

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan  
Wood, Anton Vidokle  
**Editorial**

e-flux journal #52 — february 2014 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
Editorial

01/02

Neoliberalism began as the idea that economic rationality could be applied as a model of governance in place of political ideology. No more authoritarianism. Just the rational calculation of people's needs and wants. But now we realize that needs and wants are not rational. They are crazy. And they take place on such vastly different scales that, without any political idea to stabilize desires and render them accountable – even simply in the sense of being legible and comprehensible – we are faced with nothing but irrationality as a governing order. Even logistical mechanisms are only the infrastructural bracketing of a rational order that is actually and profoundly not.

The source of this irrationality is neither capital nor the desire for it. It becomes more and more clear that capital is only a medium for something else which is far more complex. Economists got something fundamentally wrong: they assumed that markets and economic flows were self-regulating. But in getting it wrong, they unleashed a force behind abstract capital that totally unraveled the terms upon which the industrial notion of economy had been operating.

As former modes of governance prove insufficient, new territories – and therefore new economies – open up. We used to have two modes of citizenship, and they were pegged to either soil or blood: *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*. This is what backed colonization and this is what backed the Westphalian model. But that model is gone. The conditions for it will never be there again. Blood and soil fail us, constantly and in turn. Our bloodlines are bad. They are tainted, they are mixed, and they are filthy. Our genealogy is untraceable. Our soil is over-plowed. It is a ghost town, barren and unlovable. And yet, the collapse of the idea of citizenship backed by a blood standard has given way to new modes of citizenship: based in profit, in disaster, or in some impossible conflation of both. We buy passports in Malta. We wash up on the shores of Lampedusa. Hopefully. We are contract labor living in luxury slum compounds in the Gulf. We are aspiring climate refugees. We are Polish plumbers dancing at Berghain.

But what forms of allegiance does all of this assume – to what kind of territory? We have known it all along: the boundaries of our new states are shaped by language. Language is what makes things true by making words spin right. Language is what makes things convincing by making them sound familiar. Language is what settles in and goes to work at fundamental points of ambiguity between symbolic control and material resource. Between command and flow. Between the military and the internet. Between you and your

devices; between states. Your passport comes out of a laser printer.

When symbolic calculation and semiotic abstraction mix with real power, they unleash an entirely new way of understanding the limits of both. Not everything is relative. Some things just don't flow. Some things don't translate; some things are heavy. The whole point of symbolic games is to mediate these absolute limits. When a crime causes irreparable damage, you need a symbolic equivalence to make up the difference. You can't always return stolen goods. You can't stop islands in the South Pacific from going underwater. You can't bring back the dead. You need to make up for it; you need reparations that spin right. It is less about solving problems than about finding the symbolic resources to move on. Even if financial and computational abstraction regimes convert laws and borders into commodities and psychotic projections of desire, it does not necessarily mean that these things were so stable to begin with. And maybe the role of institutions was always to find the language to mask that very fact, to inscribe authority so deeply that symbols can be absolutely believed. Which is to say, maybe we aren't so crazy after all.

x