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SPECIAL
EDITION
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16 DIALOGUES ABOUT SHEEP, BLACK HOLES, AND MOVEMENT

16 Dialogues about Sheep, Black Holes, and Movement

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SENSE OF BELONGING

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IN CONVERSATION WITH Sandro Mezzadra

› Wissal Houbabi
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› Binta Diaw
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OVERTIME AS METHOD

› Sophie Krier AND Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro
IN CONVERSATION WITH Sandro Mezzadra

On May 25, 2019, thirty-five people gathered on a high mountain pasture in South Tyrol to reenact Allan Kaprow's *Overtime: A Happening*. The reinvention formed the final chapter of the yearlong program *School of Verticality*¹ and was a joint effort between artist-in-residence Sophie Krier, artist-curator Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, and Lungomare. Four years later, we look back at this work through the lens of Sandro Mezzadra's research on borders.



OVERTIME, happening, Alpe di Villandro, 2019, photo by Jörg Oschmann.
Courtesy of the artists and Lungomare.

¹ *School of Verticality* (2018–ongoing) is a public program about listening and learning with situated ways of knowing. Its first iterations were developed by Sophie Krier during a long term residency at Lungomare (*Weaving Gardens*, *Seeding Stories*, *Breaking Bread*). The verticality of the title refers to an in-depth investigation that crosses different layers of society and phenomena.

STÉPHANE VERLET BOTTÉRO The most famous happenings by Allan Kaprow are *Sweet Wall* or *Fluids*. Their narratives are quite literal—the wall ends up collapsing. In contrast, *Overtime* is not well known at all. It was never reinvented. It involves a softer, subtler action. Paradoxically, the wall becomes a link between the participants. In *Overtime*, people have to move a fence together. This implies inclusion, aggregation of differences, the notion of desire, and learning how to play with the border.

SOPHIE KRIER We reinvented *Overtime* in 2019 in South Tyrol, on Villanderer Alm/Alpe di Villandro, in the valley towards Brennero. We went up there because these alpine pastures (Almende) were commons that have become commodified for leisure, tourism, all that. The site has other interesting border connotations. It's a linguistic border. It's a geo-biological border. In ancient times there were offering places for sacrifices to goddesses: frontiers with the otherworld... Our research materials are compiled in *OVERTIME PAPERS*,² a four-part critical reader that puts Kaprow's work in dialogue with the local context. I'll just show you some pictures. Here we start to make the line. And this is when we are lighting the flares. Every fifty meters, there is that light protocol. We also did these assemblies to discuss the instructions, make amendments if it was necessary. We used a snow fence, made of light material. We were moving a lightweight line, but it was still very difficult. And we were stopped by a rainstorm around 1 a.m. We had to go down.

² Sophie Krier, Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro (eds.), *OVERTIME PAPERS* (Bolzano: Lungomare, 2019).

SANDRO MEZZADRA Must have been cold.

SK It became dangerous as it was very dark.

SVB Last year we went back and showed the film in the Villanders mine (*Bergwerk*).³

SM Is the mine still active?

