

Art Hub : Studio Program : Correspondance : Lito Kattou & Helen Hester : December 2020

CORRESPONDANCE

Lito Kattou & Helen Hester

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Dear Helen

“Ours is a world in vertigo. It is a world that swarms with technological mediation, interlacing our daily lives with abstraction, virtuality and complexity.”

That's how the Xenofeminist Manifesto starts, and to me is creating the feeling that a community has now been vocal about its very own state. It makes me think of an ongoing series of works of mine titled *Demands 2017-2020*. A series of graffiti like tags on mirrored pvc which are incorporated within my installations and relate to the sculpture bodies co-existing throughout the spaces of exhibitions and presentation, addressing in this way to their viewers. *Listen to Us | We greet you in Silence | Let us forget who we are...* The materiality of the mirror surface interweaves an exchange of a positioning of the self and the other within a communication, primary I think for the structuring of any possible community.

I think of those aluminum sculptural bodies as constantly trying to relate with others, as characters, as beings and subjectivities that claim their existence. They inhabit their own space-time. They structure identities that are uncompromising and unapologetic to ruling dominant structures that we are familiar with. I imagine that they give their names to themselves, names that do not merely showcase abilities and qualities, but actually create identities. These identities are modes of communal existence by suggesting specific characteristics and attributes., a Carrier, a Hunter, a Walker, a Weaver, a Dreamer, a SkyDiver...

They are introduced as non-gendered bodies, hybrid entities between anthropomorphic, animal and mythical beings. I see them as they may have been at the starting point for the pursuit of a place or condition, within a dislocation, or as if they may have been in the middle of a journey. The imagery painted on the surface of their bodies is related to and reveals their relationship with their physical world, their environment. An environment cherished from the past or one desired to arrive. The sunsets, for example, indicate their relation to earthly and cosmic time. These connections also become visible through the sculptural elements that they feature, as the copper-electroformed and nickel-plated flowers, or the wicker baskets.

I can observe that my interest in the complex idea of Otherness goes back to my background. I was born and raised in Nicosia, Cyprus and I have found myself from an early age questioning and trying to define this connection to the Other, through biases, collective trauma and friction socially imposed or carried with generationally, working in favor most of the times for the construction of specific political agendas. Growing up there has given me an idiosyncratic understanding of the east/west dipole. A place historically enormously turbulent, violently Westernized but in extreme proximity to the Middle East (or a part of it) holding a strong colonial past and developing rapidly to a neo-colonialist present.

This speculation of co-existence with Others different to what one has been assigned to politically, socially, culturally, or the failure to symbiosis has been with me as an open examination.

Thinking of those ideas of care and symbiosis within the communities that I try to construct through the works, I am reminded of what you have widely indicated as xenohospitality and xenosolidarity.

You have mentioned in talks and writings that hospitality should be applied towards anything different and at the same time there should be solidarity with the alien, the figure of the stranger or even the self and this of course reveals a very strong relation of both the above-mentioned principles and behaviors with alterity.

It is easy for me to relate linguistically with the 'xeno' prefix as xenos (ξένος-η-ο) in Greek language etymologically means the stranger, the other, the foreigner, the visitor, the different from oneself and by this I understand that Xenofeminism wishes to centralize, subjectivities and different states of being marginalized even by feminism itself, and be solitaire to the mostly far distanced alien Other. How was this decision taken, to incorporate otherness (Xeno) along with feminism within this new word?

I understand that hospitality is recognized as something to breed, to manage, as an art or a laborious practice. Solidarity on the other hand is a general care without domineering genius and ability or a special maintenance.

What is the difference between xenohospitality and xenosolidarity? Which is the interplay for you of distance and proximity that xenosolidarity demands?



Lito Kattou: *Demands II*, 2017, 142.7 x 46.5cm, mirrored pvc



Lito Kattou: *Dreamer*, 2020, 210 x 131,4 x 100 cm, aluminum, permanent ink, acrylic paint, electroformed copper, nickel-plated copper. Courtesy of the artist and Galeria Duarte Sequeira, Braga. Photo: Andriano Ferreira Borges



Lito Kattou: *Walker*, 2020, 220 x 125.7 x 95 cm, aluminum, permanent ink, acrylic paint, electroformed copper. Courtesy of the artist and Galeria Duarte Sequeira, Braga. Photo: Andriano Ferreira Borges

Dear Lito,

Many thanks for inviting me to be in dialogue with you, and for so generously sharing your work and its connections with your own experiences. I can certainly see how the idea of 'speculation of co-existence with Others' resonates with some of the material in *Xenofeminism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), and I am pleased that you have found our use of the 'xeno' prefix intuitive and helpful. Xenohospitality and xenosolidarity do indeed seem like productive concepts with which to begin our discussion. You ask about the difference between xenohospitality and xenosolidarity. I think there are a couple of questions nested within that. Firstly, how do hospitality and solidarity differ from each other? Secondly, how do xenohospitality and xenosolidarity differ from hospitality and solidarity as they are more conventionally conceived?

Let's start with the first (sub)question - solidarity and its relationship to hospitality. Both of these concepts, I think, speak to the idea of care for the other, but in rather different ways. Whilst it is certainly a form of care, the idea of hospitality also implies a degree of estrangement. It describes an approach taken to strangers, visitors, and guests; all acts of hospitality are, as such, acts of xeno-hospitality (although there are degrees within this category, of course). Zeynep Direk, for example, contrasts "the asymmetrical relationship of hospitality, which may apply to relations with tourists" with an appropriate ethical response to the immigrant, who is precisely not an outside visitor. This is the most obvious sense of the xeno within xeno-hospitality, then; it refers to those who are different, foreign, or unfamiliar. To this extent, the concept simply pulls out or lays emphasis on the existing conceptual content of the idea of hospitality.

Hospitality also demands to be seen as something to cultivate—an art or an effortful practice. It is something that one extends to the other in the form of, for example, a charitable welcome, and as such is underpinned by an assumption of uni-directionality. Generosity is proffered by the host to the guest, and resources, care, and support flow primarily from one person (or rather, position) to the other within a relatively fixed relationship. (It may be that, under different circumstances, the positions of host and guest can be reversed – but the fundamental dynamic and its associated power relations remain the same. To the extent that one is the host, one is expected to give; to the extent that one is the guest, one is expected to receive. There is a whole other conversation to be had here about the power of the guest in terms of rejecting, refusing, recognising, or reimbursing hospitality, but delving into that would, I think, further complicate a discussion that already looks set to be extensive!).

