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Reimagining Architectural Practice through Relation: Notes from the In-Between

Ana Bisbicus, Sarah Hachem – [habi practice]

Abstract: Architecture is never neutral. It enforces racialized brutality, ecological extraction, patriarchal domination, and capitalist accumulation. *habi practice* traces these entanglements across maps, cities, forests, seas, classrooms, and skies, revealing the structures that govern what is legible, livable, and imaginable. We write from disorientation, from the in-between, refusing singular stories, fixed identities, or universal truths. Through relation, we see how life, histories, and knowledge intertwine. Through reimagination, we call forth new forms of being and inhabiting the world. To dwell in what is broken is to confront power and to insist on futures that were and could be otherwise.

Keywords: Reimagination; Coloniality; Architecture Education; Relation; In-Between/Third Space.

Corresponding authors: Ana Bisbicus (University of Kassel, Germany), Sarah Hachem (independent Scholar); ana.bisbicus@uni-kassel.de; https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3559-837X; info.habi.practice@gmail.com; https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9694-2688 Open Access. © 2025 Ana Bisbicus, Sarah Hachem published by transcript Verlag. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (BY) license.

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Drawing: »Our [thoughts] are geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering, and overlapping [territories]. [They're] each composed of information, billions of bits of cultural knowledge superimposing many different categories of experience. Like a map with colored web lines of rivers, highways, lakes, towns, and other landscape features en donde pasan y cruzan las cosas, we are marked. […] As our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (tejemos).« (Anzaldua 2015:69) © Ana Bisbicus, Sarah Hachem – [habi practice]

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Introduction

We write from entangled and diasporic positions – dispersed, liminal and emerging from the unsettled cracks.[1] Our perspectives are informed by institutional training in European architectural thought, yet they are carried by memories and silences that exceed the frames of Western academia and its architectural canon. Our lives unfold across and within the geographies this tradition has mapped, theorized and built upon. These are geographies we have moved through, been shaped by and at times implicated in. We do not fully belong to them (anymore), and yet we are not entirely outside them either. We write from grounds that drift, resisting fixed identities and inherited certainties. We do not speak from neutrality. To us, there is no such ground. To claim it is to erase, to order, to dominate.

Our knowledges have been formed both within and in tension with architectural education, a field always entangled with the regulation and organization of land, movement, and life, folded into the long histories of possession, displacement and control. Between ancestral attachments, anti-colonial urgencies, activist insurgencies and the languages of academia, we dwell in the in-between: a site of friction and refusal. But the in-between is also where we make sense, make kin, make home, and transform.

The following notes on terms and propositions emerge from that space. Alongside, outside, and against the institution. They are fragments: incomplete and uncertain, reflecting our current thoughts yet bound to shift as circumstances, urgencies, and relations change. What appears here is not definitive. These notes are mutable; they invite revision, refinement, and critique. Where language falters, we remain open to engaging it together. We do not seek to fix meaning or impose determined forms; rather, we attend to indetermination, embrace »ongoingness,« and practice refusal, choosing to dwell in the broken rather than the fixed. In this sense, the following is also a way for us to literally come to terms.[2]

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1 By cracks we mean sites of in-betweenness and collective subversion, informed by Chicana/Latinx feminist thought (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 1987), postcolonial theory on cultural interstices (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994), and the Black radical tradition (Moten & Harney, *The Undercommons*, 2013).

2 We draw on thinkers whose work attends to incompleteness, relationality, and collective knowing, providing frameworks for engaging with the unfinished, emergent, and non-linear. These include, among others, Collins (1990), Halberstam (2011, 2018), Haraway (2016), hooks (1994), and Moten & Harney (2013).

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We understand architecture not as a set of isolated forms or objects, but as a web of relations between life forms, knowledge systems, and power structures. Our practice seeks to render visible and work against the mechanisms that are normalized or taken for granted, through which architecture participates in shaping social, spatial, and ecological conditions, producing structural forms of violence and brutality.[3] At the same time, we attend to what remains in shadow: the movements and relations that refuse capture, that insist on opacity, and that sustain emergent, collective, and other ways of inhabiting the world.[4]

In doing so, we challenge ourselves and our learning environment to ask:

What does it mean to design in relation?

