



*the committee for the study of  
desert alchemy*

**THE UNDERCOMMONS**  
**FUGITIVE PLANNING & BLACK STUDY**

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**6. FANTASY IN THE HOLD**

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# 6



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FANTASY IN THE HOLD

broken hapticality, its self-regulatory powers the invitation to build sentimentality together again, feeling each other again, how we party. This is our hapticality, our love. This is love for the shipped, love as the shipped.

There's a touch, a feel you want more of, which releases you. The closest Marx ever got to the general antagonism was when he said "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" but we have read this as the possession of ability and the possession of need. What if we thought of the experiment of the hold as the absolute fluidity, the informality, of this condition of need and ability? What if ability and need were in constant play and we found someone who dispossessed us so that this movement was our inheritance. Your love makes me strong, your love makes me weak. What if "the between the two," the lost desire, the articulation, was this rhythm, this inherited experiment of the shipped in the churning waters of flesh and expression that could grasp by letting go ability and need in constant recombination. If he moves me, sends me, sets me adrift in this way, amongst us in the undercommons. So long as she does this, she does not have to be.

Who knows where Marx got this inheritance of the hold, from Aristotle denying his slave world or Kant talking to sailors or Hegel's weird auto-eroticism or just being ugly and dark and fugitive. Like Jimmy says, precious angel, you know both our forefathers were slaves, which is not something to be ironic about. This feel is the hold that lets go (let's go) again and again to dispossess us of ability, fill us with need, give us ability to fill need, this feel. We hear the godfather and the old mole calling us to become, in whatever years we have, philosophers of the feel.

Love,  
S/F

was only an exception, an aberration, a shaman, a witch, a seer, a poet amongst others, who felt through others, through other things. Previously, except in these instances, feeling was mine or it was ours. But in the hold, in the undercommons of a new feel, another kind of feeling became common. This form of feeling was not collective, not given to decision, not adhering or reattaching to settlement, nation, state, territory or historical story; nor was it repossessed by the group, which could not now feel as one, reunified in time and space. No, when Black Shadow sings “are you feelin’ the feelin?” he is asking about something else. He is asking about a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you. This is modernity’s insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh. This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide. This is the feel we might call hapticality.

Hapticality, the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come is here. Hapticality, the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem. Or perhaps we could say these are now recomposed in the wake of the shipped. To feel others is unmediated, immediately social, amongst us, our thing, and even when we recompose religion, it comes from us, and even when we recompose race, we do it as race women and men. Refused these things, we first refuse them, in the contained, amongst the contained, lying together in the ship, the boxcar, the prison, the hostel. Skin, against epidermalisation, senses touching. Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other.

A feel, a sentiment with its own interiority, there on skin, soul no longer inside but there for all to hear, for all to move. Soul music is a medium of this interiority on the skin, its regret the lament for

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## LOGISTICS, OR THE SHIPPING

To work today is to be asked, more and more, to do without thinking, to feel without emotion, to move without friction, to adapt without question, to translate without pause, to desire without purpose, to connect without interruption. Only a short time ago many of us said work went through the subject to exploit our social capacities, to wring more labor power from our labor. The soul descended onto the shop floor as Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi wrote, or ascended like a virtuoso speaker without a score as Paolo Virno suggested. More prosaically we heard the entrepreneur, the artist, and the stakeholder all proposed as new models of subjectivity conducive to channeling the general intellect. But today we are prompted to ask: why worry about the subject at all, why go through such beings to reach the general intellect? And why limit production to subjects, who are after all such a small part of the population, such a small history of mass intellectuality? There have always been other ways to put bodies to work, even to maintain the fixed capital of such bodies, as Christian Marazzi might say. And anyway for capital the subject has become too cumbersome, too slow, too prone to error, too controlling, to say nothing of too rarified, too specialized a form of life. Yet it is not we who ask this question. This is the automatic, insistent, driving question of the field of logistics. Logistics wants to dispense with the subject altogether. This is the dream of this newly dominant capitalist science. This is

the drive of logistics and the algorithms that power that dream, the same algorithmic research that Donald Rumsfeld was in fact quoting in his ridiculed unknown unknowns speech, a droning speech that announced the conception of a drone war. Because drones are not un-manned to protect American pilots. They are un-manned because they think too fast for American pilots.