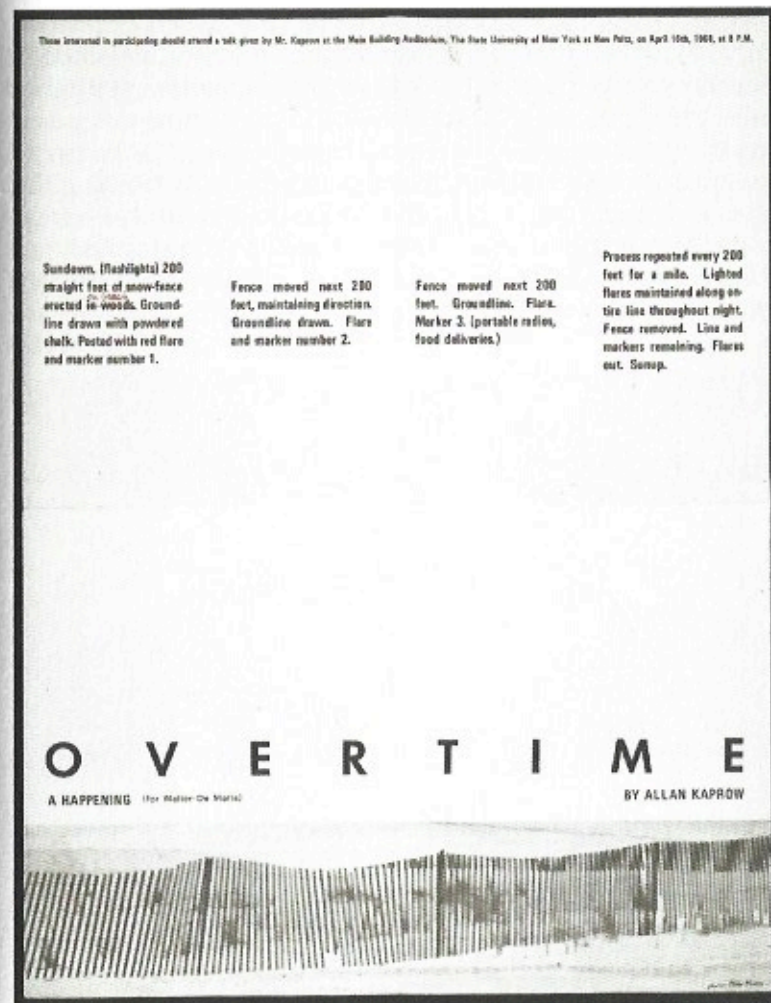
SVB No, it peaked during the sixteenth. It was related to the Fugger family and proto-capitalism. The whole area is quite a charged space, with the 1919 partition of course, the internal colonization... Moving the fence was like conjuring all those ghosts from history that make the mountain a borderscape.

Another interesting point for our conversation is the title, *Overtime*. We believe that Kaprow was thinking about the relation between labor and art, playing with the idea of "Overtime hours," additional work time. He did the happening with his students, as if he wanted to question what is work, what is leisure, what is art. Is studying already working? In a way, he was anticipating the blurring of labor boundaries in post-fordism.

SM I find the idea of a moving fence very interesting, because it foreshadows the externalization of borders. Today, perhaps even more than when we wrote *Border as Method*⁴ with Brett Neilson, there is a tension between processes of militarization of borders that aim to transform them into walls, and processes of externalization that make the geography of borders more elusive.

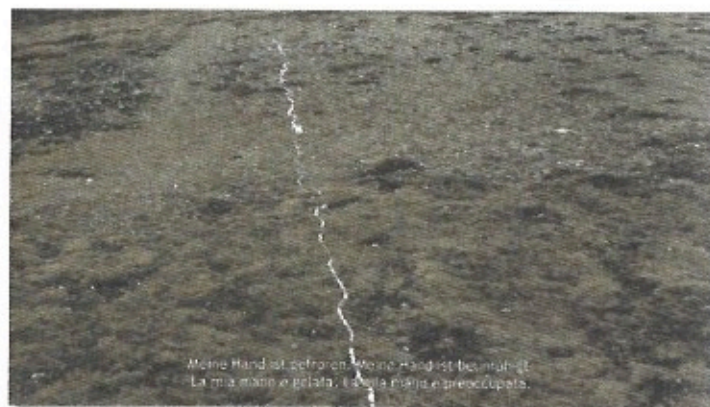
³ In 2022, Sophie Krier and Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro screened the film based on the happening reinvention in an ephemeral *Bergwerk-Kino*, a cinema-in-a-mine.

⁴ Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).



Allan Kaprow, *Overtime*, poster, 1968. Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Foundation and Getty Research Institute.

