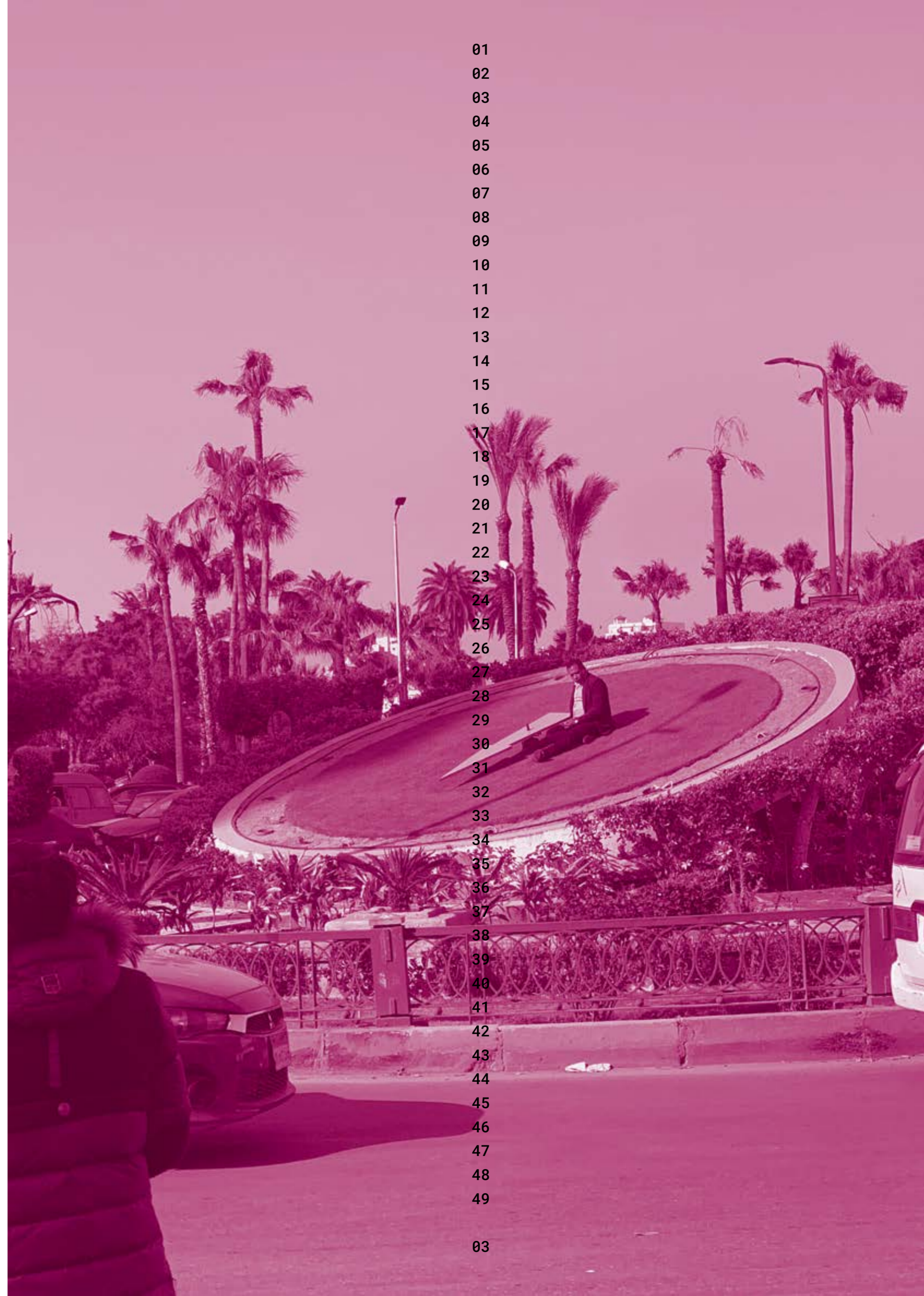


alexandria	geography	projections
archaeology	group	publication
athens	happening	record
belonging	image	repurposing
big	imagination	residency
bit	imagined	resident
border	invite	ruination
Place	landscapes	ruins
build	living	sense
buildings	marseille	space
cities	material	speak
city	mediterranean	specific
context	monuments	state
conversation	narrative	structure
cyprus	nicosia	talking
decide	palm	terms
discuss	people	Holder
egypt	person	themes
european	place	thinking
experience	point	thursday
feel	possibilities	topics
foreigner	present	tourist
fossil	preservation	transcribed
french	preserve	trees
friday	project	understand
gaze	projection	villas

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Virgil 00:00
Okay, I'm being recorded.

Lodovica 00:03
This meeting should be short,so we have less material to work with.

Omnia 06:50
I'm sorry, you're not well. How are you?

Virgil 06:57
Practically fine.

Lodovica 06:58
Yeah, exactly. Chiara is enjoying the fresh London's spring.

Virgil 07:08
Spring? It's July 1. But yeah.

Lodovica 08:24
So, In terms of structure we're probably gonna have two conversations with the whole group. I think we should probably focus on how to structure those.

Chiara 10:47
I didn't hear what he was saying. Because I cannot hear you. But anyhow, what I wanted to say is that we really need to give everyone the chance to have this kind of moment, in which one formalises their reasoning and interests. . As we wanted to work around fragments, maybe each of us can bring over to this conversation a kind of trigger. It can be visual, can be a quote, anything, and we put everything on the table, and then we can start thinking about connections between these different elements.

Lodovica 11:33
You mean for both conversations? Maybe that can be used ...

Chiara 11:42
In conversation, yeah. It's a moment to introduce to each other the thinking around the material that you're bringing.

Lodovica 11:52
Yeah. I totally agree with the idea of using a trigger that could be anything.

Gabriele 12:19
A story, something that we experienced, an event that is relevant.

Lodovica 12:33
Okay, this is great. Let's say that for the bigger group conversation on Thursday each one of us brings a trigger, which could be anything like an experience, some material we collected, etc. Then on Thursday,through this exchange, we try to define four or maximum five themes, and then we divide into groups.

Omnia 16:51
How do we distinguish what happens on or off record? When we have intimate or private conversations over the weekend? I think that since we arrived we've had conversations about everything. From Stella losing her suitcase to, I don't know... everything. And everything can indicate a wider structure. Almost every topic we talk about,any conversation we have could contribute to this publication or perhaps each singular word that we mention.

Lodovica 20:30
The project consists in having a set of conversations, long and short, intimate and in larger group setting that play across our personal geographies, blah, blah. The conversations will revolve around specific topics that will unfold throughout our time in Bella and will lead to a final output for the 15th of July.This will be formalised in a discursive presentation combined with a spatial installation / stage.

Stella 20:53
That's what we promised.

Lodovica 20:55
No, we didn't promise anything. But I had to come up with something I could send them.

Virgil 20:58
We're all dressed in matching outfits. And we

slowly walk around the visitors whispering topics that we've discussed. Intiution...

Mahmoud 21:18
Proximity.

Lodovica 21:22
Gorgomoro...

Virgil 21:32
We'll bury all of our attention to the ground.

Sara 32:22
Just earlier we were talking about establishing some set of rules, or ways of conversing. Maybe this idea of on and off record can become part of that? Also, since we are going to be having a conversation, should we also think about how to bring what is important for each of us into the conversation? Not a rule, but a way of doing it.

Virgil 36:49
It might be interesting to go around once and everyone shares. And then in the second round we go more like "I heard this, I'm this, I heard this"... you know, what we heard. Then in the third round, the structure is a little bit looser. It's more about responding. All of us try to make sure everyone speaks in this third round. But the third round can open up into more of a back and forth and chatting. We start with these two formalised rounds, one is just about saying and the other is about active listening.

Maybe we flagged to have like a check in on Wednesday.

Lodovica 52:21
Yeah, at Gorgomoro

Onur 52:27
We cannot go to Gorgomoro on Wednesday. You always make people very excited about this idea but we have meetings the whole day.

Virgil 52:36
Tomorrow morning. We can go before it starts.

Virgil 52:58
Chiara, are you interested to be included over zoom? Tomorrow or Wednesday with the other group? Do you want us to ask that there's a setup for you?

Chiara 53:14
I don't know. I will see if I can, they will take care of putting me somewhere. No worries.

Lodovica 53:30
Okay, it started raining. I guess that's how the weather interferes.

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Virgil 00:20
Okay, I am recording. 123. Amazing. This recording is taking place on the eighth of July. We are in the Unidee room and present is Virgil, Onur, Mahmoud, Mark, Stella, Omnia, Zeynep, Gabriele, Chiara, Sara and Lodo. And who wants to start? First, keeping time.

Chiara 00:00
01 So I find it very interesting that we went
02 for a topic that is pluralized all the way, like
03 geographies. One of the things that stayed
04 with me throughout the project was this idea
05 of imaginative geographies. I spoke about
06 that before, I repeat myself a bit here... this
07 is a term first used by Edward Said in his
08 work on Orientalism, to talk about the Orient
09 as a geography that is the outcome of an
10 imagination, a projection of desires, fears, an
11 accumulation of visions of the other, which
12 made clear to the West what its identity was.
13 So instead of trying to figure out oneself, you
14 create this stranger, and consequently you
15 have your own reflection given back to you
16 by it. I think, to a certain capacity, is a bit
17 what we were asked to perform here. I think
18 about Alexandria, for example, as something
19 that was very metaphorical, a place that
20 we could use, not only explore, but use to
21 think and look at other places, and at other
22 geographies. And also, in a broader sense, this
23 is what was given to us to keep in mind when
24 thinking about the Mediterranean, which is
25 a kind of imaginary geography in itself. The
26 Mediterranean was in the background of all
27 of our encounters during these last months,
28 in different ways. Maybe Brussels is a little bit
29 different. But we were always talking about it.
30 So that's my starting point.

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Chiara 00:00
So it would be nice, maybe, if we go through the concept of ruins to start with and say the first thing that each of us associates with this word.

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Virgil 00:06
I'm recording. Do I have your consent?
Onur 00:11
You have my consent. But only to record, not to use... I'm joking.

Lodovica 01:09

It's always difficult to be the first. In terms of triggers, there are many that I could choose from. But I think I'll just go for the one that I thought of this morning, which is the creation of the Cyprus Museum in 1883. Among its founders was H.H. Kitchener. He was the surveyor who made the first topographic map of Cyprus, which of course aimed at mapping not only the geography but also the minerals and other materials that could be extracted from the territory. In general I'm interested in the relationship that exists between the making of ruins and the making of fossils, and how these two processes run in parallel. So, having the same person being the surveyor of the first topographical map of Cyprus and the founder of the island's first archaeological museum combines these two dynamics in the creation of a territory not only in its narrative and geography, but also in its imagined narratives and imagined geographies.

Sara 03:21

I put these photos ... four or five photos in the Dropbox folder. The photos are of Varosha which is a town or very small city where people were forced out by the Turkish military. The photos are in multiple exposure and show both the town and its buildings and the tourists that are looking at these houses. The tourists, they're looking at these houses for their aesthetic value and not seeing what they mean for those who were displaced... Nurthane, this artist that we met in Cyprus showed us a work that uses the recordings of memories of people who were displaced from these houses. I think about these people and how they view the houses... They're finally allowed in to see their houses, as if they were tourists... They can't enter them, though. They can never be tourists, but they can also never enter them ... for now... And then the city being by the sea, it's like so open and so vast, but also so closed and so inaccessible.

Chiara 05:46

So one thing that stayed with me after all our travelling... during one of the last days in Athens, I visited the Benaki Museum of Greek Culture. One of the sections of the museum is called something like 'Greece through the eyes of its travellers', and it is dedicated to 18th/19th century Grand Tourism. It encompasses a very eclectic collection of material. Grand tour, of course, was a practice much in vogue

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01

Stella 02:29

How we project the geographies we bring with us. And I was interested in that. I have two quotes from the Invisible Cities book by Italo Calvino. And I thought I would bring them, one of them is - 'Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveller recognises the little that is his discovering the much he has not had and will never have. Arriving at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his that he did not know he had. The foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess'. And the other quote is, actually, there's a couple of ones, but the other quote that I was going to bring was - 'I realised I had to free myself from the images, which in the past had announced me to the things I sought, only then would I succeed in understanding the language of Hypatia'. This is an excerpt of a specific essay about this imagined city. All of them are conversations between the explorer Marco Polo, it's all fictional of course, and the Great Khan, in which Marco Polo talks about all these imagined cities. And I think that he comes from Venice, right? And they're all projections of Venice in one way or another, because that is the geography that he carries within him. And there's like 50 different cities that he described in 50 very different ways. But it's always that original city in the background, one's own Venice. And I've been wondering how much can we even escape that while visiting another city? Because we are looking for answers that we're hoping we can get, which are always personal, especially when we're going into the city to try to figure something out.

Zeynep 04:54

These texts on cities, are they actual archives that he wrote, or is it someone's imagination of how Marco Polo imagined?

Stella 05:07

Yes. So Italo Calvino wrote this book, where he pretends Marco Polo has this encounter with this Great Khan. So he pretends he has this encounter. And he describes, I mean he's a liar in the book, he

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Gabriele 01:43

For me, what emerged in the places that we visited, both Alexandria and Nicosia, is this ambiguity between the ruin as a monument, which is something that is there to stay and won't change, and, on the other side, the presence of ruins as something left in a state of abandonment, in a condition that still holds potential of transformation. In the case of Nicosia, because of the division and the militarisation that the city is going through. In Alexandria, with the modern architecture heritage, which we can describe as contemporary ruins, in the sense that they are recognised of architectural value by some institutions and academics, or by people who are entitled in some ways to say that they are valuable. I am interested in the ways people from the organisation Save Alex are somewhat instrumentalizing these architectures, in order to try to shape their own vision and understanding of how Alexandria should be, in contrast with the government that is not recognising these buildings as monuments, or as ruins in their monumental meaning.

Mahmoud 04:52

When I think of ruins, well, I think of the term ruins as maybe a lens or a device. I don't know, there's probably a word to describe what this is. A ruin is something you find. And ruin can potentially mean something left in a state of disrepair, either intentionally or unintentionally. Ruin can also mean something that you uncover, you excavate an old building, like the ancient Roman theatre in Alexandria. That is a ruin. But the ruin is not necessarily a monument. I think monumentalization is another step that a ruin can take. For instance, the theatre is a ruin that has become a monument. But also the modern buildings. For instance, in downtown Alexandria there are ruins that are not monuments, there are ruins left to be ruins. And my question in that delineation is, while one ruin is used for tourism, the other ruin is more interesting, because in some respects by making these buildings listed, they would force them into a very static form, like they could not evolve because they would be "monuments". At the same time, you saw so many alternative and informal ways that these buildings are being used, because they are ruins, whether they're turned into shops or alternative living spaces for people who can't afford housing, especially when there's an absence of social housing being built by the state, for instance. So there's, I think, a space which ruins occupy depending on how they are treated, if they are either weaponized or used to advertise something about a city's image. So, for me, there's a status of in-betweenness. There's also a question of what

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01

Mahmoud 02:30

I was thinking about what the term belonging meant to the people in the cities that we visited. But also it's interesting to think of our individual position and belonging to a place. As someone who's moved around and lived in different cities I experienced that on a very different level. But also to think of belonging in terms of something else, for instance, being queer and navigating the spaces of both Alexandria and Marseille, united those things in very different ways. How code switching works when you're walking around on the streets both as a queer person and, for me, also as someone who's Middle Eastern, or from Lebanon. What that means in a Mediterranean context, compared to an Alexandrian context, compared to a Southern French context, which is very different. I think it's good to think of belonging in those terms as well.

