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Improvised Lives
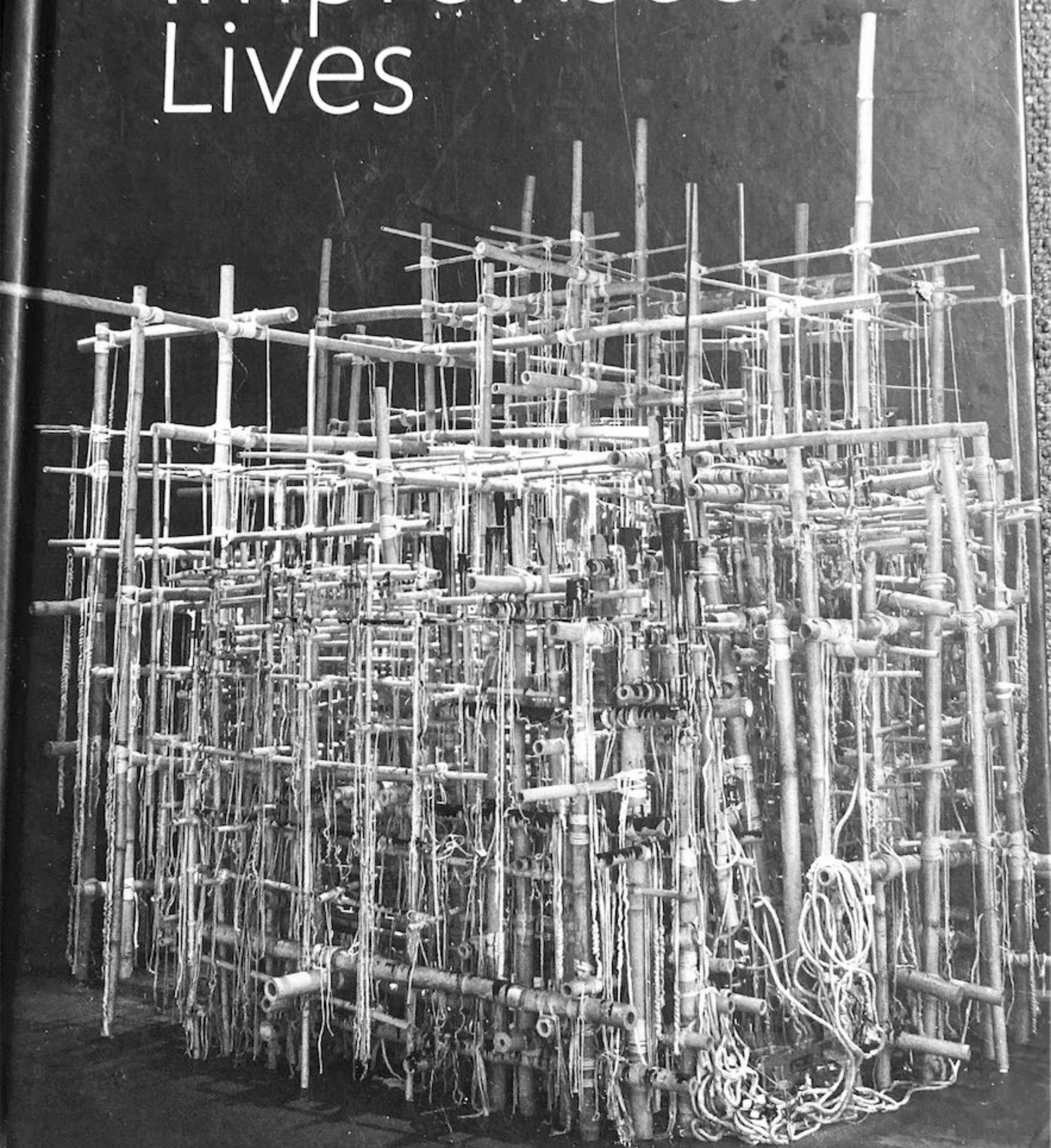
I
The Uninhabitable

The uninhabitable: those "lands of no one" (McKittrick 2013: 6). Lands that embodied inferiority and, once appropriated and settled through colonization, were further specified as the exclusive purview of those whose emplacement was to be considered "incongruous with humanness" (McKittrick 2013: 7). Katherine McKittrick asks, in the context of the plantation, whether or not that which was defined as lifeless perhaps points to simply a different form of life embedded in a range of "secretive histories" (2013: 10).

How we live is finally not that important; that we live is...
(Moten 2017: 191)

It hurts to live always undone and unfinished. It is heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking even when the impossibility is joyful or you catch a glimpse of a life outside that inflexible weight. (McKittrick and Weheliye 2017: 28)

Districting Somewhere

For several decades, my stepdaughter has occupied a two-room flat in a dreary mass of apartment blocks in

the Algiers suburb, Les Eucalyptus. She is fond of pointing out that she lives in a world on her own surrounded by glassy-eyed neighbors with far-away looks. They are not really there; they do not adhere to any script, she says. Their eyes are on prizes somewhere else. Each neighbor has different destinations in mind. Even when they navigate the same routines of drudgery, going to useless jobs, to markets short on everything, and to municipal buildings rife with conspiracies, they never take the same steps twice; they always alter the route.

