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A Conversation Among Stefan Helmreich, Daniela Gandorfer, and Zulaikha Ayub, Summer 2020

Introduction: Doing Theory

> "*Theory is about whose lives matter and how.*"
>
> —Stefan Helmreich

Daniela Gandorfer and Zulaikha Ayub: In this *Matterphorical* issue, we want to think about the production of meaning in its inextricability from matter, with meaning understood not as representational (i.e. as a semiotic or symbolic quality or quantity), but rather as something constantly being carried (phora/φορά) "with," "after" or "between" (meta-/μετα-) semantic domains while also always traveling with or through an entanglement with *matter*—where "matter" is understood not as fixed substance, but, following Karen Barad's claim, as "*substance in its intra-active becoming,*" as such "not situated in the world" but "worlding in its materiality."[1] We are concerned with those political, aesthetic, legal, social, technological, physical, and environmental entanglements that not only shape but are onto-epistemologically constitutive of processes of knowledge and meaning production and transmission.

We are interested, in other words, in *theory*—not only understood as a way of conceptualizing, but also as a mode of making sense of and sensing material-discursive practices. We assume neither a singular nor universal approach to theory, but rather seek modes that traverse disciplines, genres of analysis, and fields of knowledge. Doing theory, as we understand it, also means working collaboratively rather than under the assumption that ideas are the products of singular ingenious minds, products to be owned and defended by their authors, or to be articulated in intellectual and spatial isolation. We think, thus, not of 'theory' in the abstract, but of *doing theory*.

We wanted to talk with you because we have found your work helpful to us in that project. Across your anthropological work you have been interested in how scientists—in the life sciences, in oceanography, in acoustics, in social theory—make knowledge claims through tacking back and forth between concepts and practice. So, for example, in *Silicon Second Nature: Culturing Artificial Life in a Digital World*; *Alien*

Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas; and *Sounding the Limits of Life*, you offer ethnographic accounts of communities of biologists who are investigating the limits of the category of 'life. Your research has centered on three cases: computational theoretical biologists, marine microbiologists, and astrobiologists. You investigate how scientists in each of these fields think about the limits of life: as an intellectual matter of framing an encompassing theory of the biological realm (as, e.g., in theories of "life" that have it as a genre of information processing or, instead, as an auto- or symbiopoietic unfolding), as an empirical matter of finding edge cases of vitality (as, e.g., in the deep sea, where bacteria use chemosynthesis, not photosynthesis), and as a practice of biotechnological intervention that may result in new biotic things that amplify what counts as "biology," as flesh and discipline. In addition to this work, you have also written on transformations in dominant scientific accountings of such concepts/phenomena as "sex/gender," "race," "culture," "seawater," "sound," and, recently, "waves."

But let us start with another concept/phenomenon you've examined: theory. Theory, you write in *Sounding the Limits of Life*, is "at once an abstraction as well as a thing in the world," which is why we might "think of theory neither as set above the empirical nor as simply deriving from it but, rather, as crossing the empirical transversely."[2] You suggest, too, that scholars and others might operate "athwart theory," "tacking back and forth between seeing theories as explanatory tools and taking them as phenomena to be examined."[3] Theory, we infer from thinking with you, is *in* and *of* the world. And as such, it is inextricable from the forces involved in the making and becoming of world(s). Interestingly, your work often refers to forces—to forces of different kinds, including: motive forces[4]; human and non-human forces; social, political, and economic forces[5]; sociocultural forces; formatting forces[6]; structuring forces.[7] But let's loop back before getting to the question of force: What is *theory* for you?

Stefan Helmreich: First off, thanks so much for organizing this conversation. I've been learning a lot from you both in our backs-and-forths about all these questions, exchanges that we've been having since 2018, when you first invited me to participate in your *Reading Matters* conference, which really reformatted how I think about the limits of the concept and practice of reading.[8]

So, on theory, here's one place to begin: with a reading of the etymology of *theory*, which, as a word, derives from the ancient Greek for "to see" (θεωρός). Departing from there, I'd start by multiplying the sensory and sense-making modes in play—moving beyond the fetish of clear vision implied by the etymological gambit—and say that

"theory" might more expansively refer to modes of thinking and action that offer ways of seeing, framing, hearing, and/or sensing in structured ways, structured ways that permit the making visible, manifest, audible, or apprehensible of some set of dynamics in the world, for a particular set of purposes that might include description, prediction, and intervention. Such a definition might fit theory as it operates in theoretical physics, theoretical biology, social theory, literary theory, media theory, critical race theory, queer theory, theory of computation, set theory, feminist theory, music theory, political theory, and many other arenas. Such a definition might also make it clear that theory need not always be something articulated in, say, discourse or diagrams, or in texts or visuals. A piece of sound or music can *be* and *do* theory. A collective protest can *do* and *be* theory.

　　And then the "athwart theory" formulation … I first imagined that as kin to philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend's claims in *Against Method*, which called for recognizing the pluralism that animates actually existing scientific practice.[9] I wanted, though, to avoid working "against theory"—as Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels once suggested (they worried that "theory" assumes that problems set by theoretical frames are themselves real, which seems to me, in an upside-down way, to reify "the real" as separate from theory).[10] At its most elementary, my "athwart theory" claim is that theories—about, say, supply and demand, gender performativity, quantum computing—*do things in the world*, transform the very texture of the realities they claim to disclose.

DG&ZA: This is a very interesting claim that also coincides with a *matterphorical* understanding of theory. In thinking about your work on *life* then, which has been, as you said, one of the main foci of your research, would you say that theory thus also shapes (or: in-forms) "life"?

SH: Yes, you could say that, with "life" understood as simultaneously biotic, biographical, political. Notions of life in, say, the practice of cell culture—which has seen scientists engineer cell lines they call "immortal," "plastic," "hybrid"—have folded back into what many of these scientists take to be the *nature* of cells themselves, something that Hannah Landecker quite brilliantly showed in her 2007 book, *Culturing Life*.[11]

　　Let me rewind back to my own anthropology of science work, which has had me looking at what I call "limit biologies": biological practices in 1) Artificial Life (a genre of computational theoretical biology dedicated to simulating living things; it's like Artificial Intelligence, but for biology), 2) deep-sea marine microbiology (particularly to do with so-called "extremophiles" that live at the chemical

and pressure limits of what life on Earth can take), and 3) astrobiology (the study of as-yet undiscovered life on other worlds). When I was reflecting in a 2011 *Critical Inquiry* article about what brought together my work on "life" in these limit biologies, it seemed to me that in all of them the concept of "life" itself had become unsteady, stretched to its conceptual limits. Around then, I came across a passage in *Life.After. Theory*—a collection of interviews with post-structuralist thinkers— in which editor John Schad wrote that, "theory has made us wary of the idea of Life, or indeed any other organicist master-word."[12] *That* made me wonder whether "theory," too, might be a concept or word about which to be wary. Maybe "theory" was also being asked to do too much, or was being overtaken by the multiplicity of the world? Maybe "life" and "theory" were *both* losing coherence—maybe they were doubles of one another? Schad in fact ventured a vision of "life" and "theory" as doubles in his text—though not perhaps as doubles in dissolution—when he argued that "critical theory" as it came to be known after the mid-twentieth century was in some sense "a response to the Second World War." He argued that it might be the case that

> theory is 'life' in the strict etymological sense of the word–for 'life' comes from the prehistoric German *lib* meaning 'remain' or 'be left' and, as one dictionary puts it, 'the semantic connection between '"remaining" and life . . . is thought to lie in the notion of being "left alive after a battle".' If life is necessarily, after-life; if all living is a form of 'living-on,' in particular living-on after war, then theory is very much a form of life.[13]

Schad here offered that critical theory has been *about life*, about how to live, how to live on, to live after, so in that sense it is all about ethics, how properly to live. I would complicate and expand that claim—on beyond World War Two and beyond the pun around the German word for "life." If, as Schad suggests, some genres of critical theory were a response to the fascisms of World War Two and to the Holocaust—I think of Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hans Jonas, about whom the intellectual historian Ben Wurgaft has written very insight-fully[14]—that means that there are genres of theory keyed to other calamitous transformations in life and lives and that these *must* be part of the repertoire of what travels under the banner of critical theory.

