Collapse: *An Anthology*

Lizzie Hunt, Ijlal Muzaffar, Jenny Neville, Dimitris Papadopoulos,
Christopher Roberts, Damion Vania

This anthology was published on the occasion of the Center for Complexity's fourth annual symposium, Collapse, held at Rhode Island School of Design from September 21-23, 2022. The authors represented here were commissioned to write short essays and stories on the theme of collapse as part of the CfC's Art and Inquiry grant program. In addition to the work in this volume, the program supported the creation of 13 artworks exploring aspects of collapse, which were exhibited at RISD from September 20 - October 23, 2022. In all, 23 RISD faculty and staff from 12 departments and centers across the College contributed work through this grant.

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— CfC Team

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT
Rhode Island School of Design is built on what is now called College Hill, part of the ancestral homelands of the Narragansett Nation. Indigenous people from many nations—near and far—live, study and work in Providence today. The amplification of Native voices and histories is crucial to rectifying the many violent legacies of colonialism, and we gratefully acknowledge the ongoing critical contributions of Indigenous people across our state, region and nation.

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Collapse
4th Annual Symposium
RISD Center *for* Complexity

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Introduction

Marisa Brown

Collapse has been defined as systemic failure, a breakdown – like obsolescence or extinction, it has been understood to signify an ending on a linear timeline where there is no going back. When we think of collapse, the image that comes to mind for many of us is one of a large building crumbling to the ground, turning to rubble and dust in a matter of minutes. Collapse seems irreversible.

The authors in this anthology were invited to explore collapse at a variety of scales, from tiny organisms to interpersonal relationships; from microstructures to megacities; from social contracts and international agreements to cosmic events. We asked them to consider whether collapse is a natural system, or whether it's a function of our perception and invention; to reflect on the cultural narratives that have been told about collapse; and to imagine new futures that forestall, accelerate, or resist collapse, as the case may be, to bring about a better and more just world. All six of them tackle the theme in different ways, but they share common ground in their insistence that collapse is not always what we think it is, and that the chapter that begins after a collapse may be the most significant part of the story.

Damion Vania opens the collection with "Collapse and Connection," a written time capsule of where we are now as a species, struggling with what he calls "structural fragility," depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Vania, a therapist at RISD, empathizes with the pain so many are feeling, and offers a prescription: connection (with others and with oneself) and community. Christopher Roberts' poetic essay, "Black(Art) as/in Black(Studies) as/in Blur/s as/in Collapse/s as/in Reforging/s as/in…" signals, from

the start, that collapse, like everything in our world, is contingent and constantly changing. Roberts provides close readings of artworks by Aaron Douglas and August Wilson in the context of the Black radical tradition and what Roberts calls "reforging practice."

In "Decolonizing the (Design) Imagination," Ijlal Muzaffar shares a provocative, beautifully written argument urging us to see architecture and design – through their materiality – as witnesses to history (and historical violence, trauma and imperialism) that continue, in the present, to reveal truths that we don't want to recognize, or that have been strategically erased. In this sense, Muzaffar argues, architecture can collapse the line between past and present. Jenny Neville's short story, "After the Cut," explores social constructions of gender binaries in a cathartic narrative about one person's journey through adolescence. Dimitris Papadopoulos addresses border crossings as well in his essay, "Failure Infrastructures: Calculated Collapse and the Global Border Regime," a frontline report on how the language of crisis and "collapse" is used to justify anti-refugee, xenophobic and white supremacist border policies and infrastructures.

And finally, Lizzie Hunt's "What Is Alive? A Collapsing Definition," a fitting conclusion to the anthology, is a sensitive meditation on how we define life, and how arbitrary these definitions can be across ecology, biology, astronomy, geology, and anthropology. Hunt's text has the timeless feel of essays by Enlightenment philosophers three hundred years ago, who similarly pondered the nature of human experience and the limits of knowledge.

We are grateful to these six authors for sharing their unique insights, rhythms and stories. Together, they complicate our simplistic notions of what collapse looks like, and what it does. The authors have been presented in alphabetical reverse order, from Z to A (or V to H). By happenstance, the first two essays start at the "end" of collapse, exploring the generative connections and reforgings that can happen after collapse has occurred, while the last essay looks at beginnings: beginnings of life, of human knowledge, and our efforts to make sense of life. There is a logic to the inversion, as this volume offers a decidedly nonlinear take on collapse.

Collapse and Connection

Damion Vania

Sometimes it seems like the world is collapsing all around us—from environmental crisis to political upheaval to economic injustice…and then there is a global pandemic. I don't need to tell anyone this. I want to posit that the collapse is not only external but internal, that our selves are experiencing collapse, both as a result of and independent of these external forces. This too may be obvious. It's commonplace now to read reports that families live farther apart, more people live alone, a rising number of people say they have no close friends. Loneliness is now called an epidemic in this country, with rates of depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicidality all on the rise. 70 million Americans have chronic sleep problems. Mental health has become more of a concern than ever. Crisis is less of an anomaly and more of a norm.

Do you see yourself in these phenomena? How about the people you love? People in your workplace? People in your community?

Who doesn't feel like they are collapsing in some way at this point? As if your psychic skeleton or circulatory system or muscles or some part is failing you at any moment? As if your brain is bouncing around more than it used to, or should, or is healthy? As if the parts of you designed to scan for danger are too active? As if some state of despair is always ready to descend, maybe, say, at three in the morning when you need to get enough sleep to deal with whatever demands the next day brings? Maybe you feel all of these things, and more.

Too often, when we're in this state of structural fragility, we use maladaptive coping mechanisms.

We make bad decisions. We watch TV all day, scroll on our phones, drink, overeat, soak in our fears. A common thread between all of these gravitational pulls is that they put us in a state of isolation. Also familiar?

What do you think of the idea that the opposite of internal collapse might be connection?

As a species, we are built to be social, or, as psychiatrist Daniel Siegel puts it, our brains are built to be in playful relationship with each other. This tendency originates at birth. Of all the primates, human offspring spend the most time watching their parents. Babies watch their mothers, mirror neurons firing. As language develops, we learn the nuances and complexities of each other's inner lives, deepening our connections with a wider social group. Historically, most of our time was spent in small bands who shared the same culture and beliefs. As communities grew, writing, music, visual arts, and other ways of communicating our experiences more broadly across cultures and time emerged. We have made it as a species by working together to know one another. It's what we have evolved to do.

As a therapist, I work to help people connect with me, with others, and within themselves. All three forms of connection are interdependent—they can reinforce or undermine one another. For example, conversations you have with your therapist can change conversations you have with yourself (or others) and can make change in your own life. If you feel your therapist "sees" you and you still feel unjudged, this can shift how you see yourself and how you interact with others. When we are not connected with ourselves, we are not connected with others, and this becomes a negative feedback loop. When we are not connected, we take on negative perceptions of ourselves, which can lead to treating ourselves and others in ways that misalign with our values.

To help people connect with me, I utilize a variety of approaches, theoretical models, and strategies that best fit with how my client sees their own issues and problems. The more I attune the language we use to their way of understanding, the more effective our work together can be. I also work with people to identify what has occurred in their lives that have created patterns of thoughts, behaviors, and belief systems that do not serve them. Through a shared understanding of problems and causes, and through a relational connection and trust that is built through inquiry, we work together to seek a greater connection to their values, to the self, to others, and to the world around them.

When someone comes into my office, I always assess how connected they feel with others—and how much they keep up those connections. How close are you with your friends here? How close are you with your friends back home? How close are you with your family? It's a great predictor of the speed and type of work we will be doing. How we see ourselves is in large part related to how we are reflected back to ourselves by people who care about us. If that reflection is a positive one, we need to hold onto it. Essentially, if we are well connected with others, those people may become part of the scaffolding that will prevent collapse.

As for fostering connection with themselves, I keep an ear out for beliefs that people carry with them that are based on inaccuracies or on an old understanding of things that happened to them long ago. We all carry around belief systems that we formed at a time when our mental or emotional maturity caused us to mislabel and misconstrue. These inaccurate assumptions provoke us to use language that can continue patterns of shame, self-critique, and disconnection. Often those harmful stories we tell about ourselves and the world lead to a collapse in functioning and connection.

This pattern can start early. Developmentally, when children are young, having a caregiver who is unreliable, inconsistent, or abusive is such a difficult concept to fathom that often children will turn the blame inward. They make assumptions about what they are lacking or doing wrong, as that is preferable and easier to tolerate and understand than the reality that their caregiver is failing them. This is why parents who are divorcing are told to make sure the children know it's not their fault. When people move through their lives carrying these incorrect and unhelpful assumptions, it can cause higher rates of anxiety and depression, and prevent connecting with others.

A few theoretical frameworks in psychology use the metaphor of parts of the self as a way to see suffering and mental health. The idea is that there are different parts of ourselves that have different needs and viewpoints, and getting those parts to work together, like a family or a circle of friends, is a way to help people be easier on themselves and find ways forward. In this way the different parts of ourselves—with their different viewpoints and motivations—could be in connection with each other, allowing us to be a more integrated whole who can interact more fully with others.

In my work, I see fighting against internal collapse and toward embodied engagement with ourselves, other people, and the world as a priority. Working against internal collapse is not always simple or easy. It often takes time, effort, and persistent, patient practice. In our society, we seem to think that the more we want to change the more we have to self-flagellate, which is in fact the opposite of what we need.

But how do we reprioritize cultivating relationships, friendships, communities, when we are swirling in different ways internally? How do we reflect on our own connectivity, on who and what we're connected with and how that does—or doesn't—reflect our personal cultures and values? Resisting what stops us from being present, continually working on real listening, seeing how we treat ourselves in ways that do not serve us, just working on being kind to others—all are ways forward.

There is also great power in telling people what is inside us—the ideas and feelings and thoughts that we too often soak in alone. By saying them out loud to a witness, we change our relationship to them. I think of the quote from the Gnostic Gospels, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

Ultimately, though, we all have to figure all of this out for ourselves. When I work with people, I can't make assumptions about their experiences,

their perspectives, their lives, or their values. We search for their answers together. What are your answers? How do you do it? I'm not giving people more responsibility, more work to do, more liability to hold, but rather an invitation to build on what I imagine they are already doing—to prioritize more connection with others, in their own way, and to conceive of how they can push themselves, try harder, and risk more to build those connections.

I can only answer for myself. For me, connection is a daily practice—staying genuinely curious, being kind in small ways to people I know and don't know. I also believe that play and fun are much more powerful forces than they are given credit for, and that rigor and productivity are overvalued. In my life I try to create traditions that bring people together in ways that invite more play, both with my immediate family and my larger communities.

I recognize these ideas are well-known to many. And, still, so many of us struggle to put them into practice. We search for new, innovative ideas to save us or change our lives, but it is often the older, simpler ideas we already carry with us that can create the greatest change. The painter Ray Ortner once said, "Art is not a cleverness contest, it's an honesty contest—the capacity to truly be that thing that you are. There is nothing as old and tiresome as human novelty: there's nothing as immediate and as new as that which is most ancient."

Maybe the same can be said for ideas on how to be a human that is working on not collapsing.

In the larger collapses we are witnessing and experiencing, and with the collapses that are coming, our alliances will save us. Without each other, what do we have?

Black(Art) as/in Black(Studies) as/in Blur/s as/in Collapse/s as/in Reforging/s as/in...

Christopher Roberts

INTRODUCTION

We find ourselves in a world that needs to end, so that something otherwise may begin, again.

The two artists highlighted in this essay—Aaron Douglas and August Wilson—hail from different generations, with work that overlaps even more generations. But what is a generation? Malcolm Harris, in *Kids These Days: Human Capital* and the *Making of Millennials*, writes, "Since they aren't strictly defined, generations are characterized by crises, by breaks of one kind or another. Wars, revolutions, market crashes, shifts in the mode of production, transformations in social relations: These are the things generations are made of, even if we can only see their true shape in the rearview mirror."[1] I posit that these crises manifest as a clamor of distinct yet interwoven collapses experienced by people in and across time. Especially as it pertains to Black people, for whom being in *the crisis*[2] is constitutive of their beingness. Blackness blurs the generational, insisting on framings that extend beyond ideas of "lost," "greatest," "boomer," "millennial," or any alphabetical demarcation. Instead, this essay will use formulations such as "New Negro Movement," "Great Migration," and "Nadir" among others. Harris' concept is helpful here because it encourages us not to seek out a rigidly defined border, but rather examine what rose and what fell...what collapsed and what was reforged.