This dynamic of largely unreciprocated giving between host and guest trenches upon relations of charity – and to this extent, we might want to question just how emancipatory the concept of hospitality can really be. After all, as one article in the activist-run journal *Roar* points out, charity can be "patronizing and selfish. It establishes some people as those who assist and others as those who need assistance, stabilizing oppressive paradigms by solidifying people's positions in them." As such, despite the often broadly positive connotations attached to words such 'hospitable' and 'charitable' – as reflected in their negatively-coded antonyms, 'inhospitable' and 'uncharitable' – we would do well to pause and reflect upon if and how the idea of xenohospitality can be made useful.

Looking back at how I use these ideas in *Xenofeminism* (often, I must admit, in a rather uninterrogated way), I notice that the concept of xeno-hospitality emerges in the context of a critique of reproductive futurism – that is, of the relentlessly regressive and heterosexist process via which the ideas of both reproduction and the future become tethered to the propagation of the same (the same class values, the same structural oppressions, the same normative socio-sexual conditions, and so on). Such attempts to close down as yet unrealized possibilities are nothing less than an attempt to shut down the future, and to restrict that which cannot be restricted – the possibility that things can (and will) be otherwise. Whilst xeno-hospitality, as it is framed in the book, is used fairly loosely to mean the cultivation of an appreciation and embrace of the Other, it is articulated specifically within a chapter on xenofeminist futurities – one which calls for a

mutational politics that opens itself up to the xeno. As such, the xeno here is not simply 'the Other', expansively defined, but the unforeseen, the emergent, and the yet-to-come - the temporally as well as the socially alien. If I was to point to the difference between hospitality and xenohospitality - and admittedly, I am doing this retroactively, returning to my own work as an outsider to try to understand it anew - it would seem to lie here.

To this extent, then, we can frame xeno-hospitality as an invitational attitude to the abstract unknown. Rather than the supercilious extension of charity to strangers, visitors and guests, it is an orientation toward the impersonal force of the future. Of course, the future is hardly in need of our welcome - the xeno is coming whether we will or no - so the politics and pragmatics of such an approach are up for discussion. (Suffice it to say that, to my mind, xeno-hospitality is a stance bound up with a critique of the world as it is; one which puts us in the strongest possible position in terms of working for emancipatory change in the here and now.) But this is one approach to understanding how xenohospitality might differ from the idea of hospitality more generally - both are characterised by the extension of uni-directional welcome, but they address themselves to rather different forms of guest, and both incorporate a degree of estrangement but involve divergent dynamics of power and agency.

This brings us to the issue of solidarity, then. Tellingly, I usually articulate the idea of xeno-hospitality via and alongside that of xenosolidarity in the book. Certainly, these ideas are both entangled with a relationship to the Other and to practices of care. Does this imply that they are interchangeable? In a recent article, Jo Littler and Catherine Rottenberg note that 'contemporary feminist theory is rich in theories of solidarity and has drawn on a range of disciplinary sources to articulate them. Despite their different theoretical assumptions about subjecthood, power, politics and intersubjectivity, however, it seems fair to say that all of the theorists ultimately concur on the following points: that feminist solidarity describes some form of orientation toward the other; that this orientation is one that, to different degrees, recognizes difference; and that feminist solidarity actively attempts to facilitate gender relations that are more just and which always include reducing women's oppression. It is also useful to note that given that the word 'solidarity' also has its roots in socialist politics of the 19th century, it strongly connotes left politics, mutuality and interdependence, and the equitable sharing of resources'. This introduces us to the second question that you raised - namely, that of the relationship between difference and distance, identity and proximity within solidarity - but I think, if you don't mind, I'll return to that question in my next post, lest the discussion go further off the rails! For now I just want to pick up on this comment about mutuality and interdependence.

It's worth noting that relations of solidarity have frequently, and favourably, been contrasted and opposed to those of charity (charity being, as we've seen, closely related to understandings of hospitality). Dilar Dirik, for example, argues that: "Solidarity is not a charity undertaking, but a horizontal, multidimensional, educational and multidirectional process that contributes to the emancipation of everyone involved. Solidarity means to be on an eye-to-eye level with one another, to stand shoulder to shoulder. It means to share skills, experience, knowledge and ideas without perpetuating relations based on power." Shirin M. Rai makes a similar point: "Solidarity is not beneficence or charity, I would argue. It is a more symmetrical relationship among those whose vision of a good life coalesce around similar forms of politics." As these comments make clear, the concept of solidarity implies a necessary degree of mutuality - a multi-directionality that distinguishes it from hospitality. If hospitality refers to something extended from one position to another - in a one-way hierarchical relation of gift and receipt - solidarity bespeaks the horizontal relations of co-construction. Such relations are crucial for the advancement of common political projects.

Too often, though, hospitality has been mistaken for solidarity - a point bell hooks makes clear in her work on sisterhood. She argues that 'One reason white women active in the feminist movement were unwilling to confront racism was their arrogant assumption that their call for Sisterhood was a non-racist gesture. Many white women have said to me, "we wanted black

women and other non-white women to join the movement,” totally unaware of their perception that they somehow ‘own’ the movement, that they are the ‘hosts’ inviting us as ‘guests’. This brings home quite clearly where the limits of a charitable attitude lie. One does not need to be invited to access something that is truly held in common. As such, the extension of hospitality can, rather than embracing others, in fact serve to position them as outsiders. After all, hospitality is not only something one can give, but may also be something that it is within one’s discretion to withhold or withdraw.

Akwugo Emejulu makes a similar point in her account of contemporary political organising by women of colour. Women of colour, she notes, are effectively excluded from certain movements, and even when they do manage to break in, struggle to obtain adequate support and recognition for their work. “If women of color activists are prevented from articulating our particular interests and experiences [...] and are refused to be seen as legitimate activists in some white dominated protest spaces,” she argues, “this gives lie to the fiction of solidarity politics. It seems that solidarity can only be practiced when it is dictated and controlled by ostensible ‘allies.’” Once again, then, our attention is directed toward the fact that hierarchical relations of control, condescension, and gatekeeping – relations more properly associated with the ambivalent notion of hospitality – come to masquerade (unconvincingly) as solidarity.

