

DESIRE LINES IN ARTISTIC RESEARCH

EDITED BY LAUREN O'NEAL

ART THEORETICAL WRITINGS FROM THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS
24

DESIRE LINES IN ARTISTIC RESEARCH

EDITED BY LAUREN O'NEAL



Contents

Introduction:
Moved by Desire 9
Lauren O'Neal

Salmo trutta 15
Riikka Talvitie

Polarized Desire in the Lift and Grind of Irish Dance 25
Samantha Jones

Savoring Queer Histories, Feeding Queer Bodies:
Reflections on Cooking as Inquiry 37
Isabel Marie Barbosa

An Apparition of Lovely Things 51
Stephanie Misa

you will bring the strange you were 63
EL Putnam

Migrant Movement, Migrant Desire 79
Madison Treece, Ph.D.

Nothingness 93
Paul Landon

(Hommage à Debussy: En plein air) 109
Jung Mi Lee and Jon Sakata

A Lace Hat in a Puddle:
An exchange of letters with the past 121
Elina Saloranta

A Short Walk: Tracking the Shadows
of my Desire Lines Across the Research 139
Adesola Akinleye

Score for a More-Than-Human World 153
Adriana David

Terrain 163
Henna-Riikka Halonen

We Rape the Landscape
We Can See 177
Leah Poole Osowski

Toward the People's Cosmos:
Space Exploration as Civic Art Practice 181
Katarzyna Balug

Vertical Dreameries – Descending Desire Lines 197
Denise Ziegler

Yearning and Learning to See through Film 205
Bruno Guaraná

Na, na, na... we have been failing prolifically! 211
Or After the neuroprolix 'lens of in-tension':
shaping a guide for artistic unpredictability. 211
André Alves

Contributors 247

Introduction: Moved by Desire

LAUREN O'NEAL

You've probably seen desire lines: those worn, informal trails that traverse diagonally *across* the grass in a park, as opposed to the rectilinear concrete sidewalks *around* the park you are supposed to follow. Desire lines form as people traverse spaces where they are not necessarily invited, but where they are compelled to go regardless.

As a concept frequently cited in relation to urban planning, desire lines, also called desire paths or social trails, are "found all over the city and all over the world," notes Robert Moor. They can "appear anywhere people want to walk, where no formal paths have been provided. (Sometimes they even appear despite the existence of formal paths.)"[1]

Desire Lines in Artistic Research draws on the concept of the desire line to explore how curiosity and desire drive artistic research and practice, and what directions this inquiry takes. This anthology is a result of following a desire line. It stems from an urge to move along a diverse assembly of disciplines, including gastronomy, composition, and drawing, to observe how desire functions as both methodology and subject.

1 Robert Moor, "Tracing (and Erasing) New York's Lines of Desire," *The New Yorker*, 20 February 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/tracing-and-erasing-new-yorks-lines-of-desire.

For **Adesola Akinleye**, the desire for authentic presence in the act of research emerges as an early evening walk through London, where place and memory intersect. The movement of walking alternates with the long shutter time of photographing at dusk. The slow-gathering particles of light reveal moments of familiarity, uncertainty, and potential. Embodied knowledge also informs the research of **Samantha Jones**, who analyzes *sean-nós* Irish dancing through the interrelated aspirations of verticality and groundedness. The *sean-nós* dancer learns to move "with or against embodied paths determined by stylistic categories." But following desire lines is not an either/or choice: the flight of a jump is only possible with the counterforce of gravity.

Writing is another means of pursuing a desire line, one mapped through lines of text. **Elina Saloranta's** responses to letters by historic figures contemplate the conditions of women, the role of the artist, and the demands of social expectations. In this dialogue between past and present, Saloranta's methodology of direct address reveals how artistic research connects history to present-day concerns. Similarly, **Isabel Barbosa's** archival research into early AIDS activist zines advocates for cooking and sharing meals as radical, caretaking gestures within queer communities then and now. Barbosa's desire line connects historic materials with personal, contemporary experience to "orient ourselves toward the potential for fuller and more intimate practices."

At times, desire lines arise out of necessity. A line to (or around) something names it—gives it place and power. This attribute is experienced differently depending on who or what draws the line. **Madison Treece** reflects on the work of Chicanx photographer Delilah Montoya, whose photographic landscapes of the Tohono O'odham Reservation document the trails used by migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. "Orienting towards migrant movement

in this way," Treece observes, "demonstrates that migration is neither simple nor linear but rather transgressive, circumnavigating, and open ended." **Stephanie Misa** traces "Philippine diasporic bodies through their journeys of leaving and coming 'home'" through research into family letters, photographs, and stories about Franzis, who arrived in Vienna as part of the first wave of Filipino nurses in the 1970s. Misa observes that this governmental export of labor has created a dispersed 'elsewhere' home, where multigenerational threads of longing and memory link *here* and *there*.

Navigating unknown territories can be both invigorating and uncomfortable. In the poetry of **Leah Poole Osowski**, shape-shifting identities assemble and fragment via dusky obliques and diagonals across backyard lawns. Time vibrates, and in response, we reach toward what is just outside of our grasp. Ambiguity and longing animate **Paul Landon's** series of fragmented contour drawings, which evoke the return to a place transformed by a snowstorm. The experience reflects the challenge of sense-making through memory and perception, states of knowing which are continually "blurred out by the white whirling nothingness." **Jung Mi Lee and Jon Sakata's** *(Hommage à Debussy: En plein air)*, enlivened by Gilles Deleuze's proposal for a "sonorous landscape," assembles an ever-shifting constellation of atmospheres. Claude Monet, Paul Klee, and Franz Fanon meet Claude Debussy at the threshold of the visible, where objects coalesce and disperse through an interplay of images, sounds, texts, and traces.

Outside of the realm of the built environment, desire lines occur within systems, patterns of thought, and social structures, visible only at certain angles. **André Alves** offers an alternative to the relentless positivity of late capitalism, where failure is tolerated only when it leads to productive outcomes. For Alves, neurodivergent time and attentional capacities are assets. By channeling Samuel

Beckett to the tune of Ini Kamoze's "Here Comes the Hotstepper," failure becomes not a "retreat from agency but a reorientation of it." It makes space for difference through acts of attention.

How we attend—what compels us and how that shapes our identities—is also the subject of **Bruno Guaraná's** essay. Paying attention is a less visible but still powerful act of following a desire line within research. As a pleasurable, yet complicated, experience, it furthers knowledge as well as frustrates it. For Guaraná, Karim Aïnouz's film *Madame Satã* is compelling in part because its "meaning refuses to be contained by the corners of its frames." New insights emerge with each viewing.

Ecological desire—and the complex relationship between human and environment—emerges through the research of **Riikka Talvitie**, who followed the same river soundscape for a year, becoming attuned to the complexities of species migration and renewal in each season. Talvitie's compositional experiments, made in response to natural phenomena and ecological crises, attempt to "make audible the slow processes of nature that are silent or barely perceptible." **Adriana David** considers the "the interconnectedness of natural systems" in her dance score based on milpa, an indigenous agricultural practice of growing corn, beans, and squash togther (the "Three Sisters") to maintain healthy soil. There is mutualism within biodiversity: the role of the human is not to domesticate, but to *support*—to become "integrated into the network." In this scenario, desire is distributed, each part of the system an interdependent contributor to its success.

Time and cycles of growth equally inform a future where technology, organic matter, and more-than-human agents enmesh and transform. **EL Putnam** reflects on a collaborative project about an origin myth for a data center. Here, the desire line is embodied within the researcher. At the proposed site, an abandoned plastics factory

in Killala, Ireland, Putnam traces "steps over ground recursively, acting as interface between map, model, abstraction, and dirt on the ground." **Henna-Riikka Halonen's** essay "Terrain," unravels and reconstitutes the conventional frameworks of knowledge, being, and materiality through an "intertwining of the aquatic, the technological, and the post-planetary." An always-becoming space, one where time is elastic, is destabilizing. It is also invigorating and full of potential. Rather than "losing a point of reference, space begins to grow."

By following the paths suggested by desire, artistic research proposes other ways of perceiving and interpreting the world. In three vignettes, **Denise Ziegler** rewrites desire lines as vertical propositions, expanding their spatial and poetic capacities beyond the horizontal: "Vertical desire lines work with *and* go beyond the physical laws of matter." In this way, they enable us to envision the more "imaginative topographies" that everyday objects and experiences can offer. Inherent in desire lines are notions of territory and potential. **Katarzyna Balug** examines the role of imagination in the history of U.S. space travel and conquest. In contrast to the mandate of "explore, exploit, experience, settle," civic and artistic imagination rewrites the narrative of our future, both on earth and in other galaxies. "Space," Balug writes, "can provide an opportunity to untether from the past, imagine anew, and consider how to co-exist with our familiar and unfamiliar worlds and with each other."

Desire Lines in Artistic Research examines how we encounter, negotiate, and reimagine our conditions and respond to the directives these conditions propose. Desire compels us to move—to pursue knowledge and meaning—in distinct, yet often unanticipated ways. Within artistic research, following desire lines requires paying attention to desire, even when we don't know where it leads. My hope is that these essays generate productive detours in your own thinking and making.

Works Cited:

Moor, Robert. "Tracing (and Erasing) New York's Lines of Desire," *The New Yorker*, 20 February 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/tracing-and-erasing-new-yorks-lines-of-desire.

Salmo trutta

RIIKKA TALVITIE



To access the video/sound files and read the Finnish version of this text, visit:
https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3788623/3788624

As a composer, my artistic and research desires and goals are mostly related to sound. What matters is how things and phenomena resonate. Observation of nature is also done through the sense of hearing. The current natural phenomena, the various ecological crises, are challenging in this sense, because they do not in themselves make any sound. How to make audible the slow processes of nature that are silent or barely perceptible?

The changes in the climate are not in any way similar to the music or sound composed or organised by humans. Since the methods and techniques of composition that I have carefully learned are no longer usable as such, new ones will have to be developed.

The question of what the seasons sound like looms in my mind. I create a working plan that, in the language of the composer, could even be called a serial. I decide to follow the same soundscape for a year. I choose the small river called *Mätäjoki*, near my home in Helsinki, as the recording location. I tie the time of recording to the rhythm of nature; the recording always takes place at sunrise. My documentation starts in August 2022, and my goal is to have two recording days per month for a year, 24 in total. In addition, I document the morning sessions by videoing and photographing.





When I'm making recordings, I always have a strange feeling that something is happening on the river. The gravely sand and neat stones of the riverbed seem too regular to be shaped by nature. I set out to investigate further, even though the question is not related to my compositional project as such. I find out that a local fish association is restoring the riverbed with the aim of attracting trout to spawn. Volunteers from the association have been creating spawning holes for trout and paving the riverbeds to create suitable habitats for the fry.

The sea trout (*Salmo trutta*) that rises in *Mätäjoki* is classified as critically endangered. As the fish spawning run is interrupted by a natural fall, *Strömberginkoski*, a separate brook trout population (*Salmo trutta fario*) is found in the upper reaches of the river.
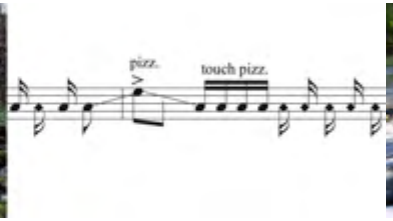
Trout are migratory fish, some of whose offspring live permanently in freshwater, while others migrate further out to sea. Once born, the trout fry spend a few years in their home range before becoming migratory smolts. Once they are large enough, the smolts migrate to the sea, where they live for several years to reach maturity. They then return to their natal areas to spawn. To spawn, the female finds a suitable gravel site. It buries the eggs in small mounds of gravel in the spawning nest, after which the male fertilises the eggs. Spawning takes place in autumn.

As the seasons progress, weather conditions change, sometimes gradually and sometimes suddenly, the amount of water in the river varies and the wind adds noise to the soundtracks. Sometimes the flowing water freezes from the surface as the sound booms under the ice floe. In winter, I pay particular attention to flooding, which occurs several times between Christmas and February. The water rolls down the riverbed, melting all the snow and ice. The peace of winter is interrupted at several times. Despite the floods, trout eggs develop throughout the winter in the shelter of the gravel banks. The incubation period lasts 6–7 months, and finally the trout fry hatch in spring.

The soundscape of the rest of the environment also changes throughout the year, especially as sunrise comes later and later. Birds begin to sing, machinery whirrs and cyclists speed by. Spring is here.







