

He says: I am from there, I am from here,
but I am neither there nor here.
I have two names which meet and part...
I have two languages, but I have long forgotten
which is the language of my dreams.

— Mahmoud Darwish¹

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**THAT
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¹From Edward Said: Tebaq' (Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading), a poem written by Mahmoud Darwish dedicated to Edward Said. Translated by Mona Anis. Published in [Cultural Critique 67](#) (2007): 175-182. University of Minnesota Press.

We live in a world that suffers from polarization and dichotomist thinking; many people think according to the logic of -with us- or -against us-, liberal or conservative, right or wrong, as well as all-or-nothing. Binary thinking happens often when complex ideas and problems are overly simplified into twofold answers. Here "the truth" is formed according to one-sided locked ways of thinking, while neglecting, refusing and even absolutely refuting all the other possible paths of logic.

It's psychologically logical that polarized thinking can help with a sense of certainty and give some comfort in a complex world, especially in uncertain times. However, it leads to disregarding the gray areas in the middle, thus creating knowledge gaps in the logic of making decisions and formulating attitudes. Binary logic can often result in inaccuracy, and it involves a lot of assumptions. It binds us into thinking about, and within, fixed categories that don't evolve over time, nor do they adapt themselves to our constantly changing postmodern liquid environments.

In his article 'A Diagnosis for American Polarization', psychologist Andrew Hartz explains the idea of social splitting and how it negatively impacts discussions on race and gender.³ "Splitting" demonstrates a defense mechanism in which people unconsciously frame individuals, groups, and concepts in all-good vs. all-bad terms. This causes instability in relationships, decisions and worldviews because they're seen as negative or positive without taking into account the consequences and conditions that generated them.

This tendency of binary thinking has been affecting the societies and structures of the Global North across social, political, economical, and ecological lines. The repercussions of such splitting have become more critical with the accelerated waves of migration and globalized mobility in recent decades, all while the social fabric and identities worldwide are being rendered more mixed and heterogeneous. Binary logic, splitting and righteousness are dangerous to any dialogue but especially to the discourse on decoloniality, inclusivity and diversity in public and social structures. In this regard, instead of promoting a hybrid conversation between the different voices towards constructive outcomes, dichotomy blocks argumentation and drives us towards dead-ends with outcomes which aren't productive nor sustainable. It urges fast conclusions while overlooking the unlearning process of change - which affects how generations perceive history and its unfolding changes.

² Full-Spectrum Thinking: How to Escape Boxes in a Post-Categorical Future. Bob Johansen. 2020. Berrett-Koehler Publishers (Oakland)

³ A Diagnosis for American Polarization. Andrew Hartz. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. Nov. 3, 2020 6:45 pm ET. Access date: Feb. 16, 2021

Against this backdrop, one main issue of our times is the lack of the very basics of conversation necessary for humans and ecosystems to coexist in the shared spaces that we inhabit. Groups, communities, and identities seem to be physically and geographically polarized into separately blocked battlefronts. It even seems tricky to find possibilities to sit at the same table with people that fundamentally disagree with each other—and instead of seeking intercultural commons, we follow rhetorics of the so-called “clash of civilizations”. This affects and leads to problems in forming solidarities. Unity today is based on micro—and allegedly separate—battles⁵, while not allowing a space for the natural differences between us to be embraced. **We want to build solidarity not through sameness, but through difference.**

The title ‘That Those Beings Be Not Being’ is taken from a chapter in Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, in which he argues that “we must clamor for the right to opacity for everyone”.⁶ For Glissant, ‘opacity’ is an unknowability—an alterity that is unquantifiable, a diversity that exceeds categories of identifiable difference. As Zach Blas writes in his introduction to an issue of *Camera Obscura*, “[o]pacity, therefore, exposes the limits of schemas of visibility, representation, and identity that prevent sufficient understanding of multiple perspectives of the world and its peoples”.⁷ Opacity stands in opposition to hypervisibility. It resists a politics that is formed around surveillance, bureaucratic quantifiability and categorization, and the drive for ‘total vision’. **To embrace opacity is to embrace the ‘in between’, to embrace that which resists a binary definition, to embrace multiplicities.**

This exhibition and public program brings into dialogue local and international artists who challenge us to move beyond the trappings of binary thinking, into intervening, overlapping, and intersecting spaces—the inbetween, the not-yet-here, the becoming. Working with video, print, sculpture, performance, and interactive environments, their works engage questions around polyvocality and the socio-political complexities of their environment through humour, storytelling, discourse, and the creation of alter egos and fictional spaces.

⁴In his talk, Smith-Laing asked Rasheed Araeen about moving from curating ‘Essential Black Art’ to another curatorial approach demonstrated by the exhibition ‘The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Postwar Britain’ at the Hayward Gallery (1989). He answered: “I came to the realization that my struggle wasn’t just my struggle. Everyone who came from Africa and Asia must have gone through the same kinds of experience as I did. I was researching what has been written about them and I was shocked. These artists did their work within the context of mainstream modernism – some of them were on the forefront of the avant-garde in the 1960s – but they weren’t recognized. For example, the sexuality in the work of artists such as Souza and Avinash Chandra was attributed not to their own experiences, but to India – and their modernism was totally ignored. I could find no art-historical publication in which they were mentioned. Once I recognized the problem, I realized it was a collective one, and it had to be dealt with collectively.” from A Question of Knowledge: Smith-Laing talks with Rasheed Araeen. Frieze, 24.10.2016.

⁵In *Mistaken Identity* (2018), Asad Haidar explains how contemporary identity politics neutralizes anti-racist movements, instead of supporting the struggle against oppression and racism. He compares how black freedom movements perceived racism and capitalism as two sides of the same coin, and how this vision has been replaced with myopic micro-battles.

⁶Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 195.

⁷Zach Blas, “Opacities: An Introduction”, *Camera Obscura* 92, Volume 31, Number 1, 2016.

TAHT
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BEINGS
NOT
BEING

Participating artists:

Guy Briller
Salim Bayri
EMIRHAKIN
Karam Natour
PHILTH HAUS
Chris Kore
Sarah Naqvi
Veronika Babayan
Müge Yilmaz
Ludmila Rodrigues
Marly Pierre-Louis, Tracian Meikle,
and Tobi Balogun
Philipp Gufler
Hilda Moucharrafiéh and Dina Mohamed
Fabulous Future
Foundland Collective
Hwang Kim

CURATED BY

FADWA NAAMNA
MARGARITA OSIPIAN

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That Those Beings Be Not Being marks the beginning of programming for the new W139 artistic core, comprised of Fadwa Naamna, Margarita Osiopian, and Sam Samiee. The core group will work on programs in different configurations, with everyone involved in different levels and capacities. This first exhibition is curated by Margarita Osiopian and Fadwa Naamna.