Even on the single hallway in her building of chipped concrete, the dealers, the Salafists, and those who are devout about nothing in particular don't so much carve out territory but allow paths to be constantly crossed so that there is nothing recognizable to defend. If the police and their bevy of hangers-on report infractions, then the proliferation of possible mistakes that residents make never repeating the same routine twice turn everyday life into something nearly impossible to police. Yet simple courtesies and signs of respect are offered no matter how profound the fundamental disagreements about the basic life orientations. The repetition of prayer, intoxication, petty scams, and household chores induces a haze of tolerance, allowing the most minimal of actions to provoke small but pliable alterations in the unfolding of a day or night and the prospects or dangers this might bring.

All of the residents are convinced of big people behind the scenes. They can even sometimes name names. But they are also skeptical of their convictions. Ever attentive of each other, regardless of whoever they have thrown their lot in with, the profusion of words, gossip, stories, and impressions make up their bets on shaping the near future, indifferent though they may be as to what that future actually consists of.

For, in such districts, existing under permanent suspicion and suspension, it is important to manufacture

evidence that can be sifted through for clues that point to culprits in all directions; where the attentiveness of gazes, so vital to keep everyone in line, can't look everywhere at once, and so small gaps open for a quick deal, a quick fuck, a quick way out. This is not a world, my stepdaughter says, that is inhabitable.

Those who wear the pants may be weakly united in their need to occupy the public sphere, to mark out a domain amidst a landscape of dilapidated cafés, mechanic sheds, and tin-can-laden corner groceries. But Les Eucalyptus is a district of endless favors, sincere and feigned respect for those with the semblance of any kind of connection. Silently, the occasional young woman keeps her head down, resists the temptations of domestic dramas and household problem solving to finish enough school to get salaried somewhere. The financing for a new mosque or two may suddenly appear from disputed sources, but the pipes in most flats leak and often run dry. There are few repairs. Neighbors hear everything and know little about what to make of it.

Again, it is not that collective denial or stasis rules. For despite the stereotypes, the public and private are subject to oscillating inversions. Sitting in a café may be the only opportunity to be alone, even when, especially at night, all of the tables are taken. "Holding up the walls," as is the common expression for unemployed men, may indeed actually hold something up, as in intercept, block, or sustain. For the walls that divide domestic spaces, the purview largely of women, are not just porous sieves of information but marks of complex geographies where bonds and cuts in webs of lateral relations are made.

All of the doors that open and close a hundred times a day where nothing tangible seems to be exchanged, all of the stairs that are climbed up and down even when no doors are opened, all of the turning of the next

corner, the hesitations between school, shop, mosque, and home, all of the shared taxis hailed to reach the next kilometer, all make up the rhythms whereby Les Eucalyptus is turned inside out and back.

The question of holding is important. No matter how improvised, lives need to be held, supported. They need a somewhere in which to take place, and places need to be assessed in terms of what they are able to hold. But to hold easily mutates into a form of capture, and if urban life comes to depend upon improvisation, the holding cannot take the form of a strictly notated score. It cannot keep a strict count; it can't make some lives count more or less than others. For when improvisation takes off, one direction cannot count as more generative than any other; this uncertainty is part of the risk of such composition. Additionally, a somewhere must hold the "secretive histories" that McKittrick refers to in the chapter's opening lines; it must hold a darkness that provides cover for experiments residents may initiate but are not yet ready to commit fully to. A somewhere must proportion exposure and opacity.

So, improvised lives require a somewhere, and in this book I will look at this somewhere as *districts*, as places capable of holding an intensive heterogeneity of lives and ways of doing things, but which also do not hold residents down to specific regimens of discipline or anticipation. Rather, they attempt to hold residents to each other just enough to enable an atmosphere of mutual witnessing, to hold residents to an ethic of letting others go their own way without that way being seen as having dire implications for anyone else. Residents are then held in an atmosphere of things continuously being worked out and proportioned. An atmosphere of countervailing, complementary, and incommensurable measures that gives rise to a specific, yet changing sense of place.

This is a book situated in districts. Or more, precisely, it is a book about *districting*. By districting, I mean a process of creating a platform for operating in the world using a repertoire of available classifications and administrative categories to set out a terrain that is then turned into something that exceeds all efforts to definitively pin it down, to contain what it can do. This surfeit of experience provides the opportunity for residents to write themselves into a milieu that otherwise might seem to marginalize them and their ways of doing things. It is a process that aims less to make a particular place inhabitable than it does to enable residents to spiral in and out, propel themselves into the larger urban surrounds and then bear back down again into the familiar places now rendered unfamiliar. It is the creation of a rhythm of itineraries that are themselves uninhabitable.

Let us take a well-known example of districting in the work of Sun Ra. For Sun Ra, going back in time, Egypt was the touchstone for what would become a complex interweaving of mythology, numerology, space travel, theosophy, Black nationalism, and the occult. Nominally a jazz musician who managed huge "arkestras" over a long career that folded in every type of music and sound imaginable, Sun Ra's commitment was to a "Black knowledge society" – a technical capacity for going into the future as an extra-planetary urbanization. While the metaphors of Saturn and outer space permeated the representations of such an urbanization, what was intended beyond such metaphors was the technical realization of the imaginations and capacities Blacks honed in their great migration to the cities of the North from the hardscrabble rural tenancies of the South and the repressive Jim Crow practices that sought to keep them at the peripheries of Southern towns and cities.

