

# Entry Points

Edited by Carin Kuoni and Chelsea Haines

## The Vera List Center Field Guide on Art and Social Justice

### No. 1

Vera List Center for Art and Politics

# The Field

7 Introduction  
Carin Kuoni

## Essays

- 14 That Incurrable  
Disturber of the Peace  
**SHARON SLIWINSKI**
- 23 On Dirt  
**JOÃO RIBAS**
- 36 The Political in and  
of Art: **THOMAS KEENAN**  
in conversation with  
**CARIN KUONI**

## Artists

- 48 Ai Weiwei  
Chen Tamir
- 54 Shahidul Alam  
Bisi Silva
- 60 Karen Andreassian  
Susanna Gyulamiryan
- 66 Amy Balkin  
T.J. Demos
- 72 Bibliothèques Sans  
Frontières  
Omar Berrada
- 78 Giuseppe Campuzano  
Ana Longoni
- 86 Chto Delat  
What, How & for Whom/WHW
- 92 DABATEATR  
Omar Berrada

- 98 Etcétera  
Galit Eilat
- 106 Gugulective  
Kathryn Smith
- 112 Hans Haacke  
Chen Tamir
- 118 Sandi Hilal and  
Alessandro Petti  
Galit Eilat
- 124 Interference Archive  
Gregory Sholette
- 130 Sanja Iveković  
What, How & for Whom/WHW
- 136 Amar Kanwar  
Pooja Sood
- 142 Faustin Linyekula  
Shannon Jackson
- 148 Mosireen  
Negar Azimi
- 154 Marina Naprushkina  
Gregory Sholette
- 160 Tenzing Rigdol  
H.G. Masters
- 164 Issa Samb  
Koyo Kouoh
- 170 Christoph Schäfer  
CAMP
- 176 Take to the Sea  
Jenifer Evans

# Dorchester Projects

- Artist
- 186 Theaster Gates
- 207 *Theaster Gates: A Way of Working*  
Installation Images
- Essays
- 198 “Some Kind of Work Simply Needs to Happen.”: **THEASTER GATES** in conversation with **CARIN KUONI**
- 214 Utopian Operating Systems: Theaster’s Way of Working  
**SHANNON JACKSON**
- 230 Collecting Publics: The Spatial Politics of *Dorchester Projects*  
**MABEL O. WILSON**
- 240 Gauging the Racial Times in the Work of Theaster Gates  
**ROMI N. CRAWFORD**
- 246 Neither “Black Church” nor “White Cube”  
**HORACE D. BALLARD, JR.**
- 253 Learning from Chicago: Responses to *Dorchester Projects* from The New School Faculty
- KATAYOUN CHAMANY**  
**JULIA FOULKES**  
**ANDREA GEYER**  
**RICHARD HARPER**  
**CARIN KUONI**  
**MARK LARRIMORE**  
**LYDIA MATTHEWS**  
**KEVIN McQUEEN**  
**JASMINE RAULT**  
**RADHIKA SUBRAMANIAM**
- 272 Theaster Gates: A Way of Reception  
**CHELSEA HAINES** and  
**JOCELYN EDENS**
- 276 Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics
- 278 Nominated Projects
- 279 Vera List Center
- 280 Book Contributors
- 284 Index
- 288 Image Credits

# Take to the Sea



Long before it was named, Take to the Sea was conceived as an attempt for someone with the wrong passport to have a reason to obtain an official letter that would enable a visa to stay on in Cairo. More formally, it was initiated in 2008 as an open-ended research project concerned with irregular migration from Egypt to Italy via the Mediterranean Sea.

Since then it has mutated many times, and different minds and motivations have migrated to and through it to produce image, sound, and text-based work. In the process of traveling to various villages from where people migrate as well as to points of departure on the coast of Egypt collecting accounts of both disillusion and desire, Take to the Sea encountered, again and again, an imagination in which the possibility of transformation rested entirely on arrival to the other shore. These journeys were marked by memories that were not yet had, and somewhere along the way, the project touched its own exile.

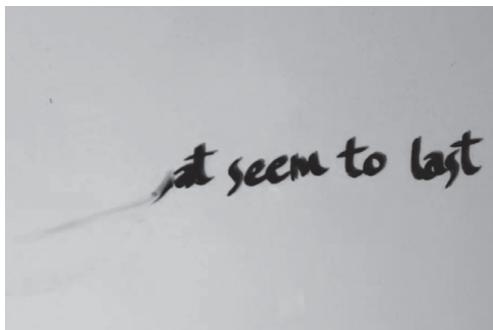
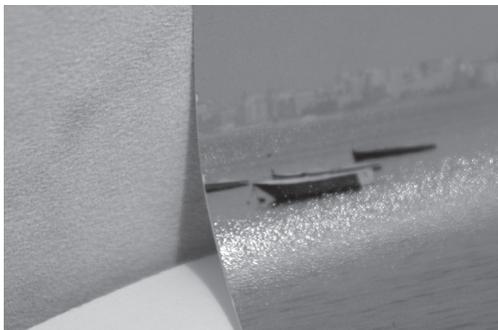
● In entering, somewhat hesitantly, into the territories of art, Take to the Sea turned the tide in on itself as its members attempted to inhabit some of the very conditions they sought to consider. Preoccupied with instances when the sea becomes a wall, a waiting room, a passage to a prison cell, the project began working through that which might emerge from the vicinity of silence, to suggest an image for the invisible drawn out of voice. More recently, for its first solo show, Take to the Sea produced a single sculptural installation, titled *A Roomful of Lost Memory*. It was an attempt to quantify or measure the matter of time. It was the possibility of retrieving a history that belongs to no one.