Today this field of logistics is in hot pursuit of the general intellect in its most concrete form, that is its potential form, its informality, when any time and any space and any thing could happen, could be the next form, the new abstraction. Logistics is no longer content with diagrams or with flows, with calculations or with predictions. It wants to live in the concrete itself in space at once, time at once, form at once. We must ask where it got this ambition and how it could come to imagine it could dwell in or so close to the concrete, the material world in its informality, the thing before there is anything. How does it propose to dwell in nothing, and why?

The rise of logistics is rapid. Indeed, to read today in the field of logistics is to read a booming field, a conquering field. In military science and in engineering of course, but also in business studies, in management research, logistics is everywhere. And beyond these classic capitalist sciences, its ascent is echoed ahistorically in the emerging fields of object-oriented philosophy and cognitive neuroscience, where the logistical conditions of knowledge production go unnoticed, but not the effects. In military science the world has been turned upside down. Traditionally strategy led and logistics followed. Battle plans dictated supply lines. No more. Strategy, traditional ally and partner of logistics, is today increasingly reduced to collateral damage in the drive of logistics for dominance. In war without end, war without battles, only the ability to keep fighting, only logistics, matters.

And so too business innovation has become logistical and no longer strategic. Business innovation of course does not come from business. It is more often derived from military strategies of resistance to its own armies, transferred free to business. Once this consisted in transferring innovations like the line and the formation and the chain of

bard talk, bar talk, baby talk, B talk, preparing the minds of the little negro steelworkers for meditation. Come on, get to this hard, serial information, this brutally beautiful medley of carceral intrication, this patterning of holds and what is held in the holds' phonic vicinity. That spiraling Mackey speaks of suffers brokenness and crumpling, the imposition of irrationally rationalized angles, compartments bearing nothing but breath and battery in hunted, haunted, ungendered intimacy. Is there a kind of propulsion, through compulsion, against the mastery of one's own speed, that ruptures both recursion and advance? What is the sound of this patterning? What does such opposition look like? What remains of eccentricity after the relay between loss and restoration has its say or song? In the absence of amenity, in exhaustion, there's a society of friends where everything can fold in dance to black, in being held and flown, in what was never silence. Can't you hear them whisper one another's touch?

## HAPTICALITY, OR LOVE

Never being on the right side of the Atlantic is an unsettled feeling, the feeling of a thing that unsettles with others. It's a feeling, if you ride with it, that produces a certain distance from the settled, from those who determine themselves in space and time, who locate themselves in a determined history. To have been shipped is to have been moved by others, with others. It is to feel at home with the homeless, at ease with the fugitive, at peace with the pursued, at rest with the ones who consent not to be one. Outlawed, interdicted, intimate things of the hold, containerized contagion, logistics externalises logic itself to reach you, but this is not enough to get at the social logics, the social poesis, running through logisticality.

Because while certain abilities – to connect, to translate, to adapt, to travel – were forged in the experiment of hold, they were not the point. As David Rudder sings, “how we vote is not how we party.” The hold's terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common, to create a new feel in the undercommons. Previously, this kind of feel

that violence, the sound that must be heard as that to which such violence responds? The answer, the unmasking, is not simply because in its imposed opposition to something, nothing is understood simply to veil, as if some epidermal livery, (some higher) being and is therefore relative as opposed to what Nishida Kitaro, would call absolute; but because nothing (this paraontological interplay of blackness and nothingness, this aesthetic sociality of the shipped, this logisticality) remains unexplored, because we don't know what we mean by it, because it is neither a category for ontology nor for socio-phenomenological analysis. What would it be for this to be understood in its own improper refusal of terms, from the exhausted standpoint that is not and that is not its own? "We attach," Fanon says, "a fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language and consequently consider the study of language essential for providing us with one element in understanding the black man's dimension of being-for-others, it being understood that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other." He says, moreover, that "[t]he black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites." But this is not simply a question of perspective, since what we speak of is this radical being beside itself of blackness, its off to the side, off on the inside, out from the outside imposition. The standpoint, the home territory, *chez lui* – Markman's off the mark, blind but insightful, mistranslation is illuminative, *among his own*, signifying a relationality that displaces the already displaced impossibility of home. Can this being together in homelessness, this interplay of the refusal of what has been refused, this undercommon appositionality, be a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question? Not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything. This is the sound of an unasked question. A choir versus acquisition, chant and moan and *Sprechgesang*, babel and babble and gobbledygook, relaxin' by a brook or creek in Camarillo, singing to it, singing of it, singing with it, for the bird of the crooked beak, the generative hook of *le petit negre*, the little nigger's comic spear, the cosmic crook of language, the burnin' and lootin' of pidgin, Bird's talk, Bob's talk,

