

# Revolutionary Intellect

## A Conversation on Becoming and Unbecoming Intellectual

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In this contribution, we, Paloma and Cara, explore the idea of intellectuality as friends and intellectual partners. In doing so, we are deliberately moving in a non-conventional format of knowledge production: we engage in a conversation that is based on our biographies and situated knowledges, a conversation that illustrates how power and knowledge are interwoven in our own lives. This contribution is based on four conversations we shared with one another. These four conversations are mirrored by the sections of this piece: Institutionalization of Intellect, Sexualization and Intellectuality, possibilities to reclaim intellectuality, and our very own attempt to subvert the notion of intellectuality: considering menstruation as intellect.

Our investigation thus moves through the entanglements of theoretical perspective, political exploration and personal reflection. We propose the autobiographically orientated conversation amongst friends as a mode to make epistemic violence visible, to name it, to survive it, to resist it.

This politically searching conversation took place over the course of six weeks and is also one of the modes of our friendship in general. Like Fred Moten, we too believe that “study is what you do with other people.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, our friendship is study and here we share small parts of both this study and our friendship.

### 1. Institutionalization of Intellect

#### 1.1 Existing in institutional spaces

**Cara:** I would be interested to know what perceptions of our abilities, intellectual or otherwise, shaped our upbringing. What did we believe about ourselves and our

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1 More, Fred/Harney, Stefano: *The Undercommons*, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson 2013, 110.

thinking and what was projected onto us by others? Perhaps we could go on a brief time travel?

**Paloma:** That is an interesting question. Early on my parents taught me that it was important to assert yourself (as a Black child) in a school or educational context; that requires you to be able to write and speak and thus become visible. Being aware of the power of language, they would encourage us to develop a versatile vocabulary. Precisely because neither of them had studied or completed any formal professional training. For them there was this constant need to prove that a lack of academic qualifications did not equate to being incapable of intellectual (or intelligent) thought and action. Furthermore, we were also perceived as a migrant extended family and thus directly labeled as precarious and deficient by *white* supremacist society. After we returned to Germany from Cameroon, when I was about two and a half years old, my father stopped speaking French<sup>2</sup> with us. He feared that our German would deteriorate if he were to raise us bilingually. This was an attitude (and myth) that he had internalized due to his own pressure to conform and assimilate into German society. Being exposed to demeaning stereotypes, prejudices and racisms about Black children or children of color in general, it felt like an urgency to become this eloquent, high-achieving persona in order to be acknowledged and taken seriously in this system. I wanted to embody the ‘perfect’ counter-image to these external narratives that ascribed precarity, impulsiveness, non-conformity and laziness to Black children. I therefore felt pressured to perform an institutionalized, normative and rather non-resistant form of intellectuality – and discipline – in order to protect myself from being treated like an unpleasant ‘caricature’.<sup>3</sup>

**Cara:** Perhaps what you describe also implies a subversive reversal of roles since ideas of intellectuality and academic success have been usurped and claimed by dominant social groups to such a large extent: and there you were claiming them for yourself. Both because you had to and because you could. . .

When I was in school, I often felt the conformist pressures of the school system. I think even before I knew myself to be autistic, I did sense that this institution must be governed by a thing not at all my mode: neurotypicality.

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2 It never occurred to my father to teach us his native tongue, Mədm̩ba. The devaluation of indigenous languages by the former colonial regime continues to impact the way diasporic communities relate to their vernaculars, in particular when considering bilingual parenting.

3 When I speak of a ‘caricature’, I refer to the distorted and stereotypical images and assumptions that are imposed on Black children by white supremacist society. Every Black child or child of color should have the right to be loud, impulsive or underperforming without experiencing immediate devaluation and pathologizing; a devaluation that is often universalized in the case of marginalized groups because the Black child or child of color is likely to be forced into the role of a representative of *all* Black children.