A collapse that was not bequeathed to Black people by a benevolent white populace, but rather a collapse instantiated by the enslaved. W.E.B. Du Bois articulated this presciently in *Black Reconstruction* when he wrote, "It was the fugitive slave who made the slaveholders face the alternative of surrendering to the North or the Negroes. It was this plain alternative that brought Lee's sudden surrender. Either the South must make terms with its slaves, free them, use them to fight the North…or they could surrender to the North."[3] It is that orientation to freedom that guides this essay, a text in search of ceremonies of black reforging, scouring the terrain of black life seeking what Cedric Robinson and Joshua Myers have termed "that noise, to see the ways that this noise has been, at root, what we are."[4]

THE NEGRO SPIRITUAL, AARON DOUGLAS

Aaron Douglas, *The Negro Spiritual* Gouache on illustration board, 1930, 50.2 x 72.4 cm (19 11/16 x 28 1/2 inches) irregular, 82.188.2 (RISD Museum)

The collapse of chattel slavery as the driving force of the nation was simultaneously the catalyst for a reforging of self for Black people in the United States. The first generation to come up from slavery as Booker T. Washington described it, emerged "with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write…determined to achieve educational self sufficiency,"[6] focused on reconnecting their families, communities, contributing to society, and making their own way. That way, for some was in the land of their enslavement, for others it was in the motherland or another diasporic elsewhere. The subsequent generation, sired by the failures of the so-called reconstruction and codification of Jim Crow, unwelcome as citizens to the nation into which they had supposedly been "freed" decided they

would build a "nation within a nation"unto themselves, as foretold by Martin Delaney decades prior. The third generation in this cycle, disenchanted by what they saw as the stagnation of the "Old Negro," opted for "a new, dynamic phase, the buoyancy from within…will have added the motives of self-expression and spiritual development to the old and still unfinished task of making material headway and progress." Aaron Douglas comes from this generation, and in his mural studies are the embers of this ceremony of black reforging, the *FIRE*!![7] if you will.

Aaron Douglas lent his acuity for drawing and illustration to countless projects of the time, everything from *The Crisis* to *FIRE!!* to collaborations with Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Charles Douglas, the NAACP, and the Barnes Foundation among others. That said, the extant scholarship has yet to earnestly situate Douglas' practice as not only the exemplar of an epoch, but an extension of the Black reforging ceremony that is the focus of this text. To do this, we will attend to the "Three Mural Studies" by Aaron Douglas that is part of the RISD Museum Collection, specifically *The Negro Spiritual*.

As part of the exhibition catalogue for *Defying the Shadow* from curator Anita Bateman, art historian Melanee C. Harvey wrote a moving piece that centered on Douglas' *Building More Stately Mansions*. Harvey points out Douglas' desire in the piece to portray a sequentially advancing educational scene, which is a significant part of *The Negro Spiritual.*

I am of the belief that black reforging is a constitutive ceremonial element of the Black radical tradition. The Black radical tradition reveals that "there are ways of inhabiting these conditions, and finding ways not to be reduced to them."[8] Though the crisis, and always already collapsing may be perpetual facets of being black, they are not immutable ones. The reforging present in these artworks is a smoldering in the wake, a harmony in the hold, a symphony in the ship, a thundering in the weather. Myers reminds us that "Black modes of living in the forms of spirituals were often dismissed as 'noise' and that what was assumed as 'noise' had evoked and invoked life." It is that noise, that thundering in the weather that we find in Aaron Douglas' *The Negro Spiritual*.

The visual sonic boom of the New Negro Movement, Douglas' work brought forth the *"black noise"*[9] that Saidiya Hartman, Joshua Myers, Tricia Rose and others have established as a significant layer of blackness. In his earlier period (1920s-early 1940s), one way that he would accomplish this was by using "flat symbolic space punctuated by value, line, and scale…in pieces that were to be read 'top to bottom and left to right.'"[10] Through these techniques Douglas was able to suggest a black gaze that, in the spirit of Tina Campt, would invite us to listen to his images so that we may witness the collapsing and reforging as black noise insisting on black aliveness.[11]

In multiple works, Douglas draws what appears to be a herald trumpet. But through a *black gaze*,[12] one comes to see the trumpet again, and sees that it is not just a trumpet, but rather a trombone. Three years before *The Negro Spiritual*, Douglas created the illustrations that would accompany James Weldon Johnson's 1927 classic *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*. What happens when we don't simply

look *at* Douglas' work, but look *with* Johnson? There is an illustration in *God's Trombones* that accompanies a sermon entitled "Judgment Day" where a trumpet-like instrument is played by the archangel Gabriel to "to awaken the dead from their spiritual rest." A central tenet of the New Negro Movement was that Black people possessed "in superlative measure that fire and light which, coming from within …It begins with a song or wail which spreads like fire and soon becomes a spectacle of a harmony of rhythmic movement."[13] A harmonious wailing and singing that burned beyond (and through) the discord of this world. In *God's Trombones*, Johnson and Douglas endeavored to bottle the thunder of those scorching rhythms through words and images. In lieu of some other instrument like a bassoon, pipe organ, or herald trumpet, Johnson selected as his conduit "a trombone, the instrument possessing above all others the power to express the wide and varied range of emotions encompassed by the human voice—and with great amplitude [of the sermon that inspired the book of verse and the preacher that delivered it] he intoned, he moaned, he pleaded,—he blared, he crashed, he thundered."[14] In *The Negro Spiritual*, the instrument of thunder, the trombone, alerts us to the black reforging that is afoot.

In the lower third of the mural study, the trombone/trumpet is being played in such a way that it is elevated to the skies. Similar to the gesture in *Judgment Day*, the instrument here is calling forth a collective. A clarion call to prior and previous generations that a "new spirit is awake in the masses… [reflecting] a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age."[15] To the right of the trombone/trumpet there is a processional, and to the right of them there is a trio of figures; each looking outward…looking up. In *The Negro Spiritual*, Douglas renders an idea that would take a more definitive shape at Fisk University.

Cravath Hall is home to the *Aaron Douglas Murals at Fisk University*, the project that in part spawned from the study housed in the RISD Museum. Glenn Jordan writes that "the intent of these murals was to inspire African-American students—to seek knowledge, especially classical education, and to engage with their history."[16] In Douglas' words, the mural was intended to be a "panorama of the development of black people in the hemisphere, in the new world…from Africa to America to the slave situation, freedom, and so on."[17] Douglas' mural was to be a visual representation of what Du Bois termed the "the souls of black folk" meant to accompany students as they studied in themselves and their pasts, the still "unreconciled strivings" of their people.

The upper third of the mural study shows silhouetted black figures with their hands and heads raised in praise, the focal point being rays of light emanating from a gap in the study. In Cravath Hall, one is able to gaze upon this section of the actual mural and see that the gap is a window, and the light literally shines through and shines on the people in the room. When viewing the mural study alongside the corresponding section in the mural itself on the north wall, the resonances are irrefutable.

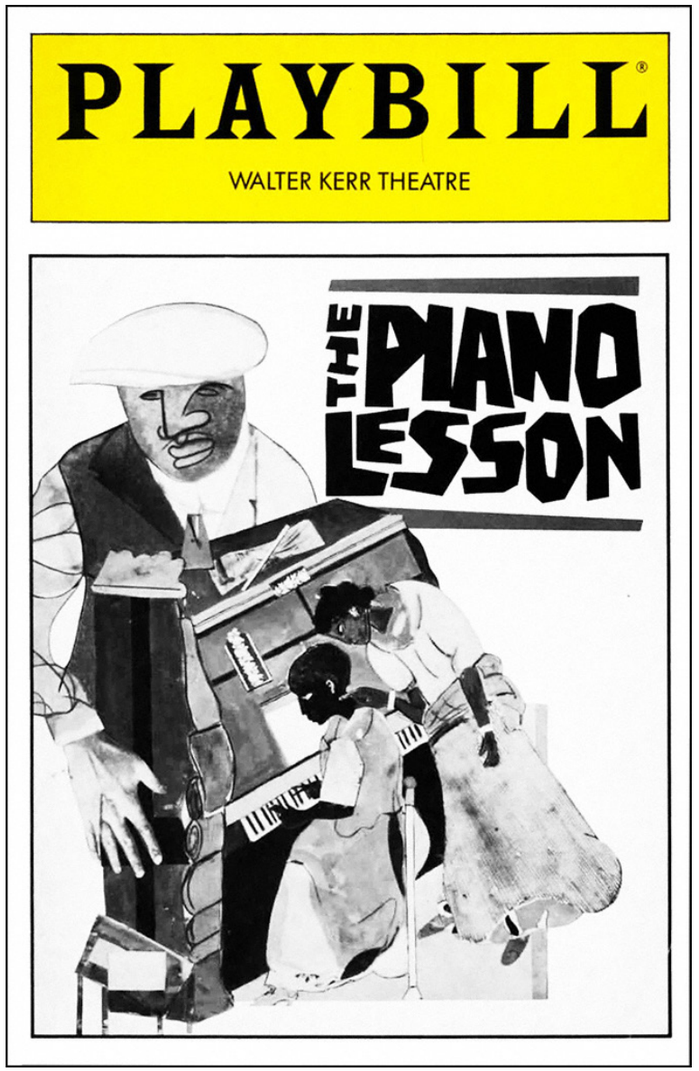
South wall, North Reading Room, Cravath Hall, Fisk University. Post-Treatment (Smithsonian American Art Museum) 2003.

Photo: Daniel Meigs, Cravath Hall.

Aaron Douglas, *The Negro Spiritual*, Gouache on illustration board, 1930, 50.2 x 72.4 cm (19 11/16 x 28 1/2 inches) irregular, 82.188.2 (RISD Museum)

Photo: Daniel Meigs, Cravath Hall.

In 2003, when the Smithsonian's Lunder Conservation Center went in to assist in additional restoration due to damage from water, salt, dirt, and the theft of some sections, the initial mural was collapsing. The status of the murals was so dire that it was said that the combination of problems were "literally eating away at the artwork."[22] The LCC staff was able to conserve a sizable portion of the murals, but "some of it was gone for good." This was not the first "conservation intervention" as it pertained to these murals, nor would it be the last. In 1965 Douglas himself "did some restoration work on the murals… [and] totally repainted much of the work, in a darker, more somber palette." In his return to his work, the spirit of his people is found in this ceremony of black reforging. He teaches us that "When survival is posed as enduring as such, we miss how that task calls for its own undoing in time." The task for Douglas was not to freeze the mural in time and preserve it as it was, as is often the desire of the colonial conservator/preparator/archivist. Instead, he painted with the grain of souring and decay that time had wrought because the mural was not a static depiction of who Black people were, but a thunderous living engagement with Black inhabitation/s of and beyond the wake.



August Wilson, Playbill, *The Piano Lesson* 1990.

When discussing a different section of the mural at Fisk, Douglas remarked, "I was thinking labor has been one of the most important aspects of our development."[25] Booker Washington, in *Working with the Hands* argued for a "theory of education of head and hands [and heart] together."[26] Having been forced to toil physically for centuries on behalf of white people while themselves receiving no substantial monetary compensation for that labor, many in the community believed that "to labour with the mind was honourable while to toil with the hands was unworthy and even disgraceful."[27] During "the Nadir," spanning roughly 1878-1920, how was the future freedom that so many imagined to be actualized? With the head or with the hands?

For some, the arithmetic was simple: to work with the head you would go north, and to work with the hands, you would stay in the South. For others, the push and pull factors were racist violence, environmental conditions, intercommunal violence, rigid social/religious norms, and love, just to name a handful. This time of movement has been referred to by many as The Great Migration, a period of mass movement of Black people "from rural to urban areas and from the South to the North and elsewhere."[28] Many historians date this period from 1915-1975, but Carter Woodson reminds us that even in 1904, "the migration of the blacks from the Southern States to those offering them better opportunities is nothing new."[29] It is not so much that Black people migrating from the South *started* in 1915, but due to advancements like the automobile, the railroad, and the locomotive, the numbers of people doing such skyrocketed in the early- to mid-20th century. And it is at an apex of that migration that August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson* is set.

Set in Pittsburgh in 1936, *The Piano Lesson* centers on two siblings. The entire play takes place in the house of a Pullman Porter named Doaker, who is the uncle of the two siblings, and hinges on the fate of a piano that has been intimately connected to the family for generations.

> The main protagonist, Boy Willie, intends to sell the piano in order to buy land where his father worked as a sharecropper and his grandfather as a slave. His sister Berniece, on the other hand, believes that this piano, for which her father gave his life, must be kept in the family and can never be sold. The argument between brother and sister plays out as a dialectical debate for which the audience must construct a synthesis. Wilson creates convincing and rational arguments on both sides of the divide.[30]

Berniece and her daughter Maretha reside in the home, Berniece and Doaker having carved out lives *working* up North; one as a porter on the railroads and the other as a domestic laborer in the homes of white families in town. Boy Willie is a sharecropper who aspires to own the land his ancestors toiled on as enslaved persons. To Berniece the piano is "literally and figuratively her and her ancestors' history,"[31] something to retain. To Boy Willie the piano is something to sell in order to "buy the same land these ancestors worked on, changing generations of servitude into ownership and escape from a brutal past."[32] For both, the piano is a harbinger of collapses and reforgings due to and yet to come from "the gospel of work."[33]

In his own words, August Wilson credits Romare Bearden as having created the work of art that moved him to write the play. Bearden created a collage in 1983 that goes by the same name. His piece, *The Piano Lesson (Homage to Mary Lou)* is of a scene where "a piano teacher hovers over a student who is attempting to play a difficult piece of music. The inspiration for this composition was the jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams, but there is no similarity between her life and the girl in the picture."[34] As it pertains to more of the structural aspects of the lithograph, "the structure of this collage acknowledges a 1916 painting by Henri Matisse called *The Piano Lesson*, in which Matisse's son, Pierre, is seen playing the piano for his teacher."[35] Bearden was influenced by Mattise formally, but it was the black noise of Mary Lou Williams that lit his imagination in such a way that led to the collage. Similarly, for August Wilson, it was his recognition of that noise in Bearden's collage that aligned with his goal as a playwright to "present the unique particularities of Black American culture" that ultimately gives us the play, *The Piano Lesson*.