Take the great book by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera*.⁵ In the mid-1980s, at the time of her writing, the northern Mexican border was the hotspot of migration. Today, there are still a lot of conflicts and tensions along the northern border, but the southern border has become a hotspot of migration as well. This is due to the fact that the US government is pushing the Mexican government to stop the transit of migrants long before they reach the border with the US. Crossing the border between Guatemala and Mexico has become extremely dangerous. The whole of Mexico has been transformed into a borderland, so activists and scholars speak of the country in terms of a *frontera vertical*, a vertical border.



Sophie Krier, Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, *OVERTIME*, 2023, film still.
Courtesy of the artists and Lungomare.

SK So the whole country has become a wall. Is this what they mean?

SM Not necessarily a wall: a border. Say you have crossed the border between Guatemala and Mexico. You want to get to the border between the US and Mexico. You have to confront

5 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

typical border control devices that are operative not only along the literal border, but across the whole territory. In Europe, migrants who confront the European border regime in the Mediterranean or along the Balkan route, actually encountered this border regime long before, maybe in Turkey, in Libya, in Mali.

In critical border studies and border activism, there is a focus on the image of the wall, so we tend to think that borders really are lines. Of course, there is a proliferation of walls in the world, and we must take this into account. But at the same time, we must look at the processes that make borders mobile. This becoming mobile of borders means that the experience of borders shapes biographies even after people crossed an international border.

There is a very good book by Shahram Khosravi titled *"Illegal" Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*.⁶ For once, I like the Italian title very much: *Io sono confine*,⁷ "I am border". It is a very effective work on the multiple ways in which the experience of the border can shape a biography.

SVB This is an idea that was very acute in the experience we developed, because *OVERTIME* was about strangers coming together with their individual experience of the border, through that gesture of moving the wall. Different people coming from different communities, met for the happening. There was the Lungomare team, local farmers, researchers, artists, a person who had come to Italy in exile, someone working with female victims of domestic violence... Very different people. A collective "becoming" emerged. The following years, we went back to meet again, screen the film, share meals.

SM There is a process.

SVB Yes, a process in the sense that a new community was born out of this experience. That was really strong.

6 Shahram Khosravi, *"Illegal" Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

7 Shahram Khosravi, *Io sono confine* (Milan: Elèuthera, 2019).



OVERTIME, happening, Alpe di Villandro, 2019, photo by Jörg Oschmann.
Courtesy of the artist and Lungomare.

S M I have spoken about space and geography, but we can also look at the same processes from the angle of time. Borders do not only stop the movement of people—they also slow movement down, and spread the temporality of waiting across different spaces. I was talking last week with a very good Palestinian friend, Ruba Salih, who is doing ethnographic work in the camps where Palestinian refugees live, in Jordan and Lebanon. She said that ever since the Oslo agreements, diplomacy and the Palestinian authority have coalesced around the sidelining of the right of return and they took it off the agenda. So waiting became the new mode of life, and camps have become cities. Refugees still see the right of return as a sacred project but have also begun to develop novel horizons beyond the failed and mutilated nation state project.

Another important point is that the imagination of borders, even in critical studies, is almost solely focused on exclusion. With Brett, we are convinced of the need to articulate this with the inclusionary function performed by borders. We borrow the concept of articulation from Stuart Hall. For example, it is clear that the processes of illegalization of migration project their shadows on the patterns of recruitment of migrant workers. In this sense we speak of differential inclusion. Thousands upon thousands of migrants die

in the central Mediterranean: I never forget this, ever since I became interested in the issue of borders twenty-five years ago or more, out of indignation. But I don't think that we can really succeed in making sense of this if we focus only on the central Mediterranean and do not look at the border regime as a whole, which is also a migration regime. We need to "articulate" it with the way in which those entrepreneurs of construction and agriculture want to recruit migrant workers, and shape patterns of seasonal labor, circular migration, etc.

