



Standby: Organizing modes of in|activity

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Introduction

In the technical sense, standby refers to an operating state in which energy continues to flow despite an apparent shutdown, thus allowing for sudden reactivation. However, the term ‘standby’ extends to realms beyond electronic devices, and it has long since shaped the work environments of people such as medical practitioners, military troops, or airplane staff. Following up on this observation, this special issue of *ephemera* explores how standby acts as an ordinary *mode of organizing* sociomaterial lifeworlds. The standby icon seen on this issue’s cover – a line breaking a circle – represents the binary language of computers, with the numbers ‘1’ for ‘on’ and ‘0’ for ‘off’ being merged into a simultaneous on-offness. If we mobilize the concept as a lens through which to observe social phenomena, standby can be understood as a state of ‘in|activity’ that indicates readiness without immediate engagement, but that nevertheless requires and generates energy, resources, and relations. As such, we explore the notion of standby as a mode of organizing that integrates new materialist, affect-theoretical and time-space-focused approaches to denote a field of tension between the contingent and persistent, between the exceptional and ordinary, between the human and nonhuman.

For this issue, we have compiled a series of conceptual, methodological, and empirical explorations that scrutinize the forces and frictions of standby as a mode of organizing not necessarily dependent on full operation. Such a

mode includes the deceptive stillness of vacant transport terminals, urban wastelands, and memorials; the busy background activities of air pollution sensors and water meters; the constant maintenance work required to keep mobile devices and data storage facilities active; or the security forces that maintain a state of readiness to respond to possible emergencies. Our primary interest lies in standby's capacity to create, regulate, and synchronize heterogeneous formations of people, things, natural elements, and technologies through the collective state of being prepared to be available. The contributions to this issue raise questions of agency, power, and resistance that particularly come to light when, for example, migrants and refugees stand by at Europe's frontiers, when marginalized populations' lives are held in limbo in urban peripheries, or when casual bystanders witness a wrongdoing without intervening. With these cases and others, the authors in this issue invite us to explore the sociomaterial compositions and political implications of what it means to never really shut down.

The editorial to this issue is an invitation to think with standby in its different facets and mutability. The first part explicates our definition of standby as an ambiguous term of organizing in|activity. As we worked on this special issue, a number of questions in need of addressing emerged: For instance, how does standby relate to notions of availability and disposability? Is standby a form of 'stuckness'? What is the difference between standby and 'waiting'? Collectively, we hope to offer new answers to these questions as discussed in fields such as organization studies, mobility studies, urban and infrastructural research, feminist studies of affect, and science and technology studies (STS). The second part of this editorial introduces our contributions, which illustrate standby's potential to be mobilized for a wide range of themes, including ways of dealing with contemporary crises, technological transitions, urbanization effects, and methodological questions. We conclude by offering three analytical dimensions that allow us to capture the ambiguity of standby: the *power* to have command over availability and disposability; the *relationality* of looseness and detachment; and the *temporality* of circular durations.

Available, but not in demand

Standby has long figured in human lifeworlds by way of ‘on-demand’ labour, a practice historically rooted in the agricultural and stevedore work of seasonal workers and day labourers and stretching to the precarious present whereby a broad segment of temporarily and (in)formally employed immigrants and displaced people around the world must take whatever short-term work they can find, whenever they can find it (Gill 2015, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010, Valenzuela 2003).

Writing about the socioeconomic implications of holding people and capital in such a state of constant availability, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels coined the term ‘reserve army of labour’ (Marx, 2004 [1867]). This notion refers to the experience of a ‘surplus population’ (Engels, 1993 [1845]: 149) of labouring bodies kept ready for deployment should capitalist demand increase.¹ Through scholars from Pierre Bourdieu (1998) to Judith Butler (2004), a multifarious canon of academic engagements has emerged, exploring both the politico-economic dimensions of precarity and the ontological condition of precariousness. In the context of work, this condition carries a sense of permanent ‘replaceability’ in relation to contingent, irregular, and uncertain work arrangements. Ultimately, what such academic engagements with standby as reserve illustrate is that *being available does not necessarily imply being in demand*.

This argument is also put forward in a growing body of literature that deals with changing labour relations and the increasing monetization of latent time in the gig economy context (Stanford 2017, Free 2020).² In this case, scholars are referring to the material, affective, and temporal enactments of

¹ Similarly, but with less focus on human standby, Martin Heidegger has offered the Rhine river in Europe as an example of the implications of a ‘standing reserve’, arguing that it has lost its poetics as a natural flowing watercourse by becoming a resource ready to generate hydroelectric energy (Heidegger 1977: 16, cf. Müller and Weir, 2018, unpublished).

