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Figure it Out: The Art of Living Through System Failures

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05 November 2026

FIGURE IT OUT



THE *Art of Living Through Systems Failure*

EDITED BY
MARA FERRERI GRAZIANO, MARCELL MARS,
TOMISLAV MEDAK AND DAVOR VIDIŠKOVIĆ

Fig

FIGURE IT OUT

THE *Art* OF *Living Through Systems Failures*

EDITED BY
MARA FERRERI, VALERIA GRAZIANO,
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DRUGO MORE
2024

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PREFACE

by Figure it Out collaborators:
Kiosk, !Mediengruppe Bitnik; RYBN.ORG,
Labomedia, Škart

FIGURE IT OUT – THE ART OF LIVING THROUGH SYSTEM FAILURES IS …a playground, research lab, and a process of learning, exchange, and establishing a whole new set of relations …a chance for side-steps, small invisible things of living poetry, to be visible …necessity for almost everyone …a way of combining social, cultural, and artistic approaches based on experiences in different parts of Europe, a way of figuring out in contexts of greater adversity and precariousness …a list of propositions, of possibilities to live differently, a dialogue, a call for more solidarity, a wake-up call

FIGURE IT OUT IS NOT …a book of certainty …a strategy, but a notegy, whatever it means …a joke, and not an artwork …liberal recipes for winning in a competitive environment …accepting the status quo

SOME GOOD REASONS TO READ FIGURE IT OUT: – To learn and get inspired – To encourage your hidden *rebbelations* – To awaken consciousness about the wide space of social weakness – To search for a new political language – To see some interpretations of how people survive – To see that each person / collective shows great creativity in overcoming the difficultie of the system and everyday life – To learn how many things we should not accept or take for granted

SOME GOOD REASONS TO AVOID FIGURE IT OUT: – To avoid uncertainty – No time to read – join the anger-feed – Some might be disappointed with limited examples.

It is not the user manual for a better life. – Or how to find collective solutions for a serene future in common. There is hardly any in the current moment

SOME THINGS WE LEARNED WHILE CREATING FIGURE IT OUT: – People are full of humor, playfulness, and ideas – It is hard, almost impossible to shape it as an art project – Trusting the intelligence of each individual / collective to invent liveable and desirable futures. – The "system" is even more ludicrous than we were aware of – Necessity of solidarity with unprivileged and invisible voices

SOME THINGS WE STILL HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT: – "with unprivileged and invisible voices" – The art of living and how to use a HackMD shared doc. – Almost everything. There are countless stories that still have to be told and heard. – The end of ultraliberal capitalism – How to stop repeating "it could be worse"

WE OWE A HUGE THANKS TO THESE AMAZING PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS: Tara Rukeci Milivojević, Sanja Stamenković, Maja Vučković, Dragana Kojičić, Milica Ivanović, Dženeta Agović, Zuzana Karlečik, Vladislav Mijić, Paul Leonard Murray, Nada, Muradija, Jovanka, Agnesa, Duda, Sandra, Sanja, Ajsela, Una, Marina, Ceca, Atifa, Maja, Ruška, Juca, Bahta, Vesna, Hajruša, Zorica, Verica, Ana, Maja, Dušanka, Fatima, Srđana, Sandra, Bisera and Snežana.

Most of those whom, because of local rules and conditions, must stay anonymous > respect and huge thanks to all of them.

All the staff and kids from Bela Crkva, all the friends from Drugo More who still believe in us, Margerita Pule for being patient and waiting for our e-mail responses, KIOSK friends for being generous, optimistic, and supportive.

Sarah & Maël (Foncière Antidote), Sidonie Han, Eric Arrivé, Brigitte Bonnefille (Clip), Sophie Gosselin & David gé Bartoli (Parlement de Loire), Nicolas Horber (∏-Node & MBC Mulhouse), Julien Bellanger (JetFM, Nantes), all Constant team & Technodisobedience participants (Brussels), Ernesto Oroza (Brussels), all Hackstub people (Strasbourg), all la Labomedia team & Futurétic (Orléans), Reni & Yogi Hoffmüller (Mur.at), STWST Linz, Bernhard Hummel (Mietshäuser Syndikat, Berlin), Servus.at (Linz), Rechtaufstadt Forum (Berlin), Marie Yan & La Générale (Paris), MiG (Paris), Tobias (Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen), Spideralex & Calafou, Davor Mišković, Ivana Katić (Drugo More), Valeria Graziano, Tomislav Medak, Marcell Mars (Pirate Care), Syndicat de la Montagne Limousine et Haut les cimes (Plateau de Millevaches), la Compagnie (Marseille), Technopolice (Marseille), Alphabetville (Marseille), Konrad Becker & Felix Stadler (Vienna), Fluidspace (Marseille), ASRG group (www).

To all amazing women around Serbia who hosted us, talked with us, agreed to share their stories and their very precious time with us.

škart poem

united translation from škart scraps:
Ljiljana Ilić, Milan Marković, Paul Murray

SNAĐI SE, DRUŽE

snađi se, druže
pravila stoje
da se preskoče
da se prekroje

snađi se, druže
izvan svih staza
po šumi, gori
bez putokaza

seti se, druže
pupoljka s grana
indijanaca
i partizana

združi se, druže
možeš i mogu
ruku pod ruku
nogu pred nogu

snađi se, druže
pa kako bude
laži su meke
istine tvrde

snađi se, druže
ljubav se broji
broje se boje
i nespokoji

snađi se, druže
i drugarice
čeka nas sunce
iz sutrašnjice!!!

FIGURE IT OUT, COMRADE

figure it out, comrade
rules are just meant
for you to alter
and circumvent

follow your heart, comrade
you are not lost
king of the forest
needs no signpost

remember, comrade
blossoming plants
all indians
and partisans

let's close ranks, comrade
together in need
your hand in my hand
and marching feet

improvise, comrade
and play your part
lies might be soft
while truths are hard

deal with it, comrade
love is what counts
colors we count
and restless sounds

figure it out, comrade
and comradess
tomorrow's sun
is our address!!!

INTRO DUCTION

by Valeria Graziano, Mara Ferreri, Tomislav Medak, Davor Mišković, Marcell Mars

Figure it Out (FIO) is an artistic and research project engaging practices and phenomena of coping, tinkering, making-do, and circumventing exclusions that are developed by marginalized, underserved, discriminated, and vulnerable people. Gendered, racialized, bordered, disabled, and exploited, these constituencies are often forced to develop tools and strategies that are considered unacceptable to the institutions of the system. Sometimes these tools and strategies are forged out of necessity, of survival, sometimes to exercise rights or to secure access to basic services available to those deemed more "deserving". Other times, these coping mechanisms reclaim rest, beauty, or pleasure as part of a dignified life. What FIO practices and phenomena have in common is that they are not about scamming peers or those more vulnerable than them. Instead, they are practices that take issue with formalized, normative forms of oppression (state, welfare institutions, corporations, workplace, credit, housing, utilities etc.) that have sets of rules and conditions of access that specific populations or individuals cannot meet. They are actions directed at the conditions that produce and reproduce systemic violence and which reformist approaches aim to fix in the long run. FIO practices instead inhabit different temporalities from the perspective of those who cannot and will not wait. In their urgency, they open up spaces where different ethical practices can emerge, where

knowledges are passed on in ways that complicate claims to a universal and transparent public sphere.

The production of the FIO project has involved different yet interconnected research and creative processes carried out by a constellation of collaborators (artists, researchers, activists) working across media, resulting in newly commissioned art projects (including by Kiosk, !Mediengruppe Bitnik and Škart), two exhibitions, a radio festival, two symposia, four bonfire events, and a web platform/publication inclusive of interviews, commissioned texts and a dedicated library of resources. Partner organizations in these productions are Drugo More (Croatia), Kiosk (Belgrade, Serbia), Labomedia (Orléans, France), Unfinished Foundation (Malta), and Vektor (Athens, Greece).

The following text will focus on contextualizing the subject matter in historical terms and introduce one specific project among the many that compose FIO, namely the process of research-creation that focuses on storytelling.

CHEATING, LYING, STEALING

The FIO project begins with tales of individuals or entire communities outwitting the system. By "system," we mean any administrative structure or organization that sets and upholds the "rules of the game". These rules are composed of numerous "small rules," which are specific conditions we must fulfill to participate in the game. We all recognize this experience: for example, to rent a house or cross a border we need proof of identity, which usually requires various types of evidence. Similar conditions apply to receiving social services, refugee status, or to enroll in public schools or colleges. These prerequisites can be political, economic, demographic, or social. When we fail to meet some of these conditions, we face a choice: either give up or use our ingenuity. Sociologist Robert K. Merton's strain theory—which became the basis of

criminal sociology in the 1950s and 1960s—described innovation as accepting socio-cultural goals (like citizenship) but finding alternative ways to achieve them when regular processes fail. Innovation, in this context, involves bending the rules, employing charm, deceit, forgery, hacking, or other means considered illegal, criminal, or at least immoral.[1] According to Merton, while excluded groups must innovate to participate, the system often views their innovations as scams.

But what if we start from the idea that the game itself is rigged? Historian Julilly Kohler-Hausmann has shown that since the 1970s mechanisms for single mothers in America to access social support have been set up as a nearly impossible game.[2] The rules prohibited them from working or having a partner's support, while the aid they received was insufficient for survival. As a result, many women had to cheat the system, such as by hiding their employment. Is this a scam or a survival strategy? Such borderline cases reappear over and over again across times and geographies. As political theorist Kathi Weeks put it recently, the contemporary ubiquitous reliance on minor forms of illegalism hints to a becoming lumpenproletariat of vast segments of society, calling for a re-conceptualization of this class as one of the major uncompleted projects inherited from Marxist and anarchist debates of the previous century.[3]

1 Merton, Robert K. "Social Structure and Anomie." In *Social Theory and Social Structure*, edited by Robert K. Merton, 185–214. New York: The Free Press, 1957.

2 Kohler-Hausmann, Julilly. "The Crime of Survival: Fraud Prosecutions, Community Surveillance, and the Original 'Welfare Queen.'" *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 2 (2007): 329–354.

3 Weeks, Kathi. "The Lumpenproletariat and the Politics of Class." *Crisis & Class* 10, no. 1 (2023): 325–347.

Over the past two decades, the weight of what David Graeber called "total bureaucratization,"[4] a tangled web of surveillance, punishment, and neglect, has only grown heavier. This bureaucratic machinery was already reconfiguring capitalist societies when Fourierist and anarchist movements at the turn of the last century took notice.[5] Later, it seeped into the critiques of autonomists, Maoists, Black Panthers, and public intellectuals like Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Frantz Fanon, as they all took aim at the insidiousness of institutionalized production of delinquency.[6]

Thus, deceiving an unjust or biased system can be justified. In the F10 project, we wanted to focus on the ingenuity of socially excluded groups trying to survive. No one who is not in serious economic need would bother buying broken light bulbs at a flea market to swap them out with functioning ones at their workplace, to take those home instead, as some urban poor do. These practices arise from necessity. We must ask ourselves what kind of society creates a market for broken light bulbs or forces single mothers into impossible situations—without questioning the morality of their "cheats."

These scenarios blur the line between personal gain and survival strategies. Historically, this distinction was made by officials in administrative offices—immigration officers, social workers, bank clerks, insurance employees, state institutions, and municipal offices. The judgment of these street-level bureaucrats, based on context, experience, political views and empathy, differentiated fraud

4 Graeber, David. *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Melville House, 2015.

5 Graziano, Valeria. "Životna vještina raje: Institucionalno krparenje pučki ilegalizmi." *Kritika* 5 (2024): 125–146.

6 Vásquez, Delio. "Illegalist Foucault, Criminal Foucault." *Theory & Event* 23, no. 4 (2020): 935–972.

from survival.[7] As digitalization and automation transfer ever more decision-making power to algorithms, this bureaucratic boundary becomes less permeable for those struggling to participate in social processes. The digital realm thus became a crucial topic within the FIO project because it interacts with idiosyncratic life circumstances and automated procedures, leading to new forms of knowledges and subcultures aimed at overcoming digital governance's unintended consequences. For example, Christoph Wachter and Mathias Jud's Picidae web application helps users bypass Chinese internet censorship by transforming websites into digital pictures. Conversely, activists repurpose surveillance technology to expose illicit "push-backs" of asylum seekers when authorities violate prescribed procedures. The FIO project focuses on sousveillance practices and little scams that are developing in response to algorithmic decision-making models that reproduce or exacerbate existing exclusions and injustices.[8] People adapt to these models by deceiving them.

STORYTELLING

Knowledge about ways of coping with failing systems is shared in ways that continuously need to negotiate their right to opacity in order to exist. The FIO research collective has been tracing, sharing and finding uses for stories of FIO practices beyond the locals that generated them. This specific process has being carried out by Mara Ferreri, Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, Davor Mišković and Tomislav Medak, in collaboration with Kiosk,

7 Lipsky, Michael. *Toward a Theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy*. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, 1969.

8 Browne, Simone. "Introduction, and Other Dark Matters." In *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, 1–62. Duke University Press, 2015.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik; RYBN.ORG, Labomedia, Škart and the many people they in turn co-produced with.