Labor may be the term that buttresses much of the salient class analysis of our time, but here, it is work that I will unpack. Work is embedded in blackness in a way that labor is not. Of the relationship Black people in the U.S. had to work before and following slavery, Booker T. Washington said, "as a slave the Negro was worked; as a freeman he must learn to work. There is a vast difference between working and being worked."[37] This difference is one of the things at the heart of *The Piano Lesson*. Boy Willie was tired of being worked, and made up his mind

that he would be the one working. All he had to do was make the piano work for him. The collapse of slavery presented an opportunity for black people to reforge their relationship to work, an intervention that produced everything from debates on the ideal type of work for the race going forward, the right institutions and organizations for the purpose of training the race in different types of work, and wayward[38] modes of work outside the constrictions of respectability, including those who absconded from/against work, and then some.

At a heightened moment of disagreement with his sister regarding the possibility of selling the piano, Boy Willie says

> Land the only thing God ain't making no more of. You can always get you another piano. I'm talking abut some land. What you get something out of the ground from… As long as I got the land and the seed then I'm alright. I can always get me a little something else. Cause that land give back to you. I can make me another crop and cash that in. I still got the land and the seed. But that piano don't put out nothing else.[39]

The death of Sutter at the hands of the curse of the yellow dog meant a collapse. And in this collapse Boy Willie saw an opportunity reforege; to move from *being worked* on that land for others to *working* that land for himself.

Conversely, Berniece saw the blinder-esque approach of her brother to overturn the worked/being worked equation as a masculinist obsession with *work* outside of the family over and above the work of making and maintaining the family. In the

aforementioned disagreement, Berniece says

> Money can't buy what that piano cost. You can't sell your soul for money... I look at you and you're all the same. You, Papa Boy Charles, Wining Boy, Doaker, Crawley... you're all alike. All this thieving and killing and thieving and killing. And what it ever lead to? More killing and more thieving. I ain't never seen it come to nothing.[40]

The "gospel of work" and racial uplift that was the compass for many of the men in the family felt more like the undoing of family to Berniece. The desire to get out from under the thumb of whiteness resulted in the men of the Charles family disregarding the costs of their success for those closest to them. Berniece lost her husband in an effort he made to balance the scales of work. And as often falls to black women in the cisheteronormative family structure, she was left to pick up the pieces that lay in the aftermath of the many collapses wrought by the piano. In lieu of the actual people carved into the piano, in Doaker's house Berniece has access to the reforging *work* that made that piano what it was, and to her there is no amount of money that can repay the cost that has already been paid.

Berniece sees retaining the piano as doing right by the legacy of her mother, reflected in her statement to her brother that

> You always talkin about your daddy, but you ain't never stopped to look at what his foolishness cost your mama...Seventeen years' worth of cold nights and an empty bed. For what? For a piano? For a piece a wood? To get even with somebody...When my Mama died I shut the top on that piano and I ain't never opened it since. I was only playing it for her. When my daddy died seem like all her life went into that piano.[41]

From Berniece's perspective, the previous collapses of the family are not only due to the antiblack racism they encountered outside the home but the inability or unwillingness of the men to reforge a family yet to be in the home with what remained after those collapses, after the fire.

Booker Washington ardently believed in "the gospel of work with the hands as the pathway to freedom." Berniece cleaned floors and chandeliers and houses as a domestic worker. Boy Willie hauled watermelons and did agrarian labor as a farming man. This confluence enumerates the ways that *work* broadly, and the *work* that brought the piano into being specifically connects the siblings. Their Uncle Doaker said of their grandfather, that he "was a worker of wood. He could make you anything you wanted out of wood."[42] His intervention of inventing a narrative arc of his family that was made "up out of his memory"[43] and *working* that story into the piano itself was a refusal to only *be worked* in the service of whiteness, but *work* his family into this wooden "humble offering to and for another world breathing here now." The carving into the piano, the stealing of the piano, the playing of the piano in Pittsburgh, the discountiation of playing it in Pittsburgh, the plan to sell it, the plan to retain it, the ancestral reckonings it prompted, all coalesce to assert that Black people "did not simply or only live in subjection and as the subjected."[45] The play teaches us that "None of us survives as such; indeed, perhaps, freedom requires we give way to other things. Now.

And perhaps again."[46] At the end of the play, after the specters of the Yellow Dog, Sutter, and the ancestors connected to the vessel that is the piano all have some form or another of reckoning, the Charles family survives. But not as such, and they learn to give way to other things. With a *black gaze*, when we look upon and listen to Maretha's playing we come to see it as a reforging. Again.

CONCLUSION

Douglas with Winold Reiss and Wilson with Henri Mattise, in both we find examples of white artists that influenced aspects of their creative process. There is a tendency among some to use instances of influence such as these as an opportunity to extract Black artists from a Black specificity and transport them to an aesthetic [white] universal. While certain formal elements in their work were surely influenced by Reiss and Mattise, their rendering of those formal elements is not simply a matter of influence. The mode of formal analysis that came to define vast swaths of art historical scholarly analysis during the 20th century is ill-equipped to apprehend a robust appreciation of the works at the epicenter of this essay.

The black reforging practice that is present in *The Negro Spiritual* and *The Piano Lesson* impels a black gaze that refuses to bow to formal analysis of influence. As this essay has revealed, blackness blurs the tyranny of influence by way of "small endeavors to introduce intervention into existence." Aaron Douglas' trombone and rays of sun at Fisk University (and his retouching of the mural) introduced interventions into existence.[47] The gospel of work and the specters of ancestral reckoning in August Wilson's play (and the characters' attending to that gospel and those reckonings) introduced interventions into existence. The Black radical imagination intervenes in antiblackness' ceaselessness due to being that which "animates the mode of knowledge production…[and] recombines the contents of the long arc of Black existence in ways that call forth new relations for all."[48] Every reference is not an influence, every influence does not move you, everything that moves you does not stir you. In the wake, these separations simply collapse, and are blurred complexly by our animation of/beyond them. As Fred Moten reminds us, "What whiteness seeks to separate, blackness blurs by cutting, in touch."[49] Perhaps in those blurs we may un/make what is and reforge ourselves anew, for we are always already amidst and/or inducing collapse/s.

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4 Joshua Myers, *Black Lives* (Medford, MA: Polity Press 2021) p. 12.

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9 In *Venus In Two Acts*, Saidiya Hartman defines black noise as that which is "in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man."

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Failure Infrastructures: Calculated Collapse and The Global Border Regime

Dimitris Papadopoulos

In September 2019, Ursula von der Leyen, then President-Elect of the European Commission, announced new policy portfolios including one for the "Protection of our European Way of Life"[1] tasked to "address and allay legitimate fears and concerns about the impact of irregular migration on our economy and society."[2]

"Our way of life" as code for whiteness that is constantly subject to the external threat of irregular migration is nothing new. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection website informs users that "the U.S. Border Patrol has a long and rich history of helping to secure and protect the American way of life."[3] Of course, even a brief dive into the history of the U.S. Border Patrol is enough to reveal a legacy of violence, human rights violations, and racist policies.[4] This coded language was made evidently clear recently in the way Eastern European countries welcomed and supported thousands of Ukrainian refugees who, as some commentators put it, are "civilized" or "look like us."[5]

Despite recent scrutiny over human rights violations,[6] Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has significantly increased its budget and personnel.[7] In March 2020, now president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced, from the Greek border, the deployment of a hundred Frontex border guards, six coastal patrol vessels, two helicopters, one aircraft, and three thermo-vision vehicles, and concluded in Greek: "I thank Greece for being our European ασπίδα (shield) in these times."[8]

Holding the "shield" against migration as a political priority is enabled by a sense of imminent collapse or constant fear. Collapse is useful even before or whether it actually occurs. State authorities instrumentalize the continuous threat of crisis to legitimize aggressive migration policies that are only partially effective in their deterrence objective, and that maintain the fear of new arrivals in a cyclical fashion. As Britta Anderson writes:

> Practices including ICE raids, family separation, and indefinite detention have become institutionalized as responses to undocumented immigration, fueling a continual state of fear. (…) crisis is not a provisional suspension of procedures (…) but rather a cyclical, operative state of continuing shock. This temporality of ongoing crisis is a modality crucial to capitalism's continual operation.[9]

The crisis narrative in relation to migration does not only work on the performative level.[10] Dualities of border crisis vs. protection or collapse vs. construction materialize on the ground in ways that feed the cyclical logic of crisis that migration policies are based on.

The Camp

Moria Camp, 2015. Photo by author.

In the summer of 2015 I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesvos, Greece. Moria, now known as one of the most notorious refugee camps in Europe that encapsulated the "Fortress Europe" policies, was built as a refugee "hotspot" in a former military camp on an olive grove slope near the village of the same name. "Hotspots" were conceptualized and implemented by the European Commission as "Reception and Identification Centers" (RIC) for migrants and asylum seekers. Operated by local authorities in

collaboration with Frontex and Europol, their objective is to "swiftly identify, register, and fingerprint incoming migrants."[11]

At the time of my visit, a high-ranking police officer estimated the site's capacity at 1,200 people. Over 600 migrants and refugees were at the core of camp ("Moria in") waiting to be processed while over 2,000 were camped, mostly in tents, at the periphery of the camp ("Moria out"). The authorities used a strategy of internal spatial division and segregation of asylum seekers as a way of filtering and prioritizing their processing based on country of origin and vulnerability.[12] Asylum seekers at the core processing unit of the camp were subject to limited mobility through internal gates. Those at the periphery were able to walk to the city to get supplies and return to the camp to spend the night. Water and food portions were rationed, hygiene conditions were extremely poor, and conditions were not safe, especially for women and children at the camp's periphery. It was clear that the camp was stretched to its limits.

Pollozek and Passoth note: "the hotspot can be understood as a merging point of both sides of the European migration regime, being part of the hardened exterior frontier of the EU and of transnational control assemblages."[13] Despite its failing conditions, Moria was a functional processing site for biometrics and asylum-seeking claims. Political geographer Pallister-Wilkins reminds us that "Fortress Europe" is not a monolithic project blocking border-crossers, but one of "channeling mobilities" in specific, desired ways. In all its transformations, Moria never ceased to operate, even while authorities

The village of Moria (right) and the Moria refugee camp in the background (left) in 2018. Photo by author.

were struggling to maintain a sense of order in the camp, in parallel to other migration control sites and networks that served European migration policies.

When I revisited the camp in 2018, the tents around the main site had expanded east, west, and north. NGO workers, volunteers and locals I talked to shared their concern about the unsustainable conditions in the camp. Migrants and refugees would often protest their living conditions and would ask to be transferred to other, safer camps and shelters. Violent incidents among groups would occasionally erupt. The great majority of migrants and refugees lived in tents and self-managed, makeshift shelters dispersed beyond the main camp's fence. On September 19, 2018, journalist Louise Milner reported: "Around 9,000 people are stuck in

tents and shipping containers at the former military base. The capacity is for around 3,000 people, so it's reaching a boiling point."[15] It was clear that Moria was slowly collapsing. Its infrastructural collapse was manifested, from a bird's eye view, as a spatial collapse, an exploded, dispersed micro-geography of small structures, trash, and debris. It was already morphing into what archaeologist Yiannis Hamilakis has called Europe's "ruins in the making."[16]

Despite efforts by local doctors and international humanitarian organizations like the MSF, families with children, unaccompanied minors, seniors in poor health, young women, migrants and refugees with disabilities and mental health issues were exposed to a continuous, anxiety-inducing risk of harm and suffering, including injury and sexual violence. Humanitarian workers in the camp shared in my interviews with them that they had been working well beyond their limits, struggling to protect their own mental health and wellbeing. A psychologist working with unaccompanied minors told me: "I don't feel I am a psychologist. I feel like I am a firefighter."[17]

Not long after my visit, literal fires emerged in the camp. In September 2019, a mother and child died in a container when two fires broke out in the main camp and the tents just outside of it. Deadly incidents like this one were not uncommon in Moria. In January 2017, a Syrian and an Egyptian man died of carbon monoxide inhalation after trying to warm up their tents by lighting a fire.[18]

On September 8, 2020, multiple fires erupted in the camp, setting tents and containers ablaze. Only a few tents survived. The rest of the camp was destroyed, causing the displacement, overnight, of nearly 13,000 people. Greek authorities blamed six asylum seekers protesting COVID-19 quarantine measures for the fires. In June 2021, four Afghans were sentenced to ten years in prison for arson with risk to human life, despite objections over the evidence and requests by the lawyers to be tried by a juvenile court.[19]

The Camp 2.0

Moria's collapse, seen as a "disaster waiting to happen"[20] or as "the moral failure of Europe,"[21] was both predictable and preventable. On the day before the destructive fire, Moria was the largest displacement camp in Europe serving—at the cost of lives and suffering of asylum seekers—the objectives of European migration policies. One of the pillars of these policies was the 2016 EU-Turkey agreement according to which all "new irregular migrants" would be returned to Turkey while Syrian refugees would find a legal pathway to EU member states.[22] Critical parts of the deal such as the transfer of Syrian refugees to EU member states were barely implemented and resulted in an unending limbo for asylum seekers.

