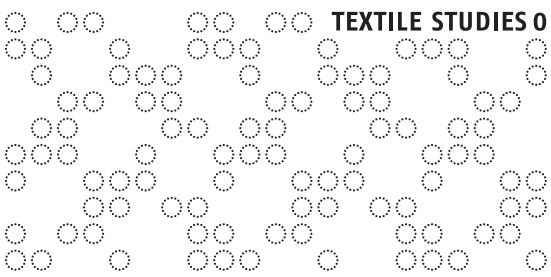
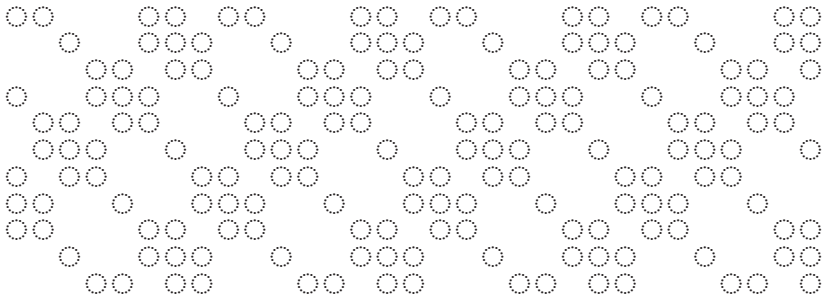


TEXTILE TERMS: A GLOSSARY
EDITED BY ANIKA REINEKE,
ANNE RÖHL, MATEUSZ KAPUSTKA,
AND TRISTAN WEDDIGEN



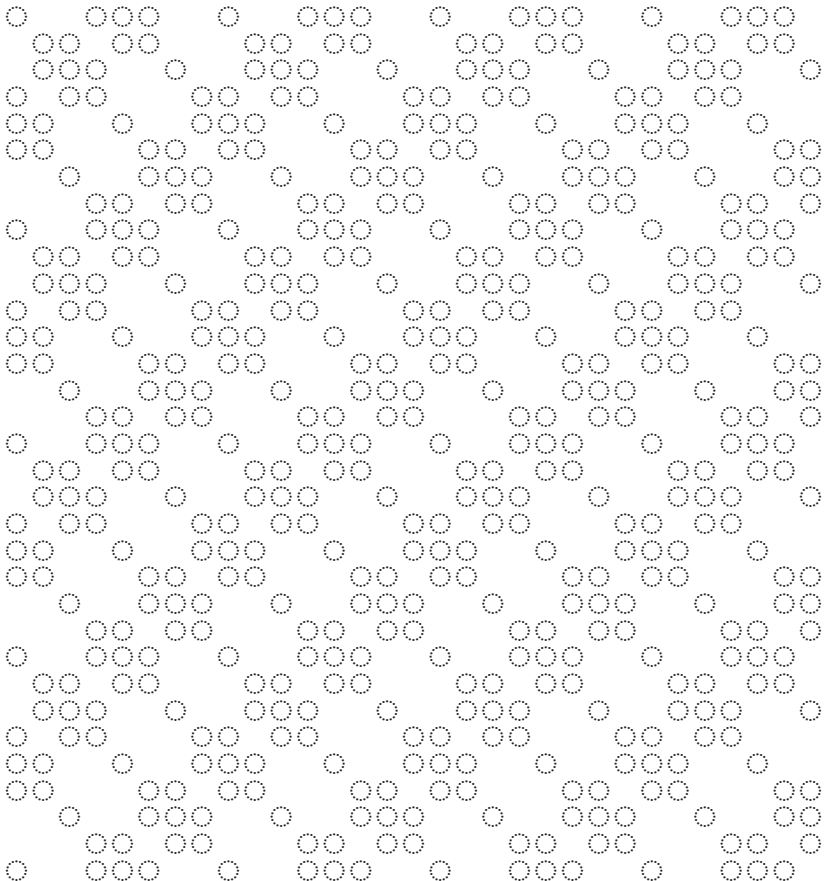
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**EDITED BY ANIKA REINEKE, ANNE RÖHL,
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EDITION IMORDE**

