



King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.5699/modelangrevi.113.4.0811](https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.113.4.0811)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

McMurtry, A. (2018). Sea Journeys to Fortress Europe: Lyric Deterritorializations in Texts by Caroline Bergvall and José F.A. Oliver. *Modern Language Review*, 113(4), 812-846.
<https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.113.4.0811>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

1.

Recent figures released by the UN Refugee Agency show that in 2017 over 3000 people lost their lives at sea whilst attempting to penetrate ‘Fortress Europe.’² Maritime fatalities were estimated at over 5000 in 2016,³ over 3700 in 2015,⁴ and over 3500 in 2014, when the Mediterranean was ranked as the ‘deadliest sea in the world for migrants’ by the

¹ As well as the two anonymous reviewers for *MLR*, warm thanks are due to a number of readers who offered illuminating comments and criticism on drafts of this essay, foremost amongst whom Robert Weninger, Margaret Littler, and Patrick French. I am also very grateful to Caroline Bergvall and José F. A. Oliver for permission to reproduce their work, as well as to their respective publishers, Nightboat Books and Suhrkamp. An earlier, shorter version of my analysis of *Drift*, ‘Giving a Syntax to the Cry: Caroline Bergvall’s *Drift* (2014)’, was published in *Paragraph*, 41 (2018), 132-48. I thank the editors of *Paragraph* and Edinburgh University Press for their permission to reprint aspects of this material.

² UNHCR, ‘Europe Key Data 2017’, 2 March 2018, <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/62326>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

³ International Organization for Migration, ‘Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals Top 363,348 in 2016; Deaths at Sea 5,079’, 1 June 2017, <<https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-top-363348-2016-deaths-sea-5079>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁴ International Organization for Migration, ‘IOM Counts 3,771 Migrant Fatalities in Mediterranean in 2015’, 1 May 2016, <<https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

International Organization for Migration.⁵ More than 21,000 fatalities at the maritime borders of the European Union have been documented since 1988,⁶ figures that have rocketed since the recent conflicts in Libya and Syria. Yet despite significant policy and media attention and heightened search and rescue efforts over the past few years, the annual death toll continues to rise in the face of an alarming lack of information about where and how people die at sea, especially when compared with extensive border control data pertaining to the detention and deportation of migrants.⁷ The EU's external border control agency Frontex was established in 2005 and it has overseen 'the birth of sea operations' with initiatives like Joint Operation Triton that began following the cessation of Italy's Mare Nostrum coastguard operation in October 2014.⁸ In contrast to Mare Nostrum, which had an explicit search and rescue remit and covered an area of 70,000 square kilometres, Triton's focus is on border control and security in the

⁵ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko, *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost during Migration* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2014), p. 20
<https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fataljourneys_countingtheuncounted.pdf>
[accessed 7 March 2018].

⁶ Cf. the independent blog Fortress Europe by Gabriele Del Grande, one of the leading sources for the documentation of migrants' deaths within and at the borders of the EU,
<<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/p/la-strage.html>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁷ *Fatal Journeys*, ed. by Frank Laczko, 3 vols (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2014-2017), xi; *Fatal Journeys: Improving Data on Missing Migrants*, ed. by Frank Laczko, Ann Singleton, and Julia Black (2017), pp. 25-46,
<https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fatal_journeys_volume_3_part_1.pdf>
[accessed 7 March 2018].

⁸ Anthony Lodge, *Beyond the Frontiers. Frontex: The First Five Years* (Warsaw: Frontex, 2010).

Mediterranean region,⁹ patrolling just 48 kilometres off the Italian coast. In April 2015, the deadliest shipwreck ever recorded in the Mediterranean saw 800 people die off the coast of Libya when the fishing boat in which they were travelling overturned as they tried to attract the attention of a passing merchant ship.¹⁰ Without any humanitarian successor to Mare Nostrum on the horizon and indeed only plans for a naval force to counter human trafficking in the Mediterranean, a militarized scheme that finds its precedent in anti-piracy patrols off the coast of Somalia, Human Rights organizations have reported terrifying increases in fatalities year on year.¹¹

An eerily prescient warning of the contemporary crisis is to be found in the closing lines of the famous essay ‘Of Other Spaces’ that was written by Michel Foucault from Tunisia in 1967. Describing the boat as ‘a floating piece of space, a place without a place [...] the great instrument of economic development [...] but [...] simultaneously the greatest reserve of our imagination,’ Foucault asserts that ‘the ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of

⁹ European Commission, ‘Frontex Joint Operation “Triton”’, 31 October 2014

<http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-609_en.htm?locale=en> [accessed 7 March 2018].

¹⁰ Alessandra Bonomolo, Patrick Kingsley, and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, ‘700 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean shipwreck’, *Guardian*, 19 April 2015

<theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/700-migrants-feared-dead-mediterranean-shipwreck-worst-yet> [accessed 7 March 2018].

¹¹ Missing Migrants Project, ‘Migrant Arrivals on Mediterranean Reach 264,513, Deaths at Sea: 3,151’, 12 August 2016 <<https://www.iom.int/news/migrant-arrivals-mediterranean-reach-264513-deaths-sea-3151>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.¹² Following Foucault and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben, it seems undeniable that we have firmly entered the biopolitical phase of this brave new world, where diffuse border-control practices deny people from Africa and the Near East safe passage to Europe.¹³ With both a hardened exterior frontier and the reintroduction of border controls in recent years, contemporary Europe can be seen to construct itself as an Agambian state of exception.¹⁴ In his seminal *Homo sacer* work, Agamben outlines the creation of sacred and sovereign states of exception, which he argues give rise to modes of exclusion that culminate in the concentration camp.¹⁵ Agamben's assertion that the concentration camp is 'the hidden

¹² Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. by Jay Miskowicz, in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. by Neil Leach, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 330–36 (p. 336).

¹³ For an account of the biopolitical border that resulted from the incorporation of the Schengen Agreement into the EC/EU system, see William Walters, 'Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalizing the Border', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2002), 561–580 (pp. 571–76).

¹⁴ Clearly, significant differences exist between European member states in relation to the current treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Nonetheless, my concern is to highlight a general tendency to intensify both external and internal border controls. For a more differentiated account of recent internal border controls across the Schengen area, see:

<[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571356/IPOL_STU\(2016\)571356_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571356/IPOL_STU(2016)571356_EN.pdf)> [accessed 7 March 2018].

¹⁵ 'The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such

paradigm of the political space of modernity¹⁶ claims a link between parliamentary democracies and totalitarian dictatorships according to which the camp is not a historical fact or logical anomaly but underlies the political domain. Agamben's state of exception is not an uncontroversial concept and has come under particular critique for its ahistoricity and quasi-ontological foundation, which have been found to neglect socio-political specifics in understanding the *homo sacer* as a transhistorical figure of exclusion.¹⁷ This article does not seek to follow Agamben in conceiving present-day refugees in terms of the *homo sacer*,¹⁸ and nor does it have scope to pass judgment on the overarching coherence of the state of exception throughout Agamben's thought. Rather, it employs the arresting thought-image of the camp to conceptualize the political situation of displaced people and mass-drowning in the Mediterranean today. As the European Union tightens its legal apparatus by passing unilateral regulations and treaties to keep

nevertheless remains outside the normal order.' Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Boazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 168–69.

¹⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 123.

¹⁷ Cf. 'Der *homo sacer* ist eine transhistorische Figur der Exklusion/Inklusion, der z.B. nicht, wie im Falle Jesu, mit einer historischen Bibelwissenschaft beizukommen wäre. Sie ist vor allem nicht individualisierbar, sondern verdankt sich einem Ursprungsdenken, das dem Typus der "alten" Mythologie zuzurechnen wäre. Bei Agamben finden wir keinerlei historische Beschreibung und Analyse. Sie wird durch die Präsentation von Evidenzen substituiert. Überall ist Golgatha.' Klaus-Michael Bogdal, 'Die Deterritorisierten: Agambens Infamien', in *Hannah Arendt und Giorgio Agamben: Parallelen, Perspektiven, Kontroversen*, ed. by Eva Geulen, Kai Kauffmann, and Georg Mein (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), pp. 11–26 (p. 13); Thomas Lemke, "'A Zone of Indistinction': A Critique of Giorgio Agamben's Concept of Biopolitics', *Outlines: Critical Practice Studies* 7:1 (2005), 3–13.

¹⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 133–34.

people out, these undocumented deaths in the Mediterranean can be read as the consequence of a contemporary state of exception.¹⁹ The premise underlying the argument of this article is that those dehumanizing forms of persecution that take paradigmatic form in Agamben's camp today find a new space of exclusion in the sea, as thousands drown trying to reach European shores.

This article takes as its subject multilingual literary works that tackle head on those lives going under. These texts will be understood to give pointed coordinates to Agamben's potentially universalizing critique. I will focus on two German-born writers, Caroline Bergvall and José F. A. Oliver, who use religious intertexts to question Fortress Europe's self-construction as a sacred space. Oliver's 2010 poem 'ostersonntag, travestien [aprilvierzeiler]' (easter sunday, travesties (april quatrains)) gestures towards the corruption of the religious festival in the face of mass drownings and tests semantic and syntactical boundaries, issuing an implicit challenge to dominant forms of discourse and cultural constructions of self and other.²⁰ A German-language poet of Andalusian descent, Oliver was born and grew up in a small town in Baden-Württemberg speaking dialect forms of both German and Spanish. The other text under discussion is Caroline

¹⁹ 'Grenzschutzagentur und Auffanglager können als Institutionen im Dienste von Grenzziehungen verstanden werden, die auf die Regulierung der Mobilität von Individuen und Gruppen sowie ihre Disziplinierung abzielen. Sie sollen erlauben, über Zugehörigkeit und Nicht-Zugehörigkeit zu Bevölkerungsgruppen, über Ein- oder Ausschluss zu entscheiden. Folgt man in der Einordnung dieser Befunde aktuellen Diskussionskontexten der politischen Theorie, lassen sie sich als institutionelle Manifestationen biopolitischer Dispositive verstehen.' Torsten König, 'Die Mittelmeermigration in der italienischen Gegenwartsliteratur – Biopolitik und Erzählung in gesellschaftlichen, medialen und poetologischen Kontexten', *Philologie im Netz* 75 (2016), 1–15 (p. 1) <<http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn/phn75/p75t1.htm>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

²⁰ José F. A. Oliver, *fabrtenschreiber* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010) pp. 72–73.