In October 2020, the Greek authorities broke ground for a new "closed-type" refugee camp, not too far from Moria, with funding from the European Commission.[23] The new camp, located in a former Greek Army shooting range, was planned to host 2,500 migrants and refugees. As soon as

the first winter came, it was clear that the new site, built on gravel by the sea, with no trees or vegetation, was exposed to floods and winds. However, the closed, more contained type of camp with increased security screening that kept migrants and refugees out of sight, was welcomed by state authorities as well as some locals, especially following the chaotic destruction of Moria and the protests that followed. The new camp is already called by camp occupants, officers, and locals, not without a sense of sarcasm, "Moria 2."

COLLAPSE CAMOUFLAGE: THE TACTICAL (IN) VISIBILITY OF BORDER VIOLENCE

Hyper-visibility and Distraction

Discussing a 2018 court order to reunite migrant families separated during Trump's brutal "Zero Tolerance Policy," Shannon Mattern notes: "The border apparatus could not be marshaled to comply with the court order, because it was not designed to recognize the humanity of its subjects. It was designed to recognize targets."[24] The border surveillance apparatus, Mattern reminds us, operating at different scales and through different technologies, fails to "see" the subjectivities of people on the move or entire groups and communities altogether.

Moria's destruction was seen and witnessed in all its spectacular failure across Europe and the rest of the world. But it was not recognized for all the harm, trauma, death, and injury that it caused to asylum seekers for years. And it was definitely not recognized by the Greek state and European authorities as the immediate result of the hotspot approach that made a site like Moria even thinkable.

The attitude of state authorities towards hotspots intentionally swings between concealment and hyper-visibility. Pushed to their capacity limits, hotspots are kept in operation even as they cause suffering to their occupants. In moments of crisis when the sites become inescapably visible, official narratives propagate the images of destruction to fuel anti-migrant sentiments and, eventually, justify more rigid security and detainment measures. Moria's spectacular collapse was seen as an exceptional, dramatic moment, a monumental failure. This, however, was a distraction that was used to justify an escalation of mobility restriction and border securitization on multiple levels.

Although not all refugee camps are built with the same provisions in place for relatively safe living conditions, crises in such sites are not unexpected. The moment of collapse in the case of Moria was the culmination of the ways in which it operated for years. The shocking effect of its fiery destruction and of the displacement of its inhabitants was effective as a media event, in terms of triggering anti-migrant political discourse and reactions by local communities. Whether in the context of the European hotspot approach or the "prevention through deterrence" doctrine in the U.S., the spectacle of violence and suffering in refugee camps, often fetishized to anaesthetization extremes, is perceived, itself, as a threat, rather as the immediate result of specific, calculated policies.

This hyper-visibility of violence and destruction serves as a distraction from the broader and often elusive architecture of mobility control that is in place in multiple other physical and virtual locations. The physical U.S.-Mexico border wall is just one component of a network of border patrol agents, detention centers, facial recognition cameras, and databases that expand well into the U.S. mainland.[25] Similarly, the European refugee hotspot is merely a logistical processing site within a networked infrastructure of border walls and fences, Frontex ships, Greek Coast Guard ships, and drones. Frontex, for example, announced 468 aerial surveillance flights in 2021 and 1,030 in 2020 alone.[26] All of these surveillance nodes and operations feed data into European information systems such as the Schengen Information System or the European Dactyloscopy database (Eurodac).

Recent scholarly, activist, and independent journalism projects[27] have focused on "soft" structures, non-human actors, networks and assemblages of the border violence and surveillance regime that are less traceable, and concealed, sometimes, under what Eyal Weizman has called the "threshold of detectability."[28] Even as state actors performatively, or even celebratorily, announce new walls, fences, and "hotspots," the scrutiny over other types of operations or infrastructures like pushbacks in the Mediterranean or undisclosed surveillance systems, is unwanted as it may reveal human rights violations and raise claims for justice and accountability.

Infrastructural Dualities

In their study of refugee tents in Denmark, scholars Whyte, Campbell and Overgaard use a pair of terms to describe the seemingly paradoxical ways in which refugee camps operate: "spectacular obscurity" and "successful failure".[29] "Spectacular obscurity" refers to the ways in which refugee camps are "presented as spectacle but their everyday functioning was explicitly obscured."[30] "Successful failure" is used to describe how although "camp infrastructure was routinely failing, this formed the basis for its actual daily functioning."[31]

Both of these concepts are useful in trying to understand the multiple levels on which refugee camps, asylum shelters or hotspots operate. In the case of Moria, while the site was often at the forefront of media attention, what was obscured, at the same time, were the bureaucratic, mundane tasks at the heart of its critical mission: identifying, screening, sorting, and processing bodies, languages, ethnicities, and vulnerabilities. These were the bureaucratic tasks causing massive bottlenecks that kept thousands of people in suspended uncertainty.

The second concept, that of "successful failure," captures the slow, accumulative effect of daily small failures in a refugee camp: "minor, infrastructural failures, such as showers with only burning hot or cold water, poor temperature regulation in tents, dirty toilets (...) these failures did not so much call for repair and maintenance, as they did for evasion and circumvention."[32] These daily failures and struggles, despite differences in living conditions, are

familiar to thousands of asylum seekers, from the Danish refugee tent camps to the Calais "jungle." On a performative level, such failures communicate both to camp occupants and to external observers that conditions are meant to be harsh as a deterrence signal. On a strategic level, these never repaired failures, which often raise tensions or trigger protests in the camps, are used by authorities to impose more restrictive measures.

What keeps asylum seekers in limbo is not just the lack of care, repair, or resources, but also the targeted ways in which humanitarian care is administered. Care, provided in hotspots based on "vulnerabilities" and other taxonomies, reinforces "hierarchies of mobility."[33] Channeling Jasbir Puar's concept of "deliberate debilitation" as biopolitical strategy, Polly Pallister Wilkins notes:

> hotspots work with particular—yet partial—forms of humanitarian relief to produce racialised regimes of differential mobility and marginalised, unequal, and debilitated life. That is, human life not considered equal but at the same time not allowed to die, alongside life subjected to regimes of legibility and registration that (re) produce racialised populations within a framework of recognition reaffirming European white supremacy.[34]

In discussing the "infrastructural warfare" launched by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza, Puar expands the notion of debilitated bodies into debilitated infrastructures and landscapes.[35] Refugee camps in the Mediterranean present, of course, significant geographical, political, and operational differences. The concept of deliberate debilitation, however, as means of reaching a desired result, touches at the core of how some of these sites operate. Deliberately exposing migrants and refugees to risk of suffering, death and injury, or keeping them suspended in conditions of extreme precarity, is a way of exercising control over bodies, their ability to move and their sense of agency and dignity.

The lack, or denial of care can take extreme forms within migration control infrastructures. As I am writing these lines, independent news media are still reporting details of an incident on the mainland border between Greece and Turkey. In early August 2022, a group of refugees was stranded on an islet on the river of Evros on the Greek-Turkish border. Following calls from international organizations, Greece refused to help or to rescue the group, claiming that the islet was not part of Greek territory, even after reports that a five-year-old girl died due to complications from a scorpion bite. When eventually the stranded group managed to cross into the Greek mainland, the Greek government acknowledged the incident and the death of the five-year old girl but didn't miss the opportunity to blame the Turkish side for enabling and weaponizing border-crossers as a factor of destabilization. Although the incident is still being investigated, what is striking is the willingness to waive territorial control or jurisdiction as a means of denying responsibility and humanitarian aid. In this highly surveilled border region, recently equipped with

"Stand by Me" School near Moria, 2018. Photo credit: Katerina Stefatos. Used with permission.

miles of new border fence and surveillance technologies, the Greek authorities refused to see and recognize the group of refugees.[36] This calculated inaction and jurisdictional and infrastructural withdrawal left the border-crossers stranded and exposed to deadly, unnecessary risk.[37]

Whether by design or not, mobility control infrastructures are as much about porousness as about solidity. From Lesvos to Ceuta and Arizona, migrants and refugees come up with new ways to navigate increasingly militarized landscapes and seascapes or seek help and rescue. They follow policy shifts and infrastructural changes with a responsive resilience, always looking for safer routes and conditions. In 2018, as Moria was increasingly becoming unsafe, a local teacher took the initiative of setting up a makeshift school with plywood and tin roofs in a safe location a few miles from the camp. The school, named "Stand by Me," provided safety and a sense of normalcy for women and children in response to the infrastructural collapse of the camp.

To acknowledge the malleability of border infrastructures is not to dismiss the lethal and debilitating violence they produce. Rethinking these infrastructures as adaptive, deteriorating, or shifting helps paint a more accurate picture of the intrinsic ways in which they operate. It also helps shift from a view of "people on the move" having to overcome fixed, unchanged infrastructures to a more nuanced understanding of border surveillance assemblages that, themselves, move and follow border-crossers. These infrastructures grow and expand, or, when needed, recede and retract. As a matter of fact, the ability to deploy, disassemble and reassemble, to be both visible and invisible, is what makes these infrastructures effective.

At the same time, to say that border control infrastructures are retractable or collapsible helps illuminate the artificial, selective, and reversible nature of their very existence. To think of collapse not as a permanent state but as a counter-tactical conceptual device can help shift focus towards more strategic refugee support and solidarity approaches centered around questions of power, agency, and legitimacy. In this sense, we can think of collapse not as an irreversible condition but as a conditional reversal of racist and xenophobic policies enabled through alliance networks and collective action.

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After the Cut

Jenny Neville

Franny grazed the palm of her hand against the soft stubble of her hair, relishing the feel. She grinned at herself in the mirror. Long strands of brown hair fell across her shoulders and spread like a starburst around her feet. Her hand still vibrated from the clippers, but her head felt a million pounds lighter. Her features popped out from her face like they never had before—big round eyes, a wide nose, thin lips. She turned her head, her neck long and elegant in the mirror.

Franny's hair had been long looping spirals halfway down her back, thick and heavy, hard to brush, and frizzy in the humidity. Now, with just an inch of stubble, her hair looked even darker, no longer the light brown she'd been used to but a dark rich chestnut. She brushed the loose strands from her shoulders and then used her feet to move them into a large pile, amazed at just how much had come off her head. She picked up a chunk of hair, ran it through her fingers, and let it drop around her, laughing. She opened the window and threw out handfuls, watching as the strands fell into a bush below, landing in a pile to look like a lopsided nest. The wind grabbed several strands lifting them and twirling them through the air.

It was liberating, lightening, and Franny was so happy she'd finally done it. For so many years, Franny's mother had forced her to keep it long, once going so far as to tell Franny her own hair length was not her choice. No more. Although her mother would be horrified, she had known this before she'd started, and she didn't care. In her first semester in college, she was old enough to make her own decisions and her mother did not have control over

her hair any longer. Along with the hair went the weight, not only physically, but metaphorically, and Franny felt as light as a bubble as if she could join the strands taken by the wind and float away into the clouds.

After she'd cleaned up, Franny dressed carefully, a button-down shirt, a pair of leggings, and her favorite Doc Martins. Again, she admired herself in the mirror, her new look making her ecstatic.

A little nervous, but mainly excited to see her suitemates' reactions, Franny went out into the main room to find her roommates all sitting around. No one looked up at her entrance. Casually, Franny grabbed her sketchbook and flung herself into a chair. Quickly, she lost herself in drawing and was startled to find Avery peering down at her.

"What," Avery said slowly, "have you done?"

"What?" Franny asked, momentarily forgetting about her hair.

"This," her suitemate poked her in the head.

"Ouch," Franny said, batting away Avery's hand and rubbing the spot, once again enjoying the feel of the closely shorn hair. She shrugged. "Cut my hair."

"You," Avery said in her slow drawl, "look like a boy."

Franny reeled back as if she'd been slapped. Avery walked a circle around Franny, gauging her up and down. "Why Fran? Your hair was so beautiful. It made you look so pretty. And now…" she gestured up and down, her mouth pulled down into a frown.

"I like it," Franny said, fingering the soft stubble on her head again.

"It makes you look like a boy," Avery repeated.

Franny's stomach twisted. It did not make her look like a boy. It showed off her features, her long neck, and brought out her eyes.

"I like it" Franny whispered, her stomach cramping. All the joy and freedom she'd felt earlier disappeared.

Avery stared at her for a few minutes, Franny unable to read any of the emotions crossing her face. Finally, Avery shrugged, "suit yourself," she said and went back to her work.

Franny fought back tears. She wouldn't cry. She liked her new hair, she liked how it made her look. She shouldn't care what one person thought, especially someone she didn't even like very much. And yet Avery's comment nagged at her, clawing at her insides unwilling to let go.

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The next morning Franny dragged herself out of bed to go to work. Her shower took half the time it had the day before and her hair was dry before her body. A thrill shot through her. This was it; this was how she imagined she would feel after she'd cut her hair. Quickly, she dressed in cargo pants and a baggy sweatshirt, ate breakfast then grabbed her keys and headed out the door. Once outside, Franny realized how cold the winter air was on her scalp, and how quickly her ears went numb. She took her scarf from around her neck and looped it over her head.

At the dinner, she hung up her coat and scarf, yelled, "Hey Marty," toward the kitchen, and received a gruff grunt back.

