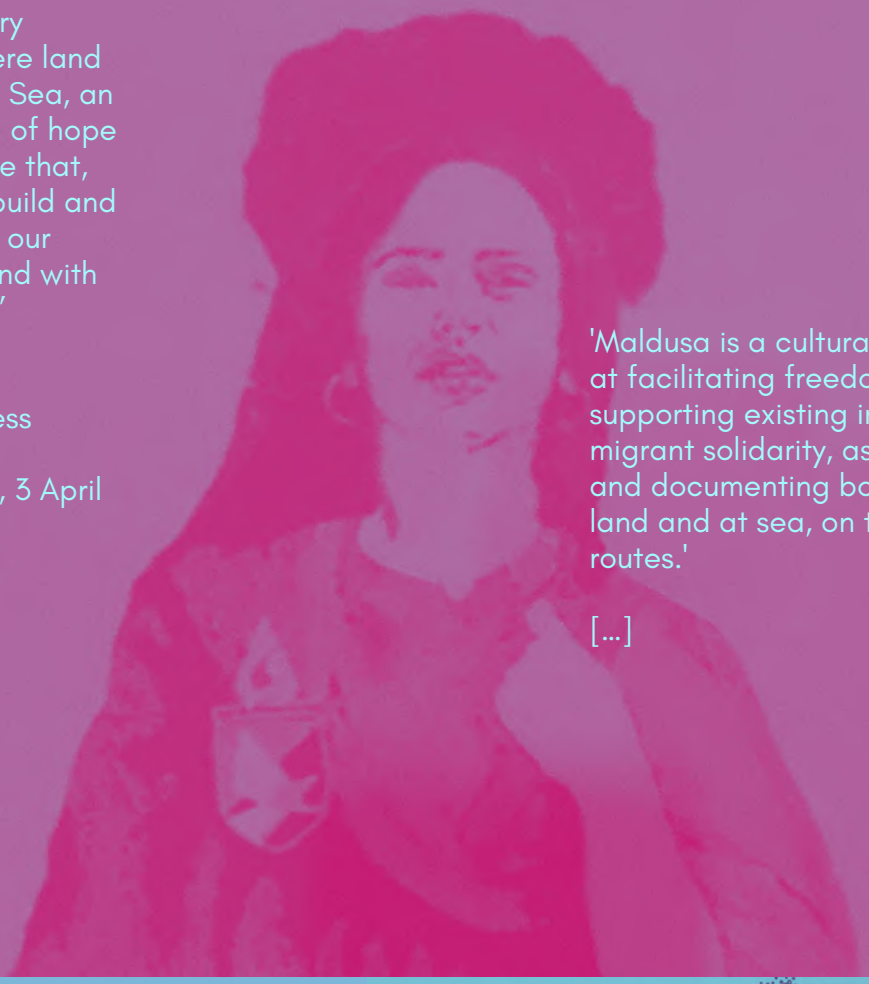
First shown in the National Pavilion of Bangladesh at the 58th Venice Art Biennale, this artwork is installed on the 2nd floor of the Norman Palace. The boat was designed on the model of the typical boats of Bangladesh to highlight the link between different realities which the artist represents. Pellegrino said: 'I wanted to have a boat built [on that design] with the aim of intersecting cultures and traditions. My bulbs redesign some Bangladeshi decorations, elements borrowed from nature, rewritten through the Sicilian culture of illuminations' [after the artwork's caption in situ].

Last June, the worst floods in Bangladesh in more than a century displaced nearly four million people in desperate need of shelter. Experts say the catastrophic rain-triggered floods, which submerged large part of the country's northern and north-eastern areas, are an outcome of climate change. [Image source: Reuters]

BE CAREFUL WITH EACH OTHER, SO WE CAN BE DANGEROUS TOGETHER

Maldusa: an imaginary nowhere and anywhere land in the Mediterranean Sea, an imagined destination of hope and freedom, a space that, every day, we try to build and to make real through our struggles, hand in hand with people on the move."