I regularly moved in ways disruptive to these structures – often inadvertently, sometimes also intentionally. These disruptions of mine were made out of an entanglement of both inability and unwillingness to conform. I believe that my ability to exist in this educational system while moving disruptively through it was possible due to *white* privilege to a large extent.

**Paloma:** How did your perceptions of your intellectuality change throughout your schooling?

**Cara:** The uncertainty as to whether I would be able to graduate affected my self-image in terms of whether I could perceive myself as intelligent or intellectual. I remember that I attempted to delink the notion of intelligence/intellectuality from the institution of the school in order to develop a self-image that was not primarily attached to this degree. But I also remember that I did not really manage this delinking at the time. I was also (both implicitly and explicitly) considered ‘stupid’ because I struggled with the school system and also with the admission to the A-levels. Looking back on it, I feel like the school system confronted me with my neurodivergence in that it made me feel like *I was diverging from I-don't-know-what*. This is certainly no coincidence, because schools confront you with particular norms of thinking and speaking and you often have to comply or at least you try and then very possibly there is a lot of shame when you fail. And also, very possibly there are accusations connected to ‘your diverging’: I remember being deemed deviant, scheming, even evil by some teachers regularly.

How one can and does relate to these norms set by educational systems is shaped by complex structures of privilege and marginalization.

My relation to my own intellectuality was highly shaped by the institution of the school. While simultaneously there were very playful modes of intellectuality in my life: Like you, I too was committed to being creative in the realm of language. That was one of my places to play, it still is. Growing up, these playful engagements with writing and reading felt very ‘non-institutional’ to me. However, looking back on it I believe that the association between the written word and intellectuality is still a highly institutionalized concept, even an institution itself.

## 1.2 Discipline

**Paloma:** I would like to talk about discipline. It is a crucial topic for me because nowadays I often refuse to or ‘fail’ at being disciplined, especially in intellectual processes, when I am intentionally or subconsciously seeking distraction – particularly

in an academic context. I often find it difficult to function consistently and to work through the tasks expected of me rigorously, following a specific scheme.<sup>4</sup>

**Cara:** With any form of creative or intellectual work, I often wonder if the idea of discipline is actually fitting. I feel that there is a very linear understanding of productivity in this notion; as though you can always function in roughly the same way. I feel that the notion of discipline is misleading, misconstrued. This idea that you can somehow achieve anything through discipline alone, or that this is always the recipe for every kind of situation is highly absurd. Simultaneously, I do understand why people (have to) adopt this as a principle for themselves to hold on to sometimes.

**Paloma:** You are right about that. I can also understand that there is an existential urgency to it, especially for people who experience discrimination and/or marginalization. If you belong to a less privileged community or ‘class’, where climbing the social ladder and gaining visibility becomes your life’s work, you might need to adopt this notion and movement of working your way up with ‘iron discipline’.

Discipline can be incredibly rewarding when exercised carefully. I grew up with this credo myself, but it led to me feeling burnt out at an early age. And I do not think that discipline always suffices to achieve social or economic advancement in the end; political and economic factors, questions of accessibility and privilege are not considered at all in this notion. This is quite reminiscent of the “American dream,” a hegemonic, perhaps colonial idea of productivity that must always be (monetarily) exploitable.<sup>5</sup>

**Cara:** To me, this idea of discipline also seems to resonate with a “masculine-coded” rigor. It presupposes the exclusion of emotions: all these structures urging you to do, to produce, to not feel, but to *do*. This notion of intellectuality so centered around allegedly unemotional productivity seems to me to move in modes very capitalist

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4 For theoretical exploration of the notion of discipline that is closely linked to our discussion see Chamayou, Grégoire: *The Ungovernable Society. A Genealogy of Authoritarian Liberalism*, Cambridge 2021. For theory and activist practices exploring linearity and Western clock time as forms of colonial power see the work of Rasheedah Phillips, for example: Phillips, Rasheedah: *Black Quantum Futurism. Theory & Practice*, Philadelphia 2021.