"Hey," he said, "come 'ere."

She plodded over and plunked down on one of the red plastic stools. "Yeah?" she asked.

He used the spatula he was holding and gestured toward her head. “What’s goin’ on?”

“I cut my hair,” Franny said.

“Huh,” Marty said and then “huh” again. He looked her up and down and shrugged. “Make sure to fill all the ketchup bottles this morning.”

Smiling to herself, Franny wrote out the breakfast specials, drawing small icons next to each one. She wrapped the silverware in napkins and made sure the salt and pepper shakers, the ketchup, and the hot sauce bottles were filled. At 6 am she unlocked the doors and started another pot of coffee brewing. The morning was busy, and Franny forgot about anything but getting the orders out to the customers. Some of the regulars did a double take or looked at her funny, but she had too much to do without worrying about it, plus, she knew people would be shocked by the change but would get over it quickly.

She dropped menus in front of new customers and asked if they wanted coffee. When she brought it back, the two women stopped talking. Franny put the cups in front of them. As she turned away, one of them stopped her, and said to the other, “Let’s ask him.” Franny pasted on a fake smile. An image appeared unbidden in her mind, and Franny imagined her face that of a rigid China doll filled with black hairline cracks. Avery was right; people were mistaking her for a boy. The women didn’t notice Franny’s sudden stiffness, and she extracted herself as quickly as possible, nodding along with them. It was two women, she told herself; it didn’t mean anything. If she repeated that enough times maybe she’d believe it.

Later, a customer called to her, “Hey, dude!” and then to his companion, “I’m asking that guy for the check.” Again, Franny tried to let it roll off her; she stopped her hand from wandering to her hair and in her mind’s eye the cracks on the China doll’s face grew deeper, blacker, as they splintered across her skin.

After the breakfast rush, Franny took the garbage out to the dumpster. Once the bag was in the trash, she walked to the end of the alley and took a deep breath, allowing herself a moment. It was still crystalline cold, and the air felt like tiny knives in her lungs. Her ears stung. When she turned to go back inside, she caught the eye of two guys walking past.

“Fucker,” one of them muttered. Then louder, “At least I know which bathroom to use.”

Franny’s heart fluttered, she turned even colder, and then just as suddenly heat flushed through her body. As she backed away, one of the guys flashed her the finger and spewed a gob of spit toward her. She ran back into the diner and straight into the bathroom, ignoring everything around her.

Franny couldn’t breathe. It seemed as if everything inside her was collapsing, melting in on itself as if she were a time-lapse photo series. She could easily imagine the cracks in the China doll she’d imagined earlier exploding, turning the doll’s head into a pile of dust. Franny struggled to take a breath; her lungs felt as if they were compressing and she felt as if her thoughts, her feelings, her very being was crumpling, as decay shot down her body and throughout her being.

In the tiny bathroom, she managed to take a shuddering breath and then wiped away angry tears. She

was so stupid. How could she have cut her hair so short and expected anyone to think she was a girl? She hated this haircut and never wanted to be seen in public again. At least not until it grew out. Avery had been right; everyone thought she was a boy. But wasn't it obvious she was a girl? She examined herself in the mirror. Sure, she wore baggy clothes, but she'd always worn those; they had pockets after all, whereas so many of the more feminine dresses and pants had none. They were more comfortable, and no one had ever thought she was a boy before. Having short hair shouldn't cause people to confuse her gender. She looked like a girl and even if she didn't, why did people have to be cruel?

Marty pounded on the door. "Hey, kiddo?" He called. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Franny said, a hitch in her voice. So what if people thought she was a boy? It didn't matter. She knew who she was and she knew the person she wanted to be. Let everyone think she was a boy. She didn't care.

She also wasn't fooling herself. It hurt. Deeply.

***

On the way back to her dorm, Franny stopped at a beauty supply store. After standing in front of the wigs for at least five minutes, she bought one that was brown and choppy along with a pack of hair nets. She knew it was stupid; no one would believe it was real hair–it was only $20 after all. But she felt as if she couldn't go 20 more seconds looking like she did.

Back in her room, she put it on, and although it looked okay, it was obviously synthetic. Franny sighed as she tried to smooth down one side. It shouldn't matter, she told herself again. But once again, her inner self betrayed her. She changed out of cargo pants and into leggings, which showed off her hips and her slender waist. No way was she giving up her Docs. She gave herself one last look in the mirror. If only she hadn't cut her hair. If only she could go back in time one day. But this was her reality now. She sighed again, grabbed her books, and went out into the suite to study. Franny knew. She knew that Avery would make fun of her and think she was an idiot. As she sat in the suite, she tried to brace herself for it, but no one else appeared.

Finally, Franny went back to her room and took off the wig. It was itchy and hot and she was pretty sure she was breaking out in a rash. It was too much bother. This was who she was now. She had to live with her choices.

She blew out a breath and threw the wig and hair net onto her bed. It's not fair, she thought. Why should she have to dress a certain way, look a certain way, be a certain way? She should be able to dress and look however she wanted and not care about what other people thought. But that was the problem. She did care. She wanted to be pretty. She was a girl and she wanted people to know it. But apparently, she couldn't have it both ways. Either she had to wear clothes that made her look feminine or look masculine and be okay with how others viewed her. But neither option worked. And it sucked.

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The next day, Franny did not have to work but she did not savor the idea of sitting around the suite waiting for one of her suitemates or their friends to come in and say anything.

Instead of the wig, which seemed foolish now, she rummaged around until she found a bright red handkerchief. She folded it into a triangle and continued to fold until it was a wide band. She put it around her head and tied the ends together at the top so that she looked like Rosie the Riveter. She added a pair of long dangly earrings, then applied thick black eyeliner and mascara, making her eyes large and luminous. Finally, she put bright crimson lipstick on her lips. Now when she looked in the mirror, she hardly knew herself. She was Franny and not Franny at the same time, like one transparency overlaying another transparency without the edges matching up.

Fuck it, she thought. Who's to say what she could and could not wear? If she wanted to have a shaved head and wear make-up, then she would. If that's what made her feel good, then she was going to do it. Let people think what they want. She was tired of this whole situation. She liked how she looked and she was going to rock it. With those thoughts flitting through her head, she headed out into the suite. Avery sat there with her friend Shawna. They looked her up and down.

"What now? What's this look you're going for?"

Franny shrugged, "me."

Franny saw Avery roll her eyes and snicker, but she tried not to let it bother her. Her face felt stiff and cold like a China doll once again. Only this time, there were no cracks. The China doll's face was smooth and clear; it protected her and she wore it like a shield.

"I like it," Franny said, turned her back, and walked out the door before Avery could say anything else.

It was still bitterly cold out and Franny did not want to spend any more time than necessary outside. She slipped into the first coffee shop she saw and ordered a cup of chai. Sliding into an overstuffed easy chair by the window, she put her tea on a small side table, removed her coat and gloves, dug her sketchbook out of her bag, and lost herself drawing the snow.

After a while, she reached for her cup and took a sip. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed someone watching her. She rolled her eyes, not ready for yet another confrontation. Why? She thought. Why can't they just leave me alone? Turning her back, she stared out the window, blowing on her cup of tea.

The air shifted by her shoulder and she looked up, eyes wide. Even as she struggled to hold up her bold front, it felt as if she was curling in on herself again, that she was small in the chair while a giant stood over her, looming, ready to crush her.

"Excuse me," said a small dark woman with short dreadlocks. "I just wanted to say, I really like your look."

Franny looked down at herself, surprised, "me?" she squeaked.

"Yeah. You look awesome."

"Th-thanks," she stammered.

The woman nodded, waved, and walked out the door.

Franny's heart swelled. She knew it was stupid, having other people validate who she was, but damn, it felt good. Then, she realized, that yes, someone did validate her look, but it was she who wore it in the first place. It was she who took the leap, she who had experienced the rejection and still decided to embrace her look. For the first time, she realized that she was brave. Brave for dressing how she wanted, being who she wanted. She held her chin high and looked around, the stiff China face falling from her body, leaving only Franny behind.

Decolonizing the (Design) Imagination

Ijlal Muzaffar

AMNESTIC DESIGNS

I recently had the opportunity to visit Seoul for a conference. Wandering around the city I ended up at Zaha Hadid's famous Dongdaemun Design Plaza, a part-exhibition, part-education, part-commercial space on the site of the remnants of the Seoul Fortress wall dating back to the Joseon Dynasty. The ruins of the wall were covered over in 1925 during the Japanese colonial occupation with a stadium to commemorate a royal wedding. When the stadium was demolished in 2007, the city announced a "cultural history" park on the site. Strolling around the Design Plaza, I was surprised to find in one of the halls a temporary exhibition on view on the work of Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA) themselves, ranging from projects by the famous architect before her death to those now developed by the firm in her signature style. Prominently displayed amongst the works was a luxury housing development on the island of Roatán, off the coast of Honduras, called Roatán Próspera Residences.[1] I assumed that in a design for a site with a long history of colonialism, shown at a site with its own colonial history, the project would also highlight questions of occupation, memory, and indigeneity.

These were not the project's concerns. The focus of the project was all technical. Ethical, not to mention historical and political, questions were subsumed under the umbrella of "sustainability," that all-encompassing design catchphrase that often assumes that ethics too is a technical problem. The project touted its "environmental" features. Its wooden barrel vaults, stacked on overlapping

terraces, contained individual housing units, each constructed out of a new glue-laminated lumber technology (Fig. 1). Each element of the structure was specifically designed for its purpose and position–for instance, every beam and column was assembled out of specially molded wood pieces, eliminating any wastage or extra materials (Fig. 2). All electrical and environmental systems were also incorporated within the structure. This reduced the amount of material and energy required to install them later in the construction process. This technically streamlined process was extended throughout the supply chain, from sourcing wood from sustainably certified forests, to the most efficient construction methods. The project also claimed social impact by promising to train local inhabitants in construction, as well as building a local dwelling for each housing unit constructed on site.[2]

Yet in this socio-technical enterprise of sustainability there is something strikingly amiss: history. All technical solutions, as well as social gestures, assume that the conditions the project is addressing have emerged by themselves or by forces that have no connection to the present. Severed of all connections to the past, this presentism turns all social gestures, from the training of workers, to the construction of local houses, appear as gestures of generosity. This is particularly curious because the project is presented as a hallmark of design imagination. A separate panel in the exhibition hall labeled "Imagination: Design and Virtual" describes imagination as the firm's unique ability to connect virtual and physical worlds.

But the presentism of the project, and the imagination summoned for it, serves to foreclose precisely the imagination needed to surface historical roots of the Honduras' present conditions. The point of invoking historical roots is not simply to drum up guilt. That too is a privilege. To acknowledge historical connections is to acknowledge how the same forces that produced the present conditions are also contained in many of the approaches that seek to address them.

And the Roatán residences project is a showcase example of this continuity. It doesn't take much effort to find out why the project became possible in the first place. At the nadir of its economic and political turmoil in 2014, the Honduran government amended the constitution to turn areas of the country into mostly autonomous Employment and Economic Development Zones (ZEDE) to attract international investment.[3] The new law gave investors the power to invoke "eminent domain" laws to acquire both public and private land in the ZEDEs according to their emerging requirements. The schemes followed the model of "chartered" cities proposed by Paul Romer, a Nobel prize winning economist, who argued that developing countries needed such investment capsules to find their way out of poverty. These zones would be protected from the inefficient markets and corruption prevalent in the rest of the country while providing opportunities for poverty reduction within them. The prime example of a chartered cities model, Romer argued, was Hong Kong, which existed as an exceptional territory first under British jurisdiction and then as an example of the two-systems-one-state model under

Chinese rule.[4] What Romer didn't acknowledge in his presentation, however, were the forces that had produced those corrupt systems, and associated poverty, in the so-called developing world in the first place. Under the cover of neo-liberal greening, the Roatán project embodies those very forces.

The Roatán residences project is part of a larger project called Roatán Próspera. Though the project itself is only on 58 acres, with a mere 300 feet of shoreline, its publicity materials show flowing luxury homes and office buildings extending for miles, erasing the local town of Crawfish Rock (Fig. 3).[5] This virtual "imagination" alarmed local organizations such as the Bay Island Alliance for Social Justice. Attempts by Roatán Próspera's Venezuelan-American CEO, Erick Brimen, to quell the fear of expansion ended up in heckling and police dispersing the crowd. [6] Kerry Bennett, president of the Bay Island Alliance, in an interview to Vice World News, didn't see this as simply a misunderstanding. "If they wanted to really do something for us, they would be more transparent and they would come and sit down with us," said Bennett. "Imagine me going into your home and just starting to shift things around and telling you what to do."[7]

Indeed, the confrontation hinges on how words like "home" are appropriated by Próspera management to claim a certain continuity with indigenous populations. Such moves are very much in line with what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, quoting Vine Deloria Jr., have famously described as the "Indian-grandmother complex" in the U.S., where countless white settlers claim indigenous lineage on the matrilinear side in "an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land." [8] Próspera's website describes the project as "Island Homes Integrating Island Culture," while ZHA claims a similar continuity by describing the "homes…as a specific ecological and social response to the climate, terrain and culture of Roatán…"[9] Home, culture, and climate become spatial euphemisms, an architectural "Indian-grandmother complex," if you will, that allows the designers, to use Tuck and Yang's words again, "deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land."[10] We get a whiff of this disingenuity when questions of environmental connections are answered by the residents' ability to open and close different louvers and specialized windows according to personal taste. As Sharlene Mollet has argued, such projects have figured as the latest installment in a long line of native land grab schemes that began with the onset of colonialism and continued, very much along the same racial lines, into the postcolonial era.[11] The ZEDEs in particular, have faced strong resistance from native groups like the Garifuna in Honduras. There are now widespread protests against government inaction and against the abduction and disappearance of Garifuna people in Honduras, particularly young men. The silence is seen as a covert strategy for displacing indigenous groups out of coveted ZEDE real estate.[12]

It's hard to stomach celebration of sustainable supply-chains and island "lifestyle choices" in the face of such surrounding violence. Why don't these concerns deserve even one sentence in the

project's design discussions? Sustainability has become an architectural elixir. It turns all questions of inequality and violence into technical problems that are proudly solved with a pat on one's back on slick websites. But architecture and design are able to do so because they render all forces that produced those inequalities to the past. The present becomes a safe space for the privileged, unburdened by how that privilege continues to be produced. Instead of being seen as a historical debt, token efforts toward social engagement appear as grand gestures. The native once again becomes dependent on the colonizer's good will.

