

## Becoming Foreign to Oneself: Embodied Encounters with Patients' Written Memories of Mental Hospitals

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### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the ways in which an artist-researcher has encountered an extensive archive comprising Finnish individuals' written memories of mental hospitals through a corporeal approach. The process of reading these accounts and the making of a short film, titled *Here. Somehow*, based on selected excerpts from some patients' and visitors' writings and a site-specific choreographic process, forms the core around which insights spiral.

Attuning to the writings and physical sites through corporeality was enabled through the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), an embodied movement method. This article deliberates on the potential of corporeal practice, through movement, to transform, reveal, and mediate something that is ineffable. What does it mean to research hunches and fractures, to read, write and perform through one's vulnerable corporeality – which is inscribed in and transformed by SRT – to the extent that one eventually becomes foreign to oneself? A phenomenological approach with an interest in affects and atmospheres offers one way to discuss this unexpected phenomenon arising out of an encounter with writings and the physical locations inseparable from them.

### TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä artikkeli keskittyy siihen, miten taiteilija-tutkija kohtaa ruumiillisessa lähestymistavassaan suomalais-ten mielisairaalakokemuksia ja -muistoja käsittävän laajaan kirjallisen arkiston. Näiden muistojen lukemisen prosessi ja lyhytelokuvan *Täällä, jotenkin* tekeminen joidenkin potilaiden ja vierailijoiden valituista muistoista sekä paikkasidonnainen koreografinen prosessi muodostavat tutkimuksen ytimen, jonka ympärille oivallukset kiertyvät. Kirjoituksiin ja fyysisiin paikkoihin asettautuminen ja mukautuminen tapahtuu ruumiillistetun liikemenetelmän Skinner Releasing -tekniikan (SRT) avulla. Artikkelissa pohditaan ruumiillisen praktiikan mahdollisuuksia muuttaa, paljastaa ja välittää jotain sellaista, mikä on sanoin kuvaamaton. Mitä tarkoittaa aavistusten ja murtumien tutkiminen, että lukeminen, kirjoittaminen ja esittäminen haavoittuvana ruumiillisuutena, johon SRT on piirtynyt ja muuntautunut niin, että lopulta tulee vieraaksi itselleen? Fenomenologinen lähestymistapa ja siinä kiinnostus affekteihin ja atmosfääreihin tarjoaa yhden tavan keskustella tästä odottamattomasta ilmiöstä, joka syntyy kirjoitusten kohtaamisesta ja niihin erottamattomasti liittyvistä fyysisistä paikoista.

# Becoming Foreign to Oneself: Embodied Encounters with Patients' Written Memories of Mental Hospitals

Kirsi Heimonen

This artistic research forms part of a multidisciplinary research project<sup>1</sup> that has focused on the bodily, spatial, affective, and multisensory aspects of Finnish individuals' writings about their memories and experiences of mental hospitals<sup>2</sup> (Jäntti et al. 2021). Although I have written with and through them and made artworks based on them (e.g., Heimonen 2020, 2021a/b, 2022), something perplexing and poignant in these memories and my encounters with them continues to challenge me. They carry on haunting me. It is as if something that is hazy, indistinct, and inexplicable in the suffering, shame, and anxiety concealed in these accounts draws me toward them again and again. Rather than taking the memories as an object of study, I have felt it crucial to approach them in different corporeal ways, and to appreciate what is ineffable in them along with insights that unfold gradually and unexpectedly through a corporeal process, in which the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT)<sup>3</sup>, an embodied movement method, plays a pivotal role. This article focuses on an attentive reading of the written memories and the unfolding of the notion of atmosphere, especially in relation to the process of making a short film, *Here, Somehow*<sup>4</sup> (2021b), based on these memories.

Being in an asylum or mental hospital has carried and continues to carry a sense of shame and stigma, and hence is something that is shrouded in silence. For many patients, writing about their experiences was an arduous process. They reported taking weeks to do it, the burden of their lived experiences constraining the amount of time they felt able to write in one day. Some told us (the researchers) that we should not write about such experiences at all, as they were so painful: the whole theme should be forgotten. Others thanked us for undertaking research on this subject. Various thoughts, feelings and affects evoking particular atmospheres hover around the written memories and physical locations of the mental hospitals at different times. In total, the research material consists of 92 writers' memories, dating from the 1930s to 2010s.