This movement between the mythic pasts of Blackness and its future realization beyond the earth seemingly unable to accommodate it was Sun Ra's persistent practice of districting. But he was also engaged in much more prosaic efforts in this regard. When Sun Ra showed up in Chicago after the Second World War, there had already been several decades where Blacks of different residential histories and class backgrounds had worked hard to use the sheer presence of Black bodies in the city – their looks, voices, movements, rhythms, appetites, sexualities, and strivings – to build economies that enabled some measure of autonomy from subservience and resistance to marginalization. Racialized apparatuses of control came down hard on these efforts, and Sun Ra encountered a Chicago that put a squeeze on trade unions, the political left, radical organizations, as well as outlets of popular culture – show venues, media, and radio.

It was at this point that the emphasis on Black knowledge as technical operations took hold in Sun Ra's project. Black people did not go through all they went through just in order to be integrated into the terms of an American society that did everything possible to keep them out. After having acquired a substantial history of being in cities, of proving that there could be something like a "Black city" itself, extra-ordinary, "extra-planetary" efforts were required in order to concretize these attainments.

From street pamphleteering, small book imprints, records, and performances that crossed swing, bop, blues, show tunes, and experimental improvisation, appearances at strip clubs, weddings, concert halls, street parties, jazz clubs, circuses, and universities, and the intersection of intensive musical and philosophical experimentation with novelty entertainment and nods to the full gamut of Black associational life, Sun Ra and

his large bands and associates tried to become a *district* in themselves. This was not just improvised expression, but a process of intensive study (Sites 2012).

For Sun Ra, then, districting referred to an incessantly inventive practice of operating in the discontinuities between having a location in which one is identified and from which one can identify and speak to others *and* the capacity to address others, call upon them, and implicate them beyond the specificity of any location. As such, Egypt did not hold anything in itself, it was not a promise ready to spring into any kind of revolutionary action, but more a device that could relay the knowledge Sun Ra said that Blacks needed toward aspirations that continuously had to find different masks under which to operate, and also away from the strict codifications of what could be counted. For Sun Ra, it didn't matter that much if Black people were missing from inhabiting American urban life; what was more important was that they went "missing in action."

A Human Surge

Amidst the competing choruses of exaggeration and indifference, of longings for extinction and desperate boosts of immune systems, something surges forward and back. The surge is both power failure and inexplicable excess; it jumps scales while sometimes eliminating anything to fall back on. It is a strange rhythm neither reconcilable to ancient cyclic times nor acceleration. This is a rhythm perhaps best exemplified in Eduardo Williams' film, *The Human Surge* (2016). Wavering indiscernibly between documentary and fiction, youth in Buenos Aires, Maputo, and Isla Bohol (Philippines) are depicted as incessantly in motion, seemingly aimless even as many of them have steady jobs. They search for

free Wi-Fi hotspots, Internet cafés, and ways to turn online activity into money.

In the first two cities, young men attempt to modulate the willful exposure of their bodies on Internet sites that offer particular amounts of money to see flesh. They are not good at this game, and they don't care. The recesses of the web do not hold their attention as much as do the prolific spaces of relative abandonment and infrequent visitation that dot their cities but that are not yet ruins. They talk about obscure theories of genomes and mathematics, witchcraft and far-off galaxies, the possibilities of pre-natal memories and future predilections, moving from one quick obscure observation to another. Impossible to stand still, always equipped with cellphones, but sometimes fixated on the slightest shift in light, in the movements of ants, the film's youth constantly engage a domain larger than the immediate surrounds even as they seemingly occupy a marginal position within it.

Here, the surge as rhythm emerges from attempts to reach beyond the confines of limited places and routines, and yet retains a microscopic view of the constantly surprising details about the places that could be left behind. This is a rhythm of endurance, of surging forward and withdrawing. It is not a rhythm of endless becoming nor of staying put; it is making the most of the "hinge," of knowing how to move and think through various angles while being fully aware of the constraints, the durability of those things that are "bad for us" (Stoler 2016).

For, as Williams' film clearly demonstrates, individuals always have to work out a sense of proportionality, even when things cannot be made proportionate in any clear, definitive way. What is it about themselves and their capacities which are to be extended to particular others and what do these acts of self-extending indicate

about what is being withheld, in part, as a lure to incite the engagement of others? This working out of proportionality is not merely the calculations of self-interest. It is also the sculpting of a field of affordances that shape the connections, interdependencies, and autonomies persons conceive and operationalize with each other. So, any notion of the *social* is always "out of joint," never assumed as a stabilized whole. Rather, it is an ongoing deformation of systemic entities, as individuals are the carriers of social affordances and memory, and societies are the parts of ongoing transformations of personhood (Corsín Jiménez 2008) – a scale without scale.

Such scale without scale can be seen across many Southern districts of the urban poor, where the South becomes something to be crossed, a "cross to bear," a something "over there" that bears weighty appellations: "We are the ones that God forgot," "We have become dogs," or "This is the middle of nowhere." These are targeted populations (Parks 2016), ones that must be kept in line by being forgotten or kept in the crosshairs, or in analyses where hairsplitting questions about "what are these populations really?" prevail. The appellations deem these spaces uninhabitable, not fit for human habitation, environments full of toxicity and violence, fast and slow.