5 References regarding the aestheticization of smart women in popular culture: Baghat, Pragma: *The Burden of Beauty. Female Nerds in Pop Culture are Still not Free*, in: *Smashboard.org*, <https://smashboard.org/the-burden-of-beauty-female-nerds-in-pop-culture-are-still-not-free/> (02/02/2022); Matoon D'Amore, Laura (ed.): *Smart Chicks on Screen. Representing Women's Intellect in Film and Television*, Lanham 2014.

and very masculine coded.<sup>6</sup> Emotions are initially excluded in favor of some kind of efficiency that is supposed to ‘take you somewhere’ – wherever that may be. . .

**Paloma:** Yes. . . there can be an internalized harshness that primarily serves others: an employer, an industry. That reminds me of a ‘great old saying’ that I often had to hear in relationships or work contexts: “Diamonds are made under pressure!”

**Cara:** I hate that! You have diamonds and they are pressed very hard and then polished. But it puzzles me that there is any attempt to apply this to people. . .

**Paloma:** “Just do it!”<sup>7</sup>, another popular slogan. I have heard it several times now and I can acknowledge its merits; at least I know how important and helpful it is to find a starting point in creative or existential processes, yet this phrase is quite reductive. I think that even finding a starting point cannot always happen ‘just like that’ depending on your life situation, on your mental and/or physical constitution, on social conditions, infrastructures and your positionality within that, – or it is at least extremely difficult and exhausting.

## To summarize

Calls to discipline and calls to function in institutional spaces both share that they create an exclusive form of normativity: to be existent within traditional notions of intellectuality is to function within the idea of linearity and within institutional spaces and structures, governed by whiteness, neurotypicality, and masculinity.

## 2. Sexualization of Intellectuality, Intellectualization of Sexualization

**Cara:** When it comes to the sexualization of intellectuality, I feel reminded of a situation you told me about in a previous conversation we had: you were speaking and

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6 For reflections on the call to discipline and its linkage to masculine socialization see Sagar, Jack: *Why are Young Men Obsessed with Discipline?*, in: *Oxford Political Review* (16/08/2020) <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2020/08/16/why-are-young-men-obsessed-with-discipline/> (14/04/2024).

7 In 2015 US-American actor Shia LaBeouf went viral with his satirical motivational speech “Just Do It!”. Originally written by CSM art student Joshua Parker, who intended it as a mockery of the corporate health and fitness industry, the video became an actual source of motivation and call to productivity and discipline for many of its recipients (see comments section below the video) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXsQAXx\\_aoo&ab\\_channel=MotivaShi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXsQAXx_aoo&ab_channel=MotivaShi) (4/4/2024).

got interrupted with the words “You’re so intelligent!”. I find this scene so emblematic of situations in which our intellectuality is not seen as a world of its own, a logic, a force – but perhaps simply as another reason to desire you or to find you attractive. Sometimes this may also reflect a certain hetero cis-male self-image: wanting to have a partner who they can classify as intellectual. And this intellectuality of the partner is not primarily seen as something intrinsic and vibrant, but is subject to the man’s authority of interpretation. Not infrequently, such self-image includes the dimension of class: that one’s partner should facilitate one’s own ‘class advancement’ or ‘class preservation’.

**Paloma:** I also had to think about this incident. It was clearly not an intellectual exchange at eye level. And it was not an act of attentive listening either, but rather of looking at me while I spoke; perhaps this also included a certain emphasis on the physicality of speaking – a particular attention to the lips and hands which also implied the sexualization of those very body parts.

However, I also had to think about how I experienced a devaluation of my intellectuality in my school days, when I was labeled “asexual,” “unexciting,” and “unattractive” *because* I was a good student.

**Cara:** That seems quite familiar and very typical to me; this binary of only being classified as either smart or feminine.