Bergvall's *Drift* from 2014, which draws together Old English and Nordic poetry with the lyrics of pop songs and excerpts from human rights reports into contemporary sea migrants' disaster.²¹ One of its explicit intertexts is the Anglo-Saxon poem 'The Seafarer', a two-part poem that begins with an account of the hardships of life at sea and closes with a religious homily.²² Like Oliver, Bergvall is a writer renowned for working across languages; she is a cross-disciplinary artist born in Hamburg, who grew up in Geneva, Paris, New York, and Oslo; she has been based in London since 1989. Both Oliver's and Bergvall's multilingual lyric texts share not just their thematic preoccupation, but also a Christian intertext, as well as manifesting a highly experimental treatment of language that challenges conventional linguistic forms and modes of discourse.

Setting out from an Agambian reading of Fortress Europe as a state of exception, this article further employs Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's writings on minor literature as a primary framework for establishing the wider political import of these innovative multilingual texts. I understand these works' linguistic experimentation in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari term 'deterritorialization', a phenomenon that shakes up the syntax and semantics of the major language and dislocates sound from sense.²³ In their *Anti-Oedipus* study of 1972, this term is introduced alongside its counterpart 'reterritorialization': 'deterritorialization' is used to denote a deconstructive and disruptive moment, whilst 'reterritorialization' designates the forming of new

²¹ Caroline Bergvall, *Drift* (Brooklyn and Callicoon, New York: Nightboat Books, 2014).

Hereafter cited as *Drift*.

²² *The Seafarer*, ed. by I. L. Gordon (London: Methuen, 1960), pp. 1–2.

²³ Cf. Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 91–114.

systems or the recontextualization of existing ones.²⁴ I will argue that the works counter present-day modes of exclusion with deterritorializing lyric practices that – according to Deleuze and Guattari – open up new lines of affiliation to imagine collectivities and futures as yet unknown. A comparable movement beyond the exclusive sacred order is articulated by Agamben in his writings on states of exception. In *Profanations* (2005), Agamben suggests that the profane order is one where the sacred as a source of criteria for exclusion has no place. He refers to Roman jurists who suggest that ‘to profane’ means a return of something sacred to ‘the free usage of mankind.’²⁵ And throughout his work, Agamben contrasts sacred states of exception with the profane, taking up Walter Benjamin’s concepts of ‘profane illumination’²⁶ and ‘the order of the profane’²⁷ to insist on the political potential of profanation to revolutionize thought and experience.²⁸ Ultimately, my close readings will integrate consideration of Benjaminian illumination into the analysis of deterritorializing lyric practice in order to consider the profane challenge issued by these literary works to Fortress Europe’s self-construction as a sacred space. In the lyric integration of intertextual references and the multilingual

²⁴ Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004).

²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2015), pp. 73–92 (p. 73).

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977–99), II.i: *Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge*, pp. 295–310.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

²⁸ For a full account of Agamben’s engagement with Benjamin’s writing on the profane, see: Leland de la Durantaye, “‘Homo profanus’: Giorgio Agamben’s Profane Philosophy”, *Boundary*, 2.35 (3) (2008), 27–62 (p. 34).

experimentation across languages and centuries, I read an attempt to draw on revolutionary energies from the past to challenge the contemporary status quo.

It is famously in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) that Deleuze and Guattari list ‘deterritorialization’ as the first of three characteristics of minor literature which offers a creative mode of countering those striated spaces regulated by the state apparatus.²⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature is defined by ‘the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy and the collective assemblage of enunciation’ (*Kafka*, 18). The starting point for their study’s reflection on minor literatures is a 1911 diary entry by Franz Kafka that considers the explicitly political character of minor literatures and their intimate entwinement in the life of the people.³⁰ Kafka’s Prague German is said to exemplify a minoritarian appropriation and subversion of the major tongue. As Paul Patton and Christian Jäger have pointed out, Deleuze and Guattari do not understand minoritarian to denote a minority in any quantitative sense, rather the term derives from the relationship of a minority to the majority.³¹ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, minorities are imagined as ‘seeds, crystals of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Hereafter cited as *Kafka*.

³⁰ Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), p. 326.

³¹ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 7; Christian Jäger, ‘Grenzkontrollpunkte: Methodologische Probleme des Transitraums und der “kleinen Literatur”’, in *Transitraum Deutsch: Literatur und Kultur im transnationalen Zeitalter*, ed. by Jens Adam, Hans-Joachim Hahn, Lucjan Puchalski, and Irena Światłowska (Wrocław and Dresden: Neisse, 2007), pp. 41–51 (p. 42).

deterritorializations of the mean or majority.³² Referring — amongst other groundbreaking literary figures — to Antonin Artaud and Heinrich von Kleist, this seminal work elucidates the transformative political and social dimensions of linguistic experimentation in a world where language's principal function is not to communicate but to reinforce the dominant order.³³ In her groundbreaking monograph *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001), Azade Seyhan points to the usefulness of minor literature as a conceptual framework for 'modern literary works that challenge boundaries of genre, monolingualism, and national character'³⁴, yet she qualifies its political significance on a number of levels. She criticizes Deleuze and Guattari both for abstracting 'the theory away from a genuine encounter with particular political contexts and historical situations', and for devising 'criteria that can be too easily stretched', suggesting that '[i]n a general sense, most exemplary works of literature can be understood as deterritorialized, politicized, and expressive of a collective ethos.'³⁵ The undifferentiated character of Seyhan's own remarks, however, does not do justice to the radical politics of Deleuze and Guattari's project, which eschews representational modes and identity politics in favour of creative writing — and imaginative reading — strategies dedicated to generating new collectivities. By re-interrogating the mechanisms and politics of the project to liberate words, images, and practices from dominant strictures of cultural

³² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 123.

³³ Cf. "The necessity of not having control over language, of being a foreigner in one's own tongue, in order to draw speech to oneself and 'bring something incomprehensible into the world.'" Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 440.

³⁴ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 27.

³⁵ Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 29.

tradition and hegemonic discourse, Deleuze and Guattari's work offers a means of conceptualizing the non-representational lyric challenge to majoritarian discourse from which refugee experience is absent. Instead, the deterritorializing lyric texts will instead be shown to generate affective modes of witness for the current crisis where lives are being quite literally lost, every day.

Throughout Deleuze and Guattari's thought, 'deterritorialization' proves a shifting term that describes processes which decontextualize sets of relations and render them virtual. It is crucially linked to processes of transformation and becoming that disrupt dominant notions of time and history to create 'lines of flight' which express a new time and era. It is this central relation of deterritorializing artistic practice to the political drive for the creation of new citizens — 'the people to come'³⁶ — that makes Deleuze and Guattari such a relevant theoretical lens for any consideration of contemporary lyric writing about the situation in the Mediterranean. This article offers a complement to Ronald Bogue's *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (2010), a study which brackets out the deterritorialization of language from its consideration of world literatures that trouble the status quo, whilst drawing attention to the scarcity of extended readings of literary examples of the term.³⁷ Through a series of close readings which

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 109.

³⁷ 'All too often in discussions of the deterritorialisation of language, including those of Deleuze and Guattari, concrete examples and extended close readings are rare. Even rarer are discussions that examine the deterritorialisations of one language via another, as takes place when a bi- or tri-lingual novelist allows the sounds, rhythms and syntactic patterns of a second or third language subtly to modify and render "other" the language in which the novel is written.' Ronald Bogue, *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 10–11.

foreground deterritorializing lyric practices, I dispute accusations from post-colonial critics such as Seyhan and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that the writings of Deleuze and Guattari and — by implication — the experimental lyric texts are at best utopian and at worst politically naïve and without purchase on the real-life events, catastrophes and resistances of Fortress Europe. In order to highlight a political attention to historical continuities in the contemporary lyric engagements with mass drownings in the Mediterranean, I use the politically oriented criticism of Agamben and Benjamin to situate deterritorializing strategies that break down conceptual binaries between Europe and Africa and instead point towards the historical and contemporary imbrications of the West in mass drownings of recent years. Ultimately, I interpret the lyric play with religious pretexts as further instances of deterritorialization, in which the categories of sacred and profane are challenged as part of a wider call for a world without transcendent distinction or absolute privilege. Instead, the lyric engagements will be seen to provoke a reimagining of the world that points towards its hidden nexuses of power, interrelated networks, flows of capital, and transnational points of connection and community.³⁸

³⁸ In its methodological attention to critical, multilingual texts, this essay is further to be situated within an emergent body of criticism that explores forms of cultural production which attend to transnational histories and was broadly initiated by scholars in the USA such as Azade Seyhan and Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). More recently, important contributions on modes of critical multilingualism have been made by Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Paradigm* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), and David Gramling, *The Invention of Monolingualism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016). As Margaret Littler has highlighted in her work on Turkish-German literature, despite a common preoccupation with destabilizing linguistic practice, the significance of Deleuze and Guattari's materialist thought has

2.

The cross-disciplinary artist Caroline Bergvall describes her book and performance project *Drift* as ‘a contemporary meditation on migrancy, exile and sea travel’ that was developed with the experimental Norwegian percussionist Ingar Zach in order ‘[t]o explore the archaic, tribal traffic between voice and drum, between text and beat, between air and skin, voice and breathing’ (*Drift*, p. 128). Following further collaboration with the visual artist Thomas Köppel and dramaturge Michèle Pralong, both based in Switzerland, the project premiered in Geneva in 2012 and was performed at six locations across the UK in 2014.³⁹ It was published as a book of text and drawings by Nightboat Books, Brooklyn, in spring 2014 and was further developed into an exhibition shown at Callicoon Fine Arts Gallery, New York, in early 2015.⁴⁰ The project works not only across media but is centrally concerned with artistic experimentation across languages and time. *Drift* employs two principal sets of intertext. As mentioned above, it takes its starting point with *The Seafarer*, an Anglo-Saxon poem that recounts the hardships of life at sea, and further draws on the Icelandic *Vinland Sagas* and early Norse lyrics (*Drift*, pp. 185–86), employing hybrid forms and neologisms which combine the modern and archaic across different languages. The central contemporary source for *Drift* is a human rights report that documents the ‘Left-to-Die Boat’ case in which seventy-two migrants fleeing

yet to be established for this field. My essay responds to this lacuna. C.f. Margaret Littler, review of Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (2005), *The German Quarterly*, 79:3 (2006), 403–05 (p. 404); Margaret Littler, review of Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012), *Cultural Critique*, 87 (2014), 215–20 (p. 216).