² We owe many of the ideas developed in this section to David Bissel’s inputs, including an early draft on ‘Standby labour for platform mobilities’ (2018, unpublished), which he kindly shared with us in the course of this project.

‘disposability’ that gig workers experience by being under the constant threat that other workers (short-term) or technologies (long-term) will replace them (Straughan et al., 2020; Scholz, 2017). Achille Mbembe (2004: 374) has further examined the affective dimension of disposability from the perspective of working and living in African metropolises, arguing that such a condition is embedded in a ‘dialectics of indispensability and expendability’ that generates psychic states of vulnerability extending beyond work relations to impact every sphere of life.

‘On hold’, but not stuck

As feminist critiques have indicated, the affective implications of standby become apparent when one studies how conditions of precarity, contingency, and crisis linger on and intensify in the shadow of liberal capitalist promises for ‘better futures’ (e.g. Povinelli, 2011, Berlant, 2011). In lieu of struggling for transformation, people seem to cling to auspicious government policies of cultural recognition and the promise of urban living conditions or to labour rights, despite their apparent shortcomings and at times detrimental effects.

Studies following in Lauren Berlant’s tradition have suggested that the failed promises of the present create an affective sense of being stuck indefinitely in a ‘midway place between hell and heaven’ (Otto and Strauss, 2019: 1806). Understood this way, standby as ‘impasse’ normalizes the permanent threat of uncertainty (Berlant, 2011: 199), thus bringing an affective tension and nervousness into everyday life, much like the ‘white noise’ that pervaded in analogue television times (Berlant, 2006: 23). However, Berlant argues, the ordinariness of such affective unease can also function as a soothing rhythm, constantly lulling people into ‘a thick moment of ongoingness’, of transitions and adjustments to the current state (*ibid.*, 200).

Still, the seemingly endless succession of promises that ‘things will be better’ can be disrupted if one conceptualizes standby not as a state of being, but as a verb. As Laura Kemmer and AbdouMaliq Simone (2021) have shown, everyday acts of ‘standing by’ enable people to hold on to the promises of the present, for the possibility of these promises’ being broken ceases to matter when the act of standing by in itself becomes a tactical manoeuvre

that functions to hold the promisors accountable and to keep the very objects and aspirations connected to their promises in play (cf. also Färber et al., this issue). As such, while being on standby can exhaust a person having to cope with indeterminate futures, *standing by is not tantamount to being stuck*.

Thus, standing by can be understood as an activity embodying the strategies and potentials of waiting, perseverance, and endurance – a way of coping with detrimental material and social conditions. This way, a standby perspective raises awareness of the potentialities inherent in the ‘small agencies’ that inhabit a predicament of stuckness (Jokinen, 2016: 87), and it registers and takes seriously the ‘multiple aspirational moods’ that standby can create (Färber 2020).

Ephemeral, but recurring

If we consider the feeling of being stuck in standby as a prevalent condition generated in late liberalism, then we need to interrogate the ‘hidden politics of waiting’ as a permanent but undesirable condition in various social spheres (Straughan et al., 2020). For instance, human geographers and anthropologists have used the notion of waiting to describe a condition of being ‘locked in’ spaces of enclosure like the Gaza Strip (Joronen, 2017) or to highlight subaltern experiences of endless, ‘chronic waiting’ (Jeffrey, 2008) in refugee camps and other spaces of resettlement (see also De Genova and Müller, this issue). In contrast to waiting, however, standby concerns something more than a phenomenological quality, a transitory moment to achieve other ends, as it also depicts a metastable state in which competing tensions build the ground for transformation (Simondon, 2009: 6). This conception brings standby closest to a Bergsonian notion of *durée*, a ‘continuous transition in itself’ (Bergson, 2007: 2), which embraces a set of repeating and overlapping temporalities without necessarily incorporating linearity (Kühn, forthcoming).