Lodovica 06:04

I was just thinking of when you and I were in Nicosia and we were discussing how we didn't feel entitled to talk about Alexandria, but somehow we felt an entitlement in talking about Nicosia, or Cyprus... I mean, it's not that we felt entitled, but we could recognise the European Union project being active in Cyprus in a more recognisable way. And that allowed us to have a more critical approach towards the situation in Cyprus. I wonder how belonging coincides with entitlement, although I didn't feel like I could belong to Cyprus, but somehow I recognised that I could talk about it in a more direct way with Michalis. Whereas with Sarah I was always a bit afraid of saying the wrong thing, or, you know, being in that position where someone tells "you are not entitled to talk about this, because you don't know anything about it." I'm thinking also of how you kept referring to this condition of not being from the Mediterranean context. I think there's something interesting about questioning who's actually entitled to critically engage with a specific context, although they're not precisely from there. And also this question of "where are you from" for me can be used in a very weird ways.

Onur 08:10

You feeling more comfortable in talking about something also relates to a notion of familiarity. For example, when I was in Athens I sent a picture to

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among the elite of Western and Northern Europe, especially in the 19th century. Young men of aristocratic backgrounds used to travel South and East, as part of their cultural education. It's something that always stayed with me throughout our project, because I feel it is a bit what we are doing or trying to reproduce too in this very project. Two things that I saw in Benaki, I think resonate with both our approaches to the visits in Alexandria and Athens, in my case. The first one is the collection of paintings and drawings. As you probably know, there are a lot of landscapes that were collected during this kind of travelling, and in most cases these are idealised landscapes.

So it's not about the real, the recording of the reality of the place one was visiting, as a lot of things were excluded from representation, or elements were put closer together. What is really easy to notice in these images is that the author almost always builds up empty space around the representation of ruins. Because ruins have to be the central focus of these travellers' vision. So this museum is packed with images of Athens in which there is nothing but the Parthenon, for example, there is no housing there is no people, if you have one person is just a figurine that is only there to build up perspective. I think this is something that we were doing ourselves throughout this project, because we were working around ruins, ruins of the Hellenic or of the cosmopolitan pasts of Alexandria, but also around possibilities of making ruins out of what we were proposed to look at. And so yeah, this is something that I wanted to bring on the table. Yet, the most interesting thing for me in Benaki was in a vetrine, which contained a collection of drawings. Yeah, very, you know, fast taken drawings by visitors and travellers, and all these drawings were just piled up. I thought that was quite anti-museological, as you could not see them actually, what remained was just this collection of piles of different drawings, all individually wrapped up in glassine paper, which is this kind of opaline paper, which covers, hides already. And I find this intriguing, somehow, to think about the piling up and the covering up and the fact that only the surface is left accessible for people to see. I figured that is something that can work also around the reasoning of our project together.

Gabriele 09:36

Okay. I am thinking about the ideal trigger to start

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this conversation. I had some hesitation because there is something which is related to my personal research trajectories, my personal practice, which I find interesting to explore. In particular, there are three concepts that I feel can link and connect, Taranto, the city where I'm working, Alexandria and Nicosia, or Cyprus. At the same time, I think there are a couple of interesting episodes that may be relevant. So maybe I will share both, if I have enough time. In terms of my personal research interest, there are three topics that intertwine: displacement, urbicide and state power. I think these three forces, or tensions are present in Taranto, Nicosia, and Alexandria, but for different reasons, in different times, and in different conditions. But what is interesting is that some consequences of these tensions are very similar. Like the abandoned places waiting for a new power to come in and to be reshaped for new market and political needs. In Cyprus we saw Varosha, in Taranto there is the Old Town, which was completely evacuated, and in Alexandria we have these particular dynamics... Okay. Two minutes. So urbicide is the identity of a city which is replaced by another. And state power identifies with the establishment of contemporary state capitalism in Egypt and in places like Taranto, and with the role of the state and nationalism in Nicosia.

I will now tell you about two events that happened to me in Alexandria and Nicosia. In Alexandria we wanted to see the rooftop of the hotel and we took the elevator. Everything was dark and there was a woman waiting for the elevator. We didn't understand what was happening at that precise moment. But probably that woman lived on the rooftop, like many other people in Alexandria and particularly in that area, which is very central. Then in Nicosia something similar happened where I didn't immediately understand what was happening. The first time we went to the Turkish-Cypriot part of the city we went to a bar and the Turkish guy we met there paid for Dimitra and Michalis. At that point Dimitra said something like "I will pay for you when you come to the Southern part" and the guy answered "I can't come". And at that moment Dimitra became very sad. Even for a person who's experienced that place, the removal of trauma is very personal and multifaceted.

Zeynep 15:08

So, my experience of Alexandria and Athens has

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01 describes all these different cities that he has
02 encountered in all these different ways, all of
03 them imaginary and all of it is fiction. It's a
04 little bit of literature, a philosophical book of
05 what it is that you find, what you encounter,
06 what you project.
07

08 **Mark 05:51**

09 Yeah, yeah, I don't have something specific
10 in mind, but I will improvise a story. Not a
11 story, but, about this idea of the imaginary, I
12 think it is, like every power, even the cultural
13 power, if it is something like this, the cultural
14 power of art, or the power of authority...
15 Every authority has its own imagined city. As
16 an example, you can see now, the port of Abu
17 Qir, which is a completely new port, based on
18 this relation between the new authority, which
19 is not really very new, and Dubai. So there is
20 a connection, this Gulfian connection, a kind
21 of geopolitical, geo-economical connection.
22 They created a complete new port and the
23 sea was demolished. So every authority has
24 its own imagination, and every imagination
25 tries to be actualized. And for sure, the more
26 powerful you are, the more you can actualize
27 the city imagined in your head. And you can
28 say, as a failure of art, that imagination is just
29 enough. Is it ok to just imagine? You know, so
30 if you imagine it, it's okay, it's enough to deal
31 with the image of Alexandria. You don't need
32 to actualize and to deal with actual archetypes.
33 It is just that.
34

35 **Zeynep 08:42**

36 I actually want to reflect on what you
37 said about the objective of this programme
38 is actually using Alexandria as a prism. And
39 I find that shape of prism very interesting
40 because a prism breaks and dilutes the light
41 into different colours. And it fractures and
42 filters. Also, it's the input into different
43 kinds of output sources. And what you said
44 about using Alexandria as a metaphor, as a
45 place to use, to think and to look at other
46 localities. It's a very power-infused act, in my
47 opinion. And when I was thinking about the
48 Mediterranean as a geography and, in what
49 sense, this geography is defined by the sea, it

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are the intangible human practices that were in place, and are no longer in place today, which have made this a ruin? Or maybe what is some of the knowledge that we have lost, or don't have anymore because of a loss of this intangible heritage? I think when it comes to ruination, at the end of the day, ruination is just a physical presence of something else that's been lost. Whether it's a civilization or a human practice, I think.

Islam 08:05

I would start from this in between situation, as mentioned. I can connect ruins to different words, different other words, but there is something that I was thinking about, especially when we were in Athens. It is the connection to death, and this hanged state of death, that is somehow reused or instrumentalised, and it's related to tourism. I don't know if there is a term, or maybe I'm just inventing it, like necro-tourism. which markets ruins as something that contains, or should be connected to, the memory of a lost civilization. But then, this makes me question museums as places that use this kind of frozen memories, or death in a shape of frozen memories, and then build different ideas on it. When I was a kid in my hometown, as ruins were everywhere, they were targeted by people who wanted to loot monuments or ancient artefacts. These people usually died while searching for these "treasures", it was a big thing, because a lot of people got lost or got trapped in graveyards, or in the ruins. So that was a way for people to try to become rich. And also the state of Egypt, for example, was selling, under the table, a lot of artefacts found in the ruins. So this official and unofficial selling of death, this is what I was mainly thinking about. It's pretty dark...

Lodovica 12:09

When I think of ruins I don't think of them as an artefact, but more as a process. I'd rather speak of ruination than ruins. Ruination implies a process, a biological, mineralogical, or chemical change of state. But it also refers to the making of ruins as a situated, an historical process through which some things and existents are made into ruins while others are not, and between those that are made into ruins, some are allowed to speak and some others are silenced. I think this refers to what you were saying about the difference between monumentalisation and non-monumentalisation. And so, when I think of ruination there's this continuous thought about how state narratives impose an unilinear, chrono-normative temporality on the environment so we can understand, and differentiate, things as being either

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01 my mom and the first thing she asked was "Oh, is
02 that a mosque?" It's the element she's most familiar
03 with. She has an imagination of what Athens is, more
04 or less but then she still looks for the most obvious
05 connection, the most significant implication which is
06 the minaret. It's really interesting how you can still
07 find familiarities in the distorted version of what
08 you're familiar with. And it connects you to the city
09 in a way that someone who is living there may not be
10 able to do because that person still sees the mosque
11 and knows that this is a mosque, but the absence of
12 the minaret is not that striking maybe.
13

14 **Virgil 10:34**

15 To frame it in terms of criticality and the feeling
16 of permission to be critical about something, I think
17 often it becomes quite problematic that when a
18 context, or a person, or an idea feels farther away we
19 let it be rather than critically engaging with it.
20

21 **Mahmoud 12:57**

22 My positionality is quite different from most
23 people in this group, but also of this residency. You
24 really have either people from a context outside of
25 Alexandria, which is European, or American, or
26 whatever it is. And then you have a good contingent
27 of people who are Egyptians. And I lie somewhere
28 in between where I am both Arabic speaking but
29 being Lebanese puts me in a different relationship.
30 My way from Cairo to Alexandria was an experience
31 because the driver thought I was European, like
32 everyone else. And when I was speaking Arabic to
33 him, he got really excited. We had a bus of like, 10
34 people, but I was the only Arabic speaking person
35 on the bus. I was playing a bunch of music that was
36 both Egyptian and Lebanese. There were a couple of
37 songs where Alexandria was mentioned on the way
38 and the driver got really happy and excited to the
39 point where we stopped and we had a snack with him
40 on the highway. But from the beginning there was
41 always that relationship of Egyptian culture being
42 explained to the entire group, but then to me, it was
43 not approached in the same way because "Oh, he's
44 Arabic so he understands a bit more". But then of
45 course I'm presenting things differently because I'm
46 also Lebanese and things would always be presented
47 to me in a way like "Oh, yeah. We thought you were
48 European. Oh, but oh, yeah, but you're Lebanese".
49 I don't ever feel a city belongs to me to speak about.

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been triggered by this particular image that I have been following through the cities, which is the palm trees, because I think it is a tool that activates urban spaces in different ways by imposing an imagined reality on those cityscapes. So I've been trying to follow its journey across different Mediterranean landscapes and also to think of palm trees as kind of historical witnesses to certain political shifts in these towns and in what kind of imaginations they existed. Like thinking of them as political actors. What also made me interested in palm trees specifically is that they're objects of gaze and they're planted specifically to be looked at. They're very active within the performances of spectatorship in the cityscapes. It's not just like a plant that is organically, you know, growing within the surrounding landscape, but it's imported. I am excluding the Creten date palm, which is the only endemic species in Eastern and Northern Mediterranean. So these palms carry a particular purpose. And they're also planted in very particular places in the cities. In Athens for example the particular places that were chosen for this plant to exist are the national parks where it was only surrounded by the busts of military generals, or in the city where it was really protected. And there was a project in Athens called the great walk where palm trees were exported from Egypt to be planted in protected vases with a very specific positionality in the city. This makes me think about how palm trees were used in Alexandria. When I was in the flea market, I came across this bunch of postcards that, to me, illustrated the specific imagination built alongside the image of this plant: images of the cityscape were juxtaposed to an image of a pyramid with a man on a camel. They carried these stereotypical imaginations of how these narratives travel across Mediterranean geographies and in which political formats they inform the imaginative practices. The cities actually reorient themselves towards a political narrative that they choose and where these plants become a tool for activating these imaginations of futurities. There's a rumour I came across about how the palm trees were excavated in Athens. They were literally taken out from the ground when the Greeks established their independence from the Ottoman Empire because they thought the palm trees were signalling their connection to the "oriental East". And there's a rumour around this, like "where did those palm trees go? And how did they come back to the city?" Because there are many now, especially

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01 is defined by the border, how do you actually
02 place it on a map? Because you really can't.
03 And I was also thinking of how I experience,
04 myself, in the UK and how I also feel that
05 when I encounter people not from my region,
06 how they map me out. I experienced this in
07 my personal interactions quite a lot, when
08 I meet a new person in the UK, because
09 there's this kind of dual mapping of the
10 Middle East, which is a completely imagined
11 geography, and the Mediterranean and how
12 these two come together. I think also Turkey
13 has a very particular positionality in this
14 specific conversation, like how sometimes
15 people choose to play out specific kinds of
16 identities. I can only speak for myself, and
17 also coming from the coastal town of Izmir
18 that has so much Greek heritage that is still
19 quite present. In Izmir specifically, people
20 define their identification with secular
21 Turkey through their ancient Greek heritage,
22 the "cosmopolitan" heritage so to speak. But
23 also the Ottoman heritage that was very much
24 assimilated with the Greek people, Jewish
25 people, Armenian people living in Izmir. So
26 I think, for me, mapping out geographies is
27 very political, but I feel actually my body is
28 placed on these maps by others constantly,
29 and I do it myself too. But I also find myself
30 doing it based on the perception of others.
31 So it's a very dialectical process. And I don't
32 know how to verbalise this very clearly. But
33 I feel it so often. It is like a cloud, how our
34 imaginations kind of blur into each other,
35 they're crossing each other, and you find a
36 common imagination that you think you can
37 communicate with. So this is something that
38 I also realised that I was doing each time I
39 visited the cities, how I constantly carry my
40 own personal geography into the physical
41 geography that I find myself in.

043 **Omnia 12:54**

044 I was coming with the intention of being
045 an active listener. Maybe I'll contribute at a
046 later stage.

048 **Chiara 13:25**

049 I think we, especially in the position

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past, present or future. And there is no interaction between these different temporalities. This is one thing.

The second thing I want to say is that ruination is not only a process that affects architecture and artefacts, but is also active on the environment in the modalities in which we make a ruin of the environment in order to extract, or continue extracting, specific existents, such as minerals, or trees, and geographies, such as the deep-sea. For example there's a discussion about making different acid lakes in Cyprus into UNESCO heritage sites. These are not the acid lake we visited with Michalis, but other acid lakes that exist as a result of mining activities of the British. Those acid waters are now infiltrating the soil, and they're affecting different water reservoirs that people use to drink or wash. So there's a continuity of violence, these processes are not actually ending. But because we think of them as ruins, as heritage we are not able to see a change in the material or social meaning of that specific site. When you, Islam, think of death there's something about questioning how can we think of ruination beyond loss or death, which, again, challenges this idea of the ruins as being just an image of a previously alive culture which is the same that happens with fossils. Now oil, fossil fuel, is considered just fossilised remains of ancient marine creatures, but it's highly active in the present. In terms of the fossil, the ruins and the processes of historicization, there's this quote from Povinelli, which goes: "So we have a hand and a fossil. On the one hand, the fossil seems to be composed of something before what the hand is composed of and able to endure beyond the hand span of life and all human hands lifespans. On the other hand, the fossil is nowhere, but there in the hand, it is not in a different time, nor it is enduring over time, it is changing as it moves across material and discursive substrates. There is no difference between the fossil and the hand unless we abstract each out of the ongoingness of their material becoming". And then she says: "Materially the fossil only becomes a fossil as such if something prior to it settled into it in the right conditions. And having become thatish it continually changes its shape and internal biochemical structure. The fossilish is exposed to its surroundings as certainly as we are. But by abstracting it out of its ongoing alteration, the fossil "or the ruin, in our case," is made to work as a tool for dividing time and people. That is, it operates as a tool for social tense". I think this quote could be useful not only to think of ruins, but also to overcome, culture-nature divide.

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01 I can only speak about my own personal experience.
02 Does that make any sense?

04 **Virgil 15:42**

05 I think I understand. I guess I want to point out
06 an ambiguity in what you just said, which is that you
07 always speak about a city from your position.