If theory is about how to live on, in an aftermath, consider crit-ical theory in Indigenous Studies—work that has been undertaken, for example, in the lands that dominant languages name the "Americas" and "Australia," work that zeroes in on the genocide, radioactive colo-nialism,[15] and continued dispossession of Native people. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, Michael Yellow Bird, and Angela Cavender Wilson's *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*,[16] Winona LaDuke's

All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life,[17] Joyce Green's *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*,[18] and Celeste Liddle's "Rantings of an Aboriginal Feminist" blog[19] are just a few important texts in this tradition. Consider, also, critical Black Studies that pose theory as a response to the Middle Passage, plantation slavery, the failure of reconstruction, and state and police violence. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*,[20] from 2016, is sharply necessary for this moment right now — a moment that is, of course, actually hundreds and hundreds of years *long*, and in which it's not clear that there is an easy "after," as instances of anti-Black violence in 2020, particularly in the U.S., call back to earlier decades, earlier centuries, in a horrifying and tangled chronotope that makes it difficult to know *what time it is*. Along with Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*[21] this is work that is about making theory for life, to live, to explain life — and it depends upon the writings and action of a long line of Black thinkers including (just to stay in the later twentieth century) Sylvia Wynter, Andre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Patricia J. Williams, Saidiya Hartman, and many more. Angela Davis, a towering figure in this tradition, has also argued that theory can be found beyond books, as she writes about with respect to music as theory in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*.[22]

So, in the political and activist idiom, *theory is about whose lives matter and how*. I realize, as I write that, that I've strayed from my other point about "theory" in, say, physics, biology, and more … Or *not*. Some of the contributors to the *Reading Matters* gathering that you convened in 2018 — Donna Haraway and Karen Barad come quickly to mind — very explicitly anchor their theory, their accountings of life and responsibility, in an active engagement with what counts as the organismic (Haraway) and with what counts as empirical observation of the physical (physics-y?) world (Barad).

What does that mean for "ethics"? It means THINK FROM EVERYWHERE, including those zones like physics, biology, chemistry, and mathematics that sometimes seem to outsiders as though they might be apart from (or, on the other hand, mere ideologically informed reflexes of or doubles for) social worlds, but that are and can be generative of fresh, contestable, and lively politics, ways of thinking and acting.

DG&ZA: "Theory is about whose lives matter and how" is a powerful statement that calls for an ethics of *doing theory* which is, as you also point out, situated, aiming to make sense of what the concept of "life," now in a more nuanced sense and attentive to material and discursive shifts, can hold — and what forms of existence are excluded, prohibited from coming into being, or deformed in their mode of existence by

certain articulations of "life." These, it seems to us, are questions that *matter*, and as such, are also material. We don't think, then, that you have "strayed from [your] other point about 'theory' in, say, physics, biology, and more." This is in fact related to the first answer you offered about theory, namely that it is "a mode of thinking *and* action that offers ways of seeing, framing, hearing, and/or sensing in structured ways—structured ways that permit the making visible, manifest, audible, apprehensible of some set of dynamics in the world, for a particular set of purposes that might include description, prediction, and intervention." Theory, then, *is* not a construction of a model of thought, or a set of propositions, but is always about thinking *and* doing. In regard to ethics, then, theory *has* to engage—one way or the other—with the question about whose lives matter, and how. That, however, requires paying attention to the concepts of "life" and of "matter," and also the language that structures that very statement, allowing for certain modes of thought, while making others impossible.

Your writing on "life" resonates with what we understand as *matterphorics*. You describe "life" as "amalgam of the conceptual and the actual," a "substance-concept," neither ignoring the material nor the discursive practices that shape the concept.[23] You also claim that concepts of "life" in biology are increasingly unstable. We think this resonates with Karen Barad's arguments about "matter"—that, with the rise of quantum physics, it was not only the concept of matter that became uncertain, but also matter as such.[24] You each emphasize that matters of ontology and epistemology are inseparable—and that methods of measurement, observation, research, and interpretation *matter*.

Here is another place where you bring "life" and "theory" together in your "What Was Life?" article: "Life and theory, wavering, gesture toward *indeterminacy* about where politics might now reside, about how life forms and forms of life form and deform in the shadow that has overtaken life after theory."[25] Can you say more? To phrase it more concretely: If "limit biologies" (we also think of forms like synthetic biology, which Sophia Roosth examines in her *Synthetic*[26]) unsettle the very *nature* underlying the concept of life, should critical theorists take that as an ungrounding to be followed? If theoretical physics renders *matter* indeterminate, do we have an obligation to at least question our use of the term "matter"? What are the ethical implications of mobilizing and circulating an understanding of a word and/or concept (*nature*, *matter*) that circulates even as it loses its ontological grounds?

SH: The implication is that critical theorists—us included—are not "above" or "outside" the epistemological quandaries that bedevil the sciences. My own field, cultural anthropology, is part of the same world as the biosciences—there are kindred conundrums (about, for

example, relations among agents, the transmission of properties) that cross-hatch our worlds.

In that sense, although I always try to ensure that the technical details of the sciences about which I write are correct (according, usually, to the dominant insider wisdom, which is, of course, always itself at least partially contested), I am not entirely sure whether, when we as scholars in critical theory "borrow" concepts from the sciences, that our task is simple fealty to those sciences for our definitions. Sometimes that fidelity is vitally productive, as with Karen Barad's work (which of course also takes sides—with Niels Bohr's interpretation of quantum physics). Sometimes the reverse is called for—the kind of blasphemy and heresy that Donna Haraway deployed, for example, in her ironic capture of the cyborg for a socialist feminist political imagination. It very much depends on what the aim of our own theorizing is. Sometimes, it might even be important to be more technically fastidious than the sciences themselves often are—I bristle, for example, at descriptions of evolution, even (or especially by) writers in popular biology that generalize the concept beyond a narrow usage. I agree with Donna Haraway that failing to teach evolution is a form of child abuse[27] and am all for analytically rigorous—and critical—explications of what evolution by natural selection does and does not explain. Banu Subramanian's excellent *Ghost Stories for Darwin* seeks to do good evolutionary biology and good feminist and antiracist theory at the same time, holding all accounts to account for their assumptions and implications.[28]

From Media (of) Theory to Ethics of Keeping Time(S)

> "*I don't think we should ask whether theory can 'catch up.'*
> *Lots of on-the-mark theory is already in place. The forces in play have been in play for a long time.*"
>
> —Stefan Helmreich

DG&ZA: On the matter of accounts and their assumptions, let us return to your reference to a passage from Schad, from *Life.After.Theory*. In that book, theory is mainly understood as literary theory, and therefore operates with reference to text and its structuring principles, including grammar. But there is more going on here, too—and that is Schad's concern, like many poststructuralists, with the limits of language after World War Two. This is about theory as *response*. Jacques Derrida in his interview in *Life.After.Theory* explains what doing theory means for him, and states that it is inextricable from a particular idea of "fidelity":

> I often repeat that my relation to the masters … –Freud, Heidegger—is a relation of fidelity and betrayal … *Within* the experience of following them there is something other, something new, or something different which occurs … That's what I call a 'counter-sign', a counter-signature.[29]

Theory, thus, is and remains a *response*. Theory is always in a relation—here even dialectically (in the sense of acting through opposing forces; through sign and counter-sign)—to the master(s) and their written text(s). The "new," and the "different," can only be in response to what the text (and a particular set of texts) allows. This has major consequences for what "life" *can be*. In the same interview Derrida states that he "*first* generalized the concept of text," in order to claim that "'text' is not just, say, literature or philosophy but life in general. Life after theory is a text. Life is a text, but then we have to change the rules, change the concept of text." "Life"—here, as conceptualized by Derrida—we would argue, can only *remain* as long as this particular notion of grammar and of text remains, as long as there is fidelity, as long as theory does not stray too far from its Western tenets.

So, although Schad's claim that "theory is very much a form of life" seems to resonate with your work as well as Barad's, the concept of "life" considered by Schad (and by Derrida) differs significantly from what you propose. For Schad, the relation between *theory* as a "response" and *life* as that which remains "after," is the result of an equation based on an etymological reference. The Old High German *lib* and the Middle High German *lîp* means first and foremost "body" [*Leib*]. Taking the semantics and epistemology of the term seriously, however, might bring theory closer to various feminist theories that understand theory as embodied and entangled (rather than, as Schad has it, as a "response")—and perhaps also to what you call "resonance," a mode of doing theory that "suggests a participation in the world, a moving in sympathy, an empirically attuned embodiment."[30] If Schad's particular notion of theory keeps it close to text and *life* close to *response* (and also to, in some ways, guilt),[31] another direction that takes (human and non-human) "bodies" and their relationality into consideration, would ask about *response-ability* (Haraway, Barad),[32] or, following other feminist thinkers, *trans-corporeality* (Stacy Alaimo), *geontologies* (Elizabeth Povinelli), and *body burden* (Vanessa Agard-Jones), to mention just a few.[33] For those theories, then, life—even as a concept—is *in* and *of* the physical world; it is embodied, material, and entangled. Importantly, life cannot be fully deconstructed; not because some kernel of naturalized meaning remains or has to remain, but because meaning production cannot be fully detached from matter, and from what *matters* for a body—and a *life*—in its singularity and situatedness. *Life*, too, needs to be understood matterphorically and in relation to onto-epistemological fields as intra-active media.

Now, in *Sounding the Limits of Life*, you write that the "medium through which one investigates things in the world is significant" and our considerations just above makes us think about the medium of text, of language, how we might rethink what we mean by that.[34] How do you, for example, think about the fact that so much critical theory operates in text—in written language, and, more particularly, in English?