Along these lines, Gisa Weszkalnys (2016) has developed a concept of ‘pause’ to explore a quality of capitalist time not fully captured by the Marxian notion of ‘reserve’ labour. Marx, Weszkalnys points out, considers pauses necessary for workers to ‘recharge’ or for soil to regain its fertility,

but these pauses must be kept brief to guarantee ‘the flow of production’ (Marx, 2013: 647; quoted in *ibid.*). In a study of today’s capitalistically organized oil industry, she shows how the pauses between periods of exploration, zoning, contractual negotiation, financial speculation, infrastructural provision, and the actual oil extraction are instead actively sustained. In this case, pausing organizes (extraction) infrastructures into rhythmic cycles of ‘dormancy, not death’, thus maintaining the sense of hope and extending ‘the promise of a profitable future’ (*ibid.*: 624, 633). In this light standby as mode of organizing realigns a multiplicity of temporal-material arrangements that emerge during periodical moments of slowdown (*ibid.*), thereby retaining its air of something fleeting and unstable, yet gaining a sustaining power through its recurrence.

Switched off, but not disconnected

As STS works suggest, the paused mode of standby can be understood as an ‘intermediate stage’, whereby a shutdown is not seen as the end of a process but rather as successive moments of failure that gain consistency through their repetition (de Laet and Mol, 2000: 240). This preliminary quality of pausing is also reflected in the technical understanding of standby as ‘plugged in’ but not receiving full voltage. Yet, as Annika Kühn (forthcoming) shows, in this case standby can be understood as an infrastructural state of *planned* detachment. During standby, the withdrawal, reduction, or impassibility of some components – that is, workers, energy flows, or techno-material elements – points to modes of (partial) disconnectivity without necessarily implying dysfunctionality (Candea et al., 2015; Harvey and Knox, 2015; Knox et al., 2015; Stäheli, 2013; Strathern, 1996). Detachment is considered an instant of operational and affective indifference, thus casting doubt on conventional understandings of relationality and organization. From the perspective of partially disconnected social formations that are still somehow available for each other, *being switched off does not necessarily mean being disconnected*.

In this sense, standby requires looking into practices of maintaining and managing ‘loose bonds’, not as a means of repairing, but rather of forging provisional arrangements that *remain* provisional (Kemmer and Simone, 2021; see also Färber et al., this issue). When failure and breakdown are

rendered constitutive of contemporary lifeworlds – as an analytical consideration of ‘constant decay’ (Graham and Thrift, 2007: 1) – standing by for the fragile and precarious becomes inseparably entwined with continuous maintenance work as an ordinary process of (re-)connecting heterogeneous and fragile compositions. Times of slowdown become a possibility – but not a requirement – for weaving and unweaving relations, for repairing what became diffused in operation or destroyed through usage and (lasting) standstill (e.g. Denis and Pontille, 2019; Jackson, 2014; Mol, 2008). In this sense particular types of standby resemble what Mol et al. (2010) describe as a practice of persistent tinkering – a careful practice of ‘holding together that which does not necessarily hold together’ (Law, 2010: 69, see also Baraitser, this issue).

The contributions: Organizing standby

The above analysis deployed a range of theoretical perspectives to illuminate the concept of standby by shining light on various aspects of standby as a mode of organizing. This disciplinary diversity is reflected in our contributions, whose specific questions and cases collectively form a concrete engagement that, as we will argue in the remainder of this editorial, offers a new understanding of standby in terms of its power, relationality, and temporality.

Standing by in crisis

Although the prevailing modes of ordering often mobilize the ideal of the restless neoliberal subject incessantly turning every externally imposed obstacle into new productive opportunities, our current COVID-19 pandemic experience has exposed many of the limits of such contemporary imperatives. It has forced some to put their bustling activities ‘on hold’ while throwing others into intense situations of work, care, and responsibility. A number of contributions to this issue explore the agentic and emancipatory qualities of standing by in crises. They ask whom, what, and how do we act when the conditions that enable acting are suspended, interrupted, or seemingly unfeasible? Crisis impedes and paralyzes; it destroys and kills – but it also reveals and uncovers, opens up spaces for transformation.

In the interview with Lisa Baraitser in this issue, psychosocial perspectives inspire our collective discussion of the notion of standby. Baraitser explores the implications of waiting because an external force, the pandemic, has impeded movement – a common, albeit often-unacknowledged experience connected to care work, even before pandemic times. Rather than see waiting as an undesired predicament, Baraitser focuses on the capacities and skills of affective detachment and withdrawal one cultivates when enduring or even intervening in times of crisis. Thus, Baraitser suggests, outwaiting a crisis can be more than a passive state; it can also be a watchful act, an ‘awareness of observing injustices of a (crisis) situation accompanied by a perpetual readiness or openness to allow for change’ (Baraitser, this issue; Baraitser, 2017).