This process was conceived as an idiosyncratic methodology to generate a zone of contact between the different processes of artistic, academic and militant research within the project itself. The collection of stories has happened via a mixed method of online and desk based research, word of mouth, interviews, and inquiries through personal and professional networks, and also, more crucially, through witnessing during short research visits hosted by other project members. These visits were organized around a bonfire gathering, that is, an unplugged (unrecorded) collective storytelling session.

While a fire might or might not have been literally present at the bonfires, these gatherings—across diverse languages and locations—have followed a scripted dramaturgy, in the first part, followed by a convivial and spontaneous second part. During the first part of the bonfire, a collective reading takes place, performed by all present. After a brief introduction of the FIO project's subject matter and motivations, a print-out of around twenty stories of FIO practices is introduced by facilitators into the circle of attendees. Everyone is invited to pass around the manuscript and, if so desired, to lend their voice to reading one of the stories aloud, before passing it on to the next person. If someone prefers not to read aloud, they can just pass the print-out onwards.

The short stories in the print-out have been written down by the researchers and various collaborators beforehand. Some have been adapted from existing articles or books, shortened and modified to work as short individual tales. Others are transcriptions and adaptations from first- and second-hand accounts of bottom-up ingenuity that the researchers were told in conversations, interviews, and previous bonfire events. In the contexts where this was preferable, the stories have been translated and read in different languages, thus a unique roster of stories has

been shared at each event. Sometimes these were prearranged to follow a theme or a narrative arch, other times they were presented in a random order.

After all the stories have been read aloud, all attendees are invited to a conversation and collective reflection on the techniques and strategies they heard about, what can be learned from them, their political potential as well as pitfalls. During the second part, participants also shared further anecdotes that might have come to mind during the listening. With their permission, such stories were then recorded and might be included in the next storytelling gathering and in the e-zine.

BONFIRES AS METHODOLOGY

The bonfire events function simultaneously as a presentation strategy and as a research methodology centered around storytelling. While a number of excellent critical research projects analyze the ubiquitous rise of contemporary storytelling as a corporate, managerial and governmental technique of power,[9] we were interested in the conditions and ambiences that can foster counter-storytelling to take place. Across our practices, there is a shared sense that the rooms in which certain stories can be shared, the spaces that have been variously addressed as third spaces or convivial places, or even temporary autonomous zones, are under threat.

In the hope of contributing to "other genres of liberatory storytelling and listening," to borrow the expression of Katherine Brewer Ball,[10] our approach has been instead of relying upon the existing communities of practice that surround the cultural centers that hosted us. In

9 Polletta, Francesca. *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

10 Ball, Katherine Brewer. *The Only Way Out: The Racial and Sexual Performance of Escape*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2024.

this sense, the events, while public or semi-public, were indeed conversations with specific constituencies, rather than attempts at engaging with the general idea of abstract audiences. This commitment to the specificities of their contexts and pre-existing relations was reinforced by the fact that the events were not recorded.

The idea of staging a collective storytelling session came from a commitment to finding a form for sharing the kind of stories of illegalism, workarounds, and everyday hacks that we were interested in learning from. Often, these are shared not in the first person, but as stories that one has heard from someone else, an acquaintance, a cousin, at the bar, etc. We were interested in this practice of retelling someone else's stories as a form of minor politics, a reflection on class and subjectivity, and on the ways in which various delinquent knowledges gain currency in specific scenes.[11] The performativity of re-telling, of passing on of stories that are second hand, not owned but borrowed, was a mechanism that interested us as a countering gesture to the predominant authorial mode of the ownership of imaginaries. Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Storyteller", noted that each retelling recontextualizes the narrative within a new socio-political framework.[12] For him, storytelling is a communal activity that transmits collective knowledge and cultural memory, contrasting sharply with the individualistic turn inaugurated by modern literature. This performative aspect of retelling allows for the continuous negotiation and redefinition of subjectivities and postures of resistances, making the act of storytelling a living, breathing political practice, where each act of retelling not only preserves but also transforms the story.

11 Mars, Marcell. "Retell." In *Ponašajte se kao kod kuće i dobro nam došli !!!!*, edited by Ana Hušman, 3–5. 2007.

12 Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 83–110. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968. Originally written 1936.

As Christian Salmon aptly noted, "Modern 'storytelling' practices are not simply technologies for formatting discourses. They are also the very space within which discourses are elaborated and transmitted, a dispositive in which social forces and institutions, storytellers and the tellers of counter-stories, and encoding and formatting technologies, either come into conflict or collude with one another."[13] This insight resonates with our approach, as we too see storytelling as constitutive of counter-spaces for knowledge and affect production.

This was also an experiment in glitching the model of public talk that is predominant in cultural, artistic, and academic spheres alike, while at the same time offering some scaffolding to hold space for meaningful conversations to take place even in the short span of a self-contained event (however hosted by milieus traversed by long-standing relations). The stories selected for the bonfires referred to different modes of lying, cheating, and stealing that reflect a spectrum of class positions, from undocumented migrants to unemployed folks, from benefit recipients to exhausted workers. Given the predominant discourse that pushes subjectivities in identifying with a glorified hustle culture of endless productivity, the discussion of cheating techniques across class lines reveals a potential for solidarity based on strategies of refusal of labour, of exclusion, and of humiliation.

Moreover, given the criminalized, transgressive, or quasi-illegal nature of many of the strategies taught by the FIO stories, we wanted to avoid putting contributors in a confessional mode. We are aware that stigma and personal shame can be associated with such survival techniques, as not everyone sees them as a reflection of a capacity for resistance against systemic failures. The invitation to read others'

13 Salmon, Christian. *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind*. Verso Books, 2017.

stories therefore functioned as a simple dispositive to enact, collectively, a minor ethical gesture: by lending others' voices to those stories that the protagonists cannot or should not be telling in the first person, we wished to open up a space for positioned listeners and re-tellers to perform an act of entrustment and custodianship of such knowledges.

A final po-ethic dispositive that was key in shaping the bonfire storytellings has been the laughter. Henri Bergson's seminal work on laughter saw it as a mechanism for making a space of collectivity "[o]ur laughter is always the laughter of a group". Moreover, he proposed that it serves as a social corrective, a means of revealing the absurdity of hierarchical and strict social structures.[14] In our context, laughter operates not merely as a response but as an active engagement with power dynamics, embodying a subversive pleasure in exposing and circumventing systemic injustices. While Bergson viewed laughter as a collective social corrective, Franco Berardi's reflections on cynicism and irony suggest another layer to this dynamic: Neither the cynic nor the ironist "believes in the true foundation of law," yet each navigates this disbelief differently: "the cynical person bends to the law while mocking its false and pretentious values, while the ironic person escapes the law altogether, creating a linguistic space where law has no effectiveness."[15] If the whys behind the anecdotes are often tragic as they reveal the systemic injustices that shape impossible conditions of living, the hows often evoke a giggle that positions the participants vis-a-vis power structures: the affect of joy felt when hearing about a way to escape an unjust system reveals lines of partisanship that might not even be known to those laughing before the event. Such moments of shared chuckles during storytelling

14 Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2022. Originally published 1900.

15 Beradi, Franco (Bifo). "Irony, Cynicism, and the Lunacy of the Italian Media Power." *Through Europe*, February 15, 2011.

undermined the isolating effects that the power structures have on acts usually performed in secret and deemed illegal.

ETHICS OF REFUSAL

The bonfire gatherings have functioned as processes of production, research, and presentation simultaneously. When thinking about this book, as it marks the closure of FIO, we have been confronted with the political and ethical question of making these stories public in printed and digital form, sharing their knowledges beyond the original settings where we encountered them.

The practice of ethnographic refusal presented us with a powerful toolbox to orientate our approach.[16] First developed within the context of social science research, particularly when studying marginalized communities, strategies of ethnographic refusal are aimed at addressing ethical and political problems inherent in mainstream research practices. We believe this insight offers much that is of importance for the context of art and cultural production more broadly.

A strategy of refusal starts with an exhortation to move the focus of research away from individuals and communities positioned as "social problems" and towards institutions and power structures. By examining policies, practices, and historical forces that create and maintain inequality, ethnographic refusal aims to disrupt the cycle of objectification and exploitation inherent in traditional research. Predominant research approaches often focus on "pain and humiliation," commodifying these narratives for authorial gain while failing to offer substantial benefits to those around which the study is centered. This

16 Ortner, Sherry B. "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173–193; Simpson, Audra. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice', and Colonial Citizenship." *Junctures* 9 (2007): 67–80.

demand for "pain stories" perpetuates harmful power dynamics, turning research into a form of "inquiry as invasion." Furthermore, the pursuit of objectivity, often driven by those in power, can obscure the ethical implications of research and further stigmatize the subjects of the study. In this sense, in FIO we sought to challenge this paradigm by acknowledging the inherent power imbalances in the relationships that underpin the sharing of the stories. Moreover, proponents of ethnographic refusal highlight the importance of recognizing and honoring refusals from participants, for example by respecting instances where research participants choose to withhold information or decline to engage with certain lines of inquiry. These refusals, often communicated through coded language or silence, represent an assertion of sovereignty over knowledge and experience. Thus, we strive to understand and interpret these acts of resistance, even if it means limiting the scope of our inquiry and interactions.

By implementing these strategies and remaining attentive to the ethical and political dimensions of our research, tracing the stories in the e-zine has made use of two approaches. The first is the inclusion of a note specifying the context in which the story was first encountered. This process wants to draw attention to the relational conditions of the telling and of the retelling.

The second dispositive was inspired by "blackout poetry," a technique that involves taking a page of preexisting text (typically a few pages from a newspaper, book, or any other printed source) and blacking out with a black or otherwise dark color most of the words, leaving only a select few words or sentences that create a new meaning when read in order. This approach uses the redaction of the stories as a way to mask sensitive information and make them unavailable for access while at the same time allowing readers to remain aware of their presence and importance.

Moreover, to introduce this multi-faceted exploration, we commissioned three short essays for the publication

by Irene Peano, Amit S. Rai, and Delio Vásquez. These essays, alongside our own reflections, function as a kind of preface—an unruly, reflexive framework that invites readers to lean in and trace the winding paths of the project's themes. They help sketch a topography of urgent refusal and radical care, setting the stage for an assemblage of interventions that challenge the punitive architectures of today's normative orders.

Contemporary popular illegalism is situated in the broader social environment as it interfaces with institutional rules, whenever institutions cease to be functional and collective agency seeks alternative routes. As practices of institutional tinkering and popular illegalism serve as both a means of survival and a form of resistance within various social, political, and economic frameworks, they further undo the distinction between political, productive, and reproductive regimes of practice. For those who are not (and were never) considered by the laws of the liberal state and/or the market as full subjects – of citizenship, of democracy, of humanity, of rationality, of morality – tinkering is often the only chance for actualizing their constitutive power. This is an essential characteristic of the political agency of the lumpenproletariat and we propose it should become an important component of institutional analysis in the present.

ARTICLES

How do we get away with (from) it? Popular Illegalisms in a Neoliberal World

Valeria Graziano

CALL IT WHAT YOU WILL

The exhortation "Snađi se, druže!"—"Figure it out, comrade!"—originated purportedly during WWII when partisans had to come up with solutions under harsh conditions. When tasked with a seemingly impossible mission, they would often ask, "But how do I do that?"; and the answer was often, "You figure it out, comrade." Later, during the socialist period, the phrase described everyday workarounds for bureaucratic or material constraints, like smuggling western clothes (in slang: "šaner") and petty theft. Today, it endures as a cultural symbol of hacking systems for personal advantage.

Many more cultures have terms for such forms of popular illegalisms. Expressions like "by hook or by crook" (UK), "βρίσκω την άκρη" (Greece), "pomoću štapa i kanapa" (Serbia), "buscarse la vida" (Spain), "l'arte di arrangiarsi" and "aumm' aumm'" (Italy), and "jeitinho" and "malandragem" (Brazil), *viveza criolla* (South American Spanish speaking countries), "megoldani okosba" (Hungary), "kombinować" (Poland), all reflect these widespread practices.

Despite the rapid spread of digital tools in the last decades, systemic demands on individuals to comply with cumbersome, invasive reporting and verification procedures have multiplied. This phenomenon is especially

visible in the U.S., prompting commentators to explore "bureaucratic harm." Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes it as "organized abandonment," echoed by Elizabeth Povinelli's "economies of abandonment," and Dan Spade's "administrative violence", perpetrated by welfare institutions lacking resources to serve the public good.[17] Fred Moten and Stefano Harney discuss "enforced negligence" by public-interest institutions, like universities, that weaponize professionalization as a process for privatizing the social individual's capacity to care.[18]

Sociologist Loïc Wacquant poignant analysis of neoliberal bureaucracy, in the article "Crafting the Neoliberal State,"[19] highlights how the punitive containment of the impoverished and the marginalized is founded on two pillars: on the one hand, the transformation of welfare provisions into workfare, a paradigm in which assistance—whether it be in the form of unemployment subsidies, social housing, food stamps or other similar provisions—is increasingly deployed as a mean to scrutinizing and moralizing behaviors and enforce psycho-social coercions skewed towards the introjection of the values of subordination embedded in the work schemes, mandatory

17 Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning." In *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles R. Hale, 31–61. University of California Press, 2008; Povinelli, Elizabeth A. *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press, 2011; Spade, Dean. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Duke University Press, 2015.