TEXTILE STUDIES 0



Textile Studies

Edited by Tristan Weddigen

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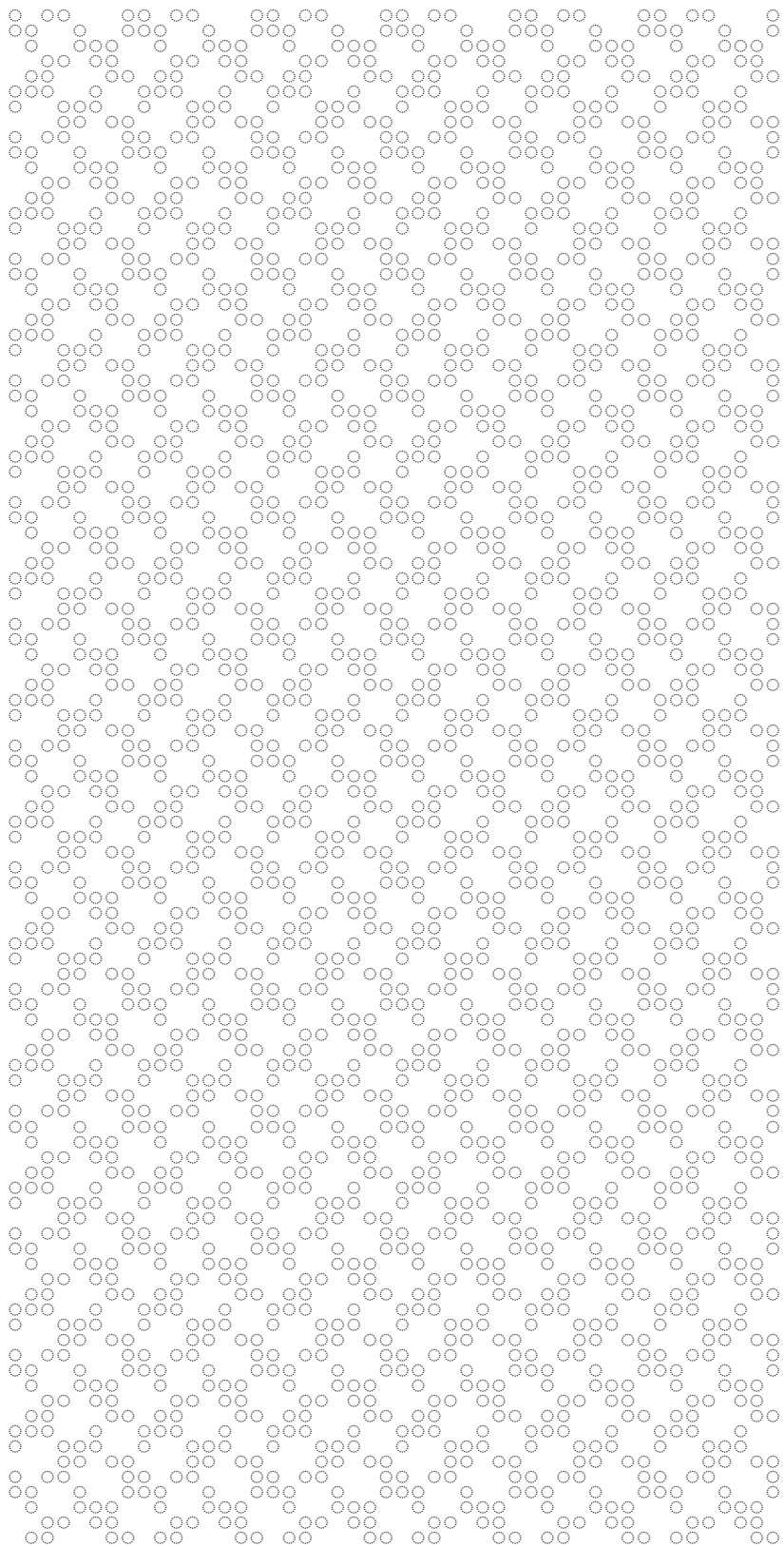
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From the very beginning of textile representation in antiquity, rags—old, used, shredded clothes—were included in the history of visual symbols, hierarchies, and social stigmata. In ancient Greek theater, when the protagonists of a drama, whether tragedy or comedy, wore rags, this was clear evidence of their loss of control and authority. The unexpected appearance of a wealthy hero clothed in rags signified a disastrous change of fate (Macleod 1974; Thalmann 1980; Groton 1990). In their essential role as markers of social margins, rags thus acted as a natural opposite to fine robes. As such, they were incorporated into Christian semantics as visual signs of deliberate poverty and mortification, as in the case of the tattered and patched habit of St. Francis of Assisi (Kapustka 2010). In the Old Testament, however, rags are symbolic objects of disregard: the Book of Isaiah (Is 64:6), for example, calls them «filthy rags,» meaning dirty «menstrual cloths»; furthermore, «silver coverings of idols,» which are to be desecrated and thrown away, are compared to rags (Is 30:22). In contrast to such rejections, rags are still used in the cult practices of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim populations of the Near East, where they are hung on the trees in front of sanctuaries as votive offerings or in symbolic curing rituals (Dafni 2002).