We do not seek to reinvent from scratch. We reimagine as Éduard Glissant teaches us and Frantz Fanon asks of us. Through relation. Through refusal of the universal. Toward an architecture of entanglement.

The Drift

Nothing exists untouched. Nothing begins in isolation. We join threads that precede us: the web, the mesh, the rhizome, the woven cosmos, the *Feral Atlas* (Tsing/Deger/Keleman Saxena/Zhou 2020).[5] Ingold (2000) and Haraway (2007), Deleuze/Guattari (1980) and Jongerius (2021), amongst others, remind us that every act, every thing and every thought is entangled.

3 We use *brutality*, following Harney and Moten, to name the structural and logistical operations of domination explored in violence (Harney & Moten, 2021, 2022).

4 cf. Michel Foucault (*Discipline and Punish*, 1977) on how power operates through regimes of visibility and ordinariness; and Édouard Glissant (Poetics of Relation, 1997) on opacity as a refusal of imposed legibility and the colonial gaze.

5 cf. Feral Atlas (Tsing/Deger/Keleman Saxena/Zhou 2020) offers an interactive platform of feral landscapes, tracing entanglements of human and nonhuman processes that interact in complex, often unpredictable ways. For example, the introduction of the Chinese mitten crab (Eriocheir sinensis) from the Yangtze River Delta to European waterways exemplifies such entanglements. Initially transported via ballast water, this species has since established itself in various European rivers, including the Rhine, where it has become an invasive species. Its spread underscores how human activities, such as global trade and infrastructure development, facilitate the movement of species across ecosystems, leading to unforeseen ecological consequences.

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Relation, like mycelium, sometimes is hidden, sometimes breaks through, is ever evolving, and weaves connections as conditions shift (Tsing 2015).

We move, think, and imagine in relation. Thought itself emerges from entanglement, where ideas, spaces, and histories intertwine. Colonial frameworks seek to fix, categorize, compartmentalize, contain, and hierarchize. But relation drifts. It resists enclosure. Édouard Glissant (1990) calls this the »Poetics of Relation«: identities and knowledges formed across movement, encounter, and exchange. Difference meets difference without demanding sameness.

Moten and Harney (2013) warn that the individual is a form of enclosure, produced when entanglement is cut off. Individuation is therefore an illusion of separation: the very idea of the individual depends on denying entanglement. We are never simply individuals, but always entangled in systems of suffering, histories of dispossession and survival, and in the webs of cultural and ecological interdependencies, which make visible the falsely constructed boundaries between self and other, past and present, human and more-than-human. It is neither enough nor possible to act ethically alone; what matters is how we organize together, cultivate collectivity, modes of gathering, because no single act can dissolve systemic and intertwined forces (Shotwell 2016).

Reimagining emerges in these spaces. It emerges through our entanglements with others, with histories, and with the worlds we inhabit. Fanon (1961) teaches that imagination is the condition of struggle: to envision the new human, new ways of knowing, new spaces where life together unfolds beyond colonial categories. »New« here is not to be understood as something unprecedented in time, but as transformed through struggle, reimagined ways of being, and renewed relations. For Glissant (1990), imagination, too, refuses to be determined by the past and unfolds improvisationally through encounter and relation, where connections across difference shape what might yet emerge.

> »What is to be done is to found a new society […] by cultivating the spaces and places that by dint of their existence instantiate the impossibility of the normative bastion that surrounds us. We might call this justice. We might call it a non-utopic utopia, a sanctuary. We might call it the undercommons.« (Bey 2019: 8:55 min)

For Bey, liberation is not only about dismantling oppressive structures. It is also about creating and inhabiting practices that make other ways of living

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tangible; here and now. It is about sustaining the shared life that already insists in us. We do not only react to brutality. We live otherwise in the midst of it, protecting and reimagining what we inherit and what we do not yet know.