But in these designations, there is a certain detachment, a detachment from the imperative to compare, to be viewed within the hierarchies of sufficiency or sustainability. If God has truly forgotten these places, then perhaps there is a kind of freedom not to be remembered by or incorporated into God's analytics. For in environs full of everyday catastrophe, the only way to live with it is to attain some indifference, where all that which is capable of producing an unjustifiable or unnecessary death – when each death is necessary and therefore justified – is flattened out. Where it becomes an even

surface that carries the marks of every event, but at the same time does not distinguish among them.

The very conditions that would seem to condemn residents to obvious hardship take on, in such a detachment, a more minimal operation (Laruelle 1999) in that they no longer solely point to that hardship but simply are what they are, and thus able to become elements of a broader sense of interactions. They become marks without meaning, lines of scarification on bodies prepared for battle, prayer, sex, and repose – not only the death to which they seem normatively consigned.

We may see many of the world's urban districts as uninhabitable. But is what makes them uninhabitable only the obvious conditions of violence, oppression, and toxicity that are their predominant characterizations? What if something else were at work? What if, besides being a descriptor of the ways in which these districts are scenes of a crime, a crime against the humanity of their residents, the uninhabitable was also a method, not one necessarily chosen by residents, but rather something converted into a method from the shards of broken lives and broken infrastructures that make up a district's heritage. What if the uninhabitable enabled a kind of thinking that challenged or refused what it means to viably inhabit a place? What if it was a method to more fully understand the *rhythms of endurance*, the surges of life that carry bodies forward and back between destinations that are altered in each approach, each retreat? So here I want to explore the uninhabitable as a method to think about these *rhythms of endurance*.

A Lure for (Yet) Another South

In terms of its role as method, I want to look at the uninhabitable as a lure, how it draws one into a place

and situation in a way that does not describe or account for it. Rather, it pulls one into its shifting terrain, fuzzy boundaries, its vibrations and rhythms that cannot be contained by any spatial structure. No component, no entity of the place stands out more than any other. Mud walls, broken concrete, oil spills, toxic fumes, riven bodies, stomped feet, wild gestures, attentive gazes – all of these elements dance with each other as curling smoke, momentary anthems, sometimes embracing each other as repeated refrains in the cold mornings and anxious nights. Everything is packed into a density of contact, of the discrepant rubbing up against each other in multiple frictions, sparks that ignite chain reactions, the webs of many crammed causations looking out for any possible vehicle of release. The heterogeneous shapes and economies of poor and working-class districts, segmented and distinctly inscribed across urban fabrics though they may be, make up specific machines. These machines produce contexts along the way, along the way of things passing through each other, of bodies passing by, of failed lives passing out of view, of scenarios and conclusions passing into something else.

The explorations of this book largely concern what was formerly known as the Global South, a world within a world that has disappeared as a world, if it ever indeed was a world. Perhaps the South was a world by default. It was the forcible enclosure wrought by a head without a body, then looking for a body anywhere, as the impetus for colonization, a practice that destroyed worlds by assuming natives did not have any (Neyrat 2016). So, to deem something uninhabitable was to make it available to interventions of all kinds, and particularly interventions that would operate at a distance, that sought to affect things by being removed from them; to operate as a body in the abstract; to manipulate but not feel (Satia 2014).

So the South I want to invoke here is a South not so much as a conceptual designation, not so much a residue of political aspiration or legacy, but something closer to science fiction, something made up as it goes along, not dissimilar to the chronopolitics of the Afrofuturists. This long-standing series of projects by Black people to write themselves into a future foreclosed to them cycles back in time in order to recuperate materials, unreal yet enduring fictions, to imagine non-human futures devoid of racial tropes.

All passages, to avoid becoming voids of the middle, still have to take place along corridors. They still need vehicles of transit, for even djinns and ghosts have geographies. And so the South becomes latitude defined not so much by common colonial demise or recuperation, not so much by a look or a specific modality of sensuousness, but a form of passage, of residents trying to reach each other even if they may have only vague ideas about each other. In the *Human Surge*, youthful men in Buenos Aires and Maputo become dimly aware of each other. Through the ongoing commodification of their black and brown bodies, they become aware of being in the same boat.

Of course, there are many "Global Souths" (Robinson 2016). Some are extensions of old and new imperial powers, some are emerging imperial or, at least, dominant regional powers as well. Some Southern cities far exceed in technical capacity anything concretized in the "North." Construction booms rest uneasily with deepening impoverishment; spectacular built environments are coupled with intense predation; socioeconomic inequalities can be staggering. Cities are torn between becoming mirrors of everywhere and amplifying a distinctiveness that sometimes proves to be simply the repetition of an injunction to be different. Oscillating conjunctions

based on religion, race, language, and regional identity provide signature architectures of circulation and enclosure. Financial investments penetrate nearly everywhere, with high-risk investments in "dangerous" atmospheres promising the inordinate riches that have long characterized supposedly remote or empty regions. Populations at risk are increasingly seen as such because they fail to take on sufficient volumes of the right kind of risk. Development curves can simultaneously fall below and exceed all expectations.

Urbanization is replete with spatial operators, where space is an informational system equipped with routines, formats, and formulas that generate repeatable products such as housing developments, industrial zones, consumption, and leisure centers. Combined with proliferating digital technologies, urban spatial production becomes subject to forms of calculation that circumvent political negotiation, infuse places with a surfeit of trends and possibilities that require narrow bands of expertise to sort out (Easterling 2016).