Throughout their iconic history, rags have epitomized alienation in Western culture. In the works of the *bamboccianti*, the Dutch and Flemish painters in seventeenth-century Rome who depicted the merry plebeian life in the ruins of the Eternal City, they signify the actuality of decadence beyond baroque courtly hierarchies (Levine 1984; Levine/Mai 1991; Piereth 1996). The used torn cloths worn by the poor in those paintings match the anachronistic sovereignty of ancient Roman ruins and thus contribute to a reflection on the passing of time, contemporaneity, and memory. In its social approach, this outsider imagery, which is not devoid of irony and wit, differs from the roughness of old bodies and old textiles in contemporaneous courtly works like those by Caravaggio or Jusepe de Ribera, for whom the torn textile was rather a visual touchstone of elaborated style and painterly virtuosity. Interestingly, the cultivated tension of «high» and «low» between the realm of courtly baroque art writings on the one hand—embodied, among others, by the aesthetic appraisal of drapery—and the artistic sense for decline, as in the picturesque rags, on the other (see Castiglione 2014), can be undermined by the fact that until the nineteenth century, the culture of the book relied on recycled rags as the main source for paper production.

With the process of modern industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, rags came to designate social failure and referred mostly to the status of the urban beggar; they became disturbing

existential markers of a devaluation of distinctions, and mirrors of individual and collective fates. Visualizing personal absence and the past through their conspicuously «empty» objecthood, rags, as phantom-like objects, occupied the very margins of representation, similarly to the old shoes painted by Vincent van Gogh (1886, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum), which prompted diverse responses in the field of philosophy (Heidegger 2002 [1950]; Derrida 1978 [1987]). In the art of the twentieth century, rags are used especially in this context to evoke the memory of crime and genocide—the failure of humanity. However, the random folds of used, torn clothes arranged in piles primarily engage a reflection on the ambivalent nature of material testimony. The mute traces of long-gone anonymous wearers, heaped into a textile mass, point to the hopelessness of historical narration in the collective act of mourning countless victims, most strikingly in the installations of Christian Boltanski (Gumpert 1994; Kapustka 2011b).

The folds of rags embody extension and intensity as inherent qualities of the baroque drapery (Deleuze 1993 [1988]). The formlessness and the absorptive qualities of the textile *barrages* lying in the gutters of Paris photographed by László Moholy-Nagy—objects that testify to the flowing of time, entropy, and death—were investigated by Georges Didi-Huberman in Warburgian terms of «dynamic inversions» (*dynamische Umkehrungen*). In his view, rags express a morbid reduction of the Renaissance pathos formula embodied by the «outwardly animated parerga» (*äußerlich bewegtes Beiwerk*) of the nymph's veil, the goddess's hair, or the servant girl's dress, all blown by the *brise imaginaire* (Didi-Huberman 2002a). While the pathos formula of the windblown textile is based on iconic suspension, turning strong and extreme emotions into visible action within a modeled balance of movement (Agamben 1999b; Didi-Huberman 2002b; Michaud 2004), rags, in contrast, inevitably show the model's actual degradation, as they distinguish themselves by the uncontrollable individuality of their folds' metamorphosis, which remains beyond the realm of recognition and eludes any consistent reading.