18 Moten, Fred, and Stefano Harney. "The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses." *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 101–15.

19 Wacquant, Loïc. "Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare and Prisonfare in the Bureaucratic Field." In *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields*, 238–56. Routledge, 2014.

training and compulsory medical treatments[20]. On the other hand, the expansion of policing, penal and carceral systems, and of the corollary prison industries (including those managing facilities specifically targeting migrant populations). According to Loïc Wacquant, this revamping of the capacities of public authorities is "not the spawn of some broad societal trend—whether it be the ascent of 'biopower' or the advent of 'late modernity'—but, at bottom, an exercise in state crafting." That is, it is a deliberate political project of advanced capitalism, a paradigm that, while originating in North America, is "in progress—or in question—in all advanced societies submitted to the relentless pressure to conform to the U.S. pattern."[21]

Contemporary accounts of institutional tinkering emerge across disciplines. Édouard Glissant's seminal work provides a key concept of "the right to opacity."[22] Glissant's notion of opacity challenges the idea that clarity and transparency are universally positive. He argues they have been routinely utilized in colonialism to reduce the texture of diverse realities. Stemming from the resistance of enslaved people to being measured and controlled by their masters, the right to opacity is for Glissant the foundational theoretical concept for a philosophy of difference and for practicing hospitality toward the Other without reducing them to what is known or understood.

Recently, the concept of opacity has been re-activated as a political accomplishment relevant to ongoing

20 Friedli, Lynne, and Robert Stearn. "Positive affect as coercive strategy: conditionality, activation and the role of psychology in UK government workfare programmes." *Medical humanities* 41.1 (2015): 40–47.

21 *Ibid*, 248.

22 Glissant, Édouard. "For Opacity." In *Poetics of Relation*. University of Michigan Press, 1997: 189–194.

decolonial work in institutions.[23] Echoing Glissant, Beirut-based artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan has been excavating the practice of *taqiyya*, a term belonging to Shia Islamic jurisprudence that connotes a legal dispensation for those who must dissimulate their faith when at risk of persecution. For Hamdan, *taqiyya* is "an admission that free speech is not about speaking freely, but reclaiming control over the very conditions under which one is being heard."[24]

In *Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India*, Amit Rai accounts for practices of *jugaad*—finding DIY solutions to problems—as subaltern responses to poverty and discrimination diffused across the Indian subcontinent, but also problematically celebrated in management literature.[25] Beyond survival, it functions as creative engagement with material and technological constraints of daily life, challenging mainstream innovation discourses that glorify it as frugal innovation, omitting its import as a critique of capitalist production.

In *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*, sociologist Veronica Gago builds on the "baroque" concept to critically examine how neoliberalism is experienced, negotiated, and resisted at the Latin American grassroots level, focusing on Buenos Aires' largest illegal open-air market, La Salada.[26] Published in 2017, the book challenges the narrative that neoliberalism is solely imposed as a top-down matrix, portraying instead as a complex process actively shaped by the practices and strategies of those it seeks to govern.

23 Davis, Benjamin P. "The Politics of Édouard Glissant's Right to Opacity." *The CLR James Journal* 25, no. 1/2 (2019): 59–70.

24 Abu Hamdan, Lawrence "تقيه (Taqiyya) – The Right to Duplicity", solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, 11 July–13 September 2015.

25 Rai, Amit S. *Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India*. Duke University Press, 2019.

26 Gago, Verónica. *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*. Duke University Press, 2017.

Her description builds on Aihwa Ong's definition of contemporary spatiality as "baroque ecology" and Álvaro García Linera work on "baroque modernity",[27] but also, albeit without direct reference, on Bolívar Echeverría's *La Modernidad de lo Barroco* to describe a distinctive Latin American way of experiencing and contesting coloniality and capitalism,[28] characterized by "motley zones" of "temporal folding,"[29] a "hodgepodge" mix of adaptation, resistance, and innovation,[30] a "simultaneous coexistence of modes" that challenges at the same time the "romantic totalities" of modernity and the competitive rationality of neoliberalism.

Back in Europe, the 1990s monetary integration was accompanied by intense political debates. The acronym PIGS was introduced by *The Wall Street Journal* in 1996, to refer to four southern European nations (Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain), marked the resurfacing of old discriminatory stereotypes, a disdain from the part of the global financial elites towards "Mediterranean indolence, to living beyond one's means, to corruption, to the lack of rules, to the absence of that ethics of rigor and business, of moderation and work that Max Weber already posed as a sine qua non condition of capitalism."[31] Such prejudices

27 Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Duke University Press, 2006; García Linera, Álvaro. "Sindicato, multitud y comunidad. Movimientos sociales y formas de autonomía política en Bolivia." In *Tiempos de rebelión*, by Álvaro García Linera, Felipe Quispe, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, and Luis Tapia. La Paz: Comuna and Muela del Diablo, 2001.

28 Echeverría, Bolívar. *La modernidad de lo barroco.* Ediciones Era, 2000.

29 Gago. *Neoliberalism from Below*, 21.

30 Ibid, 69.

31 Curcio, Anna. "'Un paradiso abitato da diavoli' … o da porci. Appunti su razzializzazione e lotte nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia", *UniNomade*, 5th September 2012. https://uninomade.org/un-paradiso-abitato-da-diavoli-o-da-porci/ (accessed October 2024).

echo those identified by Edward Said in his seminal study of *Orientalism*, where "the incorrigibility of Orientals… proves that they are not to be trusted."[32] It's an old game: painting the South and East as fundamentally corrupt, somehow intrinsically flawed, to bolster the West's sense of its own moral and economic superiority.

In Italy, one of the PIGS countries, the Southern lifestyle has long been politically contentious, notably through Antonio Gramsci's *The Southern Question*, where he discussed the economic and social divide between Italy's industrial North and agrarian South, attributing the South's criminality to the administrative neglect and economic extractivism (to put it in more contemporary terms) by the State.[33]

In the 1920s, the philosopher Benedetto Croce brought to public attention a 1600s treaty titled "On Honest Dissimulation" by the Neapolitan writer Torquato Accetto. Published in 1641, the text considers ethical behavior in politics and life, contributing to a broader debate within the Academy of the Idle, a literary institution focused on the "art of free time." Accetto sees dissimulation—hiding the truth without lying—as a veritable Renaissance art, requiring moral discipline, a strategy for dealing with harsh realities while maintaining virtue. In 1925, Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis coined the term "porosity" to address Naples' unique qualities, contrasting it to German rationality.[34] While Berlin reminded him of military barracks, they saw Naples as a place where no form – social or architectural

32 Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014, 321.

33 Gramsci, Antonio. "Some Aspects of the Southern Question." *Selections from Political Writings (1921–1926)*, 1978, 441–62, originally written in 1926.

34 Benjamin, Walter and Asja Lacis, "Neapel" (1925). In Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Herman Schweppenhauser, 7 vols, Suhrkamp, 1972.

– should be taken as permanent, where everything is in a constant state of transformation and re-adaptation. Also Alfred Sohn-Rethel, in his *The Ideal of the Broken Down* reflected on the ways in which, in the Neapolitan poverty-stricken everyday, the technical objects of modernity get their proper social use only once they are broken and then reused with "tinkering proficiency," thus become des-alienated from the realm of capitalist commodities.[35]

Franco Cassano and Franco Piperno's works, *Il Pensiero Meridiano* and *Elogio dello spirito pubblico meridionale*, explore political uses of the southern way of life.[36] Cassano depicts the South as an "imaginative periphery," stating, "[g]enerally, in the North's imagination, the South exists only as a tourist paradise or a Mafious hell."[37] He presents a "Meridian style," inspired by Camus and Pasolini, valuing freedom and skepticism toward institutionalized emancipation. Piperno, a founder of *Potere Operaio*, critiques the modern state's legitimacy crisis, advocating southern Italian "municipalities" as self-regulating entities, where local genius and urban political life thrive, contrasting state sovereignty with embodied sociability.

WHERE I'M COMING FROM

For my own research trajectory and the conception of the bonfires, the Italian cultural landscape of politicized

35 Sohn-Rethel, Alfred "Das Ideal des Kaputten. Über neapolitanische Technik" (1926). In *Das Ideal des Kaputten*. ça ira-Verlag, 2018, 41–48; the English translation by John Garvey is available at: https://hardcrackers.com/ideal-broken-neapolitan-approach-things-technical/ (accessed September 2024).

36 Cassano, Franco. *Il pensiero meridiano*. Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2015; Piperno, Franco. *Elogio dello spirito pubblico meridionale: genius loci e individuo sociale*. Vol. 11. Manifestolibri, 1997.

37 Cassano, Francesco, and Claudio Fogu. "Il pensiero meridiano oggi: Intervista e dialoghi con Franco Cassano." California Italian Studies 1.1 (2010).

plebeian illegalisms that influenced me growing up was a foundational element.

My political sensibilities were formed amidst the echoes of Italian autonomist *operaismo*, a leftist movement that emerged from the struggles of the working class but was uniquely attuned to the agency and primacy of the lumpenproletariat. Unlike more traditional leftist circles, autonomist *operaismo* acknowledged that resistance did not solely emanate from the factory floor but also from those who lived on the margins of society—people who defied both economic norms and state control. Two books, in particular, deeply informed this perspective.

Danilo Montaldi's *Autobiografie della leggera*, published in 1961, documents the marginalized lives of vagabonds, pickpockets, and smugglers in the Po River valley, who skulked around the edges of postwar Italy's economic boom.[38] The word *leggera* itself carries layers of meaning, not merely referring to plebeian criminality but suggesting a kind of lightness—a nimbleness of spirit—that captures these figures' improvisational tactics. In Milanese slang, *leggera* can denote the deftness of a pickpocket's hand or the quiet step of a thief at night, yet it also alludes to the relative "lightness" of poor people's pockets, a metonymy for their constant material lack. For Montaldi, these individuals embodied a cultural milieu of evasion and survival that characterized those excluded from the state's industrial ambitions, creating a counter-society where being *leggera* meant thriving in the cracks of the system.

Similarly, in *Andare ai resti*, Emilio Quadrelli delves into the transformation of neighborhood gangs into *batterie*—a uniquely Italian configuration of youthful, tightly-knit criminal camaraderie.[39] By the 1970s, these *batterie*

38 Montaldi, Danilo. *Autobiografie della leggera /Danilo Montaldi*. Einaudi, 1961.

39 Quadrelli, Emilio. *Andare ai resti. Banditi, rapinatori, guerriglieri nell'Italia degli anni Settanta*. DeriveApprodi, 2024.

had become fixtures of Italy's urban landscape, embodying what Quadrelli calls "a continuation of defiance under different forms." These groups weren't chasing conventional power or profit; rather, as Quadrelli writes, "to make a mockery of power was the true prize, the smirk on the faces of these young rebels a greater treasure than any material spoils." Women, too, carved out spaces within this world, moving beyond the limits imposed by both conservative and radical circles. This ethos, driven not by greed but by an irreverent thrill, was central to their way of life. It was about flipping the script on authority, about taking joy in the cracks of the system, and in deriding the so-called guardians of order.

Both Montaldi and Quadrelli relied heavily on the voices and stories of the protagonists, wrestling with the complexities of their own mediation. They aimed not to romanticize the material, but they understood that these self-narrations were not merely accounts of reality—they were acts of self-authorship, ways to construct a political identity and assert a stance. Both authors thus allowed their subjects to speak to the contradictions of their lives, illustrating how their illegal acts were not just transgressions, but expressions of agency against the encroachments of capital and state authority.

STRIKING WHILE IT'S HOT

Illegalisms—those everyday acts of maneuvering around bureaucracy and market forces—are vital to today's far-right appeal. Thus, engaging with illegalism from a leftist angle can tackle three urgent problems. First, it reveals how far-right leaders use law-breaking to build their power: figures like Trump and Berlusconi have built iconic personas by openly flouting the law, presenting themselves as anti-systemic figures, while leftist movements often find themselves cornered into defending legality, despite knowing the system's flaws. Second, it critiques

the fetish of transparency in technocratic bureaucracy, where automation pretends to create fairness but instead strips away human agency in co-determining contextual decisions. And finally, the study of popular illegalism can help dislodge the moralizing horizon of hard work as a path to a successful life as presented in the hustle-and-grind cultures. The figure of the virtuoso,[40] the self-made entrepreneur, etc. stand to receive the delinquent as their hidden doppelganger. Ingenuity is, in this sense, the big absent from the values celebrated in modern capitalist societies. Ingenuity is to class struggle what creativity is to arts and innovation is to technologies.

40 Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. MIT Press, 2004.

The Pain of Hunger

Delio Vásquez

The death threat of poverty is felt in many ways, but the suffering caused by hunger is unique. Perhaps the worst part of hunger is that when you experience it, no one can tell, and so no one really cares.