At the same time, hyperlocal networks and apps are collaboratively designed to enable peer communities to advance local interests by sharing human and physical resources. Urbanization is something increasingly characterized by open source autonomous logistics infrastructure, technologies to mitigate anthropogenic effects on climate, an expanding urban sensorium of interlinked sensors registering data at more fine-grained temporalities, and interoperable data. It seems increasingly difficult to discern a specifically human surge.

Yet, despite these developments, there is a "South" that concerns how residents pass in and out of all of the histories that attempt to generalize them, such as the appellations that saw Mumbai, Jakarta, Salvador, and Lagos as "Black cities," or that saw specific urbanities as "informal" or predominated by slum conditions. So

here, the South is the concretization of the simultaneous emergence and impossibility of worlding, of a concrete darkness that provides a home for impossible socialities that nevertheless assume an inscription, materialize lines of flight, attack, and articulation "grooving" the terrain.

The Evening of Spiraling Darkness

In the scores of working-class districts within which I have worked and lived over the past decades, there may be a straightforward and incremental line of progress in living conditions that has been attained when measured as an aggregate of life trajectories. But when broken down as stories of individual and household lives over the course of time, this aggregate of progress has been realized through wild fluctuations in these very individual stories, of often inexplicable ups and downs, stories of sudden accumulation and loss, luck and catastrophe that have dispossessed individuals of stable orientations and operational platforms, that have pushed people far and wide, as well as pushed others into narrow crevices. That which would seem to tear a district apart is sometimes at work as its guarantor of a plausible statistical mean. And sometimes districts are simply torn apart, especially when simple "meanness" dominates, where the "mean" is one barrio boss with an empty taco shell left standing.

All then seem to be evened out in an analytical gaze that pitches itself to some average story, that gathers up all of the statistical indices possible to assign to these oscillations, which considers communities marching in step along one route, one line. Progress becomes the normalization of sharing protocols and algorithmic design that figures its way across large data sets in order to support locational decisions, balance urban

processes, and maximize economic multiplier effects and sustainability.

The economic entity – the district, community, or region – that progresses is constituted through these measurements as a collective subject. But it is a subject not made up of stable components, but rather components that are passing through each other at different speeds and capacities – some on the way "up," some on the way "down," and some entrained in more circuitous routings. So that the individual identity pointed to in the story of that collective subject is itself "re-routed" into a more linear narrative, a kind of shape-shifting made up of fluctuating disjunctions between the deployment of "I" as some kind of stable referent and its shifting uses as pointing to a varied manifestation in different contexts (Gerlitz and Lury 2014; MacKenzie 2015). The collective attainment is not one of a collection of clearly defined individuals "but a moving (exchange) ratio, of more-and-less-than ones, in which authenticity, belief, doubt and speculation are the always contingent outcome of a serial calibration of signal and noise, interference and (un)certainty" (Lury 2018).

In these districts of the poor and working class across the South where I have worked, significant dimensions of the "lives" of the elements that make up these districts then appear to address no specific concerns or targets. They conjoin rhythms of occasions and practices not easily attributed to any single person or thing. They are rather shifters in a complex politics that may use the occasion of specific enunciations actualized in particular circumstances to create contexts for bringing provisional collectives to life, ones that don't pin down their constituents to overbearing judgments or histories. These contexts enable endurance, not for the durability of clearly knowable entities that must be defended or liberated at all costs, but for endurance to be something

that is felt, where what was aspired to, what was sacrificed for, what was the compelling imagination of all the strivings and hard work of care is not lost.

In circumstances of intense volatility and uncertainty – circumstances that characterize many urban districts across the South – it is important for residents not to draw too much attention to themselves, to not stand out, particularly if they enjoy advantages that others may not have, if they prompt envy or exude a constant sense of dependency. At the same time, residents cannot be viewed as simply adding to the repetition of an endless grind of drudgery and dissolution. They cannot situate themselves as merely expendable, a surplus of suffering. They must become a small niche of exception, of adding something different to the fabric of mere survival but in such a way as to be able to control the demands made of this singularity, always vulnerable to depletion. How to calibrate these measures of dissimilitude and daring, these efforts to blend in and to exceed that norm, where each maneuver risks a debilitating cost, could easily flip to its other side? How to not get double bound by the exigency to play things "both ways"?

These require astute observations that involve multiple angles, require particular ways of moving through grimy lanes, overbearing domestic disputes, random violence, and the ideology of the street. The lives of residents must ramify, but in ways not easily traced back to them but which nevertheless open corridors for these same residents to keep moving. Here, experiments to make something happen spiral out and in, bear down and ramify outwards, not in clear direct channels of affecting, but in wavy, circuitous lines. This does not simply offer an approximate description of the way resident maneuvers ramify, but also point to the incessant search for positions from which to observe the swarm of these maneuvers across the landscape of apparent

drudgery and danger. It is seeking positions where a person becomes more than one and less than two.

Here, what would seem to render everything about a particular district just one more piece of toxicity becomes a strategic device to occlude the lengths that residents go to in order to observe something differently, something tentative and momentary. Thus domestic workers in rich households, janitors in multinational headquarters, security guards in research installations, drivers of the elite, toilet cleaners in airports, enforcers for local politicians, rogue police, mechanics affixing false compartments on delivery trucks, pirate electricity connectors, cardsharps, Pentecostal pastors, button stitchers, sewer technicians, shamans, fabricators, counterfeiters, and hackers all spiral around each other and their respective places of operation.

