



(<https://www.facebook.com/rootsroutesmagazine/>)

(https://www.instagram.com/roots_routes_magazine/)



Year XVI, n°51, May – August 2026 § DESERTING

edited by Bianca Basile and Anna Chiara Cimoli

I would rather not leave.

I would rather not.

I would rather not take part in the slaughterhouse game of visibility.

I would rather venture into the thick of the forest.

I would rather not say what I think, if it will hurt someone or many.

I would rather arm the revolution from within.

I would rather stay with my son.

I would rather slip away from the party. Bury my collages underground. Make war herbariums. Disobey.

I would rather build different instruments of struggle. Sew clothes, print, cook, distribute, speak, linger, whistle.

I would rather desert, actively and resolutely, in the thousand ways in which I can do so.

In Italian, the verb *disertare* (to desert) has at least a dual nature. In its transitive use it means to devastate, depopulate, impoverish; in its intransitive form it indicates abandoning a place or failing to go where one has a duty to be present, leaving the military body in which one serves and, figuratively, a cause, or even excusing oneself from fulfilling an obligation.

In English, *to desert* means to abandon something or someone: to render it deserted. Emptiness is the powerful image behind this verb: a great no.

Yet the life-affirming meanings of refusal can be many: it can be renunciation, but also deviation and renewed momentum. This call seeks to prompt them. It does not aim to define desertion – a field open to infinite political, ethical, philosophical, and social meanings, with just as many possibilities for visual translation. Rather, it asks what we can mean today by desertion, and what visual cultures can do to translate the forms this concept is taking in different contexts.

Cessation or political act, withdrawal or occupation of a space finally fit to inhabit, conscientious objection or a slow fading on the horizon because *I'd rather not*: this issue investigates how, at the crossroads of retreat and disillusionment, desire too can find fertile ground.

Otessa Moshfegh's novel *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018) sparked wide debate: is withdrawing from an asphyxiating flow of life through psychopharmaceuticals and sleep a form of counter-life, an anti-life, a revolutionary choice, or rather a renunciatory retreat hovering between boredom and privilege?

A different flavor characterizes the desertion of those who withdraw from one world to merge with another of their own choosing. This is the choice made by Polish biologist Simona Kossak (1943–2007), who transformed her object of study – non-human animals – into her chosen family by moving to the Białowieża Forest, without heating or running water. Here, desertion is not only from the social nucleus recognized as

primary – the family – but also a desertion of species and of “academic” conduct. From there, for thirty years, Kossak continued to pursue her research, host a radio program, and fight to defend the forest, like any true witch.

“Driven by atavism, I settled in the primeval forest. At a certain moment, I realised that I had crossed the cordon and found myself siding with trees and animals. So I speak on their behalf. I graduated from biology, but it was only the years of living in the woods that taught me to understand the language of animals. I know it so well that I should be burned at the stake as a witch” (Kamińska, 2015, p. 4).

In the essay *Disertate* (2023), philosopher Franco “Bifo” Berardi starts from two recent traumas: the effects of Long Covid and the Russo-Ukrainian war. According to the author, the most evident manifestation of the necrosis of the capitalist organism is the structural cracking of trust in holders of economic, political, and military power. Democratic governments, like authoritarian ones, cannot admit their impotence in the face of financial dominance, psychic suffering, and environmental catastrophe, “because they cannot do the only reasonable thing: renounce the unquestionable principle of economic growth” (Berardi, 2023, p. 196). Berardi identifies in what he calls the “last generation” (born at the beginning of the century) an “epidemic depression,” because it cannot confront capitalism and can only abandon the field of struggle. He believes that depression “will evolve into a form of desertion” through the “dissolution of the relationship between imagination and reality,” the “disinvestment of desire,” and the “evanescence of faith in the real” (*ibid.*, p. 242).