Solidarity, in contrast to hospitality, does not involve inviting in, but rather building together. In this way, it demands to be seen as both a lived and living practice – one anchored in the concrete and ongoing labour of collaboration. Hooks argues that: “When women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity. [...] Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment.” Jodi Dean, meanwhile, suggests that: “reflective solidarity anchors coalition in the very process of continuing to work together. Just because one of us disagrees now, our connection is not necessarily severed. We can keep going, aware that later we will reassess our decisions. Indeed, simple agreement ‘now’ provides no guarantee of future commitment.” It is clear, then, that these feminist thinkers centre the ideas both of multi-directionality and of practices perpetually in progress within their understandings of solidarity. It is necessarily an unfinished business, given that it can only be practiced by and through the process of collaboration.

These ideas are taken through into the concept of xenosolidarity, to some extent. This term appears twice in *Xenofeminism* – each time within the futurities chapter, and each time in the context of a discussion of expanded understandings of kinship and the need for support networks beyond the family. So, I write that: “The ground for our most productive strategic coalitions may not travel in our DNA, as transfeminist movements have long been aware. Such movements have demonstrated the affordances of xeno-solidarity in the sustained and practical care they (have been obligated to) offer disenfranchised queer youth, estranged from the only solidarity network afforded substantial cultural visibility within the Global North – the family. Kin making, over and against baby making, makes sense when understood as a means of prioritizing the generation of new kinds of support networks, instead of the unthinking replication of the same.” Whereas xenohospitality in part speaks to the idea of a mutational politics opening up vertiginous new and unforeseeable futures – to an attitude toward an abstract impersonal force – xenosolidarity is grounded in lived practices of care and mutual aid directed towards concrete others beyond our most immediate networks (such as the household and the family). In this, it shares substantial ground with Donna Haraway – xenofeminism’s estranged mother – who writes that she is ‘sick to death of bonding through kinship and “the family,” and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope. It is time to theorize an “unfamiliar” unconscious, a different primal scene, where everything does not stem from the dramas of identity and reproduction’. The roots of this concept in conventional understandings of solidarity are clear. Why the xeno prefix is required, perhaps less so (this is what I’m struggling to articulate here).

Certainly, solidarity can be practiced in ways that are oriented not only toward the present, but also to the future (and toward the past as well). In Zeynep Direk's account, solidarity involves responsibility for "the other who is not here, who lives elsewhere in the world, and even the others who are not living, already dead, or not yet born. It is an infinite responsibility understood in the global sense, not limited by the present, which does not restrict itself with the concern only for human beings, but enlarges itself to the totality of natural beings, the totality of nature." Here, solidarity is seen to ripple ever outward, incorporating the alien in various forms. However, whilst I agree with Direk that solidarity can go well beyond our existing friends, family, and compatriots, I am not so sure that its reach into the xeno can go quite so unchecked. Xenohospitality, as (in part) an invitational attitude to mutational possibility, is invested in (and hopes for possibilities within) the impersonal force of the future. Given its grounding in concrete practices, however, xenosolidarity cannot be understood as looking to the abstract unknown in quite the same way. Indeed, I would argue that xenosolidarity, understood as the principle of acting with and for the Other, can only stray so far from home. Rather than taking this further here, I would like to invite your thoughts. I can then address your other question - on distance and proximity, difference and identity as they pertain to solidarity - in my subsequent post, once I have had a little more time to formulate my response. I hope that's OK!

In solidarity,

Helen

Dear Helen,

Thank you for your thorough reply and elaborating on the similarities and differences of solidarity and hospitality to their xeno equivalents, xenohospitality and xenosolidarity.

It is interesting, as you are mentioning the host-guest dynamics, to introduce here the context of this dialogue and acknowledge the role of Art Hub Copenhagen in bringing us together. It has been Sara Emilie Anker Møller's idea of inviting us and putting us in an exchange around our individual practices to which we have both to the same extent agreed, obviously :) It is interesting to acknowledge the role of the institution here as the host, as the inviting part and how we as guests that we have never been in contact before are given the opportunity of sharing those ideas. It is quite interesting as well, to think of this configuration under the lenses of the pandemic, which has dictated anew the formats and needs of bridging practices and voices despite localities, a need that has unfolded within the structuring of the program of cultural institutions in general.

Thinking about cultural production, art and the positioning of the artist within it, the concept of the residency itself for an artist is a provision. It is a possibility given, a context of hospitality and at the same time a form of solidarity to the wandering individual, to the nomadic unravelling practice that remains restless and in transit and I am happy to cross paths with you in a content taking into consideration the aspects of both states we are discussing here. In all cases hospitality has prescribed dynamics, as you have explained, different for each part but materialized at the end.

Likewise, within an artistic residency, the pinnacle of hospitality according to the ruling art system and related to what I have experienced as a cultural worker myself, I digest this hospitality as an open format of re-examining and opening up the possibilities of connecting and reconnecting with one's own practice and potential allies to have. It is about inviting the xeno indeed, in short or long periods of transformation, an embracing to the unplanned, a possibility to let things go in any direction and remain rigorous to absorb the yet to come.

I think that this type of cultural mobility is very much about an invitational attitude to the abstract unknown, both from the sides of the cultural practitioner and the host, directed of course from criteria and demands or expectations of both parties and the ruling systems or industries.

It is moreover, within the labour of collaboration that solidarity makes an absolute sense - seen as both a lived and living practice –and disperses in the possibility of dislocating and simultaneously re-encountering the work.

I have been thinking of my practice in relation to the shift of mobility within this new (temporary?) order of the pandemic. In mid-July the exhibition *Teras Terra* opened in Portugal at Galeria Duarte Sequeira a synergy between visual artist Petros Moris and myself, focusing on bringing common ground of our practices in direct dialogue. We both couldn't travel due to the restrictions to install and it was quite weird feeling together the preciousness of being able of presenting this dialogue publicly, despite the global awkwardness and the personal and practical difficulties, and at the same time having to trust the care given to the works from others in order to execute our vision. Of course, institutions and the art system are well trained to do this in high standards through the sub-industries of art handling etc. But the lack of direct engagement created inevitable some alienation, a void between the self, the works, the space and the people that we should have been in physical contact with. Nevertheless, we embraced it and the exhibition went well in relation to our vision, exactly because those in charge took extreme care and treated with hospitality I would say, what they were provided to work with.