³⁹ <<http://www.pennedinthemargins.co.uk/index.php/2014/05/tour-dates-for-caroline-bergvall-drift-announced>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁴⁰ <<http://callicoonfinearts.com/exhibitions/caroline-bergvall/press-release>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

Tripoli by boat in 2011 were left to drift for fourteen days with no food or water.⁴¹

Instead of reaching the Italian island of Lampedusa, the boat landed back on the Libyan coast with only eleven survivors, two of whom subsequently died. Bergvall's text offers a testimony that consistently reflects on what it means to lack citizenship and recognition in the current crisis.

The published work is arranged into six main text-sections with interspersed sketches and graphics over 180 pages; the reading process is a disorienting one with few obvious signs to guide the reader. The text begins with a series of sixteen black and white illustrations of fields of horizontal lines overlaid with scribbles and inkblots. These sketches might be seen to evoke the endlessness of a seascape interrupted only by waves and eddies or, more abstractly, to stand for the disorientation of disrupted and indecipherable sign systems — forming a quite literal barrier to comprehension.

Acknowledging its Anglo-Saxon predecessor, 'Seafarer' is the first text of the collection and it extends over thirty pages composed of lyric sub-sequences bearing the titles 'Song', 'North', and 'Hafville', the latter term from the Old Norse 'hafvilla' meaning 'at sea' or 'lost at sea' (*Drift*, p. 153). In 'Hafville,' the deterritorialized text finds visual form for this experience of losing your bearings — letters are buffeted and displaced from words, merged with other words, repeated emphatically, and engulfed entirely: 'Mo stof those onboard completely l ost l ost l ost their reckoning Th / ec rew had no idea in which direction they were ststeering A thick / fo g which d i d n ot l ift for days The s hip was driven off course tol / and They were ossted about astea for a long time and f iled tor each / their destination' (*Drift*, p. 37). As the sub-sequence progresses, the textual

⁴¹ Charles Heller, Lorenzo Pezzani, and Situ Studio, *Report on the 'Left-to-Die Boat'* (Goldsmiths, University of London: Forensic Oceanography, 2012). www.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FO-report.pdf/ [accessed 7 March 2018].

disruption increases and gradually, over several pages, the reader loses sight of the poem through the textual fog:

Insert Figs. 1 and 2: ‘Hafville 3’ (Drift, p. 38) & ‘Hafville 4’ (Drift, p. 39)

Ultimately, the final ‘t’ of the word ‘boat’ is reproduced over two and a half pages in blocks of text that, as one reviewer points out, cause our eyes to drift, perhaps recalling ‘ripples of water, their points hinting at tips of wavelets — a calm sea to cover the now-vanished text.’⁴² The deterritorialized letter ‘t’ might also be read to stand for the Christian cross that is placed upon tombs of the deceased. In the performance project, ‘[t]he syllables shatter on screen behind Bergvall, vowels sinking away as consonance emerges battered and bettered by the storm.’⁴³ Such emphatic play with displaced letters, however, further deterritorializes the reader, who is reterritorialized as a viewer, and then again as a listener, when the aural dimensions of language sounded are given centre-stage. The attempt to translate the graphic signs into sound or semantic meaning results in a prolonged act of stuttered impasse that might recall Deleuze’s comments, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, on the affective potential of minor language use. Commenting on the French writings of such minoritarian authors as Samuel Beckett and the Romanian born poet Gherasim Luca, Deleuze suggests that ‘[c]reative stuttering is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium.’⁴⁴ In Bergvall’s text, the increasingly abstract

⁴² Poetry Foundation, ‘Catching the Drift: Mysterious Passages in the May 2014 *Poetry*’, <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/guide/97>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁴³ Cherry Smyth, ‘Caroline Bergvall: Drift’, *Art Monthly*, 380 (2014), p. 31.

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, ‘He Stuttered’, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smyth and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 107–14 (p. 111).

play with linguistic signs can further be seen to actualize an experience of getting lost that finds affective expression for real-life forms of displacement and language loss whose shattering effects defy articulation and representation.

In recent years, scholars have become increasingly concerned with the role of affect in experimental poetry, particularly in considering the capacity of digital literary forms to reinscribe emotion into written text. Affects – as states ‘positioned in the pre-linguistic space between a stimulus and a reaction, and between reaction and consciousness [...] that “non-reflective” bodily space before thought, cognition and representation – a space of visceral processing’ – offer modes of response that undo ‘the mind-body distinction’.⁴⁵ With the shifting language mass that serves as the projected backdrop to her performance, Bergvall can be seen to generate what Eduardo Ledesma terms ‘polymorphic kinetic typography’ in his 2016 monograph on Ibero-American Avant-Gardes. Here, Ledesma suggests that digital literary genres can overcome the perceived emotionlessness of electronic text-based media. He elucidates:

Letters previously presented as black, uniform script on white surfaces, syntactically and hence spatially ordered – ‘kept in line,’ so to speak – without any trace of the quiver of the hand, and hence prone to an erasure that likewise leaves no trace, no blotch, no blur, no smudge, no rugged, or even torn surface, now begin to dance, to rumba, indeed to tango in a blur of colour and motion that overtakes the screen space [...].⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard, ‘Biology’s Gift: Interrogating the Turn to Affect’, *Body & Society*, 16.1 (2010), 29-56 (p. 34).

⁴⁶ Eduardo Ledesma, *Radical Poetry: Aesthetics, Politics, Technology and the Ibero-American Avant-Gardes 1900-2015* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 2016), p. 117.

Bergvall's white-on-black overlaid projections shift and fill the screen behind her and, the spatial and temporal dimensions of this work provoke wider awareness of the material character of the project. The affective appeal in Bergvall's project is further actualized through her vocal performance, which holds the piece together through a form of *Sprechgesang* that reworks lyrics from Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse. As Sophie Mayer suggests in her review of a London performance at Royal Festival Hall, Bergvall employs these older texts 'as a way of reframing the current crisis around migration in Europe. These texts act as a reminder of Europe's cultural and economic connection to the sea, charting a course from the Vikings, through colonialism, to contemporary slavery that puts prawns on our plates.'⁴⁷ In section five of 'Shake', a fourteen-part lyric text located two thirds of the way through *Drift*, the speaker straightforwardly states her political agenda to document the people going under on their way to Europe.

The room was busy
the living were noisy
crowding out the place
the dead were marching through
noone was paying any attention
that's when I started to. (Drift, p. 101)

As has been frequently noted by reviewers, Bergvall's accented English lends further affective resonance to her performance. In the log, Bergvall writes: 'Languages work in profound ways. They intermingle and act as obscure relays of one another. They call up all the languages of the world' (*Drift*, p. 161). The performance poet's voiced stream of

⁴⁷ Sophie Mayer, 'All at Sea', *The F-Word: Contemporary UK Feminism*,

<https://www.thefword.org.uk/reviews/2014/08/all_at_sea> [accessed 7 March 2018].

articulation thus enables aural relations to be established between languages, and the anonymous citational practice at the centre of the spoken text further integrates the voices of others into a work that might be seen to destabilize the apparent authority and self-containment of the constructed rational Western subject. Remarks by Bergvall in an English-language essay of 2009 help to draw out the political implications of this performative practice of ‘siting’ voice:

It is not about having a ‘voice’ (another difficult naturalising concept), it is about siting ‘voice’, locating the spaces and actions through which it becomes possible to be in one’s languages, to stay with languages, to effect one’s speech and work at a point of traffic between them, like a constant transport that takes place in the exchange between one’s body, the air, and the world. Language circulates in this conduit of air and shapes its articulated vibrations into both verbal and non-verbal sounds, semantic and somatic events, that can all be made manifest as language. The act of writing becomes less permanent, more acutely in flux. It manifests transit and spitting out.⁴⁸

I have pointed out elsewhere that ‘Bergvall argues for the need for the bilingual writer to devise a textual means of situating voice in intellectual and material terms at points of intersection between languages.’⁴⁹ She begins her reflections with reference to Spivak’s

⁴⁸ Caroline Bergvall, ‘A Cat in the Throat: On Bilingual Occupants’, *Jacket magazine*, 37 (2009), <<http://jacketmagazine.com/37/bergvall-cat-throat.shtml>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁴⁹ Áine McMurtry, ‘Voicing Rupture: Ethical Concerns in Short Prose and Lyric Texts by Yoko Tawada’, in *Ethical Approaches in Contemporary German-language Literature and Culture*, ed.

remarks on Samuel Beckett which declare the need for the bilingual writer to ‘clear one’s throat, clear a space, step away, spit out the mother tongue.’⁵⁰ For the postcolonial critic this is said to begin ‘a whole process of re-embodiment and re-appraisal of language’s spaces,’ which Bergvall identifies as ‘one way out [...] of the cultural displacements frequently experienced by bilingual and bicultural speakers’.⁵¹ Recent theoretical work on voice has emphasized not only the inherent performativity of the voice and its status as phonic material that challenges ‘the dominating logic of the semantic,’ but also the ‘*strained* relation’ between voice and mouth, which extends and problematizes the speaker’s communicative aim.⁵² Bergvall’s performance can be seen to actualize this strained relation by making the listener aware of the role of the body in the constitution of the speaking subject, as well as the tensions and discontinuities between speaker and listener. Bergvall employs hybrid and ruptured linguistic forms, playing with neologisms which combine the modern and archaic across different languages, and these techniques call for an active response from the listener. In this performative practice, Bergvall’s project might be understood in terms of what Naoki Sakai has called the ‘heterolingual address [...] in which one addresses oneself as a foreigner to another foreigner’.⁵³ For

by Emily Jeremiah and Frauke Matthes (= *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, VII (2013)), 159–77 (p. 166).

⁵⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Bonding in Difference, interview with Alfred Arteaga’, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Spivak*, ed. by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 15–28 (p. 22).

⁵¹ Bergvall, ‘A Cat in the Throat’.

⁵² Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of the Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 9.

⁵³ Naoki Sakai, ‘Translation and the Figure of Border: Toward the Apprehension of Translation as a Social Action’, *Profession* (2010), 25–34 (p. 33).