The sensitivity of my corporeality, which has

emerged and been cultivated through somatic movement practices over several decades, including entering, unfolding and intersecting with this research process, continues to surprise me. Unlike the patients, I have chosen to adopt certain practices, and have become indoctrinated, especially by SRT and its underlying theory, which unfolds experientially, including its particular social-cultural body. Nevertheless, how corporeality attunes to, is affected by, or moves is in part unforeseeable: for example, how the spatiality of corporeality creates unknown domains related to the sites and atmospheres around one (cf. Heimonen 2020). Above all, SRT as a practice is not only a medium for art-making but has also become a medium of artistic research which enables communication between the obscure and clear and the known and unknown. Hence, the movement method continues to show its potentiality as well as its relation to that which can be articulated. The present research path, involving artistic actions such as the making of a short film and writing through corporeality, has been an exploration that has entailed both drifting and following clues, all part of the erratic nature of creative discovery (Borgdorff 2011, 57). On the whole, the encounter of two archives, namely the corporeal archive and the written one consisting of experiences of mental hospitals by patients, relatives, visitors as well as members of staff and their children who lived in the hospital area, is a dynamic one that overlaps and intertwines in the research process. Here, the archive of corporeality "as an endlessly creative, transformational archive" (Lepecki 2010, 46), rather than re-enacting a past dance, suggests throwing oneself into the unforeseeable transformative choreographic process of SRT in which the writings of patients, especially, have been inscribed in my corporeality along with the impact of the sites themselves in the act of choreographing. As I was reading others' memories, my corporeal archive was activated, especially through the attention and awareness I have practised in SRT,

and the written material started to make corporeal sense as a perplexing experience beyond rationality that transformed my corporeality itself as well as the emerging movements in the choreographic process of film-making.

## Atmospheric reading

The patients' writings, touching on bleakness, loneliness, abandon, isolation rooms, anxiety, disorientation, gratitude, side effects of medicines as well as descriptions containing the accurate and detailed description of the materiality and immateriality of the mental hospitals they were in, seized my attention. Without realizing it, those accounts inhabited the spatiality of my corporeality finding their dwellings in the corporeal spaces designated by SRT, such as the caverns in the body, the valleys formed by the hip, and in the window-like spaces in the spine. Above all, I was haunted by some fragments of memories that insisted on action. Perhaps the fact that I was one of the few who had had a chance to read the collected and archived material in the first place affected the act of reading and my corporeal response. It is noteworthy that the written accounts, amounting to over 600 pages of typed or handwritten text that impressed me on the first reading, have remained in my corporeality throughout and ever since the research process. Such instant corporeal attunement in reading has similarities with the description given by Anna Jones Abramson,

[t]here is often a feeling of catching up in attunement: it is a matter of suddenly paying attention, or having one's attention seized, but with a distinct affective and bodily charge. (Abramson 2018, 344)

While reading the memories, the porousness of my corporeality appeared to be immense; words swam into its finite and infinite spaces, and rather than being immovable, words and sentences continued moving, swinging, spiralling and floating in its spatiality. Furthermore, the location of my reading, the room in which it occurred, became a co-actor in the reading process, since its shifting light conditions, the shadows of the plants in and outside the room gradually moving on the wall, the view from the window, with its slightly changing landscape, or the sounds coming from

the stairwell all affected my reading, and hence the selection of the excerpts included in the manuscript of the short film. Each reading occasion was experienced as a unique atmosphere, in which I was captured by certain sentences and fragments of the memories, their rhythm, the tone of the words used and their textual space all inexplicably affecting my corporeality. The spatiality of my corporeality became a channel through which the sites and atmospheres depicted, along with the textual space of the writings and their surrounding environment were read in and through me. This experience reveals the potential of language to embody material sensuousness and to further illuminate how the relationships between language, (im)materiality and corporeality are intertwined, enriching alternative ways of communicating.