SH: Well, first let me thank you for your reading of Schad, which really usefully anchors his word play/work in the specific history and concerns of post-structuralism and its post-war context. My reading of Schad was, no surprise, overdetermined by my own preoccupations with ideas about theory and life—though can I now steal a page from Derrida and say that my reading of Schad operated through an optic of fidelity and betrayal? I'm only partly joking … One of my modes of reading and interpreting takes inspiration from arguments forwarded by Seth Lerer in his book *Error and the Academic Self*, in which he argues that a fascination "with estrangement and displacement" and "the wandering of meanings" has become the hallmark of rhetorical philology—particularly in "America," "a landscape rife with being lost," so that, "to read as an American is to make tropes of words and, in the process, to replay in linguistic terms the patterns of emigration and estrangement that have made us who we are."[35] In that sense, my starting with etymologies as a way of motivating thinking is a bait-and-switch, starting from a provisional, seemingly prior meaning and then showing how it might travel—or, in fact, is traveling as it is brought into varied meanings. I don't want to let Lerer's notion of "American" alone, though, or unproblematically buy into its "we." It needs to be disrupted—not least with Indigenous interventions, which center modes of "estrangement and displacement" that are *not* the same as Lerer's implicitly Euro-immigrant tale of transit. I appreciate your pointing to Stacy Alaimo's *trans-corporeality* as a feminist rejoinder to Schad on "life," and, that in view, wonder whether it's possible to retain and complicate some of Lerer's arguments about wanderings of meanings by turning to Native feminist writings that are about dispossession, exile, or estrangement. I think of Kanaka Maoli writer Kalaniopua Young's "Notes from a Native *Trans* Daughter," which reflects on coming into consciousness as Native and trans, a project Young narrates as emerging through her coming to see Hawai'i as a sovereign nation occupied by the United States and through her working with relatives—close and estranged—through the meanings of Hawaiian words/concepts like *ohana* (family), *mahu* (trans/queer), and *kuleana* (collective responsibility) to think materially-semiotically about becoming trans.[36]

Your other question: How do I think about the specificity of writing in English? I think about it by trying as much as I can—as a speaker of English, with variously fractured Spanish and collapsing German—to mess with words in English, trying to bend them into new resonances while not abandoning some recognizable shared frame of meaning and ethics. I know that English has limits, but also that it has multiple and tangled histories and affordances (echoes of, at least, Germanic, Norman, Celtic, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Persian, and, later, through backward borrowing, ancient Greek and Latin), all of which can be activated if worked on, worked *athwart*.

DG&ZA: Perhaps this is also a good moment to think about theory in history and in context—and about the matter of an ethics of theory. The question of an ethics of doing theory is urgent right now. In the U.S., for example, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Movement for Black Lives protests against police violence and systematic racism in the U.S. call on the academy to account for how its knowledge production can contribute to addressing injustice. What can theory *do*?

SH: That question can be differently posed. There are *lots* of genres of theory, many of which already contribute *exactly* to confronting injustice, to calling out and dismantling racism, to revealing the ongoing inequalities that public health both reproduces and confronts. Rather than worry whether "theory" can address injustice, ask rather, *which* theories are necessary? I know that both of you have written, for example, on this question, particularly in your jointly authored "Thinking Should Not Take (A) Place," in which you think with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's notion of the *undercommons*—that imagined and actual space, outside the confines of authorizing institutions, in which thinking can take place.[37] You write

> What is needed is not only the refusal to comply with the rules of what thinking has to be and what forms of expression it has to adopt, but a collaborative commitment to thinking creatively about different modes of thought. The university grants access to knowledge about what we can know, and degrees in what we can study. We, however, still don't know what thought can *do*.[38]

I'd be curious to hear you elaborate on that—since I think it's vital, as we call out canalized thinking, to emphasize that space of the undercommons.

DG&ZA: Thank you for bringing that up. For us, *doing* theory (with emphasis on the "doing" rather than a particular kind of theory) is

closely related to modes of thinking and to both what they make possible and render un-thinkable. The co-written piece was a contribution to the tenth session of the *Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought* "Theory & Praxis" (2017) seminars, organized by Bernard Harcourt. This session focused on Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons*, which we used, together with Deleuze and Guattari's work on the matters and meanings of thought, to think about what it means to think, and to think *critically*, in academic spaces—including the room in which the seminar took place. What *The Undercommons*, and the thinkers it builds on, does is, among other things, expose the figure of the critical academic. Harney and Moten write: "To be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it."[39] As we read it, the critical academic, then, is not external to the system, "but arises, in defense or by necessity, precisely because the university is looking for a response, which will, no matter the content, reinscribe the norms of thinking and knowledge production."[40]

This speaks to the broader issue of modes of thought oriented towards identity, recognition, and representation, which are incapable of thinking difference differently (that is, thinking it not simply as the result of resemblance, comparison, or, analogy), let alone of thinking what is neither representable, nor seeking representation. The undercommons, too, cannot be represented.[41] What we suggested then—and this relates to something with which Daniela's work is concerned, and with which Zulaikha's work on drawing deals—is both a "refusal to comply with the rules of what thinking has to be and what forms of expression it has to adopt," and "a collaborative commitment to thinking creatively about different modes of thought" that make hitherto un-thinkable modes of existences think-able.[42] Critical thinking, then, is not a response or dialectical movement, but a collaborative engagement with what matters, with what comes to matter and with what is denied from mattering. This also goes right back to the discussion on Schad's notion of life, and to those notions offered by different materialist and feminist theories.

And going back to calling out canalized thinking and referring back to some of our conversations previous to this one: We think of the 2020 publication of Giorgio Agamben's three essays in *Quodlibet*, accusing Italian authorities of having invented an epidemic and implementing "frantic, irrational, and absolutely unwarranted emergency measures."[43] Relying upon a single press release which claimed "there is no SARS-CoV2 epidemic in Italy," Agamben then said, "[i]t is blatantly evident that these restrictions are disproportionate to the threat from what is…a normal flu, not much different from those that affect us every year."[44] Agamben's first essay of February 26, was released on the same day the WHO publicly announced that

COVID-19 cases were being reported in Algeria, Austria, Croatia, and Switzerland, and that Italy alone had just reported 374 new cases and 12 deaths. The fact that Agamben seemed quick to denounce a possible pandemic, and therefore the chances of illness, suffering, and death, as a pure invention, and, well aware of his influence among academic thinkers, felt comfortable to share his opinion publicly, puzzled us. And, even months later, the journalist Christopher Caldwell defends Agamben's claims (which in the meantime have appeared in book form) in an opinion piece in the New York times:

> In hindsight, Mr. Agamben missed a few things in the first days of the coronavirus. For instance, he relayed the National Research Council's description of Covid-19 as a kind of influenza—true enough in most cases, but far from the whole story. Today, however, with the Italian crisis receding, and with a measure of calm restored to the public discussion, we can see his book for what it is: not a work of scientific crankery or crackpot policymaking but an on-the-spot study of the link between power and knowledge.[45]

Caldwell suggests here that in order to conduct an "on-the-spot study" of "the" (as if there were only one!) relation ("the link") between power and knowledge it sufficed for Agamben simply to extrapolate a universal claim from his earlier work, to rely on the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere."[46]

SH: Right. Agamben's pronouncements certainly circulated because of his known stature, and I suppose part of the dynamic here is that some authors of social theory spend so much time committing to a theoretical edifice that they get kind of fenced in by their terms of art and analysis, terms which then gather a momentum of their own that may not match what is happening in the world. It's clear that Agamben's tools were not the right ones for the job—and over here in the US, the authoritarian leveraging of Covid-19 has been all about denial, a different story! That doesn't mean that Agamben's tools wouldn't be right for some job, but even in the context about which he *was* writing he seemed to miss a chance to listen out for whether theories in, say, virology or epidemiology might themselves be on the verge of rearranging understandings about the sociality and politics of infectious disease, for good and ill.

DG&ZA: It is interesting that you describe these outpaced theories as "edifices" that are "fenced in," since that suggests an ongoing worship of the individual, singular author of "theory." It also speaks to a particular European and North-American idea of protecting what has been built, of defending particular mode of individualist existence delineated

by property and upheld by the concept of the bounded subject — all of which relies on a clear distinction between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, presence and absence. Without equating violent modes of thought with physical violence inflicted on bodies on the ground, it can hardly be denied that forms of knowledge production (be it in the humanities, the sciences, the social sciences, or any other field and discipline) and transmission have been crucial to the construction and upkeep of the most violent systems and concepts — including slavery, colonialism, law, racism, fascism, and capitalism.

So, when such unwavering edifices are brought to bear on the complex entanglements at stake, this enacts a cut — a violent cut — that, whether deliberately or not, determines what *matters*, and what remains unaccounted for — and for whom. This is, we think, precisely what happened as Agamben made his pronouncement. Rather than attending to the shortcomings of his concepts in looking at the onto-epistemological entanglements (including those of RNA), Agamben confidently and publicly called the "epidemic" an invention. This choice, we argue, was not, as Anastasia Berg writes in her response to Agamben in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "symptomatic of theory's collapse into paranoia,"[47] but was rather a consequence of a notion of theory, stretched far beyond its limits, and detached from physical reality — to theory as edifice, if not fortress.