In their dancing around and with each other, they destabilize and articulate, enfold and detach. They are simultaneously the substrate of all urban productivity and the detritus. While it is unjust that so many must stake their sustenance on complex collaborations, actions vulnerable to breakage, excess demands and hopes, and that involve too many variables, it is also unjust to reduce the work that does get done to simple generalizations about predation.

Whenever this substrate of residents can convert their abstract sense of not being alone, of not being suspended in the precarity of their jobs behind the wheel, besides the switch, cleaning the corridors of power, into a felt sense of solidarity, they might trip up the entire "show." Nothing in their behaviors is aligned, matched up for sure. Nothing rules anything out definitively in rhythms of incessant turbulence. They might not bring down the city, but they are in most respects able to bring down the city to the requirements of their makeshift economies that effect a modest but real redistribution of goods and

services to their residencies otherwise formally cut off or excessively disciplined.

These are not matters of "spontaneous flow" but of calibration and measure. It is about residents passing by, measuring themselves up along whatever is momentarily gathered, employing all kinds of makeshift measures to regulate proximity and distance. Measures consist of many devices, ways of seeing, and calculating, many operating according to a "strange" mathematics. Rhythm is produced from these measures, from the efforts of the connected and disconnected to create refrains, momentary stabilities that offer up a repertoire of vernaculars, gestures, and sensibilities that can then be taken up to twist and turn a place into some malleable yet steady arena for people to pay attention to each other, engage each other, or not.

A built environment is shaped from and for various itineraries of movement. It is anticipated and parsed into varying measures and used by different constellations and densities of actors and things. It is a built environment that generates a rhythm of both convergence and detachment. This convergence and detachment is increasingly aided and abetted by home-grown "cosmotechnics" (Hui 2016b) – autoconstructed telephony networks, YouTube-disseminated realities, self-built condo timeshares, conditional cash transfers, moneyless credit systems, and rough-hewn blockchain-ledgered accountability. The slums are full of machines.

Detachment offers some protection against a porosity that brings too many things to bear on any place or occasion. The irony of toxicity is that it sometimes affords the stability of predictable, ongoing social interchange, and production of a supportive interior for the continuity of a set of social ties. Polluted streams and industrial stink can sometimes create virtuous boundaries. For, too many crossroads end up pushing things aside. At the

same time, too many firm enclosures atrophy the competencies of residents. Suture and detachment have to be taken, but there are no clear equal measures, opening and closing is always a risk (Roberts 2017).

Composition and Refusal

The rhythms of endurance are not about the resilience of human life, about the never-ending resourcefulness of a subaltern imagination. It is not about a virtuous general ecology that, in the end, works out a functional recalibration of elements each diminished in their own terms, each insufficient to the replenishment of the other. Rather, in a rupture of organicity (Wills 2016), endurance also entails the actions of bodies indifferent to their own coherence, where bodies proliferate a churning that staves off death in their extension toward a liveliness of things in general, and where bodies become a transversal technology, as gesture, sex, gathering, and circulation operate as techniques of prolonging.

How many actions are undertaken seemingly indifferent to the survival of the subject that undertakes them, which instead takes these subjects under? When bodies speak, spit, stomp, fuck, gesture, lunge, or hover, they become technical forces, and, as such, bodies are conveyors of artifice that may represent nothing in particular. Intersections of this artifice, gestures crossing gestures, are not measures of what bodies do, not practices of bordered bodies acting within specific environments. Rather, they amplify the dispersal of intensities across various places, where everyday experience is not something holed up in some makeshift protective encasing called the house, however it might be constructed, but all of the ways residency was instantiated under radars, in provisional layouts, in mass-produced real

estate schemes or improvised shelters. The form of residing is always a desperate punctuation of a crossing of undomesticated forces that cannot be measured by income levels, personality tests, medical exams, or means testing.

Here the uninhabitable is that constant refrain that seeks to create contexts of operation that cannot be stabilized as points of anchorage, as settlements to inhabit, even though the refrain, itself, is a stabilizing repetition. It is rather a decoupling of home from habitation, the making of a home that cannot extend itself into any discernible horizon and that, instead, must be discarded or carried on backs or become the guiding source of imagination. For the intersections among spiraling trajectories are a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011), inexplicable care, rogue care, care on the run, a tending not to people or by people, but a care that precedes them. It is a care that makes it possible for residents to navigate the need to submit and exceed, submerge themselves into a darkness in which they are submerged but to read its textures, its tissues, to see something that cannot be seen. It enables them to experience the operations of a sociality besides, right next to the glaring strictures of their obligations, expulsions, and exploitation, something that enables endurance, not necessarily their own endurance as human subjects, but the endurance of care indifferent to whatever or whoever it embraces.

This is a process that entails both composition and refusal. To use the example of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, it is a matter of composing the conditions that facilitate improvisation and dialogue among the players. It is also the creation of a platform that not only enfolds bits and pieces of the legacies of Black music and their interfaces with multiple soundscapes, notations, and institutions, but compresses, distorts, and stretches them to release an untold energy that propels a different

kind of "message for our folks," a different trajectory of historical time. Here, the "people of sorrow" are addressed with the gathering up of laments, invocations, assertions, pleas, prayers, lullabies, trances, and exultations that assumed various modalities, which were the emanations of particular circumstances and then reworked, rewoven with a vast range of instrumentation into a home without home.

