A Question of Will: Laboria Cuboniks in Bratislava

Laboria Cuboniks

2019-04-10

Abstract

Transcript of a talk we gave in Bratislava, in the Spring of 2017.

Techno-Materialist, Anti-Naturalist, Gender-Abolitionist

HH: We're going to start not by jumping straight into the question of will, but instead by outlining what we do as a collective and by sketching out the broad perimeters of our project, which we call xenofeminism.

We are an international feminist working group. There are six of us – one is missing today – and we are spread across three continents and five countries. The project we're trying to work on, XF, is really an attempt to articulate an emancipatory gender politics fit for an era of globality, complexity, and technology – one which thinks about technology as an activist tool whilst attempting to confront a contemporary reality cross-hatched with fiber optic cables, radio and micro-waves, oil and gas pipelines, aerial and shipping routes and the unrelenting simultaneous execution of millions of communication protocols with every passing millisecond. In short, to situate a feminist politics within the reality of the 21st century.

So, what is XF? In the collective, all six of us, have slightly different versions of what we think XF is and what it involves (or should involve). So, I'm going to articulate what I think of as my version of XF, and then Diann is going to add her account with the help of audio-visual material.

So, XF is a techno-materialist, anti-naturalist and gender-abolitionist form of feminism. What do I mean by these three terms?

Techno-Materialist

The project is techno-materialist in the sense that is seeks to develop a critical approach to technologies and to think about the different kind of impacts

technologies can have upon women, queers, and the gender non-conforming. XF does not reject technology, or science, or rationalism (ideas more usually understood as patriarchal constructs), but instead takes a genuine interest in how we might design or appropriate technological devices and processes for gender-political ends.

Some of the examples that we make reference to in the manifesto include pharmaceuticals, 3D printing, and open-source software. These phenomena have the potential to represent remarkable opportunities for the queer, feminist left. And XF is interested in exploring and leveraging these affordances.

At the same time, however, XF swerves away from technological determinism. As a project, it recognizes that technologies are not inherently beneficial – indeed, they are not even inherently neutral – but are in fact constrained by their specific design histories, by the existing infrastructures into which they emerge, and by imbalances in terms of who can access them. Technology can only represent an area of opportunity if we understand that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between devices, systems, approaches, and the wider social world. Any emancipatory techno-feminism must therefore be, first and foremost, a form of political struggle; something that is attentive to the interlocking structures of oppression, such as race, gender, and class that make up the material world. So, that is the sense in which we mean the idea of the word techno-material.

Anti-Naturalist

The second term that I used to describe the project was 'anti-naturalist'. How does this apply to XF? Well, it is an anti-naturalist project in the sense that it frames Nature, and 'the Natural', as a space for contestation (that is, as within the purview of politics).

In the manifesto, we claim that nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent or given; neither material conditions, nor social forms. Anyone who's been deemed unnatural in face of reigning biological norms; anyone who's experienced injustices wrought in the name of the Natural order, will realize that the glorification of Nature has nothing to offer us.

This refusal to accept the immutability of Nature is the one element of the XF project that perhaps resonates most strongly with me personally. Perhaps that's because it chimes with my background in queer theory, feminist politics, and the study of sexual dissidence.

Being anti-naturalist, though, is not the same thing as being against the natural world. And it is not the same thing as denying the shaping influence of the biological. XF does not deny that there is a biological stratum to embodied reality; that certain bodies have different susceptibilities or capacities (most obviously, the susceptibility and capacity to incubate a fetus).

What it does dispute, however, is the idea that this stratum is immutable or fixed, simply because it is biological. On the one hand, this involves acknowledging

the role that social ideas play in understandings of embodiment – insisting that many of our notions about gendered bodies are to some extent ideological, for example. More radically, perhaps, it involves framing the terrain of biology itself as rightfully subject to change.

Biology is not destiny, as the classic second-wave feminist slogan goes, but it's not destiny because biology itself can be technologically transformed, and should be transformed in the pursuit of reproductive justice and the progressive transformation of gender. XF, then, emphasizes what it sees as the fundamental mutability of bodies and the fundamental mutability of identities, and is invested in the disruption of the current sexual order of things. As we put it in the manifesto, "if Nature is unjust, change Nature!"