In a similar gesture, Derek McCormack invites us to reconsider the supposedly passive act of bystanding, often seen as a form of witnessing injustice without interfering in it. Exploring the ethical dimensions of ‘standing by’, he suggests that the figure of the bystander defies any idea of standby as (individual) readiness to act; indeed, the bystander comes to represent the very failure of standby. However, by considering the act of standing by as a *scene* involving a particular moment enabled by certain conditions and capacities, we arrive at an understanding of standby as distributed agency. From this perspective, McCormack’s contribution acts as an ‘encouragement to think about the friction between an expanded conception of standby and a rather more bounded and more human figure’ (McCormack, this issue).

If the bystander’s reaction to crisis suggests paralysis or indifference, the terror and frenzied activity brought on by impending catastrophe capture the opposite. However, this type of response may only serve to drag us ‘deeper into the mud’, Martin Savransky suggests in his contribution, which engages with the question of how to inherit a devastated world. He proposes that a standby perspective rejects the normative valuations of activity and passivity inherent in contemporary understandings of progress. Pointing to the absence of an easy way out of the present environmental crisis and the increasing difficulty of even imagining a better future, he advises us to train our sensibilities, values, habits, and practices to ‘learn to stand by a

perhaps', to trust the insistence of indeterminate futures and to create minor openings for action (Savransky, this issue).

Unlike the contributions that consider a standby mode as a means of coping with an anticipated existential threat, Nicholas De Genova shows us that waiting does not stop once the extreme situation has arrived. Thousands of migrants and refugees in makeshift staging areas without adequate housing and food are living on standby in the Greece/Turkey border regions, ready to cross but prevented from doing so. Despite this waiting predicament, the 'subjectivity and autonomy of migration remains operative', he argues (De Genova, this issue). In fact, migrant activities have proven powerful in re-shaping, re-defining, and debating European borders and identities.

In sum, these contributions highlight the potentials of standby as a distributed mode of organizing with the capacity to reshuffle and shift existing sociomaterial constellations, to change discourses, and to transform the actual lifeworlds of those in need of change.

Standby technologies

Standby technologies like mobile devices or digital clouds promise to stay ever on and connected, to be ready to act when needed. They promise ease, improvement, and the secure feeling of a backup, but there is a trade-off: these technologies require time and energy, maintenance, and care to guarantee their users' existence. Consequently, users must organize standby to maintain technical 'support', a task that requires their constant vigilance as they seek to care for the technologies that promise their survival.

Lisa Wiedemann describes the intimate relation between diabetes patients and their physical connectedness to the battery-powered technologies that assure their survival. These complex more-than-human assemblages require maintenance practices that ensure the technology functions smoothly and prevent technical failure. Within those practices, subjects must exercise permanent vigilance to prevent potential breakdown. Far from freeing them from the responsibility of managing their disease, active digital technologies create new vulnerabilities requiring a constant state of alertness, because

attention is shifted ‘from caring for the body towards caring for technical devices’ (Wiedemann, this issue).

Alexander Taylor makes a similar observation in relation to big data centres, servers, and cloud storage. He considers these technologies to be materialized and built forms of standby created to ensure the continuity of data availability in the face of an ultimately inevitable technical breakdown, suggesting that such technical infrastructures emanate an affective quality of safety derived from their ‘backup’ function. While they require little action on the user’s part, data centre workers expend a tremendous amount of labour, care, and energy to maintain such ‘data prepping’ (Taylor, this issue).

Joe Deville’s article in this issue examines the narrow and precarious line on which the Swiss organization chiefly responsible for disaster preparedness operates in the absence of the catastrophes for which it is preparing. In the absence of such disaster, however, the preparatory work can turn standing by into futile waiting. Deville shows how anticipating a continuous threat of detachment from material, affective, and political bonds actualizes the practice of standing by as an act of relevance-making – a constant trial of reconnecting. Deville carefully explores this process, without ever resolving the tension this limbo implies.

‘Standby urbanization’

In ‘Standby urbanization’, Frank Müller follows Rio de Janeiro’s residents as they navigate through the unstable, sandy grounds on which their dwellings stand in the urban periphery. This muddy foundation serves as an analogy for the uncertain futures projected for these dwellers by Rio’s erratic urban governmental programmes (Müller, this issue). While these policies brutally create a manner of ‘dwelling in limbo’, Müller also shows how marginalized residents strive to challenge and contest the weaknesses of such programmes.

In the case of Mexico City, Anke Schwarz refers to a way of governing urban lives by anticipating certain futures. Raising another slippery and ‘fluid matter’ – water – Schwarz elaborates on the concept of hydraulic standby.

