

# Queer Indiscipline, Decolonial Revolt: The Production of Undisciplined Knowledges in the Neoliberal Age

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*As an intervention into a domesticated academic knowledge production and an increasingly normative queer theorizing, *Queer Indiscipline, Decolonial Revolt* asks for the proliferation of other modalities of thinking and writing. The context of such interrogation is the neoliberal restructuring of the university which comfortably accommodates criticality. Where criticality has lost its sting, this paper calls for a daring indiscipline opposing political, public, and scientific disciplining. This brings practices of doing knowledge and not the knowledges as such into attention. An intimacy between the queer and the undisciplined is established by referencing the resistance to assimilationist politics and practices as queer theory's principal asset. Yet, undisciplined knowledges are not only geared towards challenging the bounds of the discipline(s), but also, and more broadly, towards decolonial futures. *Queer Indiscipline, Decolonial Revolt* explores various moments of concomitant unlearning and improvisation on and beyond the academic stage. The piece conducts three non-linear explorations. The first part analyzes the making of a hierarchical knowledge machine as part of capitalist modernity and revisits moments of queer and black queer theorizing that challenge the dividing lines between high/low, sensible/nonsensical, intellectual/corporeal, theory/practice, speech/chatter, etc. The second part discusses the masterful subject as the agent of knowledge. While the persistence and the pervasiveness of such master fantasy gets acknowledged, the verve of this paper is oriented towards the modality of queer dispossession. The final section gives way to the sabotage inherent in the unruly rhythm of life. Such sabotage is tested to counteract the frameworks, formats and concepts which articulate intellectuality on a more fundamental level. This advances the deconstruction of intellectuality to the terrifying and beautiful point where intellectuality is co-extensive with the social.*

**Keywords:** knowledge production, intellectuality, decoloniality, indiscipline, dispossession

Undisciplined knowledge practices invite the responsiveness to curiosity – the responsiveness to a question, an impulse, an intuition – in short: a doing that is not corrupted by the restrictive protocols of disciplinary thinking. It could be aptly described as an attitude that allows for a local, context-specific, and situated defiance. And it operates from a place in which the joyous celebration and a determined political positioning are not mutually exclusive.

As a preliminary proposition, I'd like to pit the *queer* antithetically against the *disciplined*. There's a raft of notions associated with this latter term: *discipline, disciplining, disciplined* and *disciplinarity* – all of which establish normative and normalizing forces. In its negation we find another set of terms: *indiscipline, anti-disciplinarity, and undisciplined*. These latter notions accompany this project's commitment to safeguard queer politics as an anti-assimilationist and non-normative project. They negate the discipline in its double valence as both an enforced order and an academic field. This double valence proves important in this inquiry; not only offers it a key to the normative force at work in the order of the academic discipline, but also to ways of sabotaging such vehicle.

This conceptual outline is complemented by a third element: *decoloniality*. The three elements aligned – *queer, indiscipline/undisciplined, decoloniality* – form the lines that run transversally through this piece. Decoloniality proves indispensable in this interrogation. This is a normative proposition expressing the urgency of coming to terms with the colonial past that lures in our postcolonial present. But I also argue *that* we necessarily hit on matters of coloniality as soon as hierarchies, exclusions and practices in the production of knowledge are exposed and addressed. With this conceptual constellation, the interplay of these three elements, I seek less to establish a strict conceptual coherence but to open up a reflexive space in which our practices of doing knowledge are revised.