**Paloma:** That leads me to the figure of the muse; or other narratives about the *intelligent*, usually “*normatively beautiful*” woman<sup>8</sup>, or a woman who is considered unconventionally beautiful *because* of her intellect. I think there is a historical and pop cultural dimension to this figure of *the clever woman*.<sup>9</sup> But this cleverness simply exists for the male gaze and becomes valuable primarily or only through said gaze. That is how I felt in the situation we were just talking about. He was facing me in his position of a 60-year-old artist and kept staring at me. I also felt like I was *being made* into his muse; as though I merely existed for his inspiration and was speaking primarily for this purpose.<sup>10</sup>

8 When referring to ‘woman’ we refer to a socio-political concept; to a societal role. With ‘woman’ we speak to all whose lives are shaped by being marked as *woman*. For theoretical reflections on the usage of ‘woman’ see Young, Iris: Gender as Seriality, in: Signs 19 (1994) 3, 713–738.

9 References regarding the aestheticization of smart women in popular culture: Baghat: The Burden of Beauty; D’Amore: Smart Chicks on Screen.

10 We want to point out two specific examples that can be illustrative of the ambivalence of the figure of the muse: In an interview with the Screendaily, titled “‘Parallel Mothers’ star Penélope Cruz on her intense working relationship with Pedro Almodóvar” Penélope Cruz discusses her ambivalent relationship with filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar, who considers her

**Cara:** I think this figure of the muse is of high importance in this context. The idea of a muse reveals this dominance that is exercised over intellectuality by those perceived as women: this dynamic through which these intellectualities are only allowed to exist in reference to men.

I also believe that with this comes an intellectualization of certain forms of sexualization and dominance: certain forms of sexualization, even abuse are considered beautiful, intellectual, and the assaultiveness of a situation is overlooked or euphemized as part of an intellectual, artistic process. One example of this is the historicity of men writing (about) women: these texts often appear complimentary but actually they impose *his* gaze on *her* and she is portrayed as valuable only in reference to him. She and her value only exist as something he created.<sup>11</sup> I believe this kind of writing is alive and well even today: it is often part of stalking as a form of patriarchal violence: symbolizing that when women are stalked by men they become *his object*.<sup>12</sup>

**Paloma:** I agree with you. I am also reminded of the way some designers sexualize and patronize their models, or about some director's obsessions with their star actresses. I am certain that the figure of the muse still exists. Perhaps nowadays the phenomenon is subtler, because due to fear of criticism and reputational damage the industry is more cautious and perhaps also a little more sensitized than 10 years ago. But in my opinion, the basic character and narrative still exist – most definitely behind the scenes, and also moving through everyday lives and through the everydayness of (patriarchal) violence.

## To summarize

Sexualization and intellectuality are connected in (at least) two ways: historically as well as contemporarily, they are manifested in the form of an 'intellectualization' of

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his muse. In the *taz* – article entitled “Missbrauch in der Modebranche: Die ungunen alten Zeiten” designer Wolfgang Joop's interview is discussed where he romanticised sexual violence against models and framed this form of violence as an essential “part of the artistic world.”

- 11 The literary format of “Minnesang” is a prominent example that showcases the historicity of this kind of writing: in “Minnesängen” women are praised by men. These women tend to get intensively idealized in these poems – but only in their role as an object for *him*; as something making *him* happy, appealing to *his* gaze, bettering *his* life.
- 12 I encountered this exact form of writing *about* women when I was being stalked, and other women-survivors of stalking recount very similar experiences: Donna Freitas discusses her experience of being stalked in her memoir *Consent*, also focusing on the role that his writing about her played in the stalking. I write about my story in *Liebe, sagt er* – recounting very similar events and thoughts as Freitas.

sexualization and assault. This is a specific form of trivialization of patriarchal orders, acts, and violences.

There are also historical and contemporary forms of sexualization of intellectuality: modes in which a woman's intellectuality is solely moderated and acknowledged through a male gaze.