When I set myself goals at the beginning of the recording process, I have no idea of the challenges I face during the year in terms of weekly and daily rhythms. The early sunrise interrupts my sleep so much that I can no longer sleep. I have to plan my schedule around the recordings. Some mornings I curse myself and my whims. On the other hand, my older child remarks enviously in the midst of the school rush: 'I wish I could just record the stream'.
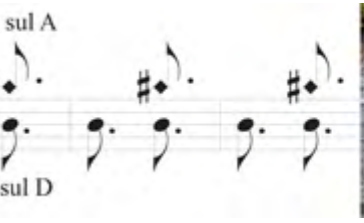
The question of what instinct drives trout to return to their home river is not fully resolved in biology. It is known that trout become imprinted on their home river during their first migration, after which the trait becomes permanent. Some researchers consider olfaction to be an important orientation factor, while magnetic fields and ocean currents have also been considered to have a guiding influence. The return to the place of birth can be long and arduous. The remarkable upwelling tendency causes fish to go upstream and jump over small obstacles. In this context, one could say that their desire is exceptionally strong.





In August 2023, the year will be over. But I will not stop my project there, I will set myself new goals. I move to make recordings with the hydrophone from the sauna of the *Tali* Allotment Garden to the idyllic fall, *Strömberginkoski*, where water cascades three metres down the cliff.

During the recording process, it seems again that something is going on. This time my attention is drawn to the increasing number of social media updates about politicians visiting the waterfall. I go to investigate and am confronted with a recent decision by the Helsinki City Council stating that a winding fishway, some 130 metres long, would be built in the park of *Strömberginpuisto*, bypassing the waterfall. A fishway is a structure along which fish can reach the upper reaches of a river through various natural or artificial barriers. Structurally, fishways come in a variety of forms, from fish ladders to fish lifts. This fishway in *Strömberginpuisto* will be constructed in a natural way so that the beautiful waterfall will not dry up, even if part of the water is diverted through a bypass.













I borrow a hydrophone. I've never used one before, which is why the first few takes sound like rehearsals. I record the sound of the current simultaneously with a normal microphone on the surface and a hydrophone underwater. The sound of water recorded from the air sounds familiar and multi-dimensional. It contains space. The underwater sound pulses granularly, closing off the outside world around it. How do recordings become music and instrumental gestures or textures? I agonise over my question and ask a musician, a cellist, for help. We make various experiments and gradually we find material that converses fruitfully with the sound of the flow.

In my research of the *Ströberginkoski*, I find another decision by the city council, which to my surprise states that the lower reaches of *Mätäjoki* will be protected as a nature reserve of *Tali*. I learn from the nature reserve's management plan that *Mätäjoki* is a good foraging area for bats. The area has been home to species such as the ground bat (*Eptesicus nilssonii*), the water vole (*Myotis daubentonii*) and the little bat (*Pipistrellus nathusii*), as well as the earwig (*Plecotus auritus*), whose echolocation sounds are certainly fascinating from a compositional point of view. The silent nocturnal animal, the chalk squirrel (*Pteromys volans*), also lives nearby. In addition, invasive alien species such as giant balsam (*Impatiens gladulitera*), sulphur



balsam (*I. Parviflora*) and white bear's bane (*Convolvus sepium*) have spread and are abundant in places. Perhaps my next interest will be in one of these species, even if their life is rather noiseless.

I have used these field recordings in several of my compositions, such as *Cycle of the Year* (*2024*) for renaissance flute quartet Bravade and multimedia. The image of a sea trout's desire to go upstream ended up in my work *On the Impossibility of Interspecies* (*2024*) for



baroque cello and live electronics. In the composition, the cello uses a looper to build a polyphonic texture, as if modelling underwater currents in which trout swim upstream. The material I composed for the cello alternates with recordings of the rapids.

For me, the project is not over yet: I would like to see trout spawning in *Mätäjoki*. On the website of the local fish association, I have been following the brown trout's rise in the river and their spawning progress. During the spawning season in October and November, I have been sneaking along the riverbank with a headlamp and trying to hit the spot just in time. As I have not yet succeeded, I do not have a photograph of the trout spawning to include here. I will continue to observe next autumn.

Works Cited

https://helsinginperhokalastajat.org/matajoki/
https://virho.fi

Janne Salomeri: "Meritaimenten paluu Mätäjokeen"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95Q1PVziVmw

Loikkaako lohi Ounasjokeen? Vaelluskalojen palauttaminen Kemi-/Ounasjokeen. Esiselvitys. Lapin ympäristökeskus, Rovaniemi, 2002.

Helsingin kaupunginhallituksen päätökset:
https://paatokset.hel.fi/fi/asia/hel-2022-002564
https://paatokset.hel.fi/fi/asia/hel-2023-013282

Polarized Desire in the Lift and Grind of Irish Dance

SAMANTHA JONES

Dance styles, by the very nature of being in a "style," demand certain choreographic vocabularies: ways of moving through space and time that indicate to both dancer and viewer that this belongs to a larger category of dance. As dancers, we are enculturated to these stylistic categories, often being taught in terms of "right" or "wrong" technique. Opposition comes through difference and then correction.

"up hop back tip down heel step step heel tip down stamp"
(*fieldnotes July 17, 2021*)

Irish dancing is an interesting case study for considering how opposition and difference in style can inform ways of being in dance.[1] Or in terms of "desire lines," ways of enacting dance which move with or against embodied paths determined by stylistic categories. That is, if a dancer were to pursue a "desire line," when is that choice aligned with the formalized technique and when is it opposed? In Irish dancing, there is an inherent desire for both grounding and lift—a tension embodied through and around technique, expressed with and against the music.

"There is a lift in the first beat that makes the second beat short. We should remember our lines—long straight legs. Not about height."
(*fieldnotes, October 13, 2011*)

The most well-known form of Irish dancing is Irish step dancing. This is the style of *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* fame. This is the style that millions of dancers in Ireland, North America, and Australia (and beyond!) compete in, adorned with glittering dresses,

1 I am indebted to my teacher and mentor Kieran Jordan (choreographer, dancer, Polarity Therapist), whose guidance in dance and life are embedded in this essay.

curly wigs, and spray tans. General stylistic features: lifted, pointed, rhythmically dense, athletic, choreographed. Performed with a rigid upper body, no arm movements, straight hips, but overextended turnout. Dancers manage to get a lot of height in their jumps and kicks, without the use of pliés or other shock-absorbing movements.[2] Over the last several decades in competitive contexts, the desire to achieve greater height and more dense complex rhythmic footwork has meant the codification of music tempos, sometimes at speeds much slower than a musician would play in non-competition contexts. Tempos are crucial to how a dancer embodies rhythmic verticality. As one of my interlocutors in Boston remarked, "In step dancing, a lot of our steps are really gravity dependent. You jump to a certain height for the upbeat and then for the next beat you are landing, and that is the noise you are making. It must be on the beat. You can vary that a little bit by jumping higher or not as high, but you can't beat the acceleration of gravity."[3]

Another style of Irish dancing called *sean-nós* (trans. "old-style") gained more widespread notice in part due to rising general interest in Irish culture amid the Celtic Tiger economic boom and specific interest in Irish step dancing following the spectacular enchantment that *Riverdance* created during the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest. Unsurprisingly, *sean-nós* dancing is often described in opposition to step dancing: close to the floor, relaxed, improvised, flat-footed. Though it retains the same rhythmic complexity and density as step dancing, the ethos of *sean-nós* dancing requires subservience to musical speeds selected by Irish traditional musicians in live casual music-making gatherings called "sessions."

2 Gratitude to Kate Spanos for this insight.
3 Interview, October 23, 2017.

Sean-nós dancers, including myself, are drawn to the style because it feels close to the music as well as close to the floor. Rather than requiring athletic prowess, the style demands less of a full body exertion than does step dancing (though, to be clear, *sean-nós* dancing is still demanding). We can break away from lines, long straight lines of the leg, of the torso, of the movement across the floor, of the up and down, in *sean-nós* dance because it is more "free." But we are still hitting the ground. And to create that precise rhythm, you need some lift. The pull against gravity gives us that percussive solidity. The verticality of *sean-nós* dancing is softer and more subtle.

"Sean-nós isn't about precision it's about expression and doing what you feel is right. So it seems to result naturally in a desire to align with the music."
(*fieldnotes, October 16, 2011*)

"sean-nós is low, there is weight on the heels."
(*fieldnotes, February 3, 2012*)

I danced competitive Irish step dancing in my youth but set that practice aside to pursue my musical ambitions. As an adult and researcher, I returned to Irish dancing, inspired by what I saw and heard as the "musical dancing" of *sean-nós.* I had never before seen a dancer play music with Irish musicians in such a casual setting. Indeed, despite my childhood musical aspirations, the music I danced to was really of no concern. In *sean-nós* I saw collaboration, improvisation, musicality, and individual expression. These were all things I personally had not experienced as a step dancer. Though to be sure, many step dancers indeed experience musicality and other positive social feelings from step dancing, my research with dancers in the Boston metropolitan area affirmed that it was desire

to dance musically and with music that often drove their pursuit of *sean-nós* dance.

"fitting the steps to the phrases is satisfying and the more in time, the more you can fit into that groove, the more satisfying it is"
(*fieldnotes, February 15, 2012*)

The contrast between stylistic technique and ways that dancers think about movement itself in step dancing versus *sean-nós* dancing raises interesting questions about the tension between up and down within the broader category of "Irish dance." And similarly, our desire to move a certain way may or may not align with our desired visual or sonic output. The sonic is primary, though the visual is important, too. We are dancers, after all.

But the tension between the styles and the binaries that are thus established are extrapolated and sometimes conflated into larger themes of "tradition" versus "modernity." A traditional/modern label applied to step dancing/*sean-nós* dancing respectively occludes the subtleties and transformations over time that are happening within each dance form, but still carries cultural weight among practitioners and observers. Traditional/modern, grounded/lifted, improvised/choreographed, collaborative/performative. These binaries and the desire to move in one direction or the other, or even to explode these binaries, are frequent undercurrents in my many years of research into these dance forms.

Though dancers would agree that *sean-nó*s is more grounded and close-to-the floor than step dancing, both share the motivation of lift: be it lifting upright to dance or lifting the spirits of people nearby. "Lift," according to musicologist Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, comes from rhythmic variation or accentuation that moves with and against an underlying motor rhythm. Such rhythmic ornamentation

creates a feeling that invites dancers to the floor.[4] Dancers in turn offer their own rhythmic variability, working within the tune's framework while offering new ideas. Step dancers will draw from a repertoire of choreography to fit a step to a tune; *sean-nós* dancers will draw from a repertoire of "moves" to compose a rhythmic phrase that interacts with the tune.

"keep our style consistent—either high all the time or lower to the ground." (*fieldnotes, November 30, 2011*)

Despite opposing aesthetic orientations—of step dancing to be "up" and *sean-nós* dancing to be "down"—it is difficult to separate "lifted" from "grounded" in either style, as both are required even when one dominates. This might be a problem of verticality.

"the kicks were higher, the movements more precise, the muscles tighter" (*fieldnotes, September 10, 2018*)

The dance scholar Anne Cooper Albright suggests that the virtuousness of verticality found in professional dance forms reflects a more general attitude toward upward social and economic mobility. Calling out the "hegemony of the vertical" with a poignant analysis of disability and dance, Albright suggests that being down, on the floor, falling, subsuming to gravity is not morally wrong but can be a form of release from the social, cultural, and political systems that equate verticality with upward mobility, capitalist wealth accumulation, and a meritocracy built on ableism, racism, and sexism.[5]

4 Ó Súilleabháin, Mícheál. "The Creative Process in Irish Traditional Dance Music." In *Musicology in Ireland*, edited by Gerard Gillen and Harry White, 117–30. Irish Musical Studies 1. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990.

5 Albright, Ann Cooper. "The Perverse Satisfaction of Gravity." In *The Aging Body in Dance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Nanako Nakajima and Gabriele Brandstetter, 63–72. London: Routledge, 2017, 64.

