

XE: Experimental Humanities & Social Engagement



EXIT!: THE POLITICS OF ESCAPE

What might a critical politics of escape look like? Social movement strategies have often been framed as struggles for visibility, recognition, or representation. While mindful of such important arguments, recent critical theory has sought to destabilize the emphasis on representational strategies in its theorization of resistance and social struggle. Such accounts underscore the fact that recognition by the state—especially for minoritarian subjects—can often translate to categorization, policing, regulation, criminalization, and other violent forms of governance. Following recent critiques of rights-based movement strategies (arising in particular from within queer studies, critical race theory, and critical trans politics), we will look toward practices of escape as potentially resistant to dominant structures of power. Taking our cue from Paolo Virno, whose theory of exodus refers to “the collective defection from the state bond, from certain forms of waged work, from consumerism,” we will look at the way a politics of escape might require a critique of normative identity categories, the nation-state, or the commodity-form. We will ask how we might see modes of exit such as withdrawal, desertion, refusal, anonymity, obfuscation, or even methods of escapism like daydreaming as critical engagements with the present. Looking in particular towards the minoritarian politics of escape, our readings will include literature on the politics of mobility and fugitivity, strategies of dis-identification, becoming minor, work refusal, the human strike, gender abolitionism, and the politics of opacity. Alongside our theoretical readings we will look at aesthetic strategies of escape—from methods of abstraction to digital art practices—

that have presented alternatives to representational paradigms. Finally, we will ask after the utopian or speculative element of such a politics. How do such practices critique the political possibilities of the present and imagine another possible future?

CEH-GA 3041

Spring 2019

Thursdays, 2:30-5:00pm

4 credits

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Accessibility

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