### 3. Reclaiming Intellectuality

**Cara:** Do you remember the first time you perceived yourself as intellectual or smart?

**Paloma:** I am trying to remember if there was any such pivotal moment. I think I had a first sense of my own intellectuality when I learned to read at age 4 or 5. I thought that this would unlock other worlds for me; worlds that had preceded me or were in the process of becoming. At the same time, I knew that society and the educational system expected this from me and I thought: Yes, I've got this now! It was definitely a major experience. Yet it is interesting that, at the time, I associated intellectuality so strongly with language and writing; especially with reading certain books that also promised a meta-level or intellectual relevance – perhaps because they had a philosophical or political impetus or simply because there was something 'serious' about them. I also dealt with slavery, racism and colonial trauma early on in my literary explorations. There was a lot of severity and melancholy, and that felt 'mature' and 'monumental' at the same time: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) or *Anna Karenina* (1878) of them were such big, canonized names – Milan Kundera, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King amongst others. Black authors such as Noah Sow (*Deutschland Schwarz-Weiß*, 2008) and May Ayim (*Farbe bekennen*, 1986) also had a significant influence on my thinking as a teenager. However, since anti-racist literature/research and its corresponding discourses were not given any space in the classroom, I found it difficult to perceive knowledge productions with such proximity to my own biography and experiences as 'adequate' intellectual content in *white* spaces. In fact, such discussions were even brutally devalued by my classmates and teachers, deemed too "emotional" and not "universal" enough.

**Cara:** Yes, this makes a lot of sense: this devaluing of anti-racist and anti-colonial intellectualities as 'emotional'...

I can relate to growing up with a lot of canonic notions on what counts as 'intellectual literature', and only realizing much later the white and male dominance in 'the canon'.

I relate to your perspective – that there was this identification with reading and language; that learning to read and being able to read at an early age was such a big deal. In general, I identified with language and storytelling at an early age. For me,

this practice was often detached from the written word and involved telling stories orally. It turned into writing later. . .

**Paloma:** Interestingly, I immediately feel reminded that as a child I also defined my intellectuality by this dreamful desire to become a novelist. I was also extremely passionate about singing, drawing, playing and dancing. It was a whole world of its own where I could pursue my fantasies and thoughts freely. I even considered artistic or physical expression to be forms of intellectuality, certainly also because I was privileged enough to have parents who encouraged our creative interests and sought out community spaces in which we could express ourselves in these ways. I am convinced that intellectuality is always a question of needs, one's own positionality, socialization, expectations and access (privileges, marginalizations). However, I think it is reductive and presumptuous to assume that people are only intellectual or intelligent if they can write, read, speak or express themselves creatively. I think it is important that we become more sensitive towards different modes of understanding, of expression, of exploration, of study and of interaction without falling back into hierarchies and categorizations. To me, intellectuality is directly linked to situated knowledges, to informal, non-institutionalized activities, and the ability to perceive oneself in relation to one's environment.

**Cara:** I find it striking how we both described and related ourselves to writing and language just now: The predominance of writing and language is evident in both of our experiences as a structure that also exhibits a hegemonic dimension. Still, neither of us spoke of intellectuality as a competition or instrument of gaining authority over others, which queers the conventional association of intellectuality and power. Instead, we both described how we created and inhabited our own worlds – partly through playfulness in written and verbal modes . . .

**Paloma:** . . . as well as playfulness and world-making through modes that involve our bodies, whether it is dance, music, love making, cooking or any other form of sensual or bodily knowledge creation.

## To summarize

Attempts to *reclaim intellectuality* engage with (im-)possibilities to react to and exist within notions of intellectuality that are exclusive. Attempts to reclaim intellectuality give rise to practices subverting conventional spaces and notions as well as to creations of spaces and concepts of intellectuality that do not rely on traditional parameters of what such *intellectuality* is and can be.

#### 4. Menstruation as Intellectuality

**Cara:** With this last one of our conversations we wanted to commit to sketching a notion of *menstruation as intellectuality*.

**Paloma:** Yes! We want to move through this claim and sketch it out to form one example of how intellectuality might become re-defined, subverted, different to its white and masculine modes.