09 **Mahmoud 15:51**

10 Of course, 100%.

12 **Virgil 16:14**

13 There were moments in both cities where I felt
14 very comfortable, fair and very happy to be there.
15 Which is a sense of belonging, maybe not a permanent
16 one, or a pervasive one. But what you said is exactly
17 what's interesting about having your perspective in
18 this conversation because the EU project that Lodo
19 and I have been referring to has this desire of making a
20 similarity across these geographies through a political
21 project of uniting Europe, creating freedom of
22 movement within the European space, and bringing
23 all these countries together. You also experience this
24 through S.W.A.N.A. (Southwest Asia and North
25 Africa), the Arab world Arabic speaking "Arab". All
26 of those terms are highly contentious and misleading.
27 But they all have this agenda of bringing together
28 and sweeping a continuous space of cultural activity,
29 which is actually quite discontinuous. You are simply
30 from Lebanon. You are not magically and intimately
31 connected with Egypt. But also you have, as you've
32 described, a different level of access.

34 **Onur 18:28**

35 I always feel a weird comfort when I don't
36 understand the language. To not understand certain
37 dangers immediately is a kind of protection. It
38 makes me feel more comfortable, maybe safer. But
39 conversely, if there is an announcement about an
40 upcoming threat I can't understand it.

42 **Mahmoud 19:39**

43 With Marseille specifically there's two
44 experiences I can think about in regards to
45 belonging in that context and where I personally
46 felt isolated only because I did not speak French.
47 The continuous translation of experience was really
48 distancing. I should speak about this because both
49 these topics connect to one story. One day we went

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after the imports that were done for the Olympics in 2004. So I'm very interested in this journey. I think this travel signifies an imagination that is associated with the landscape that we're dealing with - it makes me think of the Mediterranean not as a geography but as an imagined reality.

One final thing I want to add is that recently these palm trees have been infected by pests, and they're dying out, eaten alive by beetles - quite poetic. This made me think about the concept of infection, which I came across in Donna Haraway's work, and how we approach it. I was reading this text by her where infection is discussed alongside theories of mutation and how in Darwinian Origins of Species theoretical framework evolution is seen as a result of a mutation that is based on competition between individual species. Whereas I think infection is much more about networks and links, where things happen at the same time and you're "becoming-with" in a network. It's a series of threads that is impossible to undo or reverse just by following our steps backwards. For me the palm trees have been a thread that I've followed through the cities that I visited and it is quite difficult to connect them into a wholesome image.

Stella 20:10

Uhm, I feel like I have many starting points. One was really trying to understand my lived experience in Athens. And the other relates more to my expertise in cartography, in understanding the systems of power, how these two are connected, and how political desires manifest into landscape. One way is the process of ruination that we talked about and that is ever present in Greece. It almost feels like proof of concept in all the cities that we've visited to have like "showing you my guts, and here it is", like this "I'm valid in this way" and contribute to that imagination. It builds a city that is the city desired, in a way. At least for Athens, I'm thinking this is the kind of aspiration that it alludes to, we talked about it as an aspiration to be the symbol of Europe. And I'm thinking about how these things become centralised into that and how we are in this residency, almost here to do these visits, very short visits, and come out from them with something about a city. There is no other way to do it but to centralise it. I think it's interesting because some of us are from the cities that we visited. And so we're doing this to each other as well. I've been

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Chiara 18:25

I think I prefer taking over from what you said. With regards to fossils, for example, I think their belonging in the sphere of nature makes us think that we are witnessing a natural process, in the finding of fossils, and their scientific and museological framing. Whereas also that is very much a historical process. As for ruins in general, I totally agree with what Mahmoud was saying in terms of finding this space in between a loss of signification, or recognizability, more than signification, a loss of meaning perhaps, and the possibility of becoming monumental, of, somehow, becoming totally static, framed in a way that is supposed to be eternal, in some capacity. Also, when thinking about ruins, what comes to mind for me is the idea of temporalities, as a ruin has not only been subjected to entropy, having undergone a cycle of decay, but it has also been detached from its original function. Now, the ruin exists through a process of projection of meaning, that is very much connected to the idea of anachronism. So, what we frame as ruin is not just the shadow of the past, as an object turns into ruin in the very moment it touches the contemporaneity, which is the gaze looking at it. The gaze that decides either to preserve it, to destroy it or to forget it. And this can be formalised in many different ways.

The next step for me will be to separate a bit also between the museological and archaeological thinking and what also Gabriele was saying, thinking about the 19th century's architectures of Alexandria, which are in a state of wishful thinking of becoming monuments. What I felt when we were in Alexandria is that these buildings are just somehow detached from any functionality. The hope is that nobody is going to touch them. But there is no after-thought about how this building can come to life in different forms. It is like yeah, becoming archaeological sites more than anything, even more than becoming museums, because it seems there is no intention for them to be opened into the possibility of being lived, inhabited differently, or at least, it seems that there is not yet this kind of conversation around these spaces. So yeah, I think we have two things possibly now, one is the institutionalisation of ruination that goes into museums and archaeology, the way tourism participates in that etc., and, on the other hand, the state of becoming or never-to-become, which is in the ruins being and remaining relics, stuck in this middle stage.

Islam 24:29

I want to come into two different topics. I will start with the more interesting and weird. Because lately in Egypt,

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up to Northern suburbs, which are the poorer areas, the areas where all social housing was. Of course the difference between the North and the South is that the South is rich. There still is a certain kind of social housing there, Le Corbusier's the Unité d'Habitation, that is now a monument. In the North you have the contemporary housing settlements where mostly ethnic peoples live. We met those running a recording studio or an art space that was set up in the 80s because of intense policification of the area. That's a word, right? Policification. Like policing. Sorry, policing, intense policing of the area, because of the predominance of drug trafficking and trade in the neighbourhood. It was a hip hop studio, a dance studio. I could not understand a single word being said, because everything was in French and translation was not done at all. So someone like me was sitting in this context that I can visibly see is loaded, because we always saw drug dealers and look-outs on the entire way there. Every other street corner had someone sitting looking out for who's coming up and down, and you can tell that they're all communicating. So you enter this intense context, this suburb with huge concrete spaces. You sit in this studio, someone's talking to you about their experience, and you can tell someone's been shot and there's a memorial setup for someone, and this space is somehow connected to that memorial, and they're moved. But I felt a distance, linguistically. Later that evening, we were out drinking and I needed to get paper from someone. I was walking around avoiding most people just to see who I was comfortable talking to because everyone was drunk.. And this one person came to me asking me to roll the cigarette. So I ended up sitting down talking with him, and he was actually a drug dealer. And he was African.

Virgil 23:11

What language did you start speaking in?

Mahmoud 23:13

English. What's so interesting is that the same evening I sat with someone who was involved in this entire thing and who was there on some sort of temporary refugee, migrant kind of existence. He had not come straight to Marseille from anywhere else, He was in Italy before coming to France. So he had been in the European system for a very long time. And just to hear his story, to understand where

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thinking about the fact that I see the city through the eyes of other people on a very intimate scale as well. I think that's all I want to share right now.

Lodovica 22:38

There is no standard.

Mark 22:45

I wasn't really prepared to think about what to share. But there are some situations that happened during these visits that triggered me. One is when George told me that he wanted to visit the mosque, and that he specifically wanted to join a Sufi prayers. This is not the usual prayers of the Muslims in Egypt. I've never done it. In fact, I have no access to it. But at that point I smiled at him and acted as if I had access to the Sufi prayer. And it happened that by being with a foreigner, George in this case, I could access the Sufi prayers. Infact, through him as a stranger, by being a companion of a stranger, I could access my own city, and I could access places and communities that you could have never accessed normally as a citizen. This is very specific to me, because I come from a minority and also my appearance is different from the Sufi community's. If I asked "Could I join the prayers?" for sure there would be refusal. But when I said I was with a foreigner, everyone welcomed me. So I've been thinking about this new space of accessibility that I have never had before. On that day the Sufi were really trying to be super nice to me in front of George saying how much they accept Christians. Time is short, so I wanted to point to the specific accessibility to forbidden actions or unreachable communities that occur through the companionship of the stranger or the foreigner. Through this companionship you get to places that you felt were always forbidden to you. I have other topics, but I think time is short for this round.

Mahmoud 26:45

Just for the sake of the recording, this is Mahmoud speaking.

One of the things that I was thinking about was how both Alexandria and Marseille are two places that I've never really been to or explored. Personally, I always started to look at a city from either the city museum or ancient sites that are used to narrate the city's history. This residency in some ways is asking

01 of somebody living abroad, we feel this is
02 something that we have to negotiate with.
03 And if I have to go personal, I think this is the
04 reason why I am now doing the research that
05 I'm doing. Because I never positioned myself
06 as a Southern European or Italian, this is
07 something that has occurred to me while living
08 abroad. And I noticed that a lot of discourse
09 that I found, which I'm now trying to tackle,
10 as I find it problematic, or reductivist at least,
11 oftentimes comes from people like myself,
12 who are Italians or Southern Europeans, living
13 in Northern Europe or the States, who try to
14 elaborate or speculate on the Mediterranean
15 while participating in structures and
16 institutions that are based somewhere in the
17 North Atlantic. Look at a discipline like Italian
18 Studies, which is yet another very fascinating
19 thing for me because, of course, we don't
20 have Italian Studies departments in Italy. But
21 they're actually a thing in the States/North
22 America, and they produce a discourse about
23 things that are rarely approached in Italian
24 academia. But they do so using a layer, let's
25 say a filter, which goes into from a specific
26 American perspective of culture and politics.

27
28 I was talking with Sara the other day, about
29 the fact that I was reading a book that was the
30 outcome of one of the biggest conferences on
31 Mediterranean Studies that ever was. And in
32 this book, at a certain point, somebody was
33 pointing out the fact that nothing that was
34 produced under the label of Mediterranean
35 Studies was ever written in Arabic. It's like
36 only French, Italian, English, basically,
37 Spanish a bit. So, you see, it's very specifically
38 European. It is one of the first things that made
39 me think about the equivalence, geographical
40 equivalence and also ideological, between
41 Mediterranean and Europe. The fact that
42 as you said, Zeynep, Mediterranean is not
43 something that you can trace on a map. It is a
44 word that also means a sea. But it also means
45 a lot of things that are not mappable, a region
46 that is always ready to be renegotiated, and of
47 course, this operates via the exclusion of a lot
48 of localities that are actually Mediterranean,
49 but not completely so. Alexandria, for

something very weird is happening with all the mummies. I don't know if you heard about the parades. I was on a flight, and I started talking with the person sitting next to me. I never actually do this. But anyway, yeah, a conversation started, and he says that he is a researcher and an academic who works for the Ministry of Antiquities. And he writes about monuments and history of ruins, and excavations, trying to reinterpret or gather a story together. And then he mentioned something about Sisi wanting to re-create a moment in history, where the king or the "big king" would gather all the regions, the smaller kings from the regions that he owns, and they would have to parade in front of him in a certain way. Sisi really recreated this moment, while he stood on the same height as the grand king, looking at the mummies going in front of him. This necro-political imagination obtained by using ruins, actually, ruins of people. It's not just ruins that are fixed somewhere, it was about moving ruins from one museum to the other. And then, while this was happening, this imagine, this imaginary was created by Sisi.

The second thing that I wanted to comment on is the fact that the "save heritage" movements in Egypt are not talking about functions or repurposing of these buildings. I mean, you saw it yourself in Alexandria, for example, there is no way to repurpose buildings as cultural centres because, first there is no money, there's not enough money for culture. And second, I mean, no one cares. Any other kind of repurposing if it's business oriented, then it still doesn't matter whether this building is there or not. The state, when it removes one of the buildings, it's to repurpose the use of this piece of land. And then it's like, yeah, we will build a higher building, so instead of inhabiting 20 people we will be able to give it to 200 people. This movement doesn't rely on repurposing the ruins, not because they are dismissing the issue. It's more that it's indifferent.

Chiara 29:16

I understand perfectly, if you build a highrise in place of a villa that creates a structural problem in the urbanistic infrastructures of an area. Still I don't understand what is pushing towards preservation of the buildings in the first place. I see you don't want these lots of land to be used for, I don't know, an apartment building. This is clear, they can be used for something else. But why the preservation of the villas? I mean, that's something that is lost to me, because if we don't destroy those villas, but still they cannot be repurposed, this is just creating, as we were saying, ruins, like an Acropolis. This is a space that you cannot inhabit in

01 he's coming from, his relationship to his mother, and
02 all these other things that were so personal - that
03 I would have never understood being up in the
04 Northern suburbs, having that access, us sharing
05 this language, really made me understand a different
06 experience. Suddenly I felt as if I could understand
07 and experience someone like him.

Virgil 24:21

10 But, from my understanding of French
11 society, oftentimes the wildly economically
12 disadvantaged suburbs of French cities are not
13 necessarily monolingually French. It's interesting to
14 me that when you were there everyone was speaking
15 to you in French, although French is not the only
16 language spoken there.

Mahmoud 24:58

19 If he spoke another language that wasn't Arabic
20 for sure, nor was it English. I mean, in that setting
21 I could not demand anything of this man to speak
22 a language that he didn't speak. And it's not about
23 who translated or who didn't translate, or how the
24 experience was translated to me. What was amazing
25 in this respect was that later that evening both
26 I, someone who spoke English, and someone who was
27 in a very different socio economic situation and found
28 himself in Marseille were able to communicate in a
29 way that was very human and actually happenstance.

Lodovica 26:09

32 To be honest, I have an issue with the word
33 belonging. I don't appreciate it.

Mahmoud 26:14

36 I agree.

Lodovica 26:15

39 I would rather try to find other terms that are
40 more helpful to unpack what we wanted to talk
41 about. It could be interesting to think of the terms
42 resident and foreigner, or alien and native, and of
43 what these terms mean, especially in the context of
44 this residency. Belonging is a very broad topic and
45 I think its idea is problematic in many ways. I mean,
46 the idea of accessing the dimension of a place that
47 connects to you is very deep and you just unpacked
48 it. But at the same time this rhetoric is literally being
49 used by companies such as Airbnb to promote the

you to come to a place and do some sort of excavation, as if there's something to be revealed or fragments that were supposed to piece together, somehow, as if my newness or outside newness has knowledge in it because of its alienness to the local context. So what you see as a foreigner coming in is inherently true. Maybe that in itself, the newness, is a blank space to absorb knowledge. So looking at all these artefacts in these museums I started thinking about how at one point all of these cities had some sort of establishment and how I'm looking at stones, buildings and artefacts centuries later that I don't know what the function is. Is the function a narration of identity? Is its function to narrate to me as "a tourist" some sort of value in what this place is? Because then you walk out of the museum and you see absolute conflict and alienation. You see buildings falling apart and that in the present moment people have no place to live, they have no way to make money, people are being pushed outside. So there's this conflict between glorifying a history that was maybe much more accepting than our current moment and then weaponizing these artefacts. And I use the word weaponize only because they're almost weaponized against the people who actually live in these places. Because so many of these places are developing new cities on top of the old cities and the new cities are all about external capital, a certain kind of wealth, a certain amount of class. You often don't even have to live in these new cities or these new developments. It's almost like there's a new Alexandria being built over the present Alexandria, and there's a new Marseille over the old Marseille. It's interesting to think about both these cities as initially Greek settlements as well. It's like this other history that keeps being referenced to. What does that mean to be part of a Mediterranean basin? It was all these things that started off from statues and artefacts to now somehow connect to these new buildings, these new streets. So for me the tension between old and new, was very polarising. But somehow I feel like they dovetail at the end, somehow, they come together in some very violent ways. That's what I have for now.

