MAINTENANCE!

Domestics as Institutional Becomings

The Endotic Reader N.2: Maintenance!

Domestics as Institutional Becomings

Edited by Benjamin Busch & Lorenzo Sandoval

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Table of Contents

Maintenance! Domestics as Institutional Becomings 6
Benjamin Busch & Lorenzo Sandoval

Domestic Wear: On HomeShop, Nonsovereignty, and Self-Organised Practice 16
Elaine W. Ho

Aesthetics of Mobility 28
GeoVanna Gonzalez & Najja Moon

Kitchens 40
Maria Lind

Kër Thiossane 56
Renée Akitelek Mboya

The Domestic as a Form of Community 64
Daniel Tremolada

Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism 78
Helen Hester

Pirate Boys: The Cut-Ups 100
Eric, Henri Steeg, Maja, Ray Kovalevsky & Pol Merchan

Reproducing Revolution 108
Binna Choi

A Room Where Life Can't Take Place 122
la Sala

For My Brother 132
Edna Bonhomme

The Continuum of the Domestic (and the Conundrum of Inhaling Underwater) 136
Elena Agudio

Domestico 150
Fermín Jiménez Landa

Drone Poetry 162
Stephanie Comilang

Aphorisms on Self-Care 168
Juliet Jacques

With artworks by Sofia Lomba between the contributions

Maintenance! Domestics as Institutional Becomings

Benjamin Busch & Lorenzo Sandoval

During the last years, the notion of care has become a central topic in discussions about culture and institution making. It has brought the domestic to the centre of discussions and planning. This nurturing in many of the cases has been celebratory, strategically leaving aside how *care* actually introduces a series of ideas that have to do with dependency. Or, even worse, with subsumption, as in the case of the logic of reproductive labour, so well described by Silvia Federici. Perhaps the interest actually comes from an unmaking of power relations based on exploitation and going beyond dependency: it could be the process of imagining a system of interdependency, where we are all conscious of the fact that many of the structural elements affect everyone: indeed, there is no possible *interdepence* if it is not from an anti-racist, anti-patricarchal and interspecies positioning. The pandemic, the

climate emergency and the social uprisings (such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, international LGBTQ+ movements, and the Caravana Zapatista, just to name a few) show us this: the plan, both urgent and long-term, is to imagine a system of mutual aid between everyone and everything, human and non-human. Imagining ways of belonging, and their possible conflicts, will be part of the process. The domestic is one of those positions where to challenge current structures, and from which to learn.

As in stating any system of belonging, the domestic has its problems. *Belonging* automatically sets processes of exclusion. Still, there is no possibility of creating a community without a instilling a sense of belonging. Therefore, with domestics, the challenge is in creating a porous belonging. It is also problematic that *domestication* comes from the word *domestic*. In this sense, the domestic figures one of the thresholds where disciplinary systems are applied. Is it possible to use the same tools that make the domestic sphere a disciplinarian constellation instead to be emancipatory?

The title of this publication and related project[1] alludes to Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: "CARE"*, which acknowledges the work of maintenance as always integral to arts institutions. One of the foundational aspects of The Institute for Endotic Research has been a focus on the domestic as a source for institutional becoming, closely linked to the notion of maintenance. The very core of the institute, around the *endotic* (an antonym to the exotic), points towards this direction. In the work of French writer Georges Perec, who coined the word endotic, domesticity was a key element, working simultaneously as a space to deploy plots, a character in itself, an object of study, and most importantly, a position of enunciation. From the device of the endotic, and its relationship with the domestic, a divergent genealogy for cultural institution-making can be proposed, one that is not based on the timeline of the *Wunderkammer* and its relation with the colonial accumulation in the form of exotic items. Traversing the ongoing pandemic, it seems even more necessary to rethink the entanglement between the public and

1. Since June 2020, The Institute for Endotic Research has organized a program of solo exhibitions related to this topic. Contributors have included: Irene Fernández Arcas, DULA collective (Ash Baccus-Clark, Alexis Convento, Ludmila Leiva and Chaveli Sifre), Monilola Olayemi Ilupeju, Fermín Jiménez Landa, Stephanie Comilang, Pol Merchan, Sofia Lomba and Junko Maruyama. See http://www.theinstituteforendoticresearch.org.

the private, its possibilities to understand the commonalities lying in between them, and its historical and ongoing conflicts.

In western thought, the domestic sphere has been for long understood as a place without agency, a place lacking the possibility of enunciation. This perception has to do with its rendering as a female sphere, where different kinds of care work happens without wages or other types of recognition. With Silvia Federici and other feminist thinkers, we can acknowledge the unavoidable connection between reproductive and productive labour.[2] The latter cannot take place without the former. Reproductive labour has to be recognized in forms of wages and rights, lest it continue to be exploited ad infinitum. With this recognition, the aspects that articulate the private sphere also emerge. Practices of care, social reproduction, hospitality and personal commitment are part of the domestic, and as such they offer strategies that can be translated to intuitional modes of operation in the public sphere. Indeed, in recent years they have been introduced in many art projects. But also, as we learn from biopolitics, the domestic is a territory full of conflicts, crossed by disciplinary systems of different kinds, and subject to exploitation. It is perhaps in this tension between conflicts and its possibilities where the *power* of the domestic lies, and where the possible paths it can provide in terms of reorganizing institutional apparatuses reside.

Today, the increasing externalization of tasks in many companies leads to precarious working conditions, a model of outsourcing that extends throughout the cultural field. Freelancers are workers with their offices at home in many cases. One can even say that there is a *domestification* of labour. This means that companies might pay for the *time* of the people they hire, but they will hardly cover the insurance expenses, running costs of the individual's workplace, the means of production, ergonomic furniture, office supplies and of course not rent. In this familiar model, workers are expected to own (or rent) the means of production by themselves. Theoretically, these associated costs should be built into the hourly rate of the freelancer. But in practice, the freelancer is expected to carry these costs at their own *personal*, not professional expense, meanwhile offering an hourly rate in strident competition with

2. FEDERICI, Silvia, 'Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle', Common Notions, New York, 2012.

other precarious workers in a saturated market. It is also in the art sphere where many jobs go unpaid, and many times it is we, the artists and cultural workers, who choose to overwork ourselves under the forging of the 'I'-brand,[3] or on collective projects. It is perhaps time to critically consider if monetary compensation is the only way to make the barter for the work, or if there are other, potentially more constructive ways, and how they could square with material needs.

Of course, there is nothing new about the trail of unpaid labour under capitalism. At the turn of the 20th century, Piotr Kropotkin sharply equalized the position between proletarians, slaves and housewives.[4] To be sure, this is a claim that requires nuance and needs to be considered critically in order for it to be situated within our historical perspective. With Kropotkin, unpaid labour has to do with class, gender and race; we would add ability and sexual orientation. Kropotkin insisted on the impossibility of fulfilling the anarchist program (simultaneously the overcoming of capitalism) without liberating female workers from domestic serfdom. The long struggle for wages is something to consider in the tradition of unrecognized domestic labour. Domestic labour, healthcare and carework, and their cousin, the service industry with its underpaid workers, have been revealed as the foremost socially and economically necessary jobs during the pandemic. Essential workers are expected to put their lives at risk to keep society going, supposedly without getting a raise. The transporters, shelf stockers and supermarket cashiers suddenly hold the most important jobs, and the social hierarchy is flipped upside down, yet the monetary value of their time remains unchanged. One of the things that this has evoked and hopefully stays is the general consciousness of how precious the labour of these workers is, which is also always on the verge of being made redundant by automation.

The digital realm has an increasingly problematic relationship with the domestic. If in the beginning the Internet was seen

3. When, due to global mobilization, we are condemned to be an I-brand, petrifying means (social) death, and accelerating change is nothing else than to deepen the commodification of oneself, which is, at bottom, another form of death. LÓPEZ PETIT, Petit, Santiago, 'Los espacios del anonimato: una apuesta por el querer vivir', in Espai en Blanc, N° 5-6, 'La fuerza del anonimato', Bella Terra, Barcelona, 2009.
4. KROPOTKIN, Piotr, 'The Conquer of Bread', 1906, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-the-conquest-of-bread.

as a liberating technology, the direction platform capitalism has taken in the last two decades has elicited an omnipresent capacity not only for control, but also for 'steering' behaviours on a subconscious level, a capacity that seems to be accelerating exponentially. Messaging apps that connect friends and family also serve as vectors for unmitigated misinformation. Beyond conspiracy theories, the slow creep of internet-connected devices into the most private moments of our lives has created an almost unnoticeable possibility for corporations to violate the privacy of often unaware users, exposing them to uninvited onlookers, or to algorithms that reshuffle their thoughts, desires and, of course, ideologies. Propaganda is now produced and consumed in bed. In countries with authoritarian regimes, this has become a serious problem. In other places, it is an growing problem when we observe how algorithmic structures have the power to affect political choices, made visible through elections, without commensurate consequences for platforms; furthermore, how the desires of specific niches of a population can be modulated without any effective sanctioning.

A further problematic aspect of the constant presence in the private sphere of the digital has to do with its exploitative nature. One of the ways that industrial capitalism found to make more profit was to put its fixed capital to work constantly: machines needed to be operating as much as they could, leaving no empty time slots without being used, and inaugurating the division of labour into 3 shifts of 8 hours, so the machines could work 24 hours a day. Now, time equals love. The ultimate goal of any profit-driven app is for the user to spend as much time as possible using it, so that ads can flow and user data can be collected and permanently stored. Ad-based social media apps serve content that keeps users engaged and producing, regardless of quality or veracity, in order to gather more and more data and deliver more ads. Thus any home connected to the algorithmic infrastructure of the internet is expected to *work* perpetually for the applications installed on the apparatuses in the house. In this sense, the distinctions between the private and public sphere, and productive and reproductive time, are increasingly erased. The conditions of labour change by this fact, therefore labour rights should be modified accordingly. The status of the domestic is subject to a transformation with this novel situation. Something we could call *passive labour* occurs in the best of

the cases, when the apps do their collection without even the attention of their hosts. In the worst cases, addiction is expressed by anxiety disorders such as *nomophobia*.[5]

Another side of today's digital exploitation is the wrongly called 'sharing economy'. Again, it has to do with trying to make maximum use of any given resources so that profit grows. With the increase of use comes the increase in demand, and subsequently financial speculation. It happens with car sharing, taxis, food delivery, co-working spaces, second-hand shops and housing. Companies in the so-called sharing economy also depend largely on precarious arrangements with freelancers who are expected to act like employees, but who receive no benefits. A considerable amount of the benefits of these companies comes from the usurpation of the rights of the workers and the evasion of taxes. Most of the strategies delivered by these types of companies are based on appropriating forms of sharing resources previously developed by people from below, ways of self-management and redistribution. Sharing economies just copy these already existing systems for commoning, articulate them with flashier design, and start very aggressive campaigns to gain every possible user, or even buy the previous organizations out. In their voracity, they use the alibi of precarious lives to force people into their infrastructures: from something that was earlier a system of truly sharing, into a speculative platform that in the short term can make ends meet, but in the long term contributes to a brutal increase in prices in each market, impoverishing everyone's lives, and of course more deeply affecting the people in the most precarious situations.

Homes have been at the centre of the current political crises, which was true even before the pandemic. As Marina Garcés has pointed out, the global housing market is implementing the exploitative logic of colonialism, extending its still very much alive

5. 'The term NOMOPHOBIA or NO MObile PHone PhoBIA is used to describe a psychological condition when people have a fear of being detached from mobile phone connectivity. The term NOMOPHOBIA is constructed on definitions described in the DSM-IV, it has been labelled as a "phobia for a particular/specific things". Various psychological factors are involved when a person overuses the mobile phone, e.g. low self-esteem, extrovert personality. The burden of this problem is now increasing globally. Other mental disorders like social phobia or social anxiety and panic disorder may also precipitate NOMOPHOBIC symptoms.' BHATTACHARYA, Sudip, BASHAR, Md Abu, SRIVASTAVA, Abhay and SINGH, Amarjeet, NOMOPHOBIA: NO MObile PHone PhoBIA, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6510111.

tentacles.[6] What Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes as *internal colonialism* is the process by which local powers in colonies would assimilate and apply the ways-of-doing of the colonizers.[7] The colonized would mimic the same ways of operating as the colonizers. Within the current logic of speculation in housing, one could say that the very same logic has expanded towards every single land, of course still with brutal asymmetries and the preservation of privileges in the North. The notion of Rivera Cusicanqui can be expanded to speak of *globalised internal colonization*, even though each territory must be analysed within its own particularities. Not only that, after the 2008 real-estate bubble popped, this problem was only not solved, but has grown to a size never known before. The problem of housing has developed globally and coordinately, as a planned offensive by transnational real estate corporations, with their approach enhanced by algorithmic tools. Laws, regulations and democracy cannot cope and lack the necessary speed to face this phenomenon in real time—a symptom of the gradual reduction of democratic state agency over the last half century. After long and hard struggles for housing rights, there are small temporary wins here and there, which might still be reversed when governments change or operate at different levels, such as the case of the *Mietendeckel* in Berlin.[8] It is surprising that we rarely talk about the expropriation and socialization of housing.[9] Those words seem only to be expressed in the powers of the banks, so rarely from the lips of citizens. Through the algorithmic colonization of the intimate, labour becomes infinite. It happens in the homes of workers and non-workers. Everyone has the right to a dignified home.

6. GARCÉS, Marina, 'Desmarcar Barcelona', lecture in Master in Tourism and Humanities, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2qsVoc9szU and https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/Marina-Garces-filosofica-Marca-Barcelona_0_282072665.html.
7. RIVERA CUSICANQUI, Silvia, 'Sociología de la imagen', tinta limón ediciones, Buenos Aires, 2014.
8. 'The *Mietendeckel* was a rent control law in Berlin. It set rent limits in each area, and it stopped all rent increases for 5 years. If a landlord charged too much rent, they could get a big fine. It came in effect on January 30, 2020, and the rent reductions started on November 23, 2020. Hundreds of thousands of people got their rent reduced. Some saved hundreds of euros per month. [...] On April 15, 2021, the constitutional court said that the *Mietendeckel* is unconstitutional. Berlin did not have the right to make this law, so it was never valid. Because of this, many people must pay back the money they saved with the *Mietendeckel*.' BOULIANE, Nicholas, 'The Mietendeckel is gone. Here's what it means', https://allaboutberlin.com/guides/mietendeckel-repealed.
9. See for counterexample the Initiative Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen, which demands a socialization of housing in Berlin, https://www.dwenteignen.de.

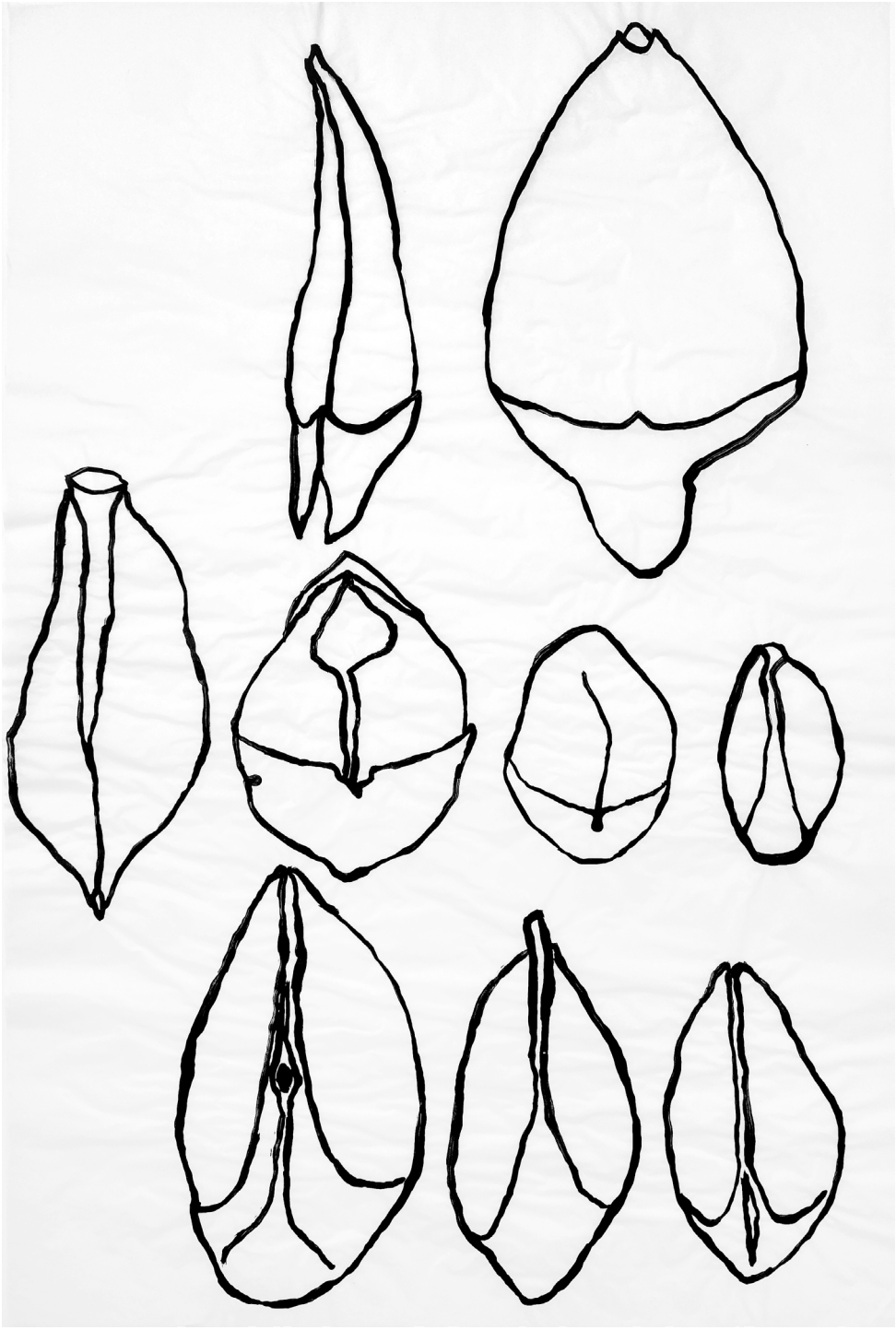
In one of his latest essays in El Pais,[10] Paul B. Preciado offered the tools of biopolitical analysis to confront the current pandemic. The philosopher made a thought-provoking hypothesis: that the threshold of the home can be understood as a border, a limit similar to those of the Schengen treaty or any national division. Beyond the clear necessity of the enclosure and the careful distance from each other we are living through, this thought brings us a fundamental question: if coming together is a prerequisite for practicing politics, how can it be possible to do it without the presence of our bodies? The biopolitical technologies of quarantine, such as remote work and online retail, enrich the owners of the means of communication and distribution, while normalizing the new modes of being perpetually at work at home. Can a political practice give up on the erotics of the body, and if so what are the consequences? Has the domestic gained a new dimension as a political battlefield?

It might be useful to come back to the strategies of OuLiPo before we finish. When the group started, Surrealism was in its last moments as an avant-garde movement in post-war France. The techniques were essentially offering variations of the same results, which did not seem very liberating, though liberation was one of the intentions of the movement. Facing the exhaustion of Surrealism as a technique for freeing the mind, OuLiPo proposed instead to use in each piece they produced a series of different constraints as a generative force. In that way, they would create a frame—a series of protocols for writing, rules of ludic processes—from which to exercise the imagination and overpass those same limitations. An institution, among other things, is a collection of protocols and regulations. Perhaps it is possible to face the disciplinary complex of the institutional practice by applying techniques as OuLiPo did. The domestic might bring a divergent set of specificities, and therefore possibilities. Learning from that sphere, it is possible to reformulate some of the existing infrastructures of institutions and imagine new ones towards systems for commoning, against structural racism and patriarchal modes of being.

Understanding an institution as finished or sacred is surely problematic, since authoritarian infrastructures are against the type of societies we would like to work towards. Therefore, the possible models must create porous ways of belonging. The people we bring together in this project exemplify these positions.

10. PRECIADO, Paul B., 'Aprendiendo del virus', https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/03/27/opinion/1585316952_026489.html, English translation in Artforum, https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/paul-b-preciado-82823.

Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #29*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Domestic Wear: On HomeShop, Nonsovereignty, and Self-Organised Practice

Elaine W. Ho

It has been more difficult than I first imagined to begin writing this text. Trying to parse out the symptoms which have prompted such procrastination, I will confess the periodic hesitation which comes with being asked to address HomeShop, the Beijing artist-run initiative with which I was involved from 2008–2013, and secondly, there is what we could perhaps call a wear of the domestic, the site which many of us have been confined to and tyrannised by with the global calls to immobility and insularity in a time of pandemic. Enough analysis, how-to, and memes about maintaining well-being while stuck at home, really. I would prefer to fantasise about a Bas Jan Ader mode of retirement escape in the open expanses of the sea.

This domestic fatigue affectively enhances skepticism about the designation of the home as a site for liberation. Not only is

the fixity of a place-based occupation more easily devoured, but that overload of analysis, how-to and memes seems only to reveal (and/or propel) greater internal turmoil—from the deterioration of social skills to domestic abuse, skyrocketing divorce rates, and pervasive psychological unrest. Granted, the exceptionalism of our new era should perhaps not be taken as emblematic of the totality of the domestic's possibilities, and we could also rather say that all of the discontent that has burst forth from homes around the world these months reveals a dynamic, positive fissure of the bounds separating civil society and individual/group prerogative. We may take care, thus, to distinguish the spatial parameters of the home from the body of practices and inflections which this publication seeks to address. In this sense, it may be argued even further to go beyond 'the body', also an illusorily contained site, toward an emphasis upon practic*ing*, feel*ing*, and inflect*ing* as ongoing yet never the same continuities infused with all of the precarities of a relational existence.

What this means to say is that the concurrent call for modes of care and maintenance must not linger upon themselves as cherished objects to be discovered within the domestic setting, and we may instead dissect the situatedness of these concepts, deconstructing ritualised or automated practices in order to extrapolate any liberatory possibilities that may be pulled back outside. Ultimately, then, I would say the theoretical

The conceptual real estate agency called *I Love Your Home*, initiated by Elaine W. Ho and Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga to share the wealth of real estate market information freely with interested passersby; 2010 (photo by Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga).

path we are taking is not a maintenance of maintenance, but to reshape what is at hand (as per the Latin root of maintenance, *manu tenere*, to 'hold in the hand') as a coming to grasp or feel processes both of 'knowing how' and 'being programmed' so that we may in fact *de*-institutionalise becoming. To flip the penchant for etymology from another direction, we could look to the Chinese equivalents for maintenance as having less to do with the control over objects in our grasp, but more with threads of connection (維持 *wéichí*), protection (維護 *wéihù*), nourishment (保養 *bǎoyǎng*), and continuity (保持 *bǎochí*).[1] What must be emphasised again, therefore, are the minor modes of difference emergent from daily activity and the habitual, something that the 'endotic' aims to achieve and is similarly echoed in the complex relations of 'instituting practices' as elaborated by Gerald Raunig, Isabell Lorey and other transversal thinkers—grassroots, bottom-up endeavours which do 'not oppose the institution, but [...] flee institutionalisation.'[2] To emphasise the blurring of public and private that occurs with work/school from home, ongoing precarisation, and even the conflation of everyday life practices with the realm of art must be more than the simple transference from one space to another but a deconstruction of both constituently so that they may be transformed in more just and egalitarian ways.

This brings me back to the first flicker of ambivalence which came with The Institute for Endotic Research's invitation to respond to the theme by way of my experience with HomeShop, by name already an obvious reference to the relay between a number of stated dualisms: public/private, commercial exchange/a general economy, work/leisure, and so on. And it was in fact the simple premise of the blurring of public and private which first defined HomeShop's activities, beginning with the glass facade

1. As an aside, or off the cuff, rather, it may also be of interest to note that the Chinese character for 'control', 控 *kòng*, consists of the radical component for hand (手 *shǒu*) combined with the character 空 *kōng*, meaning space or emptiness, a leveling which could offer another conceptual turn by which to re-examine maintenance not by the agency of the seizing hand, but by the equivalence and mutuality of forces of a hand moving through space, and space shaping around a hand, both as forms of self-regulation and/or by way of the precision of the strike (not a hit, but an in-between). I have tried to make alter-connections in this regard elsewhere, bringing together the concept of the virtuoso as outlined by Paolo Virno and the story of Ting the dexterous butcher as told by Chuang Tzu. (*Looking for publishers if interested!*)
2. Gerald RAUNIG, 'Flatness Rules: Instituent Practices and Institutions of the Common in a Flat World', in *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, ed. Pascal Gielen (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 176.

which translated a domestic space into a performed and more crucially shared realm with the outside world. But being likewise a project which so utterly incorporated and commingled multiple subjectivities, it is difficult for me not to view it retrospectively as a failed experiment that would necessarily deflate the promises of a project on domestic becomings.[3] I will attempt here, nonetheless, another route.

Indeterminant Community: The Beijing home, a Chinese square, and the international shopping mall

The already blurred distinctions between public and private that exist in the mainland Chinese context should be noted as the wellspring for a continued inquiry that could be described as an artistic response to existing conditions. In this sense it is operationally aligned with the *Maintenance!* project, with a similar eye towards heuristic processes revealing that which may be overlooked or hidden as a tool for transformation. What HomeShop often described as the 'documentary gestures' which informed much of its early work, from field recordings to community building (getting to know) and urban spatial documentation, were also the ground by which artists entered a community without largely imposing at the outset. The choice of space and location were perhaps enough of an initial proposition to reflect upon the nebulousness of the domestic and public that are norms here, one example being the grey legislation of property use which allowed the back wall of one unit of a residential courtyard to be renovated as a street-facing storefront. Chinese courtyard homes in the alleys and lanes (*hutongs*) of central Beijing are, importantly, inward facing. Once the gated complexes for the wealthy with ties to

3. Notes on the subject of the failure of the 'open platform' were first shared as part of a talk given after HomeShop closed in 2013, part of the Collaborative Studies Program organised by Binna CHOI for the Asian Culture Reseach Institute at the Asian Cultural Complex in Gwangju, South Korea, August 25, 2014. As one of the rare instances in which HomeShop was presented outside of China or Hong Kong, I could additionally fold in particular critique received from audience members of this talk as an additional failure on my part to find a better way to translate our work outside of the local context, adding an additional layer to my concerns for this text. Illustrated and revised notes from this presentation can be viewed at: Elaine W. HO, 'Notes for the Academy of Failure, May 25-27, 2018, and a Slew of Logos to Support', *iwishicoulddescribeittoyoubetter*, http://www.iwishicoulddescribeittoyoubetter.net/?p=4044, May 23, 2018 (accessed August 12, 2020).

the imperial court (located at the very heart of the city such that importance and status could be defined radially outwards by distance from the Forbidden City), the Cultural Revolution saw most of these courtyards repurposed and divided for 'the people'. A multifunctional private sphere (much as the concept of residential architecture has evolved in the west), designated by separate rooms to suit various functions and places within a domestic hierarchy, was then transformed into the dormitory, whereby courtyards became administered by state-managed units (*danwei*) who reassigned the rooms of a courtyard as living quarters to its workers. The introversion of an elite world became thus the site for a shared, communal living that melded the sociality of labour with the domestic sphere, and by the mid-2000s when I had moved to Beijing, the economic booms of China's authoritarian capitalism and the pending Summer Olympic games had already brought the city's *hutongs* to another transition phase. What had become dense ghettos for aging old Beijingers not wealthy enough or too stubborn to move to the high-rise flats in the suburbs, otherwise lower cost sublet flats for workers from other parts of the country, were also small enclaves for young people to try things out. There were smatterings of small bars, live music venues, and cafés that dotted parts of this area of Beijing within the Second Ring Road,[4] and HomeShop's entrance as an art space could be considered somewhat of an exception to the cultural environment, geographically distant from the known arts districts further outside of the city, but also ambiguous in that respect, as the understanding of 'venue for art' established by the enormous, empty galleries and massive artist studios in 798, Suojiacun, and Songzhuang was aeons apart from a tiny, 25 m^2 storefront shop residence filled with trinkets, books, and clothing but nothing for sale. This distinction, and the wealth of knowledge that is already present within the *hutongs*, are what intuited HomeShop's interest in open platforms for participation

4. The contemporary ring road development of Beijing's master plan conforms to the historical radius extending from the Forbidden City, beginning from the Second Ring Road completed in the 1980s along the old gates of the city. Continued expansion of the urban plan has led to the completion of the Third to Eighth Ring Roads, encircling even the neighbouring province of Hebei. Regarding the obvious story of gentrification that can accompany the influx of bars and cafés, please take note of a two-way analysis that could on one hand consider such growth a foreign influence upon the urban development and consumption habits of the Mainland, but likewise also a popularly desired modernising of social life spearheaded by the younger generation.