She unfolds a situation where water taps are finally installed in nearly every urban dwelling, but water is nevertheless not always available to run from them. In her ethnographic endeavour, Schwarz defines hydraulic standby as being formed by practices of sensing and buffering that establish the necessary precautions and preparedness to deal with the regular water shortages in the city.

Searching for the political potentials of spaces, Friederike Landau and Lukas Pohl juxtapose the ‘museum’ as a spatial formation representing standstill and order with the ruin as a formation with the potential to disrupt and thereby politicize urban configurations. Taking the example of the Ground Zero memorial in New York, the authors propose that ‘ruined museums’ can be used to highlight the intertwined relationships between politics and the political in urban spaces.

Capturing standby’s affectivity

The last set of contributions in this special issue experiments with capturing the affective qualities of standby. Linda Lapina proposes an inventive methodology for exploring the uncertainties and failures of standby moments by drawing attention to the ‘affective repertoires’ of standby. A spontaneous dance encounter between her as a researcher and a construction site billboard allows her to capture a range of ambivalent, heterogeneous affects that permeate the ‘active inactivity’ of a slowly gentrifying neighbourhood (Lapina, this issue).

Further seeking to transgress the textual form of academic journal writing, two of our special issue editors use two short films to examine the affective encounters of standby. Urban researcher Laura Kemmer and her colleagues Alexa Färber and AbdouMaliq Simone take the photobook ‘Suturing the City. Living together in Congo’s urban worlds’ (De Boeck and Baloji, 2016) as an invitation to discuss the effects and potentialities of (unfulfilled) urban promises. This ‘talking photobook’ (Färber, talkingphotobooks.net) can be found on *ephemera*’s website, appearing there as a resource for research and debate together with Annika Kühn’s short film *#standby*, jointly produced with Berlin and Hamburg-based video artists Friederike Güssefeld, Stefan Rosche, and Iwan Schemet. *#standby* is the end-result of the artists’

detaching and re-ordering of audio-visual material to explore the affectivity of cruise ship terminals on standby. The film guides the viewer through various resting infrastructures – from an entry hall to gangways – thus radicalizing the impression of social detachment. Yet, although the camera certainly rests on infrastructural fragments, it nonetheless captures and creates a pulsating tension – a humming – that becomes almost painfully tangible and near unbearable. This tension merges with the sound of pollution data (turned into music) and babbling voices from busier days, a soundtrack intended to denote the political scope of cruising as a contested global practice and to provide a cacophonous reminder of the ephemerality of stillness – and of standstill.

We end this section with the metaphor of the cruise ship terminal, of its liminal existence born of the regularly alternating states of lull and busyness. This circular rhythm forms the starting point for our conclusion, in which we search for openings for new beginnings that might emerge in organizing modes of in|activity.

Conclusion: Three propositions for an analytical framework

At once evoking an idle presence (the one who merely ‘stands by’, or the ‘bystander’), a metastable state of readiness to act (that which is ‘on standby’), and responsive abidance (‘I stand by you’), standby’s ambiguity might be reason enough to hesitate and pay attention. (Savransky, this issue)

Standby entails a multiplicity of registers through which activity and inactivity are fused into a single space. Building on notions such as availability, stuckness, transitivity, and detachment, we have proposed some entry points for creating an analytical framework that accounts for the ways in which loosely connected compositions are organized. Such a framework can enable us to conceive of power and control struggles that do not rely on a logic of ‘full operation’, and to consider the moral and ethical implications of standby, if conceived of as moving beyond the ‘intervention’ or ‘non-intervention’ binary. As an alternative to a conclusion, we have thus opted to propose three dimensions in which the ambiguities of standby come to the fore and become productive topics for further discussion: *the power of standby, the relationality of standby, and the temporality of standby*. Taking the

three together, we understand them as a set of starting points for analysing how the metastable state of standby depends on the patterning and organizational forces of ‘situational infrastructures’ composed of bodies, devices, and environments (McCormack, this issue, cf. also Berlant, 2016).

The *power of standby* points to situations that command availability. One such powerful mode of standby organizing involves the strategic control held over the fast-shifting and overlapping boundaries between being indispensable and expendable – for example, in forced resettlements (De Genova, Müller), biopolitics (Wiedemann, Baraitser), security governance (Deville, Taylor), and cultural politics (Landau/Pohl). This power dimension features in De Genova’s critique of how European border regimes decide over migrants and refugees ‘on the move’ and in Müller’s analysis of how (illicit) urban actors allow for the displaced residents of Latin American cities to move to a new housing complex, while others are kept waiting in perpetuity. In summary, the availability-disposability nexus of standby becomes at once a condition of preparedness for all manner of institutional and individual actors and a state of intense and permanent vulnerability: the longer these actors ‘stand by’, the more deeply they must fear for their relevance, as Deville (this issue) points out. In his analysis, Swiss disaster preparedness becomes an almost institutional perversion, a self-reproducing machinery of ‘prevention’ in danger of losing sight of where to move and which disaster to actually prevent.