Onur 30:54

For me, the triggers were difficult to think about because my experience of this residency was increasingly shaped by a lack of imagination. When I couldn't go to Alexandria, I was actually like "I don't have any kind of imagination about Alexandria". Of

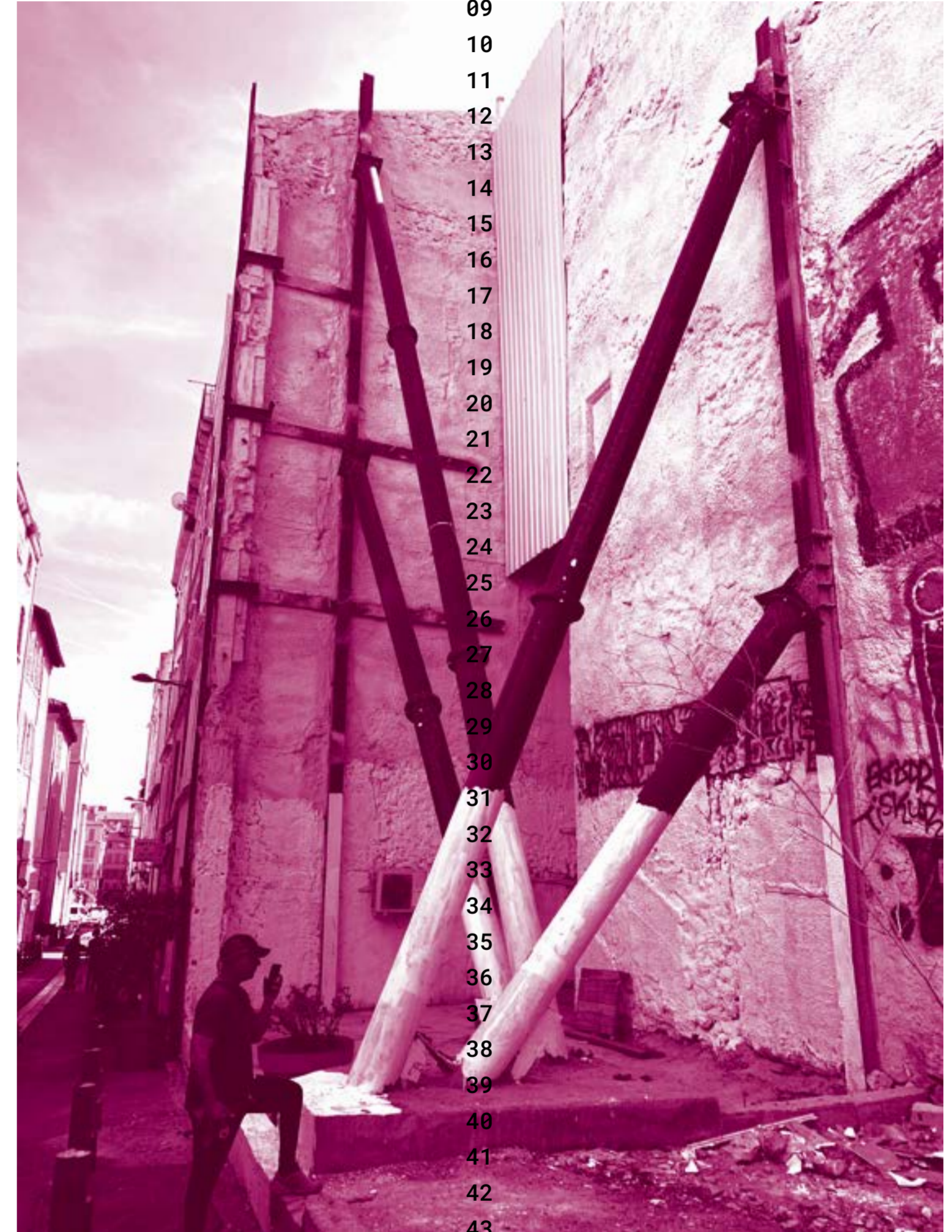
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01 example, in this project it was always referred
02 to as this quintessential Mediterranean city.
03 And I wonder, why? Because, I mean, I think
04 there are a couple of cities that are described
05 using the same rhetoric. And some of them we
06 visited. I think Athens and Marseille too, you
07 can feel the same spirit around the way they
08 are perceived from afar, or also internally,
09 as, you know, port cities that have a special
10 Mediterranean quality to them. Whereas,
11 well, for me, with Mediterranean we mean
12 a set of things that are ungraspable. I came
13 to think that it's very much about carrying
14 the remains of what we think has to be the
15 place in which the European "common" past
16 has first been configured. In Alexandria,
17 when it was referred to as a Mediterranean
18 city it was because of the Hellenistic past,
19 the cosmopolitan past, it was always about
20 the projection of these histories. It was rarely
21 about, you know, the contemporaneity of
22 the city or the city behind the links with the
23 West, with Europe. In the case of Marseille,
24 and I don't want to go there because it's
25 something that is too far from me, and I was
26 not in Marseille, but for example, one of the
27 excuses for France to project itself so much
28 in the Mediterranean, is to have this big city
29 facing the sea. And having a city that has a
30 big migrant community, somehow this is
31 described in a lexicon of metaphorisation
32 of hybridity and so on and so forth. Athens,
33 of course, I think carries the idea of being a
34 romantic all-European ruins landscape.

Stella 21:39

35
36
37 I was thinking about what you said,
38 Chiara, that Alexandria is a prism, I mean,
39 this is supposed to be like the heuristic
40 device, it dilutes the light, it fractures
41 something. I guess we were selected in this
42 project to also do that through our own lived
43 experiences. We also are prisms. This kind
44 of left me wondering about the conversation
45 behind like the... or the expectation, if there
46 was one, aside from checking a box of this
47 is multicultural, multinational. I definitely
48 noticed myself, mostly embodying my own
49 context, my own geography and bringing it to

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course I'm aware of Alexandria being this huge port city that was once very glamorous, and of this huge library that once was there and placed the city in the midst of knowledge, blah, blah, blah. But when I couldn't go I felt upset but also I wasn't shaken as much as I expected to. And the same thing happened in Athens. Because it's very close to Turkey, where I'm from, there are a lot of connections and it's a city that theoretically I knew a little bit by reading about it on paper. But when I arrived it was actually quite surprising for me how the city was kind of loud. Albeit being completely concrete, it was very organic at the same time. Once you start walking in the city, what we call the ruins or ruinations are very, very integrated in the modern city. And the differentiation between them is not always clear cut. I felt like I didn't know if what I was walking through was a huge ruination or a modern lively space. Which also has a lot to do, I think, with the recent history of Athens. Maybe it's about the economic crisis and people being fed up with all the political and economic situation. So there is a very abstract but also charming connection between imagination and ruins. I've started to feel like that what we experienced, sensually experienced as ruins, is actually a lot about the collapse of the imagination in total. It's about the place realising that our expectations or preconceptions are quite abstract and often wrong.

Omnia 33:35

I'm not sure my thoughts are ordered, but I'll try. So, the most remarkable experience related to my research and work in Brussels is when I decided to go off programme and visit the Meise botanical garden, which is outside and just north of Brussels. It is a world class botanical garden of 14 million specimens of plants, sorry, 4 million specimens of plants, as claimed in the garden's description. A lot of them are from all over the world. For me that was the main method to trace the histories of colonisation and displacement and to understand how this State is trying to piece things together through horticulture. Something of everything from all over the world placed in a lab environment. But also to try to observe, on an individual level, each of these creatures growing there and wondering if they have the consciousness to understand that they're not really growing in the desert, if they're growing inside a glass house. How would it make a difference when they know? Could

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any form, it is just there to remind you of some great past and for tourism purposes, maybe. But it's also strange to think about this, when thinking about a past that is still connected to a history of... if we don't want to use the word colonialism, because I understand that there is something different in the European communities once living in Alexandria than, think about, I don't know, British troops occupying the city. But still, it is a history of classism. That's for sure. Because when you think about the wealth that these buildings are showing, it's a complex history nevertheless... Even if you want to exclude from the reasoning the kind of intrigue that might emerge in having Western decaying buildings in a Northern African city, confident in the idea that, when kept as empty ruins, or possible monuments, they will attract other Westerners, now as tourists. So that's funny for me. That was something that I didn't grasp when I was there. What do you do with these empty villas that are, anyhow, decaying if you cannot repurpose them?

Mahmoud 33:58

In the case of the modern ruins in Alexandria. It seems like they are just in a state of pause. I'm not sure if they are being used to advertise any kind of messages. I didn't think of the differentiation between the ruins of the villas and, maybe, the ruins of the apartment blocks in downtown Alexandria, for instance. And the same thing, with the ruins actually in downtown Marseille, because all of these areas are all kind of the same in a way; heritage buildings that are left to rot and fall. And yet in both cities, what is being built is an alternative city grid, an alternative neighbourhood. So in some ways, it feels like you either have to buy these buildings, on an individual level, to take them out of ruination, and then to put them into the proper category of heritage. So you need the private capital to do this, because the state is not going to get involved. Or they are just standing there as markers to then maybe ask for an alternative agenda of development, like, yes, we have to tear them down, we have to maybe modernise, or in some cases, we have to build a whole new city, because this city is not viable. So, even in this way of pausing any development or any use of these "ruins", there's always an agenda of stasis beyond just preservation. So in some ways, actually, they are being preserved in this middle status, neither monument nor a material to learn any history from. Do we learn anything about the non-material heritage of people who used to live in these areas? (Lodovica: are there, there's someone living there?) The people who are living there are oftentimes either immigrants or poor people. I mean, in the case of Marseille (Lodovica: poor people live there), yes,

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possibility they offer to access "the true dimension of a place". I know the link is a bit stretched, but it nevertheless revolves around this idea of how you can actually connect personally to a place without being from there. But what is "a real place"? What is "access to the real soul of a place"? What is striking to me is that the experience you just recounted is extremely touching and complex and I think it was very important for you. But at the same time the idea of belonging is also used by, like, "global capitalism", you know, to tell you that you can go wherever you want and feel at home wherever you want and access the true essence of a place because you are a citizen of the world. What the fuck does it mean? "You belong to the world" doesn't really mean anything.

Mahmoud 30:21

I do not work for Airbnb or any other corporation, but I completely agree with you that belonging is a very abstract term that maybe doesn't exist at all. That's why belonging is a problematic term. What does that mean? I'm not looking to belong anywhere, I'm just looking to exist in a context that allows me to exist.

Lodovica 31:26

I was just saying that your anecdote emerged from the topic of belonging. You know what I mean?

Mahmoud 31:42

Oh, yeah. But also, to speak to what you said, there is this idea that if you can package a city's image you can feel like you can access it and you can belong to it. Right? And even narrate the idea. But what belonging is, what tourism is, and what being a resident and an outsider means are different.

Virgil 32:04

I mean we're all basically just being fucked over by this question of belonging in our personal lives. I was only able to apply to this residency in a very contingent way. It actually came up when I was finally invited because I happened to be in the United States. And there was a moment in the correspondence where they asked me something like "But you live in Germany, right?". And I had to reassure them, like "No, no, I belong."

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they resist to grow? I was mainly going to the garden to investigate if the gardeners failed to grow some species of plants. In my previous research I focused on the Blue Lily of the Nile and I was looking for the Lily bonds on the map, in the wetlands. I wanted to see if they could actually bring the *nymphaea caerulea* there because it's been said that it's really difficult to actually grow this specific lily outside of the environment of the Nile. And I couldn't find it. So I was like "Yes, bravo Lily! You could resist." Maybe the lily has arrived at the botanical garden in another way. Maybe they are being kept as rhizomes in the herbarium. But their resistance to growing would still count.

Virgil 37:51

Stella is sitting across from me. And so I will speak to Stella. Unlike you, I came into this residency looking at the list of everyone and thinking "Oh, I'm the only person that doesn't have some sort of personal or national connection to this region." This list is made of, if I may, people from Turkey and Greece and Egypt and Italy and Lebanon, and I was like "Oh, I'm from far away." In that way, the thing that I came in thinking about was national boundaries and geographies of state and national control. I think what was an eye opening experience in Egypt, for me, was to observe how the violence that I associate most often with the border in that context is something that is distributed, maybe not evenly, but broadly across the geography. And then conversely, going to Cyprus, where you have a small country on a small island - there's actually two countries depending on who you ask for, and one country depending who you ask for - and there's at least three to five different forms of sovereignty operating in seven different kinds of borders and different border crossings. There you have this over articulation of the border as the site of this violence. And having this experience of Alexandria and Egypt really helped me to understand, to kind of de-spectacularise the border as a specific site and understand everything that also leads up to the border as being part of that site. And, as I expressed this now, it also returns to the place that I did grow up in, which is very far away in California. There the border is also legally defined as 100 miles inland from it and you have this prescribed spatialisation of a border actually as an area. But I think the US often articulates itself around having this sort of well ordered order to it. Whereas in Alexandria

01 the places. Especially in Alexandria, it's very
02 easy, I think, to link Athens to Alexandria
03 in a way, because of the obvious historical
04 connections and recent common population.
05 I have friends who are from Alexandria in
06 Athens, who used to live there until the 50s.
07 And I was already sort of skeptical of what I
08 knew existed in Athens, like the sense of, I
09 don't know, maybe ownership is not the right
10 word, but projections towards Alexandria,
11 like, this city is also kind of Greek.

Mark 26:45

12
13
14 I just have questions because, when you
15 are talking about projections, it's about what
16 Chiara was saying, this kind of historical,
17 imaginative Alexandria, but also connected
18 to great history, great culture... Yeah.

19
20 Because, you know the history of
21 Alexandria... sometimes, in many fields,
22 it is considered as part of the history of
23 Europe, which is something awkward, and
24 it is clearly political and ideological. Like
25 really, because I think, okay, so, it's like
26 when Arabs are talking about Spain as part
27 of the Arabic history, you know, a kind of
28 territory that, due to colonialism, has a kind
29 of shifting belonging. So yeah, and this isn't
30 just something connected to geography,
31 but also to religion, something about the
32 beginning of Christianity and its invention.
33 And then this is like reclaiming this part of
34 the world, which is now a Christian, part of
35 the Western civilization in a way. So, it has,
36 I think... We have new history studies, but
37 what I have read is always not really putting
38 Alexandria in Egypt, you know what I mean?
39 This imaginary is something like a heritage
40 that is dominating the whole cultural and even
41 scientific domains about what is Alexandria.
42 The point that is interesting here is that,
43 in this kind of political moment we live in
44 Egypt, with this Caravan project you could
45 still do something connected to Alexandria.
46 This is quite something, because it seemed
47 impossible to do anything due to political
48 censorship and its authoritarian power. It
49 was even surprising to see artists around,

but in the case of Marseille, I think two or three buildings
fell on people who were living inside of them, you know.
So, the state is not doing anything about preserving these
buildings. So there's that relationship. And in Marseille,
you have an entire neighbourhood that overlooks the
Mediterranean being developed through international
funders and capital to build a new vision of what Marseille
could be. So it's this narration of Marseille as a historic "euro-
mediterranean" port city. But also, it just so happens that
this area is also historically where the ancient Greeks first
settled, then the working classes, and finally immigrants.
So this stratification of what ruins are, but also of potentially
what a land is like, what does it mean to be walking in a
neighbourhood that has these 17th 18th century buildings?
And just beneath them are, for instance, maybe Greek ruins?
Right? So it's this almost hidden stratification of history that
makes the land appealing and worthwhile of development,
because there is a narrative there, to excavate for capital. So
all of this kind of comes and is presented as one monolith of
history being narrated.

Lodovica 38:25

What you said made me think of Venice, the city where
I'm from, which is exemplary of some of these processes.
I'm thinking especially of what you were saying about
Marseille, and the decision to let specific parts of the city
to simply ruin. To allow the ruination of parts of the city
and wait for a disaster to happen, which in Venice was the
1966 flooding, allows a whole set of preservation policies to
be set in place. And through these policies private capital
comes in together with the expulsion of those who live in
those areas. I think preservation has a big stake in all of this.
It's not only about ruination, but about the modes in which
you preserve something as a ruin, and the interests behind
allowing the ruination of a specific area.