I am continually thinking about how oppositional styles of step dancing and *sean-nós* dancing interact with issues of bodily cultivation, beliefs in how physical movement shape or reflect the morality, virtuousness, patriotism, and identity of a dancer. Irish dancing in both forms are intimately tied up in the Irish nationalist project, from the early twentieth-century fight for independence where dancing was used as one of many practices to demonstrate the culture and thus civilization of the Irish people, to the demand for regional representation of Irish cultural variation in the 1970s by the Gaeltacht community of Galway. The "up-ness" of Irish step dancing, in particular, is rooted in the history of the dance first as a mode for instructing the rural Irish populace in etiquette and comportment, and later as a way for "Irish colonial subjects to outwardly demonstrate their moral and political stature."[6] In what J'aime Morrison describes as a "physical nationalism" rife with "feminine iconography," step dancing was harnessed by cultural nationalists in the early 20th century to demonstrate Irish identity and Irish political strength. Morrison's contribution to this narrative is to explore how Irish movement is a kind of geographical emplacement; how movement is not only a manipulation of space, but also a negotiation of territory. When this territory is colonized, the ground is ever changing, precarious and continuously reconstituted. For Morrison, Irish movement (and by extension dance) negotiates this shifting ground; "...our steps ground us, but movement also constitutes its own ground."[7]

6 Morrison, J'aime Blair. "Mapping Irish Movement: Dance - Politics - Literacy." PhD Dissertation, New York University, 2003, pp. 36–37.

7 Morrison, "Mapping Irish Movement," p. 23.

The Rise & Grind (jig)
Jump kick hop back 2-3-4
Jump kick hop back 2-3-4
Jump kick hop back 2-3-4
Out hop back, hop back 2-3-4

The first step a beginner learns is the "Rise and Grind": to rise is to lift your leading leg up high (kick, out); to grind is to beat the balls of your feet against the floor in alternation (hop back 2-3-4)—the grind makes a ground. Irish dancers might be obsessed with the ground, their shoes, their rhythm. We cannot be too picky about flooring because so few floors will accept us, but we have our preferences and these usually get borne out through shoes. Hard fiber glass soles, leather soles, taps, soft shoes, rubber soles even. Does the shoe get you the sound you want? The desired sound: is it loud? Bright? Dark? Dense? Hollow? It depends. A good floor makes all the difference. In Ireland, flagstone floors in the 19th century have been found to have pots or large animal skulls buried underneath. Folklore says that these hollow objects improved the resonance of the floors for step dancers.[8]

Can the ground be a "sensible object" for Irish dancers? According to Tomie Hahn and J. Scott Jordan, "Sensible objects are particular things that extend the body/self as a vehicle for expanded sensory means, to also enable a kind of informative sensory loop, and to creatively express one's self in that reality (e.g., through text,

8 Ó Danachair, Caoimhín. "A Pot under a Kitchen Floor." *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 60, no. 192 (1955): 128. O'Reilly, Barry. "Hearth and Home: The Vernacular House in Ireland from c. 1800." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 111C (2011): 193–215.

drawings, music, movement)."[9] We Irish dancers experience an information sensory loop when we hit the ground and launch away from it. The ground is required to make the essential sound that defines our craft. It sounds against us (our feet). It sounds with us. It sounds because we move up and away from it.

In step dancing, the up and the down is prominent, even in the words for the choreography: "down" generally means to hit the floor with a weight shift, a land of the ball of the foot, the drop of a heel. "Up" can mean a kick, a leap, a lift of the foot behind, the raising of a knee. Or "up" is implied by the "jump" the "cut" the "hop."

"cut 1-2 / switch turn 2-3-4-5 / switch 1-2 1-2 / step (L) kick out / step kick out / up jump out down / up out down / hop 1-2 1-2 / run 2-3-4-5 / step over the bridge / hop turn 2-3-4-5 / jump-cut jump out / cut down"
(*fieldnotes, August 29, 2016*)

If the music is played in such a way as to create the feeling of "lift"—if dancers are compelled to get up and dance—that lift is carrying them up and into the thick of the music, whether it is a competition stage or the rugged floor of a pub. The up and down of *sean-nós* is so individual, so variable that it is hard to make a broad statement about how much a dancer requires up movements to execute downward battering of the floor. Some dancers almost seem to glide, their feet so close to the floor you cannot see a gap. The only up/down clue is in the sound.

9 Hahn, Tomie, and J. Scott Jordan. "Sensible Objects: Intercorporeality and Enactive Knowing Through Things." In *Intercorporeality: Emerging Socialities in Interaction*, edited by Christian Meyer, Jürgen Streeck, and J. Scott Jordan, 267–88. Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 268.

"tip into the drum helps you get into the air and reminds what heel to land on and so what will be the strong beat"
(*fieldnotes, September 12, 2020*)

Whether they are minute and almost imperceptible or if they are vast and almost inhumanly high, the lift between movements enables the next landing. Not just the force, but the timing is entangled with gravity.

"Jump (*out & together*) *and stamp stamp* (*hop and lift left up*)*"*
(*fieldnotes, July 15, 2019*)

It is in these in-between moments that the lift is hardest, moving within a grounded rhythmic pattern or connecting between links of patterns. Lifting up off the ground requires a force coming from behind, from nowhere almost. "Shuffle hop back"—the hop in the middle can be sneaky. To be in good rhythm and to lead into the next (probably another "shuffle hop back") you need to get off the ground, make a distinct sound with the landing, and not lose momentum.

"connection is always to lift into the next thing"
(*fieldnotes, March 17, 2021*)

The desire to be vertical is almost too obvious in step dancing. The tight straight torso creates a line that shoots upward. My childhood dancing teacher used to say that competitors wore curly hair (or wigs) because bouncing curls made it look like the dancer was getting higher. She also praised the ability to get "air time" on leaps, something best achieved with the difficult and easily disastrous move called the "birdie"—the front leg lifts out straight and high, and in a jump the back leg lifts up to tuck under the buttocks and lands back down again. Dancers are in flight in this moment.

But the ground calls us down.

Grounded. Lifted. Up. Down.

Lift. A feeling in the music that compels a dancer to their feet.
But also. A good dancer dances close to the floor. On the head of a pin.
In time.

Lift from behind, to extend your leg straight. How high can it go?
Lift in time with the music. Land with rhythm.

Can we be close to the floor and lift?

Savoring Queer Histories, Feeding Queer Bodies: Reflections on Cooking as Inquiry

ISABEL MARIE BARBOSA

During early grad school, while researching the potential for pleasure as an ethical imperative for the queer community, I was introduced to *Diseased Pariah News* (*DPN*). Created by Beowulf Thorne and Tom Shearer, *DPN* was a 1990s dark humor zine made both by *and* for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). As a means to combat wasting syndrome, nutrition and eating became central to the care needs of the community and so Thorne, under the pseudonym Biffy Mae, birthed "GET FAT, don't die!" (GFdd!). Featured across all eleven issues, the column typically included a collection of recipes alongside advice on topics ranging from how to combat nausea to pantry stocking while on welfare. Through GFdd! Thorne emphasized the importance of addressing not only the unique nutritional needs of the community, but their desires—for flavor, for indulgence, for bodily pleasure—too. This prioritization of the embodied pleasure of one's own community, set up as an act of care and valued immediately alongside survival needs, has stuck with me in the years since, percolating in the back of mind.

GFdd! was an origin point for my own (re)oriented practice. In the fall of 2023, I found myself offering to care for a transmasc friend in the days following gender affirming surgery. As soon as the thought *what to feed them?* crossed my mind, I found myself flipping through the pages of *DPN* once again. *What about these recipes?* There was no hesitation when I asked if they were interested in turning this queer caretaking endeavor into something with a little more bite. In an exercise in both cooking as inquiry and community caretaking, I prepared a selection of recipes from GFdd! for this friend as they recovered from top surgery. These dishes, conducted alongside other care work, demonstrate a turn toward the spectral histories of my queer ancestors. Top surgery represents not only a transition to new life—life that centers euphoric embodiment—but a means of survival. The inability to transition poses very real risks to the survival of the

trans community, and, much like PLWHA deserve both hedonic and bodily sustenance, the trans community deserves the same. To orient myself towards both my ancestral and contemporary community with intentionality is a radical act—one dictated by my own identity.

It is through both our identities and our mediums that things—ideas/objects/people/places—are revealed to us. Not only does my queerness constitute my interpretive lens—it makes certain objects, certain histories available to me. Through my own identity—as a queer, trans, disabled person—I found myself turned, phenomenologically, towards *DPN* and its spectral histories. I felt the desire to reach through the pages, towards my ancestors—my community. Luckily, one of the attributes of gastronomy is that it necessarily invites us to reach across disciplinary bounds and, in doing so, encourages methods like cooking as inquiry—allowing us to extend a hand across linear divisions of time and space.

Derivative of the Indo-European word *twist*, *queer* is suggestive of a divergence from *straightness* (Ahmed 2006, 67). This intrinsic relationship to *straightness* imbues queerness with immutable spatiality—spatiality that orients us towards/away from, situating us in space and dictating how we occupy that space. Just as all bodies orient themselves in space by differentiating between left and right, up and down, the queer body (and mind) orients itself by differentiating between—turning towards and away from objects/ideas/people/paths that differ from heteronormative phenomenological orientations. This turning toward queer artifacts constitutes deviation from established institutional paths—deviation which, in turn, leaves its own marks, generating alternative paths that subvert systemic expectations and cultivate counterpublics (Ahmed 2006, 19-20).

In turning toward queer artifacts, queer spectral histories are made available. They beckon to us—resonating outwards from

artifacts, generating a "music of awareness" that calls for us to reach our hands across temporal and spatial boundaries (Crowell 1999, 100). While they gesture to concrete histories, they leave us with only traces of those histories. This can be illustrated by the oft used phenomenological object of the table, whose full form we conjure up mentally even as aspects of its physical form remain obscured by our particular vantage point (Ahmed 2006, 152-153). Food ghosts are one type of spectral history, emanating from food objects and calling us, often, to consider the daily life of the past. They are "the long-gone essences within cooking pots, cupboards, and soup bowls that once sustained [people]...and that might now bring them back to life" (Elias 2012, 15).

I extend the concept of food ghosts to the recipes and food columns found within queer zines. These zines, like *DPN*, carry the echoes—the spectral histories—of their creators, communities, and counterpublics. These echoes are felt, most deeply, when the recipes on the pages are enacted by the reader. Through embodied engagement, the recipes act as memory-joggers, shaking ancestral knowledge awake in our bones: "words can't explain what you must learn using your hands and nose and mouth" (Heldke 1992a, 219).

Embodied methodologies can give form to these spectral histories. Food, in particular, calls for embodied engagement, and there is strong interdisciplinary precedent for such a research modality. Lisa Heldke first posited the question *could it ever make sense to think of cooking as a form of inquiry?* as she explored cooking as an anti-essentialist, self-reflective, and interactive form of investigation that merged the theoretical and the practical (1992b, 251). Her work represents an ongoing project to demonstrate the value of food and rituals of foodmaking as sites of knowledge. The longstanding Cartesian dualist model, which centers the mind/body distinction, has led to a knowing/doing dichotomy, not only creating a contrast between

the two, but also elevating knowing over and above doing. Heldke's model also rejects the strict subject/object dichotomy, instead favoring a communal conception that emphasizes the relationships between inquirers and inquired (1992b, 253). She highlights a phenomenological notion similar to that of Sara Ahmed, pointing out that our choices of *which* recipes to enact are "not simply the result of personal whim combined with tradition," but rather of our larger positionality and individual context (Heldke 1992b, 260). We might say that certain recipes, certain foods, certain utensils are revealed or obfuscated by our moral-political-sexual identities.

Jennifer Brady formally put forth cooking as inquiry as a method prioritizing embodiment, relationality, and reflexivity—one that allows for an exploration of identity and power (Brady 2011, 322). Informed by autoethnography, collective biography, and dialogues around embodiment, it seeks to "add layers to the typically disembodied practices of social research that have long overlooked the body and the mundane rituals of foodmaking as sites of knowledge" in order to illuminate how we perform identity and how we might re-story ourselves in "more fulfilling, relational, socially just, [and] wholistic ways" (Brady 2011, 322-324). For Brady, cooking as inquiry revealed the areas of fracture between her personal and professional culinary situatedness, conjuring up questions of how she might integrate those positions. Despite Brady's lack of clarity around the specific implications of cooking as inquiry upon her own work as a dietitian, we can infer some potential benefits by looking towards other manifestations.

Because it is not a prescriptive method, but a reflexive one, cooking as inquiry provides fertile ground for experimental interdisciplinary work. Its ability to shed light on "the processes of identity performativity and embodiment" makes it a particularly generative modality for queer studies (Brady 2011, 331). In "My Cypriot

Cookbook: Re-imagining My Ethnicity," Maria Antoniou explores the oft problematic interactions between her ethnicity and sexuality (2004). It is through her cooking that Antoniou can reimagine herself as *both* Cypriot and lesbian. By way of embodied reflexivity, she is able to examine her reactions—illustrations of "the operations of power [working] at the level of [her] own body" (Burns 2003, 235). In my own endeavor into cooking as inquiry, I found myself coming up against questions of gendered roles in caretaking—I had such resistance to wholly embracing the role of caretaker, as a then femme-presenting person caring for a transmasc friend—*despite* having an enthusiastic desire to care for them. It was through this caretaking—feeding them some of their favorite dishes, vacuuming their apartment, washing their hair—I came to realize it was the reinforcement of a feminine identity that I bristled at, not the caretaking itself.