»The future already was,« affirms Llanquiray Painemal at the panel *The Unity of Our Struggle, the Diversity of Our Tactics II* (Brick by Brick Collective 2025), invoking a proverb also cited by Miriam Pixtun of the Maya Kaqchikel from Nacahuil, Guatemala (cf. Espinosa Miñoso 2015). The world we fight for, a world without borders, prisons, patriarchal violence, or imperial domination, is not an impossible horizon. It has already existed. Before colonization, before the carving of land into private property and nation-states, before the creation of police, prisons, and capitalist extraction, there were societies rooted in reciprocity and responsibility to land and to each other. Abolition is not an invention but an ongoing practice. Anti-colonial struggle is not nostalgia but the work of sustaining what colonialism could not fully extinguish. The future already was, and it moves with us still, in the ongoing drift and in entanglements that resist containment.

Moten and Harney (2013) caution against determination, against representation, against fixity. We remain in the broken – not the fixed, the completed, the normalized. We live otherwise, in and with others, pursuing the unimaginable even as it pursues us. Liberation is a collective endeavor, a continual drift: inhabiting what persists in the cracks, sustaining other forms of life and love, and imagining worlds that emerge from entanglement.

We hold together disorientation. That is the relational.

»All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.«
– Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993:3)

The Map

Our work interrogates the colonial and imperial logics embedded in architectural tools – maps, plans, and diagrams – that have long served as instruments of authority and domination. These tools were not simply techniques

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of representation but of occupation: of knowledge, land and life. They rendered space knowable in order to render it governable. Maps were integral to the creation and enforcement of borders and territories that defined colonial control. Produced by colonial powers, these maps were and still are used to justify the division of land, the imposition of artificial borders, and the displacement of Indigenous peoples, marking a brutal reorganization of space under colonial rule.

In our teaching and research, we therefore turn to the map not as a fixed object, but as a site of contestation. We ask:

> Who gets to plan? Who gets mapped, and on whose terms?

In order to be heard by systems of colonial governance, many Indigenous communities have been coerced into translating their spatial knowledge into colonial cartographic forms. Not due to a lack of their own systems, but because settler states have systematically denied the legitimacy of Indigenous territorial understandings. This forced translation is not benign: It reflects the ongoing imposition of epistemic hierarchies where recognition is contingent upon assimilation to the colonizer's terms. Long before colonial borders and cadastral grids, Indigenous peoples articulated spatial relations through systems deeply embedded in cosmology, kinship, and ecological stewardship. From *Micronesian stick charts of the Marshall Islands* (cf. Ascher 1995) and *Inuit carved maps* (cf. Decolonial Atlas 2016) to *Aboriginal Australian songlines* (cf. Micalizo 2016; cf. National Film and Sound Archive 2016). These were not merely »alternative« maps, but ontologically distinct ways of being in and with space, brutally disrupted by the mapping regimes of the empire.

We learn from indigenous practices and insurgent cartographies that use mapping not to reproduce colonial order, but to reclaim territory, history, and relation. Indigenous communities have long resisted spatial brutality by developing counter-mapping strategies as tools of sovereignty and memory. For example, the *Gitxsan* and *Wet'suwet'en First Nations in British Columbia* produced detailed maps of their traditional territories in the 1990s to assert land rights in court, mapping not just geography but stories, songs, trails, fishing sites, and spiritual places. (cf. Spike 1998: 88) Similarly, the *Zapatistas* in Chiapas, Mexico, began creating maps in 1994 that ignored official political boundaries and instead illustrated community spaces, resistance sites, and self-governed zones (cf. Waldseemüller/School of Chiapas). In the Philippines, the *Pulangi River Basin people* initiated participatory mapping in the 1990s to

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resist hydropower projects, combining oral histories with GPS data to assert ancestral land claims (cf. Southeast Asia Sustainable Forest Management Network 1993; cf. Environmental Science for Social Change 2023).