Roberto Kulpa and Joseli Maria Silva test the importance of doing knowledge in decolonizing queer theorizing:

[D]are we play the devil's advocate role and say that the feminist and queer epistemologies we represent across many disciplines have yet to face their colonial legacy, and their mostly (Northern) American– and Eurocentrism, and Anglophone squint? A proliferation of "post-colonial queer studies" and works attaining to geographies "beyond the West" is not enough, if we are to take the decolonial project seriously. [...] Rather, and perhaps foremost, we must reconceptualize our own practices of "doing knowledge." (Kulpa and Silva, 2016: 141)

While the first direction of impact in the larger project of decolonizing queer theory – the expansion of the geopolitical scope – has been further advanced in the last decade, the second direction – the reconceptualization of practices of knowledge – does not sit easily with academia's status quo. Decolonial resistance practices in the latter sense target the epistemic hegemonies on a more fundamental level. They challenge, in other words, the rules of the game – some of which are foundational for the academic knowledge production.

Of course, the knowledge as such carries the traces of its doing. The doing is always already implicated in the text, the reasoning, the canon. Yet, displacing the question *What knowledges are being produced?* by the questions *Who generates knowledge? How is knowledge generated? and For whom?* opens up very different interrogations. What are the rituals, gestures and styles that support the making of knowledge? Who profits from knowledge, who pays its prize? Who counts as a theorist, who as an informant? What counts as theory, what as prose? While some of these questions apply to innerscientific discourse as well, they also – and necessarily so – challenge the line that divides utterances into scientifically valid and invalid. In this context, the indiscipline figures as a response and resistance to public, political and scientific disciplining which is part and parcel of colonial modernity.

“Read this book like a song,” (Tinsley, 2018: 1) reminds Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley the readers in the very beginning of *Ezili’s Mirrors*. Tinsley’s reminder also reminds us of the fact that reading books like songs is out of the ordinary. But what if we allow songs, meditations, and murmurs permeate our knowledge production? The point in doing so is not only to challenge the bounds of the disciplines, but to challenge on a more fundamental level Western epistemology. *Ezili’s Mirrors*, which is discussed later, testifies – and impressively so – that the choice of references, methodologies, and style are the ingredients that allow other epistemologies to flourish.

We could say queer theorizing has always been undisciplined. This is true if we understand the resistance to assimilationist politics and practices as queer theory’s principal asset. This, however, doesn’t contradict or annul the diagnosis that there *is* a lot of normative queer theorizing nowadays. So it seems worth to revisit early texts of queer theorizing in which such undisciplined spirit comes across intensely alive. Such venture figures as a self-questioning internal to queer theory. Over and above, queer theories’ unruliness – the close alliance of the undisciplined with the queer – could also open a path for the interrogation of knowledge practices in the humanities more general.

One of the beginnings I’d like to visit is Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s editorial piece *What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?*. They argued that *queer commentary* might be more adequate than *queer theory* as an umbrella term for the things “most of which are not theory” (1995: 343) assembling under such rubric. At the time of their writing, in 1995, the term *queer theory* had been relatively young, having circulated only for roughly five years.<sup>1</sup> The authors of this essay were concerned with the stylization of queer critique to a meta-discourse and to a theory dignified with capital letters by the restrictive protocols of academia. Opposing such reduction, Berlant and Warner sought to revive queer critique as a multifaceted venture that wields its clout from “multiple localities of queer theory and practice” (1995: 345). Unsurprisingly, they also offered a witty comment on the positioning of queer commentary in relation to academia:

Queer commentary has involved a certain amount of experimenting, of prancing and squatting on the academic stage. This is partly to remind people that there *is* an academic stage and that its protocols and proprieties have maintained an invisible heteronormativity, one that infiltrates our profession, our knowledge, and this editorial. [...] Queer commentary has also distinguished itself through experiments in critical voice and in the genre of the critical essay. Along with queer experiments in pedagogy and classroom practice, it marks a transformation of both the object and the practice of criticism. (Berlant and Warner, 1995: 348 f.)

<sup>1</sup> It is worth to remind that the term *queer* itself is not an invention of the late 1980s or early 1990s, but has been around for centuries. While the growing surge of the term around 1990 certainly corresponded to a changing reality, the term took shape precisely at the threshold of academic discourse, trading and reworking queer activism, queer sentiment and intellectual discourse alike. Thanks to Ludovica d’Alessandro for this reminder.