Sakai, concerned as he is with theoretical reflections on translation, this speech act inscribes the otherness of the audience into the process of exchange, acknowledging the ‘varying degrees of comprehension’ between addresser and addressee.⁵⁴ In a comparable way, Bergvall’s lyric address in *Drift* operates across languages, harnessing the breaks and shifts made audible in language sounded to move beyond representational and communicative modes and, through affective appeal to the imagination, enable its listeners to become other to themselves.⁵⁵ This method has ethical implications, as it promotes an attitude of all-inclusiveness, according to which we confront others in all of their difference in the very moment of address.

It is in the second section of *Drift*, which comprises a sixteen-part ‘Song’ cycle, that Bergvall engages with the Anglo-Saxon text, a 125-line poem from the tenth century that describes the hardships and solitude of life at sea. She mines the vocabulary and sound patterns of the original and uses it as a point of departure for wider lyric reflection on what it means to be set adrift:

SONG 7

Thats why crossing high streams on gebattered
ships mind moves nomad with all tha t-tossing
Thats why never one so proud and bold what
goes seafaring without mægaworry ohman of
being broken into code Ferð to feran far to fare
Ferð to feran feor to go further heonan further

⁵⁴ Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁵⁵ Doro Wiese, *The Powers of the False: Reading, Writing, Thinking Beyond Truth and Fiction* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 45.

hereon go forth Farout to the four winds to the
 outlands Trip it journey wayfaring outvoyage to
 geseek others plucked from this eard this earp
 this harp ok the bearded geese Blow wind blow,
 anon am I (*Drift*, p. 49)

Relinquishing punctuation almost entirely, the lines evoke the speed and swell of a journey on the high seas. As David Kaufman has suggested, they retain heavy alliterative patterns common to Anglo-Saxon verse, as well as favouring its use of compound nouns, whilst the Germanic ‘ge’-prefix twists further movement into modern English verbs.⁵⁶ Bergvall integrates archaic signs into slang modern coinages and, in line four of the extract, the Anglo-Saxon ash grapheme (‘æ’) is inserted into ‘mægaworry’, whilst the contemporary exclamation ‘oh man’ is conflated into one word, dislocating the expression to float somewhere between noun and adverb, an archaic echo in which the past is left to resonate in the textual now.

The explicit pairing of ‘mind’ and ‘nomad’ in line two of the above extract from *Drift*, where the word features in evoking the timeless journey across high seas, calls up Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of nomadic distribution in *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and *A Thousand Plateaus*, which offers a means of reconceptualizing space through a political ethic that rejects political ties to specific locations and reconfigures the way in which individuals relate to social and political space. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze employs the Greek term *nomos* to designate a mode of distribution according to which nomadic individuals distribute themselves across an undivided territory, which is

⁵⁶ David Kaufmann, ‘David Kaufmann reviews Caroline Bergvall’s *Drift*’, *Asymptote* (2014), <<https://asymptotejournal.com/article.php?cat=Criticism&id=81>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

contrasted with *logos*-driven models that divide up territory between sedentary farmers.⁵⁷ As John Sellars has pointed out, this analysis is developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* into an opposition between *nomos* and *polis*, which Deleuze and Guattari align with the ‘state apparatus’ and ‘nomad war machine’ respectively.⁵⁸ Whilst — as a principle of sovereignty and control — the state apparatus ‘*parcel[s] out a closed space to people*, assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares’,⁵⁹ nomad thought ‘does not ground itself in an all-encompassing totality but is on the contrary deployed in a horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert or sea . [...]’ The nomadic trajectory [...] *distributes people (or animals) in an open space*, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating’.⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between the nomad and the migrant, suggesting that ‘[i]f the nomad can be termed the Deterritorialized par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization afterward as with the migrant [...] it is deterritorialization that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself’.⁶¹ According to Deleuze and Guattari’s reading, nomads offer a means of conceptualizing a smooth space that is not delimited or divisible. As has been argued by Sellars, Deleuze’s concept of nomadic distribution forms ‘the foundation for what is arguably the nearest thing to a political philosophy within his oeuvre’⁶² and can be understood within a wider tradition

⁵⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994), pp. 53-54.

⁵⁸ John Sellars, ‘Deleuze and Cosmopolitanism’, *Radical Philosophy*, 142 (2007), 30–37 (p. 34).

⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 443.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 441–43.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 444–45.

⁶² Sellars, ‘Deleuze and cosmopolitanism’, p. 33.

that ‘holds that all human beings belong to a single global community and that this universal community is more fundamental than the local political states into which individuals are born’.⁶³ Deleuze’s political interpretation of nomadism is methodologically useful for an interpretation of Bergvall’s multilingual project because it serves to emphasize the degree to which the lyrical mode of *Drift* is deployed to question fixed borders and signifiers and so reflect on the contemporary political crisis in the Mediterranean.

The wider political valence of Bergvall’s multilingual play emerges from further consideration of ‘Song 7’. The chain of words that takes its starting point from ‘Ferð,’ the Anglo-Saxon word for ‘heart’ or ‘spirit,’ as well as ‘journey,’ the latter meaning shared in Old Norse, operates on a principle of ‘homophonic call and response’ (*Drift*, p. 144). Bergvall does not attempt a meticulous tracing of etymologies, rather she veers away from semantic meaning to follow what she terms ‘the strongly sound-led rules of the original’ (*Drift*, p. 144). Here in particular, Bergvall’s project displays striking parallels with Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘minor literature’. ‘The sound or the word that traverses this new deterritorialization’, they write:

no longer belongs to a language of sense, even though it derives from it, nor is it organized music or song, even though it might appear to be. [...] Instead, it is now a question of a becoming that includes the maximum of difference as a difference of intensity, the crossing of a barrier, a rising or a falling, a bending or an erecting, an accent on the word. [...] To make the sequences vibrate, to open the word onto unexpected internal intensities – in short, an asignifying *intensive utilization* of language. Furthermore, there is no longer a subject of the

⁶³ Ibid., p. 30.

enunciation, nor a subject of the statement. [...] Rather there is a circuit of states that forms a mutual becoming, in the heart of a necessarily multiple or collective assemblage. (*Kafka*, pp. 21–22)

It seems no coincidence then that Bergvall begins her lyric call with a word for ‘journey’ that was once shared between languages. The aural dimensions of language sounded in *Drift* enable the text to extend into a pulsing chain of voiced relations and repetitions that do away with the fatal gap between subject and object in a moment of connection. Throughout the cycle, the final line ‘Blow wind blow, anon am I’ vibrates in the intense and ambivalent closing refrain. For David Kaufmann this forms ‘a lovely buff’, as ‘[t]he speaker of the poem is “anon” to the extent that she is always about to arrive, to get to the point. [...] At the same time, she is not “anon.” Though the speaker might be anonymous (as is the author of “The Seafarer”), the author Caroline Bergvall is not’.⁶⁴ Yet here, further echoes of Deleuze and Guattari might also be heard. In older usage, the English adjective ‘anon’ promises arrival and so the lyric songs can be read to close in a moment of ‘becoming’. In its modern usage, the word obliterates the subject, as the lyric text speaks out collectively on behalf of all those set adrift.

By changing the subject position in this performance of a collective enunciation, Bergvall’s text reflects Deleuze and Guattari’s commitment to a non-representational aesthetics that rejects traditional identity politics. It is this dimension of their work, however, that has come under intense criticism from postcolonial critics such as Seyhan and Spivak. In her seminal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988), Spivak accuses

⁶⁴ Kaufmann, ‘Caroline Bergvall’s *Drift*’.

Deleuze of having a hidden essentialist agenda,⁶⁵ criticizing him as a ‘first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves’.⁶⁶ As well as condemning the complicity of post-representation in maintaining the status quo, she is concerned to point to the necessity of representation for those who cannot speak. More recent postcolonial criticism, however, has questioned Spivak’s ‘cursory’ and partial treatment of Deleuze that misreads his understanding of the subject, as well as his treatment of difference.⁶⁷ Disputing the suggestion that ‘a post-representational position implies an inability or unwillingness to investigate or theorize the working of representation’⁶⁸ and highlighting instead the need for alternatives to representation as a political strategy,⁶⁹ these critics stress Deleuze’s concern with minor production as a means of evading the commodification of ethnicity and of disrupting familiar narratives and frameworks. Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey emphasize in their defense Deleuze and Guattari’s particular conception of the relationship to the excluded or nomadic other, writing: ‘This other is summoned forth by art and philosophy, but is disavowed by dominant reason, and for them, the point is to write *for* this other — not “for their benefit” and not “in their place”, but “before”, as a question

⁶⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313 (p. 285).

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 292.

⁶⁷ Cf. Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, ‘Living in Smooth Space: Deleuze, Postcolonialism and the Subaltern’, in *Deleuze and the Postcolonial*, ed. by Simone Bignall and Paul Patton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 20–40.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

of becoming.⁷⁰ It is in *What is Philosophy?* (1991) that Deleuze and Guattari foreground absolute deterritorialization as fundamental to the task of philosophy to summon forth a new people — ‘the people to come’⁷¹ —, identifying the future earth and its people as the sites of reterritorialization: ‘Deterritorialization of such a plane [the milieu of immanence’s plane of relative deterritorialization] does not preclude reterritorialization but posits it as the creation of a future new earth.’⁷² For Ronald Bogue this constitutes a politically transformative project that rejects a rationally ordered cosmos and combines macro- and micropolitical action in order to develop creative strategies for initiating social change, which he terms ‘chaosmopolitanism’.⁷³ In particular, Bogue takes issue with Sellars’s reading of Deleuze’s cosmopolitanism as ‘ultimately utopian’ and his claim that ‘[i]t does not offer a model for collective political action but rather outlines a personal ethical project of self-transformation in which each individual alters their own relation to space and to traditional political states’.⁷⁴ Instead, Bogue differentiates Deleuze’s chaosmopolitanism from the cosmopolitanism of the Cynics and the Stoics, primarily through its processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization which render the cosmos neither rational nor only chaotic, arguing instead for ‘chaosmopolitanism’s “realistic utopianism”, which connects deterritorialized thought to the pragmatic realm of sociopolitical action’.⁷⁵ As Margaret Littler stresses in her Deleuzian reading of ‘Der

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 32.

⁷¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 109.

⁷² Ibid., p. 88.

⁷³ Ronald Bogue, ‘Nature, Law and Chaosmopolitanism’, in *Revisiting Normativity with Deleuze*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti and Patricia Pisters (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012) pp. 98–112 (p. 98).