Gender-Abolitionist

One key element of this perspective, and the final characteristic I wish to draw your attention to, is XF's agitation for the abolition of the binary gender system. In the manifesto, we argue that the project is gender abolitionist, but this description, is perhaps a little bit misleading.

First of all, it does not explicitly encompass the full scope of our ambitions. It is not just gender that we seek to dismantle, but any structures that come to act as frequently naturalized and, thus rigidified, bases of oppression. We believe that traits associated not just with gender, but also with race, class, able-bodiedness, and so on, are unevenly loaded with social stigma and often contribute to cultures of inequality. Although the current political value of mobilizing around these categories does need to be acknowledged, XF argues that, in the longer term, the full range of these traits should be stripped of their social significance and therefore of their ability to act as vectors of discrimination.

In short, the project seeks to unpick any culturally weaponized markers of identity that harbor injustices. Secondly, the phrase "gender abolitionism" is somewhat tricky, as it risks coming across as a demand for the paring back of gender – a demand for difference in itself to be abolished. That's not what we're advocating for at all. If anything, it is the restrictions upon gendered identities that we want to see scrapped; the tenacious binary thinking that continues to funnel identities into male and female, feminine and masculine, despite the obvious paucity of this model. XF is gender-abolitionist in the sense that we reject the validity of any social order anchored in identities as a basis of oppression, and in the sense that we embrace sexual diversity beyond any binary. We advocate for the system of gender difference to be abolished via the proliferation of gender differences, if that makes sense; and the role of will within this project is something we may wish to discuss further as we move forwards. So, my version of xenofeminism is a technomaterialist, anti-naturalist, gender abolitionist species of feminism. At this point, I'm going to hand over to my colleague Diann Bauer, who will be adding another complicating strand to this definition; alienation and/as rationality.

Alienation and/as Rationality

DB: As a way to enter this and to be clear from the start, the xenofeminist project is one that recognizes that a retreat to small-scale tactics and localized politics are insufficient given the scale of the problems we face as a species and much of how must operate now. This is not to say, the work done at a local scale is unimportant, but XF, is a project, whose focus, rather, is on systemic conditions. It is at this point a preliminary discursive project. XF recognizes that possibility of broad reorientation towards social justice will have to be created by the complex systems in which we live, not despite them.

It is within this context that the idea of a productive alienation becomes very useful. The text we wrote together in 2015 is called *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* and I would like to clarify what are we talking about here when we use the word 'alienation'? I'm going to read a bit from the manifesto where this term is introduced and I will elaborate what we mean.

> XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy. Freedom is not a given – and it's certainly not given by anything 'natural'. The construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labour of freedom's construction. (Laboria Cuboniks, 0x01)

First of all, alienation is a relational term – something or someone is alienated from someone or something else. As the manifesto, says, we're all alienated; how we ever been otherwise? The argument is, that as long as we have been sapient, we've been alienated.

I'm making a distinction here between sapience and sentience. I take this from Ray Brassier (from Wilfrid Sellars). I'm using sapience to mean the human ability to use reason to both reflect and consciously act on our world and by extension to construct it, while a sentient being is one that has awareness of their surroundings but not necessarily the capacity to reflect and deliberately and act on it.

As we evolved out of 'the muck of immediacy', be this in our evolution as a species through time or the muck of immediacy of the everyday demands of being a bit of sentient biology, if given basic conditions for survival, we can do much more than just maintain that survival. As soon as we could reason beyond our biological needs and reflect on our finitude we were already alienated.

But it is this condition that enables us to plan, to plot, to discern; it ought to be like this for these reasons. It is this form of alienation that has enabled the species to be as successful as it currently is. And when I say successful, I'm not making a moral judgement. I just mean our dominance as a species in the ability to avoid extinction long enough to do some rather amazing things, like

space travel or antibiotics for example. So, on a broad scale, at the scale of the species, alienation from our biology via sapience is a productive force.

The ability as a species to self-reflect and then turn, make and remake what we are, what is human, is one of the ways XF regards alienation as productive. There are, however, other forms of alienation that I want to be clear about. Individual alienation can also be productive; there are, indeed many examples of individuals that use personal, social or economic alienation to create the new; to create something better, that wasn't there before; or, indeed, needed previously. And though, alienation on this scale can be productive, it is not the kind XF should avow programmatically. Not everyone gets to be the hero that fought the odds.