In a similar vein, Forensic Architecture collaborates with Indigenous communities to create maps that document and assert land rights. For example, they have worked with the Nama and Ovaherero communities in Namibia to reconstruct the town of Swakopmund as it existed during the 1904–1908 genocide, locating the concentration camp, sites of forced labor, and unmarked graves, which persisted in community memory but were erased from official narratives, using oral histories, testimonies, and forensic archaeology (cf. forensic architecture 2024). This mapping was carried out to support the communities' calls for preservation of burial grounds, to counter genocide denial, and to promote education about historical injustices. This approach reflects a mapping methodology that parallels Indigenous strategies of reclaiming territory and memory from colonial narratives.

As Audre Lorde reminds us, »Even when they are dangerous, examine the heart of those machines which you hate before you discard them. But do not mourn their lack of power, lest you be condemned to relive them« (Lorde 1997 [1973]: 59). Here, the »machines« can be read as the map, the plan, the diagram – the very instruments of surveillance and extraction. Lorde's words urge us not to abandon these tools naively, but to interrogate their logic, understand their mechanisms, and subvert them without reproducing them. She warns us, »the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house« (Lorde 1984). The map can be temporarily repurposed for survival, advocacy, or counter-mapping, but it will always tend back toward the structures it was designed to serve. The risk of cooptation is ever-present: If left unchallenged, the map's grammar of borders, property, and legibility will simply redraw the master's house. What is required, then, is not only repurposing but also the difficult work of unmaking – dismantling the map's colonial order in order to imagine spatial practices otherwise.

The Dictionary

A dictionary is to language what a map is to space: A structured representation that claims to define boundaries and meanings, yet often reveals the biases and power dynamics of those who produce it. As a tool of authority, the dictionary has long served to codify language, standardize thought, and

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marginalize expressions deemed outside the norm as deviant or illegitimate, enforcing dominant ideologies while silencing other forms of speaking, knowing and being.

In the German language, the *Wörterbuch* (dictionary, literally »book of words«) is perceived as a container of definitions, objectivity, and truth, while the *Bilderbuch* (literally »book of pictures«) is associated with children, play and imagination. This contrast exposes a deeper hierarchy embedded in Western knowledge systems: The privileging of the written word as rational and serious over the image, which is rendered imaginative and unserious. What is considered knowledge and who is considered knowledgeable, is thus already prefigured in the very structure of language. The dictionary reveals who is granted societal participation and whose voices are excluded in the production of »truth« and knowledge. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), those who are marginalized in society, particularly in colonial contexts, are often denied the authority to speak, and by extension, the power to define. This exclusion is again mirrored in the hierarchy of knowledge production, where written and published forms are valued above oral and embodied traditions, erasing or disregarding knowledge systems that do not conform to Western modes of understanding.

Building on this, Homi K. Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* (1994), language is not a neutral medium but a site of negotiation, ambivalence, and hybridity where meanings are constantly reshaped through cultural encounters and power struggles. The dictionary, therefore, is a tool with which dominant ideologies attempt to stabilize language, to make it behave. But meaning is never fixed. The very act of definition reveals its instability. It does so by suppressing the fluidity inherent to language. Definitions within a dictionary reflect not universal truths but the contested terrain of cultural authority and legitimacy. Bhabha's notion of *cultural translation* offers a way to think about the dictionary as a living site of negotiation rather than a static record. In this view, the act of defining is inherently ambivalent: It seeks to establish boundaries but also reveals the instability and contestation of those boundaries.

In our experience, when entering newly formed classrooms, we lack language, especially when addressing colonialism and racism, due to their systemic underrepresentation in curricula. To confront this gap and to find common ground, we create an evolving, participatory dictionary where meanings are not fixed but continuously shaped by context, interaction, and reinterpretation. This shared vocabulary becomes a space where terms are

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negotiated and reimagined to reflect the perspectives of all contributors. In doing so, the dictionary becomes not just a tool for understanding but a site of transformation. It resists the imposition of rigid structures and invites contributors to inhabit the *third space*[6] where new meanings and possibilities are forged. To envision new approaches to design, or even unsettle what it means to design, we must reimagine the language of design itself as a fluid, collaborative, and transformative process.