Hunger is, without a doubt, physically violent. It is physically painful, and the pain *endures*. It is done to you by society as a whole (usually), but you experience it completely by yourself. Even though it is physiologically harmful to the body, to the brain, and to the mind, hunger does not produce a spectacle and shock the senses of bystanders like other forms of violence do. Indeed, usually, even if you are at the very edge of death by starvation or malnutrition, no one may ever notice. To not be able to see our experiences felt, mirrored, or recognized by others—to undergo suffering in complete experiential isolation—is one way that some have defined madness. Hunger and the stress of finding food bring depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.[41]

Hunger produces little empathy. And today that's largely because hunger produces no natural mutual suffering. Unlike other forms of physical violence, like murder and the violence of war—which usually traumatize the victim, and witnesses, and the attacker alike—starvation affects and traumatizes only the one. People experience hunger all the time, and this is societally *normalized* but the experience of hunger is not experientially *socialized*.

41 Weinreb, Linda, Cheryl Wehler, Jennifer Perloff, Richard Scott, David Hosmer, Linda Sagor and Craig Gundersen, "Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health," *Pediatrics*, 110, 4, (October 2002).

A physical assault in front of us immediately affects us, but we walk by hungry people without feeling it at all. Today, one out of every eleven human beings is hungry.

The reality of a person stealing a computer, a wallet, or clothes, does not indicate that they are not hungry. If one wants to eat for more than one day, it makes less sense to steal food than to steal money or expensive goods that can be resold for more money and food. The pleasures of other forms of consumption also become real necessities for offsetting the psychological weight of hunger. When people find themselves taking dangerous risks despite the threat of state law and physical imprisonment, it is because the death threat of poverty has already been present.[42]

At the level of the affects (physically and emotionally), hunger can produce poor concentration, lower attention span, lethargy, and, because of the shame associated with hunger and poverty in our society, self-blame, too.[43] On the other hand, hunger may also stimulate hyperactivity, anxiety, aggressiveness, anger, anti-sociality, and influence a person to interpret their experiences more negatively.[44] It makes sense when hungry people act out. Human behavior under these conditions is variable and unpredictable, given the power of pain.

Pain can never be an illusion, regardless of its causes. The experience of pain is real, whether it occurs in a dream or in waking life.

42 Symmonds, Mkael, Julian J. Emmanuel, Megan E. Drew, Rachel L. Batterham, Raymond J. Dolan, "Metabolic State Alters Economic Decision Making under Risk in Humans," *PLoS ONE*, 5, 6 (2010).

43 Jamison, D. T., R. G. Feachem, M. W. Makgoba, et al., eds. *Disease and Mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa* (2nd edition), The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank (2006). "Health and Academic Achievement," National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (May 2014).

44 MacCormack, Jennifer K., and Kristen A. Lindquist, "When hunger is conceptualized as emotion," *Emotion*, 19, 2, (2019): 301–319.

Suffering follows from the pain associated with consciously reflecting on our pain, hunger, thirst, or desire.

Concerning pain, the philosopher Wittgenstein once stated: "The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself."[45] One of Wittgenstein's main points here is to emphasize the self-evidence of pain for the self. However, he gets his point across by contrasting the certainty of his individualized experience of pain with the doubtfulness of an observer's awareness of and empathy for it. But is it really true that the pain of another may always be subject to doubt? Wittgenstein's statement, strictly speaking, is true; it does make sense to say about other people that they might doubt whether or not I am in pain. But this is perhaps saying more about our low expectations of empathy from those people.

On the other hand, one might argue that from the perspective of the witness, the pain of a person is usually pretty obvious. It is in fact pretty difficult to be convincingly "tricked" by someone else for more than a moment or two about whether or not they are genuinely in pain. What I mean is that doubt *does* arise relatively quickly—but only when natural mutual suffering does not occur.

If someone is particularly good at causing others to feel visceral pain in empathy even when they are not actually in pain, we consider it an indication of a rare skill (and usually dishonorably so). It is not really so common to consciously doubt the pain of another, as if by some rational process of deliberation. Instead, it is more often the case that we simply fail to experience the pain of the other as experientially real to us. That is, sometimes, we fail to co-suffer. And the failure to naturally experience the pain of another seems to be virtually always grounded

45 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), 3rd ed. trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, 2001, §246.

in objectification and othering—in distance from the sentience of the being in pain—as when doctors fail to recognize and then take seriously the suffering of their patients. In medicine, sometimes this is an effect of the scientific profession's encouragement of objectivity and distance from the human body, and sometimes it is due to bias, as often happens when the patients are women, racial minorities, the disabled, and the poor.

By using the language of "failure," I do not mean to place blame, but I do intend to point out a degree of intentionality that is at play. The reality that we can naturally and sometimes intentionally feel something of the pain and suffering of others is perhaps clearest in the case of torture. For the torturer, they actively seek experiential connection—visual, auditory, and affective (physical-emotional)—to the experiential state of the tortured person, in order to torture more effectively. Somewhat counterintuitively, to torture "well"—to really cause excruciating pain—depends, it seems, on something like a distorted, empathic ability. As the physician and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon described in his writings on "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," it is ironic that torture entails both a process of treating the tortured person as an object, on the one hand, and the emotional labor of social connection, accessing their experience, their feelings, and their mind, in order to cause suffering, on the other hand.[46]

And so, if someone can strive to co-suffer in order to do harm, is it that we refuse to co-suffer for good? I am inclined to believe that these dynamics are cultural and colonial in origin, built upon centuries of trauma and structured feeling. After all, empathy is more common in some cultures and societies than in others.[47]

46 Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.

47 Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect*, Cornell, 2004.

It seems then that quite a few of capitalist society's most enduring problems today may be analyzed in terms of the failure or limits of natural mutual suffering or feeling. We indeed proceed as if nothing is happening. The overwhelming majority of human beings, under the overwhelming majority of contexts, reject violence, and yet we are able to be surrounded by it without flinching.

And so, is not the slow violence of hunger indeed the perfect violence for our society, because it can pass without disturbing us? At what age do we learn just the right pace and eye level to maintain when we walk by the homeless person on the street, so that we may avoid slipping into eye contact and the dangerous feeling of co-suffering with their pain? And how is it, exactly, that a person can sexually assault another person—in intimate proximity with that person's body—and not somehow feel their suffering?

Whether or not suffering is experienced in a socialized, mutual manner might usefully serve as a key indicator of the degree and strength of the level of mutuality and the socialization of experience in our communities. Just how connected are we to our environment and its beings when we experience? Are we just passing through, in a silo of mental isolation? Or can we strive to feel?

Making space through a careful sidestepping

Mara Ferreri

"Figure it out, comrade!" is an exhortation to make space for life where and when that space is not a given. It is about recognizing the symptoms of systemic failure around us and forging a path forward through, under, or sideways. As an interpellation, it often establishes a relationship with another being, an invitation to see what surrounds and decide the next step in response to a situation, or the need to make the inhabitable habitable. Any place is a good place to start when sketching out the geographies of FIO practices because virtually any place shows the scars of intersecting oppressive logics of conflict, bureaucracy, enforced scarcity, segregation, and discrimination. Figuring it out means starting from these ruins, making a hideout, and laying claim to space without clamor, by stealth, with – at most – a complicit wink to fellow wayfarers.

On a planet rendered ever more uninhabitable by the ravages of war, greed, and extraction – dwelling becomes possible only when rules are bent, circumvented, ignored, or broken outright. We can only take space by re-asserting a "right' to exist despite opposing conditions: a right that is not granted by some external authority, but taken. The old English expression "by hook or by crook" resonates with many other "figuring it out" expressions in other languages and practices denoted by them. Its meaning as "by any means possible" or "one way or another" is mistakenly associated with illicit activities due to a modern association of "crook" with terms such as criminal or underhand, which problematically equates responding to necessity and unlawfulness to criminality.

Some dictionaries report a different origin, recorded as early as the 14th Century, related to everyday uses of land and plants. At that time, peasants had many tools to aid the foraging activities as part of their seasonal livelihoods. Among them was the billhook—a cutting tool with a curved tip, useful for pruning—and the shepherd's crook—a long stick with a hook at the end. Before land enclosures, as argued by Linebaugh in the *Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, dead firewood and low-hanging fruits—fuel and food—were available to those who needed them according to shared local custom and by collective agreement, regardless of the title to land or forest.[48] They were there for the taking, "one way or another," with a curved knife or a hooked stick. But what kind of fruits are available to what kinds of billhooks today when those customs have been captured by languages of rights, formality, and liberal responsibility? How do we bring a profoundly critical hesitancy to all of this while also recognizing the usefulness of some of the branches we reach out to?

Through the lens of FIO, we can name ways of dwelling and reproducing life that skirt around the edges of the formal and the legal spheres, often exceeding them. Usually, these practices are presumed to be marginal, temporary, and precarious. But such an understanding makes sense only if viewed from the standpoint of a Western, state-centric, and legalistic fantasy of permanence and formality. Even the landing page of the UN-Habitat website admits that across the globe: "one in four people live in harmful conditions to their health, safety, and prosperity." Starting from clear evidence of the (im)possibility of dignified dwelling, FIO urges us to see the systemic urgency of untenable conditions worldwide and recognize that for

48 Linebaugh, Peter. *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*. University of California Press, 2009.

many, if not most, the mere fact of existing and occupying space is itself outside the law. Invoking rights in this context by appealing to institutional frameworks and professional knowledges tricks us into what Peter Marcuse and David Madden have called "the myth of the benevolent state." This is a "right to place" captured by the allegedly progressive ideology of urban planning and state-centric logics of organizing resources fundamentally obscures the project of urbanism (and of statecraft more broadly) as "a vector of colonization of non-capitalist spheres and spaces," in the words of Álvaro Sevilla Buitrago.[49] The reordering of space and social activities in the name of capital and state has been justified and framed in terms of granting "rights" as paternalistic obligations and responsibilities towards inferior others. As noted by post-colonial feminist scholar Uma Narayan, the discourse of rights was historically constructed "when Western countries were becoming increasingly interdependent with, unseparated from, and anything but disinterested in their unfree and unequal colonies."[50] The fantasy of contractual relationships between equals at the core of this formulation was, in practice, underwritten by an endorsement of colonialism and by a shared understanding of agency that recognized only some subjects as free, in a wider dynamic of subjugation of people and places.

Normative formulations of rights and agency here are ordered and defined in the service of a fundamentally hierarchical approach, and any "care" embedded in this worldview remains ambivalent in significance, if not outright oppressive. It is well known among researchers, community activists, and anyone who has ever had to deal with residual welfare states that implementing rights

49 Sevilla-Buitrago, Álvaro. *Against the Commons: A Radical History of Urban Planning*. University of Minnesota Press, 2022.

50 Narayan, Uma. "Colonialism and Its Others: Considerations on Rights and Care Discourses." *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 133–40.

through any non-universalist welfare mechanisms creates divisions between deserving and undeserving. "Good" citizens are evaluated through mechanisms that discipline, separate, and forge compliant subjectivities, while always excluding others: and this exclusion is also spatial. In the systemic failure that can be witnessed in many welfare regimes worldwide, "rights" to inhabit or simply be somewhere are at best granted to ever-decreasing numbers of "deserving" poor while condemning to planned abandonment a growing number of those who become disposable and displaceable. In this framework, the distribution of a "right to housing" or a "right to the city" relies on making legible, intelligible, and thus conquerable modes of living and people who have long been denied agency, dignity, and freedom. Against this, making life survivable when and where the system is rigged against one's life means reclaiming the conditions under which one is heard or seen, which can also include lying and hiding, for example, in the course of an interview with a welfare officer, or by faking "broken family relations" as the only way to receive child support in family-centric welfare systems.

Institutions, too, can be tinkered with, from within and from without. If one of the systemically failed spheres is that of the state, FIO practices are also about finding allies or building solidarities within crumbling bureaucracy and rules. It is about finding, within the fold of institutions, possibilities for porosity, intermediation, and redistribution. FIO practices can name forms of reworking bureaucracy, or shifting responsibility, or mitigating conditions through the empathy enacted by people in positions of relative power towards people in positions of powerlessness. These can sustain processes of precarious institutionalization where some elements of unlawfulness are tolerated and where special roles—such as so-called "squatters liaison officers"—are created to negotiate, from within institutions, the prefigurative reclaiming of buildings and land, instead of responding

with punitive expropriations and evictions. But what are the implications of this tinkering? At times of welfare retrenchment, it is hard not to read these practices as potentially sustaining the same failure they respond to. As discussed by Emma Power and colleagues, the "shadow care infrastructures" that support life in post-welfare cities are also sustaining cities and states in their exacerbation of deep-rooted inequalities and the retrenchment of programs of redistribution.[51] In some advanced capitalist countries, this logic has gone so unchallenged that it is now a good photo-op for "progressive" politicians to inaugurate neighborhood food banks staffed by volunteers. This is why it is infuriating, during housing justice assemblies, to hear that local housing welfare officers openly tell unhoused people to turn to organized squatting rather than waiting for a solution by the under-resourced and understaffed institutions tasked with upholding their "right to shelter." And yet, these may also be the result of an open acknowledgement, from within, that to figure things out, we all need to sidestep entirely the fantasy that the current system will provide.