Working on the in-house silkscreen printed second edition of *Beiertiao Leaks*, a community newspaper produced as an open publishing workshop and event; 2011 June (photo courtesy of HomeShop).

and social engagement, for it was the community of neighbours and the average passerby which formed the primary 'audience' of the space, and spectatorship was correspondingly not about consumption but rather premised as the opening towards other forms of engagement, camaraderie, and collaboration. To speak of multiple subjectivities, then, was based upon traversing thresholds for the public spaces of strangers and citizen-subjects to become the sphere of the community, of friends, and collaborators—not to say a private realm, but hopefully a relationality premised upon intimacy, equality, and mutual support.

In a context whereby the public space of the state as an emblem of its citizens' participation is virtually non-existent (think of Tiananmen Square), the ambiguity of the 'shop' as a space of proprietorship open to the public became the grey area whereby 'desire paths' were allowed to form in spaces where they were not intended. Like the trodden green which takes the shorter path where a paved sidewalk commands walking around, we see in the popular, extended use of establishments such as shopping malls (evening exercise routes for middle-aged city dwellers), Ikea (day-long cafeteria for retirees), and McDonald's (cram school for students, napping spot for the tired

and homeless) a form of bricoleurship more akin to the agency of being in one's own home. While it can of course be argued whether or not such tolerations on the part of commercial chains only contribute to company profits, for HomeShop the very ambiguity of commerce was intended to beg the question of how to engage in the first place. This was the first interface by which an unfurling of a field for an indeterminant community could be read as a *maintenance* of Derrida's 'community of the question':

> A community of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community. A community of the question about the possibility of the question.[5]

While Derrida speaks of the realm of philosophers, what we considered the political potentiality of such a community rests in radical openness, what Jacques Rancière has elsewhere described as politics' fundamental possibility of 'anyone',[6] and what Rosi Braidotti affirms as the 'we' of an always 'missing people'.[7] Beyond the economic criteria of being self-funded or getting together to 'make projects', the fundamental question of self-organisation being considered here is the possibility of (which) selves in tandem, whereby the ambiguous acts as the initial unsettling of the subject towards a reconfiguring of the 'I-you-we' of the community.[8] If HomeShop made any headway towards these ends, I would have to say that it occurred at all the sometimes uncomfortable and very often challenging breakdowns between the aforementioned binaries, where the repeated emphasis upon notions of public and private are not about distinct realms at all, but the mutual expansion of each into the other such that it is the movement itself (as practice) which sustains us. And yet, for us, it didn't. At least not as the space called HomeShop. The trespasses upon our

5. Jacques DERRIDA, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 1978), 98.
6. Jacques RANCIÈRE, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 49.
7. Rosi BRAIDOTTI (in conversation with Maria Hlavajova), 'A Missing People', *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2016), 571-580.
8. This statement is paraphrased from artist Susan KELLY, 'Communities of the Question or Who Wants to Know?', *Self-Organisation: Counter-Economic Strategies* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2006): 233-279.

own subjecthood—as a space, as part of the precariat, as social identities—may have as well been the self-same encroachments which contributed towards HomeShop's dissolution. If a new subject may be claimed in any sense, it is only by way of the deconstruction of other subjectivities which fly and bifurcate into other unknown territories. And if these disintegrations can be considered a historically oft-seen effect of independent spaces and self-organised practices, then it would by all means transform the way that we analyse the common fate 'failures' of the majority of such initiatives, for mutability—including the need to stop—would thereby be viewed as a generative outcome. But apologies, maybe I am only trying to comfort myself.[9]

Domestic as Practice: Elastic exchange, a neither here nor there

In fact, it is the blurring of boundaries per se which we have to blame for HomeShop's end. The constellation of various causes are actually almost too cliché to detail, but each can be examined as certain 'things' not being kept in their 'right' place: rent hikes measurably marking the gentrification to which our activities undoubtedly contributed (activities by persons not fitting an immediate local context affecting real estate value); illicit intimacies and other romantic complications which deteriorated working relations (private life spilling over into professional life); the sedimentation of banal hierarchies like gender-biased labour divisions and the need for a leader (social norms and egos influencing even the most ideologically egalitarian); and the work of maintenance both spatially and economically overpowering the resources of members such that there was little to none left for other artistic outputs (an ill distribution of resources, or perhaps simply desiring too much with too little). Perhaps there are many more. But each can be analysed with respect to their resonances between all that could be considered domestic and intimate, or social and generic, and their embarrassing stereotypicalness speaks a great deal about core issues that have been resolved neither in the home nor outside of it.

9. More optimistically, this such 'self-assurance' or confirmation may come in the form of a forthcoming publication of essays from Danmin, HU Buqin (Abu), YANG Licai, and Brother 7, four individuals of diverse backgrounds and varying relation to HomeShop, to be published by HB Station in Guangzhou in early 2021.

What concerns me still with regards to the question of domesticity is the fundamental power which is invested in it, for, if we are lucky enough to have a home, it is the only and last domain where we can possibly claim sovereignty. And even this is not true, if we admit to ourselves how domestic life has become already so programmed by devices smarter than us, by capitalist desire, and/or maybe if we live in a household where age-old hierarchies are nurtured with an iron fist. Regarding the latter, certainly not all domestic relationships are tyrannical, but the absolute rule of a parent over a child is for many rational reasons probably the most universally accepted form of sovereignty still today. I understand, therefore, the biting dissent that arises when a radical call to abolish the family is proposed, much like the outpouring that has hammered upon the work of uterine geographer Sophie A. Lewis.[10] Much of the uproar appears to be a matter of semantics, however, for whether or not it is a call to restructure the traditional family or abolish it completely depends much upon how elastic one's definition of 'family' is. There are many who would say a gay male couple with a surrogate born child is not a family. What Lewis, is calling for, in fact, is a reorganisation of familial ties via a queer, cyborgian politics of comradeliness. And these most basic relations, in the embryotic first home each of us has ever known, seem to me to be a crucial place to start looking if we ever hope to overcome the imbalances of power which plague every aspect of organised life.

I should correct myself, however. The question of domesticity, as I mentioned earlier, is not a place-based inquiry. But as a fundamental *relation* of sovereignty, it is inherently tied to placemaking and the forms of membership to a place which family and community beg. What we should be asking, therefore, is not about how to expand this realm of sovereignty to forms that are more suitable to particular ideologies, but instead how to open up the expanses of *non*sovereignty *together* in the radical and seemingly paradoxical ways that freeing subjectivity requires. Perhaps it's also a question of semantics.

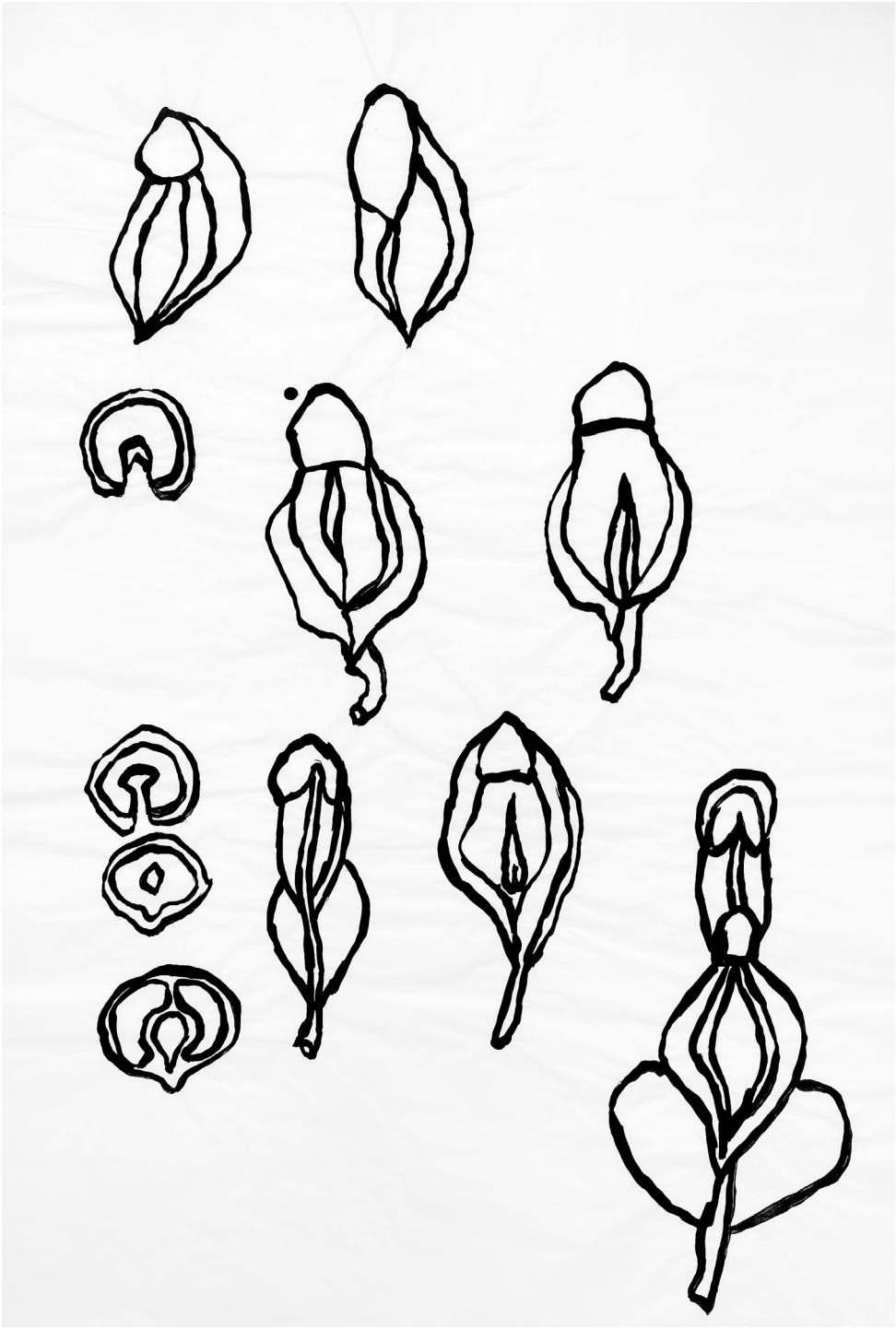
10. See for example the criticism even from the left, in Nivedita MAJUMDAR, 'Labour and Love Under Capital', *Jacobin*, https://jacobinmag.com/2020/01/full-surrogacy-now-sophie-lewis-review, January 30, 2020 (accessed September 9, 2020). Responses to critique have also been published by Lewis and may be read further here: Sophie A. LEWIS, 'A comradely politics of gestational work: Militant particularism, sympoetic scholarship and the limits of generosity', *Dialogues in Human Geography,* Volume 8:3 (2018): 333-339.

A chalk drawing of *Eight Immortals Cross the Sea* featuring the mythological characters transposed as members of HomeShop; drawn by Homeshop participant Six on the floor of the courtyard, 2011 October (photo courtesy of HomeShop).

Like one member of HomeShop once asked, '愛情是佔有還是自由? Is love an occupation or a liberation?'[11] And like the heated debate that ensued that winter evening long into the night, maybe that is how our practices of blurring boundaries may continue.

11. The term *zhànyǒu* (佔有), translated as 'occupation' above, also encompasses the concept of possession—the second character *yǒu* meaning 'to have'—perhaps not dissimilar to the Latin root of *occupare* as in 'to seize'. Ironically, the *Oxford English Dictionary* also appends the etymology with the note that another 'now obsolete vulgar sense "have sexual relations with" seems to have led to the general avoidance of the word in the 17th and most of the 18th century.'

Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #26*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Aesthetics of Mobility

GeoVanna Gonzalez & Najja Moon

Artists GeoVanna Gonzalez and Najja Moon are full time partners in life and part time collaborators. The pair conceived Aesthetics of Mobility *as a conversation series that would take place in their mobile project space, which doubles as their home. Because of the domestic nature of the space, Gonzalez and Moon are free to engage in frank dialogue about a number of topics, including inspirations, annoyances, influences, and goals. Playful, honest, and provocative, the conversation below illuminates how the pair drive viewers to consider existential questions around relationships, labor, and domesticity.*

On the semantics of labor

Najja Moon: We were talking about trying to find better language for work and labor.

GeoVanna Gonzalez: Maybe it seems silly that we're going back and forth about these two different words or various different words about it. But I think that maybe they hold so much weight. That it's hard to disassociate it from what everybody else, or let's say, 'the norm' associates it with.

NM: There's this in-between space that we're trying to find or at least think about, labor and work as activities that you choose. But the connotation of those words kind of puts it in a different bracket, or something like that.

I mean, I'm arguing that there are no boundaries - the intersection of all these things, whether it's work or play or making love or cooking, it all contributes to whatever comes next for us as artists. Like this road trip to go see my family is a part of my work. What we eat for dinner is a part of my work. Talking to you is a part of my work.

GG: You're using the word 'work' for everything, and I think that there's some things that are part of my practice, and can influence my practice, but not everything that I do is work or related to my work. And you were saying everything that you do is work.

NM: I think we're talking about this kind of blending of space, of work and life, as though it's a new way of living. Whereas I'm thinking about it more as the cyclical nature of the world. I'm thinking about how certain families, or certain tribes of people had a particular need or a particular craft, or trade. So maybe you

were working on a farm, or you were blacksmithing, and that work wasn't so segmented off of your everyday life. Like, that's what you did every day, that was your trade, you went home, you went to sleep, you woke up and did your thing. And at the community level, you exchanged those resources amongst each other. So in a way, I think, this new way of working, is almost kind of going back to how things were.

GG: Yes, but right now we're talking through these different scenarios in terms of thinking about what it means to be a freelancer versus what it means to work for a corporation or company and clock into the office, right? I think that there is a level of freedom that comes with being a freelancer, whatever sort of industry that is, of being able to be your own boss and work on things that you want to or on jobs that you're interested in. But then there's a level of self-control that you need to have in order to maintain some sort of work life balance, right?

NM: Why do you need a work life balance? I'm not trying to find a work life balance. I'm trying to make it so that everything is my work. And I don't feel like I need to make time for other things in order to be balanced. It's like, No, I just do what makes me feel good, because that's the healthiest thing to do. And that is my work.

GG: I feel there's a level of romance to the way that you're speaking about it; it's in a very utopian way which I also believe would be amazing. But I want to get to the reality of the

situation. Think about when I say, “Okay, babe, stay in bed with me” and you’d be like, “You know what, I have to get up, I feel like I need to get up and I need to do some work.” There’s something that you’ve deciphered in your head, that what we’re doing isn’t work, and you feel anxious about that. And so you have to get up and go do work, right. I think if you really felt things are the same, and interchangeable, you wouldn’t respond to it in the same manner.

There’s something in your head that is deciphering between what is considered productive towards your time and what’s considered reductive. Is that right?

NM: Well for me it’s because in that moment, it doesn’t - I don’t feel good, just laying still. The reason to do recreational things is because it’s feeding me in a particular way, so that I can feed myself in other ways later. And right now, in that moment, I’m not feeling invigorated by laying down. What will make me feel great is to get up and play music or whatever, in that moment. And it’s not that I don’t want to lay in bed with you. It’s just there’s something else I really want to do right now.

GG: But I think that there is a sort of capitalist mentality behind thinking about working 24/7, even though I think you’re also speaking from a very romantic viewpoint of an artist. If everything I do is a form of inspiration, and I’m being inspired by certain data, then that labor is connected to my work. I understand. But it’s a different mentality, right? Like your agenda behind everything, the forefront of your thinking is not about work; in reality it’s more of, *I’m just doing all the things that I’ve wanted to do, and I enjoy doing. And inherently because I enjoy all of those things, I become inspired*. So they somehow come to the surface to be in relationship to your creative passion.

NM: I think the more that all those things are the same the better. Like this conversation with you, right now, is my work. And I’m enjoying it. 😊

GG: I do think that doing the things that I want to do inherently allows me to be a better creator. Even say for instance, just relaxing. But I wouldn’t say that relaxing is work. I wouldn’t sum up everything I do as part of my work. I mean, I think that there’s also a really bad sort of assumption or perception, specifically

toward artists, like 'Oh, artists love to make their artwork and they do it all the time. So it's not working.'

NM: Well sure, but also in a tangible way - I don't want to talk about it in a capitalistic way, but we could write off all these gas receipts. You know, we could charge somebody for these hours, they're all in the car, you know? I think this actual living is work. Being alive is work.

GG: Yeah, I think that there's certain things that we inevitably distinguish, maybe off the bat you can say that I'm working right now. I am and I'm not, but we also have an understanding that they can influence our work at the same time. So say, for instance, I think going out, partying, doing drugs, going to the beach, watching movies, making love, doing all those things that are considered recreational are all necessary things to do that feed my work.

But because there's a separation in our mind of recreation and work, we have this conflict. If there wasn't that separation, we wouldn't have that conflict. I think that there's a lot of things that I would do that I don't do, because I feel guilty that I'm not doing what is considered, 'work.'

While we understand that, yes, we deserve to have that monetary value and recognition for this activity, it's still different.

NM: I think for me that idea is about emotional and mental health. I think, '*I should not feel guilty right now*.' You're watching this documentary on Netflix, when you could be writing, right? No, this is necessary. This is a part of my work, too, is clearing my head enough to actually do a good job at something else.

GG: So maybe it's not just about one word. I think the fact that we can't find the proper term for it is a positive thing. You know? The fact that it's always shifting, that it's forever changing, it can be different things at different points in time. And maybe it's even that, you can do the same action but have it mean different things, depending on whether it's a positive thing when it's happening.

On Living Life as Practice

NM: Thinking specifically about this current climate, with the domestic and workspace being so blended, I think we ask

ourselves more frequently what is working, what's not, what is home? I think for me, when we created *Aesthetics of Mobility*, that is what this truck is about, is not having to identify which one it is. It's all of it, and it's everywhere. It's everything.

We built it, this is our art. This is our physical artwork, and it's our physical home.

GG: Ya, I agree with you. Although this conversation has also made me wonder if you don't really allow yourself to enjoy, or not feel guilty about doing anything that's not attached to whatever the tangible project is that you're working on. You know what I mean? Like if it has a project name, those are the things that you can dedicate yourself to, but if they're not within that structure, or moving towards that structure, you don't find the time for it. You don't feel it's okay to spend time with it or them. Even the essence of this home being a project; you deciding that it's a project is what allows you to give as much labor as you give into it.

I think that maybe if it weren't a project and you were just building your shelter, then you would approach it in a different way. You would have a different attachment to it.

NM: I hadn't ever thought about it like that. But I do do that. Like there's a subconscious justification process in order for me to allow it to be a consistent part of my life. And that's for all facets of it. I hadn't thought about it before. But I do do that. You're right.

GG: It's like, I don't know. Maybe *I'm* also a project for you. *(Laugh)* 😂

NM: Damn, baby. *(Laugh)* 😬

GG: I don't know. 🙄 I mean, but it's like serious because if you think about what you're saying that everything is work and everything is tied into that, then it's like our relationship is work or something. *(Laugh)* 😄

NM: But Relationships are work.

GG: They require work. I don't know if they are work.

I think you haven't thought it through. I think that what I'm really challenging you with and why I initially, even in the beginning of this conversation when we were on the road, was put

off by the way that you were talking about it, is because you were so nonchalantly saying these things, that life is 'work'.

NM: And I think it's because of the connotative understanding you have of these words, right. So, I haven't felt triggered by anything because my connotative understanding of the word 'work' is different than yours. But when you said that our relationship is a 'project', that word was triggering for me. You know, like, no, I'm not setting up a budget for you.

I think nothing's really shifted for me, I think we've always been on the same page. It's always been a question of semantics. And I just enjoyed talking to you about it. Like, we could talk about it forever. *(Laugh)*

GG: I think that's how *Aesthetics of Mobility* started, because we wanted to find a way to speak about our work, and the theory behind it. We wanted to be able to talk about why we're doing it. Having the truck and wanting to think about the decisions that we made, conceptually, as opposed to just making these videos of just, you know, building out the box. And within that, we're able to then dive deeper into each of these subject matters because it just leads us down that path each time.

I think we were also really intentional in wanting to make sure that even though we had to make sacrifices within building the space - because there is a limitation as to how much we can do because of its size, of course - we didn't want to eliminate the comfort. We wanted to create a sacred space where you can lay your head down, rest and eat in.

NM: One of the things that's most exciting to me about exploring the domestic space in relation to my art practice and our collective work together, is that I think it's one of the few places where people can't invalidate what you have to say when it's based on personal experience. That personal experience is a warranted and accepted piece of data and research. So I think that, it makes it feel better and more real and less sterile in the way we critique it, and the way it impacts our lives, because it's just people talking about real ass shit that they've experienced.

GG: I also think that *Aesthetics of Mobility* is partly about visibility, I think we realize that the voices that are being heard

about doing this sort of project or the tiny house movement is all coming from middle class white people.

NM: I also think a part of the point of the conversation series when we started it, was to maybe shed light not on just a physical skill set that was being tapped into in order to actualize this, but also the research and the conceptual influences, or the life experiences that have brought this to fruition on a design level.

GG: Even if it is a tiny house or, you know, a box truck, by starting *Aesthetics of Mobility*, we've made our private space public for short moments in time through these episodes. And I think that we also, within our home are rethinking about what a home can be, right?

NM: I don't think that there's any part of what we made and what we've shared that is *rethinking home*. If home is all those things that you mentioned - sacred, a place to rest in, eat in, and what not, I think that living inside the box truck is not *not* the same as anyone else's home.

GG: Well, our domestic space isn't something that is static. It might be perceived as an unstable way of living, right? It's nomadic, you're not plotted on the land. Although, I think for us we feel like we do have a form of stability, It's like we have this thing that is completely ours that can't be taken away. We're not

having to feed into the system of paying rent or mortgage or any of those things, you know?

But I think if you're thinking about real estate, a part of creating a home for some folks is also about buying a home. Within a traditional framework of what it means to build a 'family,' a lot of that is centered around owning property, owning a home, and then making it a home, and building family within it. So I think there's levels to that that are different.

On domesticity and relationships

NM: Aside from that, do you think that being in such a small domestic space has enforced or challenged the prescribed roles that should happen in the space?

GG: I think we don't really have prescribed roles but we have specific things that we do. I mean, they can't be, right? Like, we're not a heterosexual couple. I don't think that either one of us plays the role of like, *I'm the man and I'm the woman*. Even though, you know, that exists within some queer relationships, but I don't really think that is happening within ours.

I feel like you feel the same, we've had many conversations about this too. Like, I'm not interested in there being any binaries between our relationship and our roles and the things that we're doing and what this means.

NM: But I think a lot of the ways that we start to discover who we are about modeling, right? And whether it's a heterosexual couple, or the cultural queer space that maybe behaves in a way that is super heteronormative, you kind of learn that behavior. I think that without thinking about it, people just think "Oh, this is what I do when I come home, you know, this is my role."

GG: I think that there's certain things that you don't mind doing. And then there's certain things that I don't mind doing. There's some things I hate doing. And there's some things you don't like doing. So it's like, well, let's just do the things that we both like, and then it'll equal itself out, you know. It's like, I enjoy cooking. For me, it's relaxing and meditative.

Ultimately, I believe in things being equal. So however you want to like split things up so that it does come off as fair. I'm never interested in, being "on top" or something like that, right?

Like my way or the highway type shit. *(Laugh)* I am always actively trying to push for an equality within everything I'm doing. Obviously, it requires work. it's easier said than done. And there's different levels to it, you know, but I think it all comes down to communication. And there's a balance between that too.

A new way of being

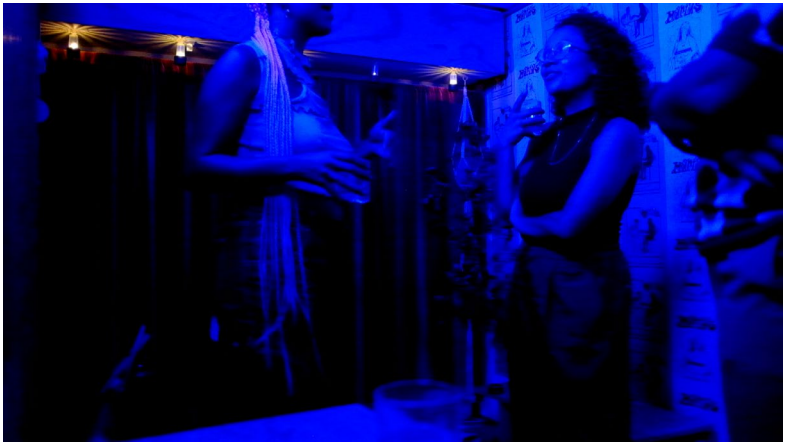
NM: But that's why I'm kind of pro using the word 'work' for all of it. I think that there is some power in calling it by its name. Even if "I would do it anyway", this does require brain power. This does require physical labor. It does.

Is there a single word that blurs the boundaries between life and work?

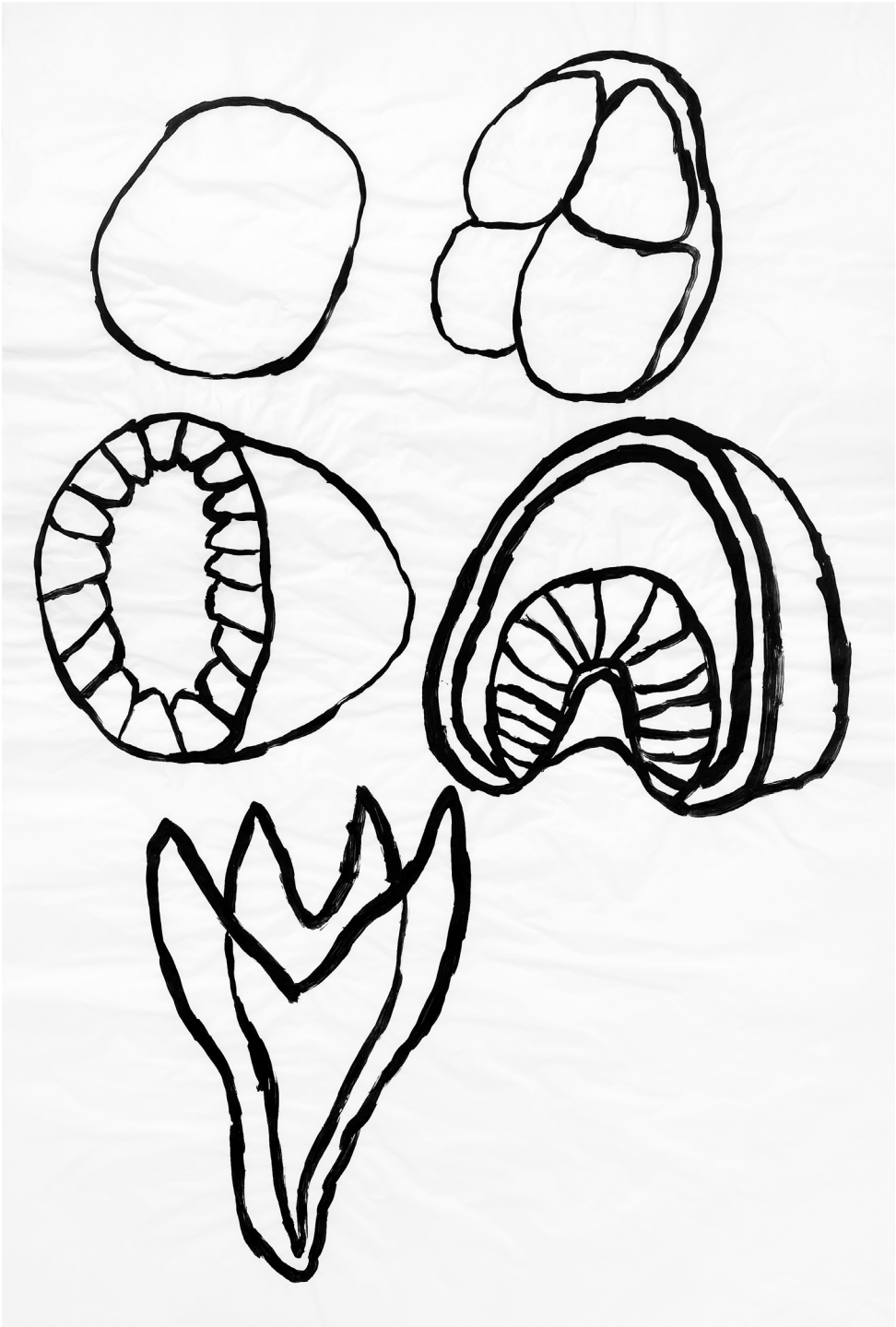
GG: I think that there isn't one word that can sum it all up. What I find fascinating though is to really break it all down. And I think it's also important in terms of even thinking about how you can excel in whatever your utopian vision is for your life right? I think that everybody has some sort of a vision; we have, we all have dreams. And we are trying to kind of reshape, even if it's just for our own lives, how we navigate all of these things, you know? To make sure you don't *fucking fall off the track type shit*. *(Laugh)*

I think it's important that we do that.

Edited by Nicole Martinez



Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #28*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Kitchens

Maria Lind

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Imagine a young woman thinking hard about contemporary living conditions. About overcrowded, unhealthy apartments and inefficient housekeeping methods. Her method is thorough: equipped with a timer, she observes every movement of fellow women working in kitchens. Her goal is to rationalize household chores starting from the heart of the house, from the kitchen rather than from the façade. The First World War and the old society that produced it are still fresh in her memory. She is keen on looking ahead: the future may not be bright, but it has potential. And it should be built.