Old, dirty, and accidentally folded fabric thus undermines mythological persistence and embodies art history's interest in anachronism as a dispositive of the disrupted and fragmented present. Through their status as untouchable marginal phenomena and formless anachronistic symptoms (Didi-Huberman 1995), rags help to critically revalue the idea of artistic progress and, by doing so, seem to neglect one of art history's early paradigms, namely, the idea of the development of form. Whereas Heinrich Wölfflin's principles of art history imply that form unfolds in the dynamic, immanent process of constant growth within the opposition of the classical style and the primitive, or late, styles (Wölfflin 1940, 8–15; 2015 [1915]), rags stand in direct opposition to such art-historical teleology, as they are passively embedded in the reductive course of time and thus essentially epitomize the stages of disintegration of a model. In rags, the meaning thus appears only a posteriori and through difference, in a heterogeneous discourse beyond formal systems of timeless values.

The textile archaeology of Roman ruins and Paris gutters is echoed in the twentieth century by Arte Povera, which was invented as a



Fig. 40 Teresa Condito, *Pistolino degli stracci*, 2015, installation view, Venice, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015.

revolutionary, anticonsumerist approach aimed at «regaining possession of <real> control of being» (Celant 1967) by introducing rough materials and structural simplicity. Michelangelo Pistoletto was hailed as one of the «guerilla warriors» of «poor art,» who were supposed to act on the border between art and life and «present the present» instead of representing reality (Celant 1968; 1969). His *Venere degli stracci* («Venus of the Rags,» London, Tate Modern), exhibited in 1967 at Cittadellarte in Biella, Italy, and since refreshed in varying installations—including in combination with other textile works, such as *Orchestra di stracci* («Orchestra of Rags,» Pistoletto/Elkann 2014, 195)—became one of the main icons of the movement. Here, the classical figure of Venus holding her own cloth and turning away from the beholder, taking the shape of a smaller-than-life-size cement cast covered with mica, is shown in front of piled-up pieces of clothing previously used by the artist to clean his *Mirror Paintings* (Verzotti 2011, 420). Pistoletto's work questions the persistence and transience of the classical canon when confronted with the dynamics of daily life and mass consumption. In this «relationship between what changes and what never changes,» the rags, according to the artist, benefit from «the undying beauty of the nude statue» (Pistoletto/Elkann 2014, 161). Pistoletto created his *Venus* installations by throwing rags across the gallery floor as though he were pouring paint, so that they would form a colorful heap behind the goddess. This monumental action, like a votive act of the artist's own idolatry, challenged other well-documented gestures, such as Lucio Fontana's *tagli* or Jackson Pollock's paint drippings. But similarly to those gestures of authentication of chance, Pistoletto's work was not devoid of continuous self-recycling and planned self-reference, thereby creating its own poeology: «In the various existing versions of the Venus, or the re-installation, you can use the same original rags or you can change them, but they must maintain their multi-colored and ruffled character. One of the plaster Venuses of 1967 was broken. My project is to put the pieces together leaving the signs of breakage evident, like the tears in the rags» (Christov-Bakargiev 1991, 157).

Il Pistolino degli stracci, exhibited by the Italian artist Teresa Conditto as part of the exhibition *Sweet Death* in the Pavilion of Guatemala at the 56th Biennale of Venice in 2015 (fig. 40), picked up this thread and presented rags as a matter of visual discourse on the authenticity of art and the artist's role as the critical agent of the «real.» Standing in front of a pile of rags, the small statue of a urinating boy—a cast of the so-called *Putto mictans*, a fountain figure by a follower of Donatello (Florence, Museo Bardini)—clearly alluded to Pistoletto's *Venus* (Vulcano 2015). Lifting his dress, the little boy joyfully peed on the oversized mass of clothes (the cast was able to emit real fluids), thus deliberately leveling the original sublimation of art's poorness. The conflict between the classical canon of the Venus figure and the perishing, ephemeral form of rags was turned into ironical adequacy: pissing on textile rubbish. The idea of «poor art» as a programmatic stance was thus brought to absurdity with its own means. Through the motif of urination—frequently used also in the visual rhetoric of the *bamboccianti*, who depicted, for example, men pissing on ancient ruins as iconic characters embedded in phenomenal actuality (Levine 1988)—Conditto