Abandon politics; work; the will to bring children into the world. These are radical recommendations, addressed above all to the connective and precarious generation, which can find a transformative potential in resignation. For this to happen, however, a colossal operation of re-signification is required:

“Re-signation, reassigning signs, re-signifying social life, changing the horizon of expectations. Focusing frugally on usefulness rather than on the abstract value of money; focusing on pleasure rather than accumulation; focusing on solidarity rather than competition. Bringing forth from the storm [...] such a psycho-cultural change is the intellectual task of the present. Only a minority seems willing to undertake such a shift. This minority can do nothing but desert, split off, separate its destiny from that of humanity, however *unthinkable* this may be” (*ibid.*, pp. 176–77).

Deserting and desiring meet where escape becomes a choice, an act of will.

This can mean looking at the present through the eye of history and asking whether and how to represent it, however unthinkable. It means fleeing the instinct to remove what burns and using it as fuel. It means illuminating the loss of many lives, deserting the instinct of self-preservation, deserting the unimaginable. In a time of crisis, we feel the duty to reflect on conscientious objection, refusal to conform, hairpin turns, re-generations, creative re-forestations. The call for this issue invites contributions that explore desertion, individual or collective, in its visual, art-historical, performative, and intermedial repercussions. Contributions, in any form (audio, video, image collections, texts, sounds...), may address, among other things, the following themes:

1. ethical and political desertion from state and para-state structures, from institutions born of the nation and nationalism, from military apparatuses, from any constituted system of power
2. desertion from a system of social values, expectations regarding roles, life stages, established knowledges, normative paradigms
3. desertion from environments and types of work that bind and suffocate, preventing living and thinking
4. desertion from a family, or from an idea of family, that does not belong to us
5. desertion from a body, or from an idea of the body, that does not belong to us
6. desertion as a condition for the affirmation of a creative, artistic, vocal self
7. desertion as a condition for the emergence of new communities, ways of thinking, and social pacts
8. linguistic, formal, visual desertions: secessions
9. taking a step to the side to gain momentum, to then leap a hundred steps forward.

““This child has already stopped screaming, but as soon as he was born he did nothing but cry and scream. Now, fortunately, he’s easier to raise.’ No, it wasn’t easy, it would never be easy. [...] Now it seemed easy because he had learned to control his secret terror that would last until death. Terror of finding himself on earth, like a nostalgia for heaven”. (Lispector, 2001, p. 135)



Hendrik Dacquin, Dancing in the desert. Peter puts on walkman via Flickr

Bibliography

Berardi F. B., *Disertate*, Timeo, Trento 2023.

Kamińska A., *Simona. Opowieść o niezwykłym życiu Simony Kossak*, Literackie, 2015.

Lispector C., *La scoperta del mondo (1967-1973)*, La Tartaruga Edizioni, Milan 2001.

Moshfegh O., *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Penguin Books, London 2018.



della
diserzione.
Dallo
sguardo
albertiano
al

di
Nodi
Magica
Saucò

viaggio
della
di-
immersivo.
dal-
di-
sguardo-
Giacomo
albertiano-
al-
Bruni
viaggio-
immersivo-
di-
giacomo-
bruni/)

di-
Natalia
nodi-
Agati
magici-
di-
natalia-
agati/)



Martina
Isernia

sottrazione
ri-
generativa.
di
Irene
Angenica



martina-
isernia/)

ri
generativa-
Riccardo
di-
De
irene-
Amici
angela
e-
riccardo-
de-
amici/)



NEWSLETTER

NOME*

EMAIL*

Ho letto l'informativa sulla privacy ed esprimo il mio consenso al trattamento dei miei dati personali in ottemperanza a quanto prescritto dal Regolamento UE 679/2016 (c.d. "GDPR").



Four-Monthly Magazine
ISSN 2039-5426

roots\$routes

is the research magazine of:

Attitudes_Spazio alle Arti

Associazione di Promozione Sociale

Str. Maggiore, 90 - 40125 Bologna

info.attitudesbologna@gmail.com

(mailto:info.attitudesbologna@gmail.com)

www.attitudes-bologna.com (<https://www.attitudes-bologna.com/>)

PRIVACY POLICY (http://www.roots-routes.org/?page_id=17509) © 2011 Roots-Routes (<http://www.roots-routes.org/>). All Rights Reserved