The first reading sessions took place during December, the darkest season in Finland, a time which increased the weight of the participants' lived memories. I was forced to read lying on my back on the sofa, since I felt too heavy to sit upright. In addition, the condensed text became alive, entering the room through the corporeal, its content and quality overlapping with the temperature and humidity of the room and with the dim light coming from the window and the shadows it cast. The dark winter season and its light conditions seemed to emphasize suffering and anguish, which pervaded the room. This process of reading has its roots in the practice of SRT, in which through the cultivation of suppleness, instant awareness and/or the spatiality of corporeality the imagery of the vocabulary of SRT becomes embodied, while the technique takes over, guiding perception to be aware of new realities (Dempster 1996; Lepkoff 1999). Furthermore, as a poetic practice (Emslie 2021, 2), the vocabulary of SRT refers mostly to such domains of nature as a field, rainforest, pool or cloud inviting one to surrender to the images, "to experience something larger than self," as Joan Skinner, the founder of the technique, describes it (Skura 1990). To immerse oneself in the images of SRT and being transformed by them (Dempster 1996; Skura 1990) as well as transcending the known self brings a kind of safeness to a state of disorientation. This merging into an image, a word or a site is about being fully present, being so attentive that the known I becomes obscure. All this has informed this research journey, in which I have exposed and immersed myself especially in patients' written memories of mental hospitals, a process

in which the borders between inner and outer, past and present, and the other and oneself have become blurred. I have also been mesmerized by the tone and quality of the writings. They were all lived through in the depths of the corporeal; they have felt special, precious, and needed to be handled with care. Gradually, in the research process, the known I has become vague, transparent and slipped away beyond the notions of the person and the personal (Heimonen 2020). Experiencing all this brought air, space, and an awareness of all that is around one.

It seems that the already cultivated notions of SRT, such as suppleness, maintaining a watchful state, shifting one's awareness or allowing it to shift (Skinner 2005) were transferred to the process of reading without my being cognisant of it at the time. Hence, the salient feature of this corporeal research process was that I did not myself choose my way of reading, sensing, and perceiving the written texts, but was guided and led by this corporeality, which cannot be totally controlled. I allowed this to happen and surrendered to the situation as if I were at one and the same time an attuned reader and a witness of the whole reading event. Or rather, had not the allowing of this already occurred decades ago when I became dedicated to the continuous practice of SRT? Embodied movement practices change one slowly and firmly, each guiding one in its special way of being in the world. The way this transformation takes place can be surprising, as in the act of reading described above. Importantly, such corporeal changes are irreversible, shifting and outweighing the rationalising self, which only later tries to figure out what has occurred.

Perhaps SRT carries something of its uniqueness in its awareness, attentiveness and allowing things to unfold, as described by Anthony J. Steinbock (2004, 39):

To describe modes of attentiveness in relation to affective forces is precisely to be reflectively attentive to attention in a unique way, not merely as a meta-reflection on what something is, but as an inquiry into how or the way in which things are given and our openness to them.

He also describes how to bracket "a self-imposition so as to let the phenomena flash forth as they give themselves [...] dispose ourselves to be struck *in which ever* way the phenomena give themselves" (Steinbock 2004, 39-40, italics original).

The above quotations don't apply exclusively to reading but also to moving, in which the known I steps back to allow the phenomena to appear. This forgetfulness of the self or self-imposition is allied to a phenomenological reflective attentiveness (Steinbock 2004, 40). The mode of attention I have embodied in practising SRT has thus required the momentary disappearance of the known I, or rather the intertwining of the known and the inconceivable. This has brought connectedness with and in the world, and instead of focusing on oneself, the relational aspect of one's existence, one's connection with the human and more-than-human, has become both meaningful and crucial. Above all, this emergent notion of the self has prohibited me from taking others' feelings personally and becoming distressed by them, despite allowing one's corporeality to be a carrier of memories. In addition, rather than an enclosed object, one's experience of corporeality has become open, incomplete, participatory and (even) more sensitive.

To submit oneself to the affective forces of the phenomena in atmospheric reading, as here, is to surrender to the words and sentences, and all that lies around and beyond them. Atmospheric reading has been described as follows:

Instead of attempting to decode or impose meaning, an atmospheric reader attempts to tune into a world in which causes remain foreign even as effects strike with vivid intensity (Abramson 2018, 353).