**Cara:** Yes! I believe what originally sparked our interest here is to consider how both the notion of intellectuality and the notion of menstruation can undergo changes, subversions when there is an account of menstruation as a mode of intellectuality, as an event with epistemic texture and dimension.

**Paloma:** We want to form a sketch of such an account together: a) to form an example of reclaiming, redefining what intellectuality means, b) to form an invitation to engage with this deliberately unfinished sketch, with this beginning of an account. How do we want to start?

**Cara:** I feel like asking: does the fact that you are menstruating right now change anything about your comfort in this conversation we are sharing right now?

**Paloma:** It certainly does. Before we started our conversation, I was worried that I would not be a great conversation partner today. I was afraid that my current state would restrict my ability to think and speak 'properly'. But I have to admit, the opposite is the case. I feel surprisingly clear and comfortable talking to you. During my menstruation, certain topics, vulnerabilities, questions and insecurities become much louder and more explicit – they move through me with particular urgency. This can be positive and negative. Sometimes I make important decisions during this particular time, which then accelerate turning points in my life.

**Cara:** Yes! Certain questions and topics impose themselves with a different, a particular force.

**Paloma:** Totally! There is a need to listen to your body, to explore yourself, that is created through distinctly intense sensations. I think this experience *can* be enriching to some extent, but also quite painful and straining. At times I am incredibly inspired to write during menstruation. Then it is not about producing something that is valuable for a particular institution, it is perhaps more about the writing itself, about accessing my own feelings and a certain physical and emotional exhaustion. This intensity of feelings can inspire me to find words for certain matters.

However, I do not intend to romanticize menstruation as such. Of course, this creativity could also be encouraged by the circumstance that one can be *forced* to slow down during menstruation and thus devote oneself to other topics and processes – provided that the menstruation coincides with a day off. Menstruations that are physically and/or mentally very distressing also relate to questions of privilege and socio-economic positioning in particular: Can I take a day off without expecting existential consequences? Or am I forced to work, or – if this is physically impossible – pushed into a further precarization of my life situation?

Until recently, I had to deal with extreme menstrual symptoms myself, which significantly reduced my quality of life. So, my experience of menstruation was very different at that time.

**Cara:** It is really important that you addressed this! I also don't see menstruation as a homogeneous phenomenon here, but rather as one that forms and shapes many different realities.

**Paloma:** And, we firmly distance ourselves from trans-exclusive forms of feminism that connect the notion of menstruation to the notion of womanhood in order to exclude trans and non-binary people. For us, menstruation is not a 'marker of womanhood' or of any gender for that matter.

**Cara:** Absolutely. We are trying to queer intellectuality and make the epistemic dimensions of menstruation visible. Many valorizations of menstruation fall back on stereotypical and biologicistic images of women: for example, by valorizing menstruation because it enables motherhood. That is not our point. We want to explore menstruation in its epistemic dimension: we are interested to ask ourselves what it does to our thinking, knowledge, writing and intellectuality.

**Paloma:** Exactly! And for me, the effect is oftentimes a certain intrusiveness, that creates an urge to find expression.

**Cara:** At times, I even experience a sheer necessity to write, to express myself. It is an intellectuality that does not reproduce this institutional productivity. The cycle as an image and constitution also represents a sort of counter-concept to a capitalist linearity that aims to produce robotic-like constancy. The rhythmicity of a cycle is completely different, more like waves.

**Paloma:** Which brings me to the idea of menstruation as resistance, in that it can urge us to *exit*; from work contexts, from certain spaces and expectations. However, the act of quitting or leaving often requires a certain privilege. And yet, regardless of

whether such an 'exit' is possible, our existence perhaps demands it and that alone contains a dimension of resistance.

**Cara:** I can relate to this, because we do not necessarily 'leave' voluntarily, it can be extremely painful. And that is closely connected to processes of exclusion: I can conform to certain norms less or not at all while I am menstruating. For example, it affects my relation to speaking: the physical act of speaking usually happens very effortlessly, almost automatic. When I menstruate, however, the act of speaking suddenly becomes perceptible to me in its physicality. I can literally feel the physical act of speaking – forming words and expressing them through sound. I then often find it more difficult to speak in structured sentences or even to speak verbally at all. It feels like a change of perspective on language and speaking; that also contains knowledge: for example, about the relevance of speaking and language in our world, about the supremacy of these forms of expression, or about my speaking and what it actually is and means.