Mahmoud 40:52

When you have either international capital or the state
or someone coming to redevelop, they all get redeveloped
in very similar ways, which is almost like this cleansing of
history, almost like a facade, a preservation of facade. And
I guess what I always think about is, well, if these buildings
have become ruins, right, there's definitely a process that
has led them to that, whether it's war or poverty. So, in some
sense, the question is, when we develop these areas, how are
we developing them? And then, what are we? What is there
to be learned, then again, from a facade, if these buildings
are the product of the immaterial heritage of people living
in a certain way, right? A society that maybe used a veranda

01 **Mahmoud 36:37**
02 Bless you. Virgil sneezed. Is there a second one?
03 Virgil duet happening. Okay. Anyone else? Could be
04 a generator outside.

Onur 40:03

05
06
07 We should approach the idea of belonging
08 critically because it immediately recalls a feeling of
09 nativity, of owning a place, of claiming rights and
10 basically not giving space and possibilities to others.
11 Maybe belonging is about tying and untying yourself.
12 This also brings in the idea of duration, because at
13 any point, you can untie yourself, and you can tie
14 yourself somewhere else. That was very present to
15 me in Athens. There was one moment that we met
16 someone quite randomly at an event. He was Greek
17 and maybe in his 50s. Like a lot of Greek people, his
18 family was moved, forced to move from Asia Minor.
19 I was telling him how surprised I was about the
20 familiarity of the city's structure to places like Izmir,
21 and that the architecture was very similar in a way
22 that I didn't expect. And he said "The only difference
23 is that Izmir is a very ugly version of Athens." Which
24 I immediately agreed with and we both started
25 laughing. This is very true, actually. At that point I
26 was untied. Which was very funny. Like, I still feel
27 the connection, but it's not the same in my mind.
28 Then I can belong to that conversation in a different
29 way. So why don't we think in terms of the space that
30 you belong to, but also the events that you feel you
31 belong to. Because obviously your ideas about how
32 much you love a place can be undone during similar
33 kinds of events. I think this is very important because
34 you carry with yourself these events that shape your
35 ideas constantly. It's a never ending process.

Virgil 43:36

36
37
38 It makes me think about the idea of hospitality,
39 what an invitation is, and what it means to be invited
40 by someone into, literally, their home or the place
41 where they live. You know, we were the third group
42 that Sarah had been taking around Alexandria.
43 And to me it seemed like she was a person whose
44 hospitality had been nearly exhausted by the process.
45 Something we haven't talked about in regards to
46 the context of Nicosia is that there are two Nicosias
47 and there are two different places to visit that are at
48 the same time one city. And there are people who
49 we met who are not invited to the other part, who

that kind of order was often felt to be absent. You know, I learned today that we had a police interaction that I literally was not able to see. So I've been thinking a lot about the spectacle of the border, and the spectacle of the violence of the border. And what happens when it's disentangled from a specific site?

It's been 40 minutes. Now the plan is to do an active response round, where we reproduce what we've heard. But do people want to go directly into that? Do we need a moment to shake things out? I mean, yeah, that's a proposal.

Sara 41:20

Yeah. I don't know. What do y'all think? Or how should we go about it?

Virgil 41:31

Should we have a consensus? Mark? Did you hear that we're discussing if we want to take a 10 minute break?

Zeynep 41:41

I think that if we take a break the conversations are gonna happen there. That's my concern. And this is about generative space right now.

Virgil 41:53

Can I propose a five minute silent break where we just think, take notes, write down, go to the bathroom and then reconvene in five minutes? I'm just gonna let this stuff go.

Stella 49:10

What are the terms of this, like, in terms of time?

Virgil 49:15

I think for this round we will do five minutes slots.

Lodovica 49:20

We will then come back together to elaborate and expand on what we heard.

Virgil 50:08

Gabriele is making an excellent point. We should keep the blunt order. Keep the rotation counterclockwise. But you can also skip and come back. Skip all the way back around. I'm not gonna go first. You just go. Okay?

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of a certain length, facing a certain way because it made sense for their communities, but then you redevelop it in a different way as, actually, we don't live that way anymore. Are we using these spaces in ways that are contemporary, which don't reflect the building's themselves? For instance? So I think that's for me a question of, okay, if there's a loss, how are we reusing it? And are we learning new things? Or is it just having culture on hold? How do we regenerate areas and maintain social cohesion? There is also a tension between preserving local culture, and its relationship to contemporary trends of international architecture, or international capital, and globalization. This is maybe a question about how we can make these "ruins" generative for the future?

Gabriele 43:43

Okay, no, I took some notes, on what Islam was saying about this contraposition between something that is abandoned in the condition of ruination and something that is preserved as a ruin, which is valuable. And I wanted to connect what he said to what you said before about this idea of like, post disaster environment. This provocation of post disaster environments as sort of ruins that we can understand as monumentalisation of the environment. It's very interesting what happened in particular in the Western world with, let's say the National Parks that are natural places where, what we do, is usually trying to make them not evolve, to crystallise them in a condition. So it's something that is for me similar to what happened with architectural or, let's say, mineral ruins in general, even though we are talking about living environments, a complex environment. What humans usually do in this condition is trying to stop change, in order to preserve a natural environment. And this is something that is institutionalised. On the other hand, the polluted post-disaster environment is in a state of continuous evolution, even though it's not good for our health, but still is in a continuous condition of exchange. It's evolving. The institution is not interested in showing it, in talking about it, in taking care of it. Because it's something that is not convenient, also, in political terms.

Chiara 47:30

What you were talking about, this last part, was about a comparison between the National Park in a sense, like preservation of a certain landscape versus a landscape that is let to...

Gabriele 47:47

Let in a condition of ruination.

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are excluded from crossing over and excluded from belonging, or alienated, or rendered foreign by political histories in a way that's much more specific, and much more present because the other part is 10 feet away, 10 metres away. So I was thinking a lot about Sarah Baghat's kind of exhausted hospitality, but also thinking about how amazing our visit in Famagusta was with Nurtane and how she was such a generous and hospitable figure, who really, literally took us into her home, and took us into the space that she was creating, but also took us to these places that she's familiar with. And even though we only went to Famagusta for a few hours, this visit was so warm, informal, and inviting, that I felt so invited there as a guest. I think that's another kind of term to bring into the conversation. I felt so genuinely and generously hosted. But at the same time there is a huge portion of that city which is made of the empty homes of people who were uninvited from that city in an illegal way. That's also what's expelled, and displaced. So I'm thinking of the temporality of hospitality versus displacement, expulsion versus invitation. Also many people have been invited to settle in Northern Cyprus, they've been brought in and their presence brings up these boundaries. For example the young people we met. They are in a hip hop dance crew none of whom can go to the South.

Lodovica 48:18

They can't go anywhere, apart from Turkey.

Virgil 48:22

Yeah.

Lodovica 48:29

I really liked what you said Mahmoud when you recounted what happened in Marseille. You said "having a place to exist". I think that's probably central to our conversation because it switches the understanding of "belonging" towards allowing specific forms of sociality to exist and thrive.

Mahmoud 49:19

I think that term comes out for me because of historical narratives and my family having to move from East Beirut to West Beirut in the middle of a civil war. So there's that process of expulsion and population trading. Also me moving to Canada and doing my education there brings in a different

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Stella 50:51
I think it's okay.

Virgil 50:55
So let's start the iPhones.

Onur 50:59
Five minutes again?

Zeynep 51:02
I wonder if it would make sense to change the format because this is much more about reflection and interaction?

Stella 51:02
Yeah.

Lodovica 51:27
I know it's a bit forced, but the rotation is really the only way through which we can give everyone the same amount of time and the same opportunity to speak.

Stella 51:38
But the order could switch up.

Virgil 51:39
Oh, sure. The order could switch up starting with you.

Stella 51:48
Yeah, yeah.

Virgil 51:50
Should we just move seats?

Zeynep 51:52
1.2.3

Virgil 52:10
We're good. We're good to go.

Zeynep 52:15
I think it's good to build on

Stella 52:24
Yeah, it's not an ambush.

01 like, okay, this still could function! People
02 still could come and discuss, you could have
03 a lecture and discuss about how the city, or
04 at least how the system is changing. We don't
05 talk super, super politically, but some political
06 links were included and all that looked
07 impossible before. So, I mean, it could have
08 been really expanded, by taking Alexandria
09 more seriously. But Alexandria is a part of
10 this context of brutal political oppression. So
11 what it means to do that kind of programme
12 about Alexandria, it means you need to be in
13 a kind of political position, fairly concealed,
14 but still understandable between us... It
15 pushes you in a kind of resistance position, if
16 you really want to focus. Which I think is sort
17 of a given, because you cannot be there and
18 then say, I will be on the side that it's not of
19 political concern, because everything is. It's
20 geography, it's architecture, it's everything...
21 it is super connected to the political context.
22 It could have been even more political but,
23 yeah...

24
25 **Stella 34:22**
26 I have a question. Are you saying that
27 the projection of European imagination,
28 the projection of a European imagination
29 to Alexandria historically, also now in this
30 European residency, is what makes it possible
31 to do this kind of work there, because it can
32 be conceived as separate. So it has a dual role.
33 Is that what you were saying?

34
35 **Mark 35:00**
36 That's a good question. If you can say, the
37 authority, the European authority, opens some
38 possibilities for the kind of artistic gesture or
39 something like that. I think from a certain
40 point of view, it could be one of the factors.
41 But one of the factors is also local, coming
42 from us. Because we began to think that
43 everything is simply impossible, we accepted
44 the impossibility of, specifically, producing
45 something, like an artwork, somewhere.
46 This is the difference between having a
47 conversation inside the city, and interacting
48 with others bringing over different imaginary
49

Chiara 47:49
For me, the problem is also the use of the word disaster. Disaster, first of all, is a word that evokes something that is out of the responsibility of human beings. Just looking at the word itself, which means "because of the adversity of the stars". So against the odds, something happened. So it creates disruption in the status quo, let's say things like, I don't know, if you think about Pompeii, that was a disaster. And nothing was left of the city afterwards. Whereas, I think sometimes we frame as disaster things that are actually longer processes that are not surprising. And also, I feel sometimes there is a resistance in adapting to different conditions, which is not only connected to the preservation of nature, for example, but also to the preservation of all those political, economical structures that are in place and that risk something out of this change. It's just, I wouldn't use the word "disaster" in this context... It will be very interesting to investigate further this idea of preservation. What does it mean and imply? Who decides what is to be preserved, and how to do so? Because there's nothing neutral about preservation; it is a choice that is made by specific actors, and is in favour of something and possibly against something else. So in the case of archaeology, in the West heritage is often framed as if something universal. We are preserving something for the good of all humankind, like UNESCO, for example. Whereas of course, this is never the case, these decisions come from the will of nation states, or of transnational organs of power. And also, in general, I think preservation is not always the cure. Some things have to be let go. I think about certain examples, especially when it comes to this idea of monumentalisation. I can bring over the example of Rome, because it's a city that is somehow suffering from the presence of its past. The way the city is static, because some things cannot be changed, it's pretty much apparent in the centre, in particular. Whereas until pretty recently, I would say, I don't know, 100 years ago, 150 years ago, there was not an idea of preservation of ruins that would prevent Romans from also using the spaces that are now just empty lots with a lot of artefacts. This is giving some wealth to the city in terms of tourism, but it's also preventing a lot of other things from emerging. This may be also the case of Alexandria, if they go ahead with this idea of preserving the past, while not caring about the ruins of the present, the things that are being built now, as we speak. And I would say that this applies to Athens too. And also, what you were saying Mahmoud, about Marseille and the creation of this imagination of a city, which doesn't pay much attention to the people living there, the communities, for the sake of somebody else's interest. I don't know if this

01 understanding of being an immigrant. But also
02 the Canadian experience specifically, where you
03 have a country that is trying to attract immigrants
04 and has its own politics around Immigration and
05 Multiculturalism while indigenous communities
06 are completely negated and abused. So there's that
07 experience of a colonial nation, and of who belongs
08 and not belongs, who gets to speak within and about
09 the state, who gets to speak about policies, and
10 who is desired and not desired. I think the entire
11 experience of going to Marseille was really just
12 danced around upon this whole idea of immigration,
13 multiculturalism, belonging, and having a home. All
14 of these experiences were danced around and none
15 could be addressed. You have institutions that are
16 based in the Mediterranean and kind of talk about
17 the Mediterranean but also kind of not, and address
18 colonialism and kind of not address colonialism. I
19 think this question of multiculturalism and belonging
20 is also about letting go, or thinking of culture as fluid,
21 alive and growing with the experiences of people who
22 come in and out of certain boundaries. While people
23 would like to belong, I think it's mostly who's allowed
24 to speak about an experience and who's allowed to
25 add to it.

26
27 **Virgil 52:31**
28 I think it's recording. Yeah, it's recording. Sorry.

29
30 **Lodovica 53:03**
31 I mean, it's not only "speaking about". I think
32 you belong to a set of relations in a way that you are
33 part of them. You are not only allowed to speak about
34 them, but you have to hold on to them. And there's
35 a reciprocity of relationship between different
36 things. I think this speaks to what we talked about
37 with Sarah in Cyprus, . that is about setting certain
38 relations to land which are not about owning the land,
39 but honouring all the beings that are in that land, and
40 the fact that there's a relation of reciprocity that
41 is implied. So for example, in moments of ecocide,
42 the understanding is not that you're disrupting
43 the landscape, but you're also disrupting all the
44 reproductive relations that are part of that landscape
45 and that you belong to in the first place. Maybe that's
46 a way to also think of belonging. It's not that you
47 belong to something, you are part of and accountable
48 for a set of relations that continuously reproduces
49 itself or stops reproducing itself.

Zeynep 52:28
I mean, I think so. But if you guys...

Gabriele 52:31
You wanted the chaos, you have the chaos.

Stella 52:39
Should I start? Okay. Uhm, I was thinking about what Mark said, and I have a confused response to it and also an attempt to expand on it. This is also a request for help with articulating. I'm responding to the lack of accessibility as some parts of the city don't belong to its residents by design. They're not meant to belong to citizens. It's that city that doesn't really belong to you as a person of the city. But, as the inhabitant, your exclusion is required in order to create this construct of imagination.

Lodovica 54:31
Who's "you"?

Stella 54:32
The exclusion of part of the population of the city, or of the citizens is required to build up the imagination of the city. And that's what makes it, that's what enhances it. That's what I'm putting on the table as something that I would like to elaborate on because it's not fully there yet.

Mahmoud 55:13
I think that the people who live in these spaces are subject to the lived experience and the politics of being a resident in that city. Whether it's the lines of religion, or background, or language. I think this can apply to any city anywhere in the world, where you're subjected, as someone who is from that place, to certain political historical realities that you live in the small minutiae of your life. That's one level. But I think there's a whole other experience of the city where ruins, artefacts, history polished up and put on display, or going to a mosque and looking at something as a Sufi ritual allow you access to that experience as a tourist. I think this is connected to the idea of the city itself and the narrative of the city being a primary resource to extract. It is as if, you know, historically cities were built to extract other resources that are no longer in place. And now the resources to extract are the city and image of the city itself.