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky was the first woman to study architecture at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna. She read Christine Frederick's 1912 book, The New Housekeeping Efficiency Studies in Home Management, with great interest, and it

is said that she wanted to free women from the slavery of kitchen work. The American guru of household efficiency had applied F. W. Taylor's scientific and management studies to domestic work, producing a bestseller along the way. The core question for the young woman became: How can home construction and interior furnishings be employed to facilitate the life of working people, whether housewives, mothers, or servants?

Schütte-Lihotzky's "Frankfurt Kitchen" did not only become a successful invention installed in ten thousand of Frankfurt's public housing program's dwellings between 1926 and 1930; it became a modernist icon as well. Embedded in the modernist project of rationalizing private life through reform, this kitchen epitomized the ideals of hygiene, division of labor, and affective work that characterized the time. The interwar movers and shakers approved of neither the small working class kitchens nor their more spacious middle-class equivalents: the former were where people cooked, ate, worked, socialized, and slept, and were therefore deemed unhealthy. Meanwhile, the latter were considered to be poorly organized and wasteful of time and energy. The popularity of this particular incarnation of modern life was to no small degree dependent upon its visibility in a number of different exhibitions; for example, "The New Flat and Its Interior Fittings" in 1927 and the 1929 Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), both of which took place in Frankfurt.

Discussions about the professionalization of housekeeping were already lively in the nineteenth century, when, in 1842, Catharine Esther Beecher published A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School and Friedrich Engels discovered reproductive labor. By the time of the Frankfurt Kitchen, a series of well-meaning charity groups, male bourgeois social reformers, and (eventually) organizations of middle-class housewives had made their mark by asserting the need to educate working-class women on the benefits of improving care within their families and homes. However, there was stubborn resistance to the privileged conviction that buildings act as "agents," as active shapers in this process of social reform. Sofas and beds continued to make their way into all kinds of kitchens, and people continued to not only sleep in them, but also to give birth in the kitchen.

Lack of funding made it necessary to limit the size of the Frankfurt Kitchen, to place it near the living room, to which the

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, *Frankfurt Kitchen*, photo by Minneapolis Institute of Art.

dinner table could be moved, fitting neatly in with recent ideas about each room hosting a different type of activity. Inspired by train restaurants, the Frankfurt Kitchen was logically structured to avoid unnecessary movements: it measured just under two meters wide and maximum three meters from work surface to dinner table. With a total area of no more than six square meters, it reminds us more of places where, to this day, space is organized for transportation (in train compartments and boat cabins) than of kitchens as they were then understood. Features such as a socket for the built-in cupboards and a sink cover were entirely new, as was a lamp that slid on a rod in the ceiling and the use of the color blue to combat flies.

Looking at photographs or visiting the scale model in MAK Vienna reminds us that we are still in the realm of the interior—after all, Schütte-Lihotzky had worked closely with Adolf Loos. The photographs and the model make you consider what questions the makers could have asked while working on the kitchen: How many drawers does an average household need? Who can look out the window—the person who is cooking and washing the dishes, or the people seated at the dinner table? Where does a child or a pet fit in? What should household workers do with the time they save in such a rational kitchen?

Just as Schütte-Lihotzky was not alone in bringing the Frankfurt Kitchen about—it was the achievement of a "coalition of modernizers" that included architects Ernst May and Mart Stam, a group of social democratic local politicians, and an organization of bourgeois housewives—she also worked with others to shape its use. However, this coalition did not account for "the consumption junction"—the fact that users affect technology and other inventions by interacting with them. It should come as no surprise that there is not one single untouched Frankfurt Kitchen in Frankfurt today. But they exist plentifully in many other places. As marketing departments came to avoid anything German following the Second World War, the Frankfurt kitchen came to be widely introduced as the "American kitchen" or the "Swedish kitchen." Until 1970, it was the "official kitchen" of West Germany.

This case is permeated by relationships between the group and the individual, the collective and the single citizen, the singular and the plural. The lingering tensions between the one and the many are at play within the nuclear families inhabiting the public-housing project in Frankfurt. Due to a failure to institute

rent control, the inhabitants ended up being white-collar workers and civil servants rather than the working-class families for whom the projects were originally planned. Similar tensions were at play among the "coalition of modernizers." Although Schütte-Lihotzky is the author associated with this particular piece of architecture—a woman with a name and face within modernist architecture, for once—this was clearly a collaborative effort, which is something she accounted for later through the voices of the users and others. Highlighting one of the crucial philosophical and practical questions of the modern project, this example reflects and shapes decision-making processes, conditions of production, and gender hierarchies.

But in the end, the fame of the Frankfurt Kitchen worked against Schütte-Lihotzky and her ideals. To her, it was an emancipatory tool facilitating the participation of women in professional life beyond the home, as opposed to serving the housewives' lobby, which wanted simply to raise the value and appreciation of household work. In the long run, the latter took the upper hand. When, after spending seven years in the Soviet Union, she arrived in Turkey in 1938 at the invitation of the Kemalist government, she was reluctant to design more kitchens. Instead, she turned to village schools in the Anatolian countryside, employing a form of "participatory standardization," using local materials with local craftspeople. It allowed for more than forty permutations depending on the climate of the location and the size of the population. Returning to Vienna in 1941 to tend to her sick sister, she was arrested and imprisoned for four years for being a Communist. The postwar period meant fewer commissions and a life without building.

*

Now picture a heated argument between two of the most powerful politicians in the world. It is a warm summer day in 1959 and the American vice president and the premier of the Soviet Union are standing in a brand new American model kitchen in a Moscow park. Nixon and Khrushchev argue about which political system is superior: the one promoting private household consumption, with all its inventive gadgets, or the kind coming to grips with basic housing needs while trying to spread more modest appliances to a wider population. A crowd is looking at the two world leaders debating the pros and cons of capitalism and Communism while an American woman hired to play the

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, *Frankfurt Kitchen*, photo by Jonathan Savoie.

role of a housewife demonstrates the various features of General Electric's canary yellow, all-electric kitchen.

The 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow was the direct result of a cultural exchange agreement forged between the hostile superpowers a year earlier. Under the banner of keywords such as "freedom," "progress," and "prosperity," it showcased cars, fashion, fine art, and the photography exhibition "Family of Man," among other things. Still in a panic over the Soviet lead in the Space Race thanks to the 1957 success of Sputnik, the American authorities wanted to play a safe card for this unique occasion: consumer goods. Some of the highlights of the entire exhibition were four kitchens full of new technology and cool design. The General Electric kitchen was equipped with some of the company's latest products, such as a panel-controlled washing machine. The futuristic RCA Whirlpool "Miracle Kitchen" was fully automated, with an automatic kitchen floor cleaner. As if in a science fiction movie, the housewife could prepare a full meal just by pushing buttons. Another kitchen focused on inventions in food production and distribution: instant food and deep frozen food, which were soon to revolutionize what we eat and how we prepare it.

Not only did one of the most famous face-to-face debates of the Cold War take place in a kitchen, it also used kitchens as

ideological weapons. Besides the space race and arms race, the competition took place through the "living-standard race." And most often, the woman of the house was the central character onto which a number of ideals and issues were projected: the American promise was for the increased range of household appliances that would liberate women by alleviating the amount of housework and widening their ability to choose. This promise of a freedom of choice as a democratic right was here specifically geared towards women as soft targets who, according to sociologist David Riesman, possessed a "universally feminine" desire to consume and beautify themselves. In this way, they could become small, but efficient missiles striking the Communist world from below.

The "nylon war"—a term Riesman propagated—had in fact already begun in the late 1940s, when the Office of Military Government in US-occupied Germany (OMGUS) began to produce and circulate exhibitions featuring prefabricated homes, advanced household technology, and suburban planning. Only later did the United States Information Agency (USIA) begin to initiate exhibitions with kitchens and other consumer goods for international audiences. Carefully planned strategies were used alongside direct contact with scenes of individual consumption to convince both the enemy population and the people of the allied nations that these objects and situations signified a route to liberty and happiness, with the long-term goal being to create new needs and unleash desires, and thereby facilitate the breakdown of the Communist regime from the inside, through the citizens themselves. International Style architecture was a favored weapon in this battle, with high-profile architects and designers, such as George Nelson, being hired to exhibit at the Moscow exhibition.

Let us pause for a moment and consider kitchens in general. Unlike few other spatial typologies, most people know kitchens in one form or another. They are closely connected to lived experience and can be found all over the world. They are so ubiquitous that they become almost banal or beyond consideration. Today, some people cook and eat in them, while others work in them. Others use kitchens as display cases for luxury design. No more than two generations ago, it was common to have been born in a kitchen and to then share this space and the apartment's second room with parents and plenty of siblings. A kitchen is thus simultaneously the most familiar locus

of personal memory, as well as a potent status symbol—a site brimming with gender and class relations, or even conflicts, as it is occasionally even a forum for debating international politics.

Beyond dwellings, most communes have a kitchen, as do bars. Bar kitchens suffer from being secondary to the counter, overshadowed by the privileging of drinking over eating. When food is served, typically from a bar menu, it is prepared in a small kitchen tucked away behind the scenes. Green rooms normally don't have them, but a coffeemaker or a hot plate may have made its way there. Communal kitchens, like communal laundries, tend to be catalysts for tensions and stages for problems. Anyone who has spent a significant amount of time in a shared kitchen can testify to having witnessed some broken friendships. Divorces take place regularly in all kinds of kitchens, often due to irreconcilable differences over household principles.

In an attempt to alleviate kitchen conflicts in the Soviet Union, the imposed central planning of "kommunalkas"—communal multifamily apartments converted from the grand former bourgeois dwellings of Tsarist Russia—used schedules to encourage tenants to cook for themselves in shifts. The Constructivist architect Moisei Ginzburg went further and abstained from building kitchens altogether: his legendary 1932 Narkomfin Building in Moscow did not have a single designated kitchen anywhere in its fifty-four units—though the inhabitants surely arranged their own makeshift cooking facilities. Whereas kitchens in Israeli kibbutzim are typically communal, with cooking organized centrally in large designated spaces, the more agricultural moshavim allow for private homes with meals prepared in the residents' own kitchens. In Kollektivhuset (The collective house), a residential building in Stockholm built in 1935 primarily for working women with children, there was a restaurant on the ground floor (next to the nursery school) that delivered meals directly to the compact apartments upstairs, thanks to a feature imported from upper-class households: the "food elevator."

There is no doubt that artifacts and spatial design do articulate politics. However, more was at stake in the famous "kitchen debate" than the ideological rift concerning what was needed to create national well-being and who was better suited to be a world power. The real question concerned how the decisions that underlie politics and life should be made, whether through central planning or through speculation based on individual

scenarios. And yet the distinction was not so clear: speculators employed long-term planning and carefully orchestrated the public presentation of their goods, while planners would necessarily speculate about reactions among their own populations. If kitchens in the US were mobilized to stimulate consumption by bluntly reinforcing the nexus of domesticity and femininity, in Europe they were part of a social contract between the state and the citizens. Kitchens were part and parcel of many essential large-scale public-housing projects and they were central to the imagination of the social welfare states. Paradoxically enough, the emphasis in this context shifted from the influence of housewives' organizations on planning and technical development in the prewar period, to councils comprised completely of male experts after the Second World War.

The American kitchens at the American National Exhibition in Moscow were both material facts—albeit not in all American homes—and highly contested symbols. As can be expected, the local reactions to the exhibition and its kitchens were ambiguous. Admiration and longing for the products on display was expressed, as was suspicion of "Potemkin village" sets and general skepticism towards unnecessary gadgets and a perceived shallowness of lifestyle. There was acknowledgment of the usefulness of new technological inventions, but more for large restaurants and communal kitchens than individual use. One journalist voiced a classical Socialist concern and objected to the idea of liberation through the consumption of new technology. She argued that new kitchens signify new bondage—turning housework into a profession and foreclosing women's participation in professional, social, and civic life outside the home.

On a popular level, the Cold War battle over technological and cultural domination was long considered to have been fought primarily in the arena of car manufacturing. We now know that homes in general—and kitchens in particular—were essential as well. Both are intimately connected to ideas about the nuclear family as consumers that were at the core of the American National Exhibition—so much that during the six weeks of the exhibition, the prefabricated model house (which included General Electric's all-electric kitchen) was inhabited by "the Browns," an imagined average family with a breadwinning father, a housewife mother, a teenage son, and a young daughter. The house was divided into two parts with a walkway down the middle, so that the 2.7 million visitors could take a good look

not only at the interior, but also at the "family." In hindsight, this "splitnik" turned out to be an amazingly efficient and enduring weapon against the lure of the Sputnik.

*

Then think of a neoclassical pavilion located in a park with a number of other pavilions. It has a portico with four impressive square columns above a few steps: The ceiling is high, and there are small windows on top of the walls. The curve of the back wall is reminiscent of an apse. The entire structure is not unlike that of a basilica: four smaller rooms flank the main space with the apse, two on each side. The building is made of both natural and artificial stone in light colors. It looks as if it could have been built in Munich in the first part of the nineteenth century, but it was inaugurated in Venice in 1905, and heavily renovated in 1938. This particular pavilion is indeed reputed for its historical links to the Nazi dictatorship, as well as various attempts to counteract that legacy. Like all the other pavilions in Venice's Giardini, this one represents not only an architectural style, but also a nation: Germany.

The pavilions of the Venice Giardini are functional buildings in that they were constructed specifically in order to house temporary exhibitions of art and architecture, without kitchens or restrooms. Alternating each summer between art and architecture, they hibernate in the interim, when they are occasionally occupied informally. Moreover, the pavilions are simultaneously representations, samples, and models. As representations, they symbolically refer back to nations and their history. At the same time, they are like carpet samples or swatches of cloth—smaller parts of a larger unit. Parallel to embassies, they are displaced slices of countries, but they are also small-scale examples of widely divergent architectural styles. Thus, the entire Giardini has ended up as a miniature three-dimensional diagram of past and present geopolitics dominated by the Western hemisphere. A mix of an arty dollhouse and contemporary model train set, they are reconfigured according to changes in international politics, consistently leaving out a vast majority of the world.

Before the advent of the telephone, cinema, television, and other mass media, world fairs, expos, and other large-scale exhibitions were primary sites for transnational exchange and communication. As enormous secular rituals, they structure the

yearly calendar of the art world to this day. Contemporary inventions large and small, new products, and art were on temporary display there, as opposed to the fairly young institution-style "museums," which also served the nation-states, but privileged permanent installations of older objects. Although the Venice Biennale was officially inaugurated to commemorate the silver wedding anniversary of the king and queen of a recently unified Italy, it also initiated a wave of such large-scale exhibitions that oscillated between edification and entertainment. In the beginning, the Biennale notably acknowledged geopolitical substrata, the "close to home"—for instance, in addition to nations, regions such as Italy's Emilia-Romagna and Germany's Bavaria were represented at the first editions.

It has been argued that all these exhibiting institutions have, in a Foucauldian sense, taken no small part in shaping the society of control. Social historian Tony Bennett's ideas around "the exhibitionary complex" can possibly help us to understand the profound effects of the Venice Biennale, as well as other nineteenth century world fairs, museums, and panoramas. By focusing on how large structures—whether state-controlled or commercial—intersect with individual behaviors, the exhibitionary complex can be described as a mechanism that employs the exhibition as a strategy for displaying objects and individuals in public, for privileging the visual and the gaze in relation to the world at large. These mechanisms have proven to be beneficial for the ritual of seeing and being seen, as with flirting and other social games. Using your own eyes to inspect both what is formally on display as well as those who are also inspecting becomes a form of self-regulation through self-observation, and not without its own pleasures. Exhibitionism in general has been crucial to the formation of modern subjectivity.

Exhibitions as arenas for comparison and competition became especially pronounced after the First World War, and further intensified in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, when various national agencies were established to execute what were to be more or less propaganda campaigns. Perhaps the most striking example is President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "People's Capitalism" campaign, which took the form of exhibitions that travelled the world to demonstrate the American system as the one that could bring the highest standard of living to all. During the same time in Northern Europe, a number of national agencies for art in public space

were born, sometimes called agencies "for public decoration." Often well-funded through the "percent for art" principle, which stipulated that a percentage of building budgets be devoted to art, these initiatives ensured that art was made accessible to larger and wider groups of people. But who was watching what and whom in this context? And how were the underlying decisions being made?

Let us return for a moment to the interior of the neoclassical pavilion. Had domestic objects been in the space, what would it have looked like? What if it had been furnished with rows of simplified kitchen cupboards and mock-up cookers? What if the cupboards were made of light wood and positioned to cut across the floor of the main space, moving somewhat brutally into the smaller adjacent rooms? The logic of the building as an agent of a certain history would clearly be interrupted. In the entryways, a local means of keeping out insects could be installed: plastic ribbons in various bright colors could hang from the doorframes. A small, uniformed staff would keep things under control, and you may wonder where these workers eat their lunch, where they change into their uniforms, and keep their own clothes.

Pavilions are models, and models are rarely equipped for practical use. A model presents and re-presents at the same time. It is both the here and now and the there and then, both past and present. A degree of abstraction is thereby introduced in the midst of a high level of concreteness. Models can be projective—like television pilots, they may point towards future manifestations and become vehicles for testing something yet unknown. As such, they are indispensable for speculators as well as planners. Models can be made after the fact as well, as copies or reconstructions, or to retrieve something lost or otherwise missing. Artistically speaking, however, the speculative aspects of models have been more productive than their use as tools for planning. Within the realm of criticality, which, like humor, always runs the risk of evaporating at the moment it is uttered as an intention, models have proven most useful. They retain the potential for withdrawal while simultaneously being bluntly literal: opacity meets transparency in the material world.

If the space of the corridor was necessary for the invention of privacy in the eighteenth century, then the kitchen is vital for the contemporary theatricalization of private life. In fact, the representation of lifestyle choices would look entirely different without kitchens and their function as arenas for display. The

kitchen has assumed center stage as a performative medium. It has shifted from being the large, shared workspace cut off from the rest of the living area in wealthy homes, from the tight space for cooking, eating, and sleeping for working-class homes, to being a genuinely hybrid place—one which has grown considerably in size, visibility, and prestige. Some people are also keen on making this new, representative, impure kitchen more "equal," more masculine: for example, Poggenpohl, established in 1892 as the first German kitchen brand, now markets a high-end kitchen as "engineered luxury by Porsche Design using cool masculine materials and colours."

With the advent of the postindustrial service and knowledge economy, current working conditions in a deregulated job market have placed kitchens in a new light. These conditions have literally propelled people into the kitchen as a workspace, adding to its other established functions. As entrepreneurs, we are likely to do a considerable part of our jobs precisely there, between the sink and the refrigerator, among computers and children. Furthermore, within post-Fordist work structures, artists suddenly find themselves pulled from the periphery into the midst of things as valued producers, as prime examples—even models—of self-motivated, unconventional, flexible, and eternally creative individuals who make up the work force, for better or worse. This is where the parallels between conceptual art and immaterial labor should not be overlooked. It can even be claimed that within the neoliberal economy, artists are the ideal entrepreneurs—quintessential contemporary workers who indicate not only where we stand today, but also what approaches us. The question of whether that makes the outcome—the products of their labor—immaterial or not is a different matter altogether.

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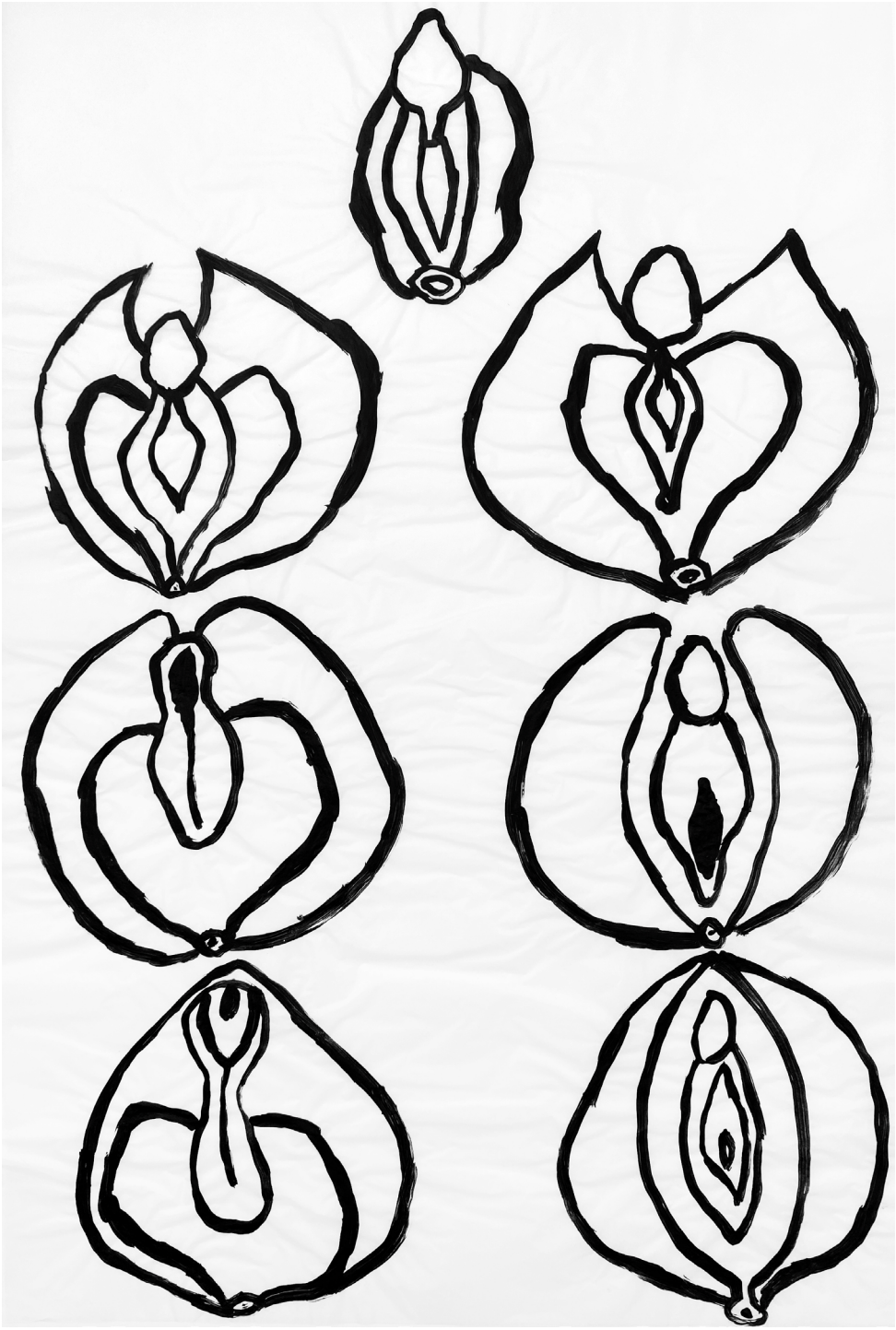
Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #27*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Kër Thiossane

Renée Akitelek Mboya

A typical family homestead in urban Senegal, Kër Thiossane boasts a flurry of activity in a neighbourhood that mimics the same in a somewhat comical call and response drone. A large multistoried, yellow house with graffitied walls and many hidden rooms, it lends itself with open arms to the curiosity of strangers. These days, those strangers are mostly visual artists, though the house has a long heritage of turning itself over to troubadour-historians and musicians, in all their different iterations. Through the labyrinthine corridors we learn that it is also a place of strange morphologies. Like any house in Dakar it is only once the rituals around the large plates of rice and fish at the lunch table are observed that one realizes just how much is actually going on behind closed doors—inside the domestic space. A kitchen, yes—but also, slightly out of perspective—a strange

robotic critter with stiff joints dispenses light splashes of water onto a sun singed potager growing spring onions and shy tomatoes; the gentle whirrs of 3D printing machines churning out little maquettes of favorite places well remembered; the chatter of a muffled radio playing sermons; and cheers from the football stadium not too far off. It's the famous Demba Diop Stadium which hosted one of the country's most memorable sporting events, when the Senegalese national soccer team defeated the French one, for the first time in a long entangled history.

Kër Thiossane began its activities in 2002 in Dakar. In 2003, the association opened a digital public space, with the aim to disseminate the resources they had at hand within the centre.

A venue for research, residence, creation and training, Kër Thiossane encourages the integration of multimedia into traditional artistic and creative practices, and seeks to support the mingling of disciplines. They focus their activities on research concerning art and new technologies and what import art and tech together can have on our societies. Working mostly through residences, trainings, meetings and workshops, Kër Thiossane consistently offers itself up to a form of peer fabrication.

Kër Thiossane develops its exchanges and collaboration with institutions on the African continent, as well as elsewhere, in particular with regards to a south-south cooperation focused on sharing knowledge and building capacities. They link the development of artistic digital practices to other domains of society namely education and training, creative industries, citizenship, ecology and urban development.

Situated in the historic Sicap Liberté II commune, where the Senghorian architectural dream for a post colonial Dakar is still vaguely present, if not a little dust worn. Senghor insisted on respect for the laws of land-use and planning, in an attempt to ensure that zoning standards were adhered to. During Senghor's term, for instance, residential areas were limited to one-story houses, very much in the style that Ker Thiossane maintains to date, with a few contemporary additions. This use of the built environment as a tool to exhibit the various aspects of the Senegalese way of life - the ethics of indoor life reflected on the outside - has become very much a part of the urban vernacular of Dakar and institutions like Kër Thiossane continue in this way to think alongside their neighbourhoods and vice versa.

Thus for example, during the 2002 FIFA World Cup, fear of demonstrations led the public authorities to instruct the

ministries to develop certain community spaces on the peninsula, in order to prevent soccer fans from heading to the presidential palace in the event of the national team winning matches. In its urban-development policy, the state government seems to have consistently created a mechanism for reducing opposition activities by significantly modifying the places where people mobilise and meet in public.

It's not surprising then that there emerged an impulse towards spaces of fellowship like Kër Thiossane; developed around dining tables and on the stoops where elder men gather to play draughts in the tender light of sunset. Since its inception in the early 2000s Kër Thiossane has been a mobilising force for artists and digital activists seeking to view technology from a critical and specific African perspective. In the overlaps of the digital and domestic space Marion Louisgrand Sylla and Balla Françoise Sylla created a space for peer to peer learning and participatory community, in what had been Françoise's childhood home, where his family had lived for generations before. In opening up their doors to the 'public' they engage and ignite the radical potential of the urban commons, inside their household.

Formally as a cultural space Kër Thiossane encourages the expression of various forms and creative mediums through the appropriation of so called 'new technologies'. By encouraging the integration of multimedia into traditional artistic practices—music, dance, theatre, visual arts, fashion and design—mediums better understood and integrated into the urban life of the early 2000s in Senegal. The overlap of different disciplines and the commitment to their application means that in the democratic way of (some) families the domestic space is continually reforming itself to incorporate new ideas with a commitment to the use of new technologies being at the centre the household.

While all the trappings of a quaint community space are easily visible within its courtyards—kitchens with charming women standing over large vats of rice, freshly washed sneakers drying along the wall, the ever present cats stretching and perching with the moving sunlight—Ker Thiossane's dedication to being at the forefront of defining a tech revolution in Africa is clear.

The timing of Kër Thiossane's beginning is not at all incidental. It is widely acknowledged that the early 2000s in Senegal coincided with the conclusion of one of the most dynamic movements for social change in any contemporary African city. Facing the consequences of severe economic collapse due to

Jardin Solidaire, 2016–2017.

the structural readjustment programmes of the 1980's and the devaluation of the West African franc in 1994, there emerged among urban youth especially, a self conscious urban identity that sought to rid itself of the turbulent politics and social unrest of the time. The Set-Setal movement marked the reemergence of an urban youth who, repelled by the image of a crumbling society, decided to take citizen ownership of the city and its destiny through plural initiatives for the maintenance of common living spaces and shared public space.

On the back of Set-Setal and facing the economic crisis of 2008 while barely having recovered from the devastating impact of the structural readjustment programs through which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were providing loans to help Senegal face the economic crisis of the 1970s while on the other hand imposing devastating policy prescriptions—we see citizens in neighbourhoods like Sicap Liberte II, where Kër Thiossane is, reform and transform the way that they approach work, and in many respects, as people are without offices, farms or factories to which they can commute, the neighbourhoods give themselves over to something of a doorstep economy, a stoop bureau, where labour is negotiated along new terms, and the performance of it is an ego battle between the types of labour being performed inside the houses usually by women—cooking, cleaning and rearing children.

Kër Thiossane is a space that embraces the urban commons as a social and political aesthetic. "Commons are those resources that apart from the property that is mainly public, pursue a natural and economic vocation that is of social interest, immediately serving not the administration but the collective and the people by whom it is composed" (Lucarelli 2011).