Because we »reject the supposed voice we have inherited from whiteness [...] We resonate. Rhythms. Collectively because there is no single one. Against the privatization of the world and of words.« (Guerra Arjona, Asamblea Opaca, 2024:14, author's translation)

The Classroom

In the territories that are today known by their colonizers' name *Latin America*, but were called *Abya Yala* by the Kuna people before colonization, the 1960s saw the emergence of a new pedagogical movement shaped by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In *Educação como prática da liberdade* (Education as the Practice of Freedom) (Freire 1967) and *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) (Freire 1968), the oppressed are understood as active creators and producers of knowledge for their own liberation. *Educación popular* emerges in the streets, in neighborhoods, in the forest, and on the field. These spaces become classrooms where knowledge is generated in everyday life, through relationships and coming together. Today, many of these approaches can be found in self-organized groups, toy libraries (*ludotecas*), community spaces and gardens in the neighborhoods on the outskirts of *Abya Yala*, as well as in rural areas with self-organized universities of Indigenous people the *Intercultural Autonomous Indigenous University* (UAIIN) in Cauca by the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) in southwest

6 The term »third space« was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) to describe an in-between space where cultural identities and meanings are not fixed but continuously negotiated. It is a site where differences interact and new forms of identity and understanding can emerge beyond established binaries. Although Gloria Anzaldúa does not use the term »third space« explicitly, her concepts of »*Nepantla*,« »*Borderlands*,« and »*mestiza consciousness*« similarly describe spaces of cultural and personal in-betweenness, where overlapping identities coexist and transform, highlighting the complexity of living between multiple worlds.

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of Colombia. *Epistemological disobedience* (2018), as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui writes in her book *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible*, refers to the practice of rejecting the Eurocentric canon that continues to marginalize or appropriate knowledge. The classroom can be understood here as a space of negotiation that transforms not only materially and spatially but also conceptually: from different scales, from ideas in people's minds to larger grassroots organizations or movements.

Moten and Harney offer a complementary perspective by distinguishing study from education. Education seeks order, hierarchy, and the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Study, by contrast, unfolds in its own rhythms: dissonant, emergent, and often collective (Moten and Harney 2013: 125ff). Study is not defined by the official start of a class or the teacher's direction. It does not need the »call to order« (Moten 2013: 126). It is present in the anticipations, murmurs, interactions, and conversations that exceed any lesson. It defies neat distinctions between teacher and student, »noise and music, chatter and knowledge, pain and truth« (Halberstam 2013:9).

Study holds the power to reimagine the world, to challenge entrenched systems of injustice, and to cultivate spaces of gathering where creativity and critical thought can flourish. Architecture, we argue, has the potential to transform not only the built environment but also the structures of power that shape our lives. The classroom, as bell hooks reminds us, can be »the most radical space of possibility« (hooks 1994:12), where participants collectively envision new ways of being and moving beyond conventional boundaries. Knowledge in this space is not transferred one-way; everyone is an expert in the lived experience of space. Each participant, regardless of background or formal training, contributes insight into how space functions, feels, and shapes life. For us, the classroom extends beyond academia: it is where theory emerges from practice and ultimately must return to it.

The Building

On November 18, 2024, the Palestinian Youth Movement shared a haunting image of a drone, captured an instant before it struck a housing building in Lebanon, dropped by Israel. The accompanying text read: »Every building is a planet.«

To destroy a building is not only to erase a physical structure; it is to annihilate worlds – the intimacies, livelihoods, histories, and stories connected

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to its walls. It is an attempt to extinguish the very possibility of its people's future. Such destruction severs relationships – with others and with oneself – displaces communities and makes visible the stakes of architecture as both shelter and instrument of control. It is also a moment in long histories of dispossession, state neglect, and militarized governance, where spatial power shapes who lives and who is made vulnerable.