SH: The word *edifice*! Right! And that immediately puts me in mind of the recent U.S. and European work to take down monuments to racism and colonialism — whether of Confederate and Columbus monuments in the U.S. or that statue of the 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston in the U.K. that was in June rolled into the River Avon. If "theory" has monuments — and it *does* — what should be done about them? Tearing stuff down has its use, for sure (*nobody* needs to read Herbert Spencer … I guess that got torn down a while ago, though…). Recurating and contextualizing, where possible, is always useful — joining Marx with Gibson-Graham's feminist *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* or Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*, for example.[48]

I have lately been thinking about what I will do the next time I teach my "Social Theory and Analysis" class, a graduate subject I've been teaching for over a decade. The question of where to begin, what to monumentalize, is always interesting. I've gotten into a habit of starting with the social contract theorists — John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau — and reading these immediately alongside their critics; I assign Frederick Douglass and Mary Wollstonecraft and ask students to think with Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract*[49] and Charles Mills's *The Racial Contract*,[50] pressing us to see … well, the obvious, that foundational contractarian political philosophical fables are predicated on patriarchy, Indigenous dispossession, and anti-Blackness at their very

earliest moments. Insofar as methodological or possessive individu-alism have become folk models for sociality, they have a history, and a history of exclusion, engineered right into them.

I'm wondering if I'll start this same way again and am in dialogue with the students who took the class last year about what they judge might be done to torque the whole syllabus, which, after that first week, generally does classic Marxist political economy, stuff about nations and sentiment, practice theory, biopolitics, critical race theory, publics, Anthropocenes …   Right after Trump's travel ban (the first one, Executive Order 13769), I revised the 2017 syllabus to make sure there were authors from the targeted countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen) on the list, and that led to some useful re-grounding of conversation, starting our feminist political theory unit, for example, with the Sudanese feminist Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim (1930-2017), which repositioned a lot of what followed. That also pressed all of us to think about the *time* of theory, the time of the social theory canon—who comes first and why.

DG&ZA: The question of time gets us back to another topic we wanted to discuss: time in the time of COVID-19. We've already talked about how Agamben's response to COVID-19 felt out of time, or behind, and it let us to think about the time that thought takes, especially in light of an ever increasing, yet unequally distributed sense of crisis, urgency, and emergency? Can analysis ever catch up, should it even aspire to do so? Or is it, perhaps, a different way of thinking time that is required?

SH: In the early days of the pandemic, I kept thinking about two parallel time cadences. On the one hand, there was the day-to-day linear-yet-cyclical time of work and life: MondayTuesdayWednesdayThursday FridaySaturdaySundayMondayTuesday…, what Franco Moretti and Amitav Ghosh have described as the regular, gradual, tick-tock time of steady bourgeois life.[51] On the other hand, there was the ballooning time of the virus, growing exponentially, accumulating presence *so much* faster than our day-to-day life could metaphorize. The time that public health presented early on in newspapers sought to set these times in calibration, asking wide publics to think about the "curve" of exponentially amplifying infection and, in our daily, day-to-day linear lives, work (through hand washing, social distancing, mask wearing) to "flatten it." That calibration was differently available to people in different social circumstances—and uneven distribution of those cadences led anthropologist Anna Weichselbraun to call them "corona chronotopes," with the virus multiplying experiences of time, slowing for some, speeding for others, looping confusingly between thens and nows.[52]

As the epidemic unfolded and, in the U.S. at least, began to reveal itself as deepening lines of racial and economic inequality, time telescoped back out, to the continuity of the epidemic with 500 years of Indigenous dispossession, with 400+ years of slavery and with the legacies following those. In some ways, that telescoping out to longer time periods revealed what Indigenous and Black scholarship *already knew*. So, I don't think we should ask whether theory can "catch up." Lots of on-the-mark theory is already in place. The forces in play have been in play for a long time.

On Theory and Force(S)

> "*Fascism need not be evenly distributed or finished in order to be poisonous and potent.*"
> —Stefan Helmreich

DG&ZA: Since you also just brought it up, let us stay for a bit with the word and concept of *force*, as well as with language. Reading through your work, we see you call upon the notion of *force* with some frequency. In one early use of that word in your book *Alien Ocean*, you are describing *other* theorists' use of the word and/or concept. You write, "In Western epistemology, nature has been imagined as a force to be dominated, tamed, struggled against."[53] You then go on, however, to use the notion yourself, writing of "globalizing social forces," of the marine microbe as "a force of leviathan significance" for the ocean, of the ocean itself as "a significant force shaping life on Earth," of some genres of evangelical Christianity as "a force against environmental consciousness."[54] You write, too, of the ocean as "an entity with a force and logic that might endlessly overwhelm or wash away our attempts to represent or control it fully."[55] Here force seems to be what makes representation impossible, to be that which cannot be caught, to be that which escapes concepts of familiarity—which means, at least to a certain degree, also metaphor and analogy. This alien ocean is associated, you write, with the not-us, the strange, even the ultimate other. However, what that force *is*, other than the ocean in its controllability and *unrepresentability*, is unclear. What *is* "force" and what does it do in or for your work?

SH: Thanks so much for this close reading of my work! Let's see. It seems like I've been using the word *force* to point to material as well as rhetorical pressures, compulsions, and weights that press things to happen. It also looks like I'm sometimes employing it as a stand in

for aggregate action, perhaps action that is animated by agencies—physical, organic, cultural, hegemonic—either without or beyond full intention.

Let me try to think my way into this a bit more. One of the articulations of "force" that I have found inspiring comes in a work by W.E.B. Du Bois, in his writing on race. He is reflecting on—and then doubling back to reconsider—a concept central to his biography:

> This was the race concept which has dominated my life, and the history of which I have attempted to make the leading theme of this book. It had as I have tried to show all sorts of illogical trends and irreconcilable tendencies. Perhaps it is wrong to speak of it at all as 'a concept' rather than as a group of contradictory forces, facts and tendencies.[56]

What is Du Bois arguing here—and who is he arguing against? I turn for guidance here to anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran and would say that Du Bois, as a sociologist, is doing something very different from his white contemporaries in anthropology, people like Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict who were very interested in thinking about *race as a concept*—and as *a concept from biology*—so that they could argue that race is an *incoherent concept*, that it doesn't hold up to the scrutiny of reason and science.[57] They want to conclude, based on their evisceration of biological race that therefore *racism* makes no sense. But Du Bois tells us that whether race is "coherent" or not does *not* tell us much about how racism works. As Ryan Cecil Jobson says in "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019," paraphrasing Mark Anderson's *From Boas to Black Power: Racism, Liberalism, and American Anthropology*,

> While the critique of biological determinism constituted the basis for European immigrant populations' legal claims to whiteness and incorporation into the privileges of citizenship, this "immigrant analogy" characteristic of Boasian physical anthropology failed to displace the fundamental racial antagonisms of the post-emancipation Americas. Misplacing the origin of said antagonisms in scientific discourse rather than the violence of New World plantations and their constitutive afterlives, Boas and his interlocutors promoted the "diminution of racial consciousness as the necessary condition for a liberal American future" in lieu of more radical projects of reclamation and repair" (M. Anderson 2019, 59).[58]

I read Du Bois, then, as arguing that race and racism work *through* contradiction—through a *range* of forces. Including, presumably, the force of violence and the force of the interested exercise (by courts,

by law) of force in ways that are not always consistent, or that change their reasoning from one moment to the next (e.g., in 1920s US Supreme Court judgments about who could be "white" and a "citizen," thinking here about Ian Haney Lopez's *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, which points not to consistencies in laws around race and citizenship in the US, but their capriciousness and contradictoriness, and ultimately service to white privilege and supremacy).[59] To use your term of art, race becomes *matterphorical*.

I realize as I finish saying all that that I've strayed a long way from the oceanic contexts you pointed to me writing about! But let me try to get back, through force. In his new book *History 4° Celsius: Search for a Method in the Age of the Anthropocene*, Ian Baucom, in an opening chapter called "Of Forces and Forcings," argues that "the forces requisite to the slave trade, the forces of modern power, and the forces of global capital"—forces materialized in ships, in law, in finance markets—have led to a world in which their ongoing effects (dispossession, extractivism, racial capitalism) are now fully entangled with "climate forcings" such as greenhouse gas and coal burning, which lead to climate change and sea-level rise. He writes, "the play of historical forces and climate forcings are not autonomous from one another but exacerbate and intensify one another." [60] Baucom draws a complex causal connection in the rest of his book between the ocean of the Middle Passage and the ocean of the Anthropocene. Earlier you said that "force seems to be what makes representation impossible, to be that which cannot be caught, to be that which escapes concepts of familiarity," but I think that, for Baucom, force (and forcings) is that which makes connections legible—which then of course opens up the question of how to *specify* the forces if pressed. And I think Baucom does a good job of spelling out what the forces of the slave trade look like—in details to do with kin networks, technologies of captivity, financial instruments, and more. From my point of view, he takes the science behind the concept of climate forcing pretty much as is (one *could* do a history of science dig into that story), but the connections he's able to make through that may have been a challenge to make another way. And he hasn't, of course, gotten *everything* into representation. "Force" still operates as a gathering summary of a range of structuring processes.

