

Berlin, January 2019

Dear visitor,

"Let's collectively move backwards." Such a simple assignment. I'm happy to embark. And I'm looking forward to you joining in. However, in trying out some first steps, questions start puzzling me. Can we figure this out together, please? Are we, am I, are you moving backwards in time or in space? How are we, am I, are you embodying this movement? How are those various embodiments (each singular_plural) oriented? Are they facing a past? Are they facing a future? Facing a site of atrocities? Facing a utopian vision? Facing with their toes? Not facing at all? Wearing a mask? And are we, am I, are you moving barefoot? ...wearing shoes? ...using a wheelchair?

Moving backwards *in space* entails a defensive moment of retreat: backing off, stepping back, hoping one will not end up in a ditch or with the back to the wall. Moving backwards *in time* means facing historical atrocities. Or utopias. Depending on our biographies and social positions they might paralyze us or spur us to action. They might enrage us and call forth resistance or revolt. They might foster regret or shame. Yet I am not sure whether those who embark on the journey of appropriating the backward move are actually ready and equipped to acknowledge our heterogeneities. We do not and never will share the same h*stories, visions, desires, values, or needs. Maybe we need to learn solidarity before we can move collectively?

"Let's collectively move backwards." Do we need to move forward, when we are moving backwards in time? Yet, then we have the future in our backs. Can we design a future without facing it? And doesn't it need a lot of trust in the future? Trust that not another atrocity will get you from behind. Trust that you may take a step back and be caught in caring embrace. To move forward into the past may only be possible if there is a future horizon of queerness at your back, as José Esteban Muñoz suggests. Then you may turn around and be nourished by a queerness yet to come, and turn back and project the queer glow from your face

into the past. What's the turning point, where your heels twirl? You, me, us—what is it for each of us that inspires a collective desire for change? Does it add up? In conflict?

My queer idea is that when we are collectively moving backwards, we might come to crossroads where we can try out another option—a different turn which allows us to live a new version of a past that we regret. To live being attentive to the injuries we have inflicted and have experienced. What if it were possible to correct a mistake: to deconstruct and reconstruct a h*story that has brought suffering and death, killings and war, injustice and degradation? Just imagine that we can give it a new try. That we can develop an alternative to colonial conquering, to slavery, to capitalist exploitation of nature and labor power, to rape, to parental and educational cruelty. Too much to ask? Too much responsibility? Well, then let's stick to the traumatic return of the repressed, to an unconsciously fed compulsion to repeat which lives in form of an embodied memory that seeps through and sometimes jumps generations. Continuously reinstalling the normative violence of a rigidly binary sexual difference, of racialized hierarchies, and compulsory ablebodiedness.

"Let's collectively move backwards." Wearing a pair of shoes the wrong way around. Why would you pretend to move forward while moving backwards? This might most obviously be a survival strategy, deceiving your enemies about your direction. But could it also be a tactical move that suggests being loyal to a future while searching for a queer escape? Feigning loyalty to a future which is a war machine that imposes the normative, and many other forms of violence. Why presume to be loyal? Why not take off the shoes? Too risky? Or is it because you assume, because you know, that queerness can be a war machine, too? Yet, while many would say that they don't trust the future, only some of us are in a position to give up on the privilege of believing in the future. Who can turn around, face the future one doesn't trust, enforce an open confrontation? But, of course, there are always more than two directions. There is a wider range of moves. What if we'd actually like

to sneak away rather than endure ongoing hardship or face new attacks? While some might feel that they are losing hard-won ground (gains in rights and freedoms and opulence), others might question that there has ever been any progress. The vast majority of people are sustaining lives under unbearable conditions.

"Let's collectively move backwards." Moving backwards while pretending to move forward only works if you have shoes, which you wear front to back. Moving backwards barefoot can never pretend to move forward, because one cannot twist one's ankle 180 degrees and still walk. Thus, the shoe is a tool. Not as good as a wheelchair or as wings; but a tool. A tool of moving backwards. Yet, what about the desire to move backward collectively. Can we collectively move in one shoe? Don't we need many shoes that can move in different directions simultaneously? Coordinated or uncoordinated. Then the question what is backwards and what is forward will shift according to the position you are referencing. Instead of linear timelines, the simultaneity of different times occurs and gives a chance to the strange encounters that Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz call 'a pleasant starting point'. In moving backwards one may find crossroads or junctions that one hadn't noticed, that might have been blocked earlier, for example, because they could only be used in companionship which you didn't have at that time. Or the companions you had been attached to promoted other routes. If we were able to live history twice, or three or four times, we would be able to open up new pasts and paths for those we love and those we don't. Cohabitation with those we haven't chosen—and think we would never choose—becomes the moment where animosity is confronted with serendipity. Moving backwards as a chance of re-embodying and re-arranging desires, of inviting what has been ignored or foreclosed so far.

Yours, Antke Engel