Excerpted from a press release:
Palermo/Lampedusa, 3 April 2023



'Maldusa is a cultural association aimed at facilitating freedom of movement, supporting existing infrastructures for migrant solidarity, as well as researching and documenting border violence, on land and at sea, on the Mediterranean routes.'

[...]

MALDUSA
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Tomb of Giuseppe Tomasi, Prince of Lampedusa, in the Capuchin cemetery. The name of Lampedusa has not always been synonymous with tragedy, that of the migrants who come to wash up on its beaches. The author of The Leopard (Il Gattopardo), one of the best ten historical novels of all time, had his family home, Palazzo Lampedusa, razed to the ground by the Allies' bombing of Palermo in April 1943. At the end of that decade, he bought part of a Palazzo on via Butera 28, in the historic Kalsa neighbourhood, where he lived until his death in July 1957.

Today, Palazzo Butera is an open laboratory, drawing together history, arts and culture in an interdisciplinary exercise aimed at finding solutions for social development. 'In this historical moment, with its extensive migration and globalisation, the continent of Europe appears to be in the grip of an identity crisis. What may rescue Europe from its crisis is a reinvigoration of its deep-rooted traditions of openness and hospitality. Sicily, with its history of millennial migrations, offers a rich and seasoned point of departure to reimagine European identity'.

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Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa*, 1818-1819, Oil on canvas, 490 cm × 716 cm, Louvre, Paris

In June 1816, the French fleet is on its way to colonise Senegal. However, the ship is sinking. About 147 people are put off the *Méduse* frigate on an open raft, with only fifteen surviving. The story moves a young painter, and this is how this huge work is created, breaking the boundaries between art and life. Many decades later, the many sinking rafts - those with migrants - will not be as moving to the majority of people.

The drama of Medusa, although much less known to the general public than the painting by Géricault that depicts it, testifies to the mediocrity of the political class ruling France at the time. This shipwreck is attributed to the immense chaos that reigned in the French administration under the Bourbon Restoration, a clear example of which was the appointment of an incompetent officer as captain of the frigate. The authorities did everything to hide the causes of the tragedy and blame it on 'bad fate'.

Willliam Shakespeare, The Tempest (1611)
Act 1, scene 2 [Miranda]

If by your art, my dearest father, you have

Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.

The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,

But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,

Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered

With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel,

Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,

Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock

Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.

Had I been any god of power, I would

Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere

It should the good ship so have swallow'd and

The fraughting souls within her.

Helichrysum panormitanum (Asteraceae), a native range of Sicilia, found in the Botanical Garden of Palermo. The garden's origin dates back to 1779.

Francesco Lojacono, *View of Palermo*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 78 × 156 cm. Sant'Anna Modern Art Gallery, Palermo

This landscape, in the wake of 'Romantic Realism', shows the countryside to the south of Palermo. Due to the variety of plant species depicted, many of which are non-native, the painting was chosen as the emblem of the 12th edition of Manifesta in 2018 titled "The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence".

It is hard to shake off an understanding of (the origins of) botanical gardens as typically colonial sites, and not associate them with extractive violence, white appropriation and hegemonic systems of knowledge production – 'the darker side of Western modernity' (Walter D. Mignolo).

ORTO BOTANICO E GIARDINO COLONIALE

But such gardens are also places that mobilise (bio)diverse forms of life to meet, adapt and cohabit for the well-being of people and the planet.

***Ficus macrophylla subsp. columnaris*, or the Moreton Bay fig. Origins: Queensland, Australia.**

This figure - wearing a crown and supporting Christ at eye level – is an alabaster candlestick in Cappella Palatina, the royal chapel of the Norman Palace and a rare portrait of King Roger II. In 1112, Roger's capital was established at Palermo, a majority Arabic-speaking and Muslim city, also with a substantial Greek community. Roger cleverly (if controversially) co-opted Islamic and Graeco-Byzantine culture into his administration and regarded his kingdom as a 'work of art'. His closest advisors were Muslims and Greeks, and he undertook a programme of administrative reform and architectural commissions that brought together all that was best in Mediterranean culture.

