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# **Fracturing Politics**

## **(or, How to Avoid the Tacit Reproduction of Modern/Colonial Ontologies in Critical Thought)**

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### **Abstract**

This article engages in an experiment that aims to push critical/post-structuralist thought beyond its comfort zone. Despite its commitment to critiquing modern, liberal ontologies, the article claims that these same ontologies are often tacitly reproduced, resulting in a failure to grasp contemporary structures and histories of violence and domination. The article brings into conversation five selected critical scholars from a range of theoretical approaches and disciplines who explore the potential of the notion of ‘fracture’ for that purpose. The conversation revolves around political struggles at various sites – migrant struggles in Europe, decolonial struggles in Mexico, workers and peasant struggles in Colombia – in order to pinpoint how these struggles ‘fracture’ or ‘crack’ modern political frames in ways that neither reproduce them, nor lead to mere moments of disruption in otherwise smoothly functioning governmental regimes. Nor does such ‘fracturing’ entail the constructing of a ‘complete’ or ‘coherent’ vision of a politics to come. Instead, we detail the incoherent, tentative and multiple character of frames and practices of thought in struggle that nevertheless produce an (albeit open and contested) ‘whole’.

### **Key words**

critical thought, post-structuralism, modernity/coloniality, struggle/resistance, ontology

## Introduction

*Ansems de Vries:* This collective discussion brings together five selected scholars who share a concern about the way much critical/post-structuralist thought tends to tacitly reproduce modern, liberal ontologies. In this article we use the notion of ‘fracture’ in the context of political struggles as a focal point for bringing our work and critique into conversation. We all argue, in one way or another, that active ontological (re-)construction is an important task for critical thought, and that the ‘fracturing’ of politics therefore needs more ontological investment and deliberation than particularly post-structuralist critique admits. Methodologically, our conversation takes things ‘through the middle’ – *au milieu*: by focusing on political struggles at various sites we develop a conversation that includes both resonating conceptions of the challenge of ‘fracturing’ modern/colonial politics, and diverging notions of its implications in theory and practice. We start off the conversation by outlining how post-structuralist critique questions yet struggles to fracture modern framings, continuing to fall back on familiar ontological assumptions.

*Coleman/Rosenow:* Most post-structuralist studies are driven by the ethos to not assimilate politics to fixed modern ontologies; framing it instead as fractured, momentary and evental, and thereby giving rise to ‘works of dissident thought’ (Ashley and Walker 1990, 367). But regardless of this ethos, ‘dissident’ investigations still often end (and indeed begin) with claims about wider social relations that remain tied to the very ontologies that scholars set out to critique. We have made this point elsewhere with regard to post-structuralist studies of ‘security’ (Coleman and Rosenow 2016b). Despite concerns to interrogate the signifying practices within which ideas of ‘security’ take on meaning, despite widening the scope of analysis to investigate a wide array of securitizing practices, the object of analysis still tends to be circumscribed by the assumed universality of traditional modern tropes such as survival, threat, and distinctions between friends and enemies. Modern ontologies of what political reality is ‘about’ continue to shape what kind of practices catch the attention of the critical scholar. For example, modern/liberal political theory based on notions of liberty vs. security is critiqued but the ontology it sustains is simultaneously upheld by regarding liberal practices that are not explicitly designated as being about security (e.g. in the economic realm) as the ‘neutral’ (as in not being object of analysis) background against which security practices appear (Ibid.). Meanwhile, as Meera Sabaratnam points out (with regard to critical analyses of liberal peacebuilding), the ongoing focus on Western discourses reinforces the idea that agency is located on the side of the West; and that the way the West self-represents is indeed ‘the terrain of the political’ (Sabaratnam 2013, 264).

*Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli:* Another prime example of an investment in fracturing that ultimately reproduces modern political ontologies can be found in critical migration studies literature. This scholarship places migration in direct relation or opposition to key modern political concepts such as Citizenship, the Nation, Security and the Economy. Nevertheless, this challenge to liberal conceptions of order and subjectivity is often undermined through a return to a liberal ontology of subjecthood based around

citizenship. Thus, for instance, a growing body of literature sheds light on the transformative and unsettling effects of migrant movements on citizenship, particularly the disruptive qualities of migrants' political claims and struggles (McNevin 2011; Nyers 2003; Isin 2002, 2012). Yet, despite the important methodological gesture that consists in "mobilizing politics" (Squire 2010) through migration, this literature tends to assume citizenship as the yardstick for judging the politicality of migrant practices, even if the mainstream conception of citizenship is challenged. As Nyers and Rygiel (2012, 12) put it: 'The language of citizenship is still that which best encapsulates the language of political subjectivity'. Migrants, rather than threatening the nation state, should be regarded as 'active citizens' who contribute to reinvigorating citizenship in a time of crisis.

Although these authors are invested in methodologically de-nationalising citizenship, we argue that they fall back on a modern understanding of the term, as politics is still 'about' citizens, sovereignty and nation states, rather than struggles for mobility as such. To disrupt this, the 'mobilization' of politics requires a further push. Such fracturing involves a shift of focus to struggles over mobility that cannot be easily contained within the political order and language of citizenship, instead bringing to light what migration *opens up* (Tazzioli 2015). This entails, in addition, a shift in the object of analysis: from migrants, subjects and citizens within a wider order of sovereignty and nation-states to struggles for mobility in a heterogenous world that is simultaneously ordering and disordering (Ansems de Vries 2014). This focus on struggles does, however, not entail losing sight of the practices employed to manage and contain this disruptive mobility. Given the close interrelation between practices of resistance, struggle, management and control, it is important to retrace the political and historical conditions of possibility through which, for instance, the production of migrant 'illegality' and unequal mobilities have been naturalised. As Coleman/Rosenow suggest, fracturing politics involves an ethos as well: a pursuit of dissident thought that offers no one fixed line or argument or frame of analysis that builds up to a coherent 'whole', whether the state, sovereignty or a broadened notion of citizenship, as further discussed below.

