



## Code of Contact

Feminist Autonomous Centre for research

*"No justice, just us."*

We use the phrase 'code of contact' rather than 'code of conduct' (the more common term, indicating a set of norms, rules, and responsibilities or 'proper' practices and behaviours of individuals within an organisation), because what we wish to emphasise is our collective responsibilities for generating the productive, anti-oppressive, empowering conditions for contact rather than the individual responsibility for following particular rules or norms that have been decided from 'above'. We desire contact. We understand that discomforts, tensions, disagreements and conflicts come with all relationalities; we believe these are an opportunity to deepen relationships and discover wisdom for our collective growth and social transformation.

### **Why do we need a code of contact?**

We need a code of contact, otherwise known as our *community agreements*, to persist, resist, and flourish as an intentional, transformative community. As people living under racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy, we have internalised relations of power and habits of hostility, and carry on our bodies a multitude of violences and traumas (which we understand as unhealed anger and rage from experiences of violence and systemic oppression). We need each other's support to become reflexive, self-critical and accountable to ourselves and to others.

We want FAC to be a space that is welcoming to everyone, particularly to those of us who have been made to feel unwelcome elsewhere because of endemic racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, ableism... We need a code of contact because we believe in learning by being and doing with others, and that no one's learning process should take place on another person's back or through the reproduction of punitive and carceral logics. We can and must do better than to take out unhealed internalised oppression and violence on each other. We cherish our interdependencies and recognise that each of us deeply needs the other in community to heal and transform together. In a world where there is no justice, there's just us.

### **How did we co-create it?**

In 2021, we (the FAC collective) researched and read various codes of conduct and community agreements that have been constructed by abolitionist, Black, transfeminist

collectives committed to transformative justice. Drawing on our individual and common experiences in social movements, academia, and the arts, both positive and negative, we reflected on four categories around which we discussed and collectively composed this code of contact:

1. The common places that unite us as a group (the "why" of FAC);
2. The values and principles that are at the heart of our existence and motivate our visions and actions;
3. The things we want to avoid – unpleasant and/or unproductive behaviours that do not reflect our values but are not red lines; and
4. Red lines (harmful, violent, or abusive behaviours we cannot accept).

The code of contact was further discussed in 2023 by the FAC collective and we came to a consensus on the following:

## CODE OF CONTACT

### **COMMON PLACES (WHY?)**

- Because we/I need space to breathe
- Because we/I want to "take the risk to encounter one another. To share who we are."<sup>1</sup>
- To create and find connection with others, within a safe(r) space
- To enact a vision to co-create a safe(r) and brave(r) space for speaking loud and not alone
- Mobilising/organising in safer spaces where coalitions can thrive
- Coming together as a community
- Because it is our/my life's dream to unlearn the violences of certain pedagogies and ideologies and collectively create an "elsewhere" and an "otherwise"
- Because our/my "work", our/my subjectivity, and our/my embodiment should not be conditioned by or service a neoliberal logic.
- Because we need to contest the institutionalised borders around universities and research.
- Because systems of education and institutions of knowledge production are epistemically oppressive and we, instead, reach toward freedom: liberatory knowledge for everyone!

### **VALUES/PRINCIPLES**

- Horizontality and collective processes, "move at the speed of trust"<sup>2</sup>
- Openness and vulnerable honesty
- Autonomy and self-accountability
- Participation without structural or interpersonal barriers
- Empowerment for those who are systemically disempowered; working actively to dismantle structures that produce privilege by those who enjoy it

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<sup>1</sup> Prentis Hemphill

<sup>2</sup> adrienne maree brown

- Equality and equity—difference is a creative force of life,<sup>3</sup> allowing it to flourish
- Collaboration, in which everyone feels valued and values others
- Interdependence and collective care
- Solidarity (is our weapon)
- Understanding and deep curiosity—“we are each other’s business”<sup>4</sup> Softness, tenderness and radical compassion—being open to feedback as source of growth and part of our relationality, with ourselves and others
- Speaking with intentionality and deep listening
- Making it possible for others and oneself to ask for and receive help and (relational) care
- Asking and looking for enthusiastic consent, respecting the answer
- Respecting other views/for others: we are all precious and we want “a world in which many worlds fit”<sup>5</sup>
- Embracing multiple articulations; nourishing body multi-territoriality, non-linearity/temporality and subjective paths to analysis, because what integrates space-time is life
- Collective and relational un/learning from ‘mistakes’: making sense of, integrating and building from reflection into transformation and action
- Inclusivity and anti-subordination/anti-domination
- Unlearning, self-responsibility, and self-accountability: being committed to doing the work with oneself, and openness to support
- Unlearning to understand our contribution in terms of neoliberal notions of success and failure.
- Bringing feedback (perceived ‘criticism’) respectfully and with tenderness and compassion
- Humour is a revolutionary weapon, knowing when and how to use it is an art
- Embracing failure, trying again
- Respecting the circle and practising inclusivity
- Respecting boundaries
- Respecting the neighbourhood, its relationalities and its ecology
- Building linguistic excitement, through allowing and encouraging the untranslatable and the ungrammatical, while also exploring practices of linguistic care for accessibility and connection.
- No one is disposable
- Practising abolitionist love