DG&ZA: It is of course complicated to speak of that which may escape or defy representation even as its presence is palpable. Another *matterphorical* concept in circulation in your work that helps you get at problems of force and representation is that of the *medium*. In *Alien Ocean* you state that "looking at, through, and into water requires some tangling with *theory underwater*, recognizing that ways of seeing, schemes of explanation, are always informed, performed, and

deformed by their medium."[61] In *Sounding the Limits of Life,* you argue that "the medium of water needs to be theorized not just as an ambient surround, but also as a medium through which living and knowing happens."[62] In *Sounding the Limits of Life*, then, theory becomes even more entangled with (physical) force, as theory, you write, needs to be subjected to "unfamiliar conditions as well–of pressure, saturation, waterlogging–seeing how it deforms as it merges with the medium it seeks to describe."[63]

SH: I'm glad you pointed to that question of medium—and let me mention the work of Melody Jue here. Her writing in ocean humanities has become vital to my thinking about water as medium. She has herself lately done excellent work on "theory underwater," much of which now informs my own thinking on theory. [64]

DG&ZA: Speaking of media and water, let us get to waves, something you have been paying significant attention to in some of your more recent work. In "Wave Theory ∼ Social Theory,"[65] in *Public Culture*, you demonstrate how the wave metaphor becomes a figure to think about phenomena of social change and consequently social theory (and you tune that analysis very specifically to today's talk of "second waves" of COVID-19 in your *Boston Review* article, "The Shape of Epidemics," co-written with historian of medicine David Jones[66]). In doing so, you point the reader's attention to the complexity of not only how representation and the physical world relate, but also to the challenges and pitfalls of collapsing the constructed dichotomy too quickly (as it cannot simply be treated as if it hadn't existed as the main structuring ontological cut in Western thought). The importance of force(s) is legible here, too. You show, for example, how representations (such as curves, figures, graphs) are in the 19th century believed to correspond to and possibly disclose *material forces*. Most importantly, however, you caution readers to not leave the question about the very *matterphoricality* of the concept or figure unaddressed: "When social transformations are described as waves, we should ask questions about causality, and about what mix of form and material is being invoked. Who or what produces such waves, physical and affective?" After admitting that "[w]ave talk can make it difficult to describe social structures," you call on the scholar presented with a given wave account to ask whether there are "legible structuring forces that are being whisked out of view by the rhetoric of the account?" This, for us, aiming to think about a mode of doing theory *matterphorically* and interested in thinking about an ethics of thought and analysis, is the crux, as it raises the question of what these forces *are* and how representation actually relates to force (and vice versa).

SH: Right! And this makes me think of Ato Quayson's caution about using "force" in a way that obscures structures of social responsibility. Writing of generalizing narrations of the Anthropocene, he writes, "we might point out that once the human is converted into a geological force it ceases being a recognizable sociopolitical category."[67] I'm reaching toward something similar in my call to think about what the wave metaphor obscures, even as, as you make me see, I'm still holding on to *force*—though modifying it as "structuring forces," which points to a tension here (or maybe, actually, a matterphorical angle?), one also grappled with by Baucom in *History 4° Celsius*.

I'm kind of amazed by how the figure of waves of social change has come into sharp discursive and material focus in the first half of 2020. The final "Wave Theory ~ Social Theory" moment I was able to talk about in the *Public Culture* piece was the "blue wave" election moment in the U.S. in 2018. And the final photo in the piece is one that I took at a June 2018 Families Belong Together March, protesting Trump's policy of separating family members who crossed the U.S. border without papers or to request asylum. A lot has happened since. In terms of protests, I have to think about the various forces that some of us experienced in the Black Lives Matter protests of this spring, 2020—a force compelling many of us to be present in assembly at a time when we had also been exhorted to keep our "social distance" in order to dampen the spread of the virus. The imagination of "flattening the curve" (a theory formatting everyday life if ever there was one!) had been a *force* keeping so many of us apart. The call to physical presence in the wake of the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor was a force bringing many of us together. All of this was of course suffused by, to invoke Du Bois, the "contradictory forces, facts and tendencies" of race and racism, to which Arun Saldanha in his brilliant book *Psychedelic White* has called its "viscosity."[68]

And force seems everywhere these days. I think of Trump, on June 2, when he "ordered military aircraft to fly above the nation's capital on Monday night as a 'show of force' against demonstrators protesting the death of George Floyd, according to two Defense Department officials. Show-of-force missions are designed to intimidate and, in combat zones, warn opposing forces of potential military actions if provoked."[69] Here, "force" is something displayed without being deployed—or, rather, something that is (in part) deployed by being displayed… There is a *threat* of harm here, which has force. But I want to hear more from *you* about force. Daniela, your dissertation, *Matterphorics: On the Laws of Theory*, [70]features a chapter entitled "Forces of Law: Falling for Theory." How do you analyze force there?

DG: My dissertation, and my work in general, is concerned with finding modes of critical thinking—particularly legal thinking—that resist capitalist and fascist modes of appropriation and extraction and it aims, too, to trace the material-discursive practices (to borrow from Barad) of sensing and sense-making. One of the attempts to challenge representationalism (the philosophical belief in an inherent separation between physical world and representations) and the idea of meaning production detached from the matter(s) of the physical world is, as Deleuze and Guattari propose, to oppose the symbolic and signifying usage of language with a "purely intensive usage," so that we "arrive at a perfect and unformed expression," which is, they argue, "a materially intense expression."[71] I find their analysis important because it reveals that language operates as a "universal translator or interpreter," dominating the mode of meaning production by means of its "imperialism," and "pretensions to a general semiology."[72] The redundancy of the signifier, they write, is precisely what allows for its "incredible despotism."[73] This is not meant as a question of word or grammatical play. As Édouard Glissant explains, "[t]he first thing exported by the conqueror was language," legitimizing attempts of domination, and "culminating in the thought of the empire."[74] Language—its modes of signification *and* the particular understanding of grammar[75]—structures what is think-able, and what remains un-thinkable. Of course, even within Western philosophy and linguistics, alternatives have been offered. There are, for example, different models of grammar and syntax, such as that of *valency*, which focuses on the number of meanings a *verb* can bind; its name was coined by linguist Lucien Tesnière in reference to Charles Sanders Peirce and chemical bonds, that is, physical processes. Various theories coming from feminist materialist, Indigenous, Black, trans, and environmental thought seek to demonstrate, in different ways, that thought and sense-making is embodied, material, or material-semiotic (Haraway), material-discursive (Barad), and I think that it is here that a different form of sense-making and expression, even a different ethics of meaning production, becomes possible. This is not to suggest that these clusters of theories are internally homogeneous, or that the theories are comparable, let alone that they are aiming to challenge *the same* structures and to do *the same* things. Rather, it speaks to the fact that the violence of language as a universal translator and the unthinkability it creates are registered more intensely by specific (material-discursively produced) bodies, and that embodied and material thought becomes all the more pertinent when both the materiality and the bodies in question are threatened with erasure—or do not even fall within the realm of thinkability. This is also not to say that these theories are inherently "good" or that they do not bear potential for violence(s), but simply that different

modes of meaning production—modes that are non-appropriative and defy representational thought—are indeed possible and think-able. And this in turn makes *fidelity*—to return to the earlier discussion on life and theory—a particular and deliberate choice, namely one to remain with what is known, to the exclusion of what is unknown and as yet unthought. *Fidelity* has to be held accountable—as does being a "traitor to the world of dominant significations, and to the estab-lished order,"[76] which can be understood as a kind of counterclaim to Derrida's fidelity.