SVB In South Tyrol, we understood that alongside exclusionary forces, such multi-scalar processes of hierarchical inclusion are affecting diverse agents. For example, mountain farmers became differentially included throughout modernity, while, as you know, the commons were getting enclosed or privatized by capital. Privately owned land got concentrated while common pastures shrank while capital reshaped the mountain landscape to multiply labor power. Othering processes continue to reorganize the mountain space as the alpine border regime is now determining the movement of non-white bodies escaping war and dispossession. So the same forces of capitalist accumulation are forcing people out of Africa through the Alps, and pushing the ecological habitat of birds or plants upwards by climatic effects. It is a space characterized by the fleeing of many bodies—humans, animals.

SK There is South Tyrol with its specific border regime. There is Kaprow and *Overtime* in San Diego (US), which is also a specific take on the border. And there is your own experience, as we meet today in Bologna. We're interested to see whether we can draw some connections between these three sites: South Tyrol, San Diego and Bologna. You mentioned before we started recording that you were born in Genoa and just told us that you became interested in the subject of borders twenty-five years ago. How would you situate yourself in relation to this interest in borders since the 1990s?

SM When I moved back from Savona to Genoa in 1981, I already had a background as an autonomist militant, and thus joined the autonomous movement there, although it had

been radically weakened by the wave of arrests of 1979. My political and intellectual training was shaped by the autonomist movement as well as the so-called workerism or autonomist Marxism, since the end of the 1970s through the early 1980s. So, in Genoa, I was politically active besides being a philosophy student. I used to say that the city in which I grew up and studied in the 1980s was a white city. In the early 1990s, we discovered that the city was not white anymore. At first, we tried to intervene to support the migrants, but we didn't have the tools. The issue of racism was totally outside our political and intellectual horizon. We learned by meeting and making friends with newcomers from Senegal or Morocco. We created an association. In the following years, my life became a full-time engagement with struggles that were quite successful. What was at stake in those years was the legitimacy of the migrant presence in the city. Our Senegalese friends told us about their border crossing, but they also taught us to discern the operation of borders within the city.

This is when I really discovered the issue of border. I say "discovered" because, again, borders were completely outside my academic horizon. In the 1980s, it was the Cold War. Borders appeared to us in Europe as frozen. It did not seem like an interesting issue. I was doing my PhD on completely different topics. Then after a few years of full-time engagement, I placed migration and borders at the center of my research agenda, and in 2002 I met Brett, moved to Bologna, and started making international connections to understand globalization from the angle of border and migration.

SVB I see another interesting connection with your work, in the way we approached the reinvention of the happening as an artistic inquiry that operates back and forth between the "fieldwork" on the territory, and the knowledge that we try to elaborate on those categories of border-making processes. Your idea of method too is a kind of folding together of theory and experience.

SM That's a very important question and also a quite difficult one because the question of theory and practice—let's put it so—is often framed in terms of the relation between

theoretical work and empirical work. This is something we do not accept. We try to work toward a different way to make sense of that relation. Usually, people have a theory, then comes empirical work, then comes reframing or verifying, and so on—which is okay, but we don't do that. We rather emphasize the gap between the two. We think that only by emphasizing the gap, it is possible to be creative in theory and, at the same time, understand something in concrete contexts.

We have provisional tools like what we call the research platform. For instance, we worked quite extensively on the port of Piraeus in Greece that has been overtaken by COSCO, the state shipping company of China. We didn't simply organize a workshop in Athens with all the project partners. Instead, we opened a platform during several months: people were able to stay and exchange with Greek researchers, artists were invited to participate, then we had workshops with everyone involved, so it was a continuous flow of experiences.

SK At some point in the book you mentioned that a possible definition of labor could be "life-engendering life."

SM That's a definition by Marx in the 1844 manuscript.

HI E^{KRIE} R It sounds very autonomous. Dictated by life rather than money. Like giving birth.