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<sup>3</sup> Audre Lorde: “Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.” *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House*, (1979) 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Gwendolyn Brooks: “we are each other’s/harvest:/we are each other’s/business:/we are each other’s/magnitude and bond.” *Paul Robeson*, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation Mexico: “Many words walk in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds are made for us. There are words and worlds which are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds which are truths and truthful. We make true words. We have been made from true words. In the world of the powerful there is no space for anyone but themselves and their servants. In the world we want everyone fits. In the world we want many worlds to fit.” *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, 1996.

- Listening to each other with attentiveness and openness
- Practice listening in a collective manner

### **PRACTICES TO AVOID**

- Silencing and remaining silent about violence (both within and outside FAC)
- Reproducing norms and stereotypes about people (concerning appearance, ability, authority, experience)
- Ignoring mental illness and distress
- Reproducing hierarchies, including unspoken or implicit ones
- Objectifying people
- Using language/expressions that naturalise/reproduce oppression and punitive logics such as "call outs", cancelling and exclusion
- Engaging in passive aggression/microaggression
- Reproducing unconscious dynamics of power/privilege (trying to make them conscious objects of reflection and deconstruction)
- Unintentionally misgendering people (doing it intentionally is crossing a red line)
- Assuming people's experience or speaking for others
- Theory-phobia and anti-intellectualism
- Elitism and class-based exclusions
- Monolingualism, monoculturalism, ethnocentrism
- Maintaining a gap between theories and practices. Praxis (their synthesis) is a constant struggle
- *Telling us how crappy or unsafe Agios Panteleimonas (our neighbourhood) is...!*

### **"RED LINES"**

- Racism (anti-Black racism, anti-Roma racism, anti-Jewish racism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-Albanian racism, anti-Asian racism and all other forms of racism), ethnocentrism, homophobia, sexism, misogyny, lesbophobia, ableism, transphobia, fat phobia, and their intersections...
- Bullying, intimidation
- Insulting others
- Aggressive language or behaviour
- Identity policing, including but not limited to intentional misgendering or any other ascription of identity that does not respect self-determination
- Violence in all its forms, including but not limited to sexual harassment/sexualised assault
- Repetition of "practices to avoid" that evades self-accountability, redress and transformation of such harmful behaviours

### **Scope**

All persons, part of the FAC collective and community, including those collaborating within, and using the spaces of FAC, in Athens and Palermo, the summer school nodes, (and wherever else FAC may be), commit to abiding by this code of contact, holding themselves and being held accountable, as well as holding others accountable with a restorative mindset and through transformative approaches to justice (understood as 'just us') and accountability. The code of contact is shared with groups and individuals working at FAC; it can be read on the website and is posted in a visible location in the centre.

## **Complaints**

We are open to complaints. We refuse the logic of “you name the problem, you become the problem.”<sup>6</sup> FAC emerged not only from our dreams, but also from our complaints. In dominant institutions, complaint usually leads to ostracisation, being fired, leaving, or making an exit. We’ve had these experiences, and we don’t want to reproduce them in our intentional community.

FAC is an experiment in staging a collective exit from dominant institutions, and prefiguring a different relationship to conflict. We define conflict as feedback (information and ‘wisdom’ usually coming from someone’s harmful experience) that has not been heard (including if it isn’t able to be seen and heard) in a system that refuses to change. A complaint is usually this kind of information. We want this information because at the core of what we are working toward is change: social change, collective change requires that we work through interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, mindful of past experiences through which we acquired habits of understanding, reacting to, and dealing with conflict (not dealing is a way of dealing).

Conflict involves strong emotions, as well as active and often activated reasoning processes that connect, revive, or trigger embodied past traumatic events. Often, conflict has been bound up with intra- and interpersonal violence(s) or the threat of violence. Some people in oppressed groups have learnt to avoid it as a survival mechanism. This in itself is oppressive: being forced under the rug, behind closed doors, or into the closet. We believe in de-privatising our relationships, including when we’re in conflict. Learning how to collectively move through, and transform conflict is essential to remaining in community, and to making our community intentional, transformative, and irresistible to be in.

As part of the feedback practices that we collectively nurture, we listen to chatters. Chatters are things we tell people we can trust, when we cannot speak openly or publicly about conflict, harm, violence, and abuse.<sup>7</sup> Chatters sometimes lead to complaint, but more often than not, they remain between friends, in closed circles, or are communicated subterraneously. Chatters can be a strategy of survival after one shatters, and they can be powerful ways of enabling one to rebuild trust in others and remain in community after trust-shattering violence. Finding one, two, or a few trusted people to talk to can be a relief in even the most hostile spaces. We see it as a feminist practice to empower each other to turn our chatters into processes of conflict resolution, accountability, and transformation.