In the last 25 years, the university has undergone major transformations in the US, in Europe and beyond. The bottom line of these changes: Things got worse. The problems addressed by Berlant and Warner are more pressing than ever. In order to counteract the disciplinary and disciplining force of the economically determined university, the authors resort to the vivid imagination of “prancing and squatting”. This could be neatly aligned with another improvisation on the academic stage, one brought forward by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney: “to be in but not of” (2013: 26). But Berlant and Warner remind us also of the fact that the “protocols and properties” of academia are all along and cannot be discarded by a simple token or a unique twist on stage. What’s required is an ongoing self-reflexive practice of unlearning and undoing.

This piece is dedicated to such concomitant unlearning and improvisation on and beyond the academic stage. Yet this is not to be misunderstood as an invitation for arbitrary transgressions. I don’t want to state that dissidence within the stratified field of knowledge production is favorable *per se* whilst such dissidence being tethered somehow to queerness. The virulent circulation of fake news and the emerging realities imbued with conspiracy are topical examples that show that the departure from the codes of proper knowledge production does not necessarily play in the hands of the emancipatory project. Contrary to this, they’re the expressions of the phantasmatic power of the new right and new algorithmic formations that rework the subject at hand: “Knowledge” becomes – in a blatant way – the discursive extension of dominion. The rogue rule of white hypermasculinities as Trump, Bolsonaro and Johnson has shed a different light on the (not only) natural sciences. Once the project complicit with capitalist rationality, its status has become more contested in the context of crisis capitalism – the COVID-19 pandemic and an ecology out of joint. Against this backdrop, I cannot stress enough the necessity to couple the undisciplined production of knowledge with a critique of dominion as exemplified in section two of this paper.

There’s an intricacy that affected this project in profound ways. It’s the trouble with criticality. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney offered one of the thought-provoking impulses by reminding us that criticality is not enough. In *The Undercommons*, they examine the critical academic’s compliance with power and the inadequacy of a critical consciousness to inspire social change (2013: 25-43). The second reminder of such inadequacy is owed to indigenous theorizing, more precisely to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s famous essay *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*. Tuck and Wayne argue that the pursuit of a critical consciousness – “the decolonization of the mind” – may well serve as a strategy to deflect from material restitution, from the demand to give up land, privilege, and power. According to them, decolonization is, first and foremost, the restitution of land (2012: 21). Such statement is prone to unsettle critical minds whose domain is the crafting of concepts as the weaponry in political struggles. But such unsettling is program: “Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an ‘and.’ It is an elsewhere” (2012: 36).

This piece is an open invitation to explore the elsewhere of colonial modernity – while it acknowledges the colossality, if not impossibility, of such aspiration. It is a beginning without end. It is a tribute to the unruly kid in the house whose virtue is the playful and vital transgression of demarcations – while it later gets diagnosed with ADHD in the rectangular thinking of psychiatry. It is an exploration of the epistemological value and the beauty that derives from such unsettling and the position of un/knowingness. It is neither a proper argument – while it certainly argues against the *proper* –, nor a systematic approach to queer and decolonial epistemologies – while it values the interesting work done under the rubric of radical epistemologies: Autoethnography, Participatory Action Research, Affective Pedagogies, Militant Research and others. It is a text that – at times – enacts what it orbits around.

### **Interventions in the Colonial-Modern Hierarchies of Knowing**

One of the most glaring historical example in which a vast body of knowledge got eradicated is the Great Witch Hunt in early modernity. There's one point of convergence in the scientific interpretation of the awful crimes carried out on women: The women who got charged with witchcraft were at odds with the new requirements of early capitalism. However, while most commentaries would argue that the women prosecuted as witches were the most "disempowered" by these changes, Silvia Federici challenges the myth of disempowerment by raising a defining question: If already disempowered, why should they be further tortured and destroyed? How could such wretched creatures instill so much fear? In Federici's view, the prosecuted women were anything but powerless, but a disturbing and fear-instilling presence for the reformers. They were the holders of particular knowledges and magical powers: "[O]ld women's going from house to house circulated stories, secrets, knowledge; binding passions, weaving together past and present events" (2012: 14). Women's sexuality figured as the quintessence of female "magic" and witchcraft. Sexuality and pleasure had to be controlled by the new elite. A regime of terror was instituted, and a new female subjectivity emerged from it: "sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world" (2012: 13).