Cooking as inquiry allows us to engage with knowledge *cultivation*, treating it as "creative and conversational engagement with the environment, both past and present, rather than a masterful, linear process of discovery and accumulation" (van Wingerden 2022, 3). It is this feature that situates it in such a place of promise for both fields beyond food studies *and* for the interstitial spaces *between* fields. We can, for example, see variations utilized in the work of public historians. In 2011, Lucy Worsley and Marc Meltonville brought to life an abridged version of the dinner that King George III ate at Kew Palace on the evening of February 6, 1789 (Collins 2011). Meltonville and his team selected five of the twenty-one dishes listed in the original menu. They had no recipes from King George's kitchen, so, referencing contemporaneous records, they tested various techniques for the dishes. *How was the meat cut for the steak pies? What does "At a Distance from the Fire" mean? How do we simulate the cooking spaces of the past in the context of our modern kitchens?* It was through their embodied research that they began to unravel the answers to these questions. By

cooking—and *tasting*—they came to understand, more holistically, this culinary history.

Experimental archaeology presents similar opportunities for embodied culinary research. Through dynamic laboratory research methods, it employs the study of contemporary material culture and technology to formulate analogies that can be used to understand human behavior in the past (Metheny 2016, 230-231). By doing so, these forms of experimental data can supplement traditional archaeological methods that rely on "'static' byproducts of past behavior" (Metheny 2016, 232). Given their past and present prevalence, bread and alcoholic beverages are particularly well studied; endeavors that have provided "much-needed understanding of *how* these processes worked—a counterpoint to the tendency of many archaeologists to 'add nutrition and stir' without considering the physical, chemical, material, and sensory processes that are involved" (Metheny 2016, 233). These approaches move beyond replication, allowing researchers to explore relationships between subsistence, technological change, cognitive advances, material culture, identity formation, and boundary maintenance. Both of the above examples offer promise for filling in gaps in the historical and archaeological records, respectively.

Recipes, in particular, can be a means of building subversive paths. They require testing, which in turn necessitates acts of repetition. This embodied repetition carves out paths that orient us in new or different directions (Ahmed 2006, 56). Through her approach to ritual cooking, Sharadha Kalyanam communicates with her kin "in a way that transcends physical barriers and space/time" (2021, 10). She conceptualizes her daily cooking practice as a ritual of recalling the generations of women who raised her "as creators and holders of cultural knowledge, (re)producing a living and growing archive" through which she enacts both self and mutual healing with her

nuclear family alongside resistance to settler-colonialism (Kalyanam 2021, 11). Her practice incorporates both Laura Harjo's "kin-space-time" envelope—a way of understanding memory not solely as a mode of recall but as a means of guidance that exists beyond the constraints of settler time—and Patti Duncan's "critical remembering"—"a process that slowly creates change through the small, simple acts from the everyday" (Kalyanam 2021, 11).

Looking to scholars like Kalyanam, I can begin to pinpoint the potential for cooking as inquiry in the context of queer studies. Kalyanam argues for cooking as both a praxis of healing and of resistance, and her words incapsulate GFdd!: "This archive is embodied love and resistance and draws on intergenerational cultural memories and knowledges that cannot be contained by or understood within dominant, normative space/time" (Kalyanam 2021, 12). GFdd! constitutes a culinary archive through which my queer ancestors communicate their vision of queer embodiment, care, and resistance.

Michael Hernandez and David Sutton explore what it might mean "to speak of cooking memory as residing not in our heads, but in our hands" (2003, 31). Positing "the use of both the body as tool and food and technique as history," they explore the leakiness of bodies as it manifests through a willingness "to mix one's substance with that of the food one is preparing" (Hernandez and Sutton 2003, 33-34). The embodied, rhythmic process of cooking calls us to extend our bodies and our senses as we reach across time and space to reproduce tradition, history, and the ghosts of our ancestors (Hernandez and Sutton 2003, 36). It is common to utilize familial modes of culinary and caretaking knowledge transmission, but this became inaccessible to many queers, as we lost a generation to AIDS. While I cannot literally share a kitchen with Biffy Mae and learn her stories, I can treat her column as an opportunity for "embodied apprenticeship" (Hernandez and Sutton 2003, 37).

Losing an entire generation has had immeasurable impacts on the queer community. We've grown up adrift, the paths carved out by our elders hidden beneath their bodies. It is artifacts like *DPN* that begin to (re)orient us towards the possibilities of existing in our queer bodies and queer communities. By enacting the recipes of my ancestors, I turn towards not only the physical object of the zine, but also objects of thought, feeling, and aspiration. I turn toward both my internal experience as I enact these recipes and my subsequent reflexive contemplation directed at the experiences of these ancestors. To enliven these dying pariahs is to act in resistance. When I enact one of Biffy Mae's recipes, I am calling her into my body and allowing her to speak through me. It is this embodiment that is crucial when dealing with the fields of food studies and queer studies. Both involve a particularly inescapable body-presence that calls us to "bring body to theory" by exploring our own situated embodiment (Burns 2003, 235). There is a "leakiness between oneself and others" that necessitates a prioritization of the "process of inter-corporeality" (Shildrick 1997, 179; Burns 2003, 232). As I share Biffy Mae's dishes at the queer community potlucks I attend, I pass along her care—her radical culinary love—to our community—a community still fighting for its survival.

Following Biffy Mae's recipes served as the initiative to create new possibilities for myself and my community. In the earliest iteration of this project, I was not only able to nourish the body of my healing friend—I also fed our relationship. As we ate together, we talked with increasing intimacy. The food—and the care—unfurled us. My gender spilled out in their kitchen—new layers of masculinity revealed themselves as I cooked sausages, pork chops, and chicken for the first time. Across slices of key lime pie and chocolate torte, I bore witness to some of their first moments of embodied gender euphoria. Much like the recipes on the page transformed as we

translated, cooked, and ate them, our embodied selves transformed, blurring together and reforming with each bite.

This experience demonstrates the embodied hermeneutics of cooking. We do not encounter things and depart unchanged, instead we move through the *hermeneutic circle*: We encounter A and interpret it based on our positionality. Through this encounter it has an impact on us and transforms us. We now return to A changed and encounter it from a new position—the cycle persists. As a consequence of this circle, we, as cooks, are able to transform the very meaning within the ever-changing context of a recipe's manifestation. We confront and explore possibilities that the recipe's author may never have considered and, through this, come to understand that truth—and experience—is something plural (Valgenti 2013, 5). It is, in part, this embrace of multiplicity that orients my approach to the matter of evaluative criteria.

The sentiment that "we get preoccupied with rigor, but are neglectful of imagination" has guided my approach to cooking as inquiry (Bochner 2000, 267). Heldke argues that to take an overly formalized approach to foodmaking as analysis is to further legitimize the knowing/doing dichotomy, which fails to "*allow for* the interesting things [about recipes and cooking] to emerge" (1992a, 213). She instead reconceptualizes cooking—traditionally relegated to the land of "hand work"—as "head work" or a "knowing" activity, while highlighting the limitations of remaining within this dichotomy (Heldke 1992a, 212). I find that this pushes me further from the desire to construct anything resembling prescriptive criteria by which to analyze cooking as inquiry.

Brady offers a selection of questions that might be utilized to orient and evaluate such a project. Her guidelines serve more as a point of reflection for the researcher, rather than as a fixed, external framework by which the academy may judge the work. While this allows for

a good-faith development of experimental and imaginative, yet reflexive research practices, I can't help but return to Arthur P. Bochner's belief that "the drive to [construct criteria] is rooted in fears about the legitimacy of our work being dismissed as not scientific, objective, or rigorous enough to count as research, and that the effort to define criteria springs from an impulse to rationalize and assert authority" (Brady 2011, 330). Criteria can be the "very means we ourselves created to contain our desire for freedom and experience, a way of limiting our own possibilities and stifling our creative energy" (Bochner 2000, 267). Andrew F. Herrmann furthers this argument against rigid criteria, pressing for alternatives that allow for knowledge production to extend outside the walls of the ivory tower and embody the notion of the 'personal as political' (2012). It is here we, once again, come to up against the notion of practice as praxis.

Further, it is through this embodied exploration that more questions arise. I found that cooking as inquiry's ability to evoke new and unexpected lines of curiosity has been one of its most powerful attributes. As I enacted the recipes from GFdd!, I gestured to Biffy Mae asking *Who were you thinking of as you researched these recipes? Who did you make these for? When you were too ill to feed others, who fed you—and did they pull from these pages? How do the voices of the recipe writers echo through, even after you reinterpreted them? What did it feel like to be in your body, as you made, shared, and ate these foods? Can the people I make these recipes for taste this history? Do my translations nourish them in the ways they need—so similar yet so different from the needs of you and your peers? How can I translate this caretaking to my ongoing practice? How can I apply it to contemporary queer resistance?* But this project was not only backward looking—embodied engagement with these recipes has served as a resource for world building.

Cooking as inquiry offers unexplored potentialities for interdisciplinary research beyond food studies. Whether employed as a

formal research method or informal practice, it offers the promise of embodied contemplation—with the possibility of opening new lines of inquiry and consideration. Embodied engagement with GFdd!—making the recipes, eating them, sharing them with my community—allowed me to reach my hand across time and space, to gesture towards my ancestors—those that survived and those that didn't. It was this act—this sensorially full engagement with history, artifacts, and flavors—that (re)oriented my practice towards my community. This (re)orientation towards radical culinary love enables reflection on "embodied, interconnected material histories of genocide, violence, dispossession, erasure, and imagine[s] real solidarities within our kitchens" (Kalyanam 2021, 9).

My endeavor into queer caretaking and cooking as inquiry has turned me towards unexpected paths—paths that were unimaginable from my position prior to encountering these queer artifacts. (Re)orienting myself has meant leaving the "skin of the social" and all the scaffolding it provides (Ahmed 2006, 20). As I have—and continue to—encounter previously unknown spectral artifacts, the world has acquired a new form. This project has moved me towards my community, eliciting questions of *how can my work honor those who came before, those here now, and those yet to be? Can my work truly speak for my community? What material good can it provide for them?* By both embracing our own desires—academic and otherwise—and following the paths of our ancestors, we orient ourselves towards the potential for fuller and more intimate practices—ones that shift away from the narrow perspectives typical to canonical academic research, embracing instead interdisciplinary, embodied knowledge "cultivation" (van Wingerden 2022). This sense that turning towards queerness carries wider meaning has allowed me to embrace curiosity and play in my research.

In more concrete terms, this ongoing exploration of cooking as inquiry has turned me towards another project: the creation of a zine called *The Irreversible Damage Supper Club* (*TIDSC*). By *and* for the trans community, *TIDSC* focuses on food, gender, community care, and—*of course*—systemic subversion as it explores questions like *how do I experience my embodied gender when I eat? Which foods elicit gender euphoria and which dysphoria? Do my nutritional and hedonic needs change as I transition—socially, medically, or otherwise? What foods fuel the healing body after gender affirming surgery? TIDSC* aims to serve as both explorative outlet and grossly needed resource, chipping away at the significant dearth of resources for the trans community. I hope it will unfurl new possibilities for my community to (re)orient themselves while engaging with some delicious, embodied play along the way. This potential for not only personal impact, but also communal impact is one of the most compelling features for me as researcher and as artist. If my work can nourish others—literally and metaphorically—then I have found myself oriented in a way that honors my queer ancestors.

This contribution straddles the line between essay and meditation. You could consider the project I reference a case study—a demonstration of one potential path desire might lead you down—and my reflections here a snapshot of an ongoing practice. I do not intend to provide a formal framework but rather inspiration for readers to employ embodied play and intuitive choice-making in their research practices. Both in relation to the concrete creation of *TIDSC* and my practice at large, my ongoing engagement with cooking as inquiry is transforming into cooking as praxis—namely as healing praxis—and I hope this notion moves others to consider similar possibilities within their own work.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Antoniou, Maria. 2004. "My Cypriot Cookbook: Re-Imagining My Ethnicity." *Auto/Biography* 12:126–46.

Bochner, Arthur P. 2000. "Criteria Against Ourselves." Qualitative Inquiry 6 (2): 266–72.