Here again, surrender to or acceptance of the event is crucial, as the main principle of letting go in the practice of SRT may lead to releasing of (muscular) tension and thinking patterns which would otherwise prevent one from perceiving how each moment discloses itself as well as transcends the known I (Heimonen 2022; 2021a; Emslie 2021, 12; Skura 1990). To supplement Abramson's description, acknowledgement of the alterity of the present writings is also to acknowledge their integrity, a stance towards them and a way of handling them that can be considered ethical. Or more accurately, both the written material and the reader become foreign, a moment of unfolding occurs, their boundaries become blurred, and, in their intersection, something emerges and hovers.

The reader's corporeal atmosphere shifts at each

instant as one reads, being affected by the overlapping, intersecting, and shifting atmospheres issuing from the memories of events, environments and spatiality experienced beyond what the words alone signify, and by the ambience of the room where the reading happens. Memories and experiences often relate to a specific time of day, season or a unique quality attached to their site or event; for example, the qualities attached to the walls, corridors or patients' rooms are suffused with gloominess or a sense of separation (Heimonen 2022). One extract from the memories conveys a sense of abandonment on returning to the hospital:

The rooms, corridors, hospital slippers, the locked cupboard, everything seemed to taunt me, "Here you are, you've failed again. You couldn't survive on your own. Now you're dependent on the help of others" (SKS 484, patient).

In this account, the environment is felt as almost hostile, illuminating the patient's relationship with it, how it affects the patient. Physical objects become alive and judgmental. While reading this fragment and encountering this kind of abandonment, the boundary of my corporeality becomes stiff and sharp, and my breathing becomes shallow. In contrast, the sense of spatiality of the surroundings described by the writer in the following fragment expands the boundaries of my corporeality: "I paid attention to the wide corridors that gave rise to a feeling of space when walking through them ... and that brought imagination into play" (SKS 0395, patient). The sheer variety of the memories challenges the reader-mover, whose attentive corporeality is suddenly confronted with huge changes as if riding on a roller coaster.

## Atmospheres in and around corporeality

The notion of atmosphere has been mentioned several times, but what is meant by it and how does it aid in illuminating the experience of reading writings about mental hospitals and mediating their content in movement in the form of a short film with a former hospital as its milieu? Etymologically, atmosphere, defined as a "gaseous envelope surrounding the earth," derives from the words *atmos*, meaning "vapor, steam" and *sphaira* meaning "sphere" (etymological dictionary, n.d.). It has been described as indeterminable, indistinct,

diffuse, neither subjective nor objective, as something "thinglike" and "subjectlike", as intersubjective, and as a "tuned space", namely a space characterized by a certain mood and thus something both spatial and emotional (Böhme 2017, 2, 5; 1993, 121). Overall, atmospheres relating to people and things are felt and experienced instantly in bodily presence (Böhme 1993; Böhme 2017, 26; Hasse 2011), and although one can react to their felt presence, it is impossible "to comprehend them through cognitive concepts" and thus "we only relate ourselves to them or live in them" (Hasse 2011, 57). Gernot Böhme introduces the aesthetics of atmospheres by focusing on how when something is present, the attention, in terms of locality and physical presence, is shifted (Böhme 2017, 26). This is also the case in my research project on the lived experiences of patients and my way of researching them. The ambiguity of the term atmosphere as something that subsists between subject and object, how it emanates from things and persons, and how, always existing in atmospheres, we affect and are affected by them, situates it in a hazy frame. Nevertheless, this indistinct nature appreciates each singular event and is noticed by the perceived, the perceiver and the unique sensitivities of corporealities. Above all, to sense the atmosphere the perceiver is corporeally present in a certain way (Böhme 1993,122; Grant 2013, 20–21). The present writings indicate that the patients – who were either forced into or on their own initiative sought admission to a hospital – were highly sensitive not only to the behaviour of the staff, such as tone of voice, but also to features of the buildings, such as the bleakness of the corridors. In addition, in the atmosphere as described above by Böhme and Hasse, the corporeal presence of the perceivers, namely the patients, was strong, as can be read in their descriptions.

Affects are closely related to atmospheres. Here, I consider affect as a prereflective encounter with oneself and an "other", whether human or more-than-human, through a lived corporeal awareness. Karen Barbour (2019, 128) outlines affect in the context of site dance as

[...] a transpersonal capacity by which a person is affected through or within their embodiment in relationships with people, sites and place, objects, sensations and activities, ideas and institutions and other affects.