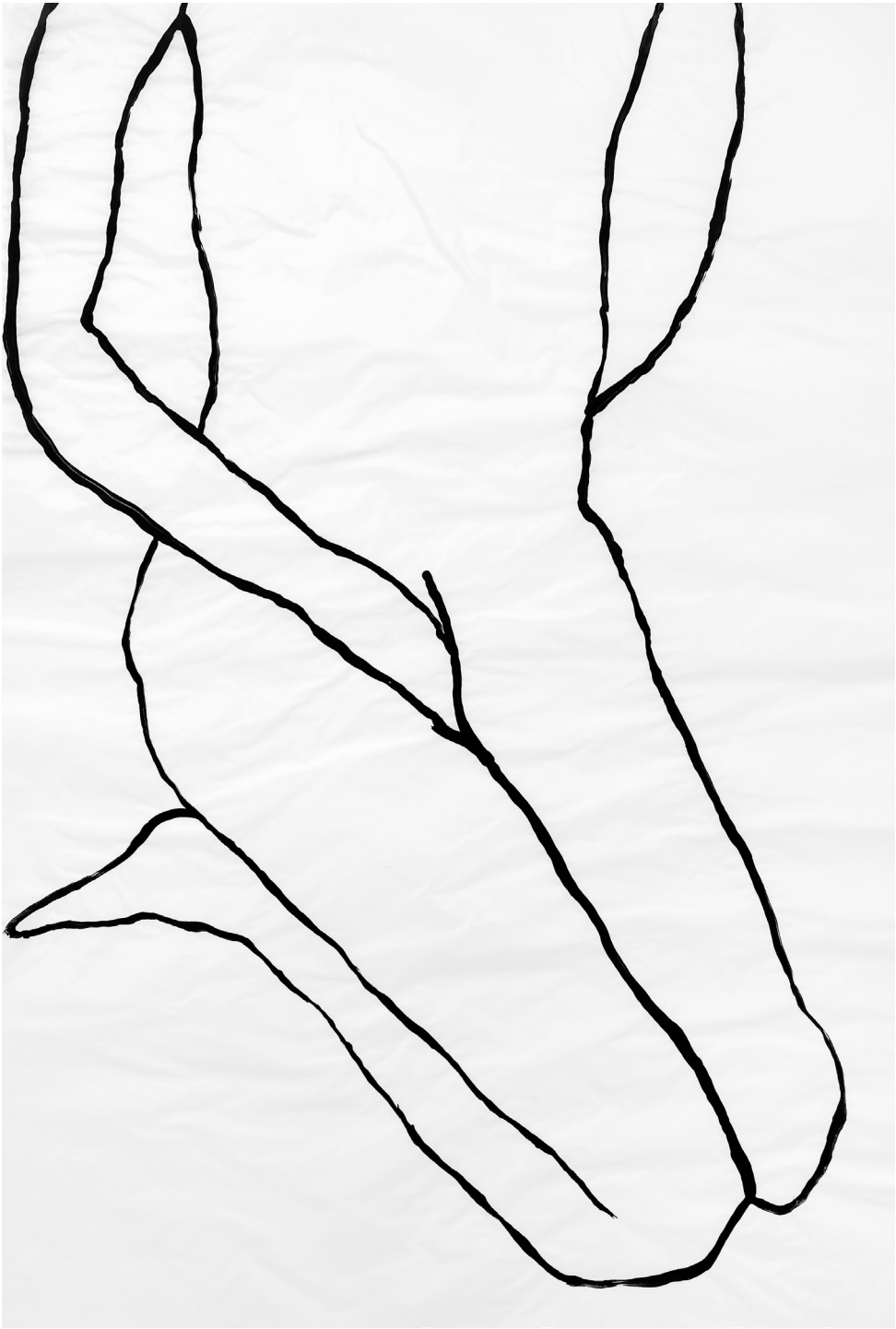
The idea of the commons, and the ways in which Senegalese institutions find themselves moulding into it is perhaps dependent on something of a caricature of Senegalese masculinity. Enshrined and immortalised as a comic book character, Goorgoorlou—an average Joe down on his luck, having lost his job as a result of the SAPs—is seen and known to use his neighbourhood, his domestic space, as a pivot from which to perform a variety of odd jobs for his community, while making the most of the resources, the technologies, that are available to him from his household.

Goorgoorlou does every thing and we find that his naming is somewhat on the nose. The verb 'Goorgoorlu' for example,

in response to the question, 'what do you do?' one could say: 'Goorgoorlu rek' or 'maa ngi Goorgoorlu', which can be translated as 'I am doing my best' or 'I am doing odd jobs to make ends meet'. In some respects it is this odd job philosophy—Goorgoorlu has been a cook, a cobbler, a clerk, a construction worker—that also defines the space of Kër Thiossane. It's a space that long before we were all accustomed to working from home, attending meetings by phone, accounted for a different type of regard for labour, where it might happen and who might accept the invitation to come and do it. In the way that Kër Thiossane is organised we see an institution, a household, defining itself in the wake of the contacts it makes. In their own words "Kër Thiossane cross pollinates Senegalese traditions with influences from the rest of the world." One of those tradition is very much the idea of home, and a commitment to always making strangers feel welcome.

Fablab Defko Ak Niëp (Do it with others), 2014–2018.

Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #6*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



The Domestic as a Form of Community

Daniel Tremolada

If I had to decide when MAMAMA espacio was inaugurated, I would find it difficult to answer. I would say that it was inaugurated perhaps when the first exhibition was made. However, we had an unplanned pre-opening before the first exhibition, so from its origin the plans were altered. I could say that the origin of the institutional history as an art space in my grandmother's house came about as a result of my grandfather's death, but that wouldn't be accurate either, as my grandfather's absence brought my grandmother more of a depression. What I can affirm is that my grandmother, anchored to a property—her house—represents an institution that has fulfilled a disciplinary function in affections. By this I mean that she has educated us from the affective point of view as a rule, which could be characterised as something positive, however in some cases it has

meant an impediment from my pragmatic point of view: nostalgia, attachments, grievances, generosity and intrusions into private family life. In my family, everything has always been organised according to emotions, to the visceral nature of passions and very rarely to reason. Proposing, from a rational point of view, that certain decisions be handled, has meant in many cases conflict and estrangement in the family. For example, in my case, the child of a very, very young mother, the product of an unwanted pregnancy, I was conceived despite the inappropriate circumstances for conceiving a child. I know that in my mother's position I would have sought an abortion, an idea that, at some point in conversation with my grandmother, I have tried to suggest, and to her with some horror, it has only meant the desire for my own death. It was there, facing that event, my birth, that a bond of containment was initiated from my grandparents towards me, as they acted as parents to the child of a daughter who had something more akin to a pet or a little brother than a son. This fact about my conception, which is not minor, added to the other transcendental fact that was the death of my mother at a very young age, marked a special relationship with my mum's parents, who, despite the particular conditions in which it occurred, provided me with a lot of love on an affective and material level.

That affective way of bonding, which indirectly educated me, at one point in my early adulthood came to suffocate me, which is why I sought my luck elsewhere and migrated to another country to study a career as an artist.

Such was the ideological distance I reached with this elderly couple that I had no intention of returning to the city of Lima, only 12 years later following the aforementioned death of my grandfather. Without it being expressed literally, we have always disagreed about family structures such as obedience to a hierarchy of power, gender and sexual orientation based on that dissident gender. The absence of reflection towards common problems or unhealthy bonding structures set the tone. Facing a decaying house, along with the decay of mourning, was my welcome. My grandmother's decision not to sell the house in which she had lived for 50 years involved extensive renovations to prevent catastrophes that seemed imminent.

At the same time, while I was still outside Lima, but after making my decision to return, I assumed that I would find a panorama like the one described above: deterioration, depression,

decadence. I looked for motivations for my return and one idea I remembered, rescued from the past, was to run a non-profit gallery or, to be more precise, an exhibition project room. When I was younger I was very excited about the idea of my house being a cultural centre. I wasn't quite sure what that cultural centre would be like, but I did know that it didn't provoke me to get involved with all the administrative apparatus associated with running a gallery. On the other hand, the desire to produce events was always something that defined my work as an artist, even when I was working in gastronomy.

In the middle of the construction of this project, I always avoided the figure of the curator, firstly, because I'm not one, and secondly, because I've never felt intellectual enough to keep up with them. Today I understand that this is a mistake, and that, even though curators don't have the role of giving legitimacy to artistic proposals—although in many cases it might be like that—the figure of the curator and his guidelines, if they do propose them, should fulfil the function of allies of artistic production. It was with the aim of reconciling myself with the personal conflict of the idea of curatorship that I took the decision to set as a requirement, some guidelines for the beginning of what was being developed. This made me remember a class I had on installation and site-specific sculpture, and that I was very motivated by the format, especially because it's something I like to use in my work. It was then that I decided to set as the only requirement for the artists who participated at MAMAMA espacio, that all their proposals should be specific to the place where they were going to be presented. As we can recognise, my grandmother's house is not a white cube, nor does it seek to be one, so to pretend to show work in these conditions would be denying the very loaded place.

As well as seeking to connect with a scene I had never been part of, my project also sought to connect with my grandmother. I wanted to offer her some occupations that would take her out of her depression, I wanted to share with her what I liked about art, to show her its emancipatory character in some cases, and the possibilities it offers as a platform when it comes to speaking out within society. At the same time, I saw that my grandfather's death functioned as a kind of liberation from patriarchy, where the wife was taking, for the first time, the reins of her life and her money. I am not saying that my grandfather was a chauvinist. However, some chauvinism inherently remained in their

Cecilia Jurao, *Soy La casa que Ladra* (2019), photo by Daniel Tremolada

Above: Daniel and his grandmother, photo by Juan Pablo Murrugara. Below: *33*, last exhibition of the year 2019 and birthday *ágape* (feast) of the artist and director of the space, Daniel Tremolada.

relationship as a couple and as a family. I imagine that he had inherited that patriarchal structure from his upbringing. I wanted, then, to take advantage of this turning point that a woman—who was transcendental for me—was experiencing, and to fulfil the function of being the channel or the means by which this person entered a new way of life that did not seem conceivable before.

That renewal that my grandmother went through, as a result of a traumatic situation, gave her, from my point of view, the freshness of emancipation, something that I consider very powerful from a contemporary point of view, so it seemed important to share that life experience. We established a bond where we both played a protective role for each other. Moreover, we developed a mutual relationship with certain particularities that made the hegemonic patriarchal hierarchy that had been lived in my house porous.

It was in the middle of the renovations of the house where the first artist decided to make the first presentation of MAMAMA espacio, because he considered that the manifesto of his work dialogues perfectly with the state of the house at that time. The space, at the suggestion of a visionary friend, took its name from the way we affectionately call grandmothers in Peru. It is actually a play on words in Spanish where you add one more syllable (ma) to the word mama, which means mother, to emphasise that she is your grandmother; the same was done with my "papapa", that is, my grandfather, may he rest in peace. The word mamama, besides naming a family degree, has a sonority related to a tribal onomatopoeia of repeating the same syllable three times, which I personally relate to the word *amar*.

Returning to the subject of the beginning of MAMAMA espacio, we could say that its genesis was the day I opened an Instagram account with that name. I mention the subject of Instagram as an important moment, since our presence on that platform extended what was happening in the experience of real life, when visiting my home, to the virtual, as an experience where the boundary between the private of a family home and the public of an open platform became ambiguous. Little by little, an avid audience for the MAMAMA experience began to emerge. A public that I fed in social networks with fragments of videos recorded with my mobile phone of my grandmother's daily life. In many cases I came to wonder if what I was doing was the prostitution or exoticisation of a character close to me. Even if she was my

grandmother, the woman who raised me for most of my life, I felt and still feel an enormous distance from her. That distance led me to manage the idea that my grandmother is an experience and, for that reason, also a product. Probably this approach, which at some moments invoked a sense of guilt, is part of recognising that within this project several tensions arose as a result of generational distances, the same ones that many people of my generation must experience when they interact with older adults. However, despite all the distances, my grandmother and I became a team, a team where the difference of its members generated an irregular texture, but after all, a team of which we were both part. Each of us contributed to the project according to our own capabilities. My grandmother, for example, dedicated herself to receiving all the people who visited the exhibitions as if they were regular guests, whom she served with a "sanguchito" or a "coctelito". She always helped me with the flowers and with having the house nice. She dressed up as if she were going out to dinner with her friends, put on perfume and talked to the guests, whom she treated as if they were my friends. They complimented her, her plants, her house etc. When the guests left, she always told me everything. From my side, I took care of inviting artists, helping with the production and installation of their projects, writing texts, distributing them, putting toilet paper in the bathrooms, etc. As I had quit my job before coming to Lima, I didn't have a fixed income, so, with my small salaries from freelance work, I bought a few things to receive guests or I paid photographers to make an optimal record of the exhibitions. It was a difficult task to find artists who wanted to invest in developing their projects in my house, but many accepted. The freshness of the proposals was interesting because, neither being in a museum nor a commercial gallery, nor having to have the pragmatic pattern of sales, nor institutional solemnity, freed the proposals. In a way we became an institution of the non-institutional. Many artists showed more playful sides than those they showed in other spaces, and I think that gave a lot of freshness to the local scene. My grandmother acted as a curator in front of the projects, delimiting how far they could go. It was surprising how flexible she became, allowing me and the artists to do much more than we had originally agreed. For example, our first agreement was that the project would be limited only to the empty garage of the house, but the proposals went further and further, invading parts of the house and the very circumstances of our activity as a family.

Another interesting aspect that happened was to locate the few alternative exhibition spaces in the city and work with them weaving a network. A rather particular support emerged in the sense of solidarity and community building.

It has been fun and exhausting to have worked so hard. I think the success of each project depends on how seriously I took it and how much discipline I put into the work. Having no timetable, no salary, the whole experience meant an investment, with an unclear aim. But all in all, it was an investment shared with my grandmother, who, throughout her life, never received a salary for being a housewife, or for taking care of kids. You could say that we became an association of unpaid workers.

At some point, when the project gained some recognition, I began to receive the attention of some institutions that do make profit from art. Perhaps what caught the attention of these institutions was the novelty of the circumstances in which MAMAMA arose, or perhaps they were interested because many of the artists who agreed to develop their projects had already built up a certain reputation before working with us. Whatever the reason, our project was capitalised on, and proved valuable to other sectors of culture. I believe that our experience deserves to be analysed as a cultural phenomenon, because it poses a novel form of art praxis. A praxis subsidised by a middle-class family that to this date has not been able to translate its earnings into sums of money, but into life experiences.

The valuable thing about the MAMAMA proposal, first of all, is that it was all real. Yes, we are a family; yes, it is our home; yes, we had fun doing it, and it showed. Secondly, by positioning ourselves from the everyday, the proposal acquired a very revolutionary potential, as contradictory as it may seem. Once again, we can see that the contemporaneity of art is not measured by how neatly it is presented or by the current issues it deals with. Contemporaneity, if it could be described at all, for me, consists in the recursiveness of its manifestations, where the precariousness of the artistic career defines its own texture. A situation that, far from being celebrated, is lived, and addressing it as such, without disguising its conditions, is a very powerful resource in the search to reconfigure models of cultural activity.

But going back to my grandmother, which is a subject I like to speak about, it was very picturesque to see how a woman, Catholic, heterosexual, traditional and, in some cases, even conservative, gave rise to the most progressive demonstrations in

her own place. I find it comical how this lady rubbed shoulders with the queerest people in the art world, without making distinctions of race or gender. They were all her guests, and as long as they all maintained basic social manners, they were all welcome in her house. An artist once made a comparison between my grandmother and her house, they were like a womb, where the fertilised ovum of art could develop.

Although we didn't manage to move massively, either as a brand or as a curatorial project (of course we didn't seek it either) we did build our own art scene. We linked up with friends or colleagues who had similar or very different proposals and we developed friendlier links compared to the ways of the art circuit.

In the wake of the pandemic, we have discovered how unprotected artists are in terms of being paid and general working conditions. Many of the conclusions I heard from some academics were that having limited a large part of artistic praxis to production in the private sector gave rise to a kind of neoliberal hegemony, where praxis itself, if it does not have a commercial value, lacks any value and therefore protection. I agree with this vision and I believe that in Peru many artistic careers have only developed in the field of sales because there are limited funds, museums or institutions that encourage creation per se.

I have talked about the first presentation that an artist made at MAMAMA, now I want to focus on the last exhibition that took place in person. For a long time, I tried to separate myself and be cautious about exhibiting my work in my space. I had some personal discussions about the ethics and even boredom of using my own platform to show my own work. However, there came a moment when I considered it interesting to do so because I felt that all the conditions were ideally in place for the proposal to close. The exhibition was called *33* (the age I turned on the day of the show). It consisted of a series of sculptures custom-designed to serve my birthday meal. I consider that to be the conceptual climax of the project, as I used my whole house, and even my bedroom, as an exhibition space. It combined not only the physical, private and familiar space, but also added the value of sharing a personal celebration, such as my birthday, in something public. I feel that I became the ideal artist to invite to my own project, as no proposal would have been more Site Specific than one that exposed me as an artist and as a grandson in a project marked by the self-referentiality of its members.

Daniel Tremolada, *33* (2019).

After *33*, as a result of the pandemic, we stopped receiving people in our house. That space that had been having a character of almost a public park, where many neighbours, who had known my grandmother for years, took advantage of the exhibitions to visit her house as a novelty, stopped happening. It's not very common in a city as hostile as Lima for people to let you into their homes. In any case, those dynamics are over. The front door of our house became the border with the world of the virus. My grandmother, being a woman at risk, cannot be in contact with other people because of the danger of contracting the virus, neither can I, no one really. It became impossible to continue with the space, in the terms as we had managed so far. I took advantage of the remote work to update the MAMAMA website, and to recapitulate all the experiences we had lived. It was a very interesting experience as I felt that it was a time where the world had stopped. I was able to take that historical moment of physical distance and distance from the past to reflect. Months passed and I got bored. Many people wrote to me asking me to activate the space, but unfortunately, I could not meet their expectations. Months went by until one day, taking advantage of

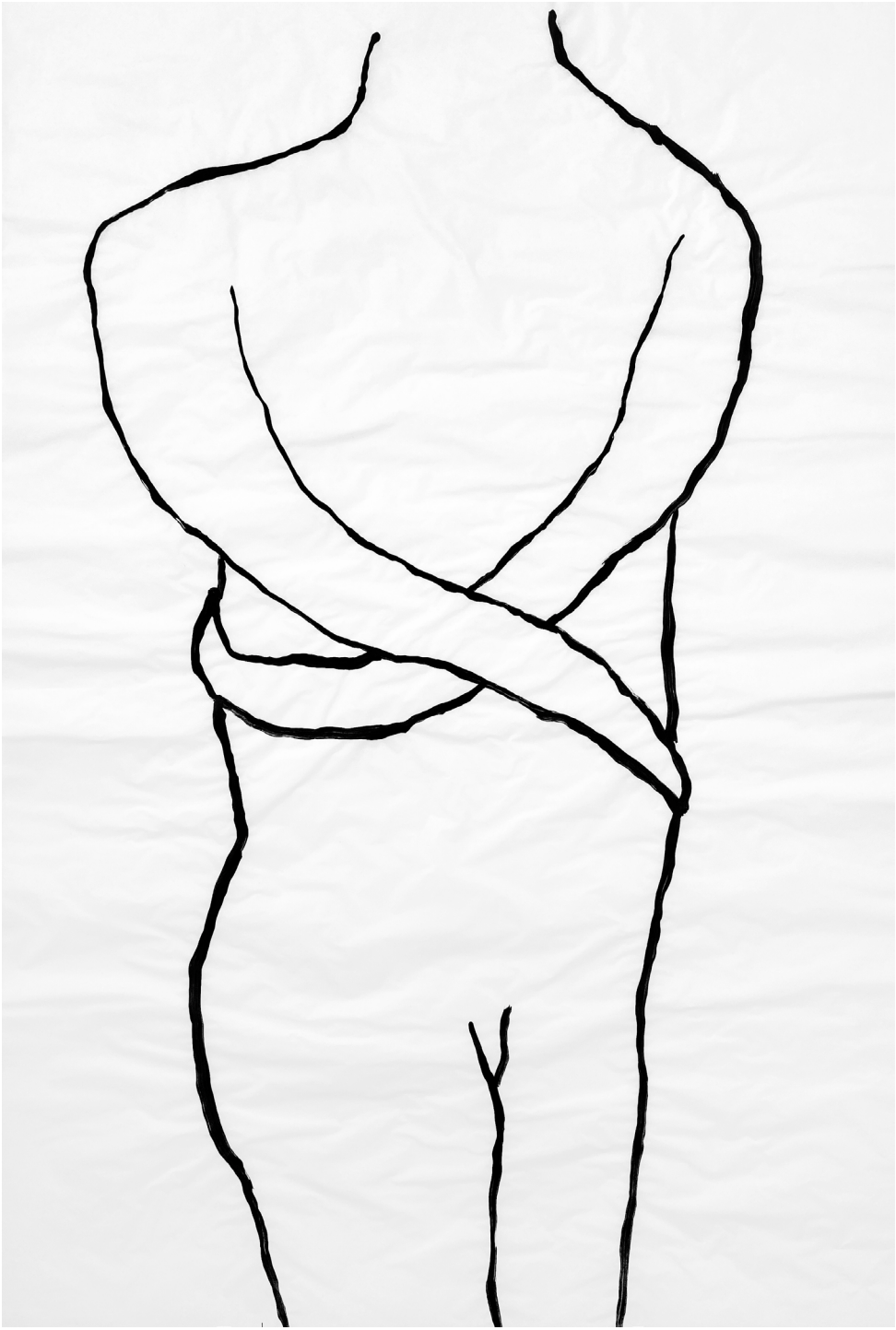
Daniel Tremolada, *33* (2019).

the name that the presidency of the Republic had given to the economic moment we were supposedly going through, I devised an exhibition. The show was called "Economic Reactivation" and consisted of a digital catalogue, in which significant parts of my grandmother's house were photographed, and on which a digital montage was made of the record of the available work of a group of artists I invited to participate. The proposal was very particular; as for the first time I devised a project focused on selling works of art. It was so literal that I used the word economy in its title, its only support being a catalogue with the aesthetics of a supermarket. I consider that this experience forced me to work much harder than previous opportunities, because my limits of timetables or virtual activity, which were ambiguous before, simply ceased to exist at that time.

The virtualisation of the MAMAMA experience was an interesting way to stay relevant as a platform. By remaining in the virtual realm, our opening hours are endless. I think it is important to use this moment to mark our limits in terms of what we want to offer as cultural workers, as this situation is going to go on for a long time and it is key that we start to reconfigure our patterns of action.

Life inside the home is supposed to be a private setting that is always on display anyway. We talk about the domestic constantly and, in fact, the domestic only exists because it is talked about in public. Now that we are asked to stay at home, it is from this domesticity that the public and the external are constructed. This puts us in a new situation, in a new way of being in the world, that is, in a new form of politics. Part of our task is to recognise and identify these new modes of contact with the other that we face in this new situation. From this, from our reconfiguring and valuing of the domestic, a new way of being in community will emerge, so we need to remember that it is not just about confinement for safety, but about strengthening the bonds of support that make environments less dangerous, and that strengthening has always happened in the domestic. Leaving behind transcendentalities to deal with the day-to-day means, on many levels, the end of the paradigm of progress.

Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #4*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism

Helen Hester

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There has been an excess of modesty in the feminist agendas of recent decades. Carol A. Stabile is amongst those who have been critical of an absence of systemic thinking within post-modern feminisms, remarking upon a "growing emphasis on fragmentations and single-issue politics."[1] Stabile dismisses this kind of thinking which, in "so resolutely avoiding 'totalizing'—the *bête noire* of contemporary critical theory—[...] ignores or jettisons a structural analysis of capitalism."[2] The difference in scope and scale between that which is being opposed and the strategies being used to oppose it is generative of a sense of disempowerment.

1. Carol A. Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 12.
2. Ibid., 13.

On the one hand, Stabile argues, postmodern social theorists "accept the systemic nature of capitalism, as made visible in its consolidation of power and its global expansion [...] Capitalism's power as a system is therefore identified and named as a totality"; on the other hand, these theorists "celebrate local, fragmented, or partial forms of knowledge as the only forms of knowledge available" and criticize big-picture speculative thinking for its potentially oppressive tendencies or applications.[3] Nancy Fraser, too, has addressed this apparent "shrinking of emancipatory vision at the *fin de siècle*," linking this with "a major shift in the feminist imaginary" during the 1980s and 1990s—that is, with a move away from attempting to remake political economy (redistribution) and towards an effort at transforming culture (recognition).[4]

The legacies of this kind of political theorizing—legacies some might describe as "folk political"—are still being felt today, and continue to shape the perceived horizons of possibility for progressive projects.[5] Yet these projects, which are frequently valuable, necessary, and effective on their own terms, are not sufficient as ends in themselves. To the extent that they are conceptualized in detachment from an ecology of other interventions, operating via a diversity of means and across a variety of scales, they cannot serve as a suitable basis for any politics seeking to contest the imaginaries of the right or to contend with the expansive hegemonic project of neoliberal capitalism. It is for this reason that Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's work positions itself as somewhat skeptical about fragmentations and single-issue politics, pointing out that problems such as "global exploitation, planetary climate change, rising surplus populations, [and] the repeated crises of capitalism are abstract in appearance, complex in structure, and non-localized."[6] As such, a politics based around the ideas that "the local is ethical, simpler is better, the organic is healthy, permanence is oppressive, and progress is over" is not always the best weapon in an attempt

3. Ibid., 147.
4. Nancy Fraser, *The Fortunes of Feminism: From Women's Liberation to Identity Politics to Anti-Capitalism* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 9.
5. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams use this term to describe a form common sense which is out of joint with the mechanisms of contemporary power, and a leftist politics that 'involves the fetishisation of local spaces, immediate actions, transient gestures, and particularisms of all kinds'. See *Inventing the Future* (London: Verso, 2015), 3.
6. Ibid., 40.

to contend with the complex technomaterial conditions of the world as it stands.[7] There is a persistent kind of abstraction anxiety hanging over progressive politics; an anxiety that haunts a contemporary leftist feminism still unwilling or unable to critically reappraise the tendencies that Stabile identified in the 90s.

Recently, however, a renewed appetite for ambitious and future-oriented emancipatory politics has begun to make itself felt at the fringes of the left—and indeed, to gather momentum and popular support more broadly.[8] Perhaps the most remarkable example of this tendency within philosophically-inflected political theory circles has been accelerationism, with its calls to build an "intellectual infrastructure" capable of "creating a new ideology, economic and social models, and a vision of the good to replace and surpass the emaciated ideals that rule our world today."[9] These so-called "Promethean" ideas have generated widespread interest, arguably both reflecting and contributing to the changing tenor of activist discourse. Interestingly, this term has to some extent emerged in opposition to the pejorative "folk political," acting as a shorthand for a very different set of values and perspectives. In a recent critical piece, Alexander Galloway suggests that "Prometheanism" could be defined as "technology for humans to overcome natural limit."[10] Peter Wolfendale, meanwhile, sees it as a "*politics of intervention*"—one that starts from the insistence that nothing be exempted in advance from the enactment of re/visionary processes.[11]

Contemporary feminism, too, is picking up on this emergent mood. Nascent projects such as xenofeminism, for example, are seeking to articulate a technologically-minded counter-hegemonic gender politics fit for an era of globality, complexity, and alienation, and as such, evince a commitment to the development of more systemic approaches to oppression (reminiscent of those Promethean "perspectives of winning" which

7. Ibid., 46.
8. I am thinking particularly here about the partial resurgence of a broadly socialist left—including Podemos in Spain, Corbyn's Labour Party in the UK, Mélenchon's candidacy in the recent French presidential elections, and the surprising popularity of Sanders in the US.
9. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics," in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 359.
10. Alexander R. Galloway, "Brometheanism", Culture and Communication (2017), http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/brometheanism.
11. Peter Wolfendale, "Promtheanism and Rationalism", Academia.edu (2016), https://www.academia.edu/26816420/Prometheanism_and_Rationalism.

characterized strands of second wave activism).[12] But is the designation "Promethean" always hospitable when it comes to these emerging feminisms? What are the connotations of this label, and what kinds of ideas does it foreground or appear to overlook? Starting with a discussion of the notion of Promethean politics sketched out by both Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano, and critically considering its relationship to gender and labor, this essay will examine some of the artificial barriers to participation in and engagement with the Promethean project, particularly in terms of the seemingly competing demands of social reproduction. This, in turn, will lead to a consideration of some of the historical debates surrounding care work and reproductive labor within feminism, and to an analysis of the facets of those debates that encourage a re-estimation of social reproduction.

The aim of this essay is to prompt a reconsideration of the domestic not only as an *object* of Promethean ambition, but also as a *site* from which to launch emancipatory political projects. Whilst the first section considers what feminism might have to gain from seizing upon Prometheanism, the second moves on to charge Prometheanism with the task of learning from feminism.