Brady, Jennifer. 2011. "Cooking as Inquiry: A Method to Stir Up Prevailing Ways of Knowing Food, Body, and Identity." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 10 (4): 321–34.

Collins, Lauren. 2011. "The King's Meal: A Popularizing Historian Cooks up the Past." *The New Yorker*, November 21, 2011.

Crowell, Steven Galt. 1999. "Spectral History: Narrative, Nostalgia, and the Time of the I", *Research in Phenomenology* 29 (1): 83-104.

Elias, Megan. 2012. "Summoning the Food Ghosts: Food History as Public History." *The Public Historian* 34 (2): 13–29.

Heldke, Lisa M. 1992a. "Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice." In *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, edited by Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke, 203–29. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heldke, Lisa M. 1992b. "Recipes for Theory Making." In *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, edited by Lisa M. Heldke and Deane W. Curtin, 251–69. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hernandez, Michael, and David Sutton. 2003. "Hands That Remember: An Ethnographic Approach to Everyday Cooking." Expedition 45 (2): 30–37.

Herrmann, Andrew F. 2012. "'Criteria Against Ourselves?': Embracing the Opportunities of Qualitative Inquiry." International Review of Qualitative Research 5 (2): 135–52.

Kalyanam, Sharadha. 2021. "Radical Culinary Love: Cooking as Healing Praxis in the Time of COVID-19." Journal of Global Indigeneity 5 (1): 1–15.

Metheny, Karen Bescherer. 2016. "Experimental Archaeology, Ethnoarchaeology, and the Application of Archaeological Data to the Study of Subsistence, Diet, and Nutrition." In *Food Research: Nutritional Anthropology and Archaeological Methods*, edited by Janet Chrzan and John A. Brett, 230-45. New York: Berghahn Books, Incorporated.

Thorne, Beowulf, Tom Shearer, Tom Ace, and Michael Botkin, eds. 1990. *Diseased Pariah News* (Issues 1-11). GLBT Historical Society.

van Wingerden, Enrike. "Unmastering Research: Positionality and Intercorporeal Vulnerability in International Studies." *International Political Sociology* 16, no. 2 (2022): 1j+. *Gale Academic OneFile.*

An Apparition of Lovely Things

STEPHANIE MISA



I.

I opened a file called “collaboration ideas” from 2015, curious. It appeared like an itinerant artefact amongst my newly re-organized work document folder—uncategorized and unmarked. I click on the document, ready to send it trash, only to be surprised by what I had written down a full decade ago:

Work Idea:

Phone conversations, like with speaking to loved ones back home as an audio piece. Pitch black TV (a Santo Niño on top of a mantel piece), subtitles on screen and Filipino/dialect on audio via earphones.

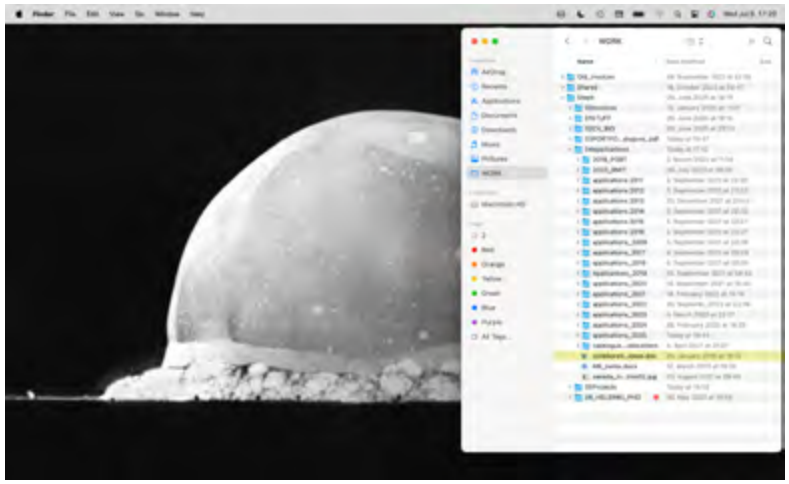
Party Line: Filipino Migrants in Vienna in conversation with Filipino Artists on otherness, alienation, and speaking in bastard tongues.

The Filipino Diaspora has long been quantified in terms of people who have left the country.

Hello, collect call from the Philippines, will you accept the charges? Press 1 for Forget me, No. 2 for Mahal Kita, and 3 for “Ay Deeed it Maahy Wiy” (the Frank Sinatra Rendition).

Ask Larry to write show intro.

A collection of the Ante family photographs, around the first year of Fannie moving to Austria from the Philippines. (courtesy of the Ante family)



Screenshot of author's desktop screen (09.07.2025) 5:20 pm.
(courtesy of author)

This seemed eerily close to a project I was working on now. Had I suddenly become my own psychic? It shouldn't have come as a surprise to me that a 2015 work idea found a way to manifest itself in a current project. If anything is predictable, it may be my steadfast fascination with the Filipino immigrant psyche. Indeed, the desire to trace Philippine diasporic bodies through their journeys of leaving and coming 'home', has always been a constant obsession. How does one even begin to understand the morphing and slow refiguring of one's mind and body between a *here* and *there*? I speak abstractly, but also quite literally, as I take my daily dose of vitamin D. Once a ridiculous consideration, this vitamin is now a constant reminder that the sun is not as close as once was.

With concrete proof (in the form of a doc file) of a looking back as now a map forward, I have come to think of *desire lines* not as patterns of routine, or shortcuts, or even lines of transcendent transformation, but simply paths that lead you back to where you've always

wanted to go, a coming home (so to say), a return to the longing (where it has calmly waited), unsatiated and still—or perhaps an *apparition*, an unexpected, wonderful, almost ghostly appearance of something revealed to you once more.

II.

A Filipino-American curator visiting Vienna in 2022 had asked me if I knew why there were so many Filipino nurses in the city. This question made me think of Gina, the Filipino nurse I had met when my partner had needed knee surgery in 2010. She was my first Filipino contact on my new phone. I had just moved to Vienna.

What was not clear to me then was that Gina was among a long line of nurses sent to Austria from the Philippines since 1973. "Was it Martial Law that drove them to flee?" asked the curator. That would have been my guess as well, but as further research brought to light, the deployment of Filipino nurses to Austria in 1973 was one of the very first organized, government-to-government arrangements for sending Filipino healthcare workers abroad under the Martial Law regime of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and would be a key reference in the creation of the *1974 Labor Code* (Presidential Decree No. 442) to formally institutionalize labor export. This facilitated the first wave of approximately 600 Filipino health care professionals, who worked in 14 different hospitals in Vienna. The *Labor Code of 1974* formalized and legitimized the Philippine government's role in labor migration. This was not accidental—it was a deliberate policy by the Marcos regime to reduce domestic unemployment, generate foreign exchange through remittances, and stabilize the economy during a time of political and economic upheaval (Martial Law).



Francia (“Franzis” to her colleagues) seated center, during her first year in Vienna. She arrived in Austria on October 6, 1973, and would work at the Kaiserin Elizabeth Hospital, Surgery Room 6 till June 1981. (courtesy of the Ante family)

The first wave of Filipino health professionals was the start of a significant, visible, and thriving Filipino community in Vienna. In 2023, the Philippine Embassy in Austria and the City of Vienna signed a new agreement to bring Filipino nurses to Vienna under a framework called a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MoU) that encourages the new wave of recruitment of nurses between the Philippines and the Federal State of Vienna and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. The agreement comes exactly 50 years after the signing of a similar agreement between Manila and Vienna, this time under the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos’s son, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr. It seemed necessary, after all, to trace desire lines that not only traversed continents but also generations.

The work-in-progress I had mentioned is also called *A Memorandum of Understanding*. It takes its working title from this mandate and outlines the political implications of contract-labor from countries of the global south, especially in healthcare, and the effects of these frameworks of skill extraction. The work approaches this topic through the stories like that of Franzis, who on October 6, 1973, arrived with the first group of Filipino nurses to Vienna. Stories, however, are told from the point of view of her daughter, Lisa, a second generation Filipino-Austrian who is a fertility nurse herself. The work focuses on an intergenerational dialogue, a lens through which questions of belonging and integration are examined, and explores the differing notions of “home”, a topic visceral and tangible through the various beautiful and lovely things from the family archive, photographs, cassette tapes, and other material mementos of a *here* and *there*.



Naty (center), Fannie’s best friend and also Filipino, with her nurse colleagues at the Kaiserin Elisabeth Hospital, ca. 1970s. (courtesy of the Ante Family)

III.

Framing a family archive within economic contexts such as family obligation, debt, and care, while attempting to bridge the real economic impact of labor-export on the Philippine economy (especially through the financial remittances it brings into the country) is a huge task. To sketch the picture of a country in dire need of economic possibilities for its population, to show skilled workers ready to leave their family to provide for them from abroad, and a foreign labor market where there is a constant shortage of care-workers for its aging population, is intricate, complex and emotional.

Can this emotion and longing be wrapped into the neat trappings of a *remittance*? In her exhibition "Remittance", curator Trisha Lagaso Goldberg closes in on its meaning: "A remittance is a transfer



Franzis's cohort of Filipino nurses who arrived in Vienna together celebrating "Philippine Independence Day" in Austria, ca. 1970s. (courtesy of the Ante family)

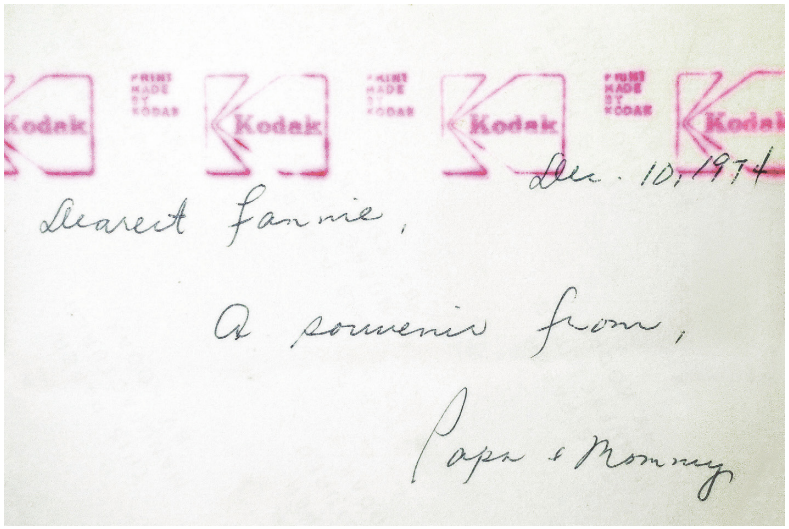
of money or goods by a foreign worker to an individual—usually a family member—in their home country. These transfers are a global phenomenon and a vital part of many nations' economies, sustaining millions of families worldwide. They provide essential income for households to cover basic needs like food, education, and healthcare, and beyond their financial dimension, *embody profound acts of care and devotion*." (Italics mine.)

III.

The entire creation of this work is processual and open. It is an active, participatory practice in which stories unfold, and the weight of these memories becomes palpable. The experiences of Lisa and Franzis are intended to provide the initial impetus with the work



Franzis' mother and father together with younger siblings. A photograph sent to Franzis from the Philippines dated December 10, 1974. (courtesy of the Ante family)



The inscription written behind the photo (December 10, 1974: "Dear Fannie, A souvenir from Papa and Mommy"). Franzis was known as Fannie in the family. (courtesy of the Ante family)

open to the addition of further voices. Crucial to this, though, is the conversation between mother and daughter and their shared contributions to this work.

As mentioned in the apparition of my 2015 "Work Ideas" file, the Filipino Diaspora has always been quantified by those who've left the Philippines. We count the number of nurses we've sent abroad, the number of sea farers, engineers, nannies, cruise ship workers, care givers, occupational and physical therapists, contracts issued by various recruitment agencies and the legal frameworks that account for employment standards, labor relations, social welfare, and occupational safety. But the accounting is one direction, a here to *there*. There is a tally of Filipino citizens who leave (and perhaps return) but there is no accounting for those who choose to stay 'abroad' and the families and connections that root in this *elsewhere*.