Why can't the same columns and beams that boast structural performance and exactitude serve as a measure of loss of the old-growth forest cleared to make room for developments like Roatán Próspera? Old-growth wood is much denser than new-growth and requires less depth to perform the same structural task. How would these columns look if they were made of old-growth forests? We don't have to cut down the remaining old-growth forests to find out. We can animate that virtually. The same animation that shows globe-trotting investors taking in the ocean breeze on terraces extended over the palm trees could show something else. It could show how much thinner the old-growth columns would have been compared to the new ones. It could render the surface of each column translucent, showing those few ghostly millimeters of difference between the existing new-growth and the now-not-possible old-growth columns. This virtual imagination could testify to the historical violence embodied in the most "sustainable" of contemporary designs.

It could also virtually treat the old-growth wood with the same reverence as the native tribes treated them. What process of construction would be required to make a column out of ancestral spirits? What permissions would have been required to turn the Roatán residences into homes? Why can't that permission be taken just as seriously as the fiction of economic growth boasting endless expansion? How would the investors compensate for that wood? Would it be with the return of native land or a share in the new economic regime?

Architecture can have the power to make history alive again. Instead of turning the issue of native displacement and the theft of native land into a vague memory, something done by other bad people with whom we have no connection, it can make these issues continuous with the present, with us and our designs. It can make indigenous beliefs just as viable and valid an interpretation of reality as the fiction of modern charter cities, economic calculations, not to mention tall tales of trickle-down benefits and benevolent handouts. This too could be, and should be, part of the architectural and design imagination. Dissolving the boundary between the virtual and the physical doesn't need to sever the present from all historical burdens. The virtual can also bring back the violence of history, of dues that are still unpaid, and crimes of the past for which we have left no space for redress in our modern political and economic systems.

Architecture has been in the service of erasing history, particularly the history of colonization. The examples of this erasure are multifarious and commonplace. The only way to address this erasure is to challenge architecture's presentism, its claim

to solving social, cultural, and political problems through technical means as if these problems have no history.

All architecture, and design, is storytelling, stories whose yarn is inevitably and ultimately intertwined with the weave of global colonialism. Architectural storytelling in its presentist technical guise is designed to tell only half the story, either deliberately leaving out or unable to imagine lingering historical connections. To expand the architectural imagination beyond the technical and the present, we have to rethink basic notions of architectural storytelling. Materials have histories beyond technical performance. Wood has a history beyond structural performance. It performs historically as well, spanning time and space, connecting continents, objects, buildings, landscapes, people, and power. Architecture and design have to develop the imagination to surface that performance as well.

SHADELESS ARCHITECTURE

Under the shade of the latticed canopy of Jean Nouvel's Louvre, Abu Dhabi, sits a collection of French mahogany furniture. The canopy's sprawling shade is celebrated as the melding of two cultures, combining the cultural capital of Paris with the traditional heritage of the desert. What is not imagined, or acknowledged, is that this mahogany was stolen from Haiti during the violent French colonial occupation of the island to build not only the French naval fleet but also the fashionable bureaus, chairs, and desks that inhabited the social spaces of the new empire, denuding the island to the extent that its barren landscape can be differentiated from the neighboring Dominican Republic from space (Fig. 4).[13] How should we think of this shade in Abu Dhabi that holds the very wood that has left Haiti shadeless? How should we think about the shiny surface of the mahogany itself that has been "tamed" through specific tools to reflect colonial ideas of civility and sophistication? Instead of invoking clichéd images of desert oases and craftsmanship, could this canopy, and the wood it covers, be imagined—through a re-coding of design and materiality—as a collapse of the very colonial forces that has made the Louvre in Paris, and in Abu Dhabi, possible?

Each and every lattice of the canopy of Louvre Abu Dhabi could be connected to the ancient forests of mahogany in the Haitian countryside. The lattices, instead of just reflecting the construction sequence, or generalized "Islamic" patterns, could count the trees felled by slave labor to build thousands of ships for the French navy on which the colonial loot of centuries accumulated in the Louvre Paris that was now being loaned to its moniker in Abu Dhabi (Fig. 5). The cross hatchings of the latticed dome could also map the thousands of crossings that those ships made between French military forts dotting the west African coast where slaves were imprisoned before being shipped to the Caribbean from the Gates of No Return (Fig. 6).[14] Without these past performances of destruction, enslavement, and military and design production, there would have been no resources, nor cultural appetite, for the Napoleonic campaign into Ottoman territories in Egypt and Syria, without which there would be no looted Egyptian antiquities in the Louvre's collection, in Paris or Abu Dhabi.

How would we see the shade of the Louvre Abu Dhabi's canopy in the desert sun if we recognized these performances? Would we be reminded of the latticed grills of the slave-holds on those mahogany ships from which their captives too saw the same speckled sun (Figs. 7, 8)?

Why can't these historical performances, performances of history, be part of architectural performance now? Should we remember, and yes, imagine, these connections anew, or should our memories and imaginations also follow the amnestic directive issued by the slavers' Gates of No Return?[15]

There is a connection between a mahogany bureau sitting in a bourgeois home in Paris, the sunshine percolating through the latticed roof canopy of the new Louvre in Abu Dhabi and the scorched shadeless landscape of Haiti that is visible even from space. Architecture and design can make possible these pneumatic performances. They can collapse the imaginative gulfs we have created between the past and the present.[16] There is a connection between the stolen indigenous land of Roatán, the "sustainable" forests grown on it, and the structurally efficient columns of the ZHA residences. They too are intimately connected in the long colonial material footprint across space and time. It is the work of the decolonized imagination to collapse, and grasp, these connections. Surely, this work will never be sufficient. There will always be more connections. But to not even try to connect propositions of design and global justice, never mind fictions of sustainable economic growth, to these past global networks would be to show the poverty of our own imagination in the present.

FIGURES

Fig. 1. Roatán Próspera Residences (image: ZHA website: https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/roatan-prospera-residences/. accessed 09-01-2022).

Fig. 2. Roatán Próspera Residences. Details of the new glue-laminated composite columns can be seen at the left and right of the image (image; ZHA website: https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/roatan-prospera-residences/, accessed 09-01-2022).

Fig. 3. Roatán Próspera. Aerial view showing the development extending for miles over indigenous land (image: Roatán Próspera's website: https://prospera.hn/roatan, accessed 09-01-2022).

Fig. 4. Legacies of Colonialism: Haiti in the Present. We can see the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic from space (image: Google Earth)

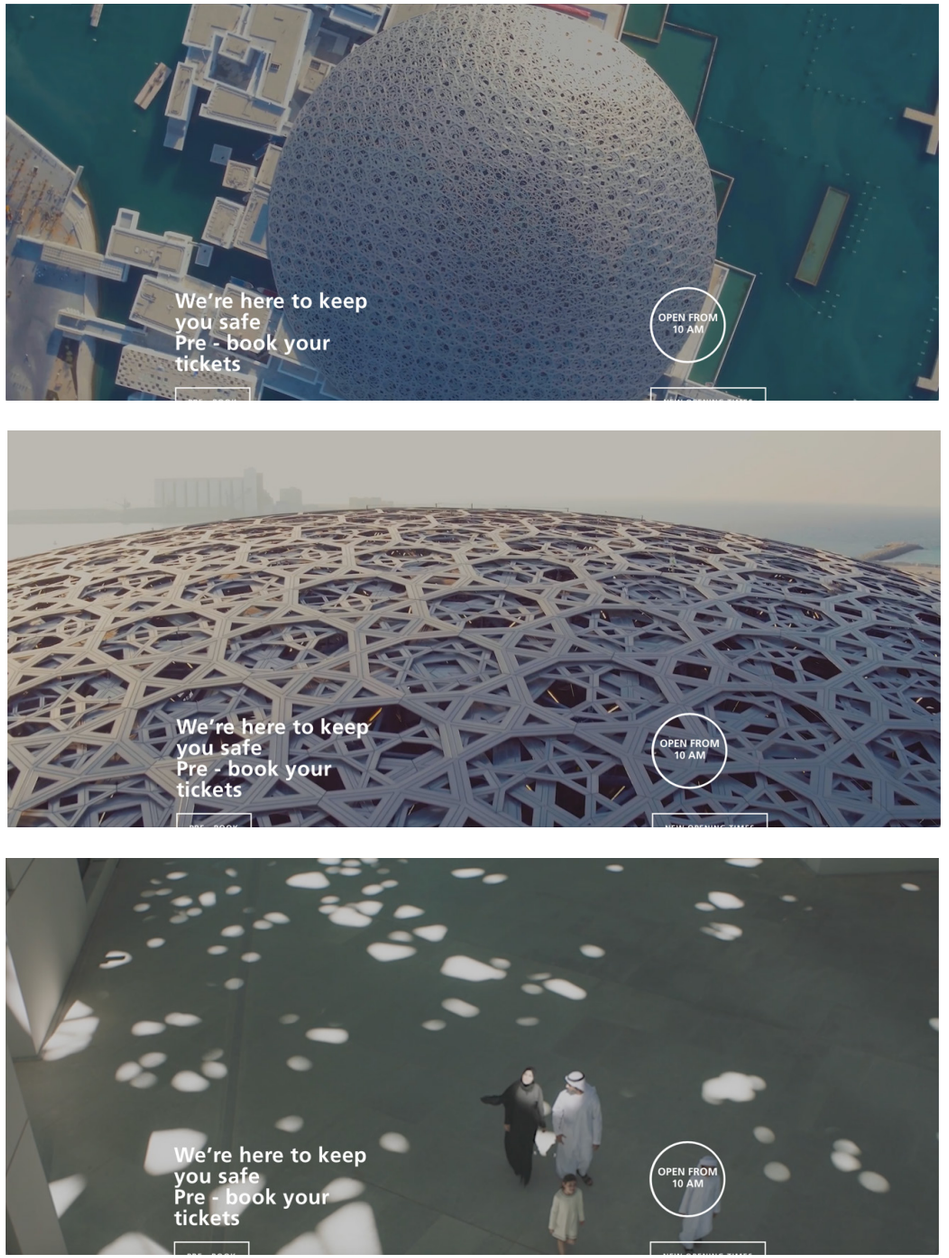

Fig. 5. The Louvre, Abu Dhabi was designed by the office of Jean Nouvel and completed in 2017. (image: https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae, accessed July 20th 2021.)

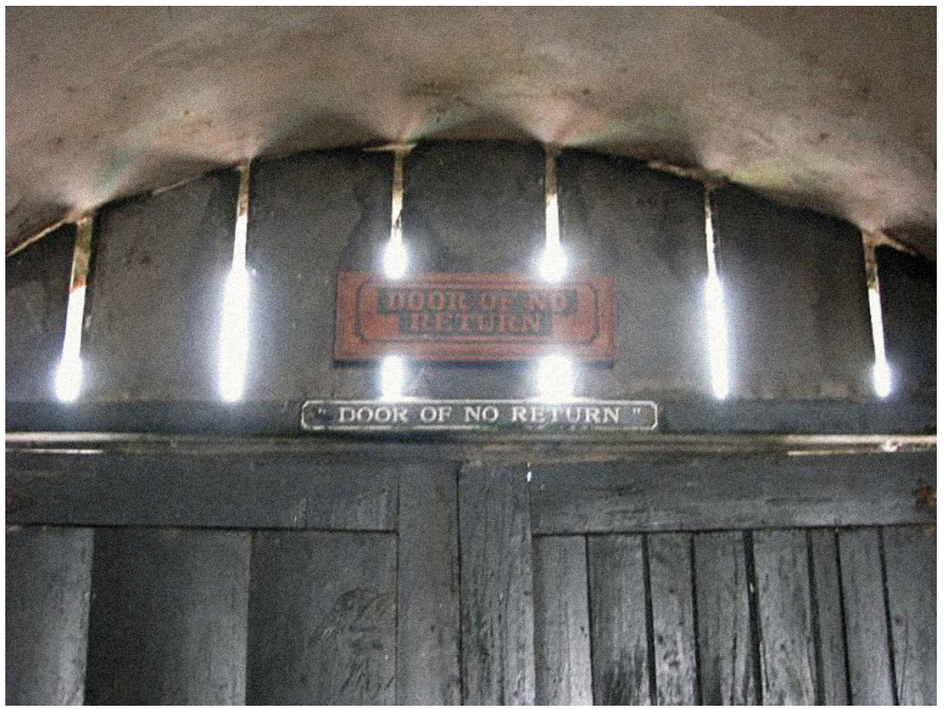

Fig. 6. Cape Coast Castle, the Gate of No Return (photo: James Dimengo). Though Cape Coast Castle was controlled over time by the Swedes, Dutch, Portuguese, and the English, it was within cannon shot of about sixty such forts, many controlled by the French with their own "gates of no returns" on a 300-mile-long western coast of Africa, along what is now Ghana, considered strategically critical in the transatlantic slave trade.