discussed the survival of pathos in contemporary art. With rags, presented as an archetype of poverty, she questioned the revolutionary scarcity of artworks, which must first be accepted by the market, supported by theory, and, most critically, conform with current intellectual fashions if they hope to become elevated icons (Keats 2013). Condito's mocking effect nevertheless draws directly on the Western tradition of poetic imagination and artistic desire. The Renaissance putto peeing on rags evokes the aristocratic culture of permissible vulgarity, expressed, for example, in the early modern use of small figures of urinating boys as courtly fountains for drinking water (Emerson 2006; 2015), or in the sophisticated iconography of erotic lust and fertility, for example in Lorenzo Lotto's nuptial painting *Venus and Cupid* (1520s, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Oettinger 2015; see Simons 2011). Embedded in this context, Condito's installation touched upon the conditions of imagination, questioning the artistic endeavor to depict the apparently «true» dimension of life. Rough rags, a shapeless textile matter, thus took over the role of Pistoletto's appealing *Venus* as the artist's canonical object of desire. The stream of the putto's urine literally animated the rags as random fragments of a past reality—anonymous, distanced, folded textile objects to be brought back to «life» by the artist's ambitious gesture. The setting was remindful of Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499, in which a urinating putto stimulates the eager imagination of the dreamy humanist Poliphilo—the «Lover of All»—in search of the noble idea of antiquity in the ruins he encounters (Leatherbarrow 2015). The putto urinating on desolate rags in a gallery space during the Venice Biennale thus clearly acknowledged its role as an ironical mover of aesthetic *fantasmata*, while pointing out the fatal spell of never-ending Renaissance idealism.

The textile tear is a radical figure; it is rooted in both religious and artistic topoi and belongs to the Western tradition of transcendence. The biblical account of the rending of the veil of the Jerusalem Temple in the moment of Jesus's death (Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45; Mt 27:51) was interpreted by the patristic exegesis as an antagonistic epitome of Christian victory over Judaism, a rupture in the curtain of the holy Jewish Tabernacle that symbolized the inauguration of the Messianic Age (sacredness). It also claimed Christianity's victory over cosmic nature as a sinful domain of the senses: Flavius Josephus (*Bellum Judaicum*, 5.5.4 (1821, 370)) describes it as a «Babylonian curtain,» which «was a kind of image of the universe,» signifying fire, air, earth, sea, and heavens by the colors of its fine linen. The tear thus signifies a violent and irreversible act of intrusion into one's symbolical space, of unmasking profanation of the hitherto existing world-models with the means of a new soteriological narrative.

As a gesture of sudden opening, the tear was used by political revolutionaries and artistic avant-gardes in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Karl Marx wanted to tear away the «curtain of social specters» in order to reveal the «hidden» materialist principles (Derrida 1994), and the Russian futurists, in their opera *Victory Over the Sun* (1913), tore the theater curtain apart in order to dissolve representation and liberate the painterly form from the limits of mimesis (Bauermeister 1983; Shatskikh 2012). But beyond iconoclasm, a rupture can also evoke its own archaeology of physical decomposition and disintegration in the act of self-disclosure within the poetics of decline. The disrupted canvas of a painting may be seen as a place of self-reflection of the image and as an embodiment of the limits of the genre: Alberto Burri's random ruptures in his *Sacchi* («sacks») — the very attributes of *Arte Povera* — refuse the mythology of transition, and acknowledge tears, fissures, splits, and cracks as inherent qualities of the painting's economy of the surface (e.g., *Sacco e rosso*, 1954, London, Tate Modern). The textile tear can thus also critically address the topos of the assumed «nudity» of truth by pointing to the ambiguity of the metaphorical language of revelation and disguise (Blumenberg 2010 [1960]).