command from military science to the factory and the office, or transferring psychological and propaganda warfare to human relations and marketing. These were free transfers of strategic innovation, requiring managers to instantiate and maintain them. No more. As everything from the internet to the shipping container testify, in keeping with cold wars and wars on terror that lead always to the failure of strategy, it is logistical free transfers that matter. Containerisation was failing as a business innovation until the American government used containers to try to supply its troops in South East Asia with enough weapons, booze, and drugs to keep them from killing their own officers, to keep a war going that could not be won strategically. Those who dreamt of the internet, if not those who built it, were precisely worried about the corruption of intelligence that the outbreak of democracy, as the Trilateral Commission thought of it, made possible in the 1970s. ARPANET as an intelligence gathering network could not have its head turned by sex or ideology, much less the powerful combination of the two. It would not be confused by the outbreak of democracy. And it assumed a never-ending accumulation of intelligence for a never-ending war that many would not want to fight. To Toni Negri's challenge, show me a business innovation and I will show you a worker's rebellion, we could add a pre-history the state fearing its own workforce.

Containerisation itself stands for what should be called the first wave of regulatory innovation as logistics, which moves in tandem with the first wave of financialisation, the other response to these insurgencies by capitalism, aside from violent repression. Indeed logistics and financialisation worked together in both phases of innovation, with, roughly speaking, the first working on production across bodies, the second renovating the subject of production. Financialisation is perhaps the better known of the two strategies of resistance to rebellion, with a first phase selling off factories and state assets, and the second selling of homes and banks, only in both instances to rent them back on credit in a kind of global pawn-broking. This had the desired effect of reorganizing any subjects attached to such pawned objects into walking, talking credit reports, who contract their own financial contagion, as Randy Martin and Angela Mitropoulos suggest in different

ways, eventually producing an entity hooked into financial affects in a way that make it more logistical object than strategic subject.

But all the while logistics itself had no lasting interest in this financialised subject or its reorganization. Logistics was after a bigger prize, something that has always haunted it but became more palpable in the double wave that produced logistical populations when the container came to rule the waves, the roads, and the rails with information, affect, meaning shot through flesh as through other objects, again on a scale and in a form impossible to ignore. The prize seemed almost within reach. Of course this fantasy of what Marx called the automatic subject, this fantasy that capital could exist without labor, is nothing new but is continually explored at the nexus of finance capital, logistics and the terror of state-sponsored personhood which is instantiated in various pageants of conferral and withholding. It is marked today by the term human capital. Human capital would appear to be a strategic category, involved as Michel Feher suggests, with a strategy of investment in and speculation on the self. But as Marina Vishmidt reminds us, the automatic subject of capital that human capital seeks to emulate, is a hollow subject, and a subject dedicated to hollowing itself precisely by expelling the negativity of labor, by exiling the one who, in being less and more than one, are his figure, his other, his double, the bearers of a generativity without reserve. Now, human capital is the automatic subject's substitute, carrying out its engagement with the skills of daily financialisation and logistics, both of which act on it as if it were an impediment to movement and not a vehicle in motion. Human capital, in other words, departs from the strategic subject of neoliberalism, generalizing through self-infliction the departure that subject ritually imposes upon its exiled interiors and making of itself a porous object that still talks like a subject, as if in some burlesque enactment of philosophy's dream of the ultimate reconciliation. It is for this reason that human capital cannot be strategized, or indeed managed, in any traditional sense, and therefore in turn we can see the hollowing out of the field of business strategy, including the decline of the MBA degree, and the rise of 'leadership studies.' Leadership studies weighs down the bookstore shelves and the business student today but leadership cannot manage.