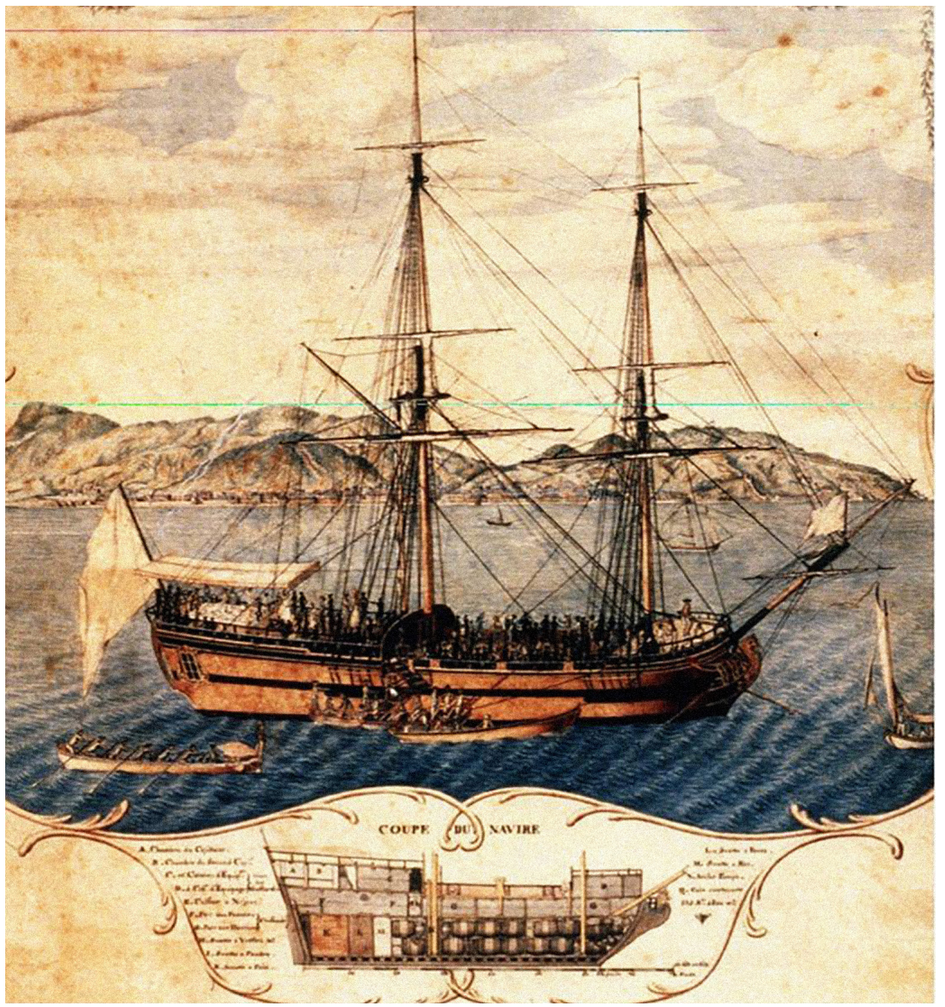

Fig. 7. The French colonized the western half of the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti). 1772 Slave ship off of Cap Francais, S. Dominique (Haiti) en route from Angola (image: The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record Created by Jerome S. Handler and Michael L. Tuite Jr. Maintained by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the Digital Media Lab at the University of Virginia Library.)

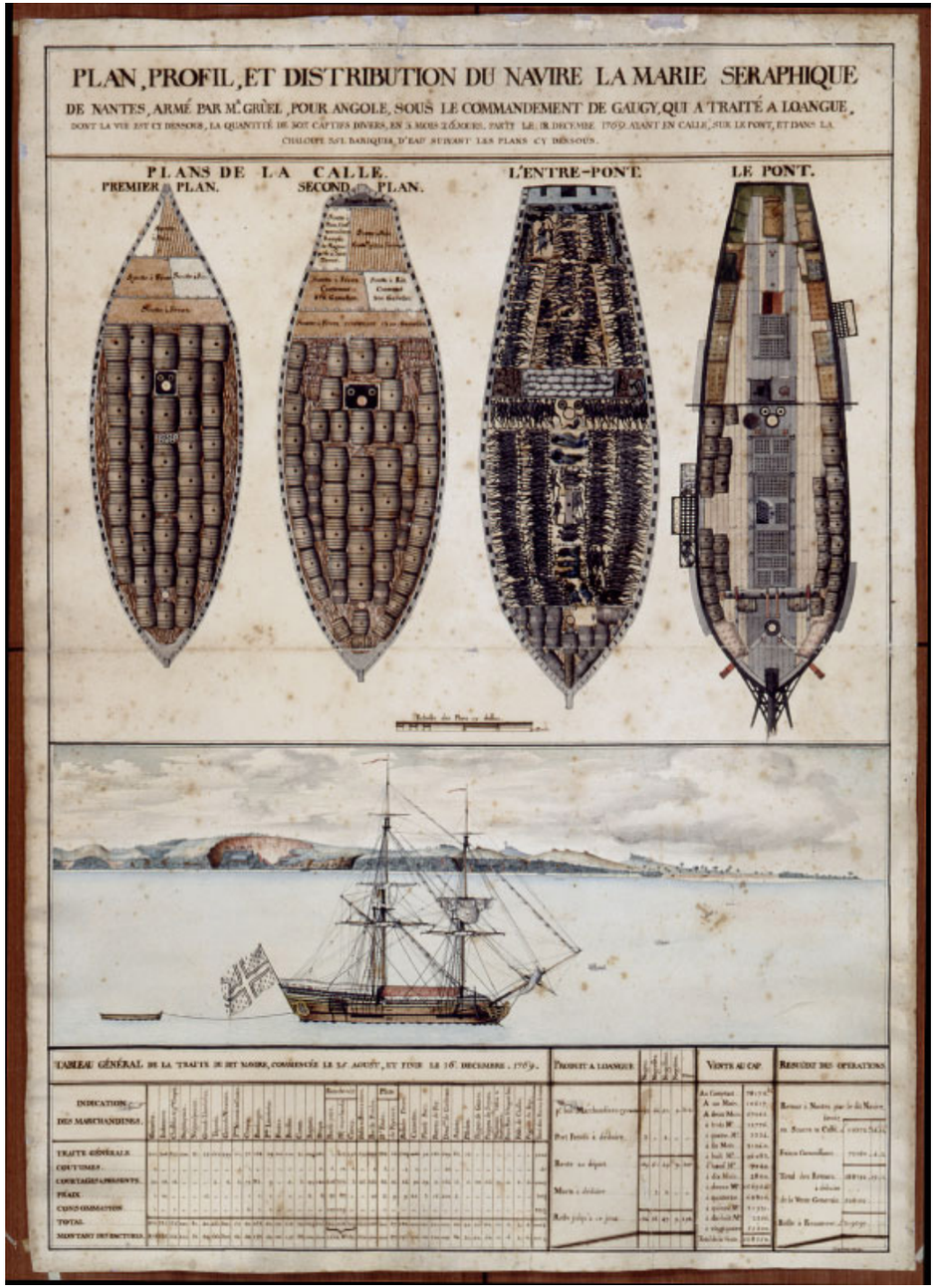

Fig. 8. Plan, profile and layout of the ship Marie Séraphique of Nantes (Photo credit: copyright Château des ducs de Bretagne, Musée d'histoire de Nantes, Allain Guillard)

Fig. 9. Mahogany Commode, ca. 1745–49, Charles Cressent, Manufacturer.

1 The exhibition, Meta-Horizons: The Future Now, was on view at the DDP Design Museum, Seoul, from 26 May-18 September 2022.

2 See the project description at the ZHA website: https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/roatan-prospera-residences/. Accessed 09-01-2022.

3 The ZEDEs were to be overseen by an international oversight committee. But the committee itself had the power to invoke eminent domain and constituted groups and individuals, such as Grover Norquist, founder of Americans for Tax Reform, who have long argued for decreased regulation and oversight.

4 Romer first presented the idea at a TED talk in 2009: https://www.ted.com/talks/paul_romer_why_the_world_needs_charter_cities?language=en. Accessed 09-01-2022.

5 See the first image at https://prospera.hn/roatan.

6 See the video of the assembly posted on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=945500435926649. Accessed 09-01-2022

7 See Jeff Ernst, "Foreign Investors Are Building a 'Hong Kong of the Caribbean' on a Remote Honduran Island," Vice World News (Dec. 2, 2020): https://www.vice.com/en/article/k7a7ae/foreign-investors-are-building-a-hong-kong-of-the-caribbean-on-a-remote-honduran-island. Accessed 09-01-2022..

8 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," in Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1: 1 (2012), pp. 1-40. Quoted on p. 11.

9 See Zaha Hadid Architects, Roatán Prospera Residences, at https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/roatan-prospera-residences/.

10 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," op. cit., p. 11.

11 See Sharlene Mollett, "The Power to Plunder: Land Grabbing in Latin American," in Antipode, 48: 2 (March 2016)pp. 412-432.

12 See Keri Vacanti Brondo, Land Grab: Green Neoliberalism, Gender, and Garifuna Resistance in Honduras (University of Arizona Press, 2013).

13 Saint-Domingue, the western part of the colonized island of Hispaniola, which later gained its independence as Haiti, was the most lucrative of the French colonial possessions. But the transformation of Saint-Domingue into Haiti passed through a long, tumultuous, revolution. Its success in large part was due to the extraordinary capabilities of its leader, Toussaint Louverture, still an understudied figure in modern history who, according to scholar Sudhir Hazareesingh, should be called "the first black superhero of the modern age." Louverture was born enslaved on a sugar plantation on Saint-Domingue and was only emancipated as an adult. At around age 50, he led what Lauren Collins has called the "most important slave revolt in history, effectively forcing France to abolish slavery, in 1794. Next, he united the island's Black and mixed-race populations under his military command; outmaneuvered three successive French commissioners; defeated the British; overpowered the Spanish; and, in 1801—despite having been wounded seventeen times in battle and having lost most of his front teeth to a cannonball explosion—authored a new abolitionist constitution for Saint-Domingue, asserting that 'here, all men are born, live, and die free and French.'" Napoleon, who had gained tremendously from Louverture's efforts in consolidating the French revolution, walked backed on his promise of emancipation and reinstated slavery in Haiti in 1802, sending a force of twenty thousand to overthrow Louverture. Louverture defeated the onslaught but was ultimately captured and sent to prison in the Jura mountains in France, where he died in months. But the republic he had established was not defeated. "In 1803, Bonaparte's army was defeated," Collins reminds us, "having lost more soldiers (his brother-in-law among them) on Saint-Domingue than he would, twelve years later, at Waterloo. In 1804, the next year, the revolutionaries established a new, independent, and free nation: Haiti, the world's first Black republic." See Lauren Collins, "The Haitian Revolution and the Hole in French High-School History," The New Yorker (December 3, 2020; and Sudhir Hazareesingh, Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

14 The Louvre in Abu Dhabi was designed by the office of Jean Nouvel and completed in 2017.

15 Katharina Schramm has argued that the Door of No Return has anchored the myth of "homecoming" for African Americans and others in the African diaspora, "refer[ing] to the cultural amnesia and sense of disconnection that slavery and the Middle Passage stand for." Schramm has examined how the rhetoric of the (Pan-)African family, contested and shared between Diasporan returnees and African hosts, is sustained through various practices, from the appropriation of slave forts to the marking of "emancipation" days and demands for reparation. See Katharina Schramm, African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage (Left Coast Press, 2010).

16 The Louvre plans to collect $1.2 billion from the UAE for lending its name to the new museum. If we can collapse these connections, it would not be unimaginable to demand that sum as a partial repayment of the $21 billion France forcefully collected from Haiti over six generations as a price for independence. See Dan Sperling, "In 1825, Haiti Paid France $21 Billion To Preserve Its Independence -- Time For France To Pay It Back," in Forbes (Dec 6, 2017): https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/12/06/in-1825-haiti-gained-independence-from-france-for-21-billion-its-time-for-france-to-pay-it-back/?sh=1435d4c4312b. Accessed July 20th, 2021.