Clearly, the Great Witch Hunt occurred at a specific time in history. The formation of colonial-capitalist modernity and the modern regime of property relations was premised on the eradication of knowledges in colonialism and the witch-hunt. Despite of their historical exceptionality, neither colonialism nor the witch-hunt figure as primal scenes and secluded historical events. Federici makes clear that the underlying scheme of the witch-hunt is still operative in the present – as campaigns designed by the elite to check oppositional powers. One important component of these campaigns is the destruction of autochthonous and magical practices and knowledges.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, the terms *destruction* and *erasure* have to be evaluated carefully. In colonialism and the witch-hunt, erasure meant a literal erasure in the form of a unprecedented attack on singular lives, means of livelihood and the systems and rituals that assisted, produced and circulated knowledges hostile to the the colonial-capitalist reform. But this doesn't mean that these knowledges have disappeared entirely. There's a resistance peculiar to these varied forms of thinking. There are enclaves and hideouts in which marginalized knowledges have survived and flourished.

Federici's line of argument is a case in point of how colonial-capitalist modernity has produced a mode of rationality that defines objective knowledge and delineates it from the knowledges dismissed as nonsensical. So the historical confrontation of two competing systems of knowledges made an imprint on the order of knowledges. It remains highly stratified and fiercely contested until the present day. Some knowledges are disqualified and nullified. Others were destined to disappear, but still survived. What evolved increasingly is a system of knowledge codified by a binary logic: scientific/non-scientific, high/low, intellectual/corporeal, theory/practice, speech/chatter, rationality/superstition, academic/popular, etc.

But how to break the codes and protocols that negate subjugated knowledges? How to access a varied, alternative history of thought? How to stimulate an insurrection on the level of epistemology? On the academic stage, one of the most notable experiments that challenged profoundly the hierarchies in the production of knowledge was set in motion at the university of Birmingham in the 1960s with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) as its flagship. The primary point of attack of the CCCS was the opposition of *high* and *low*, bringing into focus those aspects of culture that were previously cast outside the scope of academic research: popular culture, subcultures, and youth cultures. Yet the endeavors of the CCCS were not exhausted in the shift of the subject. Rather the emerging *Cultural Studies* remodeled its relation to hegemonic knowledge in opening up a space for oppositional readings. Cultural codes were interpreted as in flux, allowing for processes of resignification – *decoding* and *encoding* in the words of Stuart Hall (1993: 128-138). In its three decades lasting heyday, the CCCS encouraged interdisciplinary, self-reflexive, contextual, and fiercely political research indebted to the idea of popular knowledge. As such, it was a vortex in the production of oppositional knowledge within academia that figures as a role model until the present day.

The relation of queer and feminist scholarship to Birmingham's project of Cultural Studies is one of affinity and conflict. While queer commentary is indebted to the CCCS' stirring up of the academic knowledge production, the exploration of queer life-worlds was – paradoxically – seemingly impossible within the tradition of CCCS. There is only one piece that gives evidence of a scholar of the early CCCS tradition paying attention to a phenomenon such as gay "whole body eroticism." In the prevailing climate in the Left of that time, in which rock and punk were hailed as the sole expressions of cultural defiance, Richard Dyer's seminal essay *In Defense of Disco* (1979) set out to do justice to gay disco culture. Dyer's piece was published in the magazine *Gay Left*; this alone testifies to the blurring of the boundaries between academic and subcultural knowledge production, between research, pamphleteering and activism (McRobbie 2011: 139 f.).