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01 cities, which come to agitate the impossibility
02 we are living in.
03
04 **Zeynep 37:30**
05 It's interesting, because I was having this
06 conversation with Zedan in Alexandria, and
07 he used exactly the same sentence. I have it
08 in my diary, because I was really touched. He
09 said, we thought it was impossible to have
10 these conversations in Alexandria.
11
12 **Mark 38:17**
13 Exactly.
14
15 **Zeynep 38:18**
16 I was also reading the programme
17 pamphlet the other day, and I took a note
18 of it, and I want to read it actually now. So
19 the way Alexandria is described... There's a
20 paragraph explaining why this programme
21 chose Alexandria, and I want to read it now. So
22 the way they describe it is that 'the city became
23 a playground for the articulation of utopian
24 imaginaries, hosting anarchists, intellectuals
25 and renegades from the Arabic speaking
26 region and the world over to experiment
27 with radical modes of assembly and critique
28 and establish popular theatres, universities,
29 presses, which means institutions. And then
30 it continues 'the opportunity to think with
31 and through Alexandria allows us to exercise
32 world-making against erasure and towards
33 futurities.' So what kind of future it is that we
34 really imagined together, and I think, who has
35 the voice to contribute to this imagination of
36 futurities. And, at the same time, I was thinking
37 of these words of 'world-making practices',
38 how we tend to talk about practices of world-
39 making, as something active, that we have the
40 agency to contribute to. But I do think these
41 kinds of world-making practices could be
42 quite oppressive, it could be extractive. I think
43 the fact that these conversations are being
44 imposed on Alexandria, because Alexandria
45 is thought to be in a certain way, also creates
46 the contours around what kind of futurities
47 we can all imagine.
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is about tourism or capital that can be attracted by figuring things out in this way. But I feel all the places we visited, somehow, have similar issues with this. Yeah, this idea of how you preserve what you preserve, and how this affects the actual life of places, today.

Lodovica 53:06

I just want to say one thing, which is that I understand preservation as the process which makes something into "the past". The past is made by preservation. For me it's interesting to look at preservation itself as a process of ruination. Preservation is not the "cure" for ruination, but is about the procedures that allow ruination as a situated process that serves specific historical and cultural needs and narratives.

Islam 56:56

Are we continuing?

Gabriele 57:03

It's 15 minutes.

Lodovica 57:07

That's fine. Let's move on.

Islam 57:14

I was definitely going to mention who decides what is to be preserved, or what is to be left to decay and change. This is one of the famous processes in Alexandria. Because I think in Alexandria, specifically, the stuff that is meant to be preserved is more, like, to shape an imagined identity of the city, especially the Greek one. Alexandria lost a lot of these preserved places anyhow, either due politics or bad management. And then there is also this obvious perspective of the regime, like the old regime, the Mubarak regime and the new regime. While the new regime doesn't really care about tourism, because they know for a fact that we are not up to the game at the moment, because the economical crisis that Egypt is going through is not allowing the service sector to be as it once was; they don't have hope. So, they try to find different ways to generate money or capital, while the old regime really cared about tourism, and they were keen to identify Egypt as Pharaonic, for example. The new regime is morphing these Pharaonic styles into very weird, futuristic styles. And it shows that, okay, we are in a moment of time in which we don't care about identifying Egypt as pharaonic, for example. There is now a new project in Alexandria that they are pursuing, which is building inside the sea. And there is a lot of debate that, while

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01 **Virgil 55:17**
02 It's very apparent how ways of being in Cyprus
03 are disrupted by forms of occupation, whether it's by
04 Turkey backing the Turkish Republic of Northern
05 Cyprus - which is what is often referred to as "the
06 occupation", or, as it is increasingly apparent, the EU
07 presence in the South, which also disrupts certain
08 ways of being and certain forms of ownership and
09 possibilities of life in favour of others that are more
10 economically extractive.
11

Mahmoud 1:01:05

There's something that I wanted to ask you, Onur, which is when can you ever speak about an experience? Can you spend enough time just to say an experience belongs to you? I think there's never an experience that you're gonna have that is totalizing anymore.

Onur 1:02:46

The thing that stays with you is in a constant change in a way that your relationship with that event can't be exhausted. It always speaks differently when you think about it and depending on how you frame it. Every time you tell something that happened to you, or happened around you, there's a certain change in the story. That's how I belong to that story. Obviously, that event happened, but it doesn't stay as it was. You understand this event as something that started and ended. But then something else happens to you and that affects how you tell that story the 107th time. For me that's a very challenging point about belonging because I think I belong to something but every time the thing, or story, that I feel I belong to changes and I become disorientated, but at the same time, I have to get in proximity to that thing again, and again.

Mahmoud 1:04:31

It is mentioned again, and again. It is about recalibrating.

Onur 1:04:35

Yeah. Because when we have a conversation the experiences we bring with us change depending on what is being said. A story I want to tell will always be a little bit different depending on, for example, what you and Lodovica say and how I want to connect to that. Does it make any sense?

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Virgil 57:56

Anybody?

Mark 57:59

When I was with George the Sufi group asked me "Where is the tourist from? Is he Turkish?" I said "No. He's Greek." And they said "Okay, you can come in". This happened again when I was with Zeynep in the souk. They asked me where she was from and I said that she was Greek, because I couldn't say that she is Turkish. Not any stranger, not any foreigner is accepted. You need a foreigner with a specific profile to help you infiltrate and access what you can't access otherwise. In a way they see you not as a normal citizen like them but as a stranger. They feel this is the right setup: "You are with him, not one of us. You can come in only with him and through him." So I could infiltrate because George could infiltrate. I was identified as one of them, as a foreigner. You are the other and you can only infiltrate by knowing you are the other.

Zeynep 1:02:19

I think I want to expand a little bit on what is decided to be included and what is decided to be excluded. The specific example that I was thinking about was the absence of Ottoman heritage in Alexandria and in Athens. How I explained it in my mind - which is a question still, is that this emphasis on Alexandria and its cosmopolitan nature is actually very much European cosmopolitanism, and it doesn't necessarily include the multiplicities within the Arab communities or the post Ottoman community. So it's a very specific imagination of cosmopolitanism that was playing out in Alexandria. Also in Athens, we had a conversation with Maria Sidari, during which she presented her work about the Acropolis. She asked how we can rethink the Acropolis as a monument and the erasure of the Ottoman history that used to be present in the Acropolis. Her argument was that the Acropolis is actually not just the temple but the whole rock with the multilayered temporalities of all the civilizations that have existed in that space. But then the recent government has carved out this concrete route that is leading to the Acropolis ,the Imagined Acropolis, which only makes visible the ancient Greek Hellenic past.

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Chiara 43:13

02

This conversation between you, Mark and Zeynep, made me come back to this idea of imaginative geography as something of a construct. And the fact that you said that there was a sense of being able to fulfill an impossibility. Although I also believe that we were not given... there was no possibility for this project to succeed, because of the condition that we were carrying with us. I don't have answers for the questions that we are addressing, of course, but I have some desires or hopes, let's say, that some discourse can be produced in another way. And one thing that I want to read, which can resonate to some extent here, comes from one scholar, SA Smythe, who is working around the concept of the Black Mediterranean. I don't know if you're familiar with the concept, as it somehow departed as an adaptation from Paul Gilroy's theorisation of the Black Atlantic, as an intrinsically diasporic space, a space of shifting temporalities, now reformulated and translated into the context of the Mediterranean. This reasoning can maybe be extended to make some sense here, to start thinking about imagination in a different way. And the quote is, 'The Black Mediterranean is a variegated site of Black knowledge production, Black resistance and possibilities of new consciousness. In my view, the Black Mediterranean and its attendant regionalism foments cultural syncretism, intimacy and expansiveness, while still leaving room for geospecificity within a transnational frame. It engages the Black Radical Tradition and Black imaginative practices to show the way to use fragments of our past, (mis)remembered histories to envision new futures.' I find that here there is a conceptualization of geographical imagination that is productive. So I think we can, in our own ways, also try to work around this possibility of feeble optimism. In the sense that there has to be a negative part, the moment of destruction of the systems that are creating the condition for things not to work, for things to be structured in dynamics of power that are exploitative, violent and negate certain

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Gabriele 1:05:03

I think there is something violent in the idea of a community or being part of a community... The inherent violence within the community that Mark experienced in his own place is related to the fact that probably there are some well known tensions that are not so present to you as a foreigner.

Chiara 1:07:34

I was thinking about geography. Because when we were imagining this conversation we said, we can start from our personal geographies, what we carry on with us that is somehow present always as we go into the world in any possible form. I think this includes a lot of the things you talked about, in different ways. I mean, straightforwardly, Virgil was the only one pointing out about his own, let's say, geographical, cultural background. But this applies to each of us. And of course, there is no neutrality in the perception of a place. That's the thing we carry with us already, a filter. This filter adds up to the filters that the places are proposing themselves for us to be accessed from. I think weaponization of archaeology, or material culture, or cultural capital, these are very obvious filters. This dynamic appears through what stays and what is left out, what is erased. I only recently started understanding that I'm very much thinking about geography. I was always putting history at the centre of my reasoning, you know, and then I started thinking about the fact that, of course, geography is somewhat produced, it is a product of history. And I started reading more and more about that geographical thinking. There is a quote from Doreen Massey, which I think could be interesting for us, somehow fruitful, and she wrote: "We carry around with us mental images of the world, of the country in which we live, of the street next door. All of us carry such images, they may sometimes be in conflict, or even be the cause of conflict. And digging these things up and talking about them is one good way to begin to examine what it means to think geographically." That could be something we can think about.

Sara 1:10:41

Something that you said Omnia "bring everything from all over the world." also relates to what Lodo was saying about museums, and also to something that Mahmoud was saying about museums. And I wondered about the difference between museums

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01 forms of existence or even survival in the
02 Mediterranean geographies. But there is also
03 another possibility there. I find it interesting
04 that this conversation somewhat started with
05 those quotes that you brought up, Calvino.
06 It is very much about imagination, like how
07 we think about geography and places, in a
08 way that is totally unrelated to facts. But
09 you build up facts in another way anyhow.
10 When you were talking, Mark, about how
11 much Alexandria is framed as European...
12 The idea of the Euro-Mediterranean, which
13 is yet again, not only the region that belongs
14 in the European continent, neighbouring the
15 Mediterranean sea, but it's a concept that takes
16 in and out whatever it wants. For example,
17 the Adriatic Sea, as you were saying, is most
18 often excluded by the Euro-Mediterranean.
19 Whereas a place like Alexandria is subjected
20 to a Euro-Mediterranean claim, supported
21 by an historiographical narration that starts
22 with Alexander the Great and goes all the
23 way to the European communities of the
24 cosmopolitan times. This same discourse is
25 incarnated in the European aspirations of
26 trying to take the city back, as if there is a
27 right to Alexandria. Mark was saying, talking
28 about the fact that Alexandria is framed
29 as something outside of Egypt... This is
30 something that I was writing about when I
31 wrote recently a text and I went back to the
32 concept of Alexandria 'ad Aegyptum', which
33 is the way Alexandria was called in ancient
34 Roman times, and actually it is recurrent even
35 in modernity. Which is, Alexandria is 'by
36 Egypt' and not 'in Egypt'. It is a proximity, but
37 it's not belonging, neither in Egypt, nor in the
38 African continent, to some extent. This has
39 been used historically to guarantee a condition
40 of Euro-Mediterranean exceptionality to the
41 city. And it was very apparent to me that this
42 rhetoric was contributing to this project too,
43 in a pretty un-problematized way.

Mark 1:03:19

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46 Can I tell a story? Yeah, I have a friend
47 and we are working together on a film
48 about a script girl, about a woman, she is
49 called Sylvette Baudrot. She is French, as a

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working on this project, they are actually destroying one of the underwater archaeological sites. But then no one cares. There is no complaining about it. We don't really know. Like, some people talked about it, the government is not clarifying if it's really happening that they are destroying an archaeological site or not. So from what I see at the moment, even in cases like this, one... I don't see the reasons why the government would preserve archaeological sites to give an imaginary or imagined identity to the city. I don't think this is happening anymore.

Mahmoud 1:01:28

I was thinking about how, actually, this whole idea of ruins, in the course of human history, is not really a stable concept. Right? Like, I mean, I think about how so many Greek and Roman temples were taken apart in Lebanon historically and reused. For instance the columns from the temple of Jupiter in Baalbek were used to build the Hagia Sophia, for instance, so the idea of ruination or ruins, as being sacred and inherently to be preserved, is relatively a new idea. This act could also be a symbol of one culture or a way of life subsuming another. So even when we are preserving, it's important to ask how and for whom.

Lodovica 1:03:15

I think one question should be which ruins are being excavated to legitimise such developments. And this goes back to the monumentalisation of some ruins and the categorisation of other ruins as worth nothing. The second point is about the need to understand ruination and ruins making in connection to the creation and use of archives, whether they're "natural", and I am thinking of stratigraphy, or cultural, which relates to archaeology. Building an archive - for example in the form of a museum - delineates a narrative that is there to legitimise industrial capitalism, and its political form of the nation-state. Ruins are central to archiving that which legitimises specific types of extraction to exist and specific forms of annihilation to be allowed. It's about how do you create a regime that allows specific forms of life and sociality to be dismantled and others to actually thrive, both human and non-human.

Gabriele 1:06:04

I was also thinking about what happened, for example, in the process of industrialization of Southern Italy, in Sicily, for example, when there were these international fairs presenting all the new industrial plants that they were building. The exhibition of this, let's say, "new technological facilities", was accompanied by a collection of Greek

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Virgil 1:05:20

01
02 There's also this specific sense of remembering,
03 which isn't just replaying a script, it's actually going
04 back through the actions that are being recalled.
05 Maybe this is what you were saying. In the format of
06 the conversation Lodovica will say A, which makes
07 me think of B. But because I'm impatient, Mahmoud
08 might say C and maybe Onur will say D, but B
09 remains relevant and persists. But then by the time
10 there's space for me to contribute the thing that came
11 immediately from Lodovica's intervention, what I
12 can even say, has shifted. And that thing that we're
13 talking about is what belongs in these conversations.

Lodovica 1:06:15

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16 It's not just the topics that belong to this
17 conversation. It is us having a certain degree of
18 hospitality towards the topic that each one of us
19 brings to then build something that exists in relation
20 to and between us. What is active is not only the topic,
21 but also a specific attitude which allows the existence
22 of the other within my own discourse. And I take it,
23 I digest it, and I vomit it out for Mahmoud to then
24 eat it. It's about the idea of what is foreign and what
25 is not. and how you allow a space of existence for
26 the other up to an extent that these two things, the
27 foreign and the familiar, belong to a common ground
28 that we build.

Virgil 1:08:35

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31 I found a quote from a really amazing Judith
32 Butler's book called Giving an account of oneself.
33 Judith Butler's actual job role is not queer theory,
34 it's rhetoric. So they write a lot about speech and
35 how things are said. This entire text is about what
36 you're describing, which ponders around how it is
37 even possible to speak of oneself. And I think it's
38 something that we've been talking about throughout
39 this conversation. They write: "So the account of
40 myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or
41 carries this living self. My words are taken away as I
42 give them, interrupted by the time of a discourse that is
43 not the same as the time of my life. This "interruption"
44 contests the sense of the account's being grounded
45 in myself alone, since the indifferent structures that
46 enable my living belong to a sociality that exceeds
47 me." Even when you're beginning to speak of yourself,
48 the very fact that there is a self to speak of implies that
49 someone can hear that account. It's always outwardly.

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that are supposed to create some kind of national narrative, versus museums that are like this botanical garden and have the “bring everything from all over the world” attitude.

Lodovica 1:12:55

What kind of geography are we talking about when we say “geography”? Is geography spatial? Or is it temporal? I think these two dimensions go together. So it would be interesting to question what geography is. And to think through modes of bordering that not only act on a horizontal plane - the same way that for example the border of a nation-state does, but that are also embedded in the division of people and things in different temporal orders. This was something I pointed out when we went to Alexandria and we were brought to all these European-like buildings in ruination. It was a familiar aesthetic, but at the same time, it felt as if it was from 70 years in the future. In the gallery I was thinking “this could be Milan after the collapse of the Italian state or after a climate catastrophe.” And at that point I realised I was embodying a problematic perspective which stems from my biases and from a Western/European process of othering that makes a culture, a space, or a geography into a trace and ruin of the past, or, as in this case, of the future.