While some view buildings as isolated objects or enclosed systems like containers or machines, we understand them as worlds in themselves. They do not merely house existence; they shape it, scar it, and are scarred in turn. They are embedded in geographies of power, inequalities written into land and stone, reflecting decisions about whose lives are protected and whose are exposed. They carry the rhythms of life, the laughter, whispers, and daring dreams of those within, insisting quietly on futures yet imagined. These acts of living – of inhabiting, creating, and dreaming – are themselves forms of resistance to the structures that would annihilate them. Their walls testify to those who built, dwelled, or were barred from entering. Every building is a manifestation of power: Some reveal it brutally and overtly, as in prisons, border checkpoints, or military outposts; others encode it more quietly, in the spaces of the everyday.

Architecture is never only about material form. It organizes environments, governs behavior, influences atmospheres and inscribes hierarchies, even as it can also nurture relations, provide refuge, and hold the daring possibilities of imagination and dreaming. Buildings both reflect and enforce the uneven distribution of life, yet they are also grounds where persistence, improvisation, and collective care emerge. Buildings both embody and reproduce the social and political orders that bring them into being. It is both the scene of devastation and the ground on which life insists. Our work begins from this entanglement: To trace how power is inscribed in space, to dwell with its ruins, and to imagine how worlds might still be made otherwise.

The Forest

Forests, as such, hardly exist anymore. What we are shown are often tree plantations, monocultures designed to serve industrial timelines rather than life's cycles. Declared nature reserves, forests are regulated in ways that rarely consider who else lives there: Indigenous peoples, animals, fungi, or spirits. Displacement and extraction go hand in hand, furnishing

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our furniture, building materials, metals for construction, and the critical minerals used in batteries and electronics here in Europe, all while severing deep-rooted connections to land. The forest embodies a site of both refuge and resistance, as well as colonial extraction and environmental brutality. It is a scarred archive of loss, but also a dense and layered network of entanglement, aliveness, and endurance.

What does it mean for us as spatial planners to view the forest not merely as a resource and dead material, but as a living, »vibrant matter« (Bennett 2020). Bennett asks how political responses to public issues might change if we were to take the vitality of non-human species seriously. How can a forest, a tree, be considered not only as a resource, but also as an equal actor? How do we protect the forest as a system of relations and stories, rather than just a resource? The precedent-setting case of *Los Cedros* in Ecuador, in which a cloud forest was recognized as a legal subject by the Constitutional Court as a means of protection against a mining project, could set the tone.

The European City

The word »city« originates from the Latin civitas, which means citizenship or state. But who can have citizenship in the city? Who defines what citizenship is? According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a citizen is defined as »a member of a state« and a citizenship is the »status of being a citizen« or »a membership in a community.« But how does one become a »member,« especially when that membership is constantly denied or even revoked, and when officially granted, it can be entirely stripped away? This exclusion »has been enduring throughout the history of citizenship: [Enslaved people], women, colonial subjects, guest workers, legal aliens, [illegalized] immigrants, refugees – all have been identified as noncitizens at one point in the past, and some continue to be so in the present.« (Akcan 2020:337)

Thus, people are categorized into citizens and non-citizens, restricting or denying their access to spaces in the city. Akcan highlights how race intersects with citizenship, noting that even when racialized people in European cities have formal citizenship, they are marked as non-citizens through racism and racialized assumptions (cf. Akcan 2020). This is echoed in the words of the activist Biplab Basu (1951–2024) from KOP (Campaign Against Racist Police Violence) during a conversation on police violence in November 2023. He roughly stated, »It doesn't matter if you possess citizenship as a

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racialized person. The police ultimately determine which passport you end up with.« (Basu 2023, author's translation)

Being part of the »state/city« is not only about having this »membership,« but also about how this »member« looks and is being read. European cities become spaces where border-like controls are integrated into everyday life. At the airport, in deportation centers, through pushbacks in the mountains, in temporary shelters for permanent use, in immigration offices, in Heimantministerien, in sublease agreements, in return flight tickets as advertising posters for election campaigns, at the turnstile of public swimming pools, or at Hermannplatz during an »aleatory« police check. All these spaces serve as an everyday reminder that »no, you don't belong here.« These structures create *hostile environments* (Pezzani 2020) for those who fall outside the created norm. Does only the citizen have the right to the city?