Reversing positions, displacing binaries, short-circuiting conflicting terms. Jack Halberstam's messing around in the hierarchies of knowledges is as faithful to the tradition of Cultural Studies as determined to smash the heteronormative oedipality adhering to the early Cultural Studies' project (2005: 159 ff.). Halberstam belongs to a generation of queer cultural studies scholars that explore modes of knowledge production that "feeds off of and back into subcultural production" (2005: 163). In *Female*



*Masculinity*, Halberstam puts forward a *scavenger methodology* which turns shying away from a disciplinary rigor from inadequacy into a virtue. This venture aspires to a radical inclusion (of topics) and recombination (of methods). And perhaps it draws its creative force from queer theory's constitutive impasse: the factual inaccessibility of the immediate object of research, namely sex. If the object of research is inaccessible to observation and to traditional research methods, how, then, can research be conducted? (1998: 9-13) More than a decade later, in *Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam complemented his older methodological experimentations with the concept of *low theory*. Low theory can be thought of as an attitude, a deviant way of being and thinking that opts for "the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising" (2011: 16). The dark, the dirty, and the deviant are the privileged domains of this kind of reasoning. Nothing is excluded from the matrix of stimulating theorizing, neither in scavenger methodology, nor in low theory.

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley describes herself as a person who was "raised to be academically monogamous: to be 'married to' a single, coherent subject, 'faithful to' a line of theorizing" (2018: 172). Despite of this training, Tinsley grew fond of the transgression of compulsory academic monogamy: *Ezili's Mirrors. Black Queer Genders and the Work of the Imagination* (2018) traces Black queer sexuality, genders and same-sex kinship. Hybrid in genre and style, composed of real and fictive historical figures and led by three authorial voices, *Ezili's Mirrors* is not only a daring, surprising and ambitious piece of writing, but also an amorous exploration of imaginations, seductions and sensations that could not be expressed in academic prose. Tinsley calls her methodology *theoretical polyamory*: "a philosophy as well as a practice, theoretical polyamory encourages movement between different modes of theorizing" (2018: 172). Tinsley's love for the many resonates with the excessiveness with which Halberstam gathers subjects and methods seemingly being at odds with each other. Tinsley's fictional-theoretical liaison is composed of and decomposed by practices and genres as distinct as dance, Vodou spirituality, erotica, performance, science fiction, pop music, music videos, and fashion. If it derives from Halberstam's project it is for reasons specific to Tinsley's experience as a Black queer woman being raised in a Black womanly sociality, in which multiparenting, the exchange of children among a bunch of parental figures, was the norm: "This is a queer family, yes – but also just the way African diaspora women parent. [...] Treading in this black womanly tradition, I've found my theoretical polyamory necessitates theoretical multiparenting" (2018: 186 f.). What's more and perhaps most laudable: Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley resists the temptation to fit her explorations of Black queer sexuality and gender in the conceptual coordinates laid out by Queer and Gender Studies. The text performs an epistemological rupture from European frameworks articulating gender and sexuality. Here it is – an upheaval on the level of epistemology. *Ezili's Mirrors* as "a wild-colored quilt" (2018: 187): utterly misfitting Eurocentric academic reasoning, finding, if anything, a queer, non-linear and cross-temporal companionship in the particular powers of the social, weaving and magical practices of European women prosecuted as witches in early modernity.