A more common result of this kind of alienation is a slow and grinding dissolve of individual, political agency. People do not get broken because they are not strong or heroic enough; they get broken because of a systemic stacking of the cards. In this context, people succeed despite their alienation and not because of it. It is important to be clear what kind of alienation we're avowing as well as how, where and on what scale it functions.

XF is not a project that avows allowing things to get so bad they will be forced to get better. Those who suffer most under that sort of logic are often those who are already the most vulnerable. So while we, as a species, have the capacity for reason, and the capacity to make what ought to be, we also have the capacity to construct truly catastrophic conditions that can always exceed our imaginations of how bad things can get. Perhaps Patricia you would like to add a few things on this as I know you have also done a lot of work on this idea of alienation.

A Mereology of the Will

PR: I would like to say a few things on alienation, because I think, that, ultimately, our aim is to bring this into the direct question of this wonderful lecture series [the question of will]. As Helen was mentioning, we all have different roles in this working group, and I think the nomenclature, the naming of this as a 'working group', is quite important; it is distinct from a 'collective' which typically has one voice. One of the interesting things for me, personally being involved with this group, is to see/use it as a kind of exercise in navigating variation (on a humble micro-scale), since a lot of the time we have different political positions and priorities, so writing a manifesto together was an exercise in finding ways to thread together different issues, and find some 'generic' ground between them.

The second aspect, being the incredible learning curve one encounters when regularly working with others coming from different fields, and having to integrate this knowledge. So, our work together is also a kind of game in a transdisciplinary or synthetic thinking that, I think, we're all going to have to get adjusted to, to start to cope with the complexity of problems we're collectively facing since

they cannot be isolated in one discipline. Obviously, ours is but a very small, modest step in that direction, so I'm not trying to inflate it here either.

My specific interest in this generative force of alienation is how new knowledge, new phenomena or concepts that make an appearance in the world, can change the way we understand ourselves and our position within it. How do they transform the self-understanding of the human and how does that, in turn, transform the possibilities for acting in the world and what we would do.

Nowadays, epistemology seems to be in a political crisis, and I think, there is an urgency to figure out a way to politicize epistemology without dumbing down such a necessity into a dogmatic scienticism or a fetishization of science to guide our naive selves. What are the kind of interfaces and tools of mediation that are required (and in which I think the question of will is hugely important) to have these new forms of knowledge and knowing, to work upon us, to transform our self-understanding and have that become collective. Ultimately, this is equally an ethical program as well, an ethos, a mode of doing, of how we can/or will intervene in the world and cohabitate with each other ('other' here, not being exclusively human, either).

So, within this question of will, the thing that is key to remember is the will, as a concept, moves between the individual and the collective; and there's a really nice word that, frankly I've just learned from my colleague, Anke Hennig – mereology. It's the study of part-to-whole, and part-to-part relations that form wholes. How does the will become transformed from my personal will to behaving a certain way, to a collectivized scale? The will is only going to be minorly effective on the individual scale, so I think it's crucial to understand how it can scale up. The question of will, then, we could say, requires a mereological approach.

The Will as Self-Transformation

KB: There are a couple of passages in the manifesto that begin to ferment a xenofeminist conception of will. The important note to take from these sections, 0x0D specifically, relates the question of will to meme plasticity and complexity. Lucca will elaborate on these points afterward. To begin, I will read for us the two paragraphs which can hopefully take us further, and then will give my own take based on a few key philosophical elements that I think are important to XF.

> If 'cyberspace' once offered the promise of escaping the strictures of essentialist identity categories, the climate of contemporary social media has swung forcefully in the other direction, and has become a theatre where these prostrations to identity are performed. With these curatorial practices come puritanical rituals of moral maintenance, and these stages are too often overrun with the disavowed pleasures of accusation, shaming, and denunciation. Valuable platforms for connection, organization, and skill-sharing become clogged

with obstacles to productive debate positioned as if they are debate. These puritanical politics of shame – which fetishize oppression as if it were a blessing, and cloud the waters in moralistic frenzies – leave us cold. We want neither clean hands nor beautiful souls, neither virtue nor terror. We want superior forms of corruption. (Laboria Cuboniks, 0x0C)