## **Restorative process**

Figuring out how to work through conflict collectively makes us a force to be reckoned with: *let’s be radically gentle and careful with each other, so that we can be dangerous together.*

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<sup>6</sup> Sara Ahmed

<sup>7</sup> Nina Fraeser

We are committed to move through conflict through a collective process that is intentional, bounded, mindful of our respective capacities, and that is grounded in a restorative mindset and approach to conflict that centres our belonging to each other, our interdependencies and relationalities. Conflict, in all its forms, including tensions and disagreements, is an opportunity to deepen our relationships, to discover each other, and to grow and transform together, in community.

To be able to listen and hear the feedback that is not being heard, we are committed to feedback practices that centre our abolitionist intimacies.<sup>8</sup> In a transformative community where we belong to each other and we 'are each other's business', we are committed to the idea that conflict belongs to community, and that we are all respectively resourced and capable of being "feedback friends" and "conflict advisors" who can support those impacted by harm as well as those who may have caused it, by supporting conversations and facilitating conflict transformation processes.

This code of contact is a commitment to self-responsibility and self-accountability,<sup>9</sup> that is, a commitment one makes to oneself in order to be able to hold and nurture it with others in collectivity. We can refer to this code of contact to to gently and tenderly "call in"<sup>10</sup> people or groups enacting behaviours that we want to avoid and to open up a conversation as a way to de-escalate a situation and occasion reflection with a view to engaging in an intentional restorative process with others. Acknowledging that love is accountability,<sup>11</sup> we all have a responsibility to de-escalate and reflect with people or groups who are crossing "red lines" and to support those who may request and consent to being accompanied in this process in a way that centres their autonomy, agency, and experience.

We invite you to approach and raise with members of the FAC collective behaviours you experience and/or witness that cross "red lines". We commit to addressing incidents and patterns of such behaviours in a manner that centres restorative approaches to conflict and through a mutually agreed upon process.

In case of complaint concerning harm experienced/caused, we commit to:

1. Discussing the complaint with the person bringing the complaint in a non-judgmental way, through deep and active listening, curiosity, and with radical compassion.
2. Centering the experience of the behaviour or situation of the person bringing the complaint and their choice in regards to the accountability process, which may include keeping the complaint confidential.
3. Whilst ensuring that we do not personalise or individuate the experience or complaint, redressing the behaviour with its author for the safety of the collective.

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<sup>8</sup> El Jones

<sup>9</sup> Mia Mingus

<sup>10</sup> Loretta J. Ross

<sup>11</sup> adrienne maree brown

4. Avoiding taking recourse to overdetermined binaries of innocence/guilt<sup>12</sup> and practices of blaming and shaming (as moves to innocence), in trying to work through harm and restore or transform relationships, beyond punitive and carceral logics.
5. Moving through conflict with slowness (“at the speed of trust”) and intentionality. Centring a restorative mindset by encouraging both those who cause and those who experience harm to participate with others in a restorative process (e.g. restorative circle<sup>13</sup>) through which we seek to hold space for the underlying emotions and needs in experiences of intra- and inter-personal violences.
6. Engaging in a process of sense-making, information from tensions and disagreements so that we can meet our shared needs for safety and community together.
7. Ensuring that no one is disposable by staying in relationship through upholding mutuality and mutual integrity as inherent to a restorative accountability process and centring multi-partiality and our interdependencies throughout the process.

In case of violence and/or abuse, we commit to:

1. Discussing the problem with the individual(s)/group(s) concerned with sensitivity, compassion, and non-judgment. We do not engage in evidentiary logics and will work to avoid re-traumatisation of survivors.
2. Discussing the possibility of a survivor-centred and needs-based life-affirming process of accountability regarding the behaviour in question and its impacts on specific individuals and the collectivity as a whole. The focus of such processes is understanding and acknowledging the harm the behaviour has caused, restoring/transforming the relations that have been damaged through the behaviour, and transforming the behaviour that resulted in harm. We might also seek outside support from experienced collectives to support and/or facilitate an accountability process.
3. Centring the genuine apology and self-accountability process of the individual(s)/group(s) whose behaviour has caused harm to others, we may need to review and possibly end our collaboration.

The code of contact serves to remind us of the values, needs, and desires that bring us together in collective action. It is a living, working document, embodying our ongoing learning processes and cumulative experiences, and is revised/amended to reflect our collective learnings.

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<sup>12</sup> Jackie Wang

<sup>13</sup> We are inspired by restorative justice practices of Indigenous societies such as Anishinaabe (see Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson), also adopted by intentional communities like Auroville.

## Further reading

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—FAC Collective  
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