## Undoing Mastery

"[D]isciplines," writes Jack Halberstam, "actually get in the way of answers and theorems precisely because they offer maps of thought where intuition and blind fumbling might yield better results" (2011: 6). Clearly, *The Queer Art of Failure* advances the argument that disciplinary thinking works in the service of the domestication of writing. Yet Halberstam's quest for an undisciplined thinking-doing is driven by a desire for another subjectivity: a queer desire to inhabit the other side of the disciplining disciplinarity under the guidance of mastery. That's what Halberstam's concept of failure is about: Failure is not just something that is endured involuntarily, rather it offers an avenue to a mode of being in the world that is premised on the rejection of hegemonic notions of success. Hence, the primary loss in disciplinarity are not the messy and slippery modes of knowing, but a subjectivity tethered to the "intellectual worlds conjured by losers, failures, dropouts, and refuseniks" (2011:11). Such ambiguous desire translates into an imperative: "Resist mastery!" (2011:11).

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I strongly agree with Halberstam about the need to challenge mastery. But isn't Halberstam's dismissal of it, perhaps too easy and doesn't it come too quickly? Doesn't it disregard the complex ways in which a desire for mastery is implicated in our doing, perhaps even where we least expect or recognize it? Even through Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's masterfully undisciplined piece *Ezili's Mirrors*, runs a sense of mastery. For Tinsley, theoretical polyamory is not a license for a "shoddy interdisciplinarity", but rather – and very similar to conscious non-monogamy – it requires the multiplication of responsibilities: "Trained in literature, I delved into religious studies, dance history and theory, film theory, BDSM studies, and performance studies (among other things!) to write these meditations [...]. I've had to be respectful of all the disciplines and theorizings I enter, to know their histories, possibilities, and limitations" (2018: 177 f.).

Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery. Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (2018) is a strong contribution in deciphering colonial traces in subjectivity and knowledge production. While Singh and Halberstam share spirit in their charge of mastery and their desire to reach for "other modes of relational being" (Singh, 2018: 1), they differ significantly in the way they carry out this venture. Singh doesn't merely oppose or dismiss mastery, but rather opts for another approach in dismantling mastery: She acknowledges mastery's ubiquity and obdurate persistence. Hence, the undoing of mastery involves a self-critical evaluation of the function of mastery in the cultural text and ones sense of self. Mastery gets always in the way, mastery is everywhere – that's why Singh calls *Unthinking Mastery* an "impossible project" (2018: 1).

The argument that cuts to the core of *Unthinking Mastery* is that mastery is a colonial-modern legacy:

The most contentious claim of this book [...] is that there is an intimate link between the mastery enacted through colonization and other forms of mastery that we often believe today to be harmless, worthwhile, even virtuous. [...] [A]s a pursuit, mastery



invariably and relentlessly reaches toward the indiscriminate control over something – whether human or inhuman, animate or inanimate. It aims for the full submission of an object – or something *objectified* – whether it be external or internal to oneself. (Singh, 2018: 9 f.)

Singh tackles the complexities in challenging colonial mastery in the first two chapters analyzing anticolonial texts. Mastery *is* a colonial technology. But what Singh endeavors to show with anticolonial writings as those of Frantz Fanon is that mastery was equally deployed as a means of decolonization. Practices of countermastery – militant, corporeal, linguistic, and intellectual – held the promise to produce thoroughly decolonized subjects, while their proponents were largely unaware of a complicity with colonial warfare on the level of subjectivity.

Mastery infuses the realm of knowledge production as well. Disciplinary thinking involves the comfort of being in control of one's production of knowledge, following its rules and conventions. Drawing from feminist, queer and deconstructive sources, Singh develops the methodology *vulnerable reading* which displaces the master code in the production of knowledge: the knowing subject. In vulnerable reading, knowledge is not acquired in appropriating it and applying it masterfully according to the script of the discipline. Rather than this, vulnerable reading meets a precarious condition – both frightening and rewarding – a gate that allows opening ourselves to something else; it's an openness to undergo a transformation, to be undone. This means: not to be the same after having encountered a text, a project, an idea, a sensation.