Disrupting modern ontologies is a matter of engaging struggles that might, or might not, add up to something more coherent; and, of opening the frame of analysis beyond modern knowledge production. Conceptually, this can be done through the creation of new concepts and 'transversal' connections with other fields of thought and practice. One of us has developed the notion of the *milieu* to describe an approach to thought that starts 'in the middle' (Ansems de Vries 2014): it opens to relationality and mobility rather than starting with (fixed) orders, frames and individual subjects; and, it opens to transversality rather than seeking coherence through solid ontological and epistemological foundations. In addition, going 'through the middle' in this sense implies acknowledgement of the close relationality of ordering and disordering forces: the continuous ungrounding *and* grounding of modern frames and practices of thought. We are looking for 'cracks' that are disruptive and transformative of, whilst *simultaneously* drawing on, modern ontologies. This (re)constructive ontological approach connects the interventions that form our conversation, although we develop diverging conceptions of

the kinds of mo(ve)ments of transformation and the particular ‘cracks’ and ‘breaks’ that occur.

**Vázquez:** Coleman/Rosenow’s point that the terrain of politics tends to be understood in terms of Western self-representations is important because of the extent to which critical scholarship tends to reinforce this territoriality. I would like to suggest that what is being fractured is the sense of the political *within* modernity, but this fracturing is not challenging the monopoly of modernity as the overarching terrain of the political. This is important to understanding how and why liberal social ontologies tend to be reproduced. The dominant political thought of Western modernity remains confined to modernity’s epistemic territory, producing and policing its borders (Vázquez 2011). It has rendered other expressions of the political marginal or irrelevant. To take seriously the question of coloniality is to question modernity’s monopoly over the parameters of recognition of the political. For me, the challenge is therefore one of overcoming the modern/colonial framework, not merely disrupting or fracturing it.

We can trace back this relation between modernity and its alterity in the efforts of classical political philosophy to demarcate modernity as the territory of political life. In the founding works of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau modernity is established in contradistinction to the ‘state of nature’ (pure violence or pure innocence), which is placed outside the political. If we situate this political thought in its geo-historical context it becomes evident that they were not simply speaking of a figurative state of nature, they were thinking in relation to a colonial world that was set outside the political, as uncivilized, savage, or pure nature: ‘the colonial is the state of nature where civil society’s institutions have no place’ (Santos 2014, 121). The birth of the modern notions of the political, of the social contract, of the state was coeval with the colonial negation of other political worlds. This absencing has been the condition of possibility for modernity as overarching territory of the political. Without coloniality, modernity would not be able to uphold its claim and manifestation as a total world-historical reality.

**Coleman/Rosenow:** The failure to engage with coloniality is reproduced within more recent critical theory, in the form of the ‘internal critique of modernity’ found in the work of scholars like Foucault, Derrida, or Adorno and Horkheimer. As Gurinder K. Bhambra points out, a critical (re-)writing of histories (or, in her case, sociologies) can only leave behind ‘singular standpoint[s]’ when it reconstructs modernity ‘inclusive of its colonial histories and their consequences.’ (Bhambra 2014, 4, 13) Otherwise, as Vázquez notes above and elsewhere, critiques of modernity remain intra-modern: they manage to ‘divest[...] modernity’s economy of truth from its claim to universality by making it socially and historically constituted’, but without examining coloniality or engaging the violence of erasure of those epistemic terrains beyond the borders (Vázquez 2011, 39-40).

Secondly, when we narrow down to post-structuralist thought (inspired by – although not always true to – the thought of Foucault and Derrida in particular), it is often a *particularly limited* set of violences that stand to be uncovered and critiqued. Critique does

not merely remain internal to modernity, it becomes self-referential. Self-referentiality is the unintended outcome of the desire to fracture dominant epistemic frames of traditional political theory without constructing alternative overarching, general frames in their place. But if the question of generality is elided altogether, there is a danger of unintentionally recentring what post-structuralist scholars aimed to decentre in the first place. In IR, for example, Richard Ashley and R.B.J. Walker continue to reference and centre ‘sovereignty’ as the decisive modern problematic (see e.g. Ashley and Walker 1990). And in contemporary analyses of security problematics, post-structuralists remain centred on notions of power that emphasise an understanding of ‘security’ as manifestations of protection from, or the exercise of, direct violence and constraint, as opposed to for example the invisible violences of the ‘normality’ of political economy which invests wider technologies of pacification and dispossession (cf. Coleman and Rosenow 2016b, 203-4).

### **Milieu 1 (Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli): Spatiality, (In)visibility and Mobility**

*Ansems de Vries:* Drawing on the notion of the milieu, and going ‘through the middle’ in our combined engagement with political struggles and ontological disruption and (re)construction, we now turn to the first site of struggle: migrant mobility across Europe. We focus specifically on how these political struggles for the right to come and go challenge modern conceptions of spatiality and visibility whilst also drawing attention to the complex relationality of migrants’ transformative struggles and migration management practices that seek to regulate movement. Fracturing thus emerges as a dislocation of rather than a radical break from modernity; as a challenge to presumptions of coherence and fixed grounds without losing sight of relations of power.

*Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli:* For us, speaking of fracturing implies a disruption of the binaries that characterise modern understandings of politics without reproducing this same epistemic frame in the process. It means challenging, on the one hand, the modern pre-occupation with coherence and completeness and, on the other, the post-structuralist shift towards fracturing that remains grounded in concepts created to describe a complete and universal world. This ‘complete’ world omits an acknowledgement, for instance, of the colonial past and present that has shaped it, as Coleman/Rosenow and Vázquez point out. Yet, this is not a call to do away with binary oppositions altogether; it might be the urge to overcome binaries that helps to reproduce them (cf. Ansems de Vries and Rosenow 2015). Describing a world that is completely ‘fractured’ or without ‘coherence’ equally risks invisibilising structures of violence and domination. As mentioned below, seeing migrants primarily as ‘nomadic’ subjects who deterritorialise dominant concepts and spaces of politics, and as harbingers of a new radical politics of mobility, fails to heed practices and structures of racism that many migrants encounter daily.

Rather, our approach of taking things ‘through the middle’ emphasizes the complex relationality of governance and resistance. To speak of complexity in this way is not to

say that we cannot make sense of it all, but rather that the same practices might operate as governance and resistance simultaneously, without denying the transformative potential of particular mo(ve)ments of resistance (Ansems de Vries 2014; Ansems de Vries 2016). Hence, we must be attentive to the disruptive and reproductive effects of particular practices, without presuming, in the abstract, the naturalness, fixity and/or ‘coming’ end of modern framings. Our interest here is how political struggles disrupt, feed into *and* strategically re-appropriate modern ontologies. We will discuss this in relation to the key modern concepts of space and visibility; more precisely, migrant struggles that are not ‘conventional’ claims to territory or recognition as political subjects, but claims to what Fernandez and Olsen have called ‘the right to come and go’ (Fernandez and Olson 2011, 415).