– is a precise and rigorous description/theory of the social life of the shipped, the terror of enjoyment in its endlessly redoubled folds. If you take up the hopelessly imprecise tools of standard navigation, the deathly reckoning of difference engines, maritime clocks and tables of damned assurance, you might stumble upon such a moment about two and a half minutes into “Mutron,” a duet by Ed Blackwell and Don Cherry recorded in 1982. You'll know the moment by how it requires you to think the relation between fantasy and nothingness: what is mistaken for silence is, all of a sudden, transubstantial. The brutal interplay of advent and chamber demands the continual instigation of flown, recursive imagining; to do so is to inhabit an architecture and its acoustic, but to inhabit as if in an approach from outside; not only to reside in this unlivability but also to discover and enter it. Mackey, in the preface to his unbearably beautiful *Splay Anthem*, outlining the provenance and relationship between the book's serial halves (“Each was given its impetus by a piece of recorded music from which it takes its title, the Dogon ‘Song of the Andoumboulou,’ in one case, Don Cherry's [and Ed Blackwell's] *Mu' First Part* and *Mu' Second Part* in the other”) speaks of mu in relation to a circling or spiraling or ringing, this roundness or rondo linking beginning and end, and to the wailing that accompanies entrance into and expulsion from sociality. But his speaking makes you wonder if music, which is not only music, is mobilized in the service of an eccentricity, a centrifugal force whose intimation Mackey also approaches, marking sociality's ecstatic existence beyond beginning and end, ends and means, out where one becomes interested in things, in a certain relationship between thingliness and nothingness and blackness that plays itself out in unmapped, unmappable, undercommon consent and consensuality. Blackness is the site where absolute nothingness and the world of things converge. Blackness is fantasy in the hold and Wilderson's access to it is in that he is one who has nothing and is, therefore, both more and less than one. He is the shipped. We are the shipped, if we choose to be, if we elect to pay an unbearable cost that is inseparable from an incalculable benefit.

How would you recognize the antiphonal accompaniment to gratuitous violence – the sound that can be heard as if it were in response to



Brett Neilson on borders for instance reminds us that the proliferation of borders between states, within states, between people, within people is a proliferation of states of statelessness. These borders grope their way toward the movement of things, bang on containers, kick at hostels, harass camps, shout after fugitives, seeking all the time to harness this movement of things, this logisticality. But this fails to happen, borders fail to cohere, because the movement of things will not cohere. This logisticality will not cohere. It is, as Sara Ahmed says, queer disorientation, the absence of coherence, but not of things, in the moving presence of absolutely nothing. As Frank B. Wilderson III teaches us, the improvisational imperative is, therefore, “to stay in the hold of the ship, despite my fantasies of flight.”

But this is to say that there are flights of fantasy in the hold of the ship. The ordinary fugue and fugitive run of the language lab, black phonography’s brutally experimental venue. Paraontological totality is in the making. Present and unmade in presence, blackness is an instrument in the making. *Quasi una fantasia* in its paralegal swerve, its mad-worked braid, the imagination produces nothing but exsensus in the hold. Do you remember the days of slavery? Nathaniel Mackey rightly says “The world was ever after/elsewhere,/no/way where we were/was there.” No way where we are is here. Where we were, where we are, is what we meant by “mu,” which Wilderson would rightly call “the void of our subjectivity.” And so it is we remain in the hold, in the break, as if entering again and again the broken world, to trace the visionary company and join it. This contrapuntal island, where we are marooned in search of marronage, where we linger in stateless emergency, in our our lysed cell and held dislocation, our blown standpoint and lyred chapel, in (the) study of our sea-born variance, sent by its pre-history into arrivance without arrival, as a poetics of lore, of abnormal articulation, where the relation between joint and flesh is the folded distance of a musical moment that is emphatically, palpably imperceptible and, therefore, difficult to describe. Having defied degradation the moment becomes a theory of the moment, of the feeling of a presence that is ungraspable in the way that it touches. This musical moment – the moment of advent, of nativity in all its terrible beauty, in the alienation that is always already born in and as *parousia*

It is the evacuation of management by strategy in a desperate attempt to maintain control of private gain from a form of social production under capital that is becoming automatic and therefore not so much unmanageable as auto-managed. What is opened up here is a course in and for a general logistics. To read logistics is to read of the stated desire to be rid of what logistics calls ‘the controlling agent,’ to free the flow of goods from ‘human time’ and ‘human error.’ The greedy algorithm of the traveling salesman still requires strategic intervention because it cannot evolve as new problems emerge, unless one counts as evolution the capacity to destroy, or the incapacity that allows the self-destruction, of the contained. It cannot solve, for instance, the Canadian traveller problem, where roads disappear under snow producing new problems for the most efficient movement of the trucks. Here is where the evolutionary and genetic algorithms enter often in more Lamarckian than Darwinian clothing. But one thing is agreed. Strategy is now blocking the road as surely as snow blocks the road to Sudbury. For logistics, the subject of whatever, as Michael Hardt calls it, must yield to the object of whatever. Logistical populations will be created to do without thinking, to feel without emotion, to move without friction, to adapt without question, to translate without pause, to connect without interruption, or they will be dismantled and disabled as bodies in the same way they are assembled, by what Patricia Clough calls population racism. From here, logistics is master of all that it surveys.