What this shows is that the task of engineering platforms for social emancipation and organization cannot ignore the cultural and semiotic mutations these platforms afford. What requires reengineering are the memetic parasites arousing and coordinating behaviours in ways occluded by their hosts' self-image; failing this, memes like 'anonymity', 'ethics', 'social justice' and 'privilege-checking' host social dynamisms at odds with the often-commendable intentions with which they're taken up. The task of collective self-mastery requires a hyperstitional manipulation of desire's puppet-strings, and deployment of semiotic operators over a terrain of highly networked cultural systems. The will will always be corrupted by the memes in which it traffics, but nothing prevents us from instrumentalizing this fact, and calibrating it in view of the ends it desires (Laboria Cuboniks, 0x0D)

As a preliminary for the dirty work that needs to be done, from my own perspective I might elaborate on the integrity of will only if we can first realize, together, that just theorizing about will is not enough. To merely put the question of will into a theoretical frame is not enough because it requires a kind of knowing otherwise, through other actions; I believe will has little to do with the intellect. Will has to become the grounds of an integral philosophical practice. In other words, the will (to will) is a necessary element for any pragmatic philosophical vision that puts its 'self-conceptions' in light with its 'self-transformations' (to borrow two heuristics from Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani — but I elaborate here on my own conceptual views).

From the local perspective, the will will look like the exercise of a global integrity, as a necessary precursor to developing dignity, which is fully knowable when the agent is capable of embodying its global commitments as they are understood through the entangled particularities which call upon them (particularities which call upon the global commitments or the universal). This is not to say there is no struggle, no hiccup, no discontinuity, or no overturning of the universal for the willing or willed, given any self-conception or conception in general has gravity that weighs heavy over-time, especially when local commitments get tried or contradict the performance of a global transformation.

I speak in very abstract terms here, but we can see that this pragmatic understanding of will has a strong relation to historicity. Furthermore, it stands to reason for any collective project since historicity implies the co-existence of multiple commitments which are requisite for an out-growth of scalable cooperations. Tensions inevitably arise within any project if it becomes overly self-identified, as

its unfolding necessitates small perturbations resultant from local contingencies and experimental contradictions in the make-up of the self-conception.

Thus, seeing the will as without self becomes an even more effective means for engaging with it as a relational process, wherein multi-layering of temporalities, transformations, and even multiple contradictions, transform the form of a 'collaboration' into a fully embodied project of collective self-mastery. Indeed, an abundance of propositions begins to override the neurotic impulse to pin down a single concept when the stakes for transformation are more clear and more important. Notice I still use the word 'self' in self-conception and 'self' in self-transformation while referring to a 'will without self'. This is because there must be a certain degree of representational performative flexibility in the operation of will — a kind of generative 'shadow-self' that enables memetic plasticity to take place.

Finally, there is an aesthetic dimension to will (an ethos, perhaps), which involves courage, or the desire to recognize struggle and to corrupt all disempowering reactionary thinking. The aesthetic dimension is precisely where histories of intelligence become creative functions of revolutions: in other words, the aesthetic dimension of will involves: firstly, how will is the envelopment of time or temporalities (and self-transformations); secondly, how will is the envelopment of objectivity, to hopefully include multiple perspectives into the experiential; and thirdly, more generally, how will involves a co-composition or engineering of form, 'co-' given all the conditions and relations that give rise to a will under consideration.

I leave the rest to Lucca now.

Superior Forms of Corruption

LF: I suppose the thread where I want to pick up is just where Katrina left off, that

> The will will always be corrupted by the memes in which it traffics, but nothing prevents us from instrumentalizing this fact, and calibrating it in view of the ends it desires.

Classically, we distinguish will from "want", or desire, or appetite. So, will is this desire that can grasp itself, that can reason about itself transparently. You have this kind of self-presence of desire to itself. It is a desire that masters itself. This is the kind of classical image of will. And this is very much a heroic vision – the subject in total transparency, clear of his own intention projecting them forward into to future that will then be molded by this image.

But we all agree that there is something dangerous about this. And this isn't something new, this is something that has been under critique for decades and decades, centuries even. But, I suppose our project is still trying to find what do we want; some sort of notion of collective self-control. We want some notion

of being able to articulate these ambitious projects in a world that is noisy and chaotic and indeterminate. We don't want to just capitulate, just abandon these notions, just because they're sort of bogged down with this kind of heroic mythology, that makes them a constant hazard. So, the will, is not the moment where the desire or the agent can grasp themselves with completely transparency and presence. It is not the moment where you have complete control – even if these moments exist and if we grant for the sake of argument that they do, at very best, they are very rare and very fragile. They are also almost always blind. The will has a certain opacity to itself.