### *Struggles over (European) Political Space*

Migration scholars influenced by (post-)Marxist and post-structuralist thought have challenged the identification of politics with territory by arguing that the border is not a point or a line but a technique of governance, a method. Thus, Europe has become a borderland (Balibar 2009) as bordering techniques are both dispersed throughout and pushed beyond national and EU territories. This reconceptualization goes hand-in-hand with a critique of the way in which a migration “crisis” has been declared in Europe, whereby migration itself is presented as the source of a security and/or humanitarian crisis (e.g. Ansems de Vries, Carrera and Guild 2016; Lutterbeck 2006; Pallister-Wilkins 2015). Instead, they argue, the crisis is one of the border regime, which prevents people from moving on.

Whilst the shift from borders and security (as a reality) to *techniques* of bordering and securitization opens a space for reconceptualizing mobility, ultimately, the focus remains on that which it seeks to question, namely notions of borders, security and crisis, as Coleman/Rosenow have already pointed out with respect to security. This risks, on the one hand, (re)producing a world that is too coherent, and too much an effect of techniques of governance. A better way into this problematic is to move away from the notion of crisis altogether, focusing instead on migrant struggles for a way to move and a place to stay (De Genova and Tazzioli 2016). On the other hand, the focus on Europe as the space of “crisis”, cuts off a broader geography and history of mobility and politics that is both external to and intricately part of “Europe”.

Our approach consists of starting with struggles (Coleman 2013, 171; 2015a; 2015b), those practices of mobility pursued by migrants in their efforts to move on, in the face of migration management practices. From this perspective, migration challenges what and where Europe is. Yet, this is not to say that all migration generates spatial upheaval: the EU border regime operates as much outside its official territory as it does within and functions on the basis of illegalizing migration – e.g. by blocking off legal routes into the EU. Hence, unauthorized migrations are not disruptive *per se*. Nonetheless, some have argued that political claims by those not regarded as political actors – i.e. non-citizens – challenge what politics can be. By contrast, we suggest that the dislocation of politics

requires unauthorized mobilities that challenge not only who can be a political actor but also the political terms of sovereign territory and citizenship. For instance, large groups of migrants unexpectedly turned up at the Greek-Macedonian border to exit the EU in order to re-enter it further north. Defying the the Dublin III Regulation, which stipulates that migrants must claim asylum in the place of first arrival in the EU – thus reinforcing the idea of sovereign territory – these migrants did not seek to make a claim to a territory other than to move through. Their claim was not one of asylum or citizenship, or at least not yet, but rather one of mobility regardless of EU border and asylum regulations.

As the next example also illustrates, this challenges the idea that to be political, one must either hold or make an (unauthorized) claim to some form of citizenship within a particular territory. In the summer of 2015, migrants held up at the Italian-French border organised a protest on the cliffs of Ventimiglia, which lasted for weeks and was marked by placards reading ‘We won’t go back. We need to pass.’ Their collective refusal to claim asylum in Italy displaced the spatial capture of “Dublin”, which disallowed them a choice of where to move and stay. They argued for the right to humanitarian protection without becoming trapped in the (spatial) frames of national borders and rights of citizenship. The protest turned the borderzone between the Italian city of Ventimiglia and the French city of Mentone into a space of struggle that moved beyond these two states. In some sense, “Europe” as such became the referent of their claims.

These kinds of political struggles and spaces go unnoticed in scholarship that – implicitly or explicitly – continues to fall back on sovereignty, territory and citizenship as anchor points of politics. In addition, other political struggles over “Europe”, and their colonial resonances, also remain invisible, such as the EU’s enactment of borders outside its official territory. The focus on struggles therefore exposes, firstly, at a practical level, that the EU’s approach has been one of neutralizing, recapturing and pre-empting mobilities both inside and outside of Europe with significant effects on migrants’ lives. It also shows that the EU’s often *ad hoc* responses equally provoke forms of fracturing in the sense that migrants’ spatial claims are an effect of, disrupt, and instigate the reinforcement of borders. Secondly, epistemically, these struggles expose a challenge to the modern concept of political space.

### *(In)visibility as a Tool for Mobility*

Being seen and recognized is a constitutive aspect of being political in the modern sense. Post-structuralist scholars such as Judith Butler (2015, 9) reproduce this image by describing movements against precariousness as the exercise of ‘a plural and performative right to appear’. This raises the questions: what does making visible leave out of sight; and, what other tactics of invisibility are at play? In addition, it provokes the question of whether this economy of visibility and invisibility is the object of politics *per se*. The migrant struggles described here suggest that visibility and invisibility might be used tactically, not for the purpose of being seen but of mobility. That is, visibility is not just a visual matter of appearance and recognition but also a question of knowledge production, that is, of producing and/or disrupting a particular sense of reality.



In his early work on discipline, Foucault famously wrote that ‘visibility is a trap’ (Foucault 1991, 200). It is by being seen, or presuming one is seen, by an all-seeing power that remains invisible, that disciplinary power operates. However, the disciplinary gaze is only one way of making sense of the question of visibility in Foucault’s work (Tazzioli and Walters 2016). His later work describes governance as an effort of making reality knowable, and to make something visible as knowledge is to make it governable (Foucault 2007, 20, 109). This can also take the form of producing something as ungovernable or of making it unseen, or of seeking to remain off the radar of knowledge production. Visibility and invisibility can be tactics of governance as well as resistance, and the two are closely related (Ansems de Vries 2016).

Indeed, it has been suggested that governance and resistance are reversible (Gordon 1980, 256), as is illustrated by the rescue of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. If visibility makes some subjects exposable whilst it leaves other unseen, this can be ‘cunningly replayed by subjects’ (Tazzioli and Walters 2016). Migrants at sea, who mostly seek to remain undetected on their journeys towards Europe, re-appropriate the EU’s migration management preoccupation with making visible-knowable-governable through a form of ‘tactical visibility’. They demand to be seen and to be rescued at sea, thereby becoming objects not of security but of humanitarian concern. More than ‘reversibility’, the same practice of rescue constitutes governance and resistance simultaneously. Whilst the militarized border regime is not reversed, it is reappropriated for a moment and made to function for a different purpose. Moreover, (in)visibility as such is not the main political object, rather it functions as a tool in the struggle for mobility.