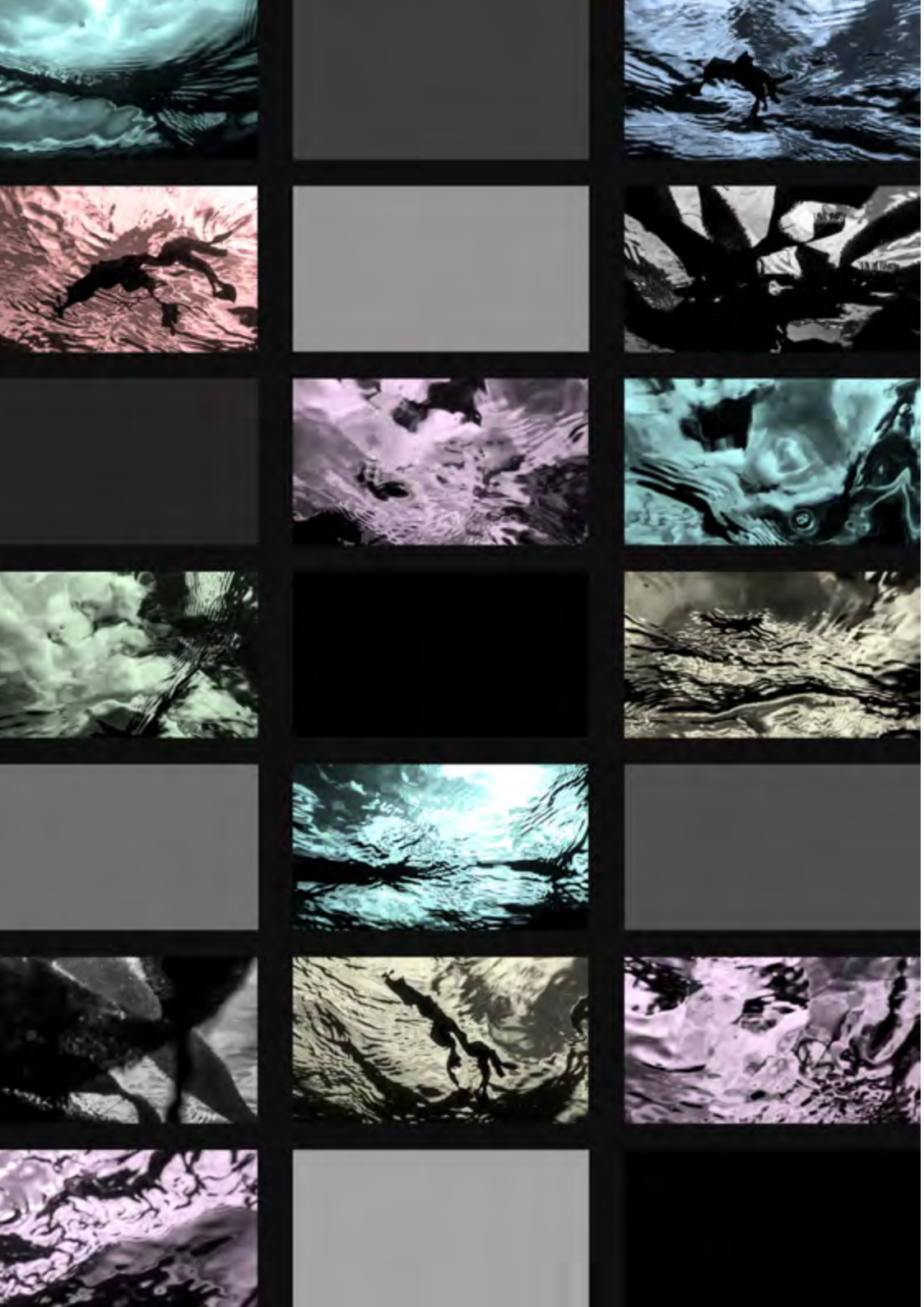


A cassette tape recording of Lisa at 3 years old that was supposed to be sent to the family in the Philippines. (courtesy of Lisa Ante)

This work is about this elsewhere, the nebulous space that holds both the imagination and texture of 'home' and the desire lines that trace back to where this longing lays—perhaps a physical place: a hometown, a grandmother's lap, or the backyard guava tree—or one that lives brightly only in the mind's eye, no matter where one may find themselves.

you will bring the strange you were

EL PUTNAM



I will give my words,
my own pity,

you will bring the strange you were

EL Putnam

Contextualizing

The title of this chapter is a fragment of generated text from a custom trained AI model that I developed while working on the project *Under the Feet of Shadows*, my ongoing collaboration with the Irish author Mike McCormack. In this work, we tell the imagined origin myth of a yet-to-be built data center in the west of Ireland, as Terra, an android being akin to a diviner, is hired to commune with the spirit of technology. In the following text, I parse an analysis of artistic research in developing this project. I want to note that while the project is a collective effort, I write from my own perspective, focusing on my process as both an artist and philosopher.

Whether I am engaging in scholarly analysis or producing an artistic work, my research involves chasing curiosities and forming patterns. To start, I become intrigued by an idea that will linger. It turns, folds on itself, crystallises. What comes to mind here is Gilbert Simondon's definition of transduction that he explains through the process of crystal formation.[1] Each point in this crystalline network leads to other aspects

1 Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

of inquiry, which I further through various approaches, including archival investigation, theoretical research, site visits, material interpretation, and performance actions.

My body and mind buzz with an excitement as forms emerge from the super solution.

As the crystals grow, I turn and trace their paths, engaging with a process that resonates with what Karen Barad describes as a diffractive methodology.[2] I want to emphasize that this approach to artistic research was not explicitly developed in advance, though that is not to deny the theoretical influence of Simondon and Barad as my engagement with their concepts have transformed me as an artist. Their ideas have provided me with a language and a theoretical framework to describe a method, which I now consider when reflecting on my process.

According to Barad, a diffractive method is a means of "reading insights through rather than against each other to make evident the always-already entanglement of specific ideas in their materiality."[3] Drawing from quantum physics theory, Barad emphasises how these entanglements are both spatial and temporal, where diffraction is a physical phenomenon created through patterns of differences, as when waves occupy the same space at the same time or when particles are in a superposition. Metaphorically engaging with this logic as a means of describing my artistic method, I consider the crystalline points that emerge and the differences of patterns through their various interactions with other points. It is an ongoing process, to mix these metaphors of crystallisation and diffraction, of creation and deconstruction that produces art through the traces of sediments in this supersaturated entanglement of activity.

McCormack and I began working together in 2020, as our organic, dialogic method of collaboration emerged from our conversations. Our first piece, *An Invitation* (2021), premiered in the Arts in Action series in Galway. We developed this project throughout the periods of COVID-19

2 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Karen Barad, "Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness: Re-Turning, Re-Membering, and Facing the Incalculable," *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 92, no. 1 (2018): 56–86.

3 Barad, "Troubling Time/s," p. 64.

lock down, as we considered the future of grief. This project, as we observe as a paraphrase of Laurie Anderson, is of the time and a record of the time: it was both produced in and a product of that period of social distancing, extreme screen mediation, shared grief, and my personal grief of losing my father suddenly in October 2019.

When we began working on a second project, it was after COVID-19 restrictions had eased, though the traces of this phase shift lingered in our actions and anxieties. Our conversations continued along our shared interests of human-technological relations in these times of extreme change and crisis, speculating about the possibilities of a future of hope, love, and care. Initially the idea emerged of writing an origin myth for a yet-to-be built data center. Through a conversation with a colleague, I came to learn of Killala, Ireland.

This fishing village in north Mayo contains the remnants of the abandoned Asahi Plastics factory, constructed in the mid-1970s and closed in 1997. Since then, this industrial specter in the rural landscape has been slated for development as a data center, with ongoing activities to provide the necessary infrastructures to support these aspirations, including a landing station for the AEC-1 transatlantic fiber optic cable that connects Killala to Shirley, New York in the United States, as well as the attempted development of renewable power sources to support the proposed energy hungry data centre.

When I approached McCormack about Killala, he mentioned how his godfather had worked on the construction of the Asahi factory, which informs an account of the building in his 2016 novel *Solar Bones.* In this text he describes how it "was spoken of as if it were a cathedral or a temple that was being built on that raised site above the small town of Killala, such a beacon of industrial progress."[4]

A point crystallises through our dialogues as we identify the site of staging. From here other points emerge. With each new form that develops, I turn and trace its material entanglements as other points appear.

4 Mike McCormack, *Solar Bones* (New York, NY: Soho Press, 2017), p. 11.



Landscapes are palimpsestual; bearing the traces of layers of their ongoing formation and human development. I read these layers through my body, tracing steps over ground recursively, acting as interface between map, model, abstraction, and dirt on the ground.

Scanning

My first trip to Killala was a way to become situated, and footage from that visit reflects this quality of attention. With the camera on a stabiliser, I spent much of my time scanning the landscape. Visiting the village port and Ross Head Beach around Killala Bay, I sought out indications of the transatlantic cable that landed here, though was unable to find any. I kept walking, looking, searching, panning the camera across the scene over and over again as I took in different views and perspectives. The wind was still that day, so the six wind turbines of the Killala Community Wind Farm remained immobile against the pilgrimage site Croagh Patrick that rose in the distance behind the town. We (my family and I) took a drive by the abandoned Asahi factory sitting on the hill just before the entrance of the town, not leaving the car at this stage (for that would be for another journey).

I work by means of situated intuitiveness, cultivating an aesthetic encounter through embodied gesture – an active entangling of the technological and geographic by means of the corporeal.

I edited the footage from that trip, digitally layering and manipulating it, adding a series of generative geometric animations and overlaying global maps of submarine fiber optic cables. I also edited a sound track with field recordings from Ross Head Beach (which my partner David Stalling recorded that day), along with other field recordings of crows and a wind turban recorded with a contact microphone. These sounds were supplemented with vocalisations I recorded in Oweynagat Cave in Rosscommon. The video and sound were edited in a spiral fashion, where

each looping of the footage became more layered, glitched, and distorted. This video was incorporated into the performance *Rituals for Circuits* (2023) presented at the DLR Lexicon Gallery in Dún Laoghaire, Ireland.

More points crystallise, as geographic sitatutedness becomes diffracted through digital editing and embodied gestures, as I loop back repetitively through these materials.

Finding

As a performance artist, I do not typically think in terms of characters. Instead, I create performances from my situated embodied experiences and I have always felt to perform as a character was leaning too much into theater. However, working with a fiction writer required me to alter my engrained habits, and I found such opportunities as a chance to try things differently while maintaining the integrity of my own creative process.

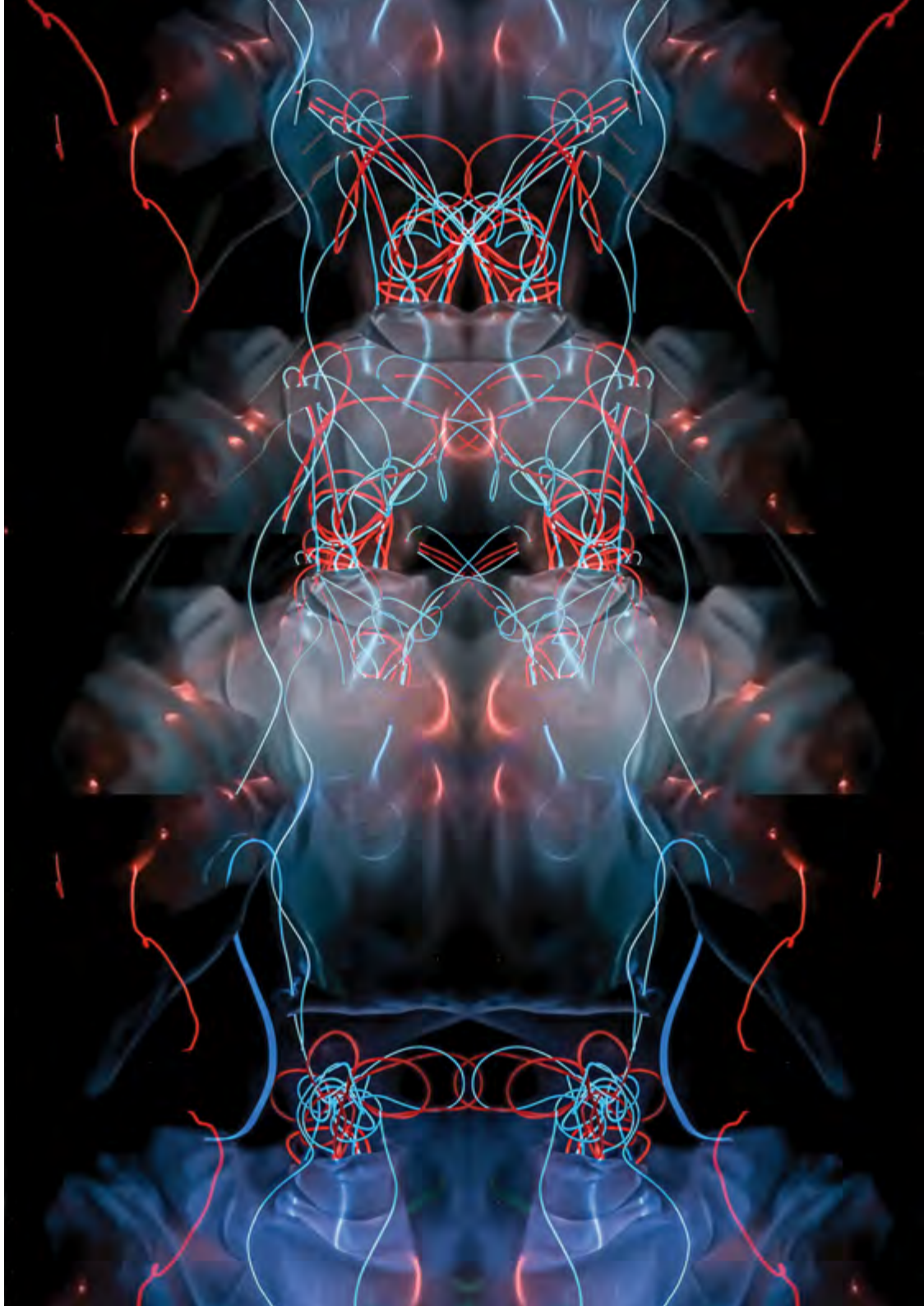
Her name is Terra: to be of the Earth, but shares the same sound as the prefix of terabyte.