I think that artists feel the idea of hospitality and solidarity related also to the way their works are treated and exhibited as an extension of themselves. This might probably have similar connections to care in the cases of writers to the context of publishing, curators to the institutions, thinkers and lecturers to the context of academia.

Going back to what is already discussed, I agree with what you have indicated of making kinship otherwise than the family whatever family is, or the comfort zone, related also to Haraway, which I will admit here that I am personally not estranged at all. But this could lead to another interesting discussion of maybe how the two manifestos are related or not. "Shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope" it is I suppose what "staying with the trouble" is about.

It is important to think in relation to xenohospitality and the xenosolidarity the ways that we have been presented of political endurance around the state of being solitaire. The European political solidarity and hospitality shown towards the immigration issue unfolding in the Mediterranean, reinforce very specific narratives within those power structures.

Direk's point of view resonates directly with this topic. Of how cruel this differentiation and categorization of hospitality can be towards the one lensed as an invader and has nothing to offer back in exchange, in contrast to the tourist.

Those political representations of care could be related furthermore to what you analysed as the practice of charity. How it creates a superiority syndrome, a patronizing decision-making mechanism to apply to those who are in need of assistance and those who have the clarity and privilege to provide it. A colonial eye, which despite the lack of imperialistic expansion strategies, unravels through the ages and gets camouflaged under different perspectives of hierarchical attachments to supervision and gatekeeping.

Through the pandemic (still strong at the present time), we have all observed different faces of solidarity or solidarity to be.

Through the last months the idea of care has been challenged a lot, the way we are asked to take care of others and ourselves and simultaneously the responsibility we feel of doing it. How

many times didn't we exchange emails including the phrase "Hope you are well and safe"? How does this distanced feeling of care, achieved somehow to remind us the fact that we are part of a universal situation?

We got related to people we never had awareness of their vulnerability, to our neighbours, we walked their dogs, bought their shopping list, we Skyped call during panic attacks and exposed our demons. We got unionized. We greeted each other on balconies and shouted "Best Wishes" in lockdown Easter day even if we do not sympathize or embrace at all the Western/Christian theological anniversaries (probably the same will happen on new year's eve). Is it visible to you as well, this new universal leaning in caring and simultaneously an endurance of not caring at all for several other stuff? I feel that there is a vague collectiveness somehow. Various perspectives in proximity with a feeling of a shared experience, a symbiotic bringing together but at the same time a holding back to acknowledge the inequalities the pandemic imposed on the ones already marginalised.

Rosi Braidotti's ambitious term from her book *Posthuman Knowledge*, (Polity 2019) smartly puts down what could be stressed out about several situations and modes of existence. *We-Are-(All)-In-This-Together-But-We-Are-Not-One-And-The-Same*.

Thank you, Lito, for weaving the concrete into this discussion so deftly. Yes, it is entirely right that we acknowledge the work of Sara in bringing us together. I have collaborated with her before, and have found her to be expert in the practices of both hospitality and solidarity. (Thank you, Sara, if you're reading this!)

It is right, too, that we should think about the resonances of the contemporary moment, and the simultaneously universalizing and differentiating impact of the pandemic — which is, as you note, beautifully encapsulated by Braidotti's phrase. We have seen that people's identities and lived circumstances - shaped, as ever, by structural oppressions (most obviously race) - have profoundly influenced their experiences of Covid-19, not least in terms of their risk of contracting or dying from it. At the same time, the pandemic has foregrounded ideas of interdependence and collective responsibility - traits which might arguably be understood as intertwined with the political universal (that is to say, with the process of assembling a collective 'we').

My Laboria Cuboniks colleague Patricia Reed, for example, takes something akin to precarity to be one possible basis for developing a universal. She views the shared (though unevenly distributed) experiences of embodied vulnerability, a need for care, and a degree of separation from the means of our survival as the glue required for the formation of a collective subject. The stakes of such a construction are illustrated by the pandemic.

As Christian Laval notes in his call for a global health commons, the discourse of neoliberal governments is only really equipped to speak in terms of individualism, and so has "often failed to find the necessary words to say that social solidarity is the first line of defense against the epidemic — that the feeling and awareness that the fate of *all of us* is in hands of *each of us* is the only vaccine currently available." It doesn't look like this will necessarily be the case for much longer, thankfully, but it's still pretty clear that a willingness to practice solidarity and take collective responsibility will continue to be essential over the coming weeks and months.

There are important connections between the concept of solidarity and this thorny issue of the universal, I think — and this is a topic I feel duty bound to broach in some form, given that Sara specifically mentioned it when extending an invitation to participate in this exchange! With whom can solidarity be built, under what conditions, and via what form of relations? And in

what sense is universalism at play in answering this question? Dilar Dirik's account of *failures* of solidarity may prove helpful here. Referring particularly to outside "helpers" who swoop in to assist in – or rather, to critique the progress of – particular struggles, she notes that 'solidarity givers can appear from nowhere, erase their own contexts and entitle themselves to dominating the discourse. They are granted an observant bird's eye view, enabling distanced analytical perspectives and authority, due to supposedly being "impartial". This immediately creates a hierarchy and the expectation that the group receiving the solidarity is supposed to demonstrate gratitude and deference to the solidarity giver, leaving the group "receiving" solidarity to the mercy of the person granting help. This often marks the end of solidarity and the beginning of charity.'

In this case, we encounter a bloated particularity masquerading as the universal; a seemingly culturally unmarked subject (that is to say, a subject who is in a position to forget or erase their own situatedness) intervenes within a particular set of political circumstances in order to bestow their allegedly unbiased insights upon those doing the work on the ground. The relations of charity described here do not map exactly onto those of hospitality discussed in my first post; they in fact represent an inversion of the more usual host/guest dynamic, as it is the outsider who extends controlling forms of apparent generosity. Nevertheless, one detects a similar lack of mutuality and a similar surplus of condescension.