Virgil 1:15:42

I was really drawn to your use of the word stranger Mark. I’ve talked about how in Cyprus the use of the Greek national flag, these other Greek national flags, the Byzantine flag, and then Turkish flag and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus flag articulates these regimes of flags, this regime of red and white versus blue and white, and a mysterious yellow and black in between, and how so much of this articulation is rooted in the origins of these questions of what a citizen is and what a nation is. I really heard that when you’re referring to this erasure of Ottoman history, because it’s something I thought about a lot when I was in Athens. And then I was thinking about the way that it is so conversely impossible to erase it in Cyprus, because there’s so little left coherence in Cyprus, except that this is a post Ottoman space. In Cyprus it was like “Okay. Actually, here we can’t escape it. Here we must confront this.” And that was really interesting to see. But I really appreciate this invocation of stranger and stranger and resident as

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01 nationality. But she left Alexandria when
02 she was 17-18 something like that, and she
03 went to France after World War Two, and
04 she began her new life first in France than
05 in the US. She worked with Hitchcock and
06 Alain Resnais and all the big names. The
07 first thing anyone asked the director was,
08 but yeah, you are from Alexandria, why do
09 you do a film about a French woman? Yeah,
10 but she is from Alexandria, she was there all
11 her childhood and all her family was already
12 there. There is a debate around the right to
13 work on an Alexandrian woman, because
14 she is, yes, not Egyptian by nationality, but
15 she comes from the city of Alexandria . So
16 also, you can say the opposite is not possible.
17 As an Egyptian, you could not work on any
18 Alexandrian component that is connected to
19 European extension, because it is considered
20 only European. So, you cannot even do the
21 opposite of this gesture. Alexandria and its
22 people are studied as part of European history,
23 and this is not debatable. We cannot say that
24 people who lived in Alexandria belong to
25 Alexandria, which is part of Egypt. So I could
26 work like... If I do a field project about these
27 people there will be a lot of questions from
28 the Europeans, if you are the right person to
29 do this or not.
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Zeynep 1:05:40

I’m not sure if I understood it properly.
So there’s this one woman from Alexandria...

Mark 1:05:45

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36 She’s a woman from Alexandria, she left
37 Alexandria when she was 18, but she has
38 a French nationality. She doesn’t have an
39 Egyptian nationality and her family were
40 living in Egypt, maybe between World War
41 One to World War Two and after World War
42 Two, they left for France again. And my friend
43 is making a film about her. And there’s a lot
44 of pressure about whether he has the right. If
45 this is his story. Why would someone from
46 Alexandria want to make a film about such a
47 woman, you know? For sure if a Frenchman
48 does whatever it is, there is no limit, but I
49 mean, just to explain that even if it is a topic,

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01 artefacts in order to justify this idea of “we’re making this
02 place great again”, as great as it was in this, you know, in
03 this very epic times, that we lived in the past.
04

Chiara 1:08:25

05
06 I think that always happens, especially with the
07 representation of the state. The Expos are very interesting
08 examples, especially those of the late 19th century, early
09 20th century, because the Western nations back then were
10 all pretty much new, or very young, even those that were
11 not so young, they reconfigured themselves in the 19th
12 century. And the Expos were the first occasions for them
13 to show their contemporary achievements. And of course,
14 the weaponisation of archaeology, the use of artefacts
15 was due to the fact that they needed to build up their own
16 past, as the past is nothing given once and for all, it is an
17 always-renewing construction. What’s interesting also,
18 thinking about Alexandria, is that the aesthetics is not,
19 yet again, neutral. There is not neutrality in the decision to
20 recall, in architecture, certain aesthetical elements from
21 the past of a nation or, let’s say, of a country that once
22 occupied the territory in which the nation now arises, and
23 of whose past it has appropriated in order to guarantee
24 an historical continuum –that’s the case of modern Egypt
25 and pharaonic Egypt, or of Italy and Roman antiquity. You
26 have fashion cycles, which are to coincide with the political
27 system in place at the time. For example, Omar was showing
28 us how in the last decades, and with each shift of power,
29 the buildings had been using tropes of either pharaonic
30 or arabic aesthetics and so on. Nowadays you have a lot of
31 classicism represented. Like, it’s very funny for me to see all
32 these high rising buildings that were built on top of the lots
33 that were left empty after the destruction of the villas. They
34 were, like, huge villas. I mean, they’re reproducing the same
35 architecture, but on a huge scale. So with Greek columns,
36 friezes, and all that... that’s very fascinating.
37

Mahmoud 1:11:30

38
39 We now think of ruins has been localised, right. So like,
40 you know, Egyptians ruins apply to Egypt. But also, before
41 you could just sample ruins as you liked. What does it mean to
42 then have an Egyptian column in the middle of Paris, or New
43 York, or Rome, for instance, and then to have that Egyptian
44 column in Rome be modified and having a cross attached
45 to it. I mean, to think of history and ruination as something
46 that you sample, you’re no longer looking at Egypt, but
47 you’re looking at a relationship between the symbol of that
48 object and its context and how it got there, you’re looking at
49 the face of history. Talking about monumentality, what does

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this other duality to citizen and foreigner. How these two dualisms relate to each other is quite complex in all of these contexts we're in.. Citizen foreigner, you know, resident or stranger. I don't know what the opposite of stranger is, but it suggests something...

Stella 1:20:00

Family, familiar.

Zeynep 1:20:02

Familiar.

Virgil 1:20:02

Stranger-familiar? Yeah. There we go, thank you everyone.

Onur 1:20:04

I think that when we think about the formations of geography, history, or nation, within those paradigms there are little micro paradigms of owning and disowning. Everyone is owning something, and then someone is leaving it behind. For example, when we talk about Ottoman history in the Turkish context, it's very funny because the Ottoman history within the Turkish Republic was actually destroyed. It's the most, it was the most unwanted thing. It is what gave the establishment the grounds to build a new nation. But in the end when you start destroying and connect-disconnect yourself that violently, of course other disruptions and disowning follow: the forced migration of Greeks from Asia minor, Armenian genocide, the oppression of Kurds. What you choose to make yourself familiar with and what to estrange yourself from and how you do it shape all the new narratives of the 20th century, and also all the poor situations that we were talking about because the connection that you can build with yourself and your own history disappears.

Omnia 1:23:08

Maybe about the idea of accessibility, of being strangers or familiar within contexts each has lived or taken part in for long periods of time, I remember how it was much easier to access, for example, films or works from the same region if I contact a person in Berlin who has a collection or archive of Arab/African films. Or, for example, how difficult it is to communicate with each other or through local art institutions, whether governmental or "independent",

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01 a person, anything that is happening in the
02 city, but has another nationality... It is kind
03 of, it's inaccessible or prohibited, you know,
04 you will be questioned if you work on it
05 artistically, cinematically.
06

Chiara 1:08:44

07
08 We are one hour and eight minutes
09 long. Does anyone feel like they want to say
10 something? Final remarks, or you want to say
11 something?
12

Mark 1:09:12

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14 I just want to say something about this
15 point, Alexandria now, the actual city that is
16 living under this political situation. I think
17 one of the things that I was discussing with
18 Zeynep before, about the impossibilities that
19 we had in mind. Okay, and what are the limits
20 then? We need to know now, what could be
21 done, if there is a possibility, and what are the
22 limits? Just to test, try and understand what
23 is possible. I don't have the answer. It needs a
24 kind of empirical trial.
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it mean? And then also, what are the things that sample this imagery? Oftentimes, when you have Greek columns, you are, of course, in the generalised sense, you're talking about, like banks, when you think of Wall Street, for instance, full of Greek columns, you think of the State Capitol in the US, Greek, white marble, you think of, you know, it's always a state and financial institutions. Like when the newly formed Lebanese state built its national museum in the Egyptian revival style, right, using the new Egyptian columns. Also, I think it's very interesting to see how prevalent this kind of visual language is, and at what times we stray and return to these symbols.

Lodovica 1:13:55

Already one hour, 15 minutes.

Mahmoud 1:13:58

I think the discussion was good. I don't know what the editorial process is like. I think there's also a lot of questions that are ponderings. Those were not answered, but were not meant to be answered. I think we do have the conclusion.

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01 And you will become implicated in vast and complex
02 sets of socialities that make any sort of possibility of
03 understanding yourself impossible because when
04 you're speaking of yourself you're actually speaking
05 about how you relate to the person you're speaking to.
06 The point that Butler makes throughout this book is
07 that we constantly have to do it. A lot of older male
08 philosophers that precede Butler state that that's
09 violent, everything hurts you, and you're destroyed.
10 While Butler's intervention is "I don't think it's just
11 merely violence. I think it's actually the beautiful and
12 productive struggle of being with other people in the
13 world." One of the examples in the book, that's kind
14 of amazing, is an interview where Foucault is asked
15 about why he writes about Nietzsche. And Foucault
16 goes like "To be honest, all my friends are reading it
17 so I was reading it and then I had to write an essay."
18 There's no good reason. And Butler turns to this
19 saying that there is no good account and it's not that
20 we're all suffering because we can't really speak of
21 ourselves or were destroyed by society. It's actually
22 that we are all never enough, and that's just right. I
23 think that's what we're experiencing here as we go
24 around and around and maybe lose sight of where
25 we began. Anyways, did you want to find the quote?
26 Later, yeah. I think we can call it. Thank you.
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if I need access to Egyptian artists or works, not even in the regional or broader sense. It's often simpler to access the archives that are elsewhere, as if your memory is being restored somewhere else. It's as if these archives are collecting data from contexts that produce but don't have the knowledge of processing their own productions or histories.

Virgil 1:27:05

Maybe it's good to keep doing this "passing the mic" format. I think it's working.

Stella 1:27:11

I could use a short break. I just want to go to the bathroom for a second. But maybe you can continue.

Virgil 1:27:18

Then maybe keep passing the mic.

Omnia 1:30:04

So do you need more random correspondence? Or?

Lodovica 1:30:09

No, we don't need anything.

Chiara 1:30:13

We are doing it together.

Lodovica 1:30:16

Now the idea was to have more of an open discussion to start mapping out four main themes, which will also include sub themes. So we can divide in subgroups. At least that was what we discussed yesterday. And we can also.. sorry?

Chiara 1:31:12

Scaling down complexity into fragments, and then elaborate a conversation on that.

Lodovica 1:31:58

Exactly. The idea was to find four topics and then divide into subgroups. Then each subgroup can curate its own set of conversations. I think that the original idea was to have these two rounds of conversation and then have a break, which originally should have been lunch break. We can take a coffee break instead. Shall we have coffee?

Initial Conversation: Triggers
Friday, 8 July 2022

Geographies
Monday, 11 July 2022

Ruins
Monday, 11 July 2022

Belonging
Monday, 11 July 2022



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Virgil 00:22
I accidentally started before I thought I did. So the last 20 seconds, we're on the record about whether or not Lodo should grab a piece of paper. So I think we're good.

Virgil 01:10
I'm gonna start my audio recording app, not my screen recorder. And it started, can someone clap? Can you do one? Very good clap Onur. Okay.

Virgil 02:00
To catch everyone up when Mark gets here, we can kind of... (Stella: he's here) He is physically here? (Stella: yes behind the column) Wherever Mark is. We casually did this thing in the cafe, of saying, like, okay, what are the four topics that are emerging? So I can start. Yeah, this kind of stranger/familiar. One topic is stranger versus familiar, foreigner versus citizen. This dualities of perspectives topic. I guess that's a big one for me. Distinctions between abandonment and ruination or abandoned and ruined, and how that puts a temporal distinction between things that are now abandoned, now ruined, or were ruined or were abandoned.

Mahmoud 03:36
Like, something you see in a History Museum is not really a ruin, it's more an artefact of history writing.

Lodovica 03:57
Yeah, it is but it's also a process. It's a result of a process of ruination in terms of making ruins, creating the ruins. So ruination is, yeah, it's a more nuanced topic that we should maybe try to untangle with different strategies.

Mahmoud 04:16
Maybe positive strategies.

Lodovica 04:20
Or maybe it's two different things.

Stella 05:07
I think also what Chiara was saying, about the geographies that we carry, and how those relate to the gaze that we impose. On their imaginations.

Lodovica 05:36
01 You say they are connected? Like, would
02 you see them as one thing like geography and
03 imagination? Or?
04

Stella 05:44
05 Yeah, I could, but it could also be split.
06

Chiara 05:48
07 Geographies can be connected to different
08 geographical imaginations, to the cartography
09 that you were talking about, but also to what
10 Onur was saying about ruins being somehow the
11 outcome of a lack of imagination. So we can have
12 other topics that link with these terms.
13

Zeynep 06:06
14 What you said, ruins as lack of imagination?
15

Chiara 06:10
16 What Virgil was saying, abandonment versus
17 ruination. For me ruins is actually the opposite
18 of abandonment, ruination is to construct, to put
19 something under a lot of attention. That can be the
20 musealisation somehow, but also just the isolation
21 of certain elements. So I feel like it's connected to
22 either lack of imagination, or too much of a certain
23 imagination being projected on something.
24

Stella 06:43
25 The gaze of geography immediately engages
26 the stranger, the foreigner, whose gaze is speaking
27 and what imagination is creating, or what is
28 speaking.
29

Virgil 07:01
30 So that came up before. And one thing I was
31 thinking back about the editorial process is that
32 these thematic conversations will then be mingled
33 and merged back together. So it might even be
34 interesting when we're doing the editorial process
35 to see, okay, where are we repeating ourselves.
36 Approaching these things from these different
37 angles, while we're actually arriving at some other
38 place,
39

Gabriele 07:48
40 This idea of instrumentalisation of ruins,
41 where you have to understand very well on what
42

side this monumentalisation is doing. And on the
other side, you're constructing something of a
temporary condition that is over-imposed, in order
to reshape national identity.

Zeynep 08:32
Thinking of the piling up of the sketches that
you were talking about at the Benaki Museum,
and reproductions of classical antiquity, and how
that perception is revealed... When you pile them
together, you also create a sort of cartography of
representations. How that could be also thought
in relation to the cartography of the geography,
what kind of thinking of the layers both in visual
representation, but also what the land incorporates
in temporal layers.

Lodovica 09:24
I think stratigraphy, excavation, heritage,
ruins... that somehow can connect also different
actors, both in terms of cultural ruins, natural
strata, natural past, cultural past, present or future.
So there's something about the strata and the
excavation. I also really liked what you said, as we
are going there to excavate, as the kind of modern
archaeologists. Which then connects to what you
were saying about grand tourism. Excavation and
an-archaeology or archaeology and stratification.

Mahmoud 10:16
I think, to some extent, to go as outsiders to
any kind of locale and witness the image of the
city as imagination, that's for me is, almost like,
we're not looking at the place we're experiencing.
We are watching the image of Alexandria, we are
watching the image of Marseille (Chiara: it is like
a camera obscura), yes, 100%, this is kind of what
you're doing, you know, you're going to watch the
image. And the image has been presented to us
through artefacts. How does this city present itself
to you? What is the image not experienced? Not
the real lived experience of the city, but just an
image?

Chiara 11:37
I think we are never asked to approach reality.

Mahmoud 18:42
Can you have an objective experience of a city?