Investigating

I was struck by how the Asahi Factory was more than a lauded instance of Foreign Direct Investment, but carried a spiritual promise for a better future. Once the factory ceased operations in 1997, it devastated the region. Closing during the height of Ireland's economic boom, the Celtic Tiger, it acted as a premonition of the crash and recession to come in 2008. Reviewing the promotional materials currently being published by the county council to attract tech industries to the area, Mike and I observe a similar desire of this salvation narrative.

The same dream in the same place: the recursivity of a spiral of development and investment.

I traced this narrative through different written materials pertaining to the Asahi factory, Killala's history, and the ongoing plans for development; plans that have been coming into being through fits, spurts, and significant derailments. I looked through newspaper articles, planning permissions, strategic plans, and other official documentation that articulated visions for the town's development: visions to mold it into a node in the transnational computational industries, a common strategy for economic development in



Ireland at this time.[5]

I was not seeking a linear chronology, but letting the crystals form, diffracting them as I traced material entanglements. Simultaneously scanning through the news, lore, and visions of Killala, I was reviewing Irish mythology as I considered the possibilities of a cosmotechnics situated within the island of Ireland.[6] I read the myths and sagas that were initially transcribed in the Middle Ages, though it is arguable whether these tales carry traces of a pre-Christian oral culture, if they are just the imagined product of Christian monks, or varying degrees in between.[7] These stories were re-written during the 19th century, provided with greater consistency at a time when Ireland came to form its own identity as an independent nation-state.[8] As such, Irish mythology is fragmented and fractured, with versions of tales distributed amongst manuscripts across a broad timespan as a collection of iterations that carry a range of poetic voices across millennia.

I have noticed a growing interest in these legends within Ireland. Coming from a decolonial disposition, numerous artists, musicians, writers, and other cultural producers are engaging with myth. However, they do not have a desire to return to a state of romanticised origin or national-ethnic purity, as occurs when such traditions are called upon through conservative political agenda and myth "provides a community with a strait-jacket of fixed identity."[9] What is happening are more complex and fertile mythopoetical processes, as mythology enables critical evaluations of extractive capitalism and hegemonic norms of progress—a means of thinking otherwise. I gathered various versions

5 Kylie Jarrett, "Digital Ireland: Leprechaun Economics, Silicon Docks, and Crisis," in *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*, ed. Renée Allyson Fox, Mike Cronin, and Brian Ó Conchubhair, (London New York: Routledge, 2021), 188–98.

6 Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2016); EL Putnam, "The Question Concerning Technology in Ireland?: Art, Decoloniality and Speculations of an Irish Cosmotechnics," *Arts* 12, no. 3 (May 4, 2023): 92.

7 Elizabeth Boyle, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021); Rosalind Clark, *The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrigan to Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (Gerrards Cross: C. Smythe, 1991); Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

8 Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997).

9 Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, 97.

of the mythological tales and lore, reading and re-reading, as certain notions become distilled into a distinct symbolism that merges with the threads of Killala.

```
In this cloud of data, I am grounded
to the earth. I start where the flow
of information hits the shore.
```

Tracing

Over the next few months I visited various sites around Killala that emerged from this research, functioning as the sites of rituals where Terra evokes Spiritus—the spirit of technology.

I start at the beach at Ross Head, where Terra arrived on the scene with the flow of information from the transatlantic fiber optic cable.

```
I trace steps recursively, acting
as interface between map, model,
abstraction, and dirt on the ground.
```

Locations for subsequent performances include the abandoned Asahi factory, the birth house of Irish revolutionary Dr. Kathleen Lynn, and the cable landing station. Each site carried its own improvised rituals. After each performance, I would free write on my experience, which I would then bring back into my dialogue with McCormack. Between each performance, I became more informed about Killala through the archival research, information that I mentally recalled while in situ, influencing my improvised rituals.

The performances were documented and edited into moving image works together with text, sound, and generative, geometric animations. I also created digital collages from videos stills that I made into generative animations through creative coding. I began to think of this material as the raw feed of Spiritus. For this is how the rituals were perceived, processed, stored, and played back, not as a linear time line, but as points of data within an array.

Continuing this computational collaboration, I trained an open source ChatGPT2 model on Irish mythology, folklore, my notes from conversations with McCormack, written reflections of the performances, and the documents referred to when selecting ritual sites in Killala noted above. I was intrigued by the broken fragments of text that emerged from this poorly trained model, and turned to it like reading an oracle. It became the voice of Spiritus.



Manifesting

The first presentation of the art work took the form of a seven channel moving image installation with sound, digital images printed on acetate, and printed text. We also created a small booklet that contained the printed text for audience members to take with them.

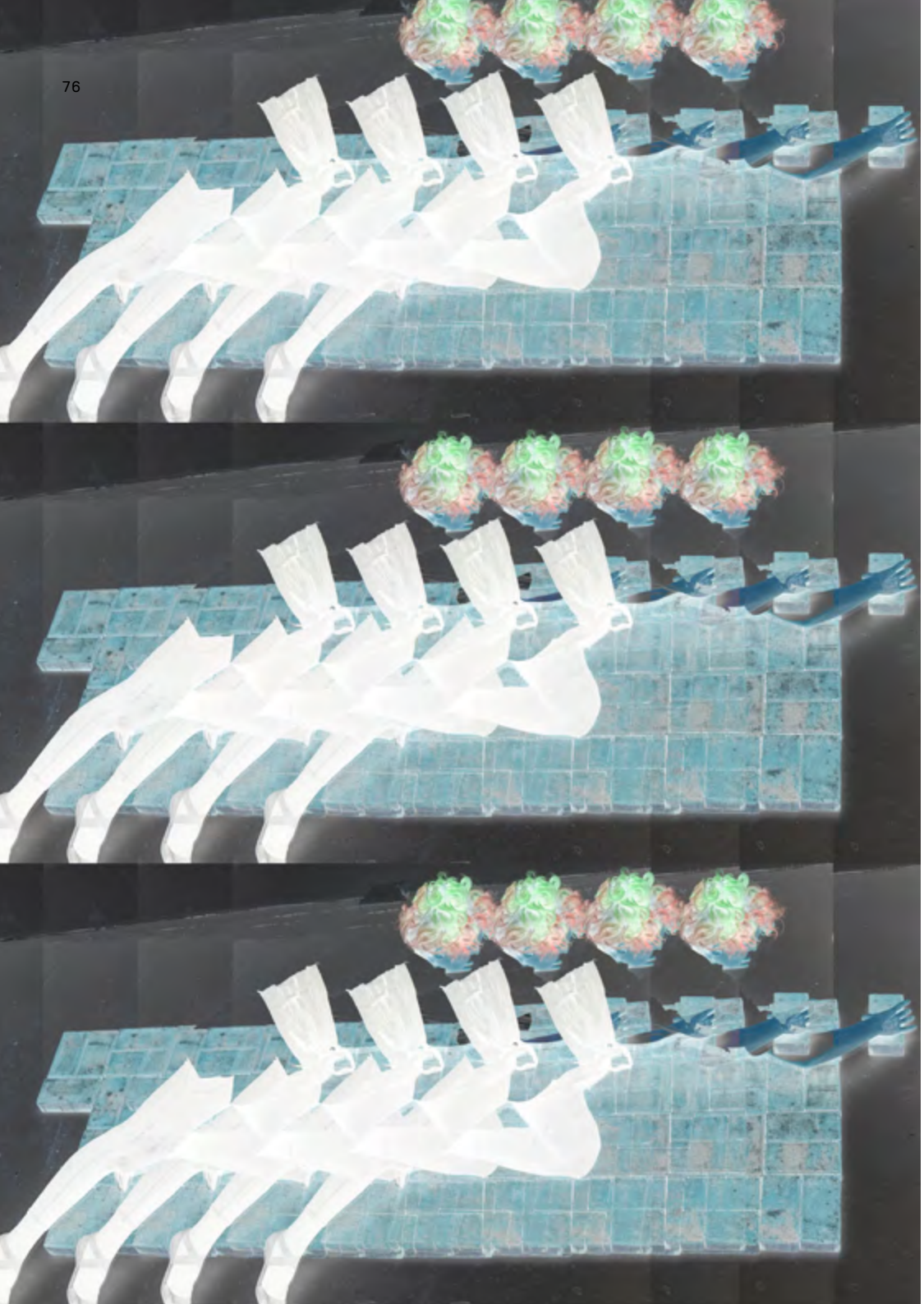
This installation has not marked the project's conclusion, as additional crystals form. Just prior to my last visit to Killala over the summer, I noticed in a document that there is a recommendation to build new footpaths in order to make the medieval town more accessible. When I was there, I observed that such construction was taking place. I also saw piles of bricks at the derelict birth home of Dr. Kathleen Lynn, sitting on the site as indications of stalled refurbishment efforts. Then when I went to the cable landing station later that day—a site I had avoided out of fear of its significance within the international network of telecommunications, though reading through the planning permissions I noted that it was an automated station and very unlikely any humans would be present to be intrigued by my visit—I was struck by the incomplete footpaths surrounding it. These footpaths were set up as an architectural feature with the intention of connecting to other infrastructures, though these were yet to be built as abandoned efforts accumulated.

My mind clung to this idea of footpaths as being symbolic of progress and development. With this in mind I developed the idea for *Imbue with Spirit*, a durational performance that first took place during the exhibition.

Footpaths leading to nowhere

Over the course of two and a half hours, as Terra I used sixty bricks to build a footpath, taking the bricks from the back to add to the front as I worked my way across the gallery in a machinic fashion. The gestures looped, with my body feeling the wear of this recursive action, as bruises and scrapes accumulated along with my tired muscles.

I had started this performance in a fury, frustrated by a conversation that occurred just prior to beginning. Someone from that region of Mayo confronted me with confusion about the installation, asking me over and over to state the meaning of the project, though never satisfied with my response. Before he left in a huff, he told me he was an engineer and how he used to fly from London to New York City on the Concorde jet in two and half hours (unintentionally setting the duration for the performance), but he just could not understand what I was doing. My emotional overflow



from this interaction was manifest in my mechanical gestures as I lifted and placed bricks repeatedly until I became machine. By the end, I could barely lift the pressed concrete blocks, sliding them along the ground to continue at an unbroken pace.

```
Recursively creating a footpath
from its own remains; a gestural
ouroboros.
```

Closing

Natalie Loveless describes how "[the arts] offer modes of sensuous, aesthetic attunement, and work as a conduit to focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape cultural imaginaries."[10] This way of working involves an amalgamation of academic scholarship and artistic practice, without fitting neatly into either category. The result, according to Loveless, is an uncanny practice that involves situated curiosity, but a also means sitting with anxieties that come through the process.

Building on these ideas, these capacities to tell stories differently, inviting the ability to think otherwise, artistic research is a means of pattern making—patterns that crystallise and diffract into entangled differences. The research involved in *Under the Feet of Shadows* does not just offer reflexive engagement with data industries in Ireland, but creates alternatives beyond the predominant discursive framings that emphasise modernist progress perpetuated by major technology corporations.