So, what we want to do then, is to look at the ways in which agency can grasp itself not on the side of its transparency or its presence to itself, but on the side of its laziness and its stupidity and the ways in which it's carried along by tides that it doesn't control, tides that its heroic self-image obscures. Every sort of great heroic quest of the will is at sail on the sea in a storm but now incentives that will sway and corrupt it do this unnoticed. And so, if corruption is a given, then corruption should be our medium. Corruption should the be clay that we to operate on.

And so how do we find, what is this superior form of corruption? The most basic particles of this corruption are just, like we said, the memes in which the will traffics, these little cultural fragments that hook into our behavior and our psyches with these little tendrils of incentivization that mostly go unnoticed. And so, we mean this in a totally cliché way – the sense in which people say, "money corrupts", or "power corrupts". This is the sort of corruption that we're starting with here, hoping to expand it.

So, first of all, what is a meme? A meme is something that is everyone at least passingly familiar with. And, you know, because it became a very popularized term, like, the internet meme, and so on, then, of course we want to go back a little bit to the notion of a meme as what Dawkins or Susan Blackmore called this "second replicator". Think of what a gene is. What does something have to be for it to be subject to evolution? What do you need in order to have a Darwinist process? You only need a few things (which is the beauty of Darwinism). You need replication, mutation and selection. And if you have these three things, you're good.

These are such abstract parameters that we can even instantiate them artificially – and this is something we often do in machine learning, in a field called evolutionary computation. We create these completely artificial, completely engineered situations in which evolution isn't just simulated, but occurs, in which you create populations of programs and you set conditions for their fitness, you set the right algorithms for mutation, and sexual or asexual reproduction and you let this just spin for a number of generations until it converges on a solution to a problem that you couldn't have scripted out in advance. You know what a correct solution might look like, at least approximately, but you have no way of getting there, so you use a machine-learning approach to take advantage of noise and this randomness, and you find the solution in very vast and complicated

problem space. And, I think there are strategies coming from this, that can be tremendously informative politically.

Memes are fragments of behavior, of cultural production, if you like, that can be repeated with some degree of fidelity, that can be variated or mutated and that there is a selection pressure on. And so, like the internet meme is a good example of this, that, sort of, dramatizes this; it's a beautiful little self-reflective dramatization of this, but is only a small case. So, how do these things move, then, within their environment – when their environment is human behavior, fueled, for the most part, by human desire? They need ways to hook into us, if they're going to thrive. Ways to coax us towards their replication and preservation, which means that the survivors – the "fittest" memes – are the ones that have ways of incentivizing us to reproduce them. This is another instance of the evolutionary process.

We have one hand the genetic evolution that we are a part of – this roughly arboreal, vertical descent – but at some point, in Earth's history, this process was cross-cut by another, where you see the evolution of memes, of the memetic sphere. These fragments have been transported horizontally across the human population. We are its environment. And in order to thrive, they needed to nudge and carve that little ecosystem in us, the way that we have to on Earth and the way that every organism has to in its environment.

This is the basic explanatory framework of memetics, kicked off by Richard Dawkins and developed at greater length by Susan Blackmore and others. And there are some really fascinating conjectures that like this dramatic encephalation of humans. . . that they needed hosts with large brains and so this became us. Whatever a meme could sort of encourage their population to favor brain size and cognitive capacity for selection, those would tend to be more likely to thrive, down the line. So, there is leaning on that works the way a good parasite does with its host; and think of the really interesting parasites like toxoplasma, or the rhizocephala barnacle. So, toxoplasma, one of the things it does, is that it infects the brain of a mouse it plays around out there, mucking around in the nervous system, and it gives the mouse a particular taste for danger and an excitement, and a fascination, in particular, with cats. The mouse then develops an almost erotic attraction to cat urine and so it becomes much more likely to be eaten by a cat, which is a migration toxoplasma optimizes for.

Then you have the Rhizocephalan barnacle which is a barnacle organism but infects crabs. So, it infects a crab and spreads its root-like "head" through the crab's circulatory system, and then hijacks its endocrine system. If the crab is male, the barnacle feminizes it. It develops an egg-like sack on the back, and then will then infect the crab's offspring. What's really interesting is that the barnacle predisposes the crab to show favoritism towards the offspring that are, themselves, infected by the barnacle. I'm working up to an analogy here.