The cut, the earthquake in Black music at the beginning of the 1960s, that period which corresponded to a significant postcolonial moment in Africa, was signaled by Coltrane's *Giant Steps* and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. Here was another kind of surge, as Kodowo Eshun (1998) describes the evolution of this cut four years later in 1965, "Ascension's surges, like those on Ornette Coleman's Free Jazz or Egyptian Empire's The Horn, build towards planes when all the horns synch in a power surge, the belching exhaust fumes of a colossal rocket as it tilts into the air like a vertical city."

Within the new compositional and improvisational structures, it was possible to figure out how the ensemble "left home," left the recognizable melody, but nearly impossible to tell how the return home was navigated, back to the familiar chord changes. Joseph Jarman, reed player with the Art Ensemble of Chicago and founding member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, would describes this as a process of "getting carried away." No longer would Black people be interested in pretending that there was a home for Blackness in this world. As Black folk were carried away to America, they would then carry themselves away without destination; they would carry themselves.

Katherine McKittrick (2016) says this act of carrying is a matter of generating rhythms and waveforms that emanate from the densities of heterogeneous activities

and forces, elaborating multiple registers of sound impacting upon neurophysiological circuits that modulate affect, sympathy, and a preparedness to act. Such sonic atmospheres are infrastructures for the enunciation of the exaltation required for collaborative practices – the sense of wonderment and ease required to live-with the ebbs and flows, the constraints and traumas of everyday life.

There is also an element of refusal here, a refusal for exclusionary inclusion, and inclusionary exclusion (Campt 2012). It's the refusal to be a subject to a law that refuses to recognize you. Rights act to absorb the margins into the realm of what is perceived to be normal. The politics of dis-identification is instead about refusing to be represented in a "right" and be accounted for that. It is about non-reductionism. This is what Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) call "outside politics." It is a politics defined not by opposition or necessarily resistance, but instead a refusal of the very premises that have historically negated, for example, the lived experience of Blackness as either pathological or exceptional to the logic of white supremacy.

It is a refusal of a relation that denies composition. Whereas composition entails gradations – more or less timbre, charting, stricture, and improvisation – these gradations are not fixed. The ensemble contributes to the evolution of the sound in ways that don't weigh their relative value. So Jarman's is not a refusal to be composed, because composition retains the relative autonomy of its components. They remain aspects of other compositions. All the characteristics and potentials of the components that go into a composition need not be what they are when they are incorporated into it. What is refused is the fixing, the chaining of elements to a particular compositional structure, the refusal of the imperative to relate.

What is refused is to become solely or primarily a "problem to be solved" or a "people to be liberated or developed." As Marcos Camacho (2017), aka Marcola of Brazil's extra-parliamentary Primer Comando de la Capital, states: "No more proletariat, or unhappy people, or oppressed. There is a third thing growing out there, raised in the mud, educated through sheer illiteracy, getting their own diplomas on the street, like a monstrous Alien hidden under the crevasses of the city. A new language has already sprung. We are at the center of the unsolvable."

The uninhabitable, then, also exists detached from being a problem that needs to be solved, something that permits all of the multitude of small efforts deployed by residents of poor and working-class districts to be something *besides* compensations, impulsive gestures, violent outbursts, or claustrophobic routines. It is also a refusal to participate in institutions which function largely to attribute failure to the behavior of their constituents.

Of course, refusal has its limits given the way that speculative destruction has long constituted the underpinnings of capital accumulation through urbanization (Brenner 2013; Harvey 1989). The production of space itself has become key to capitalist accumulation (Aalbers 2011; Harvey 2012), and urban rent, as the abstraction of the collectively produced heterogeneity of sociality and used as a privately held asset, is one of the most valued commodities (Hardt and Negri 2008). Curated unaffordability, disinvestment, overt erasure, expulsion, segregation, and social disentanglement have long been the familiar tools for making space uninhabitable. They are the all too familiar vocabularies of damming and unleashing urban churn. Huge volumes of cement, bricks, mortar, and steel are deployed to structure the intersections of countervailing forces that always have been what the city is, and then demolished as

insufficient containers of value seeking other venues and calculations. In the interstices of the continual remaking of the built environment as asset, hundreds of millions of residents are suspended in provisional formats of work and residence.

Urban majorities may have always been complicit with such speculative destruction. Yet, in part, this complicity was a by-product of the ways in which the prevailing logics of self-construction, which emphasized continuous adaptations to the inherent volatility of urban life and to the unanticipated implications of the very efforts and initiatives of the majority, were forced into sedentary, defensive maneuvers. They increasingly had to operate through skewed patronage systems and murky political games in order to protect themselves. They were forced to hold too many different activities for too many persons; they often were left to fend for themselves in increasingly hostile policy frameworks and disattentive municipal institutions. They were rendered anachronisms, leftovers, replete with discordant and confusing ways of generating livelihood and habitation. The working and lower middle classes that largely drove the real economy of cities were repeatedly subject to punitive extractions, surveillance, and systematic neglect.

Districts that seemingly exude viable densities of residential, commercial, and public use are then jettisoned for imaginations of a more middle-class lifestyle in faceless vertical developments. Pursuit of increased consumption, belief in security through asset attainment, and a systematic tending to more individualized concerns and aspirations certainly exert substantial spatial reorderings, especially as these aspirations are saddled with debt.