To combine these, a crucial feature of a prereflective, transpersonal affect is that it occurs in an encounter, which in turn contains a lived embodied awareness in a specific situation. Practitioners of various somatic methods continue practising corporeal awareness and attention as guided by their own somatic tradition. Although the principles, ways of working, and theories underlying somatic movement methods vary, the sense of corporeality entails some kind of continuous awareness with the practitioner's surroundings.

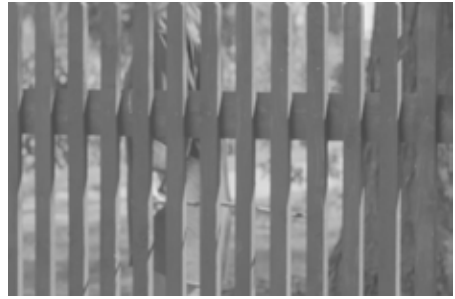
Corporeal exposure and a feeling of situatedness are important in experiencing affective atmospheres. Grant delineates how "the experiencing human is of the atmosphere", and "the experience of an atmosphere is a specific mode of the coming-forth of that body" (Grant 2013, 22). In this artistic research, for corporeality to become a spatial-temporal milieu for channelling affective events involving reading, moving and writing has demanded reiterating the releasing process until there is little left of the former I with its strains and demands. Corporeality itself has become an ever-changing atmosphere, a spatial formation which is constantly attuning to the surrounding materialities and immaterialities with instant readiness and acute awareness. This enables one to be fully present in each event, in which forgetting oneself as a determined subject in that instant may lead to estrangement from oneself. This shift towards becoming foreign to oneself through the ongoing practice of SRT, and hence in the different phases of the research process, has indeed been "the revelation of the experiencing body to itself" (Grant 2013, 22). The more sensitive my corporeality has become, the more foreign to myself I have also become.

## **Towards filming: Lingering and pausing in the sites of the mental hospital**

Reading the experiences and memories of some patients and visitors unfolded a sense of altered spatial-temporality and strangeness, which intensified in the process of making the short film, *Here, Somehow* (2021b), which was one of the results of the haunting force of those written accounts. The film's milieu was Lapinlahti hospital in Helsinki, a former (and the oldest) mental hospital in Finland, built in 1841. The atmosphere of the location struck me instantly with an inexplicable

power, such that during one visit, the lived experience of one corner in it disturbed my breathing to the extent that it was impossible to remain there a minute longer. The hospital felt odd as well as fascinatingly decayed, and at times something ominous hovered in its confines. Nevertheless, I visited its outdoor and indoor sites regularly over a period of one year, and the architecture of the building, its thick walls and long corridors as well as the surrounding park gradually became familiar. During the visits, lingering, sitting, leaning against the wall, wandering and dwelling on it as well as attuning to it and inhaling its different atmospheres in various locations during the different seasons allowed my corporeality to attune to the material and immaterial circumstances of the site as a whole.

Beyond everything, to surrender to one's surroundings and attuning to its atmospheres became a compositional process of dwelling in spaces. In that process, certain sites were paired in the manuscript with a selected fragment from the writers' memories, and for each of these pairings the nature of movement started to emerge at the intersection of the spatiality of corporeality and the textual space of the written excerpt. The phenomenologist Stuart Grant (2013) outlines a phenomenological-performative methodology for the understanding of atmospheres, and how the experience of being in a place can be illuminated by performing bodies. In a *Bodyweather* workshop on atmospheres, he outlined an embodied performative methodology for capturing, measuring and reporting on atmospheres. Emphasizing the body as the medium and site of the performative mode of enquiry and reporting, he spoke about how concrete, direct embodied experience of the environment is needed in creating the aesthetics of atmosphere and how performance is able to live and render both the time of the experience and the space performers "carry the original atmosphere" (Grant 2013, 24). In my artistic research, the so-called original atmosphere is layered and manifold, as I started by attuning to and immersing myself in others' lived atmospheres by reading their accounts and then attuning to the atmosphere of the mental hospital. In exploring and lingering in different sites within and outside the hospital, the memories of others were present in the sediments of that location, alongside the shifting seasonal and corporeal conditions. Together, these phenomena suggested a certain atmosphere that



Screen captures from *Here, Somehow*. Cinematographer: Raimo Uunila.

continued exerting its grip on me, and hence the short film may mediate something of the atmospheres related to patients' lived experiences of mental hospitals, of the quality and textual space of their writings, and of the physical locations to which they allude.