SVB From the point of view of engendering commons, I remember how one of the participants, Heidi Oberkofler, was telling us: "I work with a group of women who suffered abuse, violence. In order to heal, to do the emotional labor, the first step for them is to say: I need to set my boundary." So if border is the method of capital, what counter-method can we develop to engender care, to engender solidarity?

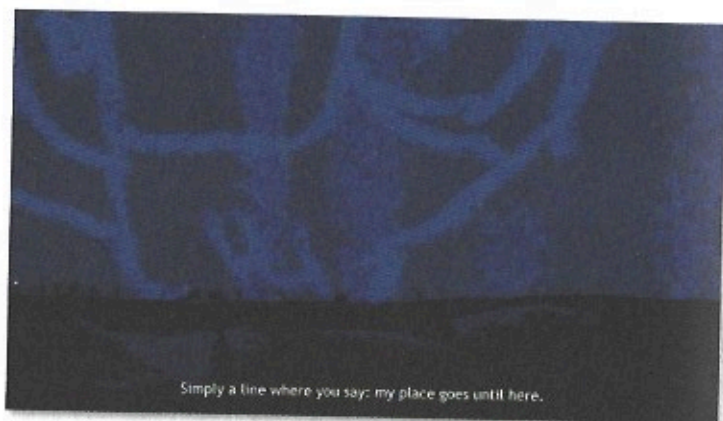
SM It's a question that we got a couple of times: who uses borders? It is clear that capital has an interest in the existence of borders, which it negotiates in a very different way from the state. This is another original point of *Border as Method*: critical border studies usually look at states and political borders, we try to articulate that with an analysis of what we call



OVERTIME, happening, Alpe di Villandro, 2019, photo by Georg Zeller.
Courtesy the artists and Lungomare.

"the expanding frontiers of capital"—going back in history to the seventeenth century and the enclosures. Today capital continues to have an interest in the existence of borders, in order to have different tax regimes or labor regimes, but it also transgresses borders through the circulation of commodities and so on. Capital produces its own spaces whose boundaries do not necessarily coincide with political borders.

From our point of view, we must fight these hierarchizing effects of bordering processes. And at the same time, we also need to imagine situations in which someone, or a community, are able to develop their own bordering processes and their own ways of managing bordering processes.



Sophie Krier and Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, *OVERTIME*, 2023, film still.
Courtesy of the artists and Lungomare.

SVB As in *Governing the commons*.⁸ It's interesting that Elinor Ostrom used the term "governing." Her position is radically opposite to state governmentality, but this doesn't mean that there's no governing at all.

8 Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (*Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions*), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

SM Indeed, because otherwise it would be the tragedy of the commons...! Anyway, it's not an easy issue. I also dream of a world without borders—abolitionism. But to imagine a world without borders is difficult. There is a form of "border fetishism" that sees the border only as a wall, as a thing—without the social relations. There are borders in processes at stake among the three of us right now. These kinds of processes have to do with the production of differences and distinctions, that also lay the ground for communication between us... Working with an expanded notion of borders, it is very difficult to abolish them, and I wouldn't go for their abolition. But this is very different from the border in the central Mediterranean that kills people every day.

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SV It also comes back to the question of translatability. Abolition thinking comes from the US. How can we use it or translate it in other contexts?

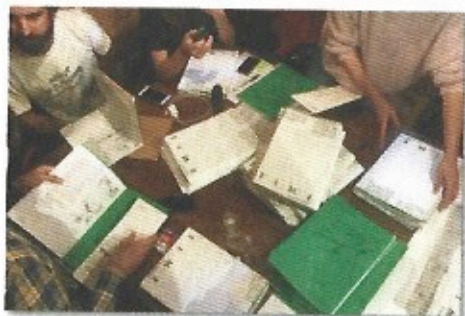
SM Several people are trying to do that. I also wrote an essay titled "Abolitionist Vistas of the Human."⁹ In the US, abolition refers to the struggle against slavery. W.E.B. Du Bois famously wrote about "abolition democracy:"¹⁰ after the abolition of slavery during the Civil War, he saw the possibility of the abolitionist coalition as a more general factor of democratization of the South. Angela Davis of course has written about such "abolition beyond abolition,"¹¹ but also Ruth Benedict, and many others. This is challenging because we need conceptual translation to make it productive in a different situation, like the European one.