Finally, the spaces we inhabit are no longer unplugged, these logics are extended and entrenched through digital mechanisms that compound analogue foreclosures, physical displacements, and extractivism. Financialization and the use of Property Technology—digital tools used by the real-estate industry for profit-making—are redrawing transnational geographies of wealth accumulation through property ownership. Digital platforms for short-term leases favor new modes of rent extraction and displacement, while algorithmic profiling further discriminates against already marginalized and

51 Power, Emma R, Ilan Wiesel, Emma Mitchell, and Kathleen J Mee. "Shadow Care Infrastructures: Sustaining Life in Post-Welfare Cities." *Progress in Human Geography* 46, no. 5 (October 1, 2022): 1165–84.

disposable communities. These forms of extractivism and sifting, sorting, and filtering, which in many ways mirror similar processes in the world of gig-work, are sketching out the displacement and control of entire sections of cities, and their dwellers. Tinkering with all of this requires addressing digital and non-digital dimensions in new spaces of algorithmic capture, the micro-tailored strictures of residual "caring" social welfare programs, and surveillance, and how they intersect with analogue processes of land enclosures, destruction, hunger, bordering, and physical violence. As conditions of systemic failure change, so do figuring out practices. Responding to the exhortation to carefully sidestep failed and harmful systemic dynamics means both recognizing existing shadow care infrastructures and continuing to hide and amplify practices that expand their capacity to make space for life.

How to do things with attention?

Amit Rai

How do we attend to subaltern techniques of ethical refusal such as hacking and piracy in participatory action research? What criteria can we use to help us decide what to make public and what to withhold when working with and about illegalized populations? My wager is that solidary researchers must develop anti-colonial and collective practices of attention that can negotiate the lived complexities of everyday hacking and refusal. These collective practices of attention can take the form of deep listening without academic judgment or extraction of racial capitalist exchange value, hacker skill-sharing, participatory encounters with subaltern hacker communities, co-creating diagrams and programs for tactical sabotage of racial capital value chains, and developing sustainable pirate care networks for mutual emancipation.

Racial and caste capital presents itself as natural, rational, legally legit, morally righteous, etc. It's all a bunch of bollocks, as we all know from the racial capitalist state's response to the 2008 economic meltdown—everything was done to save the corporations from facing their own ethical bankruptcy, even as the forces of oligopoly and monopoly were further strengthened and morally legitimated by scapegoating working-class women of color and Black people. Racial and caste capital is an upside-down world in which an ideological apparatus and media assemblage sell alienated, indebted life as if it were right side up. This is another name for racially stratified socio-economic "reason." How can we attend to such an upside-down world for the benefit of collective emancipation to come?

My participatory action research co-creates forms of attention to the everyday refusals to be governed in this way, and to the proliferating illegalisms (everyday hacking) in subaltern lifeworlds throughout the Global South. To do this is to be in solidarity with the subaltern's "right to opacity."[52] This right to opacity for subaltern communities of hackers is akin to the necessity of becoming indiscernible to the algorithms of surveillance capitalism. We should all disappear for the capitalist algorithm, emerging only surreptitiously in other forms for our tactical, collective, and contested gardens of pirate care.

Solidary researchers must refuse the extractive circuits of academic value, but not merely to celebrate the molecular triumphs of everyday plebeian illegalisms, autonomous pirate care networks, transnational hacker collectivities, Dalit *jugaad* (work-around) ecologies. Another kind of political attention is needed today. To attend to the intersectional complexities of class, gender, ecological, racial, ableist, and caste struggle is, in some sense, an infinite and prefigurative task: we common our resources as we attend to complex entanglements of power to prefigure an emancipation to come. Such an attention is also an infinite affirmation of a revolutionary joy that reactivates a certain etymology of the Indo-European word "attention": the Latin *attendere* means to bend to, to notice, to turn/stretch towards, and to apply, while the Sanskrit word *adhyana* (अध्ययन) means meditation, concentration, study, and learning. Decolonising attention is a *stretch* of perception opening learning toward an unfolding horizon of everyday illegalisms, insurrections, and emancipation[53].

52 Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. University of Michigan Press, 1997, 189–194.

53 Ingold, Tim. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Taylor & Francis, 2011; Negri, Antonio. "La forma Stato: per la critica dell'economia politica della Costituzione." (1977).

Solidary attention to plebeian illegalisms such as *jugaad* and hacking is rooted in the affirmation of the necessity of radical prefigurative politics. Researchers in the contested and policed domains of hactivist practices of social reproduction and in subaltern struggles for intersectional emancipation within and against racial-caste capital, domains in which visibility is a trap must honor the opacity of the lumpen.[54] Prefigurative politics can be thus both reactionary and emancipatory, and is discerned in ecologies of "pirate care" or *jugaad* (informal) economies of social reproduction, in anarchist and communist organising practices, in nonlinear, collective, opaque, and subaltern agencies of laboring subjects, who take up class-caste wars of position, simultaneously in and beyond the postcolonial city, in and beyond Europe, and within and against the India-Israel-Germany-USA alliance of settler colonial apartheid, extractivisms, and democratic fascisms.[55]

In the research that went into *Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India*, I collaborated with Dalit songwriters, feminist psycho-geographers, and communist Muslim media researchers to deconstruct what is known in bourgeois economics as the "informal sector." We considered, together and in diverse contexts of study, the question of the everyday illegalisms of *jugaad*, a hacker practice of working around obstacles common to subaltern communities throughout much of South Asia. This research was furthered through my engagement with the work of the Precarious Workers Brigade in London (PWB came to workshop with a group of young people I was

54 Foucault, Michel. *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975; Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (January 1, 1992): 3–7.

55 Serafini, P. (2024). Art, Extractivism, and the Ontological Shift: Toward a (Post)Extractivist Aesthetics. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *0*(0); Toscano, Alberto. *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis*. Verso Books, 2023; Rai, Amit S. *Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India*. Duke University Press, 2019.

co-creating a film festival with in East London, the Cutting East Film Festival) and at the Common House in Bethnal Green, a radical organizing space for sex worker collectives and their queer, anarchist, and socialist allies, complete with a risograph and data server where communist media was produced and disseminated, and where I was the key warden for five years, and involved in co-founding with Cliff Hammett and Alex Jonsson, a hacker group called Autonomous Tech Fetish; and where I met, among many other inspiring groupuscules, the Feminist Fightback collective, and the organizers and theorists Valeria Graziano and Camille Barbagallo, at whose house I had the pleasure to meet Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis some twelve years ago. All this taught me several things that I have tried to common in all that I do and affirm in my politics and social reproduction. The first was about making labor visible, de-alienating, and de-fetishising labor as a prefigurative act of emancipation of the commodity labor power, in its precise and complex relation to sexuality, gender, ability, and (less often) race. The second was the importance of community, however fleeting and fugitive. The third was the necessity of prefigurative self-organizing for authentic liberation. And finally that revolutionary becomings happen as event and process simultaneously. This allowed for an understanding of the abstract diagram of illegality that also facilitated a decolonisation of the bourgeois ethics of attention.

SPECULATIVE DÉRIVE

A speculative prelude emerges from imagining a Bhopal of the near future, describing lines of escape from this ring of fire that is the postcolonial city under the totalitarian surveillance of a Hindutva-to-come:

In the Bhopal of 2182, from the benthic wastes of the upper and lower lakes, long dried by the desert sun, toxic storms of Methyl isocyanate dust blow through the

Idgha hills. The unhinged doors and broken windows of abandoned NRI villas creek in mute protest to the poisonous miasmas of "MIC-dhool." In underground communes, AtiDalit Panther groups, pluri-Muslim anarcho-communist cells, Neo-Darindic tantric cults, trans, hijra, and *queewome* collectives form opaque solidarities with post-tribalist indigenous communities of resistance. Together they survive "life" underground. In the day-to-day social reproduction of their self-organized communes, which they call *inquilaab ki jadon* (rhizomes for revolution), and across and through the many labyrinths of tunnels used in their periodic insurgencies, tactical sabotage expeditions, and pirate communication lines, these subalternized "surplus populations" were at war. These proleptic social configurations of prefigurative politics struggled with the contradiction of being and becoming within and against Pak-Hindutva® socio-ecological domination. Transmitting different resistant intensities and abstract rhythms through the hijacked frequencies of pirate radiowaves, they denounced the ossified Pak-Hindutva fascist military and creato-productivist exchange hegemony. But sometimes it felt as if only the MIC-dhool miasmas wafting through the empty white hills of old Bhopal were listening to their intermittent transmissions, mocking, waiting for them to inhale their poison which had, after centuries of chemical pollution, become indiscernible from the burning surface air. In entangled ecologies of pirate care they carve out a life worth living underground. This is not easy, as the negotiations in the people's tribunals and horizontal assemblies have broken down again and again. Underground but still in between the locked machinery of algorithmic registration, surplus populations shield themselves from the merciless sun that daily pushes temperatures above 65 degrees in the shade. But there is little shade from fascist RSS-squads sent to police "insubordination" in these apartheid territories sealed shut with electrified fields of quantum info-matter in Pak-Hindutva®'s Laxman Rekhas.™ The pirate *jad* (rhizome)

against the ati-fascist *rekha* (security firewall). Each surplus population had to submit members of their own communities to serve in the Pak-Hindutva® mines, police, or for the suicide missions in the military campaigns trying to secure the occupations in Kashmir, Palestine, and New Ceylon. The time of the Tribute was drawing nigh, and there was no line of escape. The self-organizing algorithms were long ago coded to automatically register each worker during the implanting of population-specific affect-chips, and through the meticulous tracking of each worker through the regulatory regimes of Pak-Hindutva®'s Sex-Police™. For these subaltern hacker communities, the future was still and forever "an emergent property of practice."[56] How are the conditions for their *jugaad* modes of life to be sustained?[57] The nano-credit bots patrolling the empty maze-like streets around Moti Masjid sing their siren songs of easy financialization for backbreaking extractive work in the krïltïn mines down south, or for renting out what was left of the M-bodycaps of the newly indebted workers returned spent from laboring in those mines. The technologies were new but parasitic on past assemblages of capital, code, desire, financialization, resistance, and extraction…

What the critique of social reproduction in Marxist and anarchist feminist pirate care ecologies and their prefigurative permutations does is question the entire binary between use and exchange values. What then happens to the exchange abstraction in the prefigurative politics of pirate care or *jugaad* ecologies, and how is that abstraction refused in solidary participatory action research? Everywhere it seems market forces assert their

56 Jeffrey, Craig, and Jane Dyson. "Now: Prefigurative Politics through a North Indian Lens." *Economy and Society* 45, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 77–100.

57 Orozco, Amaia Pérez. *The Feminist Subversion of the Economy: Contributions for Life Against Capital*. Translated by Liz Mason-Deese Mason-Deese. Common Notions, 2022.

dismal science on and over the heads of the subaltern bodies, classes, races, sexes, genders, ecologies, and castes. In practices that foreground the metabolisms of racial capital's valorization, production, distribution, extraction, and accumulation regimes and circuits communist and anarchist pirate care upturn the seemingly natural distinction between use and exchange in racial and caste capitalist valorization.[58] Here anti-fascist attention is a dangerous supplement to the critique of the value form in racial capital, which simultaneously both includes and excludes the history of African slavery, ongoing indigenous genocides, settler colonial regimes of accumulation, Dalit refusal and self-organizing, transgender becomings, and the care networks of South Asian coolies in the Caribbean. As Graziano, Mars, and Medak put it, "In a world ridden with ecological depredation, gendered violence, racial capitalism, and imperialism, not letting others perish and die is anti-systemic."[59]

58 Arboleda, Martin. *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism*. Verso Books, 2020; Harvey, David. "The urban process under capitalism: a framework for analysis." *International journal of urban and regional research* 2.1–3 (1978): 101–131.

59 Graziano, Mars, and Medak, unpublished text, shared in personal correspondence.

Now go figure: On transgressions and trespasses in and from the University

Irene Peano

From psychoanalysis to postructuralist theory, for several decades now different scholars have argued that rules are structurally made to be infringed; that the requirements of the law are inherently impossible ones, eliciting their own transgressions; and that norms can endure and multiply by virtue of their very failures. This has left many wondering whether any "real" resistance and genuine subversion are possible, sometimes actively undermining any effort in the direction of much-needed structural change. But while intellectuals have spilled much (actual and virtual) ink pondering over the philosphical groundings of revolution, they have not as often – at least not from the white- and male-dominated ivory towers that are the established seats of learning – engaged the liberatory aspects of those realisations. Yet, we do not lack reflections on and proof of how, even though it may not radically alter the rules of the game, transgression still bears the capacity to elicit new responses, modify architectures of power and effect their partial withdrawals. Or, if nothing else, we know that the inevitable failure to comply with and adhere to the letter of the law can be aimed to divert some creative energies to pursuits that we deem necessary and valuable. A perennnial internal dialectic between law and its undersides, that are far from monolithic or self-sufficient, characterises practices of transgression.

This indeed is the lesson many of us, myself included, have learnt as much from books and classes as from those towards whom we have felt a duty and desire for solidarity: the many – a majority – whose lives are spent in contexts (across latitudes and geographies) where the failure of norms is itself the norm, where institutionalised power can afford to not bother with upholding the liberal myth of rights and obligations. Incidentally, along the way we are also watching that myth crumble under our very eyes, in the places where we once thought it was most securely rooted. We are coming to realise how even that rootedness was the short-lived illusion of a minority within post-WWII, "advanced" industrial modernity, and one grounded in struggles and conflicts too often swept under the rug.