Pausing, spending time in the outdoor and indoor sites of a former mental hospital and inhaling its historical strata generated in me a state of non-possession due to the overwhelming impressions these made on me, along with the read memories already dwelling in and inhabiting the spatiality of my corporeality. In lingering and attuning to the empty rooms, staircases and the trees surrounding the buildings, the spatiality of my corporeality absorbed the surrounding sites and realities, and elements of a multi-layered history with its lost presences began to disclose themselves (Heimonen 2020, 39). By exposing and immersing myself to these sites and memories, the contours of my corporeality became blurred. All this intensified the sense of being foreign to myself, of having an alien nature as if I was situated between myself and various other absent presences, somewhere at the crossing point of shifting atmospheres. This sense of estrangement persisted in watching the film. It was as if I did not know the sequence of events or what the mover was doing in each site. Thus, I have not spoken of myself as the mover in the first person, but instead spoken of "the-one-who-moves". Nevertheless, sensing the materiality of the floor, earth, walls, and windowsills and paying attention to the gravity passing through my feet to the ground or the floor, I avoided the possibility of being entirely lost while lingering and moving in these places.

Furthermore, the sites and their materiality paired with the chosen fragments prompted the emergence of the site-specific choreography into which

sites such as the staircase or balcony were woven. The nature of this intertexture between the mover and the materials made it difficult to discern who or what is the producer of the work, since not only do the artist's sensibility and experiences inform artistic actions, but materials also have their own agency that both tacitly and explicitly informs those actions. (Rouhiainen 2017, 148). The various sites were so crucial in the process of choreographing that each site became a co-partner in movement (see pictures 1-8). Barbour describes developing a choreography as an ongoing dialogic process with the site, that is, a process in which site-specific choreographers use "sensory awareness and somatic methods that support slowing down and paying attention, acclimatization and acculturation, participatory observation and mapping" (Barbour 2019, 112). The way SRT is embedded in and continuously transforms my corporeality is the source of my choreographic exploration, which in this instance was prompted by the historical strata of the chosen sites and the fragments of written memories already inscribed in my corporeality.

The patients' written fragments originated from their stays in the hospital and its setting, the words emerged from the movements and encounters of their corporeality with their surroundings interwoven with affects and atmospheres. The writers of the memories sensitively experienced "spaces with vital qualities" which "are to be perceived in their instant totality" (Hasse 2011, 57). Perhaps the notion of being affected by different atmospheres is related to imagination, which David Abram (1997, 58) outlines as not being:

[...] a separate mental faculty [...] rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves



beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible.

Nonetheless, something of those atmospheres as spatial bearers of mood (Böhme 1993), and the writers' articulation of the presence of the environment (Grant 2013) had been informed through their moving and being corporeally present in it. This then passed into my (the reader's) corporeality, inducing a particular way of moving and choreographing. In the practice of SRT, hidden or unknown realities are available through the

imagination, which is released by letting go of conscious control and preconceived ideas, and thus images characteristic of SRT have the potential to communicate nonverbal information (Skinner et al. 1979).

In different phases of making the film, the manuscript was the basis on which all the important decisions, such as those related to editing or to the soundscape, including whether to have two different voices reading the text fragments taken from a variety of writers, were made. Since the writers had answered the call and mailed their memories to be read and researched, it was necessary to give them and other people living with mental problems something more than solely academic publications. Inviting them to the premiere was a somewhat alarming and risky undertaking, as although the short film is the outcome of a collaborative effort with other professionals, it only offers one interpretation of the written material. The site of the premiere was the auditorium of Lapinlahti<sup>6</sup>, and hence watching the film





was an unfamiliar experience owing to the audience being aware that the sites depicted on screen were situated in close proximity to where they were sitting, and thus productive of multiple atmospheres.