10 Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

References

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.

———. "Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness: Re-Turning, Re-Membering, and Facing the Incalculable." *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 92, no. 1 (2018): 56–86.

Boyle, Elizabeth. *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland*. Studies in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland. Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge, 2021.

Clark, Rosalind. *The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrígan to Cathleen Ní Houlihan*. Irish Literary Studies 34. Gerrards Cross: C. Smythe, 1991.

Hui, Yuk. *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*. Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2016.

Jarrett, Kylie. "Digital Ireland: Leprechaun Economics, Silicon Docks, and Crisis." In *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*, edited by Renée Allyson Fox, Mike Cronin, and Brian Ó Conchubhair, 188–98. Routledge International Handbooks. London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367259228.

Kearney, Richard. *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Loveless, Natalie. *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

McCormack, Mike. *Solar Bones*. New York, NY: Soho Press, 2017.

Putnam, EL. "The Question Concerning Technology in Ireland?: Art, Decoloniality and Speculations of an Irish Cosmotechnics." *Arts* 12, no. 3 (May 4, 2023): 92. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12030092.

Simondon, Gilbert. *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*. Translated by Taylor Adkins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Williams, Mark. *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Migrant Movement, Migrant Desire

MADISON TREECE, PH.D.

Delilah Montoya is a Chicanx photographer, known for her intimate portraits of Chicanx subjects. Her work explores the icons, histories, and cultural traditions that form Chicanx identity and is attuned to how Chicanx subject formation happens at the intersection of indigeneity, colonialism, and contemporary sociopolitical events, generating multifarious modes of being. Described on her website as "Panoramic Desert Landscapes of Migrant Trails," her photographic landscape series *Sed: Trail of Thirst* (2004-2008) is part of a larger multimedia project created in collaboration with activist and artist Orlando Lara for FotoFest 2004, a biennial photography and new media art exhibition based out of Houston, Texas. FotoFest's 2004 thematic was "water," and notions of thirst, and limited water supply on the border, remain a central motif in *Sed: Trail of Thirst*; its name recalling the 1831 Indian Removal Act and subsequent displacement and forced relocation of some 100,000 American Indians commonly referred to as the "Trail of Tears."[1] Most of Montoya's photographs

1 Speaking to the Indian Removal Act, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo summarized, "Indian removal affected dozens of indigenous nations who were reduced to one small territory. Even so, unbridled settlement by Euro-Americans during the late nineteenth century led to further rounds of indigenous dispossession and reduction before and after statehood. Through Indian allotment policies, Indians were given private plots of individual property, thereby massively reducing indigenous communal landholdings. She continues, "The very meaning of the contemporary term indigenous suggests a rootedness in the land, but indigenous identities in the Americas are also mobile and adroit in their migrations, both those that colonialism forced on them and those that derived from other motivations. This sense of indigenous peoples being of one place is terribly important for political purposes, but what might come of recognizing the uprootedness of indigenous experience in the Americas that is itself a consequence of colonialism, nationalisms, but also migration patterns that today are largely motivated by economic reasons. Does the migration of an indigenous person from southern Mexico to northern New York make them any less indigenous to the Americas?"
María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Duke University Press, 2016), 227, 295.

for this series were taken on or near the Tohono O'odham Reservation in Arizona. Located within the Sonoran Desert in Southern Arizona, the Tohono O'odham reservation straddles both sides of the border and overlaps with some of the most dangerous migrant routes (Fig 1: 2023). The artist's selected site thus holds additional significance as it shows the overlapping landscapes, and therefore histories, of an Indian Reservation and the border.



Fig. 1: Photograph of the Sonoran Desert on the edge of the Tohono O'odham reservation. Hundreds of migrants cross through this desert every year trying to make their way into the United States, leaving desire lines in their wake. Photograph by the author, 2023.

The photographs from the series feature the unmapped trails used by migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and, in doing so, documents their journey through the desert landscape. These trails are often marked by "desire paths," or "desire lines." Desire lines are well-trodden paths imprinted into the Earth's surface, formed by erosion due to human or animal foot traffic.[2] Often referred to in landscape architecture, these paths are usually carved outside of constructed walking areas and are instead used as shortcuts, creating new, intuitive, and innovative modes of moving from one point to another. When faced with border walls or other United States government interventions on the desert landscape, migrants crossing from Mexico into the U.S. etch new desire lines into the border soil. These lines come to represent the migrant's desire to cross the border itself, but they also function as an effective means of wayfinding and communication. Orienting towards migrant movement in this way demonstrates that migration is neither simple nor linear but rather transgressive, circumnavigating, and open ended. Movement in Montoya's images is a strategy that allows for careful evasion of governmental violence and provides a path for migrant desire, which I define as a willful push against the impossible conditions of U.S. settler colonialism, immediate and historical, in the hope for better futures.

Migrant Campsite, Ironwood, AZ, is a panoramic, color photograph from the series *Sed: A Trail of Thirst* (Fig. 2: 2004). In the image, viewers can observe a desert landscape, surrounded by sparce, dry bushes that condense farther off into the distance. To

2 First coined by French scientist, philosopher and poet Gaston Bachelard in his 1958 book La Poétique de l'Éspace (or 'The Poetics of Space'), he first described "desire paths" as paths created by use that allow them to get from point A to point B faster than established routes. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas (Beacon Press, 1994).

the right, these bushes are closer to the viewer and fill the field of vision. In the distance a mountain range emerges, brown at close range the mountains recede into dark blues–the largest peaks just left of center. The sky is filled with large ominous clouds. In the foreground, the viewer looks onto dry and open desert earth that has been disturbed by curving tire marks just at the center of the image. Right of center there is a collection of abandoned objects: a pair of black leather boots, a small black notebook, a pink children's backpack, a blue sunscreen bottle, a pair of jeans, and slightly more to the right a red gas can. Hovering just below this gas can is a disembodied human shadow. Even further right there are more objects; at least three water jugs litter the ground under the shade of some brush, next to them are soft black and white objects–possibly a trash bag or some clothing. Below these objects is another human shadow, slightly smaller and with its arms just slightly splayed, feet obscured. The ground near these objects is disturbed, as if people have been walking or resting in this area. With the eye wandering along the picture frame longer, it is possible to spot two soft navy-blue forms that flank either side of what looks like a make-shift road, formed by a well-trodden flat stretch of ground. Likely a piece of clothing, the object's form and distance gives it the overall effect of a limp body or body-bag. What begins to emerge is a narrative, and while it may not be concrete, the viewer can begin to formulate a story around migration. My analysis of the image attempts to bring this narrative to the fore and examine exactly how the image uncovers these stories through the "trace."



Fig. 2: Delilah Montoya, *Migrant Campsite, Ironwood, AZ*, from the series *Sed: Trail of Thirst*, 2004. Inkjet print, image: 77 x 18 in. (195.58 x 45.72 cm). Image courtesy of the artist.

In *Migrant Campsite, Ironwood, AZ* the vast expanse of land culminates in monumental rock formations that are positioned as the highest point in the image. The viewer's gaze also looks over the landscape towards the mountains and is being invited on a journey; the image becomes a surrogate for the lived experience of migration in which the mountains, which define the U.S. landscape and symbolize nationalism, or citizenship, is the terminal point. In a more traditional, American landscape, the mountain's powerful majesty would often make them symbolically synonymous with U.S. nationalism, but in Montoya's image they sit far back within the frame.[3] Though they are still prominent, they are also distant and positioned as out of reach; as are the clouds, which are a source of water and could offer migrants protection from the unyielding sun. Mountains taper out towards the left where another smaller mountain peak rests towards the edge of the frame, shifting the neat linear movement

3 Lavish, sweeping landscapes with impressive geological formations were standard practice among members of the Hudson River School, which included Thomas Cole. Another member, Albert Bierstadt, who primarily focused on the American West and joined several journeys out West during the period of western expansion, this included trips to Yosemite Valley and the Rocky Mountains.

that has come to define representations of migration narratives as one of South to North to one of multiple end points and possibility. In fact, Montoya has stated that many of the images from the series look into Mexico, further upsetting neat readings of the image in which cardinal points can easily be applied to the frame, and it becomes less clear where the migrants are coming from and where they are headed.[4] Because the image is a panoramic scene composed using digital editing, the landscape becomes distorted and undulates, curving up and then down both in the foreground and across the horizon. The overall effect is destabilizing.

There are a variety of elements in the image that can be read as indexical clues or "traces" that invite viewers to speculate about what has taken place there, such as lines or marks in the sand. Historian Carlo Ginzburg describes the "conjectural or semiotic paradigm," as a methodology that allows for the meaning of an image to be read through things unseen. He suggests this is a device that can "dissolve the ideological clouds which increasingly obscure complex social structures," because "Though reality may seem to be opaque, there are privileged zones—signs, clues—which allow us to penetrate it."[5] Following his insight, we can understand *Migrant Campsite* through an analysis of both present details and important absences. Footprints with no discernable direction disturb the dirt near the migrant camp while tire tracks circle around the discarded

4 "There are two things that were going on when I was in Arizona, and you know, I didn't think about this until right now. The pathways-migration trails are ones that have been done by foot mostly, and some by jeep. These are back roads of sort. Most of the trails you are looking at, you are looking into Mexico. Those trails are looking south into Mexico." Monica Montelongo Flores and Delilah Montoya, "Recreating the Yardstick: An Interview with Delilah Montoya." *Chicana/Latina Studies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 163-164.

5 Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 111-112.

objects. The composition suggests pathways along the sightlines it creates, including a path that snakes through the dense foliage. The tire tracks could be made by ICE, border enforcement, militia men, or caravans carrying migrants. At first glance, the clues invite us to imagine a narrative of migrants on a difficult journey who are left to abandon their belongings because they are being pursued by border enforcement. There are no clear outcomes implied in the image as the tire tracks and desire lines in the ground curve and change direction, potentially away from the mountain—movement here does not necessarily happen linearly, it might switch and circle back, change direction and find new endpoints.

Michel Foucault claims that opposition to authoritarian power must, "Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic," which he outlines in his framework of "desire," defined as that which drives the body and will beyond its limits.[6] Within his semiotics-as-consciousness framework, desire can be deployed as a form of resistance that drives opposition to dominant power. Montoya's collaborator Orlando Lara points out that "desire paths" or "desire lines," are a fortuitously accurate phrase that accounts for migrants' desire for a new life in America, emphasizing material and social relations.[7] I would like to suggest in addition that the desire lines in Montoya's images visualize migrant desire to push against the violence of U.S. statecraft. My conceptualization borrows from Indigenous studies scholar Eve Tuck, who defines "desire" as,

> a recognition of suffering, the costs of settler colonialism and capitalism, and how we still thrive in the face of loss anyway; the parts of us that won't be destroyed. Desire is what we know about ourselves, and damage is what is attributed to us by those who wish to contain us...Desire, in its making and remaking, bounds into the past as it stretches into the future. It is productive, it makes itself, and in making itself, it makes reality.[8]

Desire lines as the visual representation for migrant desire can indeed be revolutionary, as they navigate modes for overcoming limitations on migrant mobility and bring visibility to historically repressed narratives of border crossing.

This affiliation is most salient in another image from Montoya's *Sed: Trail of Thirst* series: *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak*. *Desire Lines* is a black and white panoramic photograph of the desert landscape (Figure 3; 2004). Atmospheric, heavy, dark clouds loom over the mountains in the background, while the foreground is a tangle of desert plants and cacti. To the right a line of water jugs has been placed along a migrant path. On the far left of the image is a man, Mike Wilson, who is a tribal member of the Tohono O'odham Nation. He is shown in profile, pushing a wheelbarrow with water jug peaking over the edge. In Montoya's image Wilson is not only situated within his tribe's sacred lands, but he is also representing in act of

6 Michel Foucault, "Preface," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Schizophrenia and Capitalism*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xv–xvi.

7 See Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space.*

8 Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Hauntings," in *Handbook of Autoethnography,* ed. by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Left Coast Press, Inc., 2013), 647-648.



Fig. 3: Delilah Montoya, *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, AZ*, 2004, printed 2008. Inkjet print, image: 12 3/4 x 47 1/2 in. (32.4 x 120.7 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Gilberto Cardenas Latino Art Collection, 2011.52.1, © 2004, Delilah Montoya.

governmental defiance—placing water jugs for border crossers.[9] His body conveys action and his movement towards the edge of the picture frame constitutes a refusal to be contained or made stagnant. The O'odham consider movement across their land to be a sacred right and responsibility, what is referred to as Him'dag.[10] This is a gesture