⁷⁴ Sellars, ‘Deleuze and Cosmopolitanism’, p. 37.

⁷⁵ Bogue, ‘Nature, Law and Chaosmopolitanism’, pp. 111–12.

Saxophonspieler’, a short story by the Turkish-German author Zafer Şenocak that appeared in 2006, ‘a minor politics is predicated on the *absence* of a ‘people’ to represent; it concerns precisely those who lack the resources of citizenship, recognized histories or shared cultures. [...] Rather than ‘representing’ a people [...] minor politics is about their *creation*’.⁷⁶

My concern is to follow Bogue’s interpretation and to read Bergvall’s project as a way of connecting ‘deterritorialized thought to the pragmatic realm of sociopolitical action’. I will trace the textual effort in *Drift* to establish intersectional forms of solidarity by bearing witness to documented human rights violations. In this respect, Bergvall’s Deleuzian figuration of her own privilege as a white Western subject might actually be revealed in line with Spivak, who — in ‘Explanation and Culture: Marginalia’ — comments: ‘The only way I can hope to suggest how the center itself is marginal is by not remaining outside in the margin and pointing my accusing finger at the center. I might do it rather by implicating myself in that center and sensing what politics make it marginal.’⁷⁷ Ultimately, by deterritorializing the centre, Bergvall project makes a wider call for new legal protections and forms of visibility for those otherwise being denied basic rights and liberties.

⁷⁶ Margaret Littler, ‘Cramped Creativity: The Politics of a Minor German Literature’, in *Aesthetics and Politics in Modern German Culture: Festschrift in Honour of Rhys W. Williams*, ed. by Brigid Haines and others (Bern: Peter Lang), pp. 221-33 (p. 224).

⁷⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Explanation and Culture: Marginalia’, in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987) pp. 103-118 (p. 107). For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of Spivak’s thought, see: B. Venkat Mani, *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007) pp. 39–40; p. 186.

In her very choice of artistic tools of production, Bergvall can be seen implicating herself. For the Geneva première, extracts from which are available to view online, languages mixed and live voice and percussion met against a backdrop of 3D text.⁷⁸ The technologies used to create these text projections were adapted from programmes employed by nautical scientists tracking boats that got lost on the way from Africa to Europe, which were — in turn — taken from those utilized by Western states for tracking the movement of freight on major commercial shipping lines.⁷⁹ The technological tools of artistic production are therefore imbricated in those very flows of capital which determine exchange between Africa and Europe. The visual character of the text projections renders the narrative a drifting language mass that finds imagistic form for the process of linguistic shift and transformation at the heart of the project. Bergvall's performative engagement with the very commercial shipping technologies that themselves are adapted for humanitarian ends therefore enables a creative deterritorialization of those capitalist forces in relation to which — according to Deleuze — any outside position is impossible. Far from seeking aesthetic transcendence, *Drift*'s underlying materialist project instead reflects the constitution of existence through material flows and intensities of difference.

It is at the end of 'Log', a discursive reflection towards the close of the text, that Bergvall relates her sexuality to this materialist project. Explicitly underlining her solidarity as a queer woman with other minorities, Bergvall refers to her relationship with a woman and the fear that accompanies their decision to be together:

⁷⁸ <<https://vimeo.com/75406238/>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁷⁹ Comments by Bergvall following a performance of *Drift* at the Austrian Cultural Forum London, 14 November 2013.

To be with me, she must tell her husband, her kids, her family. A deep animal fear at this profound and life-changing impulse also resurfaces in me. Are you safe. [...]

To be protected in law gives a further collective implication to it all. Families, vigilantes and coastguards can no longer in all impunity go to work on those it has taken to be haflings and skraelings. But the menacing fear and the deep collective memory remain at the point of crossing, at the point of sailing, as one raises the anchor, as one ships out. They are sustained in the more obscure aspects of one's living and re-engage in full force in the face of others who still must live in abject lawlessness, in different degrees of hideout. (*Drift*, pp. 165-66)

Here, Bergvall's acknowledgement that recent legal protections for the LGBT community have fostered her awareness of the precariousness of other subject positions might at once be interpreted through Deleuze as a reflection on the possibility for the minor writer 'to express another possible community' (*Kafka*, p. 17), as well as through Spivak as an interrogation of her own implication in the centre. The affective connection articulated in these lines alludes to submerged aspects of subjective experience that resurface in moments of felt recognition with those in states of emergency and persecution, as well as in the simultaneous awareness of her own existence at a privileged remove. In 'Log', Bergvall further quotes the feminist critic Sara Ahmed who argues that 'being lost is a way of inhabiting space by registering what is not familiar' (*Drift*, p. 139).⁸⁰ Thematising issues of gender and sexuality, Bergvall highlights Ahmed's literal application of sexual orientation 'to spatialize sexuality into directional dynamics' (*Drift*, p. 139) as illuminating for her own creative practice. Bergvall stresses the material dimensions of her struggle to

⁸⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 7.

understand her project in *Drift* and explains how tracking her own uprootings, departures, and arrivals enables ‘deep magnetic oscillations across the entire spectrum of travelling and dwelling’ which permit her to experience ‘[t]he growing reality of collective departures and arrivals [...] as dynamic pattern formations, generative in a programming sense of the way they affect any port of call’ (*Drift*, p. 140). In this way, Bergvall further offers a creative response to Ahmed’s critique of Rosi Braidotti’s metaphoric interpretation of the nomad in *Nomadic Subjects* (1994). Ahmed accuses Braidotti of erasing ‘cultural difference through the figuring of the nomad as a general way of thinking’, an abstraction that, for Ahmed, leads ultimately to an implied separation of nomadism ‘from the material social relations in which thought itself is idealized as the rational capacity of well-educated subjects’.⁸¹ Instead, Bergvall foregrounds the gradual material emergence of thought through the textual and visual dimensions of her collaborative practice with the artist and programmer Thomas Köppel.⁸² Unlike Braidotti who rather straightforwardly suggests that it was the ‘stability and sense of partial belonging, supported by a permanent job and a happy relationship’ that enabled her to

⁸¹ Sara Ahmed, ‘Home and away: narratives of migration and estrangement’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2.3 (1999), 329–347 (p. 335).

⁸² ‘The textual dimension of the performance will a few months later be composed with the artist and programmer Thomas Köppel as a projected language-mass, the visual accumulation of the entire finished textual material. All of it laid out, then overlaid, set in motion and activated through a generative pattern of sequences. The sequences turn the text into a deep-moving, slow-changing multi-dimensional hypnotic wave. A vast open syntax of textual mass. The elements move around one another, are drawn and repelled, answer to separate yet co-extensive syntactical instances. It will take me a long time to understand how to do it and how to get there.’ (*Drift*, p. 140)

‘actually start thinking adequately about nomadism’,⁸³ Bergvall is concerned to engage in more nuanced terms with the experiential blind-spots and moments of tension that foster a wider sense of solidarity. A further crucial difference in the respective textual politics of Braidotti and Bergvall is their engagement with the situation of refugees and asylum seekers. Whilst Braidotti includes only a few fleeting references to refugees — predominantly in the preface to the second edition of her study —, foregrounding instead a mobile nomadic subject in terms that feminist critics such as Irene Gedalof and Inge Boer have suggested neglects real material-social conditions and idealizes a dangerously abstract in-between realm,⁸⁴ Bergvall spotlights a real case of mass-drowning in the Mediterranean at the height of the Arab Spring at the centre of her text.

For the fourth section of *Drift*, ‘Report’, Bergvall focuses on a human rights report that documents the ‘Left-to-Die Boat’ case. Bergvall notes in her log of work on the project that she read about the case in an article published in the *Guardian* newspaper on 11 April 2012 (*Drift*, p. 132). The report by researchers at Goldsmiths, University of London, ‘focuses on the spatial analysis of data surrounding the case of the “left-to-die boat”’ and employs ‘a wide range of digital mapping and modelling technologies’. The report draws together survivor testimonies and spatial analysis and was published as part of the ERC-funded and Turner Prize-nominated *Forensic Architecture* research project, whose website declares a commitment ‘to the reversal of the forensic gaze, to ways of turning forensics into a counter-hegemonic practice able to challenge state and corporate violence’ and whose investigations are said to ‘take place mainly in zones outside the

⁸³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 65.

⁸⁴ Irene Gedalof, ‘Identity in Transit: Nomads, Cyborgs and Women’, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 7.3 (2000), 337–54 (pp. 343–44).

effective control of states and its frames of criminal justice’.⁸⁵ The report itself states its aim to collate and analyze data, reports, and human testimonies in order to establish ‘what happened to the ‘left-to-die boat’ and who was involved in the events leading to the deaths of 63 migrants’.⁸⁶ It concludes in damning indictment that the migrants’ vessel was left to drift slowly ‘within one of the most surveilled maritime areas in the world, populated by at least 38 naval assets’, where the responsibility to intervene and prevent the deaths of the people on board was shirked by all those who came into contact with the craft.⁸⁷

Bergvall’s log highlights the relevance of the forensic principle that ‘every action or contact leaves a trace’ for her own practice, setting out her intention to ‘relay the report’s complex piece of memorialisation, interpretation and investigation through live recitation. To register the events through recitation’ (*Drift*, p. 134). Without literary embellishment or reworking, Bergvall cites directly from the human rights report over eleven pages in section four, inserting paragraph breaks and italicizing the typescript in the published version of her text to highlight statements from survivors. The use of white ink on a black background signals the visual dimension of Bergvall’s effort to trace the migrants’ experience out at sea. In turn, her text gives details of what happened after their boat began to drift in high waves on the morning of 28 March 2011:

Insert Fig. 3 ‘Report’ (Drift, p. 80)

Factual formulations from the human rights report that describe circumstances of human emergency are juxtaposed with muted witness statements whose pared-down syntax and

⁸⁵ <<http://www.forensic-architecture.org/project/>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁸⁶ Heller, Pezzani, and Studio, *Report on the “Left-to-Die Boat”*, p. 10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

careful repetitions forge a powerful means of calling attention to the stark facts of the case. Cherry Smyth comments astutely that Bergvall ‘refuses a dirge-like tone as if the despair and suffering of the migrants must be conveyed in the starkest, clearest syntax, a syntax that foresees the language of the trial, the delivery of justice and, ultimately, the responsibility to change’.⁸⁸ In this respect, the fourth part of *Drift* exists in intriguing tension with those more lyrical sections that precede it. All attempts at lyrical language and experimental form are foregone in the textual engagement with the human rights report, a decision that reflects the explicitly political project to demand accountability and to highlight the humanitarian crimes committed. The political force of Bergvall’s text and performance in *Drift* is therefore to be situated in the stark testimonial found at its centre, as well as in the experimental lyric that offers a Deleuzian framework foregrounding the interrelatedness of human experiences and the inorganic life that passes through all beings.