In this respect, fracturing can be seen as a dislocation of, more than a radical break from, the modern linking of politics and visibility. This is also illustrated by migrants in the so-called “jungle” in Calais who are caught up in and pursue various practices of (in)visibility, such as claims to be recognized as human beings (‘we are not animals’ is an often-heard chant). Yet, (in)visibility might also be a tool to become something other than a modern political subject, without adding up to a coherent alternative ‘vision’ of politics. In January 2016, French authorities evicted a 100-metre strip of the “jungle”. Whilst termed a ‘buffer zone’ and ‘no-man’s land’, the open space was clearly an area of control, giving police better visibility of the settlement and enabling intervention. However, the strip was soon creatively contested by becoming a ground for organized sports games for youngsters, who became kids playing in a field rather than security objects. Here, too, modern conceptions of spatiality and visibility are fractured – disrupted and transformed without being radically overcome.

These practices challenge the idea that the becoming visible of subjects is a political goal in itself. These struggles are not primarily about becoming visible, or about strategically replaying visibility and invisibility, but for the right to come and go, the freedom to move on. Recalling Rey Chow’s (Chow 2012) critique of any attempt to transpose and impose to the subalterns the capacity to speak as the yardstick of their political agency, we could similarly argue that instead of seeing in all migrant struggles the endeavor to become

visible, we should consider how spatiality, visibility and mobility are played out in those struggles. Moreover, it also opens up to a move in another direction, that of tracing migration “backward and forward” both geographically and historically, thus pushing “Europe” into confrontation with its colonial past and present.

### Conversation: Coloniality, Alterity, (In)Humanity

**Vázquez:** I agree that there is a politics at play in migration that is exceeding modernity's epistemic terrain of the political, which demands we engage with the question of coloniality. However, rather than focusing on how invisibility is mobilized strategically, I want to pick up on something Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli only mention in passing: that people migrating are invisible as political actors for the modern framework of citizenship and the state. In my view, the impossibility of recognizing them is due to their being placed outside of the political. Through the framing of 'the migrant', they are being vacuated from their trajectories and thus from the entanglement of their migration with their histories and their embodiment of coloniality. So we must ask how the western conception of the political has functioned to negate the possibility of the political to those who are marginalized, othered at its borders.

Alterity is a question of the first order for a decolonial politics, that is, a politics otherwise, a politics that disobeys and delinks from the framework of modernity. As María Lugones (2010) shows, the colonized were reduced to animality, placed outside 'sociability' and political life. The circulation of modern/colonial power was exercised directly through the bodies of the oppressed. Sartre puts it succinctly in the preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*: 'Colonial violence does not have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs, and to destroy their culture without giving them ours, we will brutalize them, turn them into brutes out of sheer physical fatigue' (Fanon 1963, 15). The enslaved, the plantation and hacienda workers, were utterly dehumanized, brutally placed outside of and the dominant notion of the political.

**Coleman/Rosenow:** We agree that it is necessary to put the question of alterity at the heart of our thinking about a different, decolonial politics. However, we would emphasize the importance of analyzing specific situations and conjunctures within which claims to alterity are made. Violent and differential ways of recognizing and allocating the humanity of others may in practice begin from the desire to defend alterity. For example, as Coleman argues in relation to the post-structuralist work of David Campbell (Coleman 2015b, 1062), calls for the defense of alterity often take the form of an immanent ethics: they are made in such indistinct terms that they are vulnerable to co-optation into the power-laden normative schemas through which alterity is recognized and defended in practice. Campbell is right to historicize the normative frameworks of liberal

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<sup>1</sup> Modified translation.

humanitarianism. However he is unable to pursue ethics that can (as Vázquez might put it) be 'de-linked' from the modern moral framework. Because he makes his claim in the abstract, the only way to 'evaluat[e] actual or potential practices of resistance' is 'in relation to the values and commitments they embody', assuming them to be 'automatically oppositional, critical, ethical' (Ibid., 1062). Accounts such as this slip readily into what Vázquez calls intra-modern critique. So for us the question arises: how we can think about a decolonial politics of struggle that is able to mobilize alterity without being reincorporated into dominant schemas for recognizing the humanity of abandoned or dispossessed others?

## **Milieu 2 (Vázquez): Towards a Politics of Relationality**

*Ansems de Vries:* The second site of struggle, Mexico, offers a more fundamental challenge by approaching fracturing politics as the need to push beyond the modern/colonial framework. In this decolonial take on fracturing as struggles about alterity, ontological (re)construction means engaging non-modern/colonial sources and knowledges, thereby opening the prospect of an alternative, relational conception of politics. The horizon of the political is extended to forms of relationality that always already include the community and the connection with the earth.

*Vázquez:* Coloniality as the negation of political life is at the core of the decolonial politics of struggle that have been ongoing for the last five hundred years. A genealogy of decolonial politics would show a tradition of struggle against modernity as the privileged political territory, against the coloniality that dictates a negation of the life-worlds, of the political life of the oppressed. As discussed, migrants' political struggles are situated at the borders of the political territory of modernity and are irreducible to acts of resistance that are simply seeking recognition or inclusion within the territory of modernity (Icaza and Vázquez 2013). However, in contrast to what Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli have emphasized, decolonial struggles fundamentally exceed modernity by being epistemically disobedient and by opening and practicing alternative horizons of political life. They exceed the frameworks of the state, of the individual agency of the citizen and the frameworks of international politics as sustained by nation-states, international institutions and corporations, as Coleman and Rosenow also emphasize elsewhere (Coleman and Rosenow 2016b, see also Coleman and Rosenow 2016a, Coleman 2015b). The decolonial option sees the emergence of the voices, the memories, the politics, the worlds of all those that have been subsumed, negated under the coloniality of the western project of civilization. As Fanon puts it in the vocabulary of his time: 'Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an obscene imitation, almost a caricature ... If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe' (Fanon 1963, 315).

### *Social Movements and Epistemic Disobedience*

The last three decades have witnessed in Abya Yala<sup>2</sup> (Latin America) the emergence of a vast array of social movements that redefine the political in their thought and practice. They give birth to alternative forms of political life: their practices stem from alternative geo-genealogies; their vocabularies, their notions of the political exceed and disobey modern western epistemologies (e.g. Escobar 2006; Santos 2014). In the thought of these struggles we find powerful ways and notions with which to practice and rethink the political. Their horizon of liberation is not confined by the logic of modernity, in other words they do not seek liberation solely through the state or the market or through modern frameworks of intelligibility (Icaza & Vazquez 2013).