**Paloma:** I know that, too. One might inhabit a physicality that is different from other phases of one's cycle.

**Cara:** True. I would like to talk about blood and bleeding. What do you think?

**Paloma:** Alright, what do you have in mind?

**Cara:** To me, this confrontation with my own menstrual blood also appears like a space of learning and research that you are exposed to. You have to make so many decisions while encountering your blood: How do I absorb it? (How) Do I want to touch it? These are all research questions, I believe.

**Paloma:** I think that is a beautiful thought and describes pretty much how I feel right now. I had to really examine my bleeding because a few weeks ago I had an unusual spotting that preceded my period. Your words also reminded me of the moments when large lumps of tissue leave my body; that is a very specific, oftentimes extremely satisfying, sometimes even comical, or at other times discomforting experience and feeling. Usually these lumps look like little creatures to me. They too are something to consider, to study. Especially this almost ironic simultaneity of attending everyday or professional life with its tasks and obligations, for example a job interview, while your body releases bloody creatures. It strikes me because it *still* requires so much precaution, improvisation and discipline from me *not* to be distracted, distressed or amused by it.

**Cara:** That is so exciting to hear, because I have very different bodily experiences with menstruation. When I bleed everything is very fluid and this flow and fluidity affects me a lot. Sometimes I also have the feeling that I read differently – as if I was flowing into a story or a world of thoughts. There just seems to be this rhythm of fluidity that feels to me like it has bearings on my endeavors of study. For a long time, I did not realize how different menstrual blood is for different people – it was often presented as this homogeneous, universal phenomenon, even though that is not true at all. For example, I do not encounter creatures in my menstrual blood like you do.

**Paloma:** I agree. These are very distinct and unique worlds of experience.

**Cara:** I believe that if menstruation was to be recognized as a form of intellectuality – perhaps an intellectuality of its own, one that changes what it means to be intellectual – menstruation would be much more valued and even more visible. And intellectuality in turn would have a very different meaning. Above all, it would not be linear and linked to a certain performance.

**Paloma:** This idea of ‘menstruation as intellectuality’ actually prompts me to go deeper into questioning to what extent my menstruation changes how I perceive and value my own intellectuality, especially in institutionalized intellectual spaces.

## To summarize

*Menstruation as intellectuality* is a catchphrase that we choose as a starting point for an associative reclaiming of intellectuality. We believe that menstruation generates many forms of knowledge, research and expression and both requires and makes logics and spaces. Examples of the epistemic texture to menstruation are a) particular urgencies that can be experienced in menstruation, b) particular changes that form knowledges on the structures in place or c) the ways one might be thrown into studying one’s body in and because of menstruation.

## 5. This was: our conversation on becoming and unbecoming intellectual

For this contribution we moved through four conversations, and shared fragments of each of these conversations here. First, we explored how we grew up with notions of intellectuality deeply governed by academic institutions, that reflect the hegemonic structures in Germany and other Western countries. Second, we felt and thought our way through some of the entanglements of sexuality and intellectuality that we have come to witness in our own lives. Third, we explored possibilities and spaces we have found to be helpful in reclaiming, redefining, subverting what

it means to be *intellectual*. Fourth, we sketched out our own attempt to redefine intellectuality in committing to a consideration of menstruation as intellectuality.

All four of these conversations are only shared in small parts here. We aim for this contribution to be a space that facilitates curiosity and helps give rise to unruly intellects. We believe committing to incompleteness, to sketches, to autobiographies, and intuitions is part of such a movement. With this, we give thanks to every soul that engaged with this piece, with these chunks of our friendship, with these bits and pieces of our continuous conversations.