The tear's negative meaning as an ontological threshold is therefore put into question, as it reflects the nature of dissimilarity in the post-modern palimpsest. In his commentary on Gilles Deleuze's *Différence et répétition* (1968), Michel Foucault deconstructs the most common myth of continuity: he pictures Ariadne hanging herself in despair with a rope braided by her own hands. As a consequence, her thread breaks and Theseus ultimately loses his way in the labyrinth, reaching neither the center nor the exit, and the whole philosophical discourse

assumes the form of a shadowy, collage-like theater of permanent mistakes (Foucault 1969). Metaphors of the tear, purposely reused like this to dismantle the unity of metaphysical analogy by means of its continuous repetition and distortion, intensely abrade it like a coin—to use Jacques Derrida’s own metaphorical borrowing from Anatole France’s *The Garden of Epicurus* (1908, 208–09)—and eventually devalue the currency of the metaphor’s aboriginal core (Derrida 1974). As such, the metaphor of the tear also appears in modern art history and image philosophy, where images shall tear the veil of resemblance and become liberated from the religious or humanistic dictates of Renaissance mimesis as well as from the boundaries of iconological reading; instead, they demonstrate the difference between the symbol and the symptom, and embody the sovereignty of figuration (Didi-Huberman 1990).

A recent art installation elevated those modern migrations of the tear to a monumental scale. During the 2015 Venice Biennale, with its sociopolitically motivated title *All the World’s Futures*, apparently endless surfaces of old torn jute sacks randomly sewn together covered the three-hundred-meter-long walls of the desolated corridor in the Arsenale building. At the very end of the show, in the form of an anamnetic breakthrough across the gallery, this work by the Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama, entitled *Out of Bounds* (fig. 54), left the impression of an inevitable monumental collapse. The sacks deprived the old brick walls of their usual Venetian charm of decay, simply copying their essential physical devastation. The deconstructive textile epidermis provided nothing but a self-referential image of overall failure and merely unfolded the quality of fragmentation instead of providing any meaningful disguise. It eluded the language of metaphor, analogy, or assigned figurative sense, and eventually renounced the aura of the artist’s single opening gesture by the refusal of all metaphors of elevated painterly sacrifice. It showed, in contrast, the tear’s ongoing autonomous history as the powerful figure of purposeless overall degradation: a ruination of a ruin.

So meaningful since the Enlightenment’s project of aesthetic alienation, the ruin was herewith put to trial by repetition and transparency. This shift from the Kantian sublime of the collapse into the postmodern collapse of the sublime was designed to reveal an uneasy testimony to the global sociopolitical actuality. The sacks, imported from India, had been originally used for the transport of cocoa, but were subsequently repurposed for carrying charcoal. The change from cocoa beans, an epitome of the Western taste for luxury, to charcoal, Ghana’s essential source of energy, evoked an image of structural displacement. The beholder was exposed to the huge gap between the overpowering scale of the ravage and the imaginative measures of human handicraft. The installation thus recalled multiple stories of reuse, migration, and circulation of goods, and was embedded in the critical discourse on the inequalities of labor in the global market. Along with their reuse, the sacks were continuously torn to pieces and turned into anonymous textile matter. The monumental figure of rupture was here primarily rooted in the interrelations of social subjects: companies, governments, groups, and individuals. The migrating sacks, which eventually



Fig. 54 Ibrahim Mahama, *Out of Bounds* (detail), 2014–15, jute sacks, installation view, Venice, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015.