We often shift coloniality to the former or still-colonized territories. City and Migration Researcher Noa K. Ha argues that, instead of attributing the problems of inequality within European cities to migration and a supposedly failed integration, the coloniality within Europe's borders should be more acknowledged (cf. Ha 2017).

Whether here or there, it is still clear that, imposed as a blueprint for the establishment of cities in contested and colonized territories, the European city serves as a model that many aspire to emulate in some way. However, following Fanon's words in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965), particularly in chapter 6, the model of Europe – and here, the European city – is one that should be overturned.

> »So, my [spatial planners], how is it that we do not understand that we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe[an city]?
>
> Come, then, comrades [fellow planners] the European [city] game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe.
>
> Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that [it] has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and [it] is running headlong into the abyss; we would do well to avoid it with all possible speed.« (Fanon 1963 [1961]: 312)

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The Sea

The souls swimming in the sea have been witnesses to centuries of violence. Brutality inflicted on bodies that were once forcibly taken on ships to build the wealth of *white* nations. Nations that are now sought by others, on boats that sink into the sea. With 10,659 tons of weight, 93.44 meters long, and 27.43 meters wide, *Bibby Stockholm* was built in 1976 by a Dutch company and converted in 1992 into an accommodation barge (cf. Bibby Maritime 2020). A boat that has been contracted by the UK Government to house people seeking asylum at Portland Port. According to the UK Refugee Council (2023), its owner, the company Bibby Marine, has historic ties to the slave trade (cf. UK Refugee Council 2023; cf. Andrews/White/Kerins 2024). The sea bears witness to the brutal cramming of people, once vessels for enslavement, now prisons on water for refugees seeking to enter Fortress Europe. As Hartman (2008) reminds us, the afterlives of slavery are not confined to the past. They persist in the spatial, social, and structural forms that continue to constrain Black and marginalized bodies. Architectures on water, like Bibby Stockholm, extend the logic of containment and control across centuries.

It is said that all water is connected. The water in our bodies that we exhale and that becomes one with the environment around us, the clouds which then, in the form of rain, drip down and flow into the rivers, and the water that flows into the rivers, and the seas. The sea, the ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, and the *Black Atlantic*, as described by Paul Gilroy, have been shaped by the violence stemming from the enslavement of Black bodies and the transatlantic slave trade. Yet, it can also be understood as a transnational and transcultural space, functioning not only as a border but also as a space of connection for the Black Diaspora (Gilroy 1993). We could consider the sea as a space that was and is not only a witness to coloniality but also a space that has been, and continues to be, subjected to colonial negotiations. Renisa Mawani describes in her Book *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire* (2018) how international law did not emerge in European cities or along colonial borders, but rather on ships during imperial struggles at sea.

> »All the dead who sail our waters, we will not forget them.« (The Truth in Exile – Road to Peace 2025, author's translation).[7]

7 Sentence extracted from a textile in the exhibition *The Truth in Exile – Road to Peace* (Berlin 2025). The exhibition was created through various workshops with people from the

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The Third Space

We build on the ideas of those who came before us and wrote extensively about how spatial understanding can be conceived. Not as something closed or fixed, but as something fluid that can extend beyond geographical boundaries, spanning across dreams, memories, and experiences. Space, as something constantly in flux, emerges through the friction and encounters of diverse experiences and perspectives, opening up new spaces, spaces of possibility. These are spaces that, as Homi Bhabha taught us, allow processes to unfold precisely where difference exists (Bhabha 1994:1). Spaces that are produced in the in-between and provide a »terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself« (Bhabha 1994:2). These are spaces that challenge binary constructions, which structure the way our world is built.