Certainly, there is substantial evidence garnered across urban situations of the incessant and accelerated disentanglement of complex residential ecologies. While

the exigencies of sustainability have indeed produced a wide range of fortuitous calculations – of the design and emplacement of built environments, of viable carbon footprints, material flows and energy use – the inability to make inhabitation work is not a matter of insufficient knowledge but rather political design. It is a continuous parasitic depletion of the capacities of the majority in favor of the conceits of an elite and its shadow world intent upon the circumscription of democratic life and the "desocialization of the common" (Hardt and Negri 2008).

Yet, here too, the majority may refuse any clear organization of sense, refuses any clear disposition of virtuous interests and futures. In many instances it refuses consolidation, and there is no denying the debilitating scenarios that this refusal unleashes. Such prospects remain a vital incentive for political mobilizations aimed at shaping the judicious operations of institutions and infrastructures. Still, a certain detachment from convictions that the virtuous is restored through recognizing our proper place within complex ecologies or jurisdictions may be necessary in order to fully appreciate the ways in which cities are full of many different kinds of forces. These forces do not necessarily rule out the ability of people to stay in place but require such stability to be a function of circular dispersals and returns, of constant exiting and re-entering through side doors.

As Claire Colebrook (2014) argues, inscription (and thus inhabitation) in its most basic maneuver remains the marking of something through its corresponding nothingness, of the civilized against the uncivilized, and so forth. Inscription is the tool of cutting. Once something is defined against what it is not, that "what it is not" is then "cut loose" from that which has been differentiated, no matter how tied it may be to a conceptual, economic, or political dependency. It assumes

the position of utter contingency, the being of anything whatsoever, despite the proliferations of narratives and spatial controls through which that which is differentiated is subjected. At the same time, how, she asks, would we read ourselves if we did not assume some kind of overarching spirit or meaning within whatever is inscribed, but rather like inert lines, like the weathering of a building or the weathering of a storm, as an endurance that persists without sense.

Fugitive Graces

Habitation is supported through shifting ecologies of relation, through analogical substitutions where the elements of conditions of sufficiency can assume different valences, substitutions, and compensations (Barber 2016). The elements making up these relations are elements that express a fundamental "likeness" for each other and underpin their "willingness" to recalibrate their functioning in terms of each other. This is the ecological relationship where differences turn to each other, translate themselves in terms of the other, and over which hangs the specter of an inclusive "we." The weak and the strong, the natural and unnatural – different though they may be – can participate in such a larger frame of commonality. The militancy of the subjugated can always be smoothed over through reference to a common humanity or the operation of translation that frames that militancy as an act of subjectivity, a subjectivity whose features might not be shared but where the capacity to be subject is.

So, what would happen if such analogies were cut? What would a radical detachment look like? A detachment that nevertheless is able to hold many things, but where there is no possibility to discern the differences among those things. Or, a kind of detachment that runs

as a parallel track to relational ecologies, a track that is something else besides (right next to) the incessant imperative to understand how things relate. For detachment also indicates that by the time a certain life at the margins comes to be represented, it has already moved on somewhere else.

At the heart of urban life was the belief in the capacity of the human to operate according to the maximization of its position, and this required a notion of free will, of the ability to act freely amongst otherwise constraining interdependencies (Colebrook 2017). This freedom necessitated relegating certain bodies to the status of property, capable of circulating only through the transactional circuits of economic exchange and valuation. Can, then, any detachment of urban life from this dependency on subjugation be conducted in the language of freedom or autonomy? How might an insistence on freedom and autonomy occlude the ways in which working-class districts manage to maintain conditions that keep precarity at bay? How might it keep us from paying attention to a life of small attainments, modes of sociality embedded in a kind of darkness, difficult to empirically verify?

So, the uninhabitable is the lure that initially draws us into particular kinds of observations aimed at diminishing, devaluing, improving, and redeeming specific conditions of the urban. Yet, under the veneer of these observations and the kinds of realities they constitute runs another surface *besides* them. Here, the conditions viewed as uninhabitable produce a series of maneuvers, thousands of small experiments that attempt to provisionally reconcile the demands that residents submerge themselves into the sensibilities connoted by their destitution or expendability and, at the same time, emerge from those conditions to offer resources and sensibilities that are nothing on their own but are

components of an oscillating tissue, a constantly changing ground of improvised "districts." In these districts, intersections amongst these small projects might take place as the panoply of "strange alliances."

What is created does not so much ground or orient, but constitutes a politics of making home on the run, a form of fugitive graces, where particular operational entities, enfolding the human into something besides itself, come to the fore through practices of care. This is not a world of analogies, not a world where what residents do with each other is easily translatable into some overarching term. It is a care that detaches as much as it connects, for it cares about the way in which residents of poor and working-class districts are forced into particular kinds of structural relationships, made into the labor or saviors in reserve, made to enunciate not only their own impossible habitation but that of the scene of the crime, whether the Capitaloscene or Anthropocene.

Ensemble Work

These different sensibilities of the uninhabitable operate as an ensemble, as an enactment of vision in immediate praxis, as experiment that may not go anywhere, which may easily implode and exist without guarantee. But they are a necessary means of addressing a world of constraint and closure in terms that cut across the coherence of that world. Out of place, they are still capable of "neighborly relations" and "strange alliances." It is an ensemble of music, suggested by actual ensembles, such as the Art Ensemble of Chicago or those of Ornette Coleman.

Chapter 2 of the book thus consists of a series of vignettes that suggest how ensembles constitute a tissue of conceptualization, a quilting of notions, and