9 Sandro Mezzadra, "Abolitionist Vistas of the Human. Border Struggles, Migration and Freedom of Movement," *Citizenship Studies* 24, n. 4, (2020).

10 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: an Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935).

11 Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire Prisons and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005).

SK In a sense, *OVERTIME* is also about translating. Allowing different modes of knowing to coexist. Cohabiting in difference. As we explored in our editorial series *OVERTIME PAPERS* Kaprow wanted to dissolve boundaries between life and art, and challenge Western modernity's habit of framing actions and thoughts in normative ways. The happening allowed us to apprehend these ideas through a collective embodied experience that activated non-linear assemblages of temporalities and sensitivities.



Sophie Krier and Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, *OVERTIME PAPERS*, 2019.
Courtesy of the artists and Lungomare.

SM Yes! There is that wonderful passage by Audre Lorde where she says that one of the most difficult tasks of our life is to experience differences as bridges, not as barriers between us.¹² Once we are not unilaterally focused on walls, borders can also become bridges. Most of the time they are both walls and bridges.

¹² Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" (1977), *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984).

› Sophie Krier

is an artist and researcher, who interweaves biographies of beings and places by conceiving situations for shared reflection. *Undisciplined spaces of learning* conceived over the years include the book series *Field Essays* (2008-ongoing), which aims to make room for listening pauses between practitioners and thinkers; *School of Verticality* (2018-ongoing), a program focusing on "acupuncture of place" that Krier developed in the context of a research residency hosted by Lungomare; and the *Travelling Academy* podcast series and exhibition *In Search of the Pluriverse* (2020-2022) commissioned by Het Nieuwe Instituut and co-curated with Erik Wong. Krier is currently researching presence in soil-based, equine and buddhist practice.

› Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro

(he/him) is an artist working at the intersection of social practice, installation, writing, gardening and cooking. He is interested in the entanglements of community, materiality, body and place. Based on site-specific research and durational interventions, his practice explores pedagogies of repairing. He co-initiated the collaborative platform *School of Mutants* in Dakar in 2018. Bottéro's work has been exhibited at biennales, museums, and festivals, including ZKM, Karlsruhe; Centre Pompidou Metz; 12th Berlin Biennale; 14th Dakar Biennale; RAW Material Company, Dakar; 12th Taipei Biennial; 7th Oslo Triennale; Le Lieu Unique, Nantes; Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam; Sheffield DocFest.

› Sandro Mezzadra

teaches political theory at the University of Bologna and is an adjunct research fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society of Western Sydney University. In the last decade, his work has particularly centered on the relations between globalization, migration, and political processes, on contemporary capitalism, as well as on postcolonial theory and criticism. He is an active participant in the "post-workerist" debates and one of the founders of the website Euronomade (www.euronomade.info). With Brett Neilson, he is the author of *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013) and *The Politics of Operations. Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2019). He is currently coordinating the Horizon 2020 project PLUS ("Platforms, Labor, Urban Spaces").

AS IF - 16 Dialogues on Sheep, Black Holes, and Movement is a reader about life and multiplicity, as well as the desire to engage in shaping the present and imagining the future through artistic and creative processes. "Activating Contextual Practices," "The Public Space as Anchor Point," "Sharing Knowledge," and "Sense of Belonging" are the four chapters that weave together a synaptic network of individual and collective biographies, relating geographies, history, and nature. Sixteen dialogues, trialogues, scenographies, correspondences, and glossaries connect people, fields of work, and disciplines to embrace alternative and diverse ways of living and thinking. Fifty-four voices together reveal how active and visionary engagement can create resonances that connect, heal, and foster transformation processes.

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