I sympathize with [the] refusal of disciplinary marginalization, with the desire to find oneself 'at home' within disciplinary knowledge production and within languages intimate and once foreign to us. And yet one of the claims of *Unthinking Mastery* is that we must begin to exile ourselves from feeling comfortable at home (which so often involves opaque forms of mastery), turning instead toward forms of queer dispossession that reach for different ways of inhabiting our scholarly domains – and more primordially, of inhabiting ourselves. (Singh, 2018: 8)

What might such queer dispossession be? Is it the moment we cut loose of deliberate choosing and let our supposed "objects" of knowledge taking over? What if our objects visit us, haunt us, and possess us? Anthropologist Saba Mahmood gave testimony of being possessed and dispossessed by her object of study, namely Islamism:

Perhaps [...] it is through this process of dwelling in the modes of reasoning endemic to a tradition that I once judged abhorrent, by immersing myself within the thick texture of its sensibilities and attachments, that I have been able to dislocate the certitude of my own projections and even begin to comprehend why Islamism, at least in one of its renditions, exerts such a force in people's lives. (Mahmood, 2005: 199)

While we might be tempted by the certitude of an intellectual position as it equips with self-confidence, territory, and rewards, it proves limiting. It hinders coming alive in thought, undergoing transformation, arriving at a place of knowing unknowingness. Yet that's the pathway to becoming "vulnerable to other possibilities for living, for being together in common, for feeling injustice and refusing it" (Singh, 2018: 21).

### **Sabotaging Intellectual Time and Space**

In her 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (1987: 7). Maybe the title misleadingly monopolizes the attention to the spatial aspects in the process of writing. The omission of questions of money is a severe distortion and I don't intend to be complicit with the same fatal erasure. Nevertheless, I'd like to dwell on questions of space and time for the time being. Woolf's genre is a specific, it's literature, but her concern transgresses the boundaries of her specific genre. Woolf is concerned with the absence of women in English literature, or, where women are present, their mediocre performance as writers. She's quick in identifying the reasons why women fail to match the standards of literature set by man: the lack of money and space. Woolf intervenes in a spatial setting in which the women's realm is the parlor, the reception room or the walk-through room; constantly interrupted in her activities, interrupted by conversations, guests. Her duty is to weave the social fabric of the bourgeois household.

The Afro-American theoretician bell hooks invites in a completely different environment and another architecture of knowledge production. In her essay *Black Women Intellectuals*, she reflects on the absence of female Blacks in the intellectual field. We find ourselves in a Black working-class sociality, in which women are assigned to the duties of the household: cooking, cleaning, caring for others. They seem other-directed and fully absorbed by multiple tasks of family life. What shrinks to nothing in this setting is the alone time that allows for profound reading, thinking and writing. Despite the differences of the social environments described by Woolf and hooks – they're manifest, even tremendous! –, I'd like to cautiously approach the similarity of their experience: It's the specific regime of space and time that is part of female bourgeois subjectivity and female Black subjectivity. The misery of writing of (Black) women, they conclude, lies in the firm grip of duties, the involuntary presence of people, the interruption and the architecture that does neither offer a room of one's own, nor allow for time of one's own. In their desire for an intellectual life, they claim unanimously space and time. They lay claim to an intellectuality they feel bereft of in a world structured by sexism and racism. They both seek – in different times – to reclaim the term and function of the intellectual they had been bereft of since time immemorial.

To be sure, there is a significant difference between Virginia Woolf and bell hooks. Woolf's imagined space of writing is in accord with an utterly bourgeois model of intellectual activity: It appears as individualistic and elitist, as a space suspended from reproductive obligations and social relations. Woolf reclaims the space that was the exclusive privilege of the white, bourgeois man and she claims

right to the freedom when to isolate from and when to enter in social relations. Unlike Woolf, hooks is acutely aware of the risk of buying into this model of bourgeois intellectuality. She seeks to negotiate her intellectual life with the life of the community. In her vision, the intellectual and the communal life are not juxtaposed and mutual exclusive. She strives, reversely, for a socially integrated model of intellectuality and vehemently repudiates the widespread assumption that one has to choose either between the life of the mind or the life of the community. hooks writes: "Certainly not all intellectual work occurs in isolation (some of our best ideas emerge in the context of exchange) but this reality co-exists with the reality that solitary contemplation of ideas is a crucial component of the intellectual process" (hooks, 1991: 160). According to this account, isolation is not the sole place of intellectuality, but still its indispensable part.