The decolonial turn is the opening and the freedom from the thinking and the forms of living (economies-other, political theories-other), the cleansing of the coloniality of being and of knowledge; the de-linking from the spell of the rhetoric of modernity, from its imperial imaginary articulated in the rhetoric of democracy (Mignolo 2011, 48).

These reflections are a provocation to challenge the monopoly of modernity over the representation of the political. In a sense we need to go beyond the fragmentation of modernity as well as beyond its own internal logic of fragmentation in order for us to recognize the decolonial as political. Lugones helps us challenge the notion of fragmented politics as a notion subservient to the logic of domination, corresponding to the splitting of social groups and the separation of individuals into discreet entities. 'If the person is fragmented, it is because the society is itself fragmented into groups that are pure, homogeneous' (Lugones 2003, 141). Lugones invites us to think of 'non-fragmented multiplicities', that are not atomized into discrete categories, into hierarchical systems. These forms of the political are configuring a politics of multiplicity capable of recognizing how multiple oppressions are interlocked. This recognition is grounded in concrete embodied experiences of oppression. A politics of resistance and liberation can only act through a politics of coalition that goes against the grain of fragmentation and that challenges oppression as a condition of depoliticization, of being denied a political life. We are witnessing the emergence of plural subjectivities, of radical coalitional politics that advance alternative political vocabularies and practices.

### *Decolonial Politics of Relationality*

A decolonial politics, then, might be seen as the dilution of abstract political formations by a politics of location and embodied politics that is not contingent but rooted in the contextual and embodied experience of the modern/colonial divide. The mobilization of indigenous, *afrodescendientes*, peasants, women and youth are configuring 'struggles that are seeking to organize themselves as the powers of an alternative society, not-liberal, not-

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<sup>2</sup> Abya Yala is a Kuna (Panama) term which means "land in full maturity" and makes reference to the territory of the Americas. It is now being used widely by indigenous movements in what can be seen as a decolonial move to reclaim the right to name one's own territory.

statist and not-capitalist' (Escobar 2016). These decolonial struggles are enacting alternative forms of the political. They are non-modern in that they do not come from a western geo-genealogy of thought, and are not confined to modernity as the sole terrain of the political. We will talk here of two major trends within these relational politics: 'autonomia' (autonomy) and 'comunalidad' (communality).

Relational politics are emerging, not from the fragmentation of modern politics, but from the cracks of the modern/colonial system that announce the emergence of the decolonial. 'The cracks become the place and space from which action, militancy, resistance, insurgence, and transgression are advanced, where alliances are built, and the otherwise is invented, created, and constructed' (Walsh 2014). The cracks signal a radical departure from the modern/colonial framework, from a political shaped by individual notions of agency within institutional frameworks. 'The cracks as a place of a convocation, an "other" place that invites, calls together, and summons forth a place of unlearning and relearning "with," in, and through a pedagogy-politics-practice grounded in relation' (Walsh 2014).

'Autonomia' and 'comunalidad' are two prominent examples of alternative political configurations grounded in indigenous geo-genealogies that contest western modernity. Gustavo Esteva explains what the Zapatista notion of 'autonomia' entails.

Autonomy implies self-government, in which the authorities command by obeying. People don't delegate their power in representatives, but designate temporary authorities, which can be substituted at any moment and assume specific mandates and responsibilities. They are not professional politicians or bureaucrats, but ordinary men and women who perform temporarily functions of government. The distance between those governing and those governed vanishes. ... The Zapatista struggle for autonomy combines the freedom and capacity for self-determination with that of conceiving with other peoples and cultures ways of political and cultural communion (Esteva 2011).

In the Zapatista territories there is no possibility of conceiving the political as something that is separated from the people, as something that belongs to the 'institutions or the politicians'. Nobody is non-political; nobody is excluded from political life. The political is not a space for the production and reproduction of privilege. This political thought of the assembly (la asamblea) is the founding principle of a political life that upholds a notion of autonomy in which diversity is the ground for equality and relationality not for fragmentation and individuality. 'We are equal because we are different' they say.

The Zapatista notion of 'autonomia' is closely related to that of 'comunalidad', exercised by many other indigenous communities in Abya Yala, as it has been named in Oaxaca, Mexico. 'We are communality, the opposite of individuality; we are communal territory not private property; we are co-partaking not competition' (Martínez Luna 2010, 17). 'Comunalidad', within indigenous geo-genealogies of thought, displays a sense of the political that is not anthropocentric but understanding the human as always already in

relation with a broader human and non-human community, extending its relationality both in space as in time. '[W]hat emerges are truly relational worlds, where the communal is placed over the individual, the connection with the earth over the separation between humans and non-humans, and 'buen vivir' over the economy' (Escobar 2016).

We are witnessing the emergence of relational politics that are transgressing the dominant narratives of the west, challenging the political as that which negates alterity by upholding the separation between the human and the other, between the human and the earth. Modernity is being decolonized as privileged terrain of the political by a relational politics enacted by those who have been denied a place in the political, by those who have been reduced to animality through racialization and through the negation of sexual difference. The decolonization of the political includes the emergence of nature and more generally the earth as a non-anthropocentric political sphere. Here, the milieu, as a force in the middle, can help us think the political as embracing transversal connections between humans and the earth. This is a move beyond the fracturing of politics that concerns both the struggle against modernity/coloniality and the development of alternative politics.

### **Conversation: How Do We Think of Power?**

*Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli:* Vázquez has shown the importance of bringing the colonial to the forefront of the debate. His emphasis on local struggles resonates with our own approach. Interesting parallels could be drawn between decolonizing struggles in Latin America and migrant struggles at the borders of/across the EU in the ways in which they confront Europe with its colonial past and present. However, our concern is that conceiving of these struggles as overcoming modernity/coloniality risks romanticization. Whilst we are sympathetic to the idea of cracks and of a politics of relationality, we are less convinced by the notion of a 'radical departure from the modern/colonial framework'. The idea that everything that is decolonial is different from modernity, and therefore the expression of an alternative politics, risks setting up a new "vision" of a world in which forms of domination and violence become invisibilized.