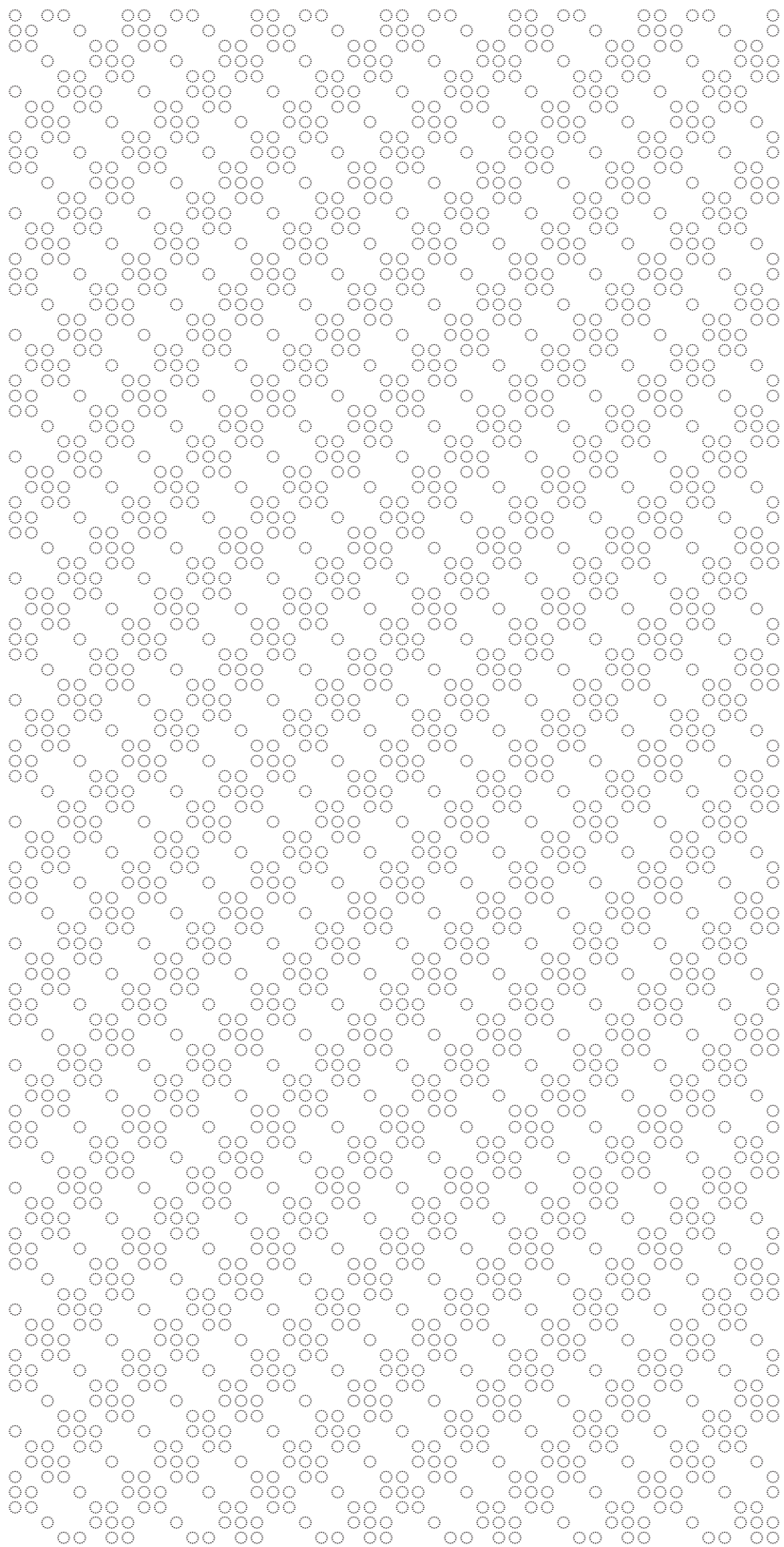
ended up as a «painting,» thus displayed the discrepancies between anonymous exploitation in a global economy, one-sided resource politics, and the hopeless fate of the local migrant workers involved: «They tell of the hands that lifted them and the products they held as they were carried between ports, warehouses, markets and cities. They tell of the condition of the people who are trapped by those places, and the places themselves,» the artist declared (Campanini 2015). With the words «Produce of Ghana» printed on the sacks, the «painterly» illusion reached its critical meaning: outdated titles appearing on the destroyed surfaces of reused fabrics.

In the Indian jute sacks that are pointlessly imported across the globe one can also see an exponent of the worldwide social inequality in the production, circulation, and use of textiles themselves, the contemporary symbol of which would be the shred. The actuality of the textile trade—today the most visible synonym of global exploitation through the intercontinental capitalist market of big corporations—is embodied by the ruins of the Rana Plaza textile factory building in Sabhar, Bangladesh. When it collapsed in 2013, it caused a moral tear and—for a short time—became a tragic icon of the global consumers' deliberate oblivion. In *Out of Bounds*, the aesthetic sublime, as the Western model of distanced emotional response to an overwhelming catastrophic scenario, was thus made part of the debatable ethical heritage of remote control in the globalized world. The sense of modern empathy itself appeared torn between the omnipresence of global information and the limits imposed by geographical distance.