Opposite page:  
Take to the Sea, *A Roomful of Lost Memory*  
(installation view), 2013



Top:  
*Take to the Sea, A Roomful of Lost  
Memory* (installation detail), 2013

Bottom:  
*Take to the Sea, When the Sea  
Became a Wall*, 2010



Clockwise from top left:  
From the Take to the Sea archive  
(installation detail), 2012

Take to the Sea, *I Swear I Saw This*  
(video still), 2013

Take to the Sea, *A Mc Guffin for Art*, 2010

# Jenifer Evans on *Take to the Sea*

A creased, pale A4 page is divided into sixteen equal rectangles. Each section of this grid is filled to varying extents by stacked lines of printed black text. Of diverse lengths and font sizes, the resulting text blocks leave an irregular rhythm of blank gaps. Definitions, symbols, facts about computer malfunctions and the shipping of e-waste, musical notations, poetic questions, and quotes: “‘You can’t read erasures,’ he said, ‘but you can imagine reading that which has been erased for good.’” On the flipside of the flimsy page, equal amounts of lorem ipsum text, font size adjusted accordingly, have been made to fill three rectangles of different sizes. This publication, created in 2013, could be folded into a little boat. “Disappearance is a misnomer,” it says. “Living or dead, each is in a very real place.”

*Take to the Sea* emerged out of a research project that started in Egypt in 2008, affiliated with an academic institution, the American University in Cairo. An inquiry by a large and changing group of researchers into undocumented migration from Egypt to Italy became a compulsive, impossible quest to compile information on all the drownings of migrants in the Mediterranean, with hours spent trawling through the local press.

For a year and a half, trips were made from Cairo to out-of-the-way northern villages from which would-be migrants took to the sea. Later, a documentary film was made from the many conversations had with the travelers, their smugglers, and the travelers’ families. But a core group of researchers—Laura Cugusi, Nida Ghouse, Lina Attalah, Mohamed Abdel Gawad, and Shaimaa Yehya—grappled with how to tell these stories in a way that avoided certain representational traps: the familiar images, numbers, problem-and-solution-oriented terminology, and tales

of hardship that occur in news media and academic studies when irregular migrants are discussed.

A meeting in the summer of 2010 with writer and curator Bassam El Baroni, then co-curating *Manifesta 8*, generated a turn toward contemporary art. The migration of the researchers’ practice into this field permitted their own stories to fold into their storytelling, and also brought in experimental formats and nonlinear modes of narration, new kinds of encounters, and a destabilizing of their own footing as they drifted into unknown territory. For *Manifesta*, Cugusi, Ghouse, and Attalah made *Not Yet Anywhere*, a disorientating, complex sound installation in an abandoned post office using recordings of historical correspondence discussing the sea, discipline, and exile in assorted languages alongside sound effects.

This marked the beginning of a sporadic, protean art practice that exists when *Take to the Sea* are invited to exhibit or perform or when they are in the same place at the same time. But it also impacts the in-between periods, when its members are silent as *Take to the Sea* but working separately in other professions, incorporating its fluid outlook into journalism, art writing, photography, or curating. *Take to the Sea* is a series of detours, impossible attempts, and shifting interests, and its exhibited outcomes are always temporary and site-specific.

An 2013 exhibition in a small space—Nile Sunset Annex in Cairo—consisted of a single sculptural gesture—blocking the doorway with old defunct hard drives, which had each once been part of a computer, by stacking them into a wall-like barricade, giving the illusion of a roomful. The weeks-long act of finding these hundreds of grey, metal hard drives, each the same but different (damaged and soiled differently, with different layers of surface or internal workings

visible), through speculative trips into computer malls, markets, and dumps on the outskirts of Cairo, was an unspoken part of the work, like the trips to Rashid and the villages of the Nile Delta back in 2008. The complications of calculating how many hard drives could fit in a room or a doorway, and how much hard-drive weight the room's floor and walls could hold, were reminders of their earlier, vain attempts to determine the length of time it took to get from Rashid to Sicily by talking to people who had made that trip.

Like a somber, detailed monument to those known and unknown passengers who were following their desires but drowned at sea, with their past memories and the future they were forbidden to have, to the survivors who were stacked together in ships' fish containers for days without food or drink, the silent impervious work makes us wonder about practicalities and numbers and other people's experiences, as well as whether anything could be retrieved.

A work made earlier that same year, titled *I Swear I Saw This*, was a brief repeating video projected vertically downward onto a blank paper on a small round table. A flickering, stop-frame sentence in black pen is written across the white page, but its beginning vanishes before it can be completed: "There are moments that seem to last forever." Idea inhabits form, the sentence disappears and keeps coming back, a loop of interrupted silences.

*Take to the Sea* was nominated by Bassam El Baroni.