In this account, we find that the operations of the false universal come to stymie the practice of genuine solidarity. This, of course, resonates with many familiar anxieties about what solidarity means and what it might involve. As Jeremy Gilbert points out, "Many people are alarmed" by calls for solidarity as mutual becoming; "They remember the many instances in which the appeal to unity has been the basis on which the continued subordination of women, people of colour, queers, people with disabilities, trans people, and many others has been legitimated within particular movements or organisations (the labour movement, the women's movement, etc.). They would hear in any call for "solidarity" a call for such people once again to accept the subordination of their desire, identities and interests to those of some greater unifying cause, in the name of some imagined future that will never arrive."

Jodi Dean is similarly critical of the concept of solidarity "commonly associated with Marxism and the labor movement. The ideal of solidarity with the working class often repressed dissent and discussion. Party loyalty required that many interests be set aside, interests such as child care, pregnancy leave, women's wages, and the employment of women in certain occupations." Both of these accounts point to the fact that a collective political subject – the "we" that struggles and is struggled for – has historically been insufficiently encompassing. Solidarity has meant the imposition of a unity that is not universal, as the interests of some are privileged at the expense of others.

And indeed, this use and understanding – or rather, misuse and misunderstanding – of solidarity is far from being consigned to the past. Akwugo Emejulu offers a concrete example of this in her account of the 2017 Women's March in London: 'In seeking to organise an "inclusive" demonstration that crossed party political lines, the organisers initially invited representatives from all the major parties', including right-wing populists and those responsible for 'destitution policies targeting migrants and the ruinous austerity agenda'. Furthermore, Emejulu notes, 'when these critiques were levelled at the organisers, the defensive responses and the branding of critics as 'divisive' seemed to bring into sharp relief the limits of feminist solidarity.' As she puts it, 'A global call for sisterhood is not enough – it assumes a unity and shared purpose amongst women that does not exist. Feminist solidarity between women cannot be presumed – it must be fought for and made real through individual and collective action.' This reminds us again of the necessity of viewing solidarity as a concrete practice and lived/living process.

Such comments also bring home the fact that the universal, in the form of an insufficiently qualified call for unity, can operate as a *barrier* to the operations of solidarity. Trying to be unsituated

– to offer a position inclusive of literally all perspectives – is unsustainable. If this is what we take the project of universalism to involve, then it is doomed to failure. Given that the xenofeminist manifesto telegraphs its reliance upon the idea of the universal at various points, however, it should be clear that this is not my personal interpretation or understanding.

Many previous attempts to articulate a universal have, as Braidotti astutely reminds us, been hampered by a wilful failure to be properly representative; the universal subject is ‘implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity’. I agree with her when she argues that the concept of the posthuman requires a ‘new agenda [...] which is no longer that of European or Eurocentric universal, rational subjectivity, but rather a radical transformation of it’. Note that this agenda is framed as a transformation, however, rather than an outright rejection.

The xenofeminist challenge is not simply to reject universality, but to contest and to re-engineer the universal. This is why Laboria Cuboniks seeks to position the universal as a kind of ‘mutable architecture that, like open source software, remains available for perpetual modification and enhancement’, and why the xenofeminist project should be viewed as an invitation rather than a blueprint.

As Dean remarks: “Our solidary reflection will never enable us fully to include all voices and experiences. Nonetheless, as we adopt this perspective, we accept responsibility for our exclusions and attempt to include excluded others in our “we.” She points to ‘the discursive constitution of a coalitional “we.” This “we” changes over time, varying with and responding to ever-changing needs and circumstances.’ Far from transcending the concerns of the social, then, or taking the form of some complete, encompassing category waiting to be properly uncovered, the universal demands to be understood as the perpetually unfinished business of the political.

Xenofeminism insists upon the universal not as an object but as a process – a technology always in need of assembly. In this specific sense, there is no universal, only *universalising*. As Dean puts it. “We must construct the universal through shared questioning, rather than assuming the universal precedes this questioning.” To emphasize this key point once again, what we are discussing here is (in the words of the XF manifesto) “not a universal that can be imposed from above, but built from the bottom up – or, better, laterally, opening new lines of transit across an uneven landscape.”

The universal is not discovered but collectively constructed via the process of deciding who the ‘us’ in the formulation ‘all of us’ might refer to. This is an idea I gestured to in my discussion of interdependence and solidarity above, but I would point out at this point that vulnerability is not the only basis upon which a collective political subject might be imagined. One could equally seek to articulate a ‘we’ on the basis of a shared potential for subversion, resistance, refusal, and re-making.

This position is, to a certain extent, one shared by bell hooks, who understands the false universal (as manifested in unqualified calls for unity and the erasure of conflict) as a barrier to solidarity, but who nevertheless calls for sisterhood anyway. hooks is quick to note that an emphasis on sisterhood can act as an ‘emotional appeal masking the opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women’ and as a ‘cover-up hiding the fact that many women exploit and oppress other women’. She goes on to note that: “Their version of Sisterhood dictated that sisters were to “unconditionally” love one another; that they were to avoid conflict and minimize disagreement; that they were not to criticize one another, especially in public.” It is clear whose voices, within this framework, are most likely to end up being silenced.

Rather than abandoning sisterhood, however, hooks calls for its re-engineering. “In recent years Sisterhood as slogan, motto, rallying cry no longer evokes the spirit of power in unity,” she argues. “Some feminists now seem to feel that unity between women is impossible given our differences. Abandoning the idea of Sisterhood as an expression of political solidarity weakens

and diminishes feminist movement. Solidarity strengthens resistance struggle." What is required is collaboration without amalgamation, coalition without subsumption – the construction of a 'we' provisional and capacious enough to hold all who need to be held.

In hooks's words: "Women need to come together in situations where there will be ideological disagreement and work to change that interaction so communication occurs. This means that when women come together, rather than pretend union, we would acknowledge that we are divided and must develop strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentments, competitiveness, etc." While hooks continues to believe in the possibility of women working together, then, she is clear that this happens across and despite difference.

Again, I think, we can see the dynamics of difference and identity, distance and proximity, lurking in the background of my response - and again, I haven't really had a chance to dig into this very much. I think having sketched out some ideas about the universal in relation to solidarity, though, it may actually be easier to start this conversation. I feel like Reed's work, in particular, makes a helpful contribution, as its concept of solidarity without sameness is buttressed by critical reflections on universalism. Depending on how the exchange flows, I think I'd really like to touch upon the possibility of both sameness without solidarity and solidarity without sameness, as a way back into the perpetually unsettled feminist debate about difference (and also into the idea of xenosolidarity). However, if xenohospitality involves a refusal to foreclose the future, then perhaps I should stop making plans. Rather, I should privilege, as you put it, "embracing to the unplanned, a possibility to let things go in any direction and remain rigorous to absorb the yet to come" (This is actually something I'm not very good at!).