Gendering Prometheus: Risk and Collective Politics

A Promethean politics is averse to both illusion—"the persuasion that the powerless can prevail over the powerful without concentrating and organizing their forces"—and melancholy—"the sense that emancipation is an object better mourned than desired."[13] It might, at its most general level, be characterized as a transformative, world-building, and technologically enabled emancipatory endeavor, oriented towards the future. For Ray Brassier, in "Prometheanism and its Critics," it is "simply the claim that there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world."[14] The implicit gender political dimensions of this are clear throughout his analysis,

12. See Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics of Alienation," in *Dea Ex Machina*, ed. Armen Avanessian and Helen Hester (Berlin: Merve, 2015).
13. Alberto Toscano, "The Prejudice Against Prometheus," STIR (2011), https://web.archive.org/web/20131006173459/http:/stirtoaction.com:80/the-prejudice-against-prometheus/.
14. Ray Brassier, "Prometheanism and Its Critics," in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 470.

which frequently demonstrates a remarkable affinity with key elements of technofeminist thought—from an avowed anxiety about ceding nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science (NBIC) technologies to the champions of neoliberal capitalism, to (most obviously) an interest in synthetic life and in questioning the assumption of birth as a biological absolute. All elements of existence, including the human and its reproductive processes, are therefore positioned as mutable and as available for re-engineering.

If, as Brassier contends, the "Promethean trespass resides in *making the given*," then emerging strains of feminism which privilege the synthetic over the organic, the mediated over the immediate, and technologized natureculture over an inflated idea of "the natural" might justifiably be described as examples of Promethean gender politics.[15] Like the mythical Greek figure, such feminisms demonstrate an interest in the processes whereby life (both biological and social) is constructed and crafted, as well as a healthy disregard for supposedly immovable limits and an investment in the liberatory potentials of technology—that infamous "Promethean supplement."[16] Following Shulamith Firestone (a Promethean in both name and nature!), xenofeminism professes an interest in what some envision as "technology's ultimate cultural goal: the building of the ideal in the real world," and as such might find Prometheus to be a suitable figurehead, despite his mythical associations with arrogance, pride, and machismo.[17]

Indeed, several contemporary leftists have already sought to challenge the Titan's association with these gendered forms of swagger. Toscano, for example, in reclaiming the epithet "Promethean" from Simon Critchley, declares that:

> the figure of Prometheus is not, as so many critiques of Marxism have argued, the herald of some kind of disastrous hubris; Prometheus is the bearer of the open question of how we, creatures that draw their breath in gasps, can manage not to be subject to the violent prerogatives of sovereignty. The demands and prescriptions that a "Promethean" politics carries are not those of nihilistic destruction, nor are they infinite and unfulfillable;

15. This would include not only xenofeminism, but a host of other technofeminist and posthumanist positions, such as recent interventions by Paul B. Preciado and Alexis Shotwell. Ibid., 478.
16. Ibid., Galloway.
17. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 170–171.

> they are specific but unconditional demands made on our capacities that, although certainly limited in kind, are often more than sufficient, when concerted and composed into the action of a collective subject, to act in a principled, egalitarian and emancipatory sense.[18]

A Promethean politics is here depicted as founded upon *answerable* demands—calls to satisfy aims that are actionable and achievable, and which are neither illusory nor melancholic. Again, then, this adjective would appear to be a good fit for those ambitious and counter-hegemonic contemporary feminisms that heed Stabile's call for a more systemic and structural analysis of classed and gendered oppression, which might effectively be combined with smaller-scale, single-issue organizing.

But feminists should not seek to take up this label without subjecting it to some careful and critical qualification. Myths have histories, after all. As Galloway notes, the Promethean story in fact includes "three moments"—the narrative concerns not only the light-fingered Prometheus, but also the neglectful Epimetheus and the gift-extending Hermes (a character identified with genericity on account of his bestowal of equality and justice to all humankind).[19] However, whilst critiquing the apparent "brocialism" of the Promethean turn, and despite approvingly citing xenofeminism's "universalism from below" as part of a more holistic account of emancipatory politics, Galloway misses one further strand of this mythical nexus—that is, the story of Pandora. We would do well to remember that Prometheus's transgressions are depicted as leading Zeus to *punish* mankind via the creation of the first woman. This is the far more obvious and provocative element from a gender political perspective! Many versions of the myth present Prometheus as justifiably suspicious of Pandora—the original woman as deceptive gift—thereby rendering our trickster hero somewhat less than appropriate as an icon for feminist initiatives. We must be wary of the deep significances packed into literary allusions; rhetorical flourishes may be laden with cultural baggage. But if it seems churlish to point out that Prometheus represents both a gendered mythology and a mythology of gender, then it is perhaps less trivial to acknowledge that the kinds of Promethean activism some commentators envision present distinctly gendered barriers to political participation.

18. Alberto Toscano, "A Plea for Prometheus," *Critical Horizons* 10, no. 2 (2009): 255.
19. Ibid., Galloway.

In the first place, the ability to answer "an absolute (although not infinite) demand for human emancipation" is shown to require not only the possession of certain financial, social, and cognitive resources, but also the freedom to commit oneself to undertaking a degree of personal risk in the face of potential conflict and violence.[20] This freedom, I would argue, is not equally available to all people and is likely to be constrained by the obligations of, for example, reproductive labor (by which I mean the activities that nurture future workers, regenerate the current workforce, and maintain those who cannot work; in effect, the everyday tasks involved in staying alive and helping others stay alive). For Toscano, a Promethean politics which seeks to "increase effectiveness, prepare emancipation and minimize domination [...] will involve considerable degrees of self-mastery, which is to say of *discipline*—after all, the recognition of our 'finitude' (or rather, our mortality) is often a powerful counter-argument to political commitment (just think of your family, think of what you could lose, and so on)." If domination is "based on the exploitation of our mortality—and especially of the cares and fears that so often prevent political mobilization," then engagement in the Promethean endeavor (characterized here as an inherently, if not especially, self-endangering practice) must be understood as subject to certain restrictions. This is not only a matter of the responsibilities attendant upon social reproduction butting up against calls for concerted, effortful, and resource-consuming political activity (although this will remain a problem for activism of all stripes and persuasions for as long as movements ignore the role of social infrastructure in enabling involvement). It is also a question of acknowledging that, for structural reasons, anxieties in the face of absolute demands are likely to be more acute for some individuals (including, but not limited to, women) than they will be for others.

"Cares and fears," then, are differentially distributed phenomena, and it is harder to be indifferent to one's self-perpetuation if it is not merely the perpetuation of the self that is at stake. For some, the exhortation to "just think of your family" cannot be dismissed so easily by discipline and an effort of will in the face of familial, domestic, and other material caregiving responsibilities, and this should prompt us to reflect upon and revisit what we consider to be meaningfully political. It is worth

20. Ibid., Toscano (2009), 254–255.

noting that Toscano's "plea for Prometheus" can in some ways be viewed as distinct from later accounts, such as Brassier's, in which the connections between collective political ambition and concerns regarding personal risk are not confronted so directly. Whilst both perspectives share an assumption that one "cannot have an emancipatory politics rooted in fear," and that one should denounce an ethos of "self-preservation at all costs," Brassier's characterization tends to operate at a certain remove from the idea of the socially enmeshed, fully embodied individual.[21] He may declare that "a species whose only concern is its own perpetuation does not deserve to exist," but he is not directly interested in or explicit about the lived implications of this. A dismissal of the blind prioritization of the continuation of humanity is surely easier to accept when considering the issue at a species' level than it is when, say, considering the ongoing lives of specific vulnerable individuals dependent upon your paid and unpaid labor in order to survive and flourish.

Whilst xenofeminism might embrace the "attempt to participate in the creation of the world without having to defer to a divine blueprint," and can enthusiastically advocate for a forward-looking counter-hegemonic technopolitics invested in re-engineering the given, it is crucial that those of us involved in the development of this project also sound a note of caution about the designation "Prometheanism."[22] As far as possible (and acknowledging that, yes, there will indeed be situations in which the demands of the collective outweigh those of the individual and her dependents), Promethean endeavor must not be positioned in such a way as to pit it against the immediate responsibilities of reproductive labor to the extent that the demands of one can only be met at the expense of the other. This kind of framing of emancipatory leftist politics repels and excludes too many with a stake in the debates, and is likely to give rise to precisely those boring and boorish militant masculinities that hostile critics have pre-emptively deemed characteristic of movements like accelerationism. It seems obvious to me that any emancipatory project worth its name must, of necessity, be a feminism. As Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici note, "the struggle over 'reproduction' is central to every other struggle

21. Ray Brassier, "Prometheanism and Real Abstraction," in *Speculative Aesthetics*, ed. Robin Mackay, Luke Pendrell, and James Trafford (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 77.
22. Ibid., Brassier (2014), 485.

and to the development of 'self-reproducing movements,' that is movements that do not separate political work from the activities necessary to the reproduction of our life, for no struggle is sustainable that ignores the needs, experiences, and practices that reproducing ourselves entails."[23] Furthermore, left Prometheanism betrays its impetus and ambitions for thoroughgoing social transformation if it fails to explicitly confront the full nexus of structural oppression, or to bring intersectional gender politics within its purview. "Brometheanism" indeed!

Contemporary counter-hegemonic feminisms must grasp the difficulties attendant upon demanding certain kinds of political involvement and do what it can to lower the gendered, classed, and raced barriers impeding participation. In other words, our "Promethean" politics must acknowledge that many people experience diminished personal freedom in the face of obligations to others, and that this need not diminish the *importance* of freedom as a goal of collective self-mastery. Individuals may operate within specific material constraints and restrictive given circumstances, but on the species level, "there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world."[24] Further to this, xenofeminism should insist on the wrong-headedness of assumptions that position the sphere of social reproduction as little more than a check upon collective ambition and an obstacle to the answering of potentially fulfillable demands. In fact, whilst the requirements of care work certainly present complexities that demand careful navigation, this sphere of gendered labor also offers distinctive opportunities for "principled, egalitarian and emancipatory" action.[25] In what follows, we will look at some of the ways in which domestic labor has been positioned by feminist thinkers, before considering whether or not spaces of domesticity might also be spaces for ambitious political thinking—thinking which exceeds the so-called "folk political."

A Promethean's Place?

It is perhaps understandable that very few aspects of social reproduction make an appearance in twenty-first century

23. Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici, "Introduction," The Commoner 15 (2012): 2, http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=114.
24. Ibid., 470.
25. Ibid., Toscano (2009), 255.

proclamations about Promethean politics. After all, there are numerous barriers to envisioning things like care work and domestic labor as positive elements in a counter-hegemonic project, and feminists themselves have historically disagreed about the role of indirectly market-mediated reproductive labor in the process of radical and emancipatory change. For Angela Y. Davis, for example, writing at the beginning of the 1980s, the tactical adjustment most likely to help overthrow oppression on the basis of gender involves getting women *out* of the home and into the workplace in as great a number as possible. She argues that housework is "invisible, repetitive, exhausting, unproductive, uncreative," and that "neither women nor men should waste precious hours of their lives on work that is neither stimulating nor productive."[26] Such labor is both limited and limiting, her analysis suggests, and it is up to feminists to "call upon women to 'leave home' in search of outside jobs—or at least to participate in a massive campaign for decent jobs for women."[27]

Part of the motivation behind Davis's emphasis on the workplace here is an attempt to counter the atomization and privatization usually associated with the domestic dwelling. As Ellen Lupton has argued in her history of women and machine design, the rise of household appliances and domestic technologies in the mid-twentieth century "affirmed women's roles as consumers of individual products instead of shared central services," further fostering those forms of segregation facilitated by geographically dispersed post-war suburban housing developments.[28] Work, in Davis's analysis, is crucial for overcoming privatization and for the development of sex-class consciousness and a collective politics. Wage labor may be boring or brutal, but unlike the isolated residence, it encourages connection: "on the job, women can unite with their sisters—and indeed with their brothers—in order to challenge the capitalists at the point of production."[29]

This attitude to work can also be seen to inform much of Davis's perspective on universal basic income (or UBI). Her views on this diverge markedly from the earlier account of Firestone (another feminist with an interest in domestic arrangements), despite both agreeing on the importance of UBI as a kind of transitional

26. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 222.
27. Ibid., 240.
28. Ellen Lupton, Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines for Home to Office (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 15.
29. Ibid., Davis, 240.

demand. For Firestone, whose work on industrial automation and cybernetic communism is widely seen as both seminal and controversial, the introduction of effective workplace technologies will have far-reaching implications when it comes to gendered cultures of work. Suddenly, she argues, "we are talking about more than a fair integration into the labor force; we are talking about the obsolescence of the labor force itself through cybernation, the radical restructuring of the economy to make 'work,' i.e. compulsory labor, particularly alienated 'wage' labor, no longer necessary."[30] This transition toward increasing automation should, Firestone proposes, be supported by a UBI that will allow people to subsist in a residual money economy without having to resort to paid work.

Whilst Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* discusses UBI as a means of subsistence at the fag end of the money economy, enabling people to live without being forced into wage labor, Davis sees it as primarily as a means to get women (particularly mothers) *into* the workforce, and thereby out of the home. Noting that women on welfare "have rarely demanded compensation for keeping house," Davis claims that

> Not "wages for housework" but rather "a guaranteed annual income for all" is the slogan articulating the immediate alternative they have most frequently proposed to the dehumanizing welfare system. What they want in the long run, however, is jobs and affordable public child care. The guaranteed annual income functions, therefore, as unemployment insurance pending the creation of more jobs with adequate wages along with subsidized systems of child care.[31]

This version of UBI sees it as a stopgap for individual women, facilitating the process of finding suitable jobs.[32] Again, then, we

30. Ibid., Firestone, 194.
31. Ibid., Davis, 237.
32. This is slightly different from the ideas of feminists such as those who were involved in campaigns for Wages for Housework in the 1970s, and who viewed 'the struggle of welfare mothers, led by African American women inspired by the Civil Rights Movement' for a guaranteed annual income precisely as a demand for wages—wages "from the state for the work of raising their children." See Silvia Federici, "Introduction," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 7. As Antonella Corsani astutely points out, however, those models in which the UBI is presented merely as a form of wage may be somewhat unambitious in that they remain "inscribed within a logic of monetary 'recognition' of the productivity of life for and within capital." In other words, they posit "a limit to capitalist exploitation but {do} not allow other becomings." See Antonella Corsani, "Beyond the Myth of Woman: The Becoming-Transfeminist of (Post-)Marxism," *SubStance* 36, no. 1 (2007): 127.

witness a turn away from the home and toward the traditional waged workplace as the privileged site of "Promethean" socialist activism and systemic structural analysis. However, if we are seeking to reconsider the possibilities of social reproduction, in the interests of generating a more egalitarian conception of what a contemporary Promethean politics might mean, then we need to move beyond this privileging of the conventional spaces of wage labor. Indeed, we must turn our attention to the opportunities inherent in the collective reorganization and re-imagination of domestic space.

Against Domestic Realism

The drive to get homemakers into work, it should be noted, is far from the ultimate aim of Davis's project. She would like to see a kind of hi-tech socialization of housework, with "teams of trained and well-paid workers, moving from dwelling to dwelling, engineering technologically advanced cleaning machinery" under the instruction of the state.[33] But such a vision of the individual's emancipation from housework would, she suggests, only be realizable under socialism, and the transformation of the political and economic system must therefore be agitated for as a primary goal. Davis's argument is that women should first become wage laborers outside of the home, in order to help bring about progressive changes in the social order, so that moves toward the de-privatization of domestic labor might take place (arguably a somewhat rigid and counter-intuitive sequencing of social transformation, given that it initially requires women to fight for a place in the very labor force their employed male comrades are struggling against).

This argument is likely to register as somewhat problematic to contemporary readers, given that we are increasingly aware of the "erasure of the border between labor time and life time"—a border that was always tenuous or non-existent for some facets of the working class.[34] For many of us lucky enough to be exploited by capital—and, when one considers the majority of the current alternatives, we mostly are lucky, even as we recognize the necessity of struggling for new and better alternatives—the home frequently becomes a site at which wage labor (or unrecognized work related to wage labor) is performed. The so-called

33. Ibid., Davis, 223.
34. Ibid., Corsani, 124.

"feminization of labor," meanwhile, means that reproductive activities once largely associated with the home "no longer function to reproduce labor-power but instead are activities that directly produce surplus-value."[35] Add to this the fact that non-unionized and precarious workers find workplace organization notoriously difficult, and the fact that many working women will pass off the unmanageable labor of social reproduction to lower paid domestic workers, and any claim for the necessity of prioritizing the conventional waged workplace is likely to come in for intense critical scrutiny.

In Davis's work, the domestic sphere, perhaps surprisingly, appears somewhat denuded of political opportunity. Unlike the traditional spaces of waged labor, it is seen as a potential site for transformation, but not as a possible field of operations for working to bring about such transformations; it is always figure, never ground. It is interesting to note that—despite quoting from the work of the visionary late nineteenth century home economist and feminist futurist Charlotte Perkins Gilman—Davis appears somewhat unimaginative in her understanding of what the home is or might be. Whereas Gilman argued for new domestic arrangements (including feminist housing complexes with shared cooking facilities) to help promote the evolution of socialism, Davis's thinking is largely restricted to the conventional privatized dwelling (albeit one made newly subject to socialized, technologized, and state-organized housework).[36] For her, it would seem, the meaning and the shape of the home has been set, and can no longer be seen as mutable.

Indeed, even many of the activists involved in the ambitious *Wages for Housework* project—a campaign avowedly invested in finding ways to agitate from beyond the traditional spaces of waged work—at times fail to think beyond the notion of domestic space as privatized single-family units. In her 1975 essay "Wages Against Housework," for example, Silvia Federici explicitly seeks to "draw a line" between her position and "the proposed socialization and collectivization of housework," which she believes risks devolving too much power to the state.[37] Elements of the social and spatial structures associated with reproductive labor

35. Ibid., 125.
36. Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution: History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods and Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 184.
37. Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 21.

are here once again largely passed over as territories for radical transformation. The organization of the home itself—a space that is arguably both reflective of and influential upon elements of human experience such as economic relations and sexual norms—does not appear to be visible as a site of potential change.

This unwillingness or inability to re-imagine the spaces of social reproduction relates to Dolores Hayden's claims in her excellent history of feminist home design and community planning, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*. In this text, Hayden gives an overview of some of the various experiments in domestic design and organization undertaken from the mid-1800s through to the 1930s. Despite this genealogy of domestic innovation, however, Hayden notes that feminists have, in more recent years, come to accept the "spatial design of the isolated home, which [requires] an inordinate amount of human time and energy to sustain, as an inevitable part of domestic life."[38] This is evidence of what I propose to call "domestic realism" (so named after Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, rather than the literary genre)—that is, of the stubbornness or obstinacy of domestic imaginaries, even in the face of otherwise extensive visions of socio-technical overhaul. Domestic realism names the phenomenon by which the isolated and individualized small dwelling (and the concomitant privatization of household labor) becomes so accepted and commonplace that it is nearly impossible to imagine life being organized in any other way. That this occurs despite many people's lived experiences of the pressures and difficulties attendant upon reproductive labour as it is currently organized only serves to make it more remarkable.

The home, to use the language of Prometheanism, comes to be positioned as an un-remakeable given. As Hayden's work makes clear, however, there are many possible forms of domestic arrangement—both spatial and relational—aside from the atomized and depoliticized family space that Davis has in mind. The material feminists of Hayden's study

> saw that many decisions about the organization of future society were being incorporated into the built environment. Therefore, they identified spatial transformation of the domestic workplace under women's control as a key issue linking campaigns for social equality, economic justice, and environmental reform.[39]

38. Ibid., Hayden, 294.
39. Ibid., 10.

These feminists devised various approaches to rethinking domesticity, such as collective residential neighborhoods featuring cooperative housekeeping centers and kitchen-less houses, apartment hotels with communal dining rooms and spaces for shared childcare, and courtyard housing blocks with a common laundry, parlor, and library (as well as spaces for food preparation).[40] Indeed, these interventions—or something like them—obtained material expression in the socialist housing of "Red Vienna", designed and built as part of a radical program of municipal reforms instigated by the Social Democratic city council between 1919 and 1934. Here, "workers' dwellings were incorporated with kindergartens, libraries, medical and dental clinics, laundries, workshops, theatres, co-operative stores, public gardens, sports facilities, and a wide range of other public facilities."[41]

Whilst not explicitly framed as a feminist measure, the gender political potential of these attempts at "shaping a new form of socialized proletarian life" are both apparent and tantalizing.[42] Historians of urban planning have been quite clear about the limitations and failures of this particular Austrian initiative, and critics such as Eve Blau have taken pains to delegitimize the idea of an architectural quick-fix, stressing instead the inexorable connections between spatial and social relations. However, the manner in which these examples prize open the home as a site for reappraisal nevertheless has interesting implications for Promethean politics. Practical suggestions for eliminating "domestic drudgery through design" abounded at the beginning of the twentieth century, as socialists and feminists alike imagined new technologies that would facilitate a less oppressive, exhausting, and time-consuming household.[43]

That feminists of this period sought to intervene within the material hegemonies of gendered life before concentrating on agitating for greater male involvement in reproductive labor says something about the intractability of those social roles

40. Ibid., 71.
41. Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna 1919-1934* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1999), 2.
42. Ibid., 50.
43. In 1914, for example, the New York Feminist Alliance proposed the building of a Feminist Apartment House in which 'All corners would be rounded, all bathtubs would be built in, all windows would pivot, all beds would fold in to the walls, and all hardware would be dull finished' in order to reduce the labor of dusting, polishing, and so on. Ibid., Hayden, 200.

that differentially disadvantage non-men. In many re-imagined domestic spaces, the material environment was recognized as a tool to help encourage collective housekeeping. The sharing and specialization of domestic labor that this helped to bring about was designed to reduce the burden placed upon individual women and to enable them to cut costs whilst reclaiming a portion of their time, either for other forms of work or for the pursuit of personal, civic, and political interests. Admittedly, many of these projects were driven by bourgeois home economists (such as Gilman). Many people belonging to the urban working classes would of course have had far less positive experiences of co-living and shared facilities, given late nineteenth and early twentieth century tenement conditions. However, the implications of these projects often reached beyond the middle classes. Cooperative domestic arrangements in, for example, the Chicago settlements of the 1890s worked to facilitate the organization of trade unions and helped to discourage strike breaking.[44]

A number of the historical examples included with Hayden's text were purely speculative or overtly fictional, and most never made it past the planning stage, but a number were (at least partially) realized. Of those that did become a concrete reality, the socialization of domestic labor that they involved provided a justification for extensive investment in home technologies. Hayden notes, for example, that certain American communes in the 1860s enjoyed what were at that point cutting edge innovations such as "gas light, steam baths, and steam heat," leading one nineteenth century journalist to declare that "a communist's life is full of devices for ease and comfort."[45] Here, we find the seeds of a project, grounded in lived realities, that reaches beyond the aspersions cast upon the "folk political"—a transformative and technologically enabled enterprise that attends to important issues around gendered oppression and aims to make space within the conditions of the present for a more emancipatory feminist future. Indeed, only a truly Promethean project can be fit to dis-embed something as seemingly intractable as domestic realism. What can contemporary feminisms (and other so-called Prometheanisms) hope to inherit, absorb, and repurpose from this tradition of socialist and feminist practice?

44. Ibid., 167.
45. Ibid., 48.

Towards a Promethean Feminism

As the above discussion suggests, the familial and the domestic should not be seen merely as a drag upon or a barrier to a boys'-own Prometheanism, but must instead be viewed as an important field upon which an ambitious and emancipatory political endeavor might be enacted. That is to say, domestic arrangements can evidently foster and facilitate the kind of collective politics that Angela Davis sees as coming primarily from the conventional capitalist workplace. In de-prioritizing the home to some extent, Davis arguably risks naturalizing current domestic arrangements, inadvertently presenting alterable and contingent forms of organization as unassailable, immutable, and permanent—or at least as more permanent than other kinds of social structures. As such, they come to represent a form of material hegemony so deeply embedded that it can be neither looked past nor seen through.

This is particularly ironic, given the long-standing status of the household as a locus of political mobilization within Black communities in the United States. Within these communities, the enforced mutability of the family—both as a legacy of slavery and as a consequence of neoliberal economic precarity—has rendered the potential instability of naturalized models of domesticity painfully apparent. As such, Davis's analysis speaks to the distinctively raced histories of relations of social reproduction. The bourgeois family form must be recognised as a culturally dominant ideal from which people of color (as well as many queer, gender non-conforming, and working class people) have historically been structurally excluded. Considering the ways in which access to the family has been differentially distributed according to race, class, and sexuality allows us to appreciate its potentially variegated place within situated struggles. Nevertheless, we must strive to find intersectional and emancipatory mechanisms for collective social survival that do not require us to reify contemporary inegalitarian domestic relations. In other words, we must not work to overthrow one set of oppressions with the explicit aim of replacing it with another.

When it comes to thinking about Promethean projects and the home, twenty-first century feminists would do better to turn their attentions to Shulamith Firestone, in whose work we can detect a concerted effort to contest domestic realism

and to contend for the sites of reproduction (in both its social and biological forms). As with contemporary Prometheans and xenofeminists, Firestone is interested in the politics of generation, the technologically enabled manipulation of birth, and the refusal of sexual reproduction as an immovable given. "Pregnancy" Firestone argues, "is the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species"; in the late twentieth century, however, the development of increasingly sophisticated means of artificial reproduction have "created real pre-conditions for overthrowing these oppressive "natural" conditions, along with their cultural reinforcements."[46] It is perhaps to be expected, given this perspective, that she has plenty to say on the topic of the gendered division of labor in the home. When it comes to domestic technologies, Firestone's comments are brief, but in keeping with her avowed positions on industrial automation and assisted reproduction, she speculates that, in a future radical feminist society, "cybernation would take care of most domestic chores."[47]

The idea that automation in the home might eradicate many of the daily burdens of housekeeping is one that has long been promoted by consumer capitalism, and Firestone's techno-optimism here affirms her critics' suspicions that she neglects the socio-political. In Nina Power's words, "While the Soviets proposed the socialization of housework and childcare, Firestone leaves almost everything to the machine, which will fix housework, reproduction, and the working day."[48] It is certainly important that we follow these critics in questioning any kind of blind faith in domestic technologies, for there are numerous barriers to machines becoming the emancipatory force that Firestone envisions. As Davis notes, "the structural separation of the public economy of capitalism and the private economy of the home has been continually reinforced by the obstinate primitiveness of household labor. Despite the proliferation of gadgets for the home, domestic work has remained qualitatively unaffected by the technological advances brought on by

46. Ibid., 188, 183.
47. Ibid., 210.
48. Nina Power, "Toward a Cybernetic Communism: The Technology of the Anti-Family", in *The Further Adventures of The Dialectic of Sex: Critical Essays on Shulamith Firestone*, ed. Mandy Merck and Stella Sandford. (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2010), 155.

industrial capitalism."[49] A healthy disregard for the perceived necessity and moral value of drudgery is to be encouraged, but Prometheanism must aspire to avoid illusion just as much as melancholy.

However, Firestone's response to the gendered oppressions of reproductive labor includes a marked emphasis upon cooperation and cohabitation beyond the confines of the traditional family structure—an emphasis she shares with many of the ambitious projects outlined in *The Grand Domestic Revolution*. Indeed, the household as a collective is an important element of Firestone's politics, and a lot of her attitudes regarding the dismantling of the family would lend themselves to co-operative housekeeping. A household, as a social unit composed of a "large grouping of people living together for an unspecified time, with no specified set of interpersonal relations," would not retain the "division of labor by sex" typical of the unit of the family.[50] Contra Power's comment about her disinterest in non-cybernetic solutions to the challenges of the domestic, Firestone *does* reflect upon the collectivization of domestic chores, stating that "the larger family-sized group (twelve to fifteen people) would be more practical—the waste and repetition of the duplicate nuclear family unit would be avoided, e.g., as in shopping for three or four people."[51] Domestic technologies, like cybernation and assisted reproduction, do not exist in a vacuum; instead, they are viewed as requiring concomitant advances in social and interpersonal relations if the feminist socialist revolution that Firestone envisions is to be realized.

Whilst we may not agree with all of the substantive content of Firestone's idiosyncratic envisioning of a feminist future (the racial politics of *The Dialectic of Sex* are particularly problematic, for example, as is the implication that there is an absolute end point of perfect synthesis for gendered humanity), there is much to take up from her expansive, ambitious, and technologically-minded feminism. The changes associated with the

49. Ibid., Davis, 229. Lupton, and others, would likely flag up some of the tasks that certainly *have* changed in response to domestic technology, whilst also pointing out that, quantitively speaking, the time spent in housework has not shifted as much as one might hope. Partly this has been a result of rising standards and other social changes, though certainly research and development addressing the possible automation of traditional household chores has not progressed at the same pace as that directed towards other forms of work.
50. Ibid., Firestone, 207.
51. Ibid., 210.

re-imagining of social reproduction, for example, are not seen as an endpoint in and of themselves, but are presented as one crucial field of operations in a series of other radical alterations in lived experience. In this truly Promethean feminism, love, work, leisure, the family, science, art, and sexual reproduction are all equally mutable, contestable, and available for species-wide re-engineering. The home can be reconceived of as a site of Promethean potentiality rather than as an example of stubbornly embedded material hegemony; that is to say, it is a space that can be mutated to facilitate a Promethean politics rather than a site of risk aversion inherently obstructive to the development of the solidarities that such a politics demands. If Prometheanism teaches us not to accept the given—to refuse to accede to the world as we find it—then xenofeminism and its fellow travelers would do well to reject inherited infrastructures of domesticity and to work to engineer more emancipatory alternatives. The task for contemporary feminisms after Firestone is to reclaim the spatial and relational dimensions of social reproduction from the enervating clutches of domestic realism—as well as to recalibrate the nuances of the designation "Promethean" to make it more hospitable to these kinds of initiatives. Feminism should be Promethean, and Prometheanism *must* be feminist.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Mark Fisher, who responded to an earlier draft with characteristic enthusiasm, generosity, and Promethean urgency. It is also dedicated to looking after ourselves and each other. #FisherFunction

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Helen Hester is Associate Professor of Media and Communication at the University of West London. Her research interests include technofeminism, sexuality studies, and theories of social reproduction. She is a member of the international feminist collective Laboria Cuboniks.

Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #19*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.

Pirate Boys: The Cut-Ups

Eric, Henri Steeg, Maja, Ray Kovalevsky & Pol Merchan

Collective writing, 2017

Flights of Angels

I am linked by T to electricity,
to genetic research projects,
to mega urbanization,
to the destruction of forests of the biosphere.

To me, these guys are the essence of masculinity.
They had four arms, four legs, two faces and two sets of genitals.
This time when I run after a man who doesn't want me,
I'm really going to run after him.

Flights of angels,
I said to myself,
and so staggered...
to my bed,
and oblivion.

A Haunting Voice

You begin as a soft-soft body
what began as light strokes
gives way to an ultimate destination:
the halves made whole,
the sexes united,
the wall thrown down,
the panic of self-loss
through merger with the Other
successfully managed.

The transcendent self redeemed,
the answer found,
the One triumphant.

A haunting voice in a half-forgotten tongue
like purple herpes pustules.

The stains will never go away.

Perhaps it's time to begin laying the groundwork
for the next transformation.

Becoming Pussy

An outsider
looking in the film emulsion fluids,
forge.

That plasmatic feeling,
a crystalline,
oil-soluble steroid carbon chain of molecules,
they were in Paradise.

The body,
explodes in an enormous sheet of flame,
BECOMING Pussy,
an act of political warfare.

Boy's Language

The boy growls like a dog
power, desire, release,
submission, capital, rubbish,
and rebellion circulate.

She pursues him not for sexual reasons
his femininity may have provoked the assault.

There are languages here,
he says,
but I understand none of them.
Echoes of the Haitian revolution,
voodoo, pirates, biker gangs,
and adolescent love
the pain stays
the roots bodies
have in their chest.

Dead Sky

His chest and legs began to fade,
his body went out like a dead sky.

One by one the atlas of wounds
had been transformed
into a series of constellations points.

Which pain covered?

A Ghost is Home

A ghost is home alone at night
I see my life backwards
awoken by the phone She stares through
the rear-view mirror.

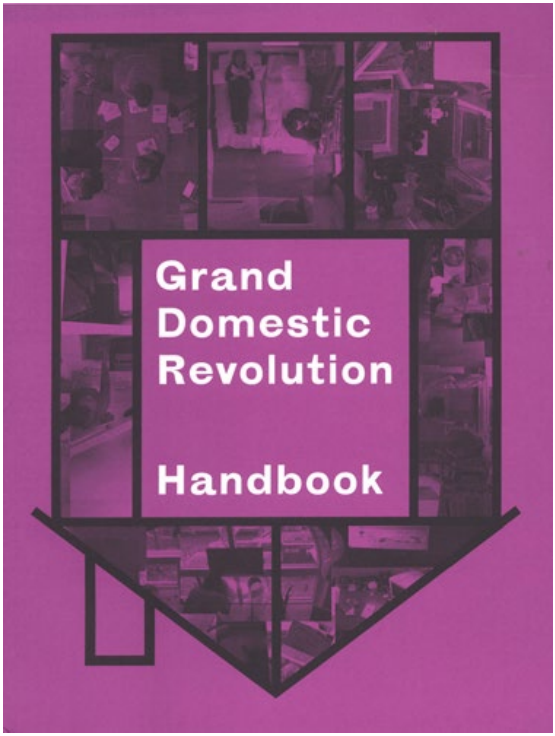
Sofia Lomba, *Bondage Bodies #30*, 2021, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.

Reproducing Revolution

Binna Choi

Originally published as the introduction to *Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*, edited by Binna Choi and Maiko Tanaka (Amsterdam: Valiz with CASCO, 2014).

The "Grand Domestic Revolution"—this provocative expression originates from the late nineteenth century United States when Anarchist movements were deeply engaged in critiquing the subservient positioning of women and traditional family models. The phrase was coined by anarchist philosopher Stephen Pearl Andrews and popularized by his colleague Victoria Woodhull. About one hundred years later in 1981, architectural historian Dolores Hayden picked it up as a descriptor for another movement that both shared an affinity with Andrews's ideas on anarchism and which also emerged at the same time he developed the notion. What Hayden referred to in its use was the work of a group of women she called "material feminists", committed as they were to the material condition of women and their transformation through small urban and suburban



Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook (cover).
Design by Åbäke and Margherita Huntley.

experiments. Their actions, next to those of the suffragettes, advocated remuneration for women's reproductive work and a tangible change in homes and neighborhoods to socialize or better communalize childcare and quotidian tasks, such as doing the laundry and cooking and other undervalued activities which were otherwise performed in isolation. Thirty years after this history was introduced to the world, this very book in your hands and the project it derives from, calls into the present this movement again, declaring the continuation of the grand domestic revolution—in the twenty-first century!

The need for another revolution in this vein might not immediately seem the appropriate response to the specific conditions of the present day, sublated as it is by the neoliberalization of all spheres of life. But the same momentum that has placed restrictions on ways of living, has also stimulated our imagining and practicing of other possible economic and social systems and

other cultures, if imbued with a sense of desperation—a case in point being the "global uprisings" the world over. At Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory, we shared this desperation to transform our environment, leading us to suggest a revolution at the "point zero" of our society, from our own home.[1]

But why home? Why call for a grand domestic revolution now?

Writer Marina Vishmidt, our interlocutor at the inception and during the development of the project, described home as "the site where politics is born and buried". This expression conveys the idea that home is a concrete, micro site in which everyday matters and the public are embedded. It redirects our critical gaze so that we focus on our everyday practices, not an autonomous haven but where the system is naturalized. Another assumption to start with was that a focus inward would enable us to look beyond the broader macro system and to desist from lamenting our impotence in facing its unyielding power. And finally, it was to help us recognize that no change can be effected in others without changing ourselves.[2] This approach was informed by another branch of leftist feminist politics in the late 1960s and 1970s with its well-known tenet: "the personal is political". The statement claims that subjects considered personal or private, such as child rearing, maintenance, work at home, and relationship dilemmas, are viable political issues. Through raising their voices about these issues in public discourse, this feminist movement incurred changes in women's positions and entered "women's matters" into the common, public agenda. Their achievement can be seen today with many women now holding jobs outside of the home. Further, the home itself is no longer an exclusively female domain, and the public sphere no longer a place belonging only to men.

1. It was notable that when I started conceiving this project, many artists also paid attention to the sites of "point zero" appearing in life, as in the *53rd Venice Biennale* in June 2009 at several national pavilions. Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset at the Danish and Nordic Pavilion were staging a group show turning one pavilion into a collector's fancy living room and another into a villa of the bankrupt proprietors that was made available for sale. Haegue Yang at the Korean Pavilion presented an abstracted version of her own kitchen, while Liam Gillick at the German Pavilion put a number of kitchen units on view creating a discursive stage.
2. This problematization was also our response to the commission by the 4th edition of *Utrecht Manifest: Biennial for Social Design* in 2009 to conceive a project under their theme, the very notion of social design. Our question was whether social design, its seemingly altruistic gesture, neglected the very condition in which design operates, the system of capitalism and the capitalist way of living that those design practices usually facilitate.

Aside from the fact that full equality between men and women is still to be gained, this same feminist perspective also recast our view on other paradoxical problematics at home. As more women work outside of the home, households, especially in richer parts of the world, are taken care of by women from poorer parts of the world or from other social classes. And their housework is not valued on the same terms as work in wider society. We need to make clear that the feminist agenda is not for women alone. Directly concerning all genders is the way in which the home is literally overtaken by market forces. An explicit cause of the 2008 financial crisis can be traced back to policies for home-ownership promotion in the US with the aid of mortgage loans and the indentured life to which common debtholders became subjugated. We also saw in the Netherlands how the acceleration of neoliberalism marked by the promotion of home ownership and concurrent decrease in the social housing sector, notably, the criminalization of squatting. This individualized and commodified home then serves as an extension of the office for dealing with over-work, constant "work" pressure, leaving to the side the labor involved in maintenance and care, or, as was said earlier, assigning it to the "Other". What is to be observed as a phenomenon here is the anti-valorization and privatization of home as a reproductive field, the place where one rests, rejuvenates, maintains, sustains, cleans, cooks, cares, or whatever one does that is not in the interest of producing something new. In her essay contained in this book "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons", activist and writer Silvia Federici—an emblematic figure in the 1970s feminist movement as one of the co-founders of the International Feminist Collective—points to the state of reproductive field as "the main casualty of the neoliberal era of capitalism". As such, she calls for another "grand domestic revolution" resounding with our own desire to do the same as we began the project. We have to find our way back to a place and time that pushes against the capitalist "productivist" force and its perpetuating cycle of over-production, exploitation, and consumption, by collectively engaging with that struggle as well as collectivizing the everyday work of reproduction. The feminist revolution is interminable, and history must be connected and reconnected to help us articulate our contemporaneity and the means to change it!

As an initial and basic method, we began with what we called "living research". After an intensive search with a limited

budget and having no anticipation of what it actually would mean for an institution to become a "home", we were able to rent an apartment in the vicinity of Casco. The apartment was expected to function as both a symbolic ground and, more importantly, a concrete, physical place where various practitioners, artists, designers, theorists, and other workers and researchers, are invited to come and live through and transform the place.[3] The apartment was 60 square meters in size, with a living room, an adjacent open kitchen, and one bedroom with a balcony. Architects ifau & Jesko Fezer overfilled the space with a number of pieces of IKEA furniture painted in different colors determined by use to be gathered in various ways reflecting the varied inclinations and usership of the residents. The apartment was indeed inhabited by various people, and in different numbers, from a single occupant to a couple to a family to a group. Each person brought their own questions and angles into the home, treating it as a site for other possibilities that surpassed the distinction between private and public. Home here became a place for sharing and communization via reproductive and productive labor, and for connectivity with direct and indirect neighbors. This living process involved a lot of cooking, informal gatherings and conversations, seminars and library building, generating ways to engage with the issues, relate to people, and to produce or make something different from what was possible at our "office". It was intimate, inter-subjective, spontaneous, and unstructured.

In the end it was this high degree of "structurelessness"—entangled with a mix of hospitality and its transversal capacity—that demanded a great deal of time for engagement, urging us to find a more workable arrangement. After about a year of this unusual parallel time of "living/research/together" next to our regular program, we devoted a short, intensive period to the series *Check In*, taking place over a week at different sites and locations to which we were connected. During these moments we revisited what we had been doing and how

3. There was what looked like a "practical" desire-in contrast to the conceptual-that directed the concept of the project along with the rent of an apartment. At Casco we very much wished to have a place to host artists abroad with whom we worked. They come to visit the city a few times and tend to stay for a while. Instead of the commodified hosting facilities such as costly hotels, we as a team offer them a more caring environment. In hindsight, this "practical" desire does not look to be separate from the conceptual drive of this project and hence it is articulated here.

we had been inhabiting the apartment through the organized program. This also included the publishing of a midterm manual titled *The Grand Domestic Revolution GOES ON* (2010) in which we listed activities that we organized, collected fragments of our readings, conducted an interview with Hayden, and shared articles including one by Vishimidt that illuminated key issues of our research during the learning process.[4]

Meanwhile, the initially sterile-looking apartment was beginning to feel quite homey, with the pile up of various traces and miscellaneous tools for living acquired over time. The spatial compositions changed at several intervals, each bringing a new look and offering alternate social modalities. From 2010 to 2011 some "artistic devices",[5] were also introduced: *Rotasystem*, a neighborhood back-balcony rotating garden-system constructed of bicycle parts by curator and educator Sepake Angiama with architect Sam Causer; *Meal Machine*, an "auto-caring" garden by artist Doris Denekamp and architect Arend Groosman; *Speaking Trumpets*, acoustic extensions of home amplifying sounds between neighbors by artists Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere; *Two-Part Door*, a space divider allowing flexibility between privacy and openness by artist Mirjam Thomann; several small and big looms for weaving textiles for home production by artist and action-weaver Travis Meinolf; maps by artist Paul Elliman with graphic designer Na Kim, artist and botanist Hans van Lunteren, and ecologist and gardener Rob van de Steen, that identify plants that could be seen in the neighbors' properties and on the street and hence transgress territorial borders via perception; and a set of pots for brewing healthful drinks from plants collected in the streets of Utrecht by artist and curator Wietske Maas.

All of these seemingly practical devices, however, turned out to be impractical, if not dysfunctional. The balcony rotation system was too wobbly, and no neighbors were willing to connect to this device. The auto-caring system for the garden

4. Binna Choi and Maiko Tanaka, eds., *The Grand Domestic Revolution GOES ON* (Utrecht and London: Casco and Bedford Press, 2010).
5. Brian Holmes uses the term "artistic device" to refer to a type of practice that needs "a new definition of art, as a mobile laboratory and experimental theater for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural change." They emerge from the process of inquiry and desire for change. And those devices are "best understood not in isolation, but in the context of an assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari's sense." Brian Holmes, "The Artistic Device, or the Articulation of Collective Speech," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 6, no. 4 (2006): p. 412.

was not quite self-sufficient and needed constant manual care. However, not merely in defense of their relevance but also in attempt to avoid succumbing to standard measures of success or failure, we might recall anarchist and political activist Emma Goldman's words, when she was brought up on accusations of being impractical due to her anarchistic premise:

> A practical scheme, says Oscar Wilde, is either one already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under the existing conditions; but it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to, and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The true criterion of the practical, therefore, is not whether the latter can keep intact the wrong or foolish; rather it is whether the scheme has vitality enough to leave the stagnant waters of the old, and build, as well as sustain, new life.[6]

Indeed, our very impractical devices articulate what does not yet exist in our homes, neighborhoods, and towns in view of forming lasting, mutually supporting, and caring webs of connectivity. As much as disappointment, in our case, they urged us to move further, stepping out of the precepts of the middleclass neighborhood of our apartment where privacy is the most valued commodity. The unnamed culture breeding from lived and shared time in the apartment, which might have been evolving against our initial expectations of the productivity of these devices, also intensified the urge to push on. Along with the *Check In* series described above, we were determined to continue with our living research, taking up different points of operation, moving from our own neighborhood to others, connecting by concern, active organizing, or seeking out appropriate forms of collectivity.

Another phase was in fact immanently unfolding through "action research" conducted by graphic designer Chris Lee, Casco intern and graphic designer Elsa-Louise Manceaux, and *Grand Domestic Revolution* (GDR) co-curator Maiko Tanaka, by visiting and meeting different communities of concern with regards to domestic labor, the value of reproduction, and, hence, alternative economies. Next to the growing research library, *Read-in*, a collective initiated by artist Annette Krauss and theatermaker Hilde Tuinstra, also continued rather courageous visits

6. Emma Goldman quoted in Jack Halberstam, "Charming for the Revolution: A Gaga Manifesto," *e-flux journal* 44, no. 4, (2013), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/44/60142/charming-for-the-revolution-a-gaga-manifesto.

to random neighbors in the city, by knocking on their doors and asking them to host the reading group. *Read-in* suggested ways in which knowledge could be formed that is collective, physical, and which transgresses the well-protected borders of the self and privatized space. We also started organizing a series that provided structural momentum, *Town Meetings*.[7] Each *Town Meeting* had a thematic focus, different from the previous, but repeated if necessary, articulated by a group of special guests from heterogeneous realms including art, philosophy, activism, gardening, law, labor, and trade unions, not just from the neighborhood or within Utrecht, but on a national and an international scale. We also made open calls to the public to take part in collective works dealing with particular topics and forms of work.

A few collective working groups were being formed through this more structured, streamlined phase of living research. The groups include Ask! (Actie Schonen Kunsten), *Our Autonomous Life?*, and the *Werker Magazine*—led Domestic Worker Photographer Network, each of which have a distinctive form of collective engagement as well as unique points of focus. ASK!, consisting of cultural workers from alternate backgrounds, directly grew out of the *Town Meetings* and the collaboration with Domestic Workers Netherlands and the organizers of the Dutch trade union, FNV Bondgenoten. The premise of the group is to build an alliance between cultural workers and domestic workers, instead of holding onto the "competing precarities" of each and rather connecting through them. Their activities comprise research and "reverse graffiti" actions as campaign mechanisms. *Our Autonomous Life?* was prompted by an edition of *Check In* when cultural anthropologist Nazima Kadir presented her PhD research on the social and power dynamics of the Amsterdam squatting community. Activating the research further, we arrived at the idea of making a cooperative sitcom. With the support of artist Maria Pask, a group of non-actors and sitcom specialists with different relationships to squatting movements and housing struggles gathered to develop the script, production, and acting together. Importantly, they took

7. For the conception of Town Meetings, we were inspired by Town Meetings organized by artist Martha Rosier in the context of her *If You Lived Here...* project from 1989 and Assembly by Agency, a Brussels-based artistic "agency" led by Koby Matthys where different stakeholders around a common concern are assembled for debate.

on dissemination and distribution responsibilities along with the organization of discursive occasions in connection with other squatting communities or various stakeholders around housing and squatting practices. *Werker Magazine*, an Amsterdam-based artist and designer duo Marc Roig Blesa and Rogier Delfos, has been developing a "domestic worker photographer network", expanding on the notion of domestic workers as much as that of the photographer.

A clear strategy shared by these groups is a tendency towards collectivizing across fields, interests, or generations in finding a common ground. Instead of following a social service model, wherein a service is provided by one group for another, our interest was to form horizontal and mutual relationships with heterogeneous communities. We still sought alignment with social movements, but in more tangential ways. It is as tangents that these works do not serve the objectives of those movements in a straightforward fashion. They rather seek possibilities for typically impossible communities to be formed, with the hope of stimulating each movement to open itself up to fully becoming what it is. Alignment is not the end goal, the deeper pursuit is of a practice that is in itself a form of society originally envisioned by these often passed over initiatives and ideas. Architecture theorist Stavros Stavrides, in elaborating on alternative forms of urban movement in his essay for this book, "Housing and the City: Reinventing the Urban Commons", stresses the politicization of everyday life that practices new forms of social relations and creates changes and ruptures in power relations—as the ground for social movements that otherwise only focus on "demands". He references what writer and political theorist Raúl Zibechi's terms "societies in movement" as complementary to social movements as we know them. Stavrides emphasizes that growing out of a society in movement, urban movements can not only appropriate city spaces, but "actually transform or even produce parts of the city." The micro-society that we have been practicing and creating is one in which differences are negotiated and the interdependence of learning and being is inspired by that difference, moving beyond instrumentalization or the mere common objective. In a text published elsewhere, Stavrides asserts: "We have to establish a ground of negotiation rather than a ground of affirmation of what is shared. We don't simply have to raise the moral issues about what it means to share, but to discover procedures through which we can find out what and how

to share."[8] This process cannot be entirely smooth or positive; it is also conflictive. The above "group works" experienced the fits and starts of this transition. Armed with a sense of resilience in desiring another society in the here and now, we contend that they became seeds for further movement. However, this process too ended in questions for us: How do we continue it? How do we prevent these groups being trapped in their own internal-external conflict management, and instead create new leverages and connections that in turn multiply and grow?

The decision to make an exhibition for the project was born out of the desire to develop a public strategy for these collective works. It was expected to offer the possibility to lay out the research fragments that were growing and accumulating as other elements in the apartment remained hidden and disparate, as well as to prompt the collectives to consolidate their works and find a form to "present" themselves to a public. As we had to one day move out of the apartment, the exhibition might also serve as a temporary shelter for what had been brewing there. It was pertinent to the direction of the project that our two neighboring spaces, the political bookstore Rooie Rat and the local history museum Volksbuurtmuseum, were also willing to host parts of the exhibition and enable us to introduce different "domestic" environments by hosting some of the fruits of our "labor" conducted inside and outside the apartment.

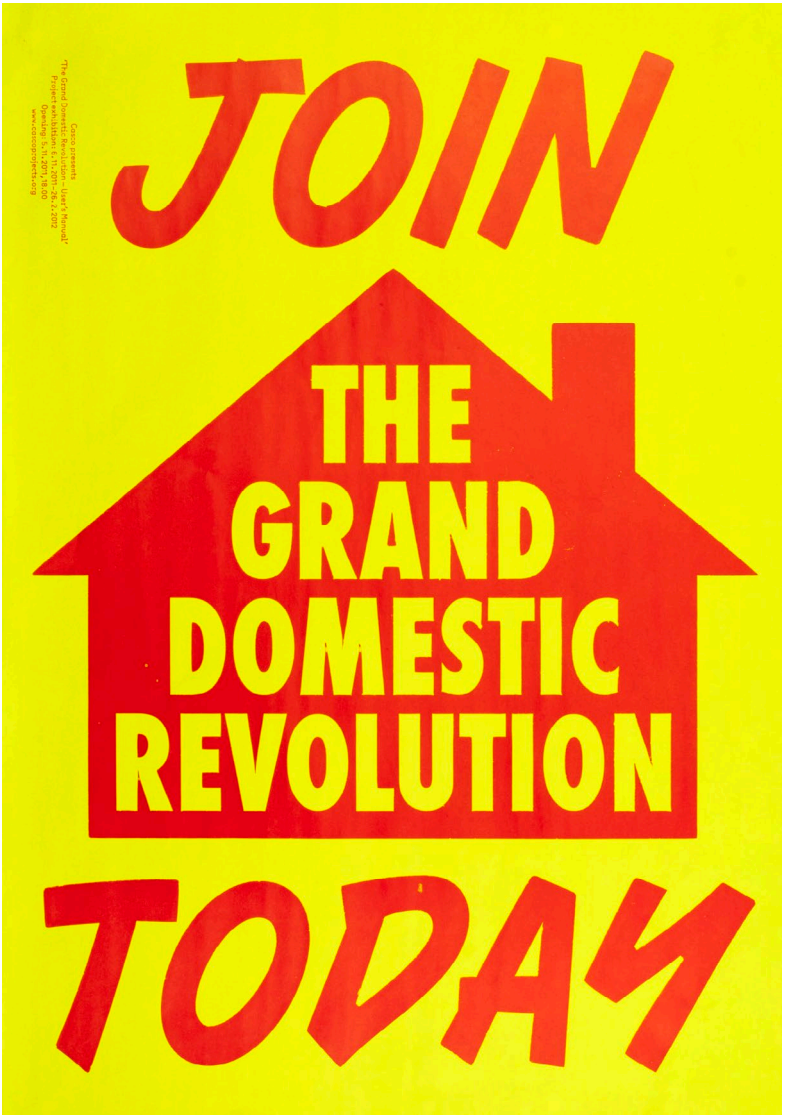
Thereafter, GDR as it had begun in a small apartment in Utrecht became better known, and recognized more widely—notably by female cultural workers or women-led organizations—traveling to and evolving in London, Derry~Londonderry, Ljubljana, Stockholm, Malmo, and so on. What is significant for this journey is that the project is continually adapted in connection to each of the local contexts, their practices and communities. The dissemination of the project takes a form of trans-local organizing where differences among contexts are shared and articulated, and patchworks of communities, not unitary ones, are forged.

Literally or metaphorically, transforming our own "homes" entirely or establishing new types must be long-term efforts, though we are confidently on our way. GDR thus far deserves the revolution in its title if looked at not as an isolated moment of radical change, but as a gradual, resilient, molecular, and

8. Stavros Stavrides, "Beyond Markets or States: Commoning as Collective Practice," *An Architektur—Produktion und Gebrauch gebauter Umwelt*, no. 23 (2010): p. 12.

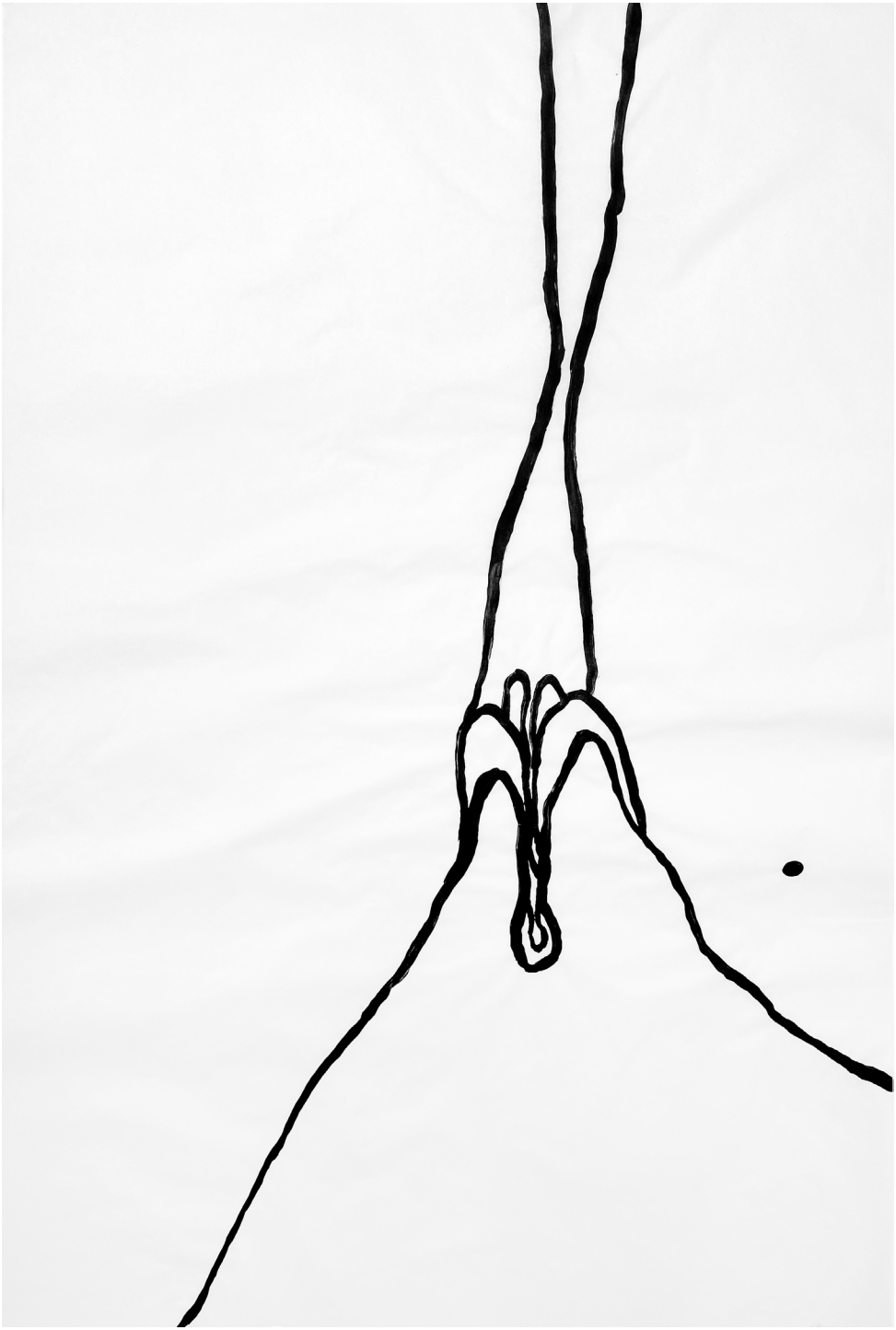
connective process. It is a process of transformation that is co-extensive with the way in which human beings or trees in the forest grow, that is with care, nourishment, and maintenance, efforts towards their future maturation and germination. These actions are just as true of the reproductive field to which we are devoted to appreciating and cultivating. And our commitment is already manifest in many facets around GDR, such as Casco itself where domestic practice has been a great part of operations since we entered deeply into GDR. At Casco, a balance between what is treated as productive work and what is treated as reproductive work is constantly examined and practiced. The habit we developed of asking who is doing invisible or domestic work, and looking for ways to communalize or eliminate that work, is also an effect of the revolutionary impulse. Another effect is the network of friendship that has formed throughout the project up to GDR GOES ON, one that insists on taking time for cooking and eating together, and caring about and for each other. Above all, we do not forget that our grand domestic revolution is not a lonely avant-garde one, but that there are many other grand domestic revolutions going on, whatever their names, undertaking similar concerns, directions, and practices. We are here to sustain, resonate with, support, and become connected to those grand domestic revolutions. Hence, this book is to be seen not just as a document of what has been materialized and the desires yet to be materialized throughout our project, but as a handbook that accommodates and fosters the reproduction and transformation of those very instances and actions. You, as the reader of these stories, images, and essays, might find aspects that resonate with what you have already been doing and might want to connect to us or our practices. Or you might be inspired to "reproduce"—in its best sense—what we have done by caring, fixing, mending, and growing these actions and ideas somewhere else, where you are. Please consider the contents of this handbook as tools for reproducing our common and continued revolutionary work.