In working with transnational migrants who have defied the putative impermeability of the EU's (increasingly externalised) borders, and more generally with people who are forced to endure the law's own self-transgressions (for example the many Nigerian citizens that I encountered in over a year of fieldwork, for whom daily life is lived in structural mistrust and corruption), I have repeatedly faced the ambivalence that comes with acknowledging that "crime" can be as productive for the *status quo* as the law itself. Many activists and/as scholars[60] have argued that migrants' illegalisation is functional to a hyper-exploitative regime of extraction that relies on the threat, even more than and before the enforcement, of various forms of capture and expulsion. From prisons to administrative detention and forced repatriation, by way of less blatant dispositifs

60 The best-known names would include the likes of Sandro Mezzadra or Nicholas De Genova (who both drew, in different ways, on the work of Michel Foucault, among others), but I want to emphasise that such reflections are really the result of collective endeavours that cannot be reduced to individual authors, nor restricted to the academic milieu where indeed authorship is the required norm. Furthermore, such collectives have come together in often ephemeral projects too numerous to name.

denying citizenship rights to different degrees and creating conditions of progressive segregation and vulnerability, the threat of being deprived of one's means of sustenance and reproduction always lurks, affecting the range of possible choices at one's disposal. And yet, those same activists and/as scholars, and especially migrants themselves, at the same time have vouched for the constitutive excess spurring the desire to cross borders in the search of a better life. In other words, while the act of illegally crossing a border can end up being capitalised upon, that same act does not for this cease to bear subversive potential. If the outcome of this scuffle between excess and capture is always open-ended and can never be determined in advance, the border regime's (as the carceral complex's) evolution across the last few decades is witness to the reactive nature of attempts to contain and extract. Put differently, dispositifs of power always respond to perceived threats, and the latter are often ingenuous acts of flight and refusal as much as of direct, head-on defiance.

Now that old and new conflicts and struggles (along the lines of gender, racism, class, the environment…) are becoming too many and too blatant for anyone to ignore any further, we are once again seeking for the right tools to foster their radical potential. If the law itself is a ruse, the political-ethical question should be how to inhabit the rift that grounds our very existence in a meaningful way. Where power's modality is for the most part necropolitical (as it indeed is for ever growing numbers on this planet), figuring such things out is necessarily an undercover operation, requiring camouflage, cunning and a healthy detachment from any belief in the sanctity of the law, in the possibility to abide by it. But if in saying this I am assured of the good company of the many who have dedicated their efforts at arguing for the potentials of subversion and the joys of excess, less frequently have we done so from a reflexive and grounded standpoint. When not from thoroughly abstract coordinates, for the most part academics

(like many of those engaged in critical cultural work more generally) have defended transgressive causes on behalf of others – of those others who, a more or less explicit argument goes, are most criminalised, marginalised, excluded. Of course we should have learnt long ago that we must stop seeking to speak on behalf of "the subaltern", let alone romanticise their predicaments. Yet, the consequences of this realisation for our own practices are still little explored. If supporting those with relatively less entitlements is necessary, just what would count as actual support is no simple matter. We too have figuring-out work to do.

Perhaps our academic reticence to engage with (and in) transgression "at home" is the result of a (perceived) relative privilege, that comes with being able to critically interrogate pretty much anything under the sun as long as the critique remains in print and in print only, and does not touch the house if not marginally and vaguely. Equating this to "biting the hand that feeds us" and thus naming it as betrayal makes the conditions of such feeding fall off the frame entirely. Such indeed is the nature of power struggles – teasing into compliance, threatening and enforcing retaliation against open challenges. All the more so, we need to take the lessons we learnt of others seriously, and imagine more ways of engaging (discreetly or otherwise) the institutions that are failing *us*, too. For this is the point: many may be too invested in the narrative that interpellates us as a chosen elite, for whose membership, we are told, we should forever be grateful, to recognise – or at least to confront – the myriad ways in which universities and other knowledge-producing institutions are exercising forms of extraction, expulsion and violence on ourselves and others, also thanks to our own complicities, silences, fears and direct endorsements. Our labour is constantly undervalued, the efforts of an ever expanding precariat hardly paid for at a rate that could grant a dignified reproduction. The fact that such processes of extraction and expulsion may touch different subjects to varying degrees is no excuse not

to confront them. Nor indeed should it prevent us (quite to the contrary) from identifying the ways in which these same processes are related to others, happening outside the physical and symbolic bounds of the university, in other workplaces and more generally in the lives of ever-increasing numbers of people. War, genocide and ecocide; gentrification, classism, racism, gender discrimination and sexual harassment; precarisation and forms of knowledge enclosure are only some of the possible examples of how the university as an institution is failing not only its members but its supposed mission – or rather is betraying its real motives, which were there all along for those who wanted to see them. And again, is this not true of any institution in the racial capitalist world order? Were the good things we could get out of institutions – any institution – not the result of struggles, open or otherwise?

Some years ago, in their book titled *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten argued precisely that "one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of – this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university"[61]. And if, in the spirit of figuring things out, subversion may need to remain underground, nonetheless we must renew our efforts to create and recognise complicities, to devise codes that permit these knowledges to travel and these recognitions to happen, extending out to those outside the walls of the tower, to bring these walls down. Making the knowledge we co-create widely available, despite copyright restrictions, might be a good example – if only a small one – of how this is already being done. Other examples may best be kept underground. At the same time, to be up to the task,

61 Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Autonomedia, 2013, 26.

some open confrontation might also be in order – bearing in mind that even the most cunning, well-disguised transgression is never risk-free, but embracing that risk as a way to dismantle more mundane, discreet and yet as harmful forms of exposure: those of extraction.

STORIES

Broken Light Bulbs

First heard in Cologne, date unknown. Retold in Rijeka in 2022, via Berlin. Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin in 2023.

In [redacted] a large town in [redacted] there is a busy flea market. Every weekend, hordes of people flock to this peculiar marketplace, [redacted] peddlers sold broken light bulbs. There were different colors, shapes, types. Each was sold at a modest price, but their shattered filaments and opaque glass gave no hint of their purpose. Why would anyone want to buy broken light bulbs? Those in the know understood that these bulbs were a crucial element of a quotidian struggle over scraps of disposable income by the bottom-of-the-ladder workers. Their true purpose lay in the shadows of the city's vast office complexes. Buyers selected light bulbs that bore the closest resemblance to those used at work. They smuggled them to their workplaces, concealed in their briefcases, purses, and backpacks, like infiltrators on a mission beyond enemy lines. Once there, unseen by others, they secretly replaced functioning light bulbs with broken ones, taking home the good ones to use or resell. [redacted]

The Corrupted File

First heard in place unknown, date unknown.
Retold in Berlin 2022. Brought to bonfire in Orleans 2024.

A friend told me a story from back in the day when applications for art funding were sent as a file via email. She said that one day, a member from an artist collective [redacted] called her in panic: "you must help me, I have lost *the* file!".

"Hang on, which file are you talking about? What do you mean by 'the' file?"

"The file. The file! You know, the one we always [redacted] The corrupted file. I can't find it anywhere!".

It turned out that every time they applied for funding, the [redacted] a few precious extra days to finish their application. [redacted]

In fact, the [redacted] extension, which some operating systems back then could not deal with.

Ajvar Tourism

First heard in Rijeka in 2021.
Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin in 2023.

For a long time, people in [redacted] used to travel to [redacted] during the off-season. With few tourists, holiday homes were more affordable. In their baggage, they brought fresh produce from home: ripe red peppers and glossy purple eggplants. [redacted] baking sessions. Families worked with seasoned expertise, each member having a role to play in the labor-intensive process. [redacted] was included in the holiday rental of the apartments, they saved on the costs of [redacted]. The ovens were fired [redacted] their efforts would reward them in the months to come. At the end of their stay, they left no trace behind, returning the holiday homes to their peaceful [redacted] summer vacationers once more. Back home, families would bask in the warmth of their [redacted] during the cold winter days.

The Biggest Intranet

First heard on the net, 2020.
Brought to the bonfire in Orléans in 2024.

In 2003 in [redacted] kids who wanted to play the strategy game Starcraft started to pull very long LAN cables between their homes. To pass the cables, they were using the municipal electric cable infrastructure. [redacted] were the first to oppose these kids creating their big intranet, because they found themselves exposed. When the police came to shut down the intranet, they also discovered taps that stole electricity.

By 2019, more than 30,000 people in [redacted] were connected through the intranet, which we call Street Net or SNET. As the network grew bigger, the government decided to intervene and required networks to have an administrator who set and enforced the rules and regulations. The first rule was never talk about politics…. and then don't talk about the religion, don't put up pornographic material, don't do business, don't connect to the internet. This was really an intranet, the biggest intranet in the world without access to the internet.

The grassroots network that was created by the people was eventually kidnapped by the government and transformed into an official institution called the [redacted] which motivated many people to leave the network. The intranet put in question the practice of the revolution, as the kids were doing something that [redacted] creating something based on collective resources, but the government didn't like it as the kids were hacking and cracking the cultural politics [redacted]

Faking Broken Family Relations

First heard in place unknown, date unknown.
Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin in 2023.

I had to go to court against my parents because at that time we lived together in [redacted] and I needed a paper from the court. My parents sued me claiming broken family relations due to which we can no longer live together as a family. They had to state that now I live in one room with the children and with a possibility to occasionally use the bathroom. The court decision was made by which officially I don't live with my parents. That was the one paper out of sixty-eight papers that I needed to submit to be entitled to child support. We had to do it in order for me to be able to claim this support as a single mother. Broken family relations, I remember that sentence..it was amazing to me. [redacted] Well, my father explained to me: you know this is just fictitious…it's not real. But it's kind of a big deal to me, and the worst part is that we did it for nothing, we didn't cheat the system. I got a job at the same time so I lost the right to claim child support.

Senior Crime Figures

First heard on the net, date unknown.
Brought to bonfires in Mošorin, 2023 and in Berlin, 2024.

In Japanese society, long associated with respectability, decorum, and discipline, an unlikely phenomenon has quietly been taking root: a peculiar elderly crime wave has been sweeping across the country, signaling a metamorphosis hidden beneath the veneer of its orderly social façade. Recent years have seen an astonishing rise in the number of crimes committed by those aged 65 and above, a demographic usually associated with wisdom and reverence. In 1997, their presence in the crime statistics was a mere speck, but two decades later, it had swollen to constitute more than a fifth of all convictions. Traditionally, children had been the pillars of support for their aging parents, upholding the time-honored virtue of filial piety. But in a society transforming, economic opportunities were scarce, and the younger generation's priorities have been shifting further and further away from elderly care. And so, for many people approaching the end of their life, the prison cell becomes a sanctuary. To them, incarceration was more than just confinement; it offered three meals a day, healthcare, and shelter.

Pillow Sledging

First retold in an interview.

One year, snow had fallen, and the kids [redacted] wanted to go sledding, but in [redacted] they didn't have enough sleds for all of them. So, they got an idea. It's a way of collective problem-solving: "Let's figure it out, comrades." They took pillows from their beds, wrapped them in garbage bags, and hid them in their school bags – pretending they were going for a walk, so the teachers wouldn't know what they were up to or where they were going. Then they climbed to the top of the hill, pulled out the pillows because, actually, a pillow wrapped in a garbage bag is a sled. I didn't know that, they either made it up on the spot or had done it before. So, it slides, and it's soft, but since no hill is perfect – there's always some sticks or rocks poking out – as they went down, the bags tore, and the pillows ripped, with feathers flying everywhere. It was truly surreal. The white snow, and suddenly feathers floating around them. [redacted] the joy of that brief ride before the pillow ripped was priceless, so it was worth all the pillows. [redacted] gained something.

Review-Bombing Dingtalk

First heard on the net in 2020. Retold in Rijeka in 2023. Brought to bonfires in Berlin and Orléans 2024.

In January 2020, school students in the city of Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in China and the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic, were the first in the world to experience virtual teaching. The Alibaba Group-owned corporate app DingTalk started to be used by teachers to set homework and monitor the virtual classroom attendance of quarantined students. After Wuhan, this expanded all across China's estimated 50 million school students.

Soon, word spread that there was a way to resist this. Tens of thousands of students logged in to give the app negative user reviews—"review-bombing it"—in the hope that it will be removed from app stores. For a time, the rating of DingTalk plummeted from 4.9 to 1.4 stars, and the app had to beg for mercy by uploading an apology video on the Chinese streaming site Bilibili.

Smartphone Trees

First heard on the net in 2020.
Brought to bonfires in Berlin and Orléans 2024.

In 2020, passers-by in a suburb of [redacted] saw a bunch of old smartphones hanging from the tallest branches of the trees surrounding a Whole Foods store. Among delivery drivers competing for orders, the word had spread that placing a phone as close as possible to the stations where deliveries originated would enable them to gain a split-second advantage over other drivers. The plot involved syncing those phones with their actual working phones, and combining this with a software monitoring Amazon's dispatch network, to be allocated more gigs. In a few cases, some drivers would place multiple phones in a tree and then hand out delivery requests to other drivers for a cut of the proceeds. A 2020 report mentioned that it was mostly a coordinated effort by desperate gig workers whose other jobs, for example as Uber drivers, had dried up because of the pandemic lockdowns.