Dear Helen

I understand decentralization of the dominant western stereotype of what is or has been considered human, as a vital key in order to get into transformational traits and achieve a formation of a collective subject. How to deprioritize ourselves from given granted hierarchies? How can we recognize wider obligations or connections and similarities to the ecologies and networks we are part of? And as you are mentioning, with whom can solidarity be built with, under what conditions, and via what configurations?

I have expressed my analogous interest in the observation and awareness of failing potencies in symbiosis and community making in the beginning of this dialogue. I am interested in the nature of physical, mental, political or symbolical transformations that we decide to go through or not in order to destabilize or resist. It is interesting also to think of the circumstances in which solidarity can unravel as an aggression or perpetuance of the problematic norm and how it can be subject to failure.

Dean, basically remarks a "we" that should be understood in capability of broadening its membranes for inclusivity and in awareness of the responsibility of exclusions and inclusions, though already in acceptance with the inevitability to include all experiences and voices.

Sisterhood and feminist solidarity in a "we" that changes over time, since it is a matter of a practiced ever-changing experienced process, it is an aspect to think about related also to the xeno-universal as you are putting it down.

By thinking of the way you are approaching sisterhood, its powers and downfalls and the interest you have expressed in considering and taking into the debate about difference "the possibility of both sameness without solidarity and solidarity without sameness", I am reminded

of *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago. A historical work, which she created collaboratively with a range of artisans and other practitioners as a goal to “end the on-going cycle of omission in which women were written out of the historical record” and that is now part of the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

In an article she wrote for *The Guardian* in 2012, where she reveals her personal motivation in entering the art world and the women’s movement, she admits: “The truth is that for centuries women have struggled to be heard, writing books, making art and music and challenging the many restrictions on women’s lives. But their achievements have been repeatedly written out of history..... I set out to chronicle this on-going erasure in my installation *The Dinner Party*, a monumental, symbolic history of women in western civilisation. It created a major stir when it premiered in 1979. Originally slated to travel to a number of museums, the tour collapsed in the face of vitriolic reviews, sometimes (sadly) written by women.”



Judy Chicago: *The Dinner Party*, 1979. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.



Judy Chicago: *The Dinner Party*, 1979. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.



Thursday Night Potluck with "The Dinner Party" Workers, 1978. Courtesy of Through the Flower Archive. [Via](#)

Dear Lito

How interesting to see the differences between *The Dinner Party* (as a work of art about a kind of elaborate domestic performance; the installation is lit as for the stage) and the potluck (as an actual act of feeding, being fed, and being together). I wonder if we might consider these two examples as illustrative of some of the differences between hospitality and solidarity? This is not a developed thought at all, just a vague impression.

The final piece depicts a great act of care on many levels but (naturally enough) foregrounds the *product* of that labour - a deliberately impressive and beautiful constellation of elements (I particularly like the headless table). Like all dinner parties, it is a self-conscious work of art - a gift to others. The potluck, meanwhile, is precisely an event in which the process of labour is both dispersed and visible. The saucepans, tupperware, and tin foil all keep the completed work of preparation on full display; the seemingly disposable cutlery, plates, and possibly tablecloths speak to the work that will follow now that the meal is over. The caption under your image suggests that this was a weekly event, rather than an occasional spectacle too. While dinner parties are demanding (and potentially rewarding, if pursued under the right conditions) acts of hospitality, only rarely extended to a carefully chosen selection of guests, the potluck is something more quotidian - a lived and living process to which all contribute in some way. From each according to her ability, to each according to her needs, pursued at the level of potato salad.

One could argue that, while *The Dinner Party* seeks to recognise both specific 'women' and 'women's work' more generally, and perhaps to redistribute artistic labour in some sense as well, the potluck (or *The Potluck?*) speaks to efforts not simply to recognise or redistribute this work, but to reduce it to a minimum. Admittedly, polystyrene plates are not the most glamorous or ecologically friendly icon of a post-work feminist orientation, and here solidarity is being practiced at a small scale among a very particular group of people, but I think the general spirit is an interesting one. We see the recognition, redistribution, and reduction of the labour of social reproduction as entangled with lived and living practices of solidarity.

I don't know much about the artisans involved in the production of the installation, but I would note that, on the basis of the image, this is not exactly an example of solidarity without sameness. At first glance, those pictured seem to have a great deal in common - and of course, they are all artists and craftspeople working on a specific feminist piece, which suggests shared interests and perhaps shared political priorities. However, as I implied in my last post, it's not the case that, by virtue of a shared gender, difference is transcended or rendered irrelevant, or that a single element of shared social identity location immediately and unproblematically equates to unity. It is quite possible to have sameness without solidarity. As Ann Ferguson remarks: "Common gender by itself does not create solidarity over difference; as we have seen by issues of racism in white women's movements." Indeed, Jodi Dean makes clear that the absence of uniform alignment between personal identity and political position is precisely the reason why solidarity is so necessary: "Just as it is not the case that the success of any one group entails the failure of the others (as if group boundaries were somehow natural or given), so is it equally implausible that everyone with "minority" or "marginal" status automatically agrees. Consequently, we need a way to think about how we can come together in coalition, a way to thematize the attitude of those who work together in common political struggle." Solidarity can never be assumed, even if we might wish to project it as a political inevitability sometimes. It is an *effortful* practice - a deliberate process emerging out of our reasoned commitments, rather than a direct emanation resulting from our social position. That is to say, it is something one does rather than something one has.

At the same time as sameness fails to automatically generate solidarity, so the absence of a shared identity should not be seen as terminating the possibilities of meaningful, multi-directional collaboration. As I've suggested in previous posts, just as one can experience sameness without solidarity, so too can one have solidarity without sameness. In Patricia Reed's words:

“the collective subject cannot be premised by principles of likeness, by principles of familiarity. It demands, rather, a mode of solidarity without homophily, without sameness.” This returns us to the question of xeno-solidarity, then – and to the issue of whether solidarity is in fact ever possible *within* sameness. Does solidarity in fact require a degree of estrangement, and if so, how does this relate to the dynamics of hospitality? If solidarity involves the co-construction of the (always partial, always provisional) political universal then what role does particularity play within this?