Citrus myrtifolia, the myrtle-leaved orange tree in blossom. Origins: Asia.


ASSOCIAZIONE SICILIA
SENEGALESI OCCIDENTALE
SENEGAL INDIPENDENCE DAY
29 APRIL


PIAZZA SS.40 MARTIRI
פיאצה סאנט'קוארנטה מארט'ר'
سَاحَة الأَربَعِين شَهِيدا

'The Flower Garden and The Field of Stars'. Northern transept, Monreale Cathedral, mosaic floor in opus sectile with geometric motifs. This sector is the best preserved, almost entirely original medieval work dating back to 1177-1183. The plan of the Cathedral is in the form of the Latin cross, but its architectural and figurative language shows clear influences of the Islamic and Byzantine cultures, which inspired Sicily for a long time.

The much-missed charismatic former mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando (his final mandate ended in June 2022), celebrated the multicultural and mosaic-like identity of his city and its inhabitants as a site of hospitality. His mission – that of restoring Palermo to its historical primacy as the cradle of a cosmopolitan Arab-Norman Mediterranean culture. 'Palermo is not a European city,' he said, 'it's a Middle Eastern city in Europe', that shares as much in common with Beirut and Djibouti as with Rome or Hamburg. Orlando's progressive stance on migration, the DNA code of our culture and contemporaneity, and his proposals for a new model of citizenship based on mobility as a human right, stand in stark contrast to the heightened climate of hostility toward migrants in Italy today.

'Prior to the [Vietnam] war, a hopeful vision of justice and love had been evoked by the civil rights struggle, the feminist movement, and sexual liberation. However, by the late seventies, after the failure of radical movements for social justice aimed at making the world a democratic, peaceful place where resources could be shared and a meaningful life could become a possibility for everyone, folks stopped talking about love' – bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: William Morrow, 2000.

We carry our islands sinking under the sea

We carry our hands, feet, bones, hearts and best minds for a new life

We carry diplomas: medicine, engineer, nurse, education, math, poetry, even if they mean nothing to the other shore

We carry railroads, plantations, laundromats, bodegas, taco trucks, farms, factories, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, temples…built on our ancestors' backs

We carry old homes along the spine, new dreams in our chests

We carry yesterday, today and tomorrow

We're orphans of the wars forced upon us

We're refugees of the sea rising from industrial wastes

And we carry our mother tongues

爱(ai)，حب (hubb), ליבע (libe), amor, love

平安 (ping'an), سلام (salaam), shalom, paz, peace

希望 (xi'wang), أمل ('amal), hofenung, esperanza, hope, hope, hope

As we drift…in our rubber boats…from shore…to shore…to shore…

Wang Ping, *Things We Carry on the Sea* (2018)


Notatnik

Curated and Produced by members of the Beyond the Now Collective
Daniela Nofal, Kim Charnley, Ailbhe Murphy and Áine O'Brien

Designed by *Isabel Lima*

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Daniel Trilling, Investigative Journalist and Author

PROJECT PARTNERS & FUNDERS

Beyond the Now aims to open up new creative cultural and political affinities/solidarities for a post-pandemic world. We comprise small to medium arts, civic, research and digital organisations: Counterpoints Arts, (London); Mozilla Festival (Amsterdam, Berlin, London); Ettijahat-Independent Culture (Beirut and Brussels); CREATE (Dublin); co-culture (Berlin): in addition to individual researchers and producers working at: Open University (UK); Arts University Plymouth (Plymouth - UK).

Re-framing Migrants in the European Media - comprised a cluster of media practitioners, activists, digital researchers and foundations: including, Here to Support (Amsterdam); Zemos98 (Madrid); Gazeta Wyborcza (Warsaw); Eticas (Barcelona); European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam) and Beyond the Now (Berlin, London, Brussels/Beirut, Dublin, Plymouth).

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AN ENTRY POINT TO A STORY...