Writing fiction requires a certain rhythm of life, so does the production of theory. Writing, then, urges – at least occasionally – the taming of the unruly rhythm of social life, both the chaos and the humdrum of the daily life. In this view, the task of the intellectual is to coordinate and orchestrate time, space and desires in accordance with the demands of the intellectual activity. This is an exercise in asceticism, though not fully asocial in nature: in the best case indebted to social change. I don't seek to deny the rewards we gain from intellectual seclusion, both personally and politically. But we pay a prize for it. There are other rewards out there, yet to be explored. So what if we accept the givens? What if we accept the spatial, temporal, architectural, emotional, mental and bodily states that make up our lives and which are – at least sometimes – at odds with the requirements of the ordered regime of the conventional form of intellectual activity? If there is sabotage inherent to our traumatized and indebted subjectivities and our ways of life, why not submitting to this sabotage? Why not give in to the interruption, the chatter, the noise, the repetitions, the exigencies of reproductive and social life, the disobedient revolts of affect and desire, yes, to all unglamorous aspects of life? Why not letting these forces freely evolve, and, along with it, letting them sabotage the conventional regime of intellectuality? But this is not a call for anti-intellectuality – I believe we have to be protective of the precarious intellectual activities of mind and body in the thin air in which we live today. But why not opening doors to a sense of intellectuality implicated in the rhythm that is supposedly hostile to thinking and writing?

bell hooks addresses the decolonization of the mind. But what is the decolonization of the mind? Does it mean, as hooks suggests, to remove all obstacles – some of them internalized – that hinder a marginalized Black woman from entering into the sphere of intellectuality? "Within a White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal social context like this culture," she writes, "no Black woman can become an intellectual without decolonizing her mind" (hooks, 1991: 160). Of course, decolonization is not a process of assimilation, but one of profound transformation of one's subjectivity as well as the structures and institutions within which the production of knowledge takes place. Decolonization requires the courageous modification of the bourgeois ideal of intellectuality.

But we could tackle the question of decolonization also from the other side, from the trajectory of sabotage: Why not counteracting the frameworks, formats and concepts given by the colonizer, the white bourgeois man? Why not letting implode his terms and practices? Stepping to the side instead of taking one step further. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney resort to what they call *study*: “The point about study is that intellectual life is already at work around us. When I think of study, I’m as likely to think about the nurses in the smoking room as I am about the university” (2013: 112), states Harney. In *The Undercommons*, Harney and Moten tear knowledge production out of its traditional setting bound up with the university, books, and the figure of the intellectual. What comes to the fore are modes of being and thinking together uncorrupted by the history of Man:

Study is what you do with other people. It’s talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The notion of the rehearsal – being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory – there are these various modes of activity. The point in calling it “study” is to mark the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activity already present. (Harney and Moten, 2013: 110)

With Harney and Moten, the figure of the intellectual – whether bourgeois-individual or community-oriented – gets displaced by a mode of intellectuality which is co-extensive with the social. It’s helpful to remember that Moten and Harney declare their writing first and foremost indebted to Black women: “And this is so because black women have been for so long theorizing” (2016: 1); it’s a theorizing that barely left an imprint on libraries and archives, but still was and is there. The intellectuality at work in study is not addressed to future generations. It’s made up of bodies and affects assembling in the present moment – even in most unfavorable settings as the assembly line of the factory. Study is the collective production of desires and intensities that can be said to happen if the irreducible relationality is actualized in a doing – in the magic moment in which the illusory fortress of the individual is punctuated and torn apart by the contagious cohesion of the social.

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