Whilst the two-part Anglo-Saxon poem concludes in what Bergvall terms ‘a poetically less developed and strongly didactic Christian moral tale’ (*Drift*, p. 163), her contemporary text instead identifies ‘illumination’ in love and art as the fundamentals of what she terms ‘a process of shared life’ (*Drift*, p. 164). Bergvall’s choice of term recalls Walter Benjamin’s 1929 poetic, philosophical, and political essay ‘Der Surrealismus: Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz’.⁸⁹ This essay develops the groundbreaking concept of ‘profane illumination’ alongside reflections on the potential of the aesthetic avant-garde as a model for social change. In this influential work, Benjamin suggests that Surrealism constitutes a set of magical experiments with words that possesses revolutionary potential. The ‘*profan[e] Erleuchtung*’ is identified as that

⁸⁸ Smyth, ‘Caroline Bergvall: Drift’, p. 31.

⁸⁹ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.i, pp. 295–310.

‘materialistisch[e], anthropologisch[e] Inspiration’ that enables ‘[d]ie wahre, schöpferische Überwindung religiöser Erleuchtung’⁹⁰ in its status as a momentary transfiguration in the present moment, unleashing a source of revolutionary energy deriving from the past. In this respect, Benjaminian illumination can also be read in terms of its deterritorializing potential. By reworking the didactic Anglo-Saxon text into a contemporary lyric reflection on a modern-day mass drowning, Bergvall engages with the quasi-material connections between languages and sign systems to bring about a transfiguration of the present that makes a call for change. Her poetic practice enacts ongoing processes of linguistic deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which reflect a never-ending dissolution and creation of forms that break down barriers between self and other, challenging hierarchical modes of thought. *Drift* actualizes a multilingual politics of speech and performance that reinscribes lost letters and obsolete sounds to devise a uniquely creative means of si(gh)ting and sounding ancient and contemporary histories that would otherwise go unseen and unheard.

3.

The politics of real and textual borders are also to be found at the centre of José F. A. Oliver’s lyric writings. These are characterized throughout by a close attention to linguistic detail, their interrogating syntactical relationships, as well as their examining the component parts of words in order to uncover buried etymologies and hidden significances. In an interview of 2013, Oliver employs Benjaminian terminology of astonishment (‘Staunen’) to underscore the ambivalent place of the poet on the periphery:

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 297.

Ein Dichter beispielsweise lebt unweigerlich an der Peripherie. Wo immer er auch sei. [...] Ich bin dem Fremdwerden nah und den Nächsten kontinuierlich fremd. Ein staunender Schreibnomade. Dies Staunen hält mich wach. Und Wachheit ist mein Zentrum. Segen und Fluch der Migration.⁹¹

In what might be read as an answer to Deleuze and Guattari's question 'how to become a nomad [...] in relation to one's own language?' (*Kafka*, p. 19), Oliver uses a spatialized vocabulary of approach and retreat to suggest that his multiple languages and dialects enabled 'eine dreifache Annäherung an die deutsche Sprache, um mich dann wieder von ihr weg zu bewegen und die eigene poetische Sprache zu entwickeln'.⁹² Here, he directly acknowledges the negotiation of multiple linguistic boundaries as that which makes possible poetic expression, commenting on his writing practice as 'eine in die Sprache sich hinein schreibende Spracharbeit', and thereby emphasizing the textual labor that has determined his development as a poet.⁹³ For Oliver, the oral traditions of Andalusia have been particularly significant in fostering his early appreciation for rhythm and sound. Playing with verbs that take 'hören' as their root, the poet highlights the crucial role of listening for his lyric works and elaborates as follows on the political dimensions of this material engagement with language:

⁹¹ José F. A. Oliver and Marie T. Martin, 'José F. A. Oliver im Gespräch mit Marie T. Martin: "Alles Leben ist Peripherie und Zentrum zugleich"', *poet* 15 (2013), 164–69 (p. 164), <<http://www.poetenladen.de/marie-martin-jose-oliver.htm>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

⁹² Hannelore Van Ryneveld, 'Im Gespräch mit José F. A. Oliver – "viel stimmig und meersprachig"', *Acta Germanica* 36 (2008), 119–40 (p. 121).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Zuhören ist ein sehr schönes deutsches Wort, d.h. wenn ich mich irgendwo zugehörig fühle, dann schenke ich das Ohr. Ich bin ja jemand der vom Hören kommt, ich höre die Farben, ich höre die Bilder, und das versuche ich in irgendeiner Form ästhetisch zu verschriften indem ich meine eigene lyrische Form ständig weiter entwickle. Was sich gehalten hat und was verfeinert wurde in all den Jahren, das ist die Liebe zum Rhythmus, d.h. jedes Gedicht von mir kann rhythmisiert werden, es kann mit einem rhythmischen Anspruch, den man allerdings erkennen muss, gelesen werden. [...] Ich will ja auch, dass gestolpert wird, und über das Stolpern horche ich vielleicht auf. Also wirklich dieses Aufhören, auch in dieser Doppelbedeutung. Dass man auf-hört aber auch aufhört in bestimmten Kategorien zu denken. [...] Und insofern sind es für mich so einige Signalwörter, die mich dann bestätigen in diesem Weg des Hörens. Und es ist für mich klar, dass diese ursprüngliche entschiedene politische Haltung sich heute eher in einer entschiedenen ästhetischen Form zum Ausdruck bringt.⁹⁴

The comments foreground the importance of rhythm and sound for Oliver's poetic practice in inducing forms of awareness in his readers that are generated through a quasi-material attention to textual shifts and breaks, which are attributed fundamental political significance.⁹⁵ The state of attentiveness and willingness to engage with the

⁹⁴ Van Ryneveld, 'Im Gespräch mit José F. A. Oliver', p. 126.

⁹⁵ In its use of experimental and multilingual forms to engage with a traumatic historical context, Oliver's work has much in common with the late poetry of Paul Celan. Oliver has referred to comments by Erich Fried in contemplating his own fascination with Celan's poems: 'Celan ist kein "politischer Mensch". Er legt auch keinen Wert darauf, "zeitnah" oder "zeitverbunden" zu sein. Aber vielleicht gerade deshalb sind seine Gedichte besonders tief von dieser Zeit geprägt.

other that Oliver identifies in the base verb ‘hören’ takes on wider political dimensions when combined with varying linguistic prefixes, which in turn generate varying meanings. Using terms that call to mind those examples of minor literature in which Deleuze identifies a ‘creative stuttering’ at work,⁹⁶ Oliver appears similarly concerned that the reader should ‘stumble’ against linguistic boundaries in order to open up alternative world views and lines of flight.⁹⁷

Oliver’s notion of stumbling is at the heart also of his most explicit lyric treatment of the contemporary crisis in the Mediterranean, his poem ‘ostersonntag, travestien [aprilvierzeiler]’ which forms part of the *fahrtenschreiber* collection published by Suhrkamp in March 2010.⁹⁸ The collection is dedicated to Oliver’s longstanding partner Gisela

Nicht wie aktuelle Leitartikel, nicht wie philosophische und politische Analysen der Zeit, sondern diese Gedichte sind der reinste Ausdruck, den ich kenne, für den Zusammenstoß zwischen den großen, uralten Bildern der menschlichen Seele, der menschlichen Phantasie, und den Katastrophen der Gegenwart.’ Erich Fried cited in José F. A. Oliver, *Lyrisches Schreiben im Unterricht: Vom Wort in die Verdichtung* (Seelze: Kallmeyer, 2013), p. 145.

⁹⁶ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 111.

⁹⁷ Cf. ‘Ich lasse diese Fremderfahrung ausstehen, ich brauche diese Fremderfahrung und dieses Stolpern im Gedicht. Es darf nicht glatt sein, es darf nicht den Eindruck erwecken, ich habe es verstanden. [...] Aber auf eine Art und Weise, die nicht verletzend oder nicht arrogant ist, den Leser nicht entmündigt, sondern auf eine Art und Weise, die den Leser an die Grenzen bringt, um aus dieser Grenzerfahrung etwas mitzunehmen.’ Van Ryneveld, ‘Im Gespräch mit José F. A. Oliver’, p. 131.

⁹⁸ *fahrtenschreiber* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010) pp. 72–73. Hereafter cited as *fahrtenschreiber*. Oliver also engages with the drownings in the Mediterranean in a cycle of six poems entitled ‘Totentanz 1–6’ that forms part of his lyric volume *wundgenährt* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2018). José F. A. Oliver, email message to author, December 21, 2017.