My chapter on the force of law, then, aims to challenge the meta-phorical use of force (as term and concept) and to trace its material-dis-cursive meanings. What, for example, does it mean that it is still not known what force *is*; that classical and quantum mechanics have very different notions of what force is and how it relates to matter(s), and that there yet seems to be comfort in using "force" not only to describe what escapes our attempts to represent, but also when the question of how that which is referred to by force becomes what acts in the phys-ical word, on actual bodies, pushing, moving, hurting and effacing them? I am thus interested in understanding force, especially force of law, in its material-discursivity. I point to the pitfalls of understanding the force of law as "interpretative force" (as does Derrida in "Force of Law") and aim to show by means of case studies how all kinds of forces (drag force, gravity, strong nuclear force, etc.) are inextricably entangled with law, legal matter(s), and boundaries. In my chapter on force, I chose two case studies, which are, as the chapter reveals, closely entangled when it comes to law and the matter of physical force(s). The first is the stratosphere jump by the Red Bull-sponsored Austrian parachutist Felix Baumgartner in 2012 who worked to unlock the legal boundaries pertaining to the atmosphere so he could be "free" to fall while at the same time strenuously advocating for borders around the Mediterranean Sea in order to restrict with strong right-wing support, "hundreds of thousands of refugees INFILTRATING"[77] Europe. The second case study pertains to another, and different, kind of free fall (and dive)—by the diver in Friedrich Schiller's 1797 ballad "The Diver," and reveals entanglements between physical forces and pressures, modes of reading, the materiality of legal spaces, and contemporary deep sea mining laws. What these case studies show is that, at least in Western legal history and theory, it is not by accident that law has been mainly understood as expressed in written language, and as necessarily detached from the physical world. This is precisely how these legal systems have been successful in regulating which bodies matter—and which are excluded. I am interested in making force a materially intense expression, to understand it material-discur-sively, in each context and environment, looking closely at its physical processes and the legal, social, political, and economic entanglements.

There is a lot at stake in how language operates and in how terms are denied their *matterphoricity*. We already talked about "life" and "matter." I believe "force" is yet another *matterphorical* concept that requires close analysis and attention. It matters how "force," and "force of law," is read and mobilized—something that Hannah Arendt points out in her 1961 book on the Eichmann trial. Eichmann stated confidently that he had "nothing to do" with "the killing of Jews," in fact, he claims to have "never killed any human being," nor given an order "to kill either a Jew or a non-Jew."[78] All he did, his argument went, was simply act as a "law-abiding citizen," subject to "the force of law," which was solely possessed by the Führer.[79] The reference to the "force of law" as an attempt to justify the exclusion, injury, torture, suffocation, and killing of bodies is as contemporary as the idea that the force of law may be possessed by a man inhabiting (and abusing) a specific political position. U.S. President Donald Trump is a case in point. As an opinion piece in *The Atlantic* written by a Professor of U.S. Constitutional Law and concerning some of Trump's "post-legal" acts, states in reference to the Roman jurist Ulipan: "What Pleases Trump has the Force of Law."[80] And indeed, just recently, Trump, in context of the protests unfolding from the killing of George Floyd, gave a speech in the White House announcing his willingness to "deploy the National Guard in sufficient numbers" to "dominate the streets," and to get protestors he deems "lawless," immediately "arrested, detained, and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." Trump equates that law with a power-upholding force, possessed solely by him, and closely related to his pleasure: "One law and order—and that is what it is, one law. We have one, beautiful law," he announces. This is no coincidence. In a phone call to governors the same day, Trump continuously referred to the use of police and military force to quell protests (#blacklivesmatter as well as Occupy Wall Street) as "a beautiful thing to see," "a beautiful thing to watch," and simply as "beautiful." It is no secret that the rendering of violence against bodies (often declared enemies), the use of armed weapons to squash resistance, and the display and application of force as "beautiful" are crucial elements of fascist semantics. Think about the fascist writings of the German author and entomologist Ernst Jünger after World War I, or about the "Futurist Manifesto" (1909), written by the Italian futurist Filippo Tommas Marinetti. The latter expresses the desire to "glorify war," calls ideas to die for "beautiful," and states that beauty exists now only in the struggle. And: "What has no aggressive character cannot be a masterpiece. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man."[81]

DG&ZA: This also leads us to our last question, one that seems to be—still and again—very present: fascism(s). Our use of the plural is deliberate, as the singular implies a stable concept capable of capturing

the many—partly also contradictory—forms and expressions fascism takes. In terms of thought and thinking, research and academic work, what are, in your opinion, the tools to defy fascist modes of appropriation, mobilization of mass(es), and radical forms of inclusion/exclusion?

In going back to Schad's notion of theory as a response, does fascism(s) require different modes of reading, writing, and grasping? Are scholars limited to either comparison (new forms of fascism with known forms of fascism) or to "responding" to ever-shifting forms of fascism(s), not only on the level of state and government, but also to fascism as "inseparable from a proliferation of molecular forces in interaction"? According to Deleuze and Guattari, fascism cannot be easily grasped, because

> fascism implies a molecular regime that is distinct from molar segments and their centralization . . . Rural fascism and city or neighborhood fascism, youth fascism and war veteran's fascism, fascism on the Left and fascism on the Right, fascism of the couple, family, school, and office: every fascism is defined by a micro-black hole that stands on its own and communicates with the others, before resonating in a great, generalized central black hole.[82]

In other words, the difficulty here does not only pertain to theory as response and to the particular temporalities of theory and thought, but also to specific modes of thought, such as comparison, recognition, and analogy, which seem to fail as tools to grasp and defy fascism. Recently we came across a piece by Sarah Churchwell on "American Fascism: It Happened Here," published in *The New York Review of Books*. She writes:

> American fascist energies today are different from 1930s European fascism, but that doesn't mean they're not fascist, it means they're not European and it's not the 1930s. They remain organized around classic fascist tropes of nostalgic regeneration, fantasies of racial purity, celebration of an authentic folk and nullification of others, scapegoating groups for economic instability or inequality, rejecting the legitimacy of political opponents, the demonization of critics, attacks on a free press, and claims that the will of the people justifies violent imposition of military force. Vestiges of interwar fascism have been dredged up, dressed up, and repurposed for modern times. Colored shirts might not sell anymore, but colored hats are doing great.[83]

To ask more concretely, how can the various forms of fascism(s) be grasped in, let's say, the U.S.? How do you—as a scholar and writer—think of fascism(s) and its relation to thinking, scholarship, and higher education?

SH: Fascism in the United States will arrive clothed in national symbols and myths—so, although we do see swastikas circulating in some corners of American life, we're not going to see them raised on flags above the White House—and these symbols (the American flag, statues of the founding fathers, the Constitution) will be used to both obscure and amplify racism and white supremacy. And they will be so used even as the left contests them and tries to recapture them—indeed, such contestations will be pointed to by the fascists as a sign that they cannot possibly stand for parochial right-wing values. Indeed, such deployments of symbols have been intensifying under the Trump administration, with Trump rallies festooned with outsized flags (and even flags that feature photographs of Trump superimposed upon the stars and stripes—which Trump supporters in no way see as desecration), with the monomaniacal rally at Mount Rushmore, and more. The ineptitude of the administration's deployment of symbols—really, an upside-down Bible? A defense of the Confederate flag?—in some ways magnifies what it wants symbols like the American flag now to stand for, creating a halo of deniable crazy around the damage they're really doing. There are of course fresh symbols too—the MAGA hats, the no-mask look, and the Trump-Pence 2020 campaign logo, which I have to say I'm starting to experience as a swastika whenever I see it.

Figure 1. Logo appearing in video produced by Trump supporter with the twitter handle @som3thingwicked and later tweeted by Trump himself (credit: Twitter)

We gotta talk about the name *Trump*, too, right? To *trump* is to employ a playing card of a suit that ranks above others (the fact that Trump once owned a casino in Atlantic City gives this all extra resonance)—that's a meaning that speaks to the arbitrary use of power, of the force of imposed convention. Some old meanings seem newly relevant—from the OED: *trump, v.*[2]: "To deceive, cheat," *trump, v.*[3] *4.a.* "To impose or thrust (something) *upon* a person." *Obsolete. 4.c.* "To get up or devise in

an unscrupulous way; to forge, fabricate, invent." The trumpiness of Trump is *right there*… It kinda doesn't require any reading. The name itself is a fire alarm.

So, in answer to your question, one way I grasp fascism in the U.S. — and Trump IS a fascist — is through the operation and activation of symbols. Such usage can be both deliberate and disavowed. Remember when an anti-Hillary Clinton ad featured a Star of David next to the legend "most corrupt candidate ever"? That brazen anti-Semitism was meant to be papered over by the gaslighting refusal to admit that symbols mean anything, that any anti-Semitism was being *read in*. The argument went that it was a *coincidence* that the star had six points. Give me a break.

Figure 2. A since deleted tweet from @realDonaldTrump (credit: NBC News). See: Alan Rappeport. "Donald Trump Deletes Tweet Showing Hillary Clinton and Star of David Shape," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/us/politics/trump-clinton-star-of-david.html

Trump's fascist successes — the travel ban, the separation of families at the U.S. border, and let's not forget his attempt to claim that Obama was not a U.S., citizen! — have not yet added up to a total system, total totalitarianism, and he has still not converted a majority of people to his cause. But that also obscures the possibility that fascism need not be complete — a la literary and cinematic dystopias — in order to be present and to enact terror. U.S. fascism is inextricable from U.S. racism and white supremacy — and it's already been operating at strength against Indigenous communities and communities of color, for whom it arrived long ago. If race — and racism — as Du Bois offered, is made of "illogical trends and irreconcilable tendencies" and operates "as a group of contradictory forces, facts and tendencies," that has not stayed its power. In fact, it has made it hegemonic. I guess I would

say, then, that fascism need not be evenly distributed or finished in order to be poisonous and potent.

