

Editorial: Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency

L'Internationale Online Editorial Board

29 Nov 2023

This hope no doubt seems naive, even impossible, to many. Nevertheless, some of us must rather wildly hold to it, refusing to believe that the structures that now exist will exist forever. For this, we need our poets and our dreamers, the untamed fools, the kind who know how to organise.

–Judith Butler, 13 October 2023 ¹

Since 7 October, across European public spheres, rampant censorship and self-censorship has infected institutions and been internalised by cultural producers. The refusal by western governments and media to use words pronounced by the world's leading human rights bodies to name the decades-long occupation and apartheid and the unfolding genocide of the Palestinian people also pervades the cultural sectors. The expression of grief, anger and sadness at the killing in Palestine and Israel is even contested, while the basic humanitarian appeal for a lasting ceasefire has been opposed. Consequently, the agents of the European political and public spheres are restricting freedom of expression, rather than mediating conversations across differences.

Censorship and a heightened contestation of language reveals how interpellation is acting on, and within, public spheres, whereby the ideological positions of state and media infrastructures become internalised by citizens and articulated as their own. As this interpellation takes hold and actors are reduced to passive rather than thinking subjects, the capacity of public spheres to be shaped or moved by discourse and debate is at stake. At the same time, the global role of Europe has come under question, as it has failed to adopt any constructive or even meaningful position, either displaying its underlying acceptance of dehumanization or actively taking the side of colonial domination. International alliances and relations – including those within our network of museums, universities and arts organisations – are confronted anew with how the traces of coloniality and imperial violence, exerted from multiple directions, cross their structures.

1. Judith Butler, 'The Compass of Mourning', *London Review of Books*, vol. 45, no. 20, 19 October 2023, available at lrb.co.uk (last accessed on 28 November 2023).

This is where we all are – even as we are touched in different ways and to different degrees. We, the editors of L'Internationale Online, are unwilling, or unable, to write with an institutional voice, assumed or imposed. That voice, wherever it may be located, is alien. We write, however, in an attempt to find some common expression among specific, situated and generational experiences, with the aim to mobilise critical voices and to work and think collectively, beyond the interpellation of governments and the media.

The demands of the Palestinian liberation movements on cultural sectors are clear. If our institutions cannot meet them, we must acknowledge the failures and limits of our spaces, entangled as they are in broader political mechanisms. The immediate path, then, for a publishing platform like L'Internationale Online, is to utter, to speak, to work with subjectivities and situated knowledges – our own and others'. The material we plan to publish over the coming weeks and months will not be able to adequately address the extent of the daily tragedies, the contortions of debate, the historical implications of witnessing and speaking to genocide. Still, the texts, films and sounds offer a possibility to work in excess of institutional positions and to contribute to an ongoing reshaping of public spheres and critical discourses.

In addition, we see the long-term task for the cultural sphere to be to reformulate the vocabularies that have acted as the scaffolding for rhetorical frames and political positions within artistic fields, in order to overcome the weaponizing and imposed foreclosure of language. Any attempts at this will have to foster a wide appeal, building a popular front that could have the approach, the attention and the drive to effectuate such change, while knowing that such moves might lead to a fragile, tumultuous phase of in-betweenness.

Following Donna Haraway's call to 'think we must; we must think' – as a struggle against *Denkverbot* and the shutting down of discursive spaces and practices – and after Fred Moten's summoning of 'collective study', we embark on multiple lines of inquiry to navigate the shifting grounds and registers of the present conjuncture. Among these many trajectories we will turn to feminist decolonial thought and praxis to analyse the ongoing case of Israeli settler colonialism and its military and carceral regimes. We will seek to draw attention to the asymmetries in power relations and the instrumentalization of rhetorical frames, their origins and their consequences in the European context. And in a forthcoming article Ovidiu Tichindeleanu outlines the repression within European public spheres and the entanglement of this with imperial histories. As acts of solidarity, we will platform the work of artists, poets, musicians and film-makers working past the limits of language to think through the present and its myriad implications and inflections. The publishing here will be necessarily partial and incomplete. It is not approached as a declaration, or an answer. Rather, to recall Audre Lorde, we approach it as an exercise in finding the words we do not have.

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