The Tokens

First heard through an installation by Centrul Dialectic at the "New TEMPOralities: the Xenogeneses of SF" exhibition, Bucharest, 2021. Retold in Rijeka in 2022. Brought to bonfires in Mošorin in 2023, Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

In the 1990s, [redacted] migrant workers staying in motels in Germany had discovered a way to heat their rooms without the need to buy tokens for the heating machines. The company running the heaters investigated the matter, but could not find anywhere the fake tokens used to cheat the system.

The trick was clever. The workers had discovered that the company token fit neatly into a Pepsi cap. So they collected Pepsi caps, filled them with water, put them in freezers, and made cast ice tokens. Once inserted in the machine, they would trigger the heating but then disappear into a small puddle of water, which the heat would quickly dissipate.

Tapping

First heard in [redacted] *date unknown. Retold at the bonfires in Mošorin in 2023, and Berlin in 2024.*

In Spain, thousands of people lost their jobs and their homes during the financial crisis of 2008. Many couldn't afford to rent, so they squatted, [redacted] at one point over 250,000 people were living in unlawfully occupied flats and houses all across the country.

The media presents the squatters, *okupas* as they are called, as lazy, self-marginalized drifters, as a threat to other poor neighbors who pay for their housing and for their bills. 60% of those living in occupied flats have had to connect to the electricity illegally by "tapping" into the existing system. [redacted] common locked cupboard on the ground floor or in the basement, where the meters of all flats are kept. Only those who own or rent legally have a key, and breaking into that cupboard is a punishable offense. [redacted] no laws protecting dwellers' basic right to water and energy. Since people need electricity, the untapping can happen regularly, with electricians from the companies having a sort of "beat" for checking illegal tapping, and so they get to know the residents, especially in small towns and villages. The proof of the disconnection is a photograph of the untapped meter. Sometimes, more often than imagined, the workers photograph the meter, then [redacted] cupboard's door is unlocked; or [redacted]

[redacted] company has been informed, the order re-established, so they can tap it again. Sometimes, [redacted] they nod to each other if they meet in the street.

Writing Essays for Money

First heard in the installation "Technologies of Care" (2016). Retold in Mošorin in 2023, Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

One of the workers that Elisa Giardina Papa interviewed for her project on care in networked digital work—identified as Worker 1—told her:

I am a 51 year-old woman, single, mother of three. I work as a university professor in [redacted] I have a Master's degree in [redacted] and a PhD [redacted] I work online because we are going through a high inflationary process in my country. Online freelancing has become increasingly popular here because it offers the possibility to generate income in dollars. My daughter began on Upwork three months ago, and I opened an account on Fiverr. We do research, scientific papers and articles, homework for a variety of subjects, and translation (English to Spanish or vice versa). We work with two accounts. On Upwork, you have to link the account to your resume and upload an accurate photo of yourself. On Fiverr, a higher degree of anonymity is accepted, so we present ourselves under a single male profile. I work in academia. I am no stranger to the wage gap and heteronormativity in our society. I am sure that women make less than their male counterparts for the same work, and I am also Latin American. Being a Latina woman makes me more prone to receiving less for the same hard work. Our clients are students with no time or no interest in fulfilling their academic assignments. Also, other freelancers require help with their orders. They never state it up front, but when you check their reviews, you see they are freelancers advertising exactly what they have asked you to do. I assume they get paid more than I do, so it is convenient for them.…when you are starting as a freelancer, you need to take on jobs that are pretty

slave-like in order to catch your first clients. So together, me and my daughter, we took on an enormous amount of work that could only be delivered on time if there was more than one person doing it.

Suing Your Mother

Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin, 2023
and retold in Berlin, 2024.

[redacted] so that she could get financial help [redacted] the pension was too low, something around [redacted] entitled to disability allowance. But in order for her to get that help we as her children had to sue her to prove that we couldn't be the ones taking care of her. And then she [redacted] you sue me, it's not a big of a deal. [redacted] got that help eventually.

Hot Water Buttons

First heard in London, 2017. Retold in Rijeka, 2022.

Someone once told me a story about the coin-automated metres to get hot water in many working class homes [redacted] in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, a company technician would regularly [redacted] collect the coins on behalf of the companies. [redacted] separate out the pennies from the buttons and other round [redacted] returned with a silent nod [redacted]

Sticky Newspapers

First heard a long time ago, place unknown.
Retold in Orléans, 2024.

[redacted] papers that fly out, in the street, to stick them to cover [redacted] to avoid getting scanned, [redacted] parking. [redacted] as if the paper had come to stick [redacted] the wind.

Keeping Old Cars

First heard in place unknown, 2019.
Retold in Rijeka, 2023. Brought to the bonfires in Mošorin, 2023, Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

[redacted] old cars, typically imported after many years of service in more affluent countries in Western Europe. [redacted] checks, regulations and pollution standards. But people don't have money to buy new cars. Knowing that their cars will fail the annual technical test, car owners have found a way around it. They [redacted] a pass. Inspectors know [redacted] a cyclical basis, and issue fines [redacted] started to coordinate. [redacted] two to three months, [redacted] cash they receive covers the fine and [redacted]

Friendship Tyranny

First heard in 2010. Retold in Bela Crkva in 2024.

There was a kid who hated carrying his school bag to school. So, he told his best friend, "If you're really my best friend, [redacted] a bit of friendship tyranny, but also a way of figuring it out. So, that friend carried two bags to and from school to prove his loyalty and friendship, while the other managed to go without a bag. You can apply this too if you don't feel like carrying your shopping bags home – just give them to someone and say, "If you're my friend, here you go, carry the watermelon for me."

Earless Cows

First read in 2013. Brought to the bonfires in Mošorin, 2023, Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

In 2019 Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo won the Nobel Prize in Economics. They had spent years researching the lives of the poorest people on the planet. They concluded that the fight against poverty often relies on mistaken assumptions and unrealistic expectations from measures devised in offices, which reduce the poor to mere cartoon characters. Instead, their art of survival can be very resourceful. In their book *Poor Economics*, they provide examples of how people find ways around the control mechanisms put into place to manage them. In India, micro-insurance was attempted based on microcredit principles, specifically insuring cows, without developing any control mechanism, resulting in a massive influx of claims. "After the first lot of policyholders universally claimed to have lost their cattle, they (insurance company) decided that in order to claim that an animal had died, the owner would need to show the ear of the dead cow. The result was a robust market in cows' ears: Any cow that died, insured or not, would have its ear cut off and the ear would then be sold to those who had insured a cow. That way they could claim the insurance and keep their cow."

Smuggling from Italy

First heard a long time ago, place unknown. Retold in Belgrade. Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin in 2023.

My other [redacted] six children [redacted] in the fifties and all through the seventies she used to go [redacted] sew in her traditional skirts, hiding [redacted] into a kind of sack and wore them [redacted] food, but also linen and fabrics.

Borrowing Tips

First heard on the net, 2022.

Eighteen-year-old [redacted] and [redacted] are part of "Borrowing TikTok," a growing community of teens sharing shoplifting tips under the guise of anti-capitalist activism. [redacted] educate their combined 55,000 followers on how to [redacted] "If it's a chain, it's free reign." These accounts, [redacted] unethical practices. [redacted] inspired by anti-capitalist ideas, [redacted] punish profit-driven corporations. She recently "borrowed" [redacted] a local shelter.

Turkers Tricking the Turk

First heard on the net, 2021.
Brought to bonfires in Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

The unsung heroes of the gig economy, or perhaps more accurately, its foot soldiers, are the workers on platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk, where "Turkers" tackle micro-tasks for pocket change. Each nugget of data they polish typically earns them as little as 0.05 US dollars.

But there's a twist in the tale: AI needs humans to curate and annotate training datasets, as well as to check the outputs generated by the models to guide them to produce more accurate results. However, some researchers recently uncovered that up to 46% of these Turkers are using AI to beat AI at its own game. They're roping in the likes of ChatGPT to hustle through tasks more quickly and efficiently, squeezing more money out of the tech giants' deep pockets.

And there is a further twist: As the Turkers started to use AI to take up parts of their jobs, the AIs that they are training are starting to turn into funhouse mirrors of echos—producing data that is distorted, biased, and just plain weird. Therefore, like in a high-stakes game of digital cat and mouse, the AI companies are currently trying to sidestep this self-feeding loop, while the crafty Turkers are forcing them to either cough up more money for their human touch, or concoct new ways to phase it out.

The Best Education

First heard in Mošorin, 2023.

[redacted] theatre and education festival [redacted] group, who were 16 or 17 years old, it was a big deal—they'd [redacted] even traveled before. So it was an exciting opportunity for them. But the performance had to be original, and it had to be about education or at least educational in some way. Their first response was, "Does this mean we have to do something about not getting pregnant, or not smoking, or not drinking?" I reassured them, "No, don't worry, it's not about that. It just has to be something related to education." Now, I'm pretty good at getting groups to express themselves, but when it came to the topic of education, it was like talking to a wall. Nothing. No ideas, no inspiration. It was like trying to get blood from a stone. I was about to give up, and even the idea of going to Italy wasn't motivating them. That's how stuck we were. Then, on one of the last days, I happened to notice [redacted] a hole in her jeans, and I thought I saw writing [redacted] the answers to a test at school." Suddenly, everyone was laughing. It was the first time in three months that I got any kind of reaction related to school! Then someone [redacted] entire test written on her leg, with all the answers. The group was in hysterics. Finally, we had something. They were so proud and energetic, talking about all the different ways they'd cheated

on tests. [redacted] we created a play about cheating—about someone who cheats their way through school and succeeds. In the end, the character in the play graduates, and we projected a picture of Berlusconi on the backdrop, as a kind of nod to the situation in [redacted] where buying diplomas was becoming common practice. Now, here's the kicker. [redacted] we had a discussion. We'd been through this whole process, creating a play about cheating, criticizing the education system. So I asked them, "What would a perfect education system look like? Ideally, what should it be?" One boy raised his hand and said, "It would look exactly like the one we have." I was shocked. "What are you talking about? We've just spent this whole time criticizing it!" And he replied, "No, because [redacted] To survive [redacted] have to cheat. So, what better education system than one that trains you to cheat in order to succeed?"

Twenty Bras

First heard a long time ago, place unknown.
Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin in 2023.

– We were paid very little on the radio in [redacted] and at that time I sold all sorts of things illegally. I went to [redacted] nicknamed [redacted] for years. We [redacted] And once I bought lingerie, bras, and panties…and asked myself: and now what shall I do with it? And then it dawned on me: I will put on all twenty bras and a leather jacket over it. And we arrived [redacted] tore the whole car apart, looking for drugs. So when they didn't find the drugs, they let us go.

The Knowledge

First read in 2018. Brought to the bonfire in Mošorin, 2023.

In the UK, poor people who live in public housing are demonized. When parents don't live together, they are represented as "broken families." The supposed negative effects on children are used as a metaphorical stick to beat their parents. Much of the stigma concerns single mothers and their relationships with the fathers of their children. As a single mother living in public housing, it then becomes extremely important to know "what to say" and how to answer questions from social services and the state. Sociologist Lisa McKenzie calls it the art of "getting by." She explains: "Being able to negotiate your way around the welfare system and knowing how to 'answer questions' is part of your education."[62] It is women, generation to generation, who pass on "the knowledge" for "how to answer questions." Mandatory questions in "welfare interviews" with social services determine the financial support that will be received by the mother, so it is important to get them right. The point is, there are a number of reasons why women are reluctant to share the name of the father with official institutions, partly having to do with financial reasons, and partly with the personal safety of some or all people concerned. As a consequence, many women "have had to say at benefit agency interviews that they do not know who their child's father is – he was a one-night stand, and they can't remember his name." In one instance, a woman told the social worker that she had a one-night stand with "a hunchback with one eye"!

62 McKenzie, Lisa. *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain*. Bristol University Press, 2015, 57.

Riders' Bots

First heard on the net, 2021.
Brought to the bonfire in Berlin in 2024.

[redacted] delivery riders are largely treated as independent contractors, whom algorithms put in competition with each other. This system, common to many other countries, has given rise to a range of bots: paid programs that allow a fast booking of the best available slots.

The most popular bots are called Reglov, Glovobot, GlovIp, LaFenice, and Sushi Clicker. They are typically downloaded for a fee from websites, but some developers manage their businesses via Telegram and other similar platforms. Once installed, the bot allows users to bypass the official shift assignment system, which in some companies is based on the rider's personal ranking. The ranking's score is reputational. That means that it is based on factors such as the absence of negative reviews, the seniority of service, and the rider's availability during the so-called 'diamond hours,' the evening hours of the weekend. By using the bots, newcomers or those with lower ranking scores can outcompete those without bots, to secure more and better shifts for themselves.

Buying a bot costs on average between 40 and 50 euros, then a monthly subscription is necessary, around 10 euros. Some offer the possibility of an annual subscription, between 80 and 100 euros. Although the use of bots is officially prohibited by many companies, and unions have condemned such digital practices, this remains a very widespread phenomenon and many riders say they couldn't do without it.

Cheating Academia

First heard on the net, 2017.
Retold at the bonfire in Berlin in 2024.