This caution against romanticization, and the need to emphasize the entanglements of governance and resistance, applies as much to our own discussion as it does to Vázquez. That is to say, by highlighting migrants' struggles over mobility – to come and go, and to stay put – we are not suggesting that all movements, or migration as such, should be considered as struggles that challenge modern politics. We caution against romanticizing the migrant as a harbinger of a new politics. Many of the migrants who stay put in particular places across Europe do not do so as a political gesture – as a deliberate fracturing of politics – but because they are stranded as an effect of the imposition of borders, whether these are physical border fences or migration management policies that have rendered them 'illegal'. For instance, migrants who were finger printed under the Dublin regulations upon arrival in Italy or Greece but moved on nonetheless might get stranded when they are unable to gain legal status elsewhere in Europe. This is effectively

the case for people in the “jungle” in Calais, who refuse to claim asylum in France because their desired destination is the UK, yet who are stuck in a borderzone with little recourse to legal rights.

This does, however, not mean that the “jungle” is simply a space of abjection; rather, it is a milieu of governance-resistance: it is, *simultaneously*, a space of exclusion and refusal insofar as its very existence is a manifestation of migrants’ inability to cross the Channel; a place of passage where people come and go; a more permanent settlement where people get stuck; and, a space of autonomous politics, an active town “outside” of official frames of government. Yet, “outside” does imply being “completely independent from”: the autonomous politics of the “jungle” are in a sense both enabled and constrained by government/police control. In the spring of 2015, migrants residing in various places across Calais were pushed to a waste dump outside of town. Being discarded thus is precisely what allowed a more autonomous politics to appear. In the following months, the place developed into a working town of its own – a space of residence, passage, resistance and precarity.

This complexity of governance-resistance on the ground also raises questions regarding our own engagement with migrant struggles. It is important to be sensitive to these struggles and their (changing) context, without embracing them uncritically. At one level, the people living in this settlement, as well as those supporting them, are “against” the “jungle” as the fact of its existence is a manifestation of the violence of the border regime. Nonetheless, when the settlement became threatened with destruction, and in the face of daily violence by the French authorities, migrants, activists and humanitarian organizations alike mobilized to defend it, even if they did not want it to exist in the first place. In this shifting context, you find yourself arguing for-and-against the “jungle”: for better humanitarian standards and protection in and around the settlement *and* against its very existence. How to position oneself in a situation in which we are all involved in reproducing a space we think should not exist? As for its residents, after the destruction of a large residential area, the chant ‘No jungle! No jungle!’ is less often heard; more often, migrants tell researchers and activists ‘jungle good’, in resistance to the violence that both destroys the place and keeps it in existence.

**Coleman/Rosenow:** Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli draw attention to how autonomous forms of politics can emerge accidentally out of a governmental strategy that aims to suppress. They also point out how such autonomous politics remain the flip-side of a border management regime that primarily creates precarity. In other contexts autonomous forms of politics are even actively *promoted* by states in order to neutralize claims made upon them. For example, Charles Hale (2011) discusses how indigenous demands for autonomy have been respected by the Guatemalan state and territorial autonomy actively promoted with the use of World Bank funds as part of a reconfiguration of the governance of ‘empty spaces’ not of use to capital. Yet those indigenous communities who occupy land that is of use to capital – particularly mining interests – continue to be displaced and killed.

We agree that part of what is needed is to understand entanglements between governance and resistance, discipline and dissent (Coleman and Tucker 2011). It is at this point, however, that we want to raise questions to both our interlocutors. How, by approaching fractured politics through the lens of struggle, can we make sense of what is at stake in those struggles? Can we *limit* critical engagement with struggle to how practices of resistance of the worlds made through epistemic departure disrupt and call into question modern ontologies? Is it not also important to be able to say something more general about wider relations of modern/colonial power and violence? We agree with Vázquez that it is necessary to understand how decolonial struggles transcend and contest modern definitions of politics. However, we question whether or not it is sufficient to place *exclusive* emphasis upon relational politics as a (pure) decolonial politics. While we agree about the need to avoid romanticization, a great deal may be lost by over-emphasizing the complexity of governance/resistance: not only the possibility of radical alternatives but also any sense of wider power relations giving rise to struggle. Not just ‘what alternative vision of politics does this struggle embody’, but also ‘what are the specific dynamics of power that have given rise to our dispossession, our oppression, our erasure at this conjuncture’ are key question for actual human beings in struggle. Addressing these questions through the experience of oppression and struggle in practice very often leads even decolonial struggles to engage modern social theory and political economy alongside politics that are radically decolonial. Even the Zapatista movement has been profoundly influenced by a Marxist-related analysis of the material conditions of capitalist societies (cf. Morton 2002).

### **Milieu 3 (Coleman/Rosenow): Fracturing In/Through Experiments of Struggle**

*Ansems de Vries*: The third milieu is focused on making sense of wider relations of power *through* specific struggles; holding in tension the way these struggles fracture universalizing ontologies and frames while at the same time upholding some understanding of the ‘whole’. Based on the example of peasant mobilizations in Colombia and utilising the philosophy of science of Gaston Bachelard, what is developed is an ontology of fracture and generality that provides the ground for attending to political struggle as experiment.

*Coleman/Rosenow*: As Gayatri C. Spivak noted in her 2001 Oxford Amnesty Lecture, the subject-constitutive effect of the colonial violation implies that it can only ever be ‘renegotiated’, never undone (Spivak 2004, 524). Spivak’s emphasis upon class apartheid (Ibid., 530, 525) alerts us to lines of structural inequality within and between the struggles of social movements (in both North and South); inequalities that arise out of systemic violences of existing, historical structures of domination. How do we get at this systemic violence so as to better understand the stakes of struggle? On the one hand, awareness of the fundamental epistemic significance of coloniality as the underside of modernity demands that we question the potential for epistemic imperialism and co-optation arising from any attempt to fix the politics of struggle within a readymade framework. This applies not only to implicit liberal social ontologies but also to Foucault-inspired analyses



of fluid relations of power/resistance that are unable to capture more general dynamics of systemic and epistemic violence. Importantly, it also calls into question appeals to readymade Marxist frameworks for making sense of power and for giving form and voice to ‘the human’ (Coleman 2015a; 2015b; Coleman and Rosenow 2016a). On the other hand, however, we need to be equally attentive to how any attempt to evade the epistemic violence of modern ontology by identifying and fixing decolonial politics also comes from racialized and class-divided places of enunciation (see Suárez-Krabbe 2015). How do we make sense of wider relations of power without reinforcing traditional, universalizing ontologies? And how do we do so in a way that is not limited to intra-modern critique but open to thinking between and within the borders of epistemic terrains?