To some extent, of course, solidarity is necessarily directed toward the other – after all, it would be rather jarring to claim to be in solidarity with oneself. For Jerney Gilbert: “Relations of solidarity are never based on the assumption of a shared or unitary identity. They work across differences without trying to suppress them, and they make those differences productive.” This means going beyond the kinds of selfish parochialism that have masqueraded as solidarity in the past. As Dave Beech argues, we must “overcome the misconception that solidarity is the politics of a narrow, exclusive club identity. Different groups, organisations and institutions foster different combinations of congeniality, cooperation and critique.” In the concrete – that is to say, at the level of lived practice on which solidarity functions – this involves starting from the connections between struggles, and establishing a form of transversal politics oriented toward assembly. We’re talking about, in Verónica Gago’s words: “a feminism of the masses, rooted in concrete struggles of popular economy workers, migrants, cooperative workers, women defending their territories, precarious workers, new generations of sexual dissidences, housewives who refuse enclosure, those fighting for the right to abortion involved in a broad struggle for bodily autonomy, mobilized students, women denouncing agrottoxins, and sex workers’. In this sense, she argues, the contemporary feminist movement ‘constructs proximity between very different struggles.”

All this would suggest that solidarity is premised upon an orientation to otherness. That being said, however, I’m not sure the interplay of distance and proximity at stake here is quite as simple as it seems. In an earlier post, I stated that ‘xenosolidarity, understood as the principle of acting with and for the Other, can only stray so far from home’, and I still think that holds true. The potential limits to solidarity - limits which may be in some ways more pronounced than those associated with hospitality - is an issue I perhaps need to dwell on a little further.

Dear Helen

In relation to the *Dinner Party*, despite its formal and contextual power, its importance as a work of art and its impact on the women’s movement, I initially thought of it as paradigm to think of sameness with/out solidarity related to its contextual inclusion and exclusions, as well with what Chicago refers to as vitriolic critics from women in its inauguration. Although, when I found the image of the potluck, I got instantly very intrigued and I decided to send it, placing it abstractly into this comparison with the work. A “find the differences” mind game is logical to occur when looking at the gathering photograph and the work, as the presence and absence of bodies in either case creates a strong feeling of omission.

I guess that since there are roles that are distributed it is inevitable not to think here of hierarchical modes. It is still not very clear for me if the group of women participating in the realisation of the project were volunteering or if Chicago employed them, if it was a collaboration or a cooperation. But there is obviously a basic difference related to this hierarchy in extension to labour.

Nevertheless, those roles of hierarchy within the cultural production are not unusual. It is a common methodology of the star architect, star academic, star artist to accomplish projects by the workforce of their employees. In the case of volunteer work and if the final work is not co-authored but remains under the courtesy of the leader, it makes sense also to connect volun-

teering to a reversed charity. I believe though that it is fair to take into consideration whether one decides that information revealing those relationships with the workforce will be incorporated into the history of the project and its future communication, claiming or not through these details stakes in (cultural) capitalization.

It would be interesting to expatiate further on the potential limits of solidarity while we keep reminded of what you have clarified above and what it might have been recurring in the dialogue that solidarity is not a political inevitability, neither a direct emanation derived from our social position. It is something that one does, rather than something that one has as a prescribed virtue. It can be understood, felt, cultivated through the comprehension of sameness and difference.

However, it is easy also to observe solidarity as performativity. In behaviours, which are related with what we have mentioned before of custodianship or gatekeeping, coming for example from enthusiastic reformed social media activists, which relate in sameness through rhetoric. There one can notice a clear reversion in importance of words and consultation that are not necessarily participatory, rather than in actions.

I would like at this point to get back to the manifesto and the chapter of Trap that problematizes 'the theatrical prostrations to identity' performed as wanna-be debates in the sphere of social media, favouring 'moral maintenance' and destroying the potentiality of those platforms to work in favour of organization, connection and skill-sharing.

The chapter elaborates: "We want neither clean hands nor beautiful souls, neither virtue nor terror. We want superior forms of corruption."

I understand corruption as a disruption of the norm, an upset, a tip over of the well established. How corruption could be linked to solidarity and resistance for the Xenofeminist identity?

It is interesting how this could wrap up this dialogue in a circle - opening the exchange with a testimony or a homology and closing here with one of the demands that the Xenofeminists are declaring (thinking of the Xenofeminists in a literary and transcendental way, as *Les Guérillères* by Monique Wittig for example).

Dear Lito

You're quite right to draw attention to the character of the relationships involved in *The Potluck*. Whether we think of these artists as employees, volunteers, or collaborators will shape our understanding of the political and interpersonal dynamics at stake, including whether or not we understand participation in the Thursday night ritual to be something akin to autonomously chosen activity.

I think it's important, too, to think about how the meanings of solidarity are changed via the means and medium of their expression. You refer to social media, and to what the manifesto calls 'obstacles to productive debate positioned as if they are debate'. Of course, social media platforms are not incapable of facilitating helpful forms of political activism – I'm currently supervising a PhD project by Gabriela Loureiro which convincingly outlines the merits, deficiencies, and political consequences of Brazilian "hashtag feminism" as a form of digital consciousness raising, for example. But particular platforms have particular affordances and, as with all forms of political engagement, there may be more or less emancipatory and effective ways of pursuing our aims.

Since my last post, I have been thinking on the relationship between hospitality and solidarity, specifically in relation to Jo Littler and Charlotte Rottenberg's suggestion that, just as hospitality can exclude via invitation, so too can solidarity build boundaries via their breach. As they point out: "Solidarity invoked in a feminist context is often thought to cut across different identity cate-

gories — such as race, class, sexuality or nation — without assuming sameness among women or falling back into gender essentialism. To express solidarity with others is ostensibly to recognize and respect differences without colonizing those differences. Simultaneously, however, solidarity can appear to assume entrenched identity categories, thus risking the re-naturalization of these very same categories. When one stands in feminist solidarity, in other words, one often does so from a particular identity (and often identifying as a particular gender) in order to express support for the ‘other’ who is also defined by her identity.”