Scherer, who died just after its publication on 21 April 2010, with the title ‘fahrtschreiber’ gesturing towards the poet’s status as someone who documents life’s journey. The poem comprises twelve unrhymed quatrains followed by an unattributed one-line quotation — ‘es schwimmt sich schön im mittelmeeer» (*fahrtenschreiber* 73) — with which it closes in a moment of heavy irony. By drawing together childhood recollections of Easter with references to dying in the Mediterranean, Oliver encourages his readers to consider how apparently subjective memories are constructed within cultural tradition through idealized images, only to be deterritorialized by being placed in stark juxtaposition to the nightmarish realities intimated in the lyric verses. The poem opens with an image of the crucifix amidst chocolate and dripping marzipan, artifacts associated with the Christian festival. As in Bergvall’s text, the solitary lyric voice is not to be straightforwardly located or identified with any clear perspective and, here, no first or second person pronouns feature. The opening diminutive and excess of confectionary might suggest, however, that it is with a memory from childhood that the text begins:

ostersonntag, travestien

[aprilvierzeiler]

im klausenröckchen schokolade

das Kreuz tropft marzipan

& schnee-

verschnitt. Vorm fenster

nistet Ostara

auf frühen kirschbaumblüten

ihr frischweiß altgeronnen

das laub ist jung. Es pokert sätze / auf

geflaumtes grün / ein

handgemachter sonnenvierter [april-

versponnen / april-

besommert] zwingt

die blüten blütenauf / reicht

an die lust

der maialtäre. Da schreit

sich einer heimatfroh / : froh. Die wolken sind

kajütentüren. Dort

laufen leichen aus ins blau / die

kommen allesamt vom meer & sind

ganz schwarz. Die menschen-

spieler schachern eifrig

am hasentisch ums knospenweh

: 1 spieler setzt auf afrika, der will noch

punkten. [Zu spät]. Die edel-

hölzer sind verhandelt / die opfer-

zahlen kontingente

das exil

ist altpapier. Das wort

wie ostereier

umgefärbt die sprache / krötenwörter, die

springen auf ans leben. Die

springen ab vom leben

& sind

schon längst verdorben. Jemand

mischt »mensch« & »würde«. Wie karten

: [I zufallskonjunktiv]. Das wasser

speit verdross / gleichgültigkeit

& selbst *der Himmel*

: brache. Die Kinder

suchen nester ab. Die welt

ist kein versteck / vom hasentisch

fällt dann ein stein. Vom stein

starrt her ein engelsaug

samt schwert. Das grab / die gräber

sind im off. Der tag, I wurf

hortensienbälle, die nackt-

verglühen. Auch sie

im bilde / surreal

»es schwimmt sich schön im mittelmeeer«

The poem's opening quatrains draw heavily on nature imagery, as well as alluding to the mythical realm with a reference to the Germanic goddess 'Ostara,' ancient namesake for the festival of Easter, who is said to be nesting outside in a cherry tree. According to the philological reading put forward by Jacob Grimm in his seminal study *Deutsche Mythologie* of 1835, Ostara is the goddess of the radiant dawn.⁹⁹ Grimm further associates Ostara with hares and Easter eggs, motifs which also feature in Oliver's poem, but in this text these motifs and the seeming idyll are quickly undermined as the sardonic lyric voice begins to point out the jaded character of the apparently untainted images from line seven. In this light, the opening images of chocolate, marzipan, and dripping snow might further be identified as part of what George Steinmetz and Julia Hell have termed 'the visual archive of colonialism' that — in the German context — finds paradigmatic form in those chocolate-covered marshmallow sweets traditionally called 'Negerküsse' or 'Mohrenköpfe', as well as in the figure of the African servant used by the Sarotti company between 1918 and 2004 to advertise its chocolate.¹⁰⁰ Read through Braidotti, a 'politics of location' can be seen at work here which 'combines epistemological with political accountability' to enable 'analysis of the multiple power locations one inevitably inhabits as the site of one's subjectivity.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ 'Ostara, Eástre mag also gottheit des strahlenden morgens, des aufsteigenden lichts gewesen sein, eine freudige, heilbringende erscheinung, deren begriff für das auferstehungsfest des christlichen gottes verwandt werden konnte'. Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1875), p. 241.

¹⁰⁰ George Steinmetz and Julia Hell, 'The Visual Archive of Colonialism: Germany and Namibia', *Public Culture*, 18.1 (2006), 147–183 (pp. 154–55).

¹⁰¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 15–16.

A clear break from these nostalgic images of childhood comes in line 8 with the introduction of the impersonal pronoun ‘es’ that is identified as the anonymous driver of such forms of language which, in insistently foregrounding a state of naturalness, are exposed in all their artificiality. The terminology of dealing and gambling that subsequently extends throughout the poem suggests deep disillusion with the consumerist tendencies of lyricizing forms. The pairing of hackneyed images of leaves and blossoms with the erotically charged vocabulary of consumption might be said to find a lyric precedent in Ingeborg Bachmann’s famous lyric farewell to lyric poetry, ‘Keine Delikatessen’, that was published in the *Kursbuch* journal in 1968:

Soll ich
eine Metapher ausstaffieren
mit einer Mandelblüte?
Die Syntax kreuzigen
auf einen Lichteffect?
Wer wird sich den Schädel zerbrechen
über so überflüssige Dinge – ¹⁰²

However, the resigned despair in the modernist text conveyed through its hopeless rhetorical questions gives way in Oliver’s poem to cynical recognition of the relation between inflated forms of language and nostalgic forms of emotional attachment.

The fracturing of words and heavy repetitions in the third stanza underscore the clumsy calculation behind the deceptive vision of springtime implied to have been knocked off in a state of heady intoxication and cynically acknowledged in a bracketed aside:

¹⁰² Ingeborg Bachmann, *Werke*, ed. by Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster, 4 vols (Munich: Piper, 1978), I: *Gedichte, Hörspiele, Libretti, Übersetzungen*, pp. 172–73.

[april-
versponnen / april-
besommert]

(*fahrtenschreiber*, p. 72)

Recalling Ernst Jandl's guttural evocation of Austrian annexation in 'wien : heldenplatz' (1962),¹⁰³ the insistent rhyming verbs placed just before stanza- and line-breaks in stanzas three and four convey something of the force with which these idealized images of springtime are imposed. The influence of Ostara as a 'Spring-like fertility goddess'¹⁰⁴ can be identified in the erotic overtones of lyric references to desire, May altars, and images of showy, up-turned blossoms that – like the orgiastic rally in Jandl's poem – are directly associated with a surging outburst of exaggerated nationalistic feeling:

Da schreit
sich einer heimatfroh / : froh.

(*fahrtenschreiber*, p. 72)

In this instance of combined linguistic and political critique, the further significance of Ostara, as the title of a racist publishing house and book series founded in 1906 in Vienna and read by the young Adolf Hitler, might be heard to echo.¹⁰⁵ José Oliver has

¹⁰³ Ernst Jandl, *lechts und rinks: gedichte statements peppermints* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2002), p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. 'From 1906 on Lanz published the magazine *Ostara*, "the first and only periodical dedicated to the research and cultivation of heroic racedom and men's rights," with detailed reviews of the latest publications on the "race business." At first the series was a forum for Pan-

commented that in using disrupted forms of language and heavy punctuation, his intention is to engender ‘Bewusstheit in Sprache’.¹⁰⁶ Here, Deleuze’s remarks on the material resonance of minor literature help illuminate Oliver’s use of syntax ‘in order to cry, to give a syntax to the cry’ (*Kafka*, p. 26). Cut-off syntactically from the words around it by a slash and colon, the isolated adjective ‘froh’ stands ambivalently in the middle of the line, itself a textual barrier. On the one hand, it mirrors the hollow cry of a contemporary Pegida supporter shouting him- or herself hoarse on empty boasts of national glory and, on the other, its ambivalent positioning might be read as a provocation to more general reflection on subjective happiness, or memories thereof, and their foundation on nostalgic forms of recollection derived from old tropes and cultural clichés. The word seems lost — unsure of its own coordinates or referents — and deterritorialized from any embedded context.

The poem’s central quatrains reflect on contemporary humanitarian catastrophes at sea, which are at their peak in the spring and summer months, as refugees set out on their journeys north across the Blue Route, so-called after the waters of the Mediterranean that ‘brings people from Africa and Asia through North Africa to Europe’¹⁰⁷ and that forms a significant proportion of the estimated five to seven billion

German authors. [...] Whether or not Lanz and young Hitler briefly did meet in Vienna is rather inconsequential. However, what is certain is that Hitler was familiar with the *Ostara* series and with Lanz as a prolific writer publishing in the Pan-German newspapers.’ Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Vienna: A Dictator’s Apprenticeship*, trans. by Thomas Thorton (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 218–21.

¹⁰⁶ Van Ryneveld, ‘Im Gespräch mit José F. A. Oliver’, p. 134.

¹⁰⁷ John Morrison and Beth Crossland, ‘The Trafficking and Smuggling of Refugees: The End-Game in European Asylum Policy’, *New Issues in Refugee Research* 39 (2001), 1–93 (p. 5)

<<http://www.unhcr.org/3af66c9b4.pdf>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

dollars generated annually by global human trafficking.¹⁰⁸ The significance of Easter, a Christian festival celebrating rebirth and life over death, is turned upside down in the poem, since all those in search of a new life are seen to perish, as they set out only to wash up as black corpses on southern European beaches. The gentle assonance and alliteration of line 17 serve to underscore the horrific inversion of the Christian baptism ceremony, where instead of fulfilling the promise of eternal salvation the lines present a communal scene of mass-slaughter:

Die wolken sind

kajütentüren. Dort

laufen leichen aus ins blau / die

kommen allesamt vom meer & sind

ganz schwarz

(fahrtschreiber, p. 72)

The adjective ‘schwarz’ is left to resonate ambiguously, as the reader contemplates its different meanings and associations — black bodies, blackened corpses and, perhaps also, the word’s use as signifier in German to denote illegality and, in this case, illegal passage — ‘schwarzfahren’. Over the past decades, Fortress Europe has built up its administrative and physical barriers so ferociously that today there is no alternative for asylum seekers but to enter the European Union illegally and at great personal risk.¹⁰⁹ Reflection about the invisibility of real-life human crisis within bureaucratic discourse dominates the closing quatrains, where a shift can be identified in the focus of the speaker’s linguistic critique from interrogating forms of hackneyed lyricism to attacking the language of

¹⁰⁸ Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo: A Journey among Refugees* (New York: Picador, 2006), p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

international capitalism, when faced with the reality of dead bodies on southern European shores:

Die menschen-

spieler schachern eifrig

am hasentisch ums knospenweh

: I spieler setzt auf afrika, der will noch

punkten. [Zu spät]. Die edel-

hölzer sind verhandelt / die opfer-

zahlen kontingente

das exil

ist altpapier. Das wort

(fahrtschreiber, pp. 72–73)

The sustained lyric use of terminology from the domains of gambling and commerce serves to draw attention to the recklessness with which human lives are treated, a callousness underscored by the lines' harsh sibilance and alliteration. In this section, the splitting of words across line breaks contemplates the disjuncture between forms of language and lived realities. Indeed in reflecting on the different borders thematized in the poem, broader questions about the injustices and inequalities of the free-market global economy are to be discerned. The irony is not lost on the lyric speaker that, in the globalized twenty-first century, as economic barriers are coming down and first world financiers aspire to follow in the footsteps of their colonial forefathers, the political

borders between states are in fact being strengthened to keep people out of Europe, despite its absolute structural reliance on cheap migrant labor from Africa.¹¹⁰