I think this is the way that memeplexes operate, through human behavior, discourse and communities.

10

This is the approach I'm interested in taking right now, if we are going to examine the ways in which we mobilize a political program, for example, or we have a behavior we want to encourage, or if we want to look at how these various political platforms operate. The heroic approach is to look at our intentions and at our advertised self-image, the way we see ourselves. And you know, there's a limitation to this. One is that, in maintaining this heroic ego – this is what we're doing, this is what is right, what we will achieve – misses, I think, the ways in which the will is not just accidentally corrupted, but the way these memeplexes can move from one host to another, by taking advantage of these little subtle corruptions and incentives.

So, suppose you have a progressive political program, which sounds good, which is full of noble causes, and its content is wonderful, but its pragmatic hooks are inherited from a far older and more repressive memeplex – Puritanism, for example – incentivising its hosts to propagate it through mechanisms like shaming and denunciation and so on. The manifest content benefits – in terms of propagation – from this symbiosis with an older, tougher species of memeplex. It benefits from having all these little hooks that will capture attention, encourage adoption and provoke response. These aspects, which in order to be effective are better kept implicit, are going to be selected for so long as they hasten propagation and encourage survival, even though they often operate in ways entirely contrary to the memeplex's manifest content – its progressive message. Now, the manifest content, or 'ego' of the memeplex, isn't completely ineffectual or empty. It is, itself, a cluster of memes that need to survive and influence their environment. There are a number of actions happening there, but the danger there is that you have malignant behaviors that are selected for more strongly, because they attach to more immediately pressing incentive hooks. This is how you get memetic colonies that appear to be acting against their own stated interests. You have "corrupting" influences operating at cross-purposes with the manifest, heroic mission for which they are the vehicle.

So, there is this conflict there that, I think, has to be addressed, that can't be addressed through this heroic image of the will. It demands this, sort of, *counter-heroics.* A sort of meditation on the will that is constantly attentive to corruption. Not to eliminate corruption. . . if our brains were, and this might be a bit speculative here, selected for. . . our large gooey brains, constantly chattering to themselves, that dream, that yammer, that expend energy in ways that are virtually useless in terms of genetic selection . . . they are not the sort of things that are going to be able to embark on such a pure and heroic path. But the thing is, if we can just understand how the memetic ecology that we work in operates, then maybe we can develop better techniques for manipulating that ecology. Find ways to work it that may be more productive and interesting.

And one of the things that I've been curious about – partly just because I like to, think about everything I'm working on at once, and have a bit of a compulsion to transfer analogies from one domain I have my foot in over to another – is to approach this problem of crafting better corruptive spheres

of influence, of re-engineering the memetic ooze we swim in, and ask if we can treat this as a sort of artificial environment. To approach these problems the way we would in evolutionary computation, or genetic programming. I don't mean the programming of DNA, I mean the use of natural selection as a computational algorithm, for evolving programs that converge on unknown optima in a certain problem space. Can we treat the wonderfully rich cross-hatching of our evolutionary process that the memes bring us into – can we treat this as something that we can then engineer, the way we would approach analogous problems in machine learning? Can we treat our environment of memetic corruptions and incentives as a sort of artificial intelligence that we can then train, or engineer? (Not necessarily an artificial intelligence, but a swarm of artificial intelligences.)

And this is the other thing, in computer science, when we use genetic programming and we take this approach — it is a sub-discipline of machine-learning which is used to solve problems for which there are typically no known, tractable deterministic solutions, and is used to do something that approximates what we call learning when we see it in humans. And, so, to sort of, understand how this might work -– if anyone ever took, like, a philosophy 101, you've probably read the various arguments for the existence of god; you probably know the theological argument that supposes that you find a watch on a beach, that obviously looks like it's a product of intelligent design, and you'd be crazy to think it was produced randomly, blah, blah, blah, therefore God exists. You know, it all seems silly, and all that, but there's an insight there, which is: *blind selective evolutionary processes* do *approximate what we call intelligence.*

And if there is such a thing as collective intelligence, it's not some hive mind, not this kind of Borg of consciousness, or human brains wired together (not yet, anyway). It is this blind swarm of memetic activity. This is, I think, where the dimension of collective intelligence exists. It's mad, it's utterly insane most of the time, but there is an intelligence there – a kind of blind, Darwinian intelligence. So, if that is the vehicle of our collective activity. If we can understand, and, sort of, predict behavior in the ways in which you can complex political movements and so on, we can maybe try to train that intelligence to do things that we would actually want it to do; to align it with the manifest object of our will; objects that we think we want.