01 And my answer to that would be no. No, because an
02 experience of a place is profoundly individual, and
03 profoundly subjective, even if you live there. And
04 even if you don't. At some level, every experience
05 is subjective. The question maybe is the duration,
06 how long a person lives or stays in a city and
07 of course which level of investment they have.
08 There's a difference between someone coming to
09 visit a place or a neighbourhood or someone living
10 in that neighbourhood and talking to the butcher,
11 talking to the grocery person, to have connections
12 and then, at some level, to produce a sense of
13 community. And this is for what makes a resident.
14 What's interesting about this is that all of this is
15 a language of image making. Right? Presentation.
16 And for me, the question that remains is, how does
17 this factor into the present moment of people who
18 actually live there? If we are producing images
19 of cities, or if our cities are producing images of
20 themselves for consumption? What does that
21 leave to the people who actually live there? At
22 least in my experience in Marseille and Alexandria,
23 there was a focus on producing an image, but not
24 necessarily having a way of taking care of people
25 who live there. So that's the tension.
26

Sara 21:07
27 But Omnia, you were asking, how can you not
28 reproduce these versions of places that are coming
29 from the outside? Or was that your question? Can
30 you repeat your question?
31

Omnia 22:30
32 I don't believe an outsider needs to be a
33 visitor, an outsider could be someone who was
34 born in a place and was consistently marginalised,
35 or consistently positioned out of whatever centre.
36 But to resist reproducing an image... How can you
37 resist reproducing or looking the same way as
38 through exhausted/exhausting lenses, which make
39 images similar to the ones previously imprinted in
40 collective memories? Are there such strategies? I
41 don't know.
42

Sara 23:48
43 An understanding of a place that doesn't
44 objectify it? Or is there understanding only through
45 projection?
46

Lodovica 24:26

You always project an idea of a city, even if you live there. That's what I'm saying. It's never gonna be a truer version. It's always gonna be a construction. And I think that's the thing in any image, you'll always project an understanding of the politics behind your projection. That's the important thing, your politics, the biases, and knowing that is your projection, and there might be others. And there's no one truer than the other.

Sara 25:24

Onur, were you saying something about this, or is it something different?

Onur 25:30

What is the projection? It's important to keep in mind that these terms are kind of... they became quite homogeneous in one sense. Okay, what's the projection? Because when you project or I project the projection becomes a multiplicity in itself rather than one thing. So I think it's important to keep that in mind, so we're not falling into the trap of an idea of unity.

Mahmoud 27:14

I have to leave.

Onur 28:39

I think we cannot just say that a tourist's idea of a city is not true. It's very real and actual.

Mark 29:18

Can I tell a story? It's kind of a joke, but also a story. When we were in Marseille there was Alex, he was a social entrepreneur, and there was always this tension between him and I, about wine. He always wanted me to drink wine. And he felt really offended when I said no, because I just wanted to drink cognac, whiskey, or anything else but wine. And he felt... you are in Marseille, and you have to drink wine! And he insisted, in a very very serious way. It was serious. And I felt really sad, like, this guy is so sad, because I didn't accomplish his generosity for him. Thus my generosity was to tell him, on the last day, today I will drink, this is your day, you can order for me all kinds of wine. Give me wine, bring me cheese, old French cheese. Any French thing, I will eat it up, just for you. You could

01 not imagine the smile on his face! This is France's
02 contribution to civilization, actualized on the table.
03 And then, at the end of this, he said something, it
04 could have been a joke, but I think it was not. Yeah,
05 it was his true self. He said: "You, friend, you are
06 not very good at speaking French. If you'll learn
07 more French, you will start loving drinking wine."
08 I thought yeah, it's a joke, but there is something
09 real inside that. Like he really believed that.

Lodovica 36:20

12 We can continue, but we are five minutes to
13 40 minutes.

Omnia 37:02

16 For example, a person of authority coming
17 to visit Egypt, I don't know, someone who comes
18 and says this is how the place actually looks
19 like, and then goes on, and publishes something
20 called "The description of Egypt," and suddenly
21 this becomes the verified image of the place.
22 If you're not present, or well represented in this
23 image, somehow, you're framed as an outsider, a
24 stranger in your own native land. Being a stranger
25 in the place where you grew up in, again... I feel
26 that if you've experienced being marginalised in a
27 community or a place, somehow you understand
28 this within every place or city you go to. If you're
29 a stranger in your own city, you're a stranger in
30 every city.

Sara 38:53

33 I wonder about the experiences of
34 estrangement, and also the experience of being a
35 person who grows up in a place, or spends extended
36 amounts of time in a place, who still never gets to
37 be a dominant player in their narrative. That can
38 happen for a number of reasons. It can be that
39 you're from a minority, or you're not acknowledged
40 as a citizen, but it could also be because you
41 experience a place differently, maybe you have to
42 be invisible in some way. There is a multiplicity of
43 local narratives. So there is a disagreement also
44 from the inside, if that makes sense. As a person
45 from Cairo, which is a very tourist-heavy place,
46 I see that there is an image of Cairo that is, like,
47 exported. Your exclusion is necessary for this kind
48 of imaginary, or fiction of the city to be maintained.
49

Lodovica 41:34

I think extraction comes back in this dynamic of exclusion and expulsion. So it's not just a single narrative, it's also an economic narrative and extractive narrative.

Virgil 42:40

I think that what is coming up is also that citizenship is just one form of belonging in a place. But it's this particular kind, because it has a political dominance, because it is empowered with certain forms of legitimacy. It's a form of legal recognition. One thing I have been trying to think about is relating the idea of citizenship to the history of enclosure, or the conversion of public or shared common property into private property. And that we might understand the concept of citizenship as a kind of privatisation of forms of relation, which have to do with the place. Citizenship is actually a category of belonging that is deeply enmeshed in the notion of ownership. And, for me, that's where it gets really interesting, when we think about also in terms of extraction. Also extraction relates to the history of enclosure and the production of primitive accumulation. And citizenship is a category that emerges, I think, in the same historical narrative, and follows along with it, and it's a necessary condition used to reinforce these things.

Lodovica 44:22

And also there was the need of a narrative able to legitimise, at the time, ideas of evolution, cultural evolution, but also biological evolution. So we go back to the image-making but also the museification in that sense. The archive fever of, okay, we actually have to legitimise citizenship and the nation state by creating ruins, by creating fossils, which is energy which is minerals. So that's all part of that process of legitimization.

Chiara 45:04

What we were saying is that nation building comes with the construction of the citizen, as an identity that is framed in a lot of standardisation. And of course, it's adapted, as time goes by, and the nation changes, if it does change, but still it is connected to that original root.

Stella 45:36

01 This residency references the hierarchies
02 that already exist, because we travelled with a
03 certain amount of privilege to these cities, and we
04 enhances that privileged perspective. And how do
05 we resist that? What Onur said about this idea of
06 letting things be more fragmented. I think what
07 they demanded of us was to go somewhere, and
08 make up our mind about something, because
09 we had to produce an outcome as well. And we
10 had to make sense of the place... in a way it had
11 to happen fast. And the outcome had to have a
12 powerful statement on it. And that is a problem,
13 I guess, but how do we crack it? And leave a little
14 bit more, the things that we don't really know, we
15 don't really understand? I'm not quite sure about
16 it. Yeah.

Zeynep 48:07

20 We were discussing as a group the other
21 day, about how Alexandria thinks, imagines and
22 approximates itself. And how it is maintaining the
23 influence of Europe in its heritage and imagination.
24 But then, where are these imaginations located?
25 I think Sara's point really spoke to me. Who has
26 access to public discourse? Because, ultimately,
27 there's always an exclusion and inclusion, what
28 Onur said, and ownership and disownership. So I
29 think these elements all play into each other.

Virgil 51:20

31 But there's a kind of condition that we can think
32 about here. Is that there's also this double category
33 of expat versus migrant. And certain people,
34 usually from the US, but also sometimes from the
35 UK or France, arrive in Athens, and they're like
36 I'm an expat and living here, I'm a digital nomad!
37 I'm freelancing. Athens, Greece in general, but
38 Athens in particular, is defined by a "problem with
39 migrants and migration". There's people arriving
40 and they're coming from other places, and they're
41 refugees. And one group is invited and excited to
42 be there. And the other one is not. If you forget for
43 a moment, the obvious fact that everyone carries
44 the baggage of the way they arrived and where
45 they came from, the gesture of arrival is similar
46 and related to that which we experienced in this
47 residency. Sometimes there is a conflation of
48 identities, which, I think, also reveals that tension.
49

Lodovica 53:07

I've been trying to take notes, and also Zeynep. So, we had a whole part about citizenship and ownership. Connected to ruins and fossil making, then I have grand tourism, which will be also connected to image-making and instrumentalisation of ruins. A lot of ruins, ruins, ruins... as lack of imagination. I think ruins should be a topic. Let's make it as simple as Ruins.

Chiara 55:00

It also converges into citizen-making and museums.

Lodovica 55:11

So we have, stranger/familiar, or what do we want to call it? (Virgil: dialectics of belonging?) Then, there was imagination...

Zeynep 56:42

Consumption and reproduction of the image itself, narrative of antiquity, locality, understanding the politics behind your projection, resistance to it, acts of looking.

Stella 59:29

What was perception?

Lodovica 59:32

Gaze, imagination and image.

Chiara 59:37

Is very visual.

Chiara 1:00:46

The other, geographies, not only spatial geography, but also temporal, can also be sentimental. Or cartographies of self and collective cartographies.

We can use geographies, and then go into the single configuration of the term.

Lodovica 1:02:28

Let's write down geography for now.

Chiara 1:02:37

Maybe Geographies, just a plural to remember that we are talking about many different things.

Zeynep 1:02:45

Geographies, Ruins, Belonging, Projection.

I think if we're going to have multiple conversations maybe four is a bit too much. Also thinking technically, I don't know.

Chiara 1:09:58

I think the problem is that, for sure, we are going to repeat ourselves in different groups, because these are topics that cannot be pulled apart one from the other. Since it is not the whole group participating in each conversation, we need to be a little bit careful. Otherwise we risk having a lot of material, but we can use only a little part, because yeah, the rest is just a repetition.

Virgil 1:10:48

Projection is a part of all of them. And there might be some utility in reducing to just three and saying it's Geographies, Belonging and Ruins. It's actually all about our projections, ultimately, and also it's like 11 of us. So with three topics it's basically four people in each group. It feels a little bit more stable.

Chiara 1:11:35

I think we need to have some sort of script, in a sense that we go through some points, even if we are not foreseeing everything that is going to happen in each proposition. So we can go from macro to more specific, for example, if we think geography is the starting point of a conversation, and there is a middle point, and then there is something that is even more specific. This way if we are part of the second group, we know that possibly some things that are on our mind have been covered already. Is not that we can fully imagine that. Yeah. Yeah. Because for me, for example, ruins and belonging are very tricky... with ruins I keep on thinking about nation building, for example. And if we talk about citizenship in belonging, the two things are going to be incorporated one in the other.

Lodovica 1:12:30

But in a way, I mean, I see the kind of discussion that could happen around citizenship within ruins, in relation to ruins. Is a different one than the one that could happen when you talk about the same topic in Belonging.

Chiara 1:12:44

Stranger versus familiar?

Lodovica 1:12:48

And resident? I mean, it's all about that, whereas ruins it's more about, like ownership, extraction. It's also a different materiality.

Chiara 1:13:06

Belonging is more about perception of self and perception of communities. So you project your role, yeah.

Lodovica 1:13:17

Yes.

Lodovica 1:13:55

Geographies, Ruins and Belonging, three.

Lodovica 1:14:41

Let's move to dividing into groups.

Zeynep 1:14:56

I'm in Geographies.

Virgil 1:14:57

I'm in Belonging.

Chiara 1:15:11

I want to be both in Ruins and Geographies actually, okay?

Lodovica 1:15:19

Now, I would love to be in Geographies...

Chiara 1:15:24

Belonging, who was in belonging?

Onur 1:15:48

Yeah, I think I started it anyway, so I should be in it.

Zeynep 1:15:52

Yes.

Sara 1:16:02

Undecided.

Onur 1:16:54

Projection is cancelled.

Virgil 1:16:59

I'm ending the recording.

Place Holder

Place Holder is the aftermath of a peripatetic residency, the attempt of a small group to hold still what would otherwise slip away: the conversations that fill in the space between us during moments of rest, after dinner, on the couch, over some wine.

Between artist book and collective essay, Place Holder is a working process between eleven artists and researchers conducted through a series of thematic conversations reflecting on their participation in the Caravan residency, which brought the group variously to Alexandria (Egypt), Athens (Greece), Biella (Italy), Brussels (Belgium), Marseilles (France), and Nicosia (Cyprus) over the course of four months at the beginning of 2022.

Images

Images were gathered by the participants during the Caravan residency period across the programme's many geographies. Unlabeled and ambiguated into a magenta and black palette, they indicate the associative framework through which Place Holder proceeded as a collective response.

Transcripts

The texts presented here are in an unresolved form, neither a raw transcription nor an edited script. While they have been edited for clarity and to reduce repetition, certain errors of the machine transcription and the quirks of spoken language have been left in place to best reflect the literary quality of speech.

We hope that any difficulty in reading might reflect the complexity of listening in conversation.

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27

Participants

28

Chiara Cartuccia is a researcher and curator

29

based out of London.

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31

Onur Çimen is a writer, who works on various

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modes of sharing texts / narratives.

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34

Lodovica Guarnieri is a researcher and designer

35

whose work draws upon the entanglements

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between infrastructures and ecology.

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38

Stella Ioannidou is an artist, designer and re-

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searcher who works and lives between Athens and

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New York.

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42

Sara Fakhry Ismail is a performance and vi-

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sual artist who explores modes of listening and

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movement.

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46

Zeynep Kaserci is a visual anthropologist by

47

training and works as a documentary producer in

48

London.

49

50

Gabriele Leo is an architect, independent researcher and urban practitioner. He is part of the collective Post Disaster.

Mark Lotfy is an Alexandrian artist, filmmaker and producer. His work explores the boundaries between fiction, documentary, and new media.

Omnia Sabry investigates light and light-sensitive mediums in film and other languages.

Mahmoud El Safadi is an artist whose work explores the boundaries between nature and culture, the human and the non-human.

Islam Shabana is an interdisciplinary artist based in Cairo.

virgil b/g taylor is a US faggot living in Germany. He makes fag tips, an online speculative zine.

Colophon

This printed edition was edited by Chiara Cartuccia and Lodovica Guarnieri. It was designed by Fag Tips. It was transcribed using Otter.ai and is type set in Univers, Roboto Mono, Minion Pro, Triplex Sans and Big Caslon. Place Holder was printed in September 2022 and presented at Bozar and Mucem on the occasion of the exhibition "Alexandria: Past Futures". Place Holder was showcased at the Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy in July 2022 at the conclusion of the Caravan: Thinking with Alexandria residency.

Many hands from all sides supported the work of the artists and researchers through this residency program. Particularly, we are thankful to the unwavering support of Clara Tosetti.



01

Alexandria: (Re)activating Common Urban Imaginaries (ALEX) takes a fresh look at the many challenges facing the art and heritage sectors through the symbolic and historical prism of the city of Alexandria and its influences on urban development in the Mediterranean and beyond. The project led to the creation of nomadic art residencies between Egypt and Europe, the production of exhibitions in the cities of Marseille and Brussels, and the organisation of professional seminars and public forums.

11

ALEX connects archaeologists, architects, urban planners, curators, artists, sociologists, historians and authors within a multidisciplinary programme conceived by a broad consortium bringing together institutions from eight European countries and Egypt: Mucem—Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (France), Bozar — Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (Belgium), Royal Museum of Mariemont (Belgium), Cittadellarte — Fondazione Pistoletto (Italy), Onassis Stegi (Greece), Leiden University (Netherlands), Kunsthall Aarhus (Denmark), Undo Point Centre for Contemporary Art (Cyprus) and in collaboration with associated partners CLUSTER (Egypt), French Institute in Alexandria (Egypt) and Theatrum Mundi (United Kingdom).

21

Project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union (2020-2023).

28

Caravan: Thinking with Alexandria February to July 2022

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The Caravan residency programme is part of the ALEX project. Caravan set out to explore the European cities of Athens, Brussels, Marseille and Nicosia through the lens of Alexandria and its contested urban imaginaries, in relation to the role artists can play in their locally situated, yet trans-local and trans-historical, troubles and heritage. Conceived and realised by the UNIDEE residency programmes at Cittadellarte — Fondazione Pistoletto in Italy. Caravan is curated by Sarah Rifky in conversation with Edwin Nasr.

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Alexandria
(re)activating common urban imaginaries

FONDAZIONE
PISTOLETTO
CITTADELLARTE
BIELLA

Bozar Mucem UNIDEE RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

MARIE MONT

Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

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