How shall we as scholars think of fascism and its relation to thinking, scholarship, and higher education? It's about finding the right tools to fight it on different fronts, and in different places. That's going to be different in the US, in Brazil, in India… We need to continue to teach, teach, teach and write, write, write and learn, learn, learn about fascisms' histories and multiplicities. We have to use whatever platforms we have to fight it.

Thinking of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's notion of the *under-commons* and the ways that critical academics struggle against universities' complicity with structures of inequality at the same time as they operate in and of the university, I was, from my own corner, pleased by MIT and Harvard's successful lawsuit against the Trump administration in July 2020, when U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sought to block F-1 visas for international students enrolled at universities that had shifted to online remote instruction in response to the pandemic (and can we talk about the resonance of ICE as a name? Here's the OED: *ice, v.* 4. c. *transitive. U.S. slang.* "To kill, murder." The people promoting ICE know full well that their name invokes a slang word for *kill* and they are using it deliberately to cause terror). To me, as not-a-lawyer, the ICE directive's language *sounded* legal-ish, but the MIT-Harvard lawyers argued that the directive was *unlawful*: "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion ... or otherwise not in accordance with law." 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). The analysis that MIT and Harvard's lawyers offered was one I found spot on: "The effect–and perhaps even the goal [of the ICE directive]–is to create as much chaos for universities and international students as possible."[84] I *hope* that the legal thinking used by MIT and Harvard can, as you say, Daniela, "resist capitalist and fascist modes of appropriation and extraction," and I *feel* like it just resisted unreason and xenophobia, but … I do worry.

Here's another element. The lawsuit reminded the Trump administration of the risks to *life* of not approaching the pandemic seriously, of precipitously "opening" campus: Observing that "Crowded classrooms, dining facilities, and dormitories are commonplace features of ordinary campus life and could lead to large-scale outbreaks of COVID-19 until the pandemic subsides," they went on to deliver a basic lesson in infectious disease: "All human beings share a risk of contracting and, upon contraction, transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19. Any adult who contracts the virus may experience life-threatening symptoms, lifelong health consequences, and death." So … we're back to some of our opening topics to do with *life*.

DG: Thank you for drawing attention to the specific deployment of symbols and the necessity for constantly teaching, writing, and learning "about fascisms' histories and multiplicities." It also brings to mind another contribution in this special issue, namely "Skittles as Matterphor" by the legal scholar Patricia J. Williams. In her piece, Williams also attends closely to visual references and symbols deliberately employed by Trump and the Trump administration as a mode of meaning production. Williams shows that racist and xenophobic references are *material* and as such, carry with them (-*phor*) embodied meanings, material expressions of pain, suffering, and death. As an example, Williams mentions a tweet by Donald Trump, Jr. which featured a bowlful Skittles with the legend "If I had a bowl of Skittles and I told you just three would kill, you would you take a handful? That's our Syrian refugee problem."[85] The image, Williams argues, is a reference that not only mobilized anxieties about Muslim migrants, but also "invoked the death of Trayvon Martin, who was carrying a package of the candy when shot and killed by George Zimmerman."[86] Williams instructs us to learn to understand these modes of meaning production not only as systems of necropolitical referencing, but also as *matterphorical* in order to grasp the violence they cite and reinscribe.[87]

SH: Yes, these sideways semiotics—always assuming the reader has something resonant open in another window, to use a computer screen metaphor—are very much the order of the day and we need to learn how to read them.

DG: And on the lawsuit—I share your cautious take on the MIT and Harvard lawsuit, which did, in this case, resist a xenophobic policy, yet does beg the question about law's ability to be mobilized in general. I am relieved that the threat of this lawsuit blocked the potentially enormous harm that would have been done not only to international students, but also to students, faculty, and university staff more generally, let alone the broader community, through the increased spread of Covid-19 that would have followed from all in-person classes.

But what this situation—the fact that private research universities and the U.S. government were, at that moment, negotiating the value (in its various meanings) of lives and health of human beings inhabiting spaces of higher education as well as state territory more broadly–further brought to my attention is the specific relation between law and life. The lawsuit argued that the ICE directive is "unlawful" and that therefore the lives at stake cannot be threatened. It implies a relation between law and life. More precisely, it suggests that law, if applied correctly, protects life. This relation, however, is less stable, less self-evident, and less present than it may seem. The history of legal personhood (or: legal subjectivity) and the question of a right

to life are cases in point. Current attempts in, for example, the U.S., Ecuador, New Zealand, and India, to include non-human beings (such as: nature, rivers, particular animals, trees) into the selective circle of legal personhood reveals—despite, or perhaps precisely because of its attempt to broaden the definition of the concept—the dynamics of this legal concept. It works by means of inclusion and exclusion of categorized entities; categorizations that are as such already violent cuts that exclude what does not fit its frame. In the past, these cuts have cut *out* women, non-white people, slaves, children, people with disabilities, those declared mentally ill, bodies that did not fit the declared norm, let alone non-human beings.

The question of the right to *life* adds more cuts, given that "life," as our conversation has explored, is *not* a stable concept or term.[88] What's more, the concept of life as discussed here, cannot be assumed to coincide with the term "life" used in the phrase "right to life." I find Elizabeth Povinelli's statement in *Geontologies* helpful here. She argues that liberal forms of governance (including law) rely on "a common but once unmarked ontological assertion, namely, that there is a distinction between Life and Nonlife that makes a difference." The formula, per Povinelli, is thus: "Life (Life{birth, growth, reproduction}`v. Death) v. Nonlife." This cut, to rephrase Povinelli's formula, creates Life as an *opposite*, and thereby introduces the very possibility of exclusion, not only in terms of death (of killing, murder, disappearance), but of denying existence as such. Dominant legal systems, and especially the right to life, are built upon this dichotomy, which is why they work according to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The statement I was referring to before is challenging precisely this onto-epistemological cut. Povinelli writes that "[i]t is certainly the case that the statement 'clearly, x humans are more important than y rocks' continues to be made, persuade, stop political discourse." And yet it is, she states, "the slight hesitation, the pause, the intake of a breath that now can interrupt an immediate assent" that demands close attention.

Thinking about breathing—about *Black Lives Matter*, which is so intimately tied to the forced inability to breathe, about respiratory illnesses (especially for indigenous people living in these areas) caused by nuclear radiation from Uranium mining in Utah, or nuclear tests in New Mexico, about "inmate fire workers" in California being so close to wildfires, to heat and smoke that breathing becomes impossible, about zones of enormous air pollution, leaving those with less financial means in respiratory trouble, and of course about Covid-19—this hesitation is significant. It bears the potential to escape our mode of signification, of what law and life mean and how they actually relate. Thinking differently about breathing challenges modes of power and governance that rely on the separation in order to decide not only what and who matters, but, more importantly, for whom and why.

Here again, Marinetti's fascist Futurist Manifesto—which, by the way, also contains a call to "destroy museums, libraries, academies of every kind…fight moralism, feminism"—comes to mind. It reads:

> Look at us! We are not out of breath, our hearts are not in the least tired. For they are nourished by fire, hatred and speed! Does this surprise you? it is because you do not even remember being alive! Standing on the world's summit, we launch once more our challenge to the stars![89]

In the fascist imagination, breathing is not simply about being alive, but about dominating, about being superior even in breath—continuing to breathe after those deemed in the way of fascist forms of life, have been out of breath, bereft of breath and the ability to live and breathe a life.

SH: Which may be a way of getting back to the question of "life" and the ethics of modes of thought, inextricable from forms of living, with which we began—though now with the attention to embodiment that we must demand in any discussion of vitality…

DG & ZA: Yes—we returned *differently*, having arrived at a moment and point which has less to do with concluding than with an invitation to continue, to pick up threads and drop them (to refer to Haraway's string figuring). And it is also a moment we wish to use thanking you again for your time and generosity of thinking-with us about matter(s) of ethics, theory, life, and force(s)—and for offering many threads to pick-up and think-with you in turn.

Notes

1. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2007), 180-1, 83.

2. Stefan Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits of Life: Essays in the Anthropology of Biology and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 96.

3. Helmreich, 104.

4. Here also in relation to theory: "'Theory' is not always anyway the *motive force* animating astrobiological searches for signs of life" [our emphasis]. Helmreich, 85.

5. Helmreich, 96.

6. Stefan Helmreich, "Wave Law," in *Blue Legalities: The Life & Laws of the Sea*, ed. Irus Braverman and Elizabeth R. Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 131.

7. Stefan Helmreich, "Wave Theory ~ Social Theory," *Public Culture* 32, no. 2 (May 1, 2020): 287-326.

8. "Reading Matters Conference," Princeton University, https://readingmatters.princeton.edu/conference-overview.

9. Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (New York, NY: Verso, 1975).

10. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 723-742.

11. Hannah Landecker, *Culturing Life: How Cells Became Technologies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

12. Payne and John Schad, ed., *Life.After.Theory* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 172.

13. Payne and Schad, 176. The quotation Payne and Schad are referencing is from John Ayto, *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), 323.