Perhaps the film offered its spectators an opportunity to attune to some of the patients' lived experiences of mental hospitals, as fragments of rarely heard individual views, fates and histories were embedded in the performer, site, sound and voiced text rendering them memorable. It is hoped that future showings of the film will prompt further public discussion on the current situations of people living with mental problems and illnesses, their care and the almost abolished former mental healthcare

system with an asylum or a mental hospital set in a park. From this perspective the film is also a socio-political act as it mediates something of how one affects and is affected by not only the human but also the more-than-human present in institutional care settings.

## Afterword

This article has spiralled and curved around the notion of atmosphere and how one can become foreign to oneself in a research process by exposing oneself to words, physical sites and all that is beyond them. Now, after re-reading the written memories several times and living with them for some years, while they continue to exist as if freshly imprinted in my corporeality, the unsayable and absent presence of the words, sentences, sites and corporeality have expanded, demanding further attention. The notions of affect and atmosphere in the collected memories and hospital sites resist control and an ending – something of the research





material continues to leak, affect, spread and have an impact. It is as if words were an obscure power without meaning or as if a hand was passing through the wall of a white corridor to gain a glimpse of another reality. The indeterminable and diffuse nature of the atmosphere captures into its sphere, certainties fade. Moreover, the articles and the short film have addressed only a modest part of the written material – much remains to be found both in the collected archive and in corporeality.

In this research project, I have repeatedly been asked what the cost of exposing one's vulnerability to the materials is and how I protect myself. Several years ago, I described how vulnerability is a method of communication, since communication is like a rupture or wound in both parties requiring fragility (Heimonen 2011, 188). Instead of armour, spatiality, availability, the suppleness of corporeality and the momentary disappearance of the known I have led to allowing affects, feelings, and thoughts to enter my corporeality, to dwell, move and continue their journey in artworks and writings, or to leak into unknown terrain. Life and research projects leave traces, marks, and scars in the corporeal, yet through moving and writing these marks can be erased, disappearing in the fractures in the text and infinite caverns of the corporeality. The notion of letting go posited by SRT strengthens and encourages me to continue this corporeal transformative journey.

Atmospheric reading relates to the way in which Virginia Woolf outlines reading as attunement resonate. On the first phase of how to read a book, she writes, "Wait for the dust of reading to settle; for conflict and the questions to die down; walk, talk, pull the petals from the rose, or fall asleep" (Woolf 1960, 242). This advice also resembles the process of attuning to the sites of Lapinlahti hospital, as I lingered there aware of the

overwhelming strata of atmospheric impressions. It was from these that movement gradually began to emerge in an encounter with a given site. In SRT, one's skeletal rather than muscular nature is cultivated, a process which seems to unfold a space between the joints and limbs, "a suspended relationship to gravity which can be likened to the suspension of a dust particle in a shaft of sunlight" (Skinner et al. 1979, 11). This image encourages to halt and experience spaces in one's corporeality that enable dust, as unknown and hazy, to linger in one's corporeality, suspending or displacing some previous ways of moving. The process of letting go also encourages "it" to move one, to experience being danced (Skinner 2005; Skinner et al. 1979, 12) and, eventually, to become foreign to oneself, at least momentarily.

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## Endnotes

- 1 In the research project, *Engraved in the body*. Ways of reading Finnish people's memories of mental hospitals, the other four researchers approached the same material from cultural and literary perspectives in the context of psychiatric history.
- 2 The material was collected and archived together with the Finnish Literature Society (SKS).
- 3 Henceforth SRT
- 4 The short film was shown as part of a lecture presentation I gave at the NOFOD conference in 2024.
- 5 I began the practice of SRT in 2004 and qualified as a teacher at the introductory level in 2017.
- 6 Lapinlahti is currently occupied by an organization working for and with people living with mental problems and has workspaces for artists and therapists.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Dr Kirsi Heimonen** (1955–2024) was University Researcher at the Research Institute of the University of the Arts Helsinki. Her background was in dance, choreography, somatic movement practices and experimental writing. Her late artistic research interests focused on the way in which written memories from mental hospitals transmit bodily intertwinement with the environment and the unsayable. Most recently she was involved in a textual choreographic project with Professor Leena Rouhiainen.