In order to conceptualize a way through this dilemma we draw on the engagement of one of us with peasant mobilizations in defence of ‘life’ and ‘territory’ in Colombia – known as *planes de vida* or ‘life plans’ (see Coleman, 2015a). These processes have drawn much inspiration from the Zapatistas in their attempts to constitute a horizontal structure of social organization, with a rotating leadership and an ongoing process of critique of internal power relations of dominance and of the dangers of reproducing logics of violence within the practice of struggle. This too, has been configured as a process of epistemic disobedience, encapsulated in the maxim that ‘before taking power, we have to avoid being taken by power’. The *planes de vida*, as one popular educator put it, ‘came out of our convergence in space time with indigenous communities’ and was ‘born in opposition to the concept of development’ (cited in Coleman 2015b, 266). The *planes de vida* are also a form of migrant politics in that many of those involved have been peasants reclaiming their land after being forcibly displaced by state and corporate violence perpetrated in pursuit of extractive and agroindustrial megaprojects. The ethos of the *planes de vida* is one of new beginnings (conceptually as well as in practical terms). ‘Life’ and ‘territory’ were invoked at the start as empty names, to be filled with content through discussion of what it means to people to live and remain in a territory (conceived not as mere land, in the sense of a geographical terrain, as property or as a commodity) but as already always inseparable from human life (Coleman 2015a, 1072; 2015b, 266; Coleman and Rosenow 2017).

Nevertheless, these struggles do not represent a radical departure from modern ontologies so much as a fracturing of their coherence, an opening up of cracks. An example can be found in their ambiguous stance toward law and the state. The state is conceived as an ‘enemy’, that which has brought repression and dispossession, but simultaneously as a party in conflict from which ‘all rights’ are demanded. While the emphasis on rights might appear to entrap resistance within a juridical framework in which demands are authorized by appeal to law, rights have been mobilized in ways that unsettle the coherence of rights talk. Contestation of impunity for systemic human rights violations highlights contradictions between the affirmation of universal rights and the negation of rights through development. This has sometimes been accompanied by explicit critique of how modern discourses of human rights define and allocate

humanness only to those recognizable within a colonial ontology (Coleman 2015a, 1070-2).

This fracturing of coherence is also at play in these movements' long processes of collective 'diagnosis' of the power relations that made living impossible, processes that have been inseparable from the task of filling 'life' and 'territory' with content:

This included analysis of how, for example, the violent repression and socioeconomic deprivation suffered was linked to agrarian counter-reform, to Colombia's pursuit of FDI in natural resources and to the country's membership of the WTO. Through links with other groups – peasants, trade unions, indigenous groups and *internacionalistas* – experiences of struggle elsewhere were shared in ways that animated this collective analysis. A sense of the whole, of the conjuncture, of what was resisted, what was defended, and of who 'we' were in resistance was emergent from the process of struggle. (Coleman 2015b, 266).

Despite an understanding of land and nature as inseparable from life, despite the influence of indigenous cosmovisions, despite the desire to contest and transcend conceptions of politics based upon a negation of the Other, Marxist theory is very much part of the inheritance of *planes de vida*. 'Marxist analysis was not, however, invoked as a coherent theoretical perspective – and still less as a blueprint' (Ibid.). Any sense of a coherent Marxist ontology shattered in the very processes of its appropriation within the experience of struggle. 'Marxist thinking was a baseline continuously thrown into the air, to collide with other strands of analysis, such as indigenous cosmologies and ... post-development thought' (Ibid.). It was inseparable from the construction of a vision of life with no 'name and number plate', except that it certainly was not an accommodation to the 'strategies of capital.' (Ibid., 267).

It is through consideration of the fractured and hybrid ontologies at play in struggles such as these that we can address the question of wider relations of power and order. The fracturing of coherence in struggle is often a consequence of the experience of struggle itself (Coleman 2015a; 2015b). In the actual practice of struggle, in encountering constellations of power and domination, frames of thought often shift and transform (cf. Coleman 2015b; Coleman and Rosenow 2016a; 2016b; 2017). As such, engagement with struggle often forces us to grapple with the dissonance between epistemic terrains (Coleman 2015b, 273). It demands a practice of critique willing to cross borders between terrains of thought. The gaps between dissonant terrains cannot be healed or bridged, but must be endured.

#### *An ontology of fracture and generality*

The question then arises as to whether or not we need a more fundamental understanding of the ground from which we can claim this possibility of holding fracture and generality in productive tension, of enduring gaps, while simultaneously refusing

betrayal of political worlds emergent from struggle. This may at first glance appear at odds with an ethos of fracture, as it again seems to steamroll a multiplicity of experiences and diverse epistemic frames in order to make them submit to a rigid understanding of the ‘whole’. However, as Anibal Quijano (2013, 31) has noted, ‘[i]t is not necessary ... to reject the whole idea of totality in order to divest oneself of the ideas and images with which it was elaborated within European colonial/modernity’. To appeal to the ‘whole’ is not necessarily to invoke ideas of a of a historically homogeneous totality or a hierarchical order with functional relations between its parts. Cultures outside ‘the West’, Quijano (Ibid.) underscores, routinely assume a perspective of totality in knowledge that acknowledges the irreducible, contradictory and heterogenous nature of reality. Such a view of totality refuses to suppress the idea of a Other constituted by difference, and does not imply the relegation of that Other to a position of inferiority.

It is this sort of irreducible, incoherent and fractured sense to the whole that we find in struggles such as the *planes de vida*. Such struggles do not, however, merely point us to a more heterogenous understanding of the totalities of social relations upon which the struggles of social movements are staked. In the very process of ‘diagnosising’ power relations through the experience of struggle a sense of ‘what matters’ is generated (‘what matters’ is intended here in both senses: both that which materializes as a relation of power and what is at stake in struggle). Struggle can be thought of as a sort of experimental engagement with power (Coleman 2015b, 276). Social movements may begin with particular – although not always coherent – ways of framing politics, but objects once admissible within the frame are displaced as struggle encounters repression and accommodation; experiences of the ‘cunningness’ of ‘power’ hitting back or incorporating oppositional practices.