However, De Genova’s and Müller’s case studies also show how the standby modality of populations at the periphery remains a resource for potentially outwaiting and outwitting the powerful actors that surround them. Migrants and refugees use the often long periods of standby to tentatively gather force, to self-activate and actively reorganize their lifeworlds, while displaced residents mobilize the sandy ground on which their houses are built to tactically denounce corrupt or criminal actors without overtly taking action. In this sense, the empirical case studies covered in this issue remind us of the importance of attending to the strategic use of standby and to explore in|activity beyond human intentionality. Thinking with standby as the power to command the availability and disposability of others, then, turns the simplistic picture of a passive and seemingly powerless waiting-for into a multi-layered process of distributed agencies.

Approaching the *relationality of standby* raises the question of how it organizes the partial and temporal detachment of some of its components while keeping energy flowing and thus maintaining a relation that can be re-activated on short notice. As our contributors have shown, holding more-than-human compositions in readiness only potentially makes them available. A continuous tinkering with individualized and portable technologies, as occurs with diabetes patients' relation to smartphone apps and transmitters (Wiedemann, this issue), does not guarantee successful activation. However, detachment does not equal disconnection; it rather designates a way of sustaining loose relations through human/nonhuman agency. In other words, if looseness functions as an *ordering principle* in standby, then practices of tinkering (Wiedemann, this issue), of filtering (Weber, 2020), of witnessing (McCormack, this issue), and of standing by (Färber et al., this issue), become a means of keeping collective and more-than-human bodies in pulsation (Kühn, this issue).

In this case, the loose relationality of standby neither generates indifference or absolute disconnection, nor suggests that everyone is a bystander or passive witness to our current conditions of socio-economic injustice and environmental degradation. As Savransky (this issue) states, the multiplicity of participants that compose an environment come to exist *in situ* and *in actu*, consequently rendering the act of staying available for others a situated practice that depends on other non/human actors, geographical locations, and temporalities. This is why McCormack's figure of the bystander essentially points us to the infrastructures that sustain 'tensed inaction', that hold together humans, technologies, and environments beyond their individual capacity to act. Standby as a relational ordering principle thus prompts us to ask how loose connections can manage (partial) detachment in ways that generate new and unexpected formations of collectivity.

The particular circular rhythm of standby – which differs from other conceptualizations of 'linear' progression or finality – points us to standby as a *temporal* mode of organizing manifest in repeated lockdown scenarios (Baraitser, this issue), as anticipation (Schwarz, this issue), as a slowing down of time (Lapina, this issue), or as absent presences (Pohl and Landau, this issue). Often these temporal modes synchronize populations and time-

spaces to make them controllable, predictable, and ready-to-work-with. The repeated duration of standby indicates how despite having a temporal quality of being-in-the-present, standby always also refers to that which comes next (Simone 2017).

This is where Savransky's (this issue) description of the *perhaps* resonates with a notion of standby as an analytical concept developed through an attentive listening to stories that are not stories of progress and that do not sustain capitalist practices of pausing-in-order-to-accelerate. Rather, in these examples standby modes establish a sense of (imagined) futurity that helps us to endure and to persist throughout uncertain times. Baraitser detects this kind of durational power within standby when she describes it as a coping mechanism in times of crisis. However, understood as a practice of staying with stuck time, standby as a mode of crisis intervention demands that one have the ability to manage anxious states of mind (Baraitser, this issue). Such an ability to cope with conflicting and amplifying energies is unevenly distributed in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, as repeated lockdowns, the pressure to cut relations, and job losses disproportionately impact those already hit hard by the detrimental effects of the capitalist economy. As such, standby – as a *temporality* of circular duration and endurance – might then become a moment for movement (ibid) – a way of staying with and claiming more just futures.

Although we are living in times infused with the imperative to be ever ready to change, to move on, and to reconnect, we offer this special issue as a collection of terms and perspectives for re-thinking standby as a state of having powerful command over availability and disposability, as a principle for ordering loose relations, and as way of approaching a repetitive temporal mode of metastable, yet durable quality.

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