Revolutionary work is always a strange kind of labor. It oscillates between being a labor of love and reacting to the external and internal pressures to work harder and better. When feelings of confusion rise up, possibly roused by this same tangle of demands, use this book to help think through the way you work and live: trust in the ultimate worth of reproductive work as decisive for all other work that you do. And let this be a way to actualize a world that is more like home.



Poster for "The Grand Domestic Revolution – User's Manual" project exhibition presented by Casco, November 6, 2021 – February 26, 2012.

Sofia Lomba, *Mountain Bodies #15*, 2020, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



A Room Where Life Can't Take Place

la Sala

prologue

28/08/2020, 10–11 pm: Tate decides to send out redundancy emails, in the middle of a pandemic, on a bank holiday weekend, to hundreds of staff. Earlier that day on their Instagram they'd written the caption: 'Have a lovely long weekend, whether you're spending it with loved ones, taking a short trip or having time to yourself'. While this happens, TATE directors are still paid upwards of £100,000, and the institution has received 7 million pounds of emergency support from the UK Government.

In the meantime, London's Southbank Centre, one of the biggest cultural centres in the UK, is planning to make almost 400 staff redundant (63-68% of the total workforce). It won't reopen its doors until April 2021 and when it does, only 10% of its full capacity will be used for the arts, using the other 90%

for rental. It's worth noting, too, that this 63-68% of the workforce equates to a payroll reduction of only 30-35%: of course, those facing redundancies are already the worst paid and most precarious workers, and disproportionately made up of young people, BIPOC and people with disabilities.[1]

In a sense these new waves of redundancies and complete lack of care should not come as a surprise; we've all experienced the total inequity of this work, the complete disconnect between the grand and radical claims of programming and the reality of labour conditions for art workers. This has only become more apparent in the current pandemic, as it becomes a reality for many that this work is actually unworkable and unlivable. Individually and together we have so many stories of being underpaid, undervalued, and overworked. These things are not exceptional, nor exceptionally bad, but they are symptomatic of a wider system, built on wealth, elitism, nepotism and exclusion. A system that gets into your bones and rears its head when it isn't welcome. We still find ourselves saying yes to things we don't have time for, that we won't be paid for; we still keep holding ourselves and each other up to the standards of an archaic system which actively exhausts us.

In the meantime, we see organisations and individuals speak up about care and anti-racism when we know them to be lying; shamed directors talking about the future of institutions, as if they should have a say; public statements as cover-ups for years of bad practice and bullying; the constant veneer of professionalism and being friends-with-the-right-people. We see all this (like you do, too) and we know it to be a corrupt and broken system. Yet still, we find these inherited ideals appearing in our work, in the back of our minds. It's time to discard this inheritance.

la Sala

la Sala[2] came to exist in 2020, though we were dreaming of her in the years before. 2020: when the seasons moved both swift and slow. Spring arrived and was languid, long warm days with hands in the soil, relearning slowness whilst in cognitive dissonance. Then the quick weeks of summer into autumn, a

1. You can read more about both these cases at http://linktr.ee/Tateunited and http://saveoursouthbank.com.
2. See http://lasala.uk.

la Sala, Nottingham, 2020.

year of too much and too little. Of violence, conflict, neglect and refusal. A year of pandemic time. We took some comfort in the idea of a beginning: starting something built on care, slowness, principles of degrowth and permaculture. Something to nourish and sustain us.

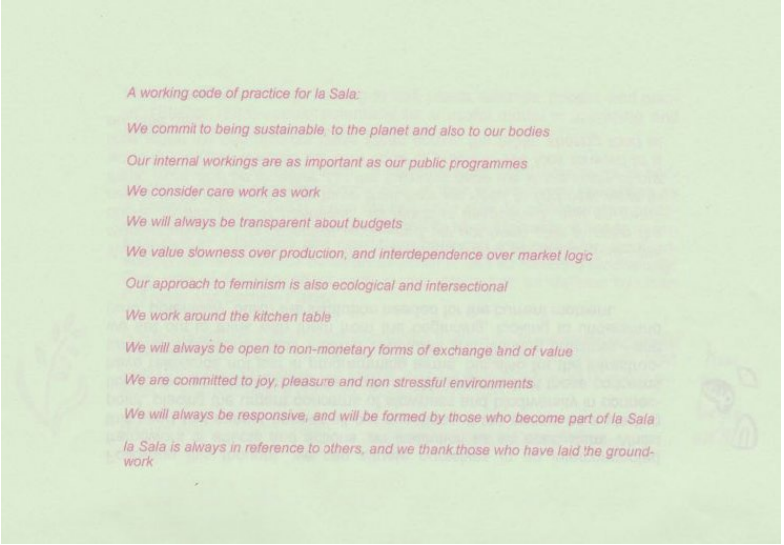
Sala in Spanish literally means 'room where life takes place', and this is precisely what we wanted to generate: a room where life is cultivated and fostered, where we can spend time together talking, cooking, and plotting, inviting others to join us. Thinking-with the feminist idea of the urgency to 'put life at the centre', we wanted to institute something that not only reflects and theorises about this principal, but also embodies it. After a decade of curating projects and working in various institutions, we came together to start a space that wouldn't only focus on the representational aspects of art and discourse but also on how to put into practice the values and theories that we were advocating for. To begin to build an organisation, an organism, that would truly centre the act of living, and living well.

How do we build a slow, careful institution? Can an institution foster biodiversity? Is it feasible to establish a more sustainable practice and perpetuate it in the long term? How can we operate in a way that is generative rather than extractive, both to the planet and ourselves? These are some of the initial questions we were concerned with when starting la Sala. We believe, as Silvia Federici says, that significant transformation only happens in collective spaces where support infrastructures are generated. We too felt an urgency to have a place to gather, a base from which to build community when so much is being cut and dismantled. la Sala was built on these premises, and that's why we chose the kitchen table as the central point in the space, a place for gathering, sharing food and drink, conversation and time.

As well as a small unit in Sneinton Market, we also have an allotment, a rented plot of land on which we cultivate and grow. This relationship is crucial for us as it reminds us of the interdependence that forms the ecosystem where we live (and work). Thinking of how to define or better understand this holistic approach to practice, we started looking at permaculture as a methodology; looking at different ways to create a system that connects and includes both sides of la Sala. We look at the three main ethical principles of permaculture as a basis for our thinking and doing, more urgent than ever in a time of climate emergency. These are: earth care, people care and fair

Beans growing on la Sala's allotment, 2020.

share. These concerns feed into every aspect of our work, from transparent budgeting and fair pay systems, to taking care of the soil, to building an organisation that is safe, accessible and supportive, and they contributed to drafting our initial code of practice, pictured below, but still in becoming.



Code of Practice, from *Institutions as Ecosystems*, la Sala, 2020.

discarding our inheritance

Still, we find ourselves replicating some of the same patterns that we were trying to move away from: tools for self-exploitation, left over from institutional work. As we explained in the prologue to this text, somehow along the way we have inherited ways of working which exhaust us and that are not sustainable. In our wish to be slow, to think and take time, to begin well, still the urge to be productive persists: we open a space, and launch a programme, in the midst of a pandemic, with no income to speak of. Only too late do we catch ourselves doing it, putting pressure on each other, still holding on to some residual professionalism that we can't seem to shake. It makes sense, when you look at it: in thinking about and aiming to practice care, in centring certain aspects of the domestic, we're actively taking on the unpaid labour of social reproduction, without even the structure of an institution to somehow hold our

work. Whilst la Sala aims to be porous, slow, and quite 'unprofessional'—we still need to find ways for her to hold us.

To put care at the centre, we also have to completely revise our understanding of what it means to do this work. This revision needs to happen not only in our own minds and bodies, but also in the institutional and infrastructural bodies that surround us: funding structures, cultures of presenteeism and performativity, ableist culture, working for free or for just enough to get by. What we might call a *labour of love* should be reframed under the demands of a reciprocal, nurturing, collective love. A labour of love should be one which holds, sustains and connects us, not one which abuses, exhausts and isolates us.

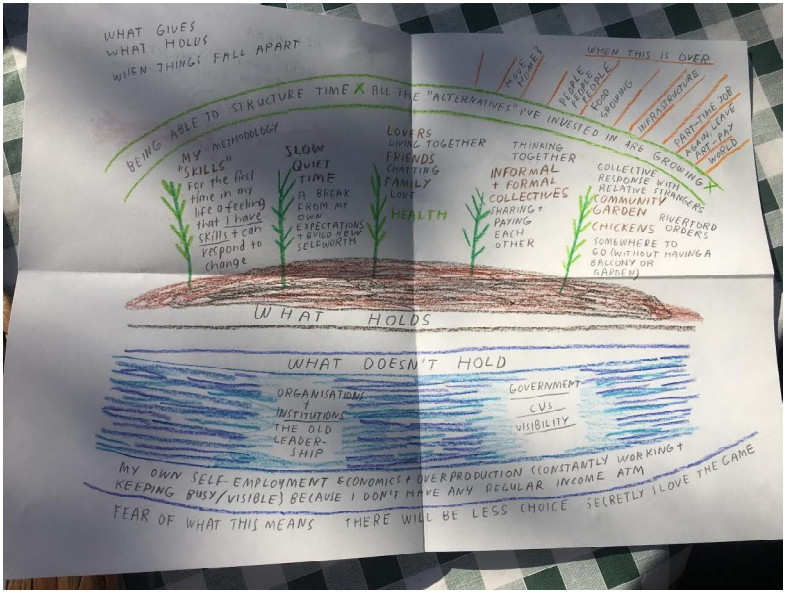
Whilst the pandemic is still unfolding, it's hard to see the totality of how it will affect our lives, work and the ways we care for each other. As Johanna Hedva wrote this Spring, "what we're watching happen with COVID-19 is what happens when care insists on itself, when the care of others becomes mandatory, when it takes up space and money and labour and energy".[3] Care insisting on itself—this is not something that our society is built for, and less so the art world. Hedva writes, "because care demands that we live as though we are all interconnected—which we are—it invalidates the myth of the individual's autonomy. In care, we know our limits because they are the places where we meet each other".[4] la Sala was set up to be a space of gathering (or, *a place where we meet each other*) with life at the centre. Now we find ourselves needing to rethink the ways in which we can be together, with a space where life cannot happen, at least as it was before. How can we continue to work in ways which centre the interconnectedness of beings whilst these connections are harder to nurture—whilst our space lays mostly empty? Whilst meeting online offers some connection—and crucially, offers access to those who never had it before—we still feel the need for physicality, for being in the room together.

what gives and what holds when things fall apart

During lockdown, in the process of looking for tools to help us navigate the current moment, we received this drawing from artist and friend Rosalie Schweiker—it has accompanied our thoughts in the past months. Rosalie's simple questions (what

3. J. Hedva, Get Well Soon, https://getwellsoon.labr.io.
4. Ibid.

gives? what holds? when things fall apart) have offered some clarity in how to think about, and operate in, this pandemic time. This gesture of kindness arrived when we needed it most—an ecosystem in a drawing. We like to think of care in the way Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher define it: "A species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web".[5] In doing this work of maintaining, continuing and repairing our world, we are always searching for those things that are worth caring for. It seems to us that Rosalie's drawing is asking these same questions, while making visible the importance of thinking with others, and in turn, we hope it might become a tool for others too. How can we maintain our world, so as to live in it as well as possible, and more importantly: when things fall apart, what remains?



Drawing by Rosalie Schweiker, 2020.

5. J. C. Tronto and B. Fisher, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring", in *Circles of Care*, edited by E. Abel and M. Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990): 36-54.

Sofia Lomba, *Mountain Bodies #12*, 2020, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.

For My Brother

Edna Bonhomme

Society has failed you
mostly because it is afraid of you
Of your tightly curled hair
with cornrows that are
neatly braided from the hands of the
people who care for you
Society fears you
because you stand six feet tall
like your grandfather
and his father
your strength is part of our
intergenerational survival

Society has ignored you
because it cannot appraise
your humanity
your intelligence
your insight
This is a failure on society's part
They don't know
the brother
the son
the friend
that loves climbing banyan fig trees
at Morningside Park on temperate days.
They don't know
the brother
the son
the friend
that adores eating friend griot with pikliz and bunun
while switching between Haitian and English or
what we call Henglish
They don't know
the brother
the son
the friend
who loves swimming in the Atlantic Ocean
hoping to reach the edge of the horizon
What society thinks it knows is a false vision
of
all
the
men
that look like
you
All the Black men who just want to
cry
laugh
walk
read
pray
breath
and
live.

Sofia Lomba, *Spongy Bodies #44*, 2017, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.

The Continuum of the Domestic (and the Conundrum of Inhaling Underwater)

Elena Agudio

0. Warning

I have always been good at diving. I remember the feeling of swimming underwater, holding my breath back and forth, and then again for another half of a 25 m pool, in apnea. I developed this talent as a synchronized swimmer, mostly, through many exercises and hours of training in my teenage years.

Life, I believe, has made me less strong. I bet: if I could try now, if I could ever visit a swimming pool in a total lockdown, I would not manage that performance. And it's not aging or cigarettes, it is not yet being a wreck. I fear, I am just not able to take deep breaths anymore.

Every time I tried, since after the passing of my father, after my children experienced the separation between their parents,

since the sky has gotten heavier on our heads and the horizon turned uncertain in front of our eyes in the time of a pandemic, my inhaling skills have been affected. My gasp is interrupted, it punches back to my mouth when it reaches the middle of my chest, and bounces away. It doesn't go deep.

This is what is happening too, I guess, with the process of writing this little text.

I think my dear friend Lorenzo Sandoval has been calling me dozens of times to remind me to send this short contribution to another brilliant TIER Reader he is composing with his colleagues. I swear: even if I have always started, it was my lung capacity that did not support me.

I have been reflecting on how to articulate a short text about the domestic, about personal and curatorial perspectives on domesticity and the subversion of a certain order of home. Every time, the in-spiration that I was receiving about to start some lines was broken before being processed in my respiratory system.

I am pretty sure that one of the main reasons may be because I have been underwater, even before starting the apnea. I am doubting, this difficulty I am facing to unfold some written and articulated reflections about domesticity may have something to do with a problem of submersion.

I am writing and it is the last day of January in 2021 (oops, now it is the 12th of February already!), eleven months since this pandemic exploded, forcing us home. I am writing, and I cannot anymore distinguish the days of the week and the hours of the day, as my time has become an uninterrupted continuum. An uninterrupted continuum. Twenty-four hours a day of child care, thousands of minutes of homeschooling, household maintenance and reproductive work indistinctly woven together with the usual incessant process and cycle of productivity, responsibility, bureaucracy, and sudden occasions for a reality check.

The domestic has become a breathless continuum.

I am short of breath. And I could train as much as I like right now. But I am underwater, dear Benjamin and Lorenzo.

I am underwater, home, and even if I can see and hear quite well, the contours of my perception are blurred. My eyes are red. My ears are flooding.

As most of us, I am swimming; and as much as I am quite a talented swimmer, I have no gills, and I do not carry oxygen tanks.

Nevertheless, being trained to dance underwater and to attune gracefully with the currents and undercurrents of a body of water gives me a sort of an anchor.

Therefore—despite the lack of proper gravitational force—let me hold this laptop on my lap, at midnight, here, in my bed. And dive in a reflection on the domestic while floating into it and not yet seeing the surface.

1. Across Kitchen Tables

> "We chose our name because the kitchen is the center of the home,
> the place where women in particular work
> and communicate with each other."
> Barbara Smith, *A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*[1]

> "But there are no safe spaces. 'Home' can be
> unsafe and dangerous because it bears the likelihood of intimacy
> and thus thinner boundaries. To bridge is to attempt community,
> and for that we must risk being open to personal, political,
> and spiritual intimacy, to risk of being wounded.
> Effective bridging comes from knowing when to close ranks
> to those outside our home, group, community, nation
> —and when to keep the gates open."
> Gloria Anzaldua, *This Bridge We Call Home* (Preface)[2]

In the middle of the first lockdown last spring, I was working intensely on a project for the Goethe-Institut together with the artist and scholar Karina Griffith. I got to know Karina on a gloomy and freezing evening some months before, up in the north, around a kitchen table in a special house in Helsinki. It was a very colourful and crisp autumn, and together with my

1. Barbara Smith, "A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press," in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 3 (1989): 11-13.
2. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds., *This bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002): Preface.

colleagues and friends Giovanna Esposito Yussif, Nathalie Bikoro and Federica Bueti, as a natural path for the unfolding of our long-term project and series *Speaking Feminisms*,[3] we organized a retreat of a week at Villa Salin. The intention was one of bridging the experience and the struggles of women and queer people with a migration background across different countries, and of continuing questioning and interrogating the possibility of undoing the epistemic violence of a certain western, white and even classist feminist tradition which for too long didn't manage to embrace the experience of PoC and marginalized communities. I should make the story short here, as to describe the agencies, the circumstances, the troubles and the affects of that experience would take me half of this book, but that moment in which I happened to meet Karina was definitely a meaningful and marking one. Leaving my two children and the difficult and toxic relationship with their father behind, forgetting the complicatedness of my professional and personal life, upon an invitation of Giovanna Esposito Yussif and Isabelle Holz, I arrive at Villa Salin, a beautiful house formerly owned by the gardener Ida Salin, who passed it on to the Feminist Association Unioni: a feminist and antiracist non-governmental organisation established in 1892, with over 2,000 members nowadays, which aims is to promote political, economic and social equality of the genders and to raise feminist consciousness in the Finnish society—the first one in Europe to grant the right of voting to women.

I arrive after other womxn participants of the retreat are already there since two days, and I immediately end up in the kitchen, where it seems the most animated conversations and most precious collaborations are already taking place. I could describe every single person and exchange we had for pages, but here I am just trying to retrace the importance of the kitchen table for the encounter with Karina, who there, for hours, shared with us moments of deep listening and intense reasoning.

Months passed and when receiving an invitation by the Goethe to put together a curatorial programme on restitution and repair in Berlin, I couldn't help but need to reopen some of those meaningful and also painful debates with some of

3. A SAVVY Contemporary series that started under that name in 2017 and continued as *We Who Are Not The Same. Exercises Towards the Unmaking Of Patriarchy, Control, Dominion and Other Male Cogito's Misplaced Potencies* to then materialize in the exhibition project and discursive programme *Ecologies of Darkness. Building Grounds on Shifting Sands* in 2019.

those troublesome, riotous and radical womxn, and I invited Karina to develop the project with me. Stronger, together, we drafted a programme which intended to deliberate on the role of public institutions and the infrastructural disproportions and asymmetries they navigate and produce, focusing on the very possibility of unsettling power relations and structures. The bursting of the pandemic forced us to cancel our planned and well reflected proposal, and to translate the project into a corona-safe format.

Because we did develop already the idea of working with radio and sonority, we came about the possibility of curating an alternative format on air, and to realize *Latitude on Air*, a radio festival organized with Radio Netzwerk Berlin and the magic Diana McCarty.

Here is where I wanted to arrive. Because among the strong and powerful shows that Diana and I put together, a highlight of the programme was a morning show that wondrously managed to condense most of the conversations that Karina and all of the womxn in that retreat laid open.

Conversations that in the new bareness and precarity of a pandemic, got bruised, intersected and interfered with the constant (24/7) foreground sound of the children and of the thick noise of anxious feelings and grieving.

Suddenly the domestic space that for a while to me and to my interlocutors represented a space of safety and intimacy, a space of plotting and of bridging of experiences, transformed. It might be, it must be, that my subjective experience and psychoanalytical perspective on home is a very troubled one. I never ever felt home anywhere until I was adult, and the couple of times I tried to build a home and the entire structure fell, I had to fall with it. The domestic therefore embodies, in my most unconscious understanding of it, a space of ambiguity, of claustrophobia but of repair, of empowerment and possibility but of danger.

That moment of intense questioning and sudden re-emerging of unsettling feelings about the sense and the order of home, that very moment of deep immersion into it, crystallized in an urgency to think through the possibility of re-weaponizing

Source: https://www.facebook.com/elena.agudio/posts/3883856148322833

the domestic space and continue building on feminist infrastructures of care.

For Karina this urgency materialized in a call to reconnect with the experience of the *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*, the activist feminist and queer press founded by members of the Combahee River Collective upon the suggestion of Audre Lorde in the late 1970s. A moment of exceptional force and strong self-determination that kept inspiring womxn of colour for decades and that still represents one of the most seminal references and examples of emancipation and creation of new archives.

This was how our *Kitchen Table Talks* took shape, this daily format that was broadcast on reboot.fm during the *Latitude on Air* festival, bringing the domestic on air, allowing space for

Source: https://www.facebook.com/elena.agudio/posts/3864025816972533

early morning conversations in front of bitter cups of coffee, in the face of the daily horrors and attacks on human decency that were being witnessed on the planet on those very days.

Because I realize more and more how much it is important to put the right words in the right mouths and hands, I prefer here to not indulge in a historical and art-historical retelling of that experience of the Combahee River Collective and of the work of people such as Barbara Smith, Cherrie Moraga, Beverly Smith, Lorde herself and others. I suggest you to please search for these radio shows online, on Mixcloud, and listen yourself to the voices that in the boldest ways did explain how meaningful that moment was and is for their communities.

But, as curator of the series, I am here just wishing to retrace that moment, and to retell you and finally write down words

about the framework in which these deep conversations around a kitchen table happened, condensing space and air for the encounter of many womxn's radical aspirations and insurgent desires, allowing us to deliberate, in a polyphonic way, on tactics to unsettle the racist/homophobic/machist/transphobic structures we inhabit, and the possibility of repair and resilience.

Thinking about the first session of *Kitchen Table Talks* I still tremble. With *Congotay, Congotay*, Nathalie Mba Bikoro and Kathy-Ann Tan—invited to question the politics of tribute economies and the 'consequences of good intentions'[4]—accompanied us into an intimate and very dense space of poetry, navigating the shifting grounds of certain discriminatory feminist politics and reflecting about being in the constant position of a guest, and about queer of colour strategies of self-inscription and empowerment. The session opened with the sound piece *Positions* by Fallon Mayanja, pondering the intersections between race, gender and sexuality (and featuring voices of Angela Davis, Maya Angelou, 2Pac, Lauryn Hill, Martin Luther King, Alicia Garza, Malcom X, Janelle Monae, Alice Walker, Arianna Brown and Cherrie Moraga among others) and tasking us to reflect on the importance of knowledge and transmission for the reshaping the world. As all the four sessions, this first explosion concluded with a piece of the commissioned series in four episodes by essayist, writer and food memoirist Yemisi Aribisala: 'Wait I'm bringing a bird out of my pocket'. The series title referred to a Yoruba proverb, used to address listeners that are impatient and straining for the punchline of what is being said. The speaker will say in response to the impatience, "Hold on I'm getting there or wait I'm bringing a bird out of my pocket."

The second session of *Kitchen Table Talks* was dedicated to reflections on restitution and how repair and reparation is a deep and complex process that must begin in the body. In the studio the guests, together with Karina and I, were Arlette-Louise Ndakoze and (connected in the air) Harmony Holiday, Immy Mali, Ana Vaz and Giovanna Esposito Yussif. The session started with a transatlantic phone conversation with Harmony,

4. See Okwui Enwezor in conversation with Daniela Roth, "I am not carrying the African flag!" in *Kulturstiftung des Bundes Magazine*, no. 22 (May 2014), accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/en/magazine/magazine_22/i_am_not_carrying_the_african_flag.html.

a US poet and a choreographer that beautifully read with us the words that electrified me when I encountered her work:

> Reparations begin in the body, and that is where our poems must begin; our poems must teach us new ways to use our bodies, must watch with us and walk with us and burst through us as new light, even if it hurts, even if it means we have to relearn self-love through the eyes of a truer more unified self. [...] Our bodies, and how we use them, are testaments to how we use language both on and off the page. Today's poems need to break up rigged thought patterns rather than look for new ways to restate and validate them, and today's black poets and all who love us, must master our bodies and their histories the way soldiers do, for our words must be directed toward saving the souls these vessels carry from suffering the fate of monopoly capitalism into fascism and back into barbarism; that's the trajectory we are on if we remain mere witnesses, if we remain abstract to ourselves. Poetry is the space wherein the facts we learn through true study and understanding of self can perform as archetypes and symbols and syncopation, so that these hard facts are easier to bear, but it is not a space we should use to escape the facts of our essence or our condition. If you ignore what happens to your body, what is happening to black bodies everywhere, your poems will ignore you back and lack the resonance we need from them to free ourselves or become our true selves again. But how do we remain that present without putting our bodies in danger or under scrutiny in order to reclaim their richest language?[5]

These words and wayward aspirations to engage with reparations from a self-aware, empowered, situated and embodied perspective resonated throughout the whole episode, reverberating in the multi-tongued words and songs of Immy, in the storytelling and philosophical reasoning of Arlette, in the poetic and political words of Giovanna, and in Ana's speculations on scenarios of future hope and dread. All those punctuated by Fallon Mayanja and her sound piece *Still in Silence / Howling Resistance*, weaving together testimonies about resistance and silence as claustration, as constraint, as strength, as a path, uttered by voices of Bobby McFerrin, Marlon Roggs, FAKA, Audre Lorde, Sampa the Great and others, and pondering her question,

5. Harmony Holiday, "Reparations begin in the body: A look at why the first and most crucial poetic gesture for a black poet in the West is a knowledge and mastery of her body," Poetry Foundation (October 6, 2016), accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2016/10/reparations-begin-in-the-body-a-look-at-why-the-first-and-most-crucial-poetic-gesture-for-a-black-poet-in-the-west-is-a-knowledge-and-mastery-of-her-body.

"If the voice is the body, what does silence and word carry in a world where the body is controlled by others?"

In its third session, *KTT* unfolded as journey with bi'bak—the project space based in Berlin-Wedding since 2015. Together with its founders Malve Lippmann und Can Sungu and team member Esra Akkaya, we deliberated on issues of transnationalism and mobility, on patterns of memory within the (post-)migrant society and aesthetics of radical everydayness. On the beautiful notes of Cem Karaca, among others, and of his song *Es kamen Menschen an* with its refrain, "It was asked for workers. It was human beings who arrived instead," Can, Malve and Esra talked about *Sıla Yolu*—the holiday transit from Germany to Turkey that immigrants have been travelling every summer since the 1960s—retracing its tales of the highway, and the many stories of leaving home, holiday returns, hope and homesickness that the memory of that travel speaks; the same route, known today as the Western Balkan route, is crossed by refugees headed in the opposite direction toward Western Europe. We continued talking about *Bitter Things*, a project that bi'bak conceived to investigate the impact of labour migration on the notion of family and motherhood from the 1960s to the present, giving space to the perspectives of women migrant workers and the children left behind, and concluded with *Please Rewind* and *Replaying Home*, engaging with the Turkish film culture that flourished in Berlin in the 1980s, when video rentals among families, neighbours and friends represented important evening social events for the community and influenced the aesthetics of German cinema.

Suddenly we were joined in the studio by our amazing friends, artists and neighbours.

Ann Duk Hee Jordan and Pauline Doutreluingne joined to weave reflections about interspecies kinship and more-than-human collaborations, reconnecting us to the *Kitchen Table Talks* framework and its queries, and thinking from and with the space of the garden, and the possibility of exercising relationality also across species and living organisms. Together, we discussed about the limiting and in some way patriarchal imposing frameworks of a kind of feminism that is stuck in a western anthropocentric epistemology, about the need of shifting from humanism to animalism, and the importance of forging new vocabularies and words in order to reimagine the world beyond the oppressive politics of fear of our times.

Last but not least the ultimate session of the *KTT* on June 7th, 2020 saw the participation of DJ Lynnée Denise who, with a powerfully edited sound piece weaving music archives and spoken reflections, drew connections between the racial character of COVID-19 in the US and the 1980s, performing a tribute to the bodies that disappeared from communities of colour for reasons that include HIV/AIDS, mass incarceration and xenophobic immigration policy. The programme closed with the sound piece *Black is Everything Beyond the Sun* by Fallon Mayanja a piece which, through film quotes, musical excerpts, poetry, and activist interviews, deliberates sonically about grieving, struggles and beauties, shared by black lives as individuals and as a collective.

The experience of the *Kitchen Table Talks* left us enriched and inspired like not many others. It did. But it also offered us the possibility of understanding again and again the illusion of safety, how precarious and vulnerable is that space of searched domesticity, and how complex, wounded and at the same time wondrous is that attempt of bridging asymmetrical experiences and navigating new contact zones. Scepticism, mistrust and a sense of danger are at the door, but what stays with us in the room is the labour of repair to share.