It is through this notion of experiment that we want to think about how we might hold together a sense of the whole with an ethos of fracture. The idea of an experimental engagement with reality that unravels any neat distinction between subject and object, which forces us to recognize irreducibility and incomensurability, resonates with how science itself has turned away from objectivism and determinism (cf. Coleman 2015b, 272-8). The notion of wave-particle duality arising from Einstein’s work is a good example to illustrate this in practice. If you want to understand the multi-colored pattern of refracted light on a compact disc, you have to conceptualize light as a wave. If you want to make a photo-voltaic cell, you have to conceptualize light as a particle.<sup>3</sup>

After Einstein and quantum theory, science itself challenges the possibility of making an ontological and/or epistemological distinction between objects and subjects, reality and the concepts and categories that make sense of it, observers and the observed, being and transformation. Particles, for example, can only become ‘real’ entities in the process of being scientifically manipulated and producing an effect within the confines of a particular experiment. ‘If you can spray them they are real’, as Ian Hacking (1983, 22)

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Iden Coleman for this example.

famously put it with regard to proving the existence of fractional electric charges. In other words, reality can never be understood outside of us changing and fracturing it, which implies that it can never completely assimilate to any given theory with which we attempt that very change or experiment.

However, as philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard underscores, general theoretical understanding of reality *in its completeness* is vital for setting up an experiment in the first place. As Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli have pointed out, the need for completeness is a foundational feature of modern political ontologies. Bachelard, we argue, helps us to appreciate the significance of coherent understandings for the setting up of experiments, without giving these understandings universal status. Theory, Bachelard (2009, 28) argues, enters the experiment as a ‘preliminary protocol’ for framing the object of a question according to what we think we understand. The relationship of theory and object is a dialectical one – by which Bachelard does not mean a dialectics of opposition or contradiction. Instead, it is one in which theory and objects are ‘different aspects of the same thing’ (Chimisso 2008, 390). For Bachelard, dialectics is an immanent process: ‘facts’ are validated relationally in an interplay with theories that have been transformed into reference points, referring to one another ‘as in a play of echoes’ (Maniglier 2009, 23). Theoretical reference points simplify reality in order to bring to the fore, in the objects they generate, the world’s actual *complexity* (Williams 2005, 59-60). This allows the generation of ‘new’, complementary theories that, however, do not replace ‘old’ ones – instead, they add up to them, seeking a ‘completeness’ that is never achieved, that is never unified, and never able to outright contradict what has been before (Ibid.).

Bachelard had a problematic understanding of science as privileged terrain of ‘true’ knowledge production and the site of a public use of reason (cf. Chimisso 2008, 391). Nevertheless, reading Bachelard against himself, we suggest his understanding of experiment might (un)ground our ‘engagement in struggle’ approach. Frames of thought in struggle are often hybridized and shifting and, maybe in contrast to Bachelard’s thoughts on scientific theory, they are often multiple, incoherent and tentative. But general theories – such as Marxist theories discussed above – do come into play. They can be thought of in a manner akin Bachelard’s theories, as ‘echoing’ reference points. Theories allow for a certain simplification of social and political realities that then, *through* the process of practical engagement, bring about actual complexity. The reality that is experienced *in* the experiment of struggle fractures available frames, completing, but never unifying, our understanding of what (political and social) reality is all about.

### **Conversation: Moving beyond Modern Scientific Rationality?**

*Vázquez:* I welcome the introduction of Bachelard to the discussion. But I would like to suggest an alternative use of his oeuvre. Coleman/Rosenow put Bachelard on his head by using his philosophy of science to speak of politics. By contrast, I would like to invite a use of Bachelard’s poetics to think the question of thought in struggle as multiple, incoherent and tentative. I think Bachelard’s poetics can be of help to create a dialogue with a conception of decolonial struggles as radical breaks with the continuity and

certainty of the territory of modernity. In the introduction to his posthumous book 'Fragment d'une Poétique du Feu' (1988) Bachelard explains how he began thinking of a 'poetical ontology' while working with literary images. The poetic image allowed him to approach what he could not through the rationality of science. Particularly important for my own understanding of the decolonial is that the temporality of modern rationality, including scientific rationality, remains bound to the centrality of 'spatiality' and the negation of relational temporalities (Vazquez 2010; 2012a; 2012b). In the case of Bachelard, particularly his late work on poetics, allowed him to enter the thought of the unexpected, of what is in excess of the given. He speaks of the poetic as 'language' rather than as individual psychology and no longer privileges rationality over imagination as he has done in his earlier work. He says that to receive the poetical one has to give oneself to a 'kaleidoscopic consciousness' and recognize that life is not an object, that life is in excess of the determination of a 'being-there' (Bachelard 1988, 47). 'The Human being is a hive of beings'<sup>4</sup> (Ibid). This 'late' Bachelard shows us that the flaring of the poetic image pierces the modern certainties of rational coherence and calls on us to go beyond the parameters of scientific and conceptual thought.

*Ansems de Vries/Tazzioli:* Coleman/Rosenow's and Vazquez's reflections offer different 'grounds' or 'echoing' points for politics as experiment and struggle. These are points, or rather lines, that diverge – by shifting between science, arts and philosophy – and that resonate in the *milieu*, in their common concern with fracturing modern frameworks 'through the middle'. Theirs is a quest for completeness that remains open to transformation, both grounding and ungrounding, in an immanent 'play' of ontological, epistemic and 'on the ground' struggles and experiments. The question of thinking the 'whole' as multiplicity, irreducibility and incoherence is thus, in our mind, a question of the *milieu*: of establishing not so much a 'starting point' as a 'way in' by engaging and transforming already existing struggles and theories, and creating new grounds through their resonances, tensions and clashes.

For us, this is also a question of mobility that resonates with Henri Bergson's argument that modern Scientific Method fails to understand movement. Bergson distinguishes between the way in which modern science seeks to capture movement in moments, positions and states; and our lived duration, which is *becoming*, i.e. the creation of new forms. He argues that it is an illusion to think that one can construct 'the unstable by means of the stable, the moving by means of the immobile' (Bergson 2005, 171, 297; 1991, 191). As Deleuze puts it: 'one misses the movement because...one assumes that "all is given", whilst movement only occurs if the whole is neither given nor giveable' (Deleuze 1986, 7). In short, the effort to render movement visible and knowable by determining its ground, direction and end, and building up a coherent picture of the Whole, fails to understand mobility as the fracturing, disruptive and transformative struggles described in our conversation.

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<sup>4</sup> My translation.

Pushing beyond Bergson we could say that approaching struggles ‘through the middle’ means not knowing what may come, being open to the cracks, inconsistencies and transversal connections that disrupt our modern imagination, yet without losing sight of the histories and structures of violence that continue to shape and inform these struggles. It is a matter of developing ‘grounding’ or ‘echoing’ points and lines to make sense of and inform/transform struggles, and the wider relations of power in which they are embedded, whilst also allowing these struggles and experiments to create and transform our politics.

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