Borderspace, as author Gloria E. Anzaldúa has taught us, is thought from the border, from the in-between. By studying and learning from the US/Mexican border, as well as from the intersection of being a lesbian, Chicana, and woman of color, she lands on the concept of *Nepantla*, a word from Nahuatl meaning »to stand in the middle.« For her, it is both a psychological and emotional space, a creative space that, from the painful border experience, can give birth to new things. Liminal beings, or *Nepantleras*, the people that inhabit Nepantla are people who, from their perspective, develop practices that allow them to navigate this border space (Anzaldúa 2015). They develop practices of creativity and care, resistance and resilience. Translated into the city, this border space – or third space – becomes a space of possibility that can respond to issues of spatial justice (Soja 2010).

> »What if we start from the space of difference rather than add difference?« (Boys 2020)

Building on Boys' provocation to start from the space of difference, we can extend the idea of third space into the realm of imagination. Speculative fiction becomes one such space, where the boundaries of identity, power, and possibility are not only observed but actively reconfigured. Speculative

Colombian exile community in Germany, addressing the war and enforced disappearances. In the rivers, the bodies of murdered individuals are often found in Colombia.

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fiction, as theorists like Donna Haraway (2016) and Kodwo Eshun (1998) suggest, can also be understood as a third space. By imagining worlds beyond the constraints of the present, it becomes a site of in-betweenness where established norms, hierarchies, and material realities can be questioned and reconfigured. In these imagined spaces, identities, relations, and power structures are not fixed but open to experimentation, offering a laboratory for thinking and practicing alternative futures. Authors like Octavia Butler (1993) demonstrate how speculative fiction can cultivate new ways of understanding difference, power, and community, transforming the narrative of the possible and creating imaginative terrains for marginalized perspectives. Reading or writing speculative fiction is, therefore, an act of inhabiting a border space.

The Sky

For millennia, the sky has been a site of wonder, connection, and guidance. The stars illuminated the paths of peoples across deserts and seas, while the moon, in her phases, taught of cycles, renewal, and time. In the creation story of the *Haudenosaunee*, Skywoman descends from Skyworld, carrying seeds of life in her hands, a gift she offers to the earth below. Her story teaches that the cosmos is not an empty expanse but a living, relational web where reciprocity and care bind all beings together, reminding us of the responsibilities that come with receiving such gifts. Yet, the sky is also inscribed with histories of domination. The language of »decolonizing Mars,« so casually repeated in media, echoes the same extractive logics that continue to scar earthly territories during colonial expansions, extending ambitions of possession and exploitation into the celestial realm. What does it mean to claim the heavens while the violent legacies of colonial conquest remain unresolved here on Earth?

Airspace, far from being a passive or neutral expanse, is shaped by histories of control and exclusion. Borders drawn through aviation treaties, satellite paths, and militarized drone operations mirror the colonial partitioning of land, turning the sky into another contested domain. Airports, often mislabeled as »non-places,« are deeply politicized spaces, entangled with histories of surveillance, migration, and global inequality. As Sinthujan Varatharajah, in an interview with Deutschlandfunk in 2022 observed, colonial histories persist in aviation routes: Lufthansa's flights to Namibia,

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Spanish airlines' links to Latin America, and the militarization of airspace through drones and satellites. (Varatharajah 2022). These infrastructures do not simply organize movement. They assert control, dictate who can traverse the skies, and render others surveilled, excluded, or constrained. Where once people looked up and dreamed of the stars, many now hear drones overhead – an unrelenting sound that seeps into the body, producing constant fear and exhaustion. The sky becomes a reminder that it is not free, that we are not free. Yet in our longing, we reach toward a sky that can once again inspire wonder.

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