But what might look like smooth sailing, flat waters, flat being, is not so undisturbed. Uncertainty surrounds the holding of things and in a manner that Luciana Parisi describes, in which the algorithm generates its own critique, logistics discovers too late that the sea has no back door. And it is not just the class of greedoids, the possessive individuals of the algorithmic world, but these new genetic and evolutionary algorithms too, whose very premise is that there must be something more, something in what they have grasped that remains beyond their reach. These algorithms are defined by what they are not yet, and what they can never fully become, despite the dreams of their materialist eugenicists. Every attempt by logistics to dispel strategy, to banish human time, to connect without going through the subject,

to subject without handling things, resists something that was already resisting it, namely the resistance that founds modern logistics. Concerned to move objects and move through objects, logistics removes itself from the informality that founds its objects and itself. There is some/thing logistics is always after.

## LOGISTICALITY, OR THE SHIPPED

Where did logistics get this ambition to connect bodies, objects, affects, information, without subjects, without the formality of subjects, as if it could reign sovereign over the informal, the concrete and generative indeterminacy of material life? The truth is, modern logistics was born that way. Or more precisely it was born in resistance to, given as the acquisition of, this ambition, this desire and this practice of the informal. Modern logistics is founded with the first great movement of commodities, the ones that could speak. It was founded in the Atlantic slave trade, founded against the Atlantic slave. Breaking from the plundering accumulation of armies to the primitive accumulation of capital, modern logistics was marked, branded, seared with the transportation of the commodity labor that was not, and ever after would not be, no matter who was in that hold or containerized in that ship. From the motley crew who followed in the red wakes of these slave ships, to the prisoners shipped to the settler colonies, to the mass migrations of industrialisation in the Americas, to the indentured slaves from India, China, and Java, to the trucks and boats leading north across the Mediterranean or the Rio Grande, to one-way tickets from the Philippines to the Gulf States or Bangladesh to Singapore, logistics was always the transport of slavery, not 'free' labor. Logistics remains, as ever, the transport of objects that is held in the movement of things. And the transport of things remains, as ever, logistics' unrealizable ambition.

Logistics could not contain what it had relegated to the hold. It cannot. Robert F. Harney, the historian of migration 'from the bottom-up,' used to say once you crossed the Atlantic, you were never on the

right side again. B Jenkins, a migrant sent by history, used to turn a broken circle in the basement floor to clear the air when welcoming her students, her panthers. No standpoint was enough, no standpoint was right. She and their mothers and fathers tilled the same fields, burned up the same desert roads, preoccupied the same merely culinary union. Harney kept in mind the mass migrations from Southern and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 19th century, beside themselves in the annunciation of logistical modernity. No standpoint. If commodity labor would come to have a standpoint, the standpoint from which one's own abolition became necessary, then what of those who had already been abolished and remained? If the proletariat was located at a point in the circuits of capital, a point in the production process from which it had a peculiar view of capitalist totality, what of those who were located at every point, which is to say at no point, in the production process? What of those who were not just labor but commodity, not just in production but in circulation, not just in circulation but in distribution as property, not just property but property that reproduced and realized itself? The standpoint of no standpoint, everywhere and nowhere, of never and to come, of thing and nothing. If the proletariat was thought capable of blowing the foundations sky high, what of the shipped, what of the containerized? What could such flesh do? Logistics somehow knows that it is not true that we do not yet know what flesh can do. There is a social capacity to instantiate again and again the exhaustion of the standpoint as under-common ground that logistics knows as unknowable, calculates as an absence that it cannot have but always longs for, that it cannot, but longs, to be or, at least, to be around, to surround. Logistics senses this capacity as never before – this historical insurgent legacy, this historicity, this logisticality, of the shipped.

Modernity is sutured by this hold. This movement of things, unformed objects, deformed subjects, nothing yet and already. This movement of nothing is not just the origin of modern logistics, but the annunciation of modernity itself, and not just the annunciation of modernity itself but the insurgent prophesy that all of modernity will have at its heart, in its own hold, this movement of things, this interdicted, outlawed social life of nothing. The work of Sandro Mazzadra and