What is Alive? A Collapsing Definition

Lizzie Hunt

The definition of life is crumbling. The one used by many biologists is a list of 7 descriptions: movement, reproduction, sensitivity, nutrition, excretion, respiration and growth. The criteria are clear, but they lead to surprising results. Mules have all the living qualities of their horse and donkey parents, except they are sterile, so are nonliving. Viruses have genetic material, but they are too dependent on hosts, so are nonliving. Parasites, however, are living.

The confusion can be immobilizing in the context of species loss. Many western environmental values are predicated on a clear definition of life. Biodiversity is the diversity of living organisms, and extinction is the loss of living organisms. What should we be counting to quantify diversity and loss? Adding to the confusion, the scale of the living world has exploded. In 1753, Carl Linnaeus believed that the number of plant species in the world could hardly reach 10,000. His taxonomy in Systema naturae' included 4,400 animal species and 7,700 plant species.[1] Now, mostly because of microbes, scientists estimate that earth might support a trillion species of living organisms.[2]

With a murky biological definition and a trillion species to consider, it's difficult to know how to use the category of life. Of course, not everyone considers contemporary biologists as the authority on this subject, and not everyone has had such a confusing experience of the definition as western scientists. New Materialists like Bruno Latour argue that it is the modern conceit to create a divide between nature and culture, and one that has only proliferated our hybridization with nature.[3] Astronomers

use their own interpretation of life as they look for extraterrestrial signs. And many communities have more relational ties to living beings. 'Aliveness' is culturally specific.

Many interpretations of life are mirrors of the human cultural experience. Does it have a soul? Does it have cells? While biologists look for similarities to humans to find life, astrobiologists look for similarities to Earth, with 'biosignatures' like oxygen and methane.[4] But astrobiologists are becoming more critical of this formula. Their failure to find extraterrestrial life might not be for lack of existence, but for lack of imagined possibilities.[5] Perhaps life in other places doesn't need what it does here, or look like it does here.

The biosignatures that are crucial to life on earth are unreliable predictors of life elsewhere, leading to what astrobiologists call 'false positives.' For example, we might find methane and oxygen on another planet but both cows and volcanoes release methane, and both plants and starlight create oxygen.[6] Volcanoes and starlight are producing critical signs of life.

If the definition of life is a mirror to us, then a telling correlation is the increased funding interest in techno-signatures, which are signs of extraterrestrial technology. To look for techno-signatures we must imagine both the diverse possibilities for life and what that life could possibly *create.* Life doesn't just exist, it *makes.* We might find incredible relationships between beings and what they've made. And while we probably can't imagine extraterrestrial technology without imagining who made it, perhaps the reverse is true too. Just as technology has changed the way we think and look, the same might be true on other planets. In the past, extraterrestrial technology meant spacecrafts or radio signals, reflections of a time when vehicles and radio symbolized technology. But as the possibilities for technology expand, I wonder if the search for extraterrestrial life will maintain a divide between techno-signatures and bio-signatures as our own planet merges these concepts with living technologies. As we look for the outer edges of the meaning of life, we should ask what the limitations are for living bodies to create living technologies? For life not just to evolve accidentally into more diverse life, but for it to intelligently and intentionally make more forms and processes of life? We have changed our atmosphere and the genetics of our food and flowers, why are we pretending that neither humans, nor extraterrestrial beings, nor nonhumans can intentionally create what life is? As space opens creative ground for us to imagine, we should allow those possibilities to critique our earthly conception of life. How do we hold the line between life and technology when there are so many examples of its crossovers? There will hopefully be a growing dialectic between different possibilities for life and how we understand life.

The western definition of life was shaped against what white anthropologists saw as primitive animism in the 19th century. In EB Tylor's 1871 book 'Primitive Culture,' he popularized the idea of animism as an inferior belief system of the 'low races' and a precursor to correct, civilized thought.[7] He defined animism more by its difference from western thought than by real connections among indigenous belief systems. Viewed from a western lens,

Tylor explains what a 'soul' is, and pastes it everywhere, on the Alongquin 'otahchuk' and the Quiché 'natub'.[8] Then he goes on to say, "The critiques that "The sense of absolute physical distinction between man and beast, so prevalent in the civilized world, is hardly to be found among the lower races. Men to whom cries of beasts and birds seem like human language, and their actions guided as it were by human thought, logically enough allow the existence of souls to beasts, birds, and reptiles, as to men."[9]

Though EB Tylor's work has been debunked, embarrassed, and contradicted, his shadow looms large over many people's understanding of animism and indigenous belief. To him, animists were erroneously mixing biology and belief. He was proud of the objective, scientific lens that his civilization was cultivating, and ironically considered his work a unique 'science of culture.'[10] The biological definition of life was formed within this same presumptive separation between nature and culture.

A century later, Nurit Bird-David published a famous 1999 article entitled 'Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology,' after working with the Nayaka, a tribe in India. Her work is a clear effort to show the validity in indigenous belief for western readers. She argues that yes, the tribe did ascribe personhood to rocks, animals, and other nonhumans, but it isn't *human* personhood. She explains that their beliefs are better defined by relatedness. Relatives are "that or whom one interrelates with" and Kinship means "one whom we share with."[11] While she doesn't share a tone of superiority with Tylor, there is still a sense that she is trying to prove that animism isn't wrong.

The placement of indigenous beliefs on a scale of right to wrong implies that there is a 'correct' belief.

The Native American focus on relationships rather than criteria is an effective critique of the western meaning of life. In Winona LaDuke's book *All our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, she writes that "Native American teachings describe the relations all around–animals, fish, trees, and rocks–as our brothers, sisters, uncles and grandpas."[12] Several philosophers have pointed out that one of the problems with defining life is that life is a process, not an inert material.[13] If we take as a starting point that humans are living, then we must incorporate that we will not always be living, that life is an interaction with time, air, and decay. The seven biological criteria suggest the existence of relationships, eating, excreting, growing, breathing, moving, reacting, and reproducing, but biologists are still more focused on what the 'thing' is rather than what the relationship is. The indigenous focus on relations both defines and instructs. While the western definition of life doesn't imply a responsibility, kin does.

It's difficult to insert a responsibility into the biological understanding of life—partially for its sheer scale, and partially because of the differences and complexities within the group we call living. Conservatively, it's estimated that 86% of species are undescribed and we know next to nothing about them.[14] Of the ones we know, they have evolved into countless unique relationships, and are living through unprecedented accelerations of climate change, urbanization, and globalization. There is no way to uncomplicate ecology. We may not know how

to maximize our support of all life, but indigenous kinship could inspire us to intentionally choose our nonhuman relationships. And while the relationships may not be familial, they will probably need more attention and care than we can give to a trillion species at once.

Another way of dealing with the complexity and scale of life could be to focus on the relationships among material life. Jane Bennett, Bruno Latour, and Donna Haraway believe that agency is not confined to plants, animals and humans, but exists in networks, assemblages, or sympoiesis. Life is a relationship among many overlapping things, with animate electricity networks and compost piles. The line between description and responsibility is slim, and each author has recommendations for how we should support these animate networks. Haraway recommends "staying with the trouble" of inherited damages and collaborating with nonhumans.[15] Jane Bennett recommends we "engage more civilly, strategically, and subtly with the nonhumans in the assemblages in which you too participate."[16] And Latour recommends we break down the artificial divide between society and nature and continue to make hybrids of nature and culture.[17] Based on their definition of life, collaborating with nonhumans seems like common sense—we already collaborate with electricity to turn on our lights, and plants to build our gardens. But more meaningfully it is a shift in the power dynamics of the relationship, to treat nonhumans less like objects to control and more like creative, generative, and equal collaborators.

Landscape Architects are key collaborators with nonhumans, shaping complex meeting points between people and living things like waterfronts, streets, and parks. They often treat sites like assemblages and treat nonhuman forces with a kind of agency. But the discipline still exists within the parameters of capitalism and is subject to the same patterns of commodification as other industries. What would it mean for landscape architects to give their nonhuman collaborators agency and creativity? How can they support rather than control their collaborators? Or recognize the unique abilities of nonhumans to make, change, build and create?

It was with these questions in mind that I began growing plants from wild seed. Most plants need to reproduce by seed to create genetic diversity and adapt, but commercial nurseries usually use genetically identical cuttings to propagate plants. While the ability to reproduce is one of those 7 biological qualities of living things, I was more immediately concerned with supporting their gene pool for survival and resilience in the context of climate change. I asked permission from local land trusts and then collected seeds in paper bags, shook them through gold-panning sieves, scratched some to mimic bird gullets, and pouched them in ziplocks of moist sand. They hid in a drawer of my refrigerator to mimic winter while I bent fence rail to build a greenhouse. Some didn't germinate. As I stood there every single morning watering and watching, thinking about whether I used the right soil, or refrigerated them long enough, I thought about whether life was really encapsulated in that tiny seed, or whether it was in the water, and the soil, and fridge, and me, and the seed was just the important thing that brought them all together.

There are many parts of the biological definition

of life that are still important. I think we should still be looking for, recognizing, and counting embodied, evolved species. But for the definition of life to be reflective of what we understand about the world, and helpful to us in relating to it, we could expand our definitions, and distinguish between 'living' and 'lifeforms.' Living would be considered a larger process that includes respiration and metabolism but also decomposition and making. Lifeforms could be the embodied species that we currently call living (just with more intuitive inclusions like mules and viruses.) Shifting our language to acknowledge life not as a thing but as a process and relationship among forms would allow us to think more accurately and creatively about living. Maintaining a distinction of species that reflect our own embodied experience allows us to acknowledge that lifeforms have uniquely evolved over millions of years so are precious and irreplaceable.

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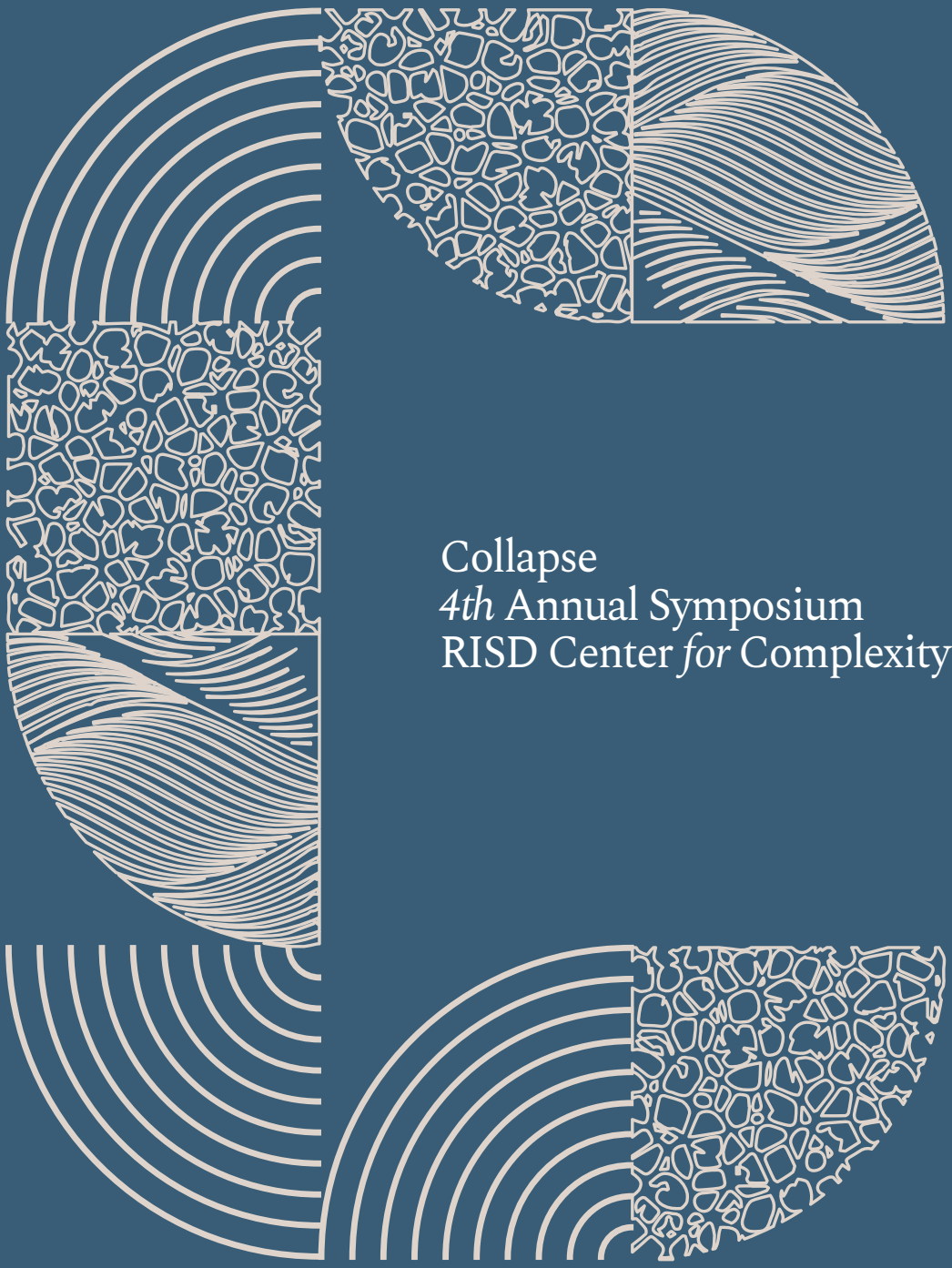

Collapse

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