In 2012, a Canadian journalist posted an online advertisement offering to help students write their academic papers. He was working at a local newspaper in small-town British Columbia and seeking a way to supplement his modest income. For 20 Canadian dollars per page, he would write a paper on any topic for students struggling to meet deadlines. Soon, he had a steady stream of customers and was making over double, as a ghostwriter, of what he was earning in his day job as a reporter. One year later, he handed in his resignation, and today he has a team of twenty full-time academic ghostwriters.

Paying third parties to complete coursework is called "contract cheating" and it is a global market estimated to be worth up to 21 billion US dollars.

Why are students drawn to cheating in this form? Systemic challenges in the academic world shape the growth of the contract-cheating industry. Precarious academic teachers and larger class sizes make learning more impersonal. Studies say that when students feel disconnected from the process of learning, they are more likely to cheat.

Ghost writers say that the only thing students who cheat have in common is that they are stressed. "[Schools] are telling students they can take a program, graduate, and get a job. And what they really end up with is $50,000 in debt and no job." Cheating is often a last resort to get by.

The Pension

First heard in [redacted] *2023.*

It's been about 20 years, maybe a little more, since I first heard about this small place on [redacted] The place is called [redacted] It's a quiet spot with just a few houses, some dating back to the 11th or 12th century. The community is small, [redacted] live to be quite old—some reaching 90 or even 100 years. One summer, when I was vacationing there, my landlady, [redacted] house next to hers had been abandoned for a long time. Back in the day, a small boat from [redacted] only connection to the outside world, looping around [redacted] Once a month, the postman would come on that boat, bringing pensions and mail. Everyone would gather by the pier, waiting for him.

There was this one old woman, well into her 90s, who had been bedridden for years. She hadn't left the house in ages. When the postman came, her family—children and grandchildren—would take the papers up to her room for her to sign, as she couldn't come down. This happened several times.

But, over time, things stretched out, and eventually, the old woman [redacted] the economic collapse about 30 years ago, her pension had become [redacted] something unusual. After she passed, they [redacted]

[redacted]

no one noticed the difference. For more than ten years—maybe longer—they kept it going. In the end, though, the truth came out. But that's how they managed to survive all those years.

Party Buses

Conversation heard in a place unknown.
Retold in Rijeka, 2023.

—I've been working inside the system all my life and I'm barely surviving that. I play dumb and that's how I survive. I am employed in the local government in [redacted]

—What is it like to work in the system?

—Well, hard. Because there is no system. The first thing you learn when you get into local government is: that's not my job. And if you want to take initiative… then there is a lot of pushback. The environment resists changes no matter what the changes are. If you have any ambition to change something…first they will clamp down [redacted] eight hours, but half the time you pretend to work, and that's just how the system works. And after some years, you learn to [redacted] is omnipresent. And that's a common thing, it's nothing new. Embezzlement is [redacted] You have all these kids showing up with their master's degrees, [redacted] buses to the rallies of the governing party are packed with them and there are only two of us left in the entire municipal administration. Out of about fifty people, two or three of us remain… that's right…and that's it. Some make fun of it, some participate in all that and make fun of themselves and the entire thing, and some are really into it. Many people don't want to go, they roll their eyes and shrug their shoulders.

The Ex-Priest and the Truck

Retold in Mošorin, 2023.

This is a story I heard from an ex-priest himself. He had been working as a Catholic priest [redacted] community projects. At one point, he was asked to visit an Aboriginal village where the men had been leaving, causing problems for the community. The village was mostly women at that point, and they told him, "The men have nothing to do, that's why they're leaving. If they had some tools, they could start a small agricultural project."

So, the priest went back to the city and arranged for some tools. He brought the tools [redacted] they had started a garden. They said, "Now we need some seeds. If you can arrange that, it would be wonderful." He was very happy, thanking God for the progress.

He returned to the city, arranged for seeds, and brought them back to the village. A month later, when he visited again, the seeds had grown, and they were cultivating crops. This back-and-forth happened several times—each time, [redacted] and the men remained in the village, everyone content.

After about a year, the crops had matured, and the village was thriving. When he asked what they needed next, they said, "We need transport to take these crops to town so we can sell them." Of course, he thought this was a great idea. So, once again, [redacted] a second-hand truck, which was donated to the village.

He left feeling very pleased with himself, happy with [redacted]

■ got a call from the village, asking him to return. When he arrived, there were no men, and the truck was gone. Confused, he asked what had happened, and they told him, "Well, the men used the truck to leave… and they haven't come back."

Children Censorship

First heard in 1995. Retold in 2024.

Just a small digression regarding censorship. A sweet little episode, [redacted] has a mother who is a poet, and she writes extremely erotic, vulgar poems. When this friend was a little girl, she was in third grade, and her mother had just published a book called [redacted] The girl proudly told her teacher that her mom had published a book, and the teacher asked, "Well, bring it to me as a present." So, she took the book [redacted] too vulgar [redacted] this little girl took a black marker and redacted out everything she thought was inappropriate. The book turned into a collection of censor bars, with almost nothing left, because she found everything obscene. But the brilliant part is that she nonetheless gave that fully redacted book to her teacher — as a present.

Mouse Jiggler

First heard on the net, 2020. Retold in Rijeka, in 2023. Brought to the bonfires in Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

A Mouse Jiggler is a must-have for any work-from-home employees. It's a device which you plug in to your computer. I put my mouse on the device and the device simulates mouse movements, which prevent the computer from going into sleep mode. The movement is irregular and simulates writing.

It gives me the chance to get a coffee or a snack while still giving the appearance of being busy. But also, in my job, I have the problem of my computer going into sleep mode immediately. I go through a lot of [redacted] that have to be read carefully. But if I don't move my mouse continuously while reading, my computer goes into sleep mode suddenly and I need to re-enter my password and find where I was in the text. So, before the Mouse Jiggler, I would need to move the mouse continuously while, at the same time, trying to concentrate on the text. This is very distracting. The IT department won't allow me to change the sleep-mode settings, [redacted]

I also used the Mouse Jiggler in a previous job where I worked remotely for an employer. This employer ran a lot of Bossware on employees' computers. I had to talk to clients a lot on the phone and if I forgot to move my mouse during calls, my computer went into sleep mode and the time tracking for my work hours stopped and I got bad ratings in my performance review. Knowing that my employer tracked my performance through mouse movement instead of looking at work results demoralized me and I left the job.

John Deere Tractors Hack

First read in Vice Magazine, 2017. Retold in Rijeka, 2022.

A group of North American farmers who have been pushing back against the monopoly of John Deere over their agricultural machineries. John Deere, an agricultural machinery giant, has been using embedded software and a licensing agreement to effectively prevent farmers from having their tractors repaired or modified by anyone other than John Deere's authorized repair partners who have the diagnostic software needed to detect a malfunction or optimize the work of a tractor. However, farming can be a time-critical operation, and malfunctioning equipment can spell doom for a farmer. As farms tend to be in remote, sometimes hard-to-reach places, authorized repair can arrive too late. A license agreement that John Deere required farmers to sign in 2016, which effectively forbids unauthorized repair, acknowledges as much when it states that farmers can not sue John Deere for "crop loss, lost profits, loss of goodwill, loss of use of equipment … arising from the performance or non-performance of any aspect of the software."

Such limitations on the right to repair are common, yet they rarely can have such devastating effects. For this reason, farmers started to resist this extortion by buying cheap versions of the John Deere firmware software and passkey generators from the Polish and Ukrainian crackers to hack the existing software on their tractors. This allows them to repair malfunctions but also to improve their equipment, such as by having it run on methane

produced from pig manure.[63] And while circumvention of software protection can be legal, the license agreement made it unlawful to do so, implying that farmers have no way but to resort to piracy and disobedience to reclaim their equipment.

63 Koebler, Jason. "Why American Farmers Are Hacking Their Tractors With Ukrainian Firmware." Vice (blog), March 21, 2017. https://www.vice.com/en/article/xykkkd/why-american-farmers-are-hacking-their-tractors-with-ukrainian-firmware (accessed October 2024).

Albanian Antennas

First heard online, "Ho visto un paese bianco bianco", Giulia Morucchio & Irene Rossini & the Department of the Eagles, 2006. Retold in Rijeka, 2022.

After the separation of the Albanian Communist Party from the rest of the European Soviet block in 1969, all television sets were made in the factory Uzina e Radio-Televizorëve (URT), which was owned and controlled directly by the State. The TVs were assembled in a way that made it technically impossible to receive any frequency other than the Albanian ones.

But people in Albania liked to secretly watch Italian television, the RAI. So they invented the *kanoçe* (KA-NO-CHE), or "cans". These were small homemade devices made of waste materials and electronic components, and containing a structure that could transform UHF signal into VHF—in other words, they translated the RAI frequency into the Albanian ones. They were sold through the black market: a network would connect a buyer with an engineer able to make and install the device. It is unclear how *kanoçe* originated. The modified can contained a pattern of resistors and amplifiers that may have followed a scheme found in Russian magazines illegally imported into the country.

Of course, the production of these antennas was illegal. Watching RAI signal was tolerated by the Communist Party up until 1973, the year of the Fourth Plenum, when the State assumed stricter control over radio and television production and programs, and over the whole telecommunications system. After that time, owning a *kanoçe* or being caught watching Italian television could lead to severe punishment. Yet, virtually everyone in Albania had one or knew someone who had one.

Zoom Escaper

First heard on the net, 2021. Retold in Rijeka, in 2022. Brought to the bonfires in Berlin and Orléans in 2024.

When I'm on my third Zoom meeting of the day and I've had enough, I use Zoom Escaper. Especially when it's one of those meetings that could easily have been an email. Zoom Escaper is a free web widget developed by New York-based artist Sam Lavigne. The tool helps you escape Zoom meetings by allowing you to self-sabotage your audio stream, making your presence unbearable to others. You can choose from barking dogs, construction noises, crying babies, or even subtler effects like choppy audio and unwanted echoes. Zoom Escaper is fantastically simple to use. All you need to do is download a free audio software that then re-routes your audio through Lavigne's website. You are then free to play with the effects. I just add the disruption that most fits my setting and the audio is so unbearable to everyone that they'll be relieved when you disconnect. If I need a few minutes break to make some coffee, I can add construction site noises and tell the people on the call that I am going to reconnect from a quieter location. Choppy audio or an echo credibly signals a bad connection. I apologize and my meeting partners are usually happy to just write me an email.

Self Check-Out

First heard in London, 2015. Retold in Orléans in 2024.

It's good to know if the machine calculates the weight in the bagging area [redacted] for example, with vegetables, there's a trick where you [redacted] and stick the [redacted] Then, you scan [redacted] advantage of self-checkout machines.

Heavy Sacks

Heard in [redacted] *date unknown.*
Brought to the bonfire in Orléans, 2024.

I heard this at a festival [redacted] sharing all sorts of stories like this. Apparently, [redacted] DIY stores [redacted] Here's how it goes: you grab a big, heavy bag of cement, the kind no one wants to lift [redacted] some small but expensive [redacted] under the cement bag on your cart. When you roll up to the checkout, the cashier usually [redacted]…

Pirate Plots

Heard on the net, 2013.

In Peru's street markets, not only can you find unauthorized copies of popular books before they're officially released, but these pirate editions often contain unexpected surprises. In a 2012 study by The Piracy Project, researchers uncovered a fascinating twist in the way pirate vendors handle literature: they don't just replicate; they reinvent.

One such example is Jaime Bayly's novel *No se lo digas a nadie*. While the official version ends where Bayly intended, the pirated edition found on the streets of Lima includes two additional chapters. These extra sections, inserted by anonymous hands, mimic the author's style so well that only a practiced reader might detect the difference. And it's not just Bayly's work that receives this treatment. Titles by celebrated authors, including Mario Vargas Llosa, have been similarly tampered with, sometimes adding new plot twists or characters, and occasionally reimagining entire sections. According to The Piracy Project, these modifications are rarely announced to buyers; instead, they discover them by chance, potentially never realizing they're holding something other than the author's original work.

Health Insurance

Heard in [redacted] *2023.*

My friend's mother [redacted] The country's health insurance system provides coverage once someone has [redacted] a little loophole, maybe, but it makes a world of difference. [redacted] out of reach.

The Witness

Heard in [redacted] *2023.*

Near the local tribunal, a bar informally known as The Witness has become a place where people go if they need to find a testimony. [redacted] Some think it is true; others believe it's just an urban legend.

The Suit

First heard in London, 2007.

Back in the days before fast fashion, 24hr home deliveries and free returns, my good friend had a trick. Whenever she needed a smart suit for a job interview, she would go early in the morning to a high end fashion shop and tell the shopkeeper that she needed a suit for her sister who was unwell, asking if she could buy it, let her try it on at home, and then return it the following day in case it didn't fit. She would then wear the suit at the job interview (carefully hiding the attached price tags) and then bring it back the following day. She never required the suits for the actual jobs, so there was no point in buying them.

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EDITORS Mara Ferreri, Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, Tomislav Medak and Davor Mišković

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FIGURE IT OUT IS NOT …a book of certainty …a strategy, but a notegy, whatever it means …a joke, and not an artwork …liberal recipes for winning in a competitive environment …accepting the status quo