As a violent intervention in a consistent texture, the tear escapes the iconological alternative—to illustrate or to transcend—and opens up possibilities of reflection on the very sense of the «suffering» of the structure. It thus introduces the issue of the image's vulnerable corporeality, which corresponds to the beholder's own bodily sensation (affect; Kapustka 2015). It is a figure that implies both individuality and authenticity in the virtual experience of pain. By addressing physical suffering as the deepest experience of the self, this sense of psychosomatic closeness moves the mind beyond authoritative notions of truth and claims of elaborated meaning. The textile ruin is, consequently, a place where the seam explicitly gains relevance as a tragic endeavor of arduous self-healing: Mahama employed Ghanaian migrant women to sew the destroyed sacks together, allowing them to revert their own painful archaeology of exploitation into a patchworked image of fragmented identity with the means of art.

Interestingly, these meticulous operations on the monumental «wounded» textile recall ancient topoi of ruptured clothing as the visible carrier of damaged lives. Tearing off one's own clothes is an old figure of mourning, grief, and despair, and relates to both individual guilt and the fatal fate of communities and of one's own family members. In its Jewish origins, it is expressed, among others, in the gesture of humbleness of Joshua, who acknowledges the guilt of his people by ripping his own clothes in front of the ark (Jos 7:6); the mourning action of Jacob tearing off his mantle as he receives Joseph's bloodstained cloth (Gn 37:34); and in the despair of Mordecai tearing his clothes in front of Ahasuerus's palace and, dressed in sackcloth, lamenting over

Haman's plans to kill all Jewish people in the Persian empire (Es 4:1). The latter, suggestively depicted by Sandro Botticelli in *Derelitta* («The Abandoned»; ca. 1495, Rome, Collezione Rospigliosi), in which art history long saw a lamenting feminine character, has made a meaningful career as a melancholic figure of despair (Wind 1940/141; Paolucci 2005). Ibrahim Mahama's installation interestingly builds upon that tradition in order to evoke a modern image of both desolation and redemption. Random splits caused by innumerable fatal fates and their purposefully hopeless repairs thus reflect Theodor Adorno's appeal for philosophy's critical self-revaluation through an acknowledgment of its own deficiency, heterogeneity, and displacement in the face of the world's fissures. In his *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, philosophy is challenged in its inability to speak as a redemptive discourse on distress by means of its self-alienation and fragmentation (Adorno 2005 [1951]). Art's self-exposure through disruption implies its own visual poetics of vulneration beyond the dialectical deficiencies of language (see Adorno (1969)) on montage as a disturbance of the «legality» of the meaning of the artwork through the «invasion of fragments of empirical reality»). But the beholder is, in any case, individually involved in a moral imperative in his or her painful closeness to the screens of damage. The textile ruin of *Out of Bounds* exposes real stories only in their fatal absence and random reconfiguration; it thus echoes the philosophical lament expressed through a diminution of one's own narrative (ibid., 189), the painful *remontage* being its final form (Didi-Huberman 2010). The endless textile damage builds an equivalent aesthetics of tragic self-reflection upon the negative, inasmuch as it purposefully shows the delay of the particular seam in the permanence of the overwhelming tear. In his negative dialectics, Adorno—for many the father of postmodern deconstruction (Geulen 1997)—declares the fragmented narrative to be the only tool of hope for reconciliation, given his pessimistic diagnosis of the Enlightenment's contribution to social violence, oppression, and goods control. Matching overall textural destruction with accidental individual patterns, the installation *Out of Bounds* does not write *the one* critical history of social and economic displacement. It develops instead a narrative of incapability interwoven into the void between the detached fragments. In Adorno's terms, one could say that it does so in order to struggle against the same inevitable disfiguration and indigence, at all costs, in vain.



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