14. Benjamin Wurgaft, *Thinking in Public: Strauss, Levinas, Arendt* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

15. Ward Churchill and Winona LaDuke, "Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism," *Critical Sociology* 13, no. 3 (1986): 51-78.

16. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird, *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 2010).

17. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016).

18. Joyce Audry Green, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2017).

19. Celeste Liddle, *Rantings of and Aboriginal Feminist* (blog), http://blackfeministranter.blogspot.com.

20. Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

21. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

22. Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1998).

23. Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits of Life*, xvii.

24. Karen Barad, "After the End of the World: Entangled Nuclear Colonialisms, Matters of Force, and the Material Force of Justice," *Theory & Event* 22, no. 3 (2019).

25. Stefan Helmreich, "What Was Life? Answers from Three Limit Biologies," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2011), 697.

26. Sophia Roosth, *Synthetic: How Life Got Made* (Chicago, IL; University of Chicago Press, 2017).

27. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, NY; Routledge, 1991), 152.

28. Banu Subramaniam, *Ghost Stories for Darwin: The Science of Variation and the Politics of Diversity* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

29. Jacques Derrida, "Following Theory," in *Life.After.Theory*, 9-10.

30. Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits of Life*, 185. Interestingly, and related to "resonance," Helmreich uses "key to" rather than "response" concerning his point that "'theory' needs to be keyed to its times and places," thus expressing a sense of attunement, and perhaps even a different kind of causality.

31. Schad, "Epilogue," in *Life.After.Theory*, 181.

32. For a related discussion on how a mode of doing theory critically might or might not relate to response/response-ability which took place a few months after this one and was thereby also informed by it, see Karen Barad and Daniela Gandorfer, "Political Desirings: Yearnings for Mattering (,) Differently" in this issue.

33. In the latter case, for instance, Agard-Jones takes the toxicological term "body burden," which refers to the amount of accumulated contamination in a human or animal body, and foregrounds that "such 'burdens' are at once material and metaphorical" and "account for the ways in which black bodies remain inextricably entangled with the forces of capital." See "Vanessa Agard-Jones: On Toxicity," Museum talk description, New Museum, https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/715/simone-leigh-the-waiting-room-vanessa-agard-jones-on-toxicity

34. Helmreich, 185.

35. Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 176-78.

36. Kalaniopua Young, "From a Native *Trans* Daughter: Carceral Refusal, Settler Colonialism, Re-routing the Roots of an Indigenous Abolitionist Imaginary," in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, ed. Eric Stanley and Nat Smith (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015): 83-96.

37. Zulaikha Ayub and Daniela Gandorfer, "Thinking Should Not Take (A) Place," Critique & Praxis 13/13, Columbia University Center for Contemporary Critical Thought, March 5, 2019, http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/praxis1313/zulaikha-ayub-and-daniela-gandorfer-thinking-should-not-take-a-place/?cn-reloaded=1.

38. Ayub and Gandorfer.

39. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons : Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 31.

40. Ayub and Gandorfer.

41. Harney and Moten, 20.

42. Harney and Moten, 20.

43. Giorgio Agamben, trans. Positions Politics editorial group, "The State of Exception Provoked by an Unmotivated Emergency," *Positions Politics*, February 26, 2020, http://positionswebsite.org/giorgio-agamben-the-state-of-exception-provoked-by-an-unmotivated-emergency/.

The original publication is Giorgio Agamben, "Lo stato d'eccezione provocato da un'emergenza immotivata," *Il Manifesto*, February 25, 2020, https://ilmanifesto.it/lo-stato-deccezione-provocato-da-unemergenza-immotivata/.

44. Agamben.

45. Christopher Caldwell, "Meet the Philosopher Who Is Trying to Explain the Pandemic," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/21/opinion/sunday/giorgio-agamben-philosophy-coronavirus.html.

46. Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 581.

47. Anastasia Berg, "Giorgio Agamben's Coronavirus Cluelessness," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 23, 2020, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Giorgio-Agamben-s/248306.

48. J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and Cedric J, Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (London: Zed, 1983).

49. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

50. Charles Wade Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

51. Franco Moretti, *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007) and Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

52. Anna Weichselbraun, "Corona Chronotopes," Fieldsights, *Society for Cultural Anthropology* Online, April 27, 2020, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/corona-chronotopes.

53. Stefan Helmreich, *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 7.

54. Helmreich, 17, 5, 260, 240 (in order of citation).

55. Helmreich, x.

56. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), 133.

57. Kamala Visweswaran, "Race and the Culture of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 1 (January 7, 2008): 70-83.

58. Ryan Cecil Jobson, "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019," *American Anthropologist* 122, no. 2 (June 2, 2020): 259-271 citing Mark Anderson, *From Boas to Black Power : Racism, Liberalism, and American Anthropology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

59. Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996).

60. Ian Baucom, *History 4° Celsius: Search for a Method in the Age of the Anthropocene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 14.

61. Helmreich, 47.

62. Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits of Life*, 186.

63. Helmreich, 185-86.

64. Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

65. Stefan Helmreich, "Wave Theory ~ Social Theory," *Public Culture* 32, no. 2 (91) (2020).

66. David S. Jones and Stefan Helmreich, "The Shape of Epidemics," *Boston Review* [online], June 26, 2020, http://bostonreview.net/science-nature/david-s-jones-stefan-helmreich-shape-epidemics.

67. Ato Quayson, "The Sighs of History: Postcolonial Debris and the Question of (Literary) History," *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (2012), 368.

68. Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

69. The Associated Press, "President Trump ordered military aircraft to fly in 'show of force' on Monday night," *The Boston Globe,* June 2, 2020, https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/02/nation/president-trump-ordered-military-aircraft-fly-show-force-monday-night/.

70. See also: Daniela Gandorfer, *Matterphorics: On the Laws of Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

71. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 19.

72. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 65, 143.

73. Deleuze and Guattari, 66.

74. Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 19.

75. "Grammar" is understood here as a set of governing rules that structure the use of a language by dealing "with its inflectional forms or other means of indicating the relations of words in the sentence." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "grammar, n.," accessed August 3, 2020, https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.princeton.edu/view/Entry/80574?rskey=LjV7zm&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

76. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues 2* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 41.

77. Felix Baumgartner, "Liebe Facebook Freunde, Fans, Hasser, Journalisten, Politiker und Sonstige!," Facebook, January 25, 2016.

78. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006).

79. Arendt, 25.

80. Garrett Epps, "What Pleases Trump Has the Force of Law," *The Atlantic,* May 19, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/05/trump-doesnt-care-about-constitution/589654/.

81. Filippo Tommasso Marinetti, "Manifeste du futurism," *Le Figaro*, February 20, 1909 (translation by Gandorfer).

82. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 214.

83. Sarah Churchwell, "American Fascism: It Happened Here," *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 2020, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/06/22/american-fascism-it-has-happened-here/.

84. President and Fellows of Harvard College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology v. United States Department of Homeland Security, U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Chad F. Wolf (Acting Secretary of DHS), and Matthew Albence (Acting Director of ICE), Civil Action No. 1:20-cv-11283, U.S District Court for the District of Massachusetts Boston Division (July 8, 2020), http://orgchart.mit.edu/sites/default/files/reports/20200708-Harvard-MIT-Complaint-Injunctive-Relief-Documents.pdf.

85. Donald Trump, Jr, Twitter post, September 19, 2016, 6:41 p.m. Image has since been removed due to copyright violation. See also "Donald Trump, Jr. compares Syrian refugees to Skittles," *BBC News*, September 20, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37416457, regarding a tweet that was also removed from twitter due to copyright violation.

86. Patricia J. Williams, "Skittles as Metaphor," this issue: 357.

87. See Williams, "Skittles as Metaphor," in this issue.

88. The *right to life* is considered the most fundamental of all human rights and as such is recognized explicitly in virtually all international human rights declarations and treaties and in many national constitutions. However, precisely because of the impossibility to define "life" as a stable concept, it is also one that leaves room for interpretation and is far from uncontested. It is, for example "affirmed in several specific contexts, where international law prohibits use of the death penalty, the intentional killing of civilians in armed conflict, and the perpetration of genocide." However, "in other areas germane to the right to life, such as abortion and euthanasia, it has proved impossible to reach any international consensus given vastly different attitudes based upon geography, culture, and social development." Right to life, therefore, denotes a (legal) right, and is not to be confused with its many politically or morally motivated appropriations, as prevalent, for example, in the rhetoric around abortion in the US. With the phrase "right to (a) life," I am referring here to both a fundamental human right (which is recognized by many, yet not all countries), as well as the common assumption that law has some inherent constructive relation, if not obligation, towards what is considered *a* life. For a more detailed elaboration on the right to life and its history, see William A. Schabas, "Right to Life," in *Encyclopedia of Human Rights*, ed. David P. Forsythe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

89. Marinetti (translation by Gandorfer).