To be in solidarity, in other words, is sometimes taken to mean acting from within a set group in the interests of a different set group. Consequently, for Littler and Rottenberg, there at times “appears to be a constitutive tension within the theory and praxis of feminist solidarity: it promises to transcend difference while, in order to be politically operative, it reinforces difference by solidifying already existing categories of identity.” To the extent that solidarity implies – indeed, demands – an obligatory otherness, it can be read as reifying difference. In bringing people and struggles together, it risks reinforcing an idea of their underlying separateness.

These are interesting, but not insurmountable, points regarding the dynamics of solidarity. First of all, I think it’s possible (and necessary) to acknowledge actually existing differences without positioning these differences as an inevitability or projecting them uncritically into the future. This is what allows me to advocate for gender abolitionism whilst also supporting the Women’s Strike, for example. What we today consider identities are the result of distinctive histories (including uneven access to material resources, the right to self-determination, and the means of subsistence) that have a significant ongoing impact. We must acknowledge the usefulness of organising around these positions, while also bearing in mind that such positions are provisional and can be made subject to change, precisely through the kinds of struggle that solidarity affords. Solidarity (as a lived and living practice) can be responsive to immediate conditions while also acknowledging that these conditions can change – and even, at times, trying to bring about this change.

Secondly, while xenosolidarity, as a form of action for and with the Other, demands difference, I’m not sure that this difference has to manifest itself at the level of identity categories. It can just as easily be constructed around interests, processes, emphases, and spheres of operation. When pro-choice activists co-ordinate with sex workers, migrants, or students, this is not strictly a case of collaboration across identities – sex workers, migrants, students, and those who support reproductive justice are overlapping constituencies; a single person could belong to all these groups, and choose to channel their energies in particular directions (be that toward one cause or many). For Verónica Gago, political transversality – that is, an approach to assembling a mass politics which relies upon collaboration and alliance building – “complicates a certain idea of solidarity that supposes a level of exteriority that establishes distance with respect to others. Transversality prioritizes a politics of the construction of proximity and alliances without ignoring the differences in intensity among conflicts.”

Zeynep Direk is another thinker who points to solidarity as an other-directed practice, describing it particularly as “a way of being responsible for others with whom we do not have any readymade social bond.” To this extent, solidarity is necessarily xenosolidarity. She is also clear, however, that there is a different dynamic between distance and proximity at stake here than there is with hospitality; the subject in solidarity should not “be conceived as being more at home than the other whom she encounters.”

Hospitality is distinguished from solidarity by the greater (or perhaps simply different) distance it implies; solidarity may of necessity be forged with others beyond our immediate circle, but it also requires some form of sharing – of interests, of status, and of ground. It makes as little sense to position solidarity as unbounded and all-encompassing as it does to extend it to the self-identical. I’m thinking back to Akwugo Emejulu’s comments on the women’s march here; feminist solidarity that seeks to accommodate the far right is unsustainable, and in fact no form of solidarity at all.

Nira Yuval-Davis argues that coalitional politics must be based on (at least loosely) “compatible values [that] can cut across differences in positionings and identity.” As she puts it: “not all political campaigns are the same. There are different levels of overlapping value systems and different levels of common political work, from a tight formal organisation to a loose informal network, from an ideological alliance to a single-issue-based coalition.” And as Jeremy Gilbert notes, in addition to working beyond any unitary position on the behalf of participants: “Relations of solidarity are always expressions of shared interests. “Expressions of shared interests” can take many forms. It is important to note that they don’t only take the form of defending an existing state of affairs (a wage level, a hospital, etc.). They can also mean the expression of a shared sense of possibility, a shared desire for a different possible world.”

Comments such as these make clear that there is a need to retain core values and perspectives when coalition building – that is, to retain an identity even as one seeks to be maximally responsive, respectful, and receptive to difference. Distance and proximity, difference and identity, are all brought into play in the lived practice of solidarity building. (I do not have time here, in my final post, to go into any great detail about how these dynamics might actually work in practice – how we can give structure to and place meaningful and appropriate limits upon solidarity while also allowing it to be as extensive as it can be without losing its leftist feminist character. What I will say, though, is that the idea of the protocol that I explore in my book may well be relevant here. There are several forms of activism – including consciousness raising and self-help health activism, imperfect as these are – that have managed to scale up and scale out by making themselves maximally available for repurposing via the protocol. Indeed, the protocol can really be seen as a tool for expanding one’s reach while retaining one’s identity.)

Our exchange over the past two weeks or so has steered me to a point at which I can more clearly recognise that the xeno in xenosolidarity is always qualified. While it is possible to construct a shared project across the boundaries of difference, any such construction will be underpinned by at least some factors that are held in common. Besides this, however, we can see that pure alterity cannot be at the heart of solidarity practices, as – even when one acts in the express interests of constituencies other than exactly one’s own – any such practices will also be pursued in the name of oneself. That is to say, there is no solidarity without self-interest.

This sounds extremely negative, but it isn’t meant to be. In short, the freedom of the individual is tethered to (and dependent upon) the freedom of the collective. Even when perspectives, goals, and tactics appear to be in less than perfect alignment, they can ultimately be cast as implicated in the same struggle. As such, solidarity tends toward the advancement of collective freedom in such a manner that “we” – that is, the “we” of the political universal – are all included.

In a roundabout way, this dimension of solidarity in fact plugs back into ideas of the xeno, because recognising that the freedom of one is fundamentally dependent upon the freedom all may – in some circumstances – involve going beyond the framework of immediate self-service and narrow personal advantage. As Ann Ferguson remarks, a sense of a truly transformational solidarity “goes beyond that of a present-interest-based solidarity, since one’s present interests as a socially located individual, e.g., with class, race, heterosexual, or national privileges, will often be in opposition with promoting sisterhood solidarity based on one’s transformational moral identity based on the collective good of all women.” In her account, solidarity allows people to ‘come to a changed understanding of their long-range interest. Such a transformed understanding of self-interest connects to a notion of collective good only achievable by solidarity projects which challenge structural injustices and allow those engaged in them to form bridge identities [...] which allow them to empathize, bond and struggle along with those oppressed by such structures’. In this case, solidarity is self-transcending even as it results in (or is pursued for) a universal benefit in which one is included.

And on your question about corruption and solidarity, I tend to think of it this way: We can never start from a position of absolute ethico-political purity, so let’s start instead from a position that tries to find better ways of building from (and away from) our inevitable flaws. Otherwise, we may not start at all.