

Editors Editorial

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As we study the foundations of what we think we know, we might ask: What do we truly know? Mussolini's regime banned not only words but five entire letters of the alphabet. In 2018, both "immortality" and "migration" were blocked indefinitely in web searches in China. How many letters or words, or even numbers, have been banned in the past? And among those, how many were never remembered again?

In this issue of *e-flux journal*, Nikolay Smirnov examines the historical left-wing, Marxist splinter of Eurasianism and its merits in the face of contemporary neo-Eurasianist figures who have turned it towards nativist and right-wing agendas. Also in this issue, Khaled Saghieh, in the first essay of a series guest-edited by Marwa Arsanios, recounts the postwar intellectual debates of the 1990s in Beirut as a war of and on memory. A whole city can shift. The memory of what was, or what wasn't, becomes an intellectual battlefield.

A line of dialogue from Kristen Alvanson's feverish yet focused sci-fi memoir *XYZT*, excerpted in this issue, illustrates as follows: "I can tell you what I see, if you'd like." "What are my injuries?" "Not that kind of seeing." The person asking about injuries has just been spared from the incomparable red heat of the Dasht-e Lut Desert by a blue Jinn, who dropped the traveler near snowy Sabalan mountain, elsewhere in Iran. Throughout *XYZT*, via modes technological and magical, persons are able to trade places between the US and Iran, seeing as the other sees. Eyes must be strained to open further toward what's come before, to where individual or group practitioners of shared artistic projects and shared cultural pursuits currently stand and where they plan to go together.

Geographer Kathryn Yusoff takes the needed step of reexamining the points of origin of the current human era, especially when considered from the history and position of blackness and indigeneity. Bear in mind that the star charts and landmarks calcified in dry stone were etched by people whose views narrowed to accommodate and compliment the stories of those who looked and fought like them. As Yusoff points out, the grammar used in describing geographies of conquest and contact to this day is violently insufficient: "As a descriptive project in the grammar of geology, [the *Orbis*] spike naturalizes European colonial relations and their epistemological and

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ecological transformations.” But, she continues, “The Anthropocene cannot dust itself clean from the inventory of which it was made ... The shift of grammar cannot keep the rawness out.”

Ana Hoffner ex-Prvulovic peers through orientalist paintings, seeing depicted and out-of-sight structures and realities of slavery therein through refreshed lenses of queerness. She points out that in institutional, art-historical contexts where paintings by the likes of Jean-Leon Gérôme are displayed, there is no language provided to deal with the sexual encounters and possibilities either shown or avoided. Moving through time, Hoffner ex-Prvulovic offers new language around the twentieth-century work of Claude Cahun and twenty-first-century photographer Zanele Muholi, in productive contrast to “the paranoid subject of the present, obsessed with its own fear of eradication and with the global catastrophe that from its point of view has to come.”

We begin to more fully comprehend, via an array of illustrative anecdotes written by Yazan Khalili, the double and triple linguistic and practical binds for artists who are particularly engaged in political work. In Khalili’s text, there is a short saga about a young would-be Muslim asking Mohammad whether God could create a boulder that is impossible for that same creator to lift. In Khalili’s telling, the story’s conclusion is this: “When a power structure has to face itself, when it is confronted with its own language, it enters into a dilemma that it cannot solve. The only way to escape the dilemma it to take away the possibility of posing the question in the first place.”

It seems fair to assume that now represents the far endpoint of many previously held logics developed over the last four-hundred-some years, yet the navigational tools used to move forward have not all accepted this fact. In the case of Günther Anders’s essay in this issue, written in 1959, the urgent task becomes to reformulate our understanding of time, of communism, of eschatology. How might we alter our sedimented ways of looking and speaking in order to arrive at the future?

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