Challenging the contemporary legitimacy of cornerstone metaphors in Christianity, the three final quatrains deterritorialize these into surrealistic poetic ciphers for modern acts of inhumanity. Oliver reworks Biblical images of resurrection to call up not the missing body of the Savior but the utter absence of marked graves for those who go unsaved — people are dying in their thousands and Europe looks away:

Das wasser

speit verdross / gleichgültigkeit

& selbst *der Himmel*

: brache. Die Kinder

suchen nester ab. Die welt

ist kein versteck / vom hasentisch

fällt dann ein stein. Vom stein

starrt her ein engelsaug

samt schwert. Das grab / die gräber

sind im off. Der tag, I wurf

hortensienbälle, die nackt-

verglühen. Auch sie

im bilde / surreal

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

»es schwimmt sich schön im mittelmeeer«

(*fahrtenschreiber*, p. 73)

In these final lines of the poem, the reworking of Christian imagery in the context of the wider lyric critique of political oppression and wrongdoing might recall Benjamin's writings on the profane and their relation to his developing thoughts on messianic time, which — with his *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* of 1940 — would ultimately offer an alternative temporal model concerned with oppressed peoples, past and present, in order to undermine dominant conceptions of history preoccupied with myths of progress.¹¹¹ In particular, the poem's closing reference to the surreal image again brings to mind Benjamin's Surrealism essay in which bourgeois politics are rejected as the equivalent of '[e]in schlechtes Frühlingsgedicht',¹¹² an analogy that finds uncanny resonance in 'ostersonntag, travestien'. The series of images and artefacts from childhood with which Oliver's poem begins might thus be read as instances of 'profane illumination', which — deterritorialized from the sacred realm — carry a call for freedom. In the surrealist motif of 'angels eye complete with sword' (engelsaug / samt schwert) of the penultimate stanza, further buried reference can be found to a seminal twentieth-century appeal for image-based modes of communication which offer a mimetic alternative to those representational modes valorized by Enlightenment rationality. The sword-bearing angel who forced Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden is figured in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) as the very symbol of technical progress: 'Unbeherrschte Nemesis wird verfemt. Der Engel mit dem feurigen Schwert, der die Menschen aus dem Paradies auf die Bahn des technischen Fortschritts trieb, ist

¹¹¹ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, pp. 700–01.

¹¹² Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.i, p. 308.

selbst das Sinnbild solchen Fortschritts.¹¹³ Here, the reader might further remember the catastrophic vision of the angel of history famously described by Benjamin in his interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920).¹¹⁴ By working surrealist motifs and references to modernist critiques of fascism into a lyric polemic that condemns contemporary acts of Western inhumanity, Oliver can be seen to create a present-day poetic constellation that firmly situates the current humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean as part of that single historical catastrophe identified by Benjamin in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* as nothing less than the history of oppressed people.¹¹⁵

The political significance of the intense cynicism voiced in the poem's final line – 'es schwimmt sich schön im mittelmeer' – finds further resonance in Benjamin's 'Surrealism' essay which closes in a similarly ironic appeal for an active, organized pessimism 'dedicated to preventing, by all means possible, the advent of the worst'.¹¹⁶ Benjamin writes:

Der Sürrealismus ist ihrer kommunistischen Beantwortung immer näher gekommen. Und das bedeutet: Pessimismus auf der ganzen Linie. Jawohl und durchaus. Mißtrauen in das Geschick der Literatur, Mißtrauen in das Geschick der Freiheit, Mißtrauen in das Geschick der europäischen Menschheit, vor allem aber Mißtrauen, Mißtrauen und Mißtrauen in alle Verständigung: zwischen den

¹¹³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2003), p. 189.

¹¹⁴ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 691.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 697.

¹¹⁶ Michael Löwy, 'Walter Benjamin and Surrealism: The Story of a Revolutionary Spell', *Radical Philosophy* 80 (1996), 17–23 (p. 20).

Klassen, zwischen den Völkern, zwischen den Einzelnen. Und unbegrenztes
Vertrauen allein in I. G. Farben und die friedliche Vervollkommnung der
Luftwaffe.¹¹⁷

As Michael Löwy has suggested, ‘Benjamin’s pessimistic-revolutionary vision allows him to glimpse — intuitively but with a strange accuracy — the catastrophes that lay in store for Europe, captured perfectly by the ironic “boundless confidence”’.¹¹⁸ As Löwy also points out, Benjamin of course could not have imagined the destruction that the *Luftwaffe* would wreak on Europe or the genocidal implementation of I. G. Farben’s most infamous invention — ‘Zyklon B’ gas — just a few years later. In Oliver’s formal reworking of Benjamin’s heavily ironic one-liner in his 2010 poem, however, a comparable premonition of ‘the monstrous disasters . . . spawned by an industrial/bourgeois society in crisis’¹¹⁹ can be identified. In this light, the Benjaminian concepts of profane illumination and historical catastrophe, and the anachronistic logic they imply, constitute a further instance of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, compounding the highly political relevance of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought for analysis of the pessimistic lyric engagement with contemporary acts of inhumanity in the Mediterranean region.

4.

Notorious articulation of the neo-liberal interests driving present-day inhumanity was given by UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson at the Conservative Party Conference in

¹¹⁷ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.i, p. 308.

¹¹⁸ Löwy, ‘Walter Benjamin and Surrealism’, p. 21.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

October 2017 when he spoke about investment opportunity in Libya to a fringe event on global trade:

There's a group of UK business people actually, I don't know whether you will have come across this, wonderful guys, who want to invest in Sirte on the coast, near where Gaddafi was actually captured and executed, as some of you may have seen. They have got a brilliant vision to turn Sirte, with the help of the municipality of Sirte, into the next Dubai. The only thing they've got to do is clear the dead bodies.¹²⁰

Johnson's crass joke not only reflects contemptuous disregard for those lives which prove mere collateral in the multinational race to open up new global markets, it might further be read as a globalized variation on Agamben's state of exception. With their brazen assertion that the bodies on Libyan beaches must disappear to make way for Western investors, Johnson's remarks manifest an extreme deterritorialization of the camp space itself, as the camp gives way to unmarked graves for those leaving Africa for Europe. In the neo-colonial present, Agamben's understanding of the camp as '*the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*' in 'a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order'¹²¹ has developed into a transnational space of exclusion that stretches beyond European shores across the entire Mediterranean region and North African coast. As evidenced in the

¹²⁰ Lizzy Buchan, 'Boris Johnson says Libyan City has Bright Future "once they clear the dead bodies"', *Independent*, 3 October 2017 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-libya-dead-body-comments-new-dubai-tory-conference-2017-a7981551.html>> [accessed 7 March 2018].

¹²¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 168–69.

comments of the British Foreign Secretary, even in their countries of origin, North African lives are dismissed as being of no consequence in the face of Western business interests. By changing the subject position to hold language to account for its forced exclusions, both Caroline Bergvall and José Oliver devise forms of testimony for people being denied legal recognition by Fortress Europe and its exclusionary practices of border-control. In contrast to Agamben's allegorical *homo sacer*, a figure criticized for its mythologizing tendencies and neglect of historical circumstance and specificity, the contemporary lyric texts move away from representational modes to instead explore the polylingual lyric voice as a site from which to oppose the oppressions of majoritarian discourse. Bogue has suggested that minor literature 'is above all linguistic action'¹²² and common to both projects is the role of the spoken word in creating — after Deleuze and Guattari — 'a materially intense expression' that uses 'syntax in order to cry, to give a syntax to the cry' (*Kafka*, 26). Through profane re-imaginings of a religious poem from the tenth century, on the one hand, and of the principal Christian festival, on the other, Caroline Bergvall and José Oliver devise minor works that liberate words and images from the strictures of cultural tradition and militate against majoritarian categories and politics.

In their projects of lyric deterritorialization and political critique, which can be read productively through Agamben and Benjamin, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, Bergvall and Oliver give radical form to contemporary human rights violations being perpetrated in zones outside the effective control of states and their frames of criminal justice. Their materialist engagement with the politics of place highlights — in Bergvall's case — points of contact between historical groups and their languages and — in Oliver's — European complicity in mass drownings off its shores. And so both writers

¹²² Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 91.

might be understood to gesture towards new models of deterritorialized rights and disaggregated citizenship which — as prominent political theorist Seyla Benhabib has pointed out — ‘permi[t] individuals to develop and sustain multiple allegiances and networks across nation-state boundaries, in inter- as well as transnational contexts’.¹²³ The heterolingual lyric works break down borders between languages, revealing language instead to be an open organism, always in a condition of dialogue and rupture, gesturing towards Europe itself as a space in which new constellations and compositions emerge through processes of migration. Whilst Bergvall’s *Drift* can be understood as a nomadic testimony, calling up an ocean voyage full of risk through a shifting field of archaic words, multilingual neologisms, and textual slippages that metonymically enact instances of human dislocation and re-connection, Oliver’s text seems less straightforwardly concerned with any mobile subject position. In contrast to his 1989 poem ‘Stühle’ (‘Chairs’) which closes in a moment of affirmation, ‘zwischen den Stühlen / lebt die Möglichkeit / in Bewegung zu bleiben’,¹²⁴ ‘ostersonntag, travestien’ appears to be constructed across a divide in which no such positive or privileged mobility is conceivable. Instead, the sea is figured as a site of human catastrophe, as Oliver’s poem obstructs and dissects the German language to force reflection on the crass discrepancy between forms of language and the unspeakable fact that people have been driven to death in their thousands attempting to reach the southern shores of Europe.

Through deterritorializing textual practice, the writers issue an ethico-political challenge to Fortress Europe’s self-construction as a sacred space. Seen in these terms,

¹²³ Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 174.

¹²⁴ José F.A. Oliver, *Aufbruch* (Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 1987), p. 54.

the lyric play with religious pretexts is itself revealed as another instance of deterritorialization — namely of the sacred — and reterritorialization of the sacred as profane in the Mediterranean context of death and suffering. By devising affective testimony for the state of exception that allows thousands of people quite literally to go under, the two poets generate new lines of affiliation and forms of imaginative community with Europe's excluded others. Read through the dual prism of Deleuze and Agamben, the testimony of the two poets imagines those falling into the sea as a people to come. The final shocking illumination of the lyric writings, then, might be found in their deterritorialized figuration of the coming people as always already having been lost, caught in a space that is only ever virtual.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

ÁINE MCMURTRY