2. Carework as Commons

The other day I stumbled upon an article that was describing the displacement of baby clown fishes in the oceans, their attempt—when grown up enough to leave the reef where they were delivered as larvae—to swim against the tide in order reach their homes and families. This kind of fish, the article was explaining, doesn't have the faculty of seeing and navigates the water by hearing "the snapping, grunting, gurgling, popping and croaking"[6] of the reef. Contrary to some other marine animals and beings, the clown fish cannot adapt to the rising of anthropogenic noise pollution and its volume. They are wandering the seas without direction, irremediably unable to find their way home.

From this underwater, privileged space of home from which I write, I yet hear my ears whistling. I am wearing a clock that

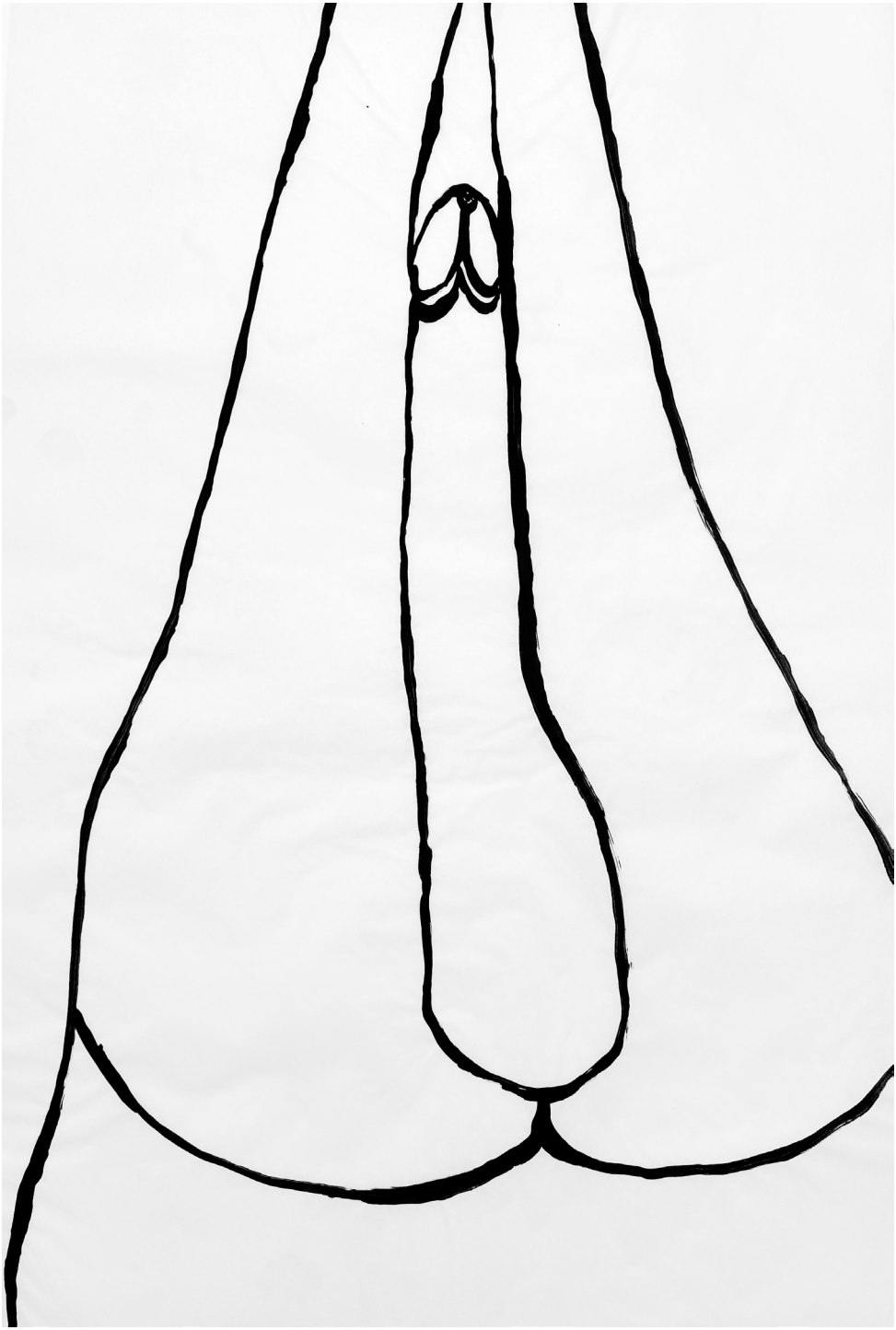
6. Sabrina Imbler, "In the Oceans, the Volume Is Rising as Never Before," in The New York Times (February 4, 2021), accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/science/ocean-marine-noise-pollution.html.

keeps counting my heart beats, I don't know why I ended up doing it today for the first time in my life. My long-lasting apnea is about to leave me exhausted, but I may still be able to find my orientation. That orientation comes from a belief in interconnectedness and kinship, in reciprocity and collaboration. That kind of collaboration that marine life, animal and vegetal life, is extraordinarily performing sometime even in the most stressful environments in which it is forced nowadays, finding its ways through. Like roots of trees finding its way through the cement of the pavements.

Thinking and practicing the domestic implies embodying structures of safe unfolding in which things can be built. The domestic is a space, a practice, it is kinship, extended families, togetherness and actions that may involve the well-being of our bodies but extends to the politics of the social collective. Articulating such a collective body is a labour conducted by mothers, careworkers, essential workers, those that cook and provide nourishment, those that act resistance and political imagination. It extends well beyond familiar notions of domesticity and should be understood as an expanded infrastructural mode of being.

For me the domestic, as unsafe as it can be, is the place where carework becomes the commons. As a mother, as a curator, as an interlocutor, in my everydayness I may have played my own part in these commons however small the scale may seem. But the political nature of these commons rests in its multiplication. In its articulation through the modalities in which each of us feels more *at home*.

Sofia Lomba, *Naked Bodies #32*, 2018, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Domestico

Fermín Jiménez Landa

I travelled with a single premise, not touching any door.

The habitable converted into a system that opens and closes under rules that depend on the interaction with elements like doors with sensors or human interactions (people who open doors, sliding doors, an opportune call to the waiter to open the door when bringing the breakfast...).

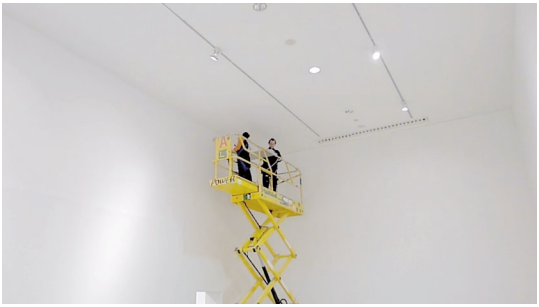
A ridiculous heroic deed, romantic but parodic, with the aim of establishing relationships between geographic, mapping, spatial, body, architecture, urban ... in the form of a story.

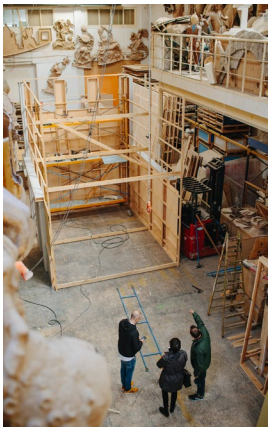
A collection of hand soaps preserved just in that last moment before the decision to be disregarded for their use, when these compact and opaque masses have become objects of great fragility and are polished and beautiful elements, pure sheets sometimes almost transparent.

In each soap there is latent one of the most normal acts and automatic repetitions: washing our hands. We think about the perception of life and the passing of time in relation to the continuous contact with an object.

Work involves a chain of favours. The gift has no economic value but it has something intimate. It requires an effort to find them because it is not worth making them, they must be rescued from another home. And it takes effort to transport something brittle.

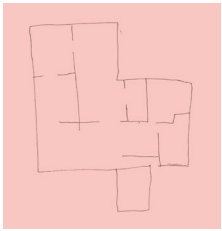
An apartment is rented a few streets away from the museum during the time an exhibition takes place. The apartment is emptied and turned into a mental space added to the museum. Everything revolves around that weird appendage halfway between reality and the imaginary. The apartment's personal property (from the closet to the coffee spoon) is stored in the museum. A marble replica of the apartment's skirting board is placed respecting the scale and orientation of the original. On the walls, we see a part of what's going on in the apartment: home visits by people of different trades doing different things (hobbies, other skills) and various interventions on the site. It was possible to visit the apartment by joining a few organized groups who arrived blindfolded.



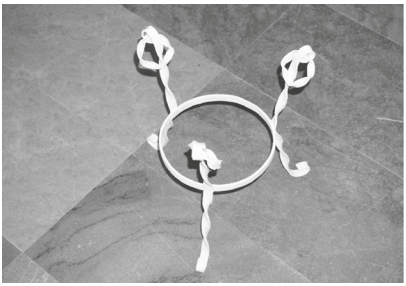


The white ceiling in a room is covered with glow-in-the-dark stickers of stars for kids, charged up by the light of the spotlights that makes it possible to view the rest of the works in the daytime.

An L.A. garage becomes an exhibition space. I am the first guest at the site and I propose to exhibit a car to go back to the beginning. I sent the key of my mailbox from Spain so the public can use it to scratch the car. During the time of absence of the key, we took out the letters that arrived by putting our fingers through the slot.



Inspired in Burt Lancaster's film, I drew a perfect straight line of swimming pools with the help of Google Maps and a telephone with GPS and crossed Spain swimming a river of pools from Tarifa to my parent's pool in Pamplona.



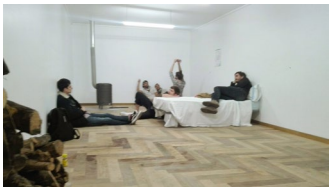
The escape consists in a process. The work has been made from within by a team of volunteers and the artist. At the end of the construction, the authors have been locked up and evicted the sculpture as best they could. The result is sober, compact, but small details prove this performative side; the earth removed from what looks like an attempted tunnel and the remains of the interior of the sculpture that we see through the bricks, such as a tent, shovels or food rests.

This kind of garden sculpture, loaded with references to archetypal scenes from literature and cinema, uses hollow brick, a construction tool that refers us on the one hand to the design of the human habitat and on the other to modern and contemporary sculpture.

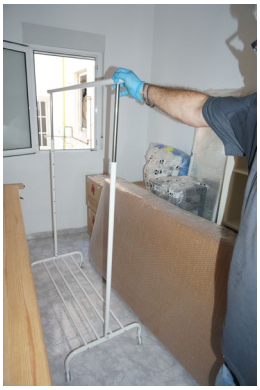
Shared sofa between two wall-to-wall neighbourhood homes that hardly know each other and who live in different portals. The sofa, in-demonstrably, is as close as possible to its original shape, we assume that it is only a few centimetres apart from the wall.

The Fallas is a traditional celebration held in commemoration of Saint Joseph in the city of Valencia. The term Falles refers to both the celebration and the monuments burnt during the celebration. Each neighbourhood of the city has an organised group of people that produces a construction known as a falla which is burnt at the end of the Falles, every night of March 19th.

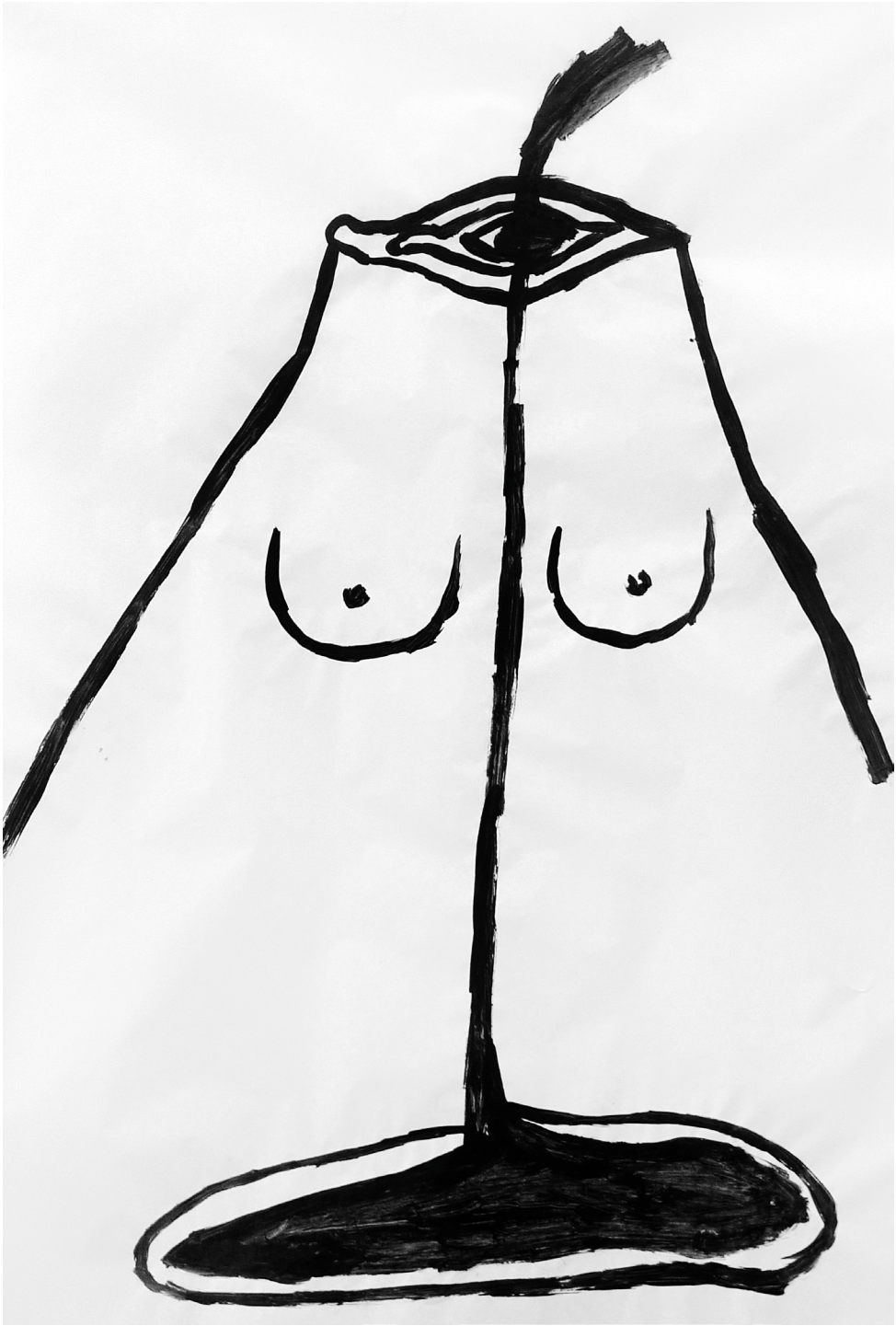
The falla started March 19th of 2017 when a small stick was lighted from the flames of the burnt of the previous falla. The fire was kept maintained among oil lamps, candles, cigarettes, birthday cakes and gas water heaters until falles of 2018 lighting a heater of a house that is a falla. An anodyne building, a block, that was the last home of the fire. In Spanish hogar, means both fire and fireplace, fire and home. Falla is for the first time habitable and inside fire can be felt as a thermal sensation.



The floor is made out of pieces extracted from old furniture of the neighbourhood, recovering an old tradition of the Falles, that where originally made of the old furniture. At the end, the fire burned the fireplace.



Sofia Lomba, *Spongy Bodies #43*, 2017, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Drone Poetry

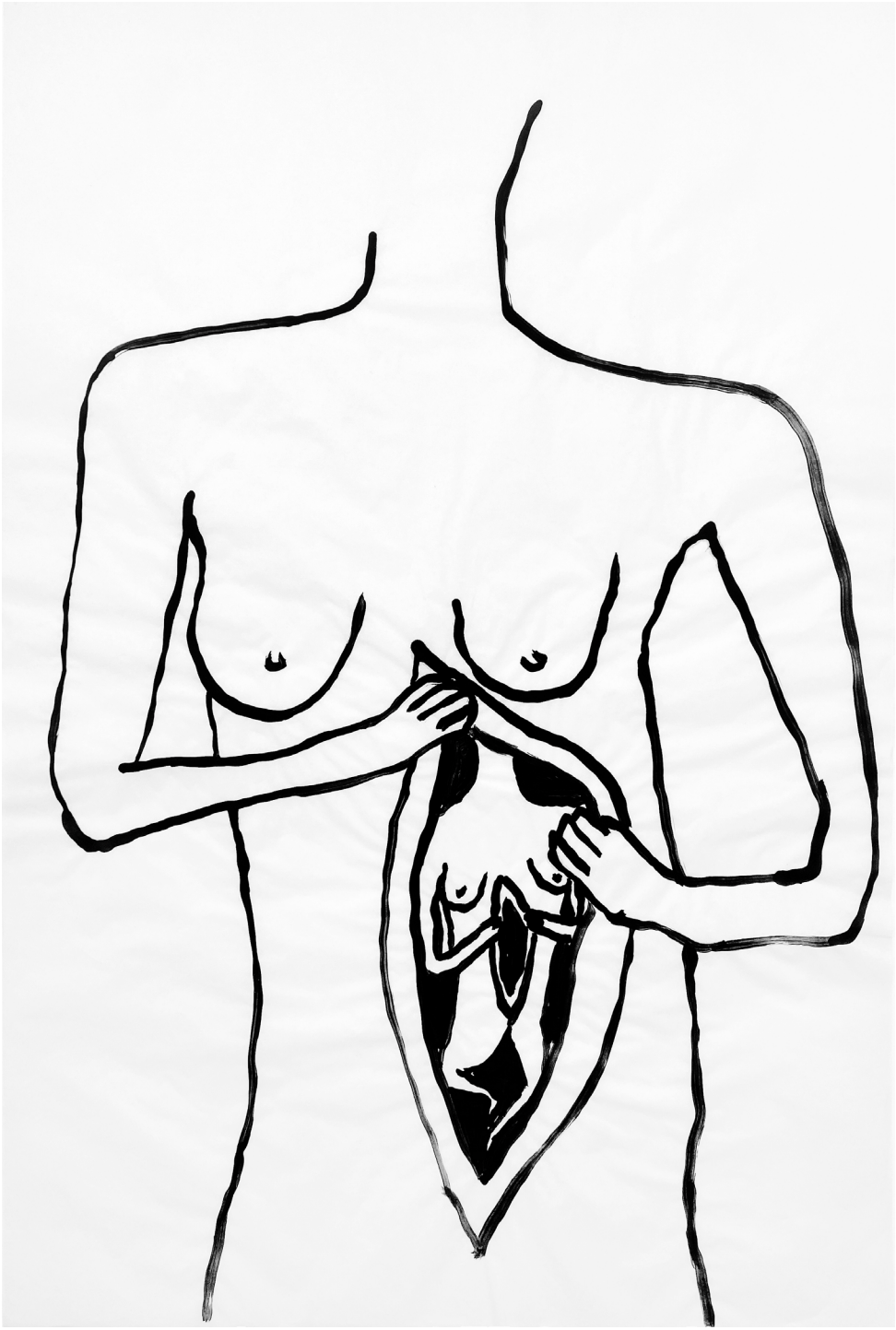
Stephanie Comilang

Sunburned flesh
We enter a new space
I clip into the vestibule
And right away
We are ash baked
These storybook villas
Still dream behind shutters
Their balconies fine
As hand made lace
I am the colour of burnt pineapple, lemon, mango

Your eyes will rest a few minutes
each one amidst the many, all one
It's merely the beginning
A dream in future time
These boys on the side
like boys we've left like punchlines
While all our desires and fears
amass here offline
So far from the tower lights

I have a #purpose
I fall without resting
and let judgement suspend
To become a lesser phantom
love yourself

Sofia Lomba, *Spongy Bodies #48*, 2017, acrylic on silk paper, 75 x 50 cm.



Aphorisms on Self-Care

Juliet Jacques

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For A.K.

1. Late capitalism encourages—if not *forces*—its subjects to ignore their own needs. Twenty-first century thinkers have explored the ways in which employers, aided by digital technology, aim to programme people into subserviating sleep into its needs,[1] and the ways in which a focus on individual rather than collective freedoms has led to the valorisation of the 'entrepreneur who is isolated and self-combating' and voluntarily exploits oneself throughout a working day that has no fixed beginning or end.[2] In this context, it is no surprise that Audre Lorde should have conceived '"self preservation" as an act of political warfare', nor that much of the conceptual work about how

1. Jonathan Crary, *24/7* (London: Verso, 2013).
2. Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics* (London: Verso, 2017), 5.

self-care is a critical part of longterm radical engagement has primarily been done by people from marginalised communities, who experience discrimination that drastically exacerbates capitalism's structural inequalities.

2. The emergence of self-care as a concept comes after the decline, at least in Europe and North America, of the principle of dying for an idea—or, at least, of sacrificing one's life in a direct, immediate confrontation over a political ideology. Whatever the nostalgic glamour attached to the thought of fighting for (say) the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, the disappointment of the sclerotic and in certain cases barbaric regimes that followed moments of revolutionary fervour has largely led to a shift away from the aim of forcibly seizing the state apparatus. Much has been written on this: Albert Camus's assertion, in *The Rebel*, that all revolutions have resulted in an increase in state power stuck with me,[3] as did Mark Rudd's reflection, in a documentary on the American insurrectionary group The Weather Underground, that the logical conclusion to putting any idea above a human life can only ever be an uncontrollable wave of violence.[4] Over the last fifty years, much radical activism has focused on civil rights movements for minority groups, in reaction to people being directly killed by the state, let down by healthcare systems (which have prioritised the absence of illness rather than encouraging positive models of wellbeing) or destroyed by social prejudices. Generally, it has aimed to transform society less violently, and met with different forms of resistance, which intentionally wear insurgents down over time. In this way, people still die for a cause, albeit more subtly—hence the need for self-care.

3. Capitalism has proved so resilient because it can assimilate not just practically any challenge to it, but also any tactic designed to mitigate its effects. (Again, this is not a new observation.) A Google search for 'radical self-care' brings up many pop psychology websites and a critical *Guardian* op-ed about how Audre Lorde's theories have been reduced to 'lifestyle advice for an age of diminished expectations' in which 'the best *[most people]* can hope for is to get through the day' rather than for

3. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: A Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. by Anthony Bower (Harmondswort: Penguin, 1971 [1951]), 8.
4. *The Weather Underground*, dir. Sam Green & Bill Siegel, 2002.

any sweeping social change.[5] As its writer, André Spicer, points out, #selfcare is everywhere now, used to inject a radical air into relaxing but mundane activities, to sell products, or to justify the removal of (often publicly funded) infrastructures of social or medical care. Concerns about whether or not self-care can retain the 'radicality' of its origin are secondary to those about how capitalism uses the concept to divorce the needs of individuals from their wider context. In the workplace, it is easy to see why corporate managers would encourage employees to practise 'selfcare' rather than to, say, join a trade union.

4. If people on the left, individually and collectively, were to (re)animate a collective politics that aimed to limit work to eight hours per day, five days per week, allowing people to live securely on the proceeds, without feeling the need to carry on digitally outside their contracted time, what could be the consequences for 'self-care'? In the UK, the left-wing turns away from fighting numerous small, often localised battles and towards the use of a large party infrastructure despite its traditional (and *especially* recent) reluctance to fight for better working and living conditions may be explained, in part, by the need many people feel, given how occupied they are in making ends meet, to outsource their struggles to a wider movement. This, combined with renewed interest in the possibilities of unionisation, which secured the eight-hour day and the weekend during the inter-war period, has focused on affordable rents—especially in urban areas, where workers often commute for over an hour to badly-paid, unskilled, and insecure jobs—and making 'flexible' working practices less exploitative, or in the case of zero-hour contracts, banning them entirely. There has also been a more utopian strand, arguing for 'fully automated luxury communism', but no society in the world is close to realising this. So, rather than speculate about what self-care might look like, or if it would even be necessary after huge ystemic change, let's consider how to manage ourselves while radical political movements continue to push for their demands to be met.

5. To even invest emotions, let alone *time*, into an attempt to reorient established parties away from 'business' (i.e. *capital*) and towards labour is just as draining as becoming personally

5. André Spicer, '"Self-care": how a radical feminist idea was stripped of politics for the mass market,' The Guardian (August 21, 2019).

involved in smaller-scale campaigning. Multi-faceted resistance from politicians, the media and influential public figures—often in the form of personal attacks on individuals or groups, and amplification and repetition of deliberately inaccurate information that requires constant rebuttal—aims by stultify people into disengagement, a tactic identified by writer Joe Kennedy as 'non-linear borefare'.[6] The establishment understands the phenomenon of activist burnout, and uses every means at its disposal to induce it. Using representative politics to address multiple issues on our behalf may not prove as productiveas we might wish, but maintaining hope for a more equitable, less exhausting society is far easier within a movement than alone. It is invaluable to acknowledge—but never *accept*—that any attempt at systemic change will take place against such a background, and to keep sight of the need for collective action in the face of dispiriting power structures, however difficult that may feel.

6. Many, but by no means all of the greatest joys in life involve other people. But all collectives are ultimately made up of individuals, and our disappointments and defeats affect us primarily on that level. While it is vital that movements develop shared support systems that do not replicate the exclusions and oppressions of the capitalist order they oppose, it is also necessary for everyone involved with such movements to find techniques of self-care that work for them. One is to see it as a commitment to healthy practices and values, disregarding the idea that self-care is indulgent in itself: an idea with which I had some sympathy, before I explored the roots of the concept, thought about how and *why* it was coopted, and reminded myself of Lorde's assertion that it needed to go beyond the glib quest for 'happiness', or even contentment, and feed into larger movements. It sounds obvious, but the turbo-charged trap of capitalism wants us to forget—no-one can meaningfully build towards social change if they are exhausted.

7. The body has its limits, and it is a better aim to bring capitalism—and, first, oneself—around to the slower time of radical politics than to force one's life and concerns into the unsustainable pace of neoliberalism. *Time* has a paradoxical nature in radical politics: the

6. Joe Kennedy, 'Non-Linear Borefare,' A Drawing Sympathy (July 13, 2016).

demand for revolution has been replaced by more reformist types of organising. Movements have become more urgent as people's socio-economic conditions have worsened, but nonetheless have substituted the push towards a *moment* for something slower at the precise point at which capitalism got faster, approaching terminal velocity with its dwindling number of jobs on a dying planet. (The ecological crisis should make anyone on the left question the wisdom of accelerationism: the quicker the pace of capitalism, the harder it becomes to avoid smashing into this particular wall.)

8. It is especially true of online politics, which can be alienating even when it is conversational, infuriating even when it is hilarious, and isolating even when it is collective, to respond as often as possible to 24-hour news. It can induce a sense of exhilarating stasis, in which it seems like everything is changing even as nothing does, with all the disappointment that entails. It can also induce 'compassion fatigue', given the sheer scale of horrors to which it exposes us on a continual basis. Understanding the addling, addictive nature of these media, and their potential to dehumanise us and make us forget about the humanity of others, as well as the premium they put on the present moment gives us a greater sense of perspective—of our own relation with thepast and future—and is crucial to any meaningful self-care. That said, virtual community is better than no community at all, especially for those unable to access physical spaces. The suggestion to simply opt out of the Internet, like the one that people abandon their antidepressants and connect with nature, is sometimes made from a position of immense privilege, and it's worth thinking about how the idea of self-care may itself be violent when it ignores structural inequality, or becomes an imperative—depending on *where* such imperatives come from. Addressing self-care for people with depression or anxiety—two of the prevalent mental health issues under neoliberal capitalism—some feminist blogs advocate cancelling plans and isolating oneself whenever it feels necessary. Sometimes this is necessary, but is still terrible advice. First, your friends may also be depressed and/or anxious and may not be able to help but take such behaviour as a rejection. Secondly, writing as someone who endured severe depression in my teens, I found that having friends who persuaded me to stick to plans whenever I wavered made me feel more valued and less alone: coercion is not always violent, nor done without consideration for one's feelings.

9. All this, then, would point to *radical* self-care being something that is done collectively, in a spirit of shared kindness that is conceived, as Lorde put it, as an act of political warfare—partly for oneself, but primarily for one's comrades and for humanity as a whole, even those with whom we disagree. One should still be careful about giving one's opponents the benefit of too much doubt or being forgiving to a fault—the levels of exhaustion this can engender can barely be described. This love can grow into organised programmes of looking after each other, such as the Black Panther breakfast clubs, designed to put pressure on political representatives to feed children before school. It can, as Sara Ahmed suggested, come from a position of recognising that social privilege is an informal, unspoken support system that 'reduce[s] the costs of vulnerability, so if things break down, you are more likely to be looked after'—one example she gives is that heterosexual relationships are largely seen as more valid than queer ones, meaning that heterosexual people are more likely to be supported through a break-up or bereavement.[7] We can create better support networks for a wider range of people by infusing the large-scale organising of labourist politics with ideas developed by anti-racist, feminist and LGBTQI+ movements. Just because these two radical poles have sometimes been in conflict with each other does not mean they are inherently opposed: while some groups are disproportionately damaged by the twenty-first century's freneticism, we all need to find ways of living that give us more time to think, rest, and love.

7. Sara Ahmed, 'Selfcare as Warfare,' Feminist Killjoys (August 25, 2014).

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