That would be a long circuitous path through counter-heroics to something that heroism has failed to achieve. And it doesn't move through the medium of transparency, but through opacity. It doesn't move through the medium of self-determining freedom, but through the medium of heterogeneous randomness or noise. This can be the medium, I think, for our collective emancipation, if we learn to approach certain large-scale problems with this mindset.

PR: Just to summarize a bit, since I'm just a front-end, and not a hardcore programmer, to tie this into a general picture, I really want to highlight your mentioning of counter-heroics because that is, definitely something that we've been advocating, in the sense that a diversity of disciplines is required to even

start examining these problematic objects. This is definitely a non-revolutionary position (but not, non-transformative), so, just to point that out, that these modes of transformation are distinct from "evental-based" ones, which I don't think are adequate to our complex entangled times, where political power operates in a tetra-headed fashion, and within neoliberalism, oftentimes, even from within oneself (with the 'no society' model becoming an imperative for individual responsibility/culpability across the spectrum of life).

Ultimately, for the follow-through on substantial socio-political transformation (which is equally a normative transformation), this requires long-term engagement and organizational innovations that can host these transformations. It requires a profound endurance that may even span many generations. The main element that I'd like to extract from your description is this procedural aspect of it.

A meme requires uptake. You can launch something in the world and it can just die and there is no definitive way of knowing what is going to stick and what's not; there are a whole bunch of contingencies. I think it is really important to distinguish it from this previous heroic notion of will which will be often tied to a revolutionary temporality and to a definitive telos, a goal. What the counter-heroic procedure advocates is a probabilistic approach where you start to seed the future in a way – which crucially demands that we start to speculate on ideas of 'betterment', of who/what contributes to this conceptualization and how this concept of 'betterment' is modeled – but knowing that it cannot be fully determined and integrating this contingency as a necessary part of reality. So just to point out how this counter-heroic functioning of the will, also structurally changes the political horizons that would be afforded to it.

DB: I keep getting stuck on that crab. My identification keeps oscillating between on the one hand, on a metaphorical level, with the Rhizocephalan barnacle, the thing that is infecting the crab, so looking to it as an example of how to change a system through infecting it, and on the other hand, identifying with the crab. Knowing that we are a biological system subject to all kinds of influences, many of which are dramatic yet we are none the less, quite unaware of them.

LF: Humanity is like the infected crab. That's what we are.

DB: Yeah, but my sympathies keep oscillating. Knowing we are still stuck in the bit of biology that has needs and vulnerabilities, but also capacities to... I suppose to construct will on behalf of a collective, rather than just our drives, just our biology but none the less knowing we are always, on some level, subject to that biology. I just keep going back and forth.

LF: I just think this is a good metaphor that we're neither 'humanity' nor whatever humanity becomes. It's neither the barnacle, nor the crab, but the interface between them. Humanity, if I had to come with one definition from the top of my head, is that evolutionary process that's cross-cut between arboreal genetic selection and rhizomatic memetic selection. It is the ways in which these two processes jus tolerate each other or exploit each other. And there are

the little, you know, indeterminacies that gave us these little flickering gaps of negative freedom from nature. This is what is because we are this this sort of juncture between these two, kind of, you know natural-ish processes. I think this is, kind of, what keeps nature fractured for us.

DB: I suppose that difficulty there was how do we make the more convincing and infectious memes? because there needs to be lots of alternate ones working in the same direction becuase many of them won't go anywhere but if you make enough in the direction you want to take things politically, something might get through.

LF: I think this is something that has been missing from lot of leftist political thought – attention to the little, subtle incentivization structures. What the left is very good at is imagining their telos, the target they aim at, but they are less attentive to these little nudges that will bring us there. And of course we all have these little nudges, which means that the corruption won't be on our side; that we will be operating in ways contrary to those projections and, that is, I mean, a hugely open problem, i.e., thinking about that small, subtle scale, thinking about that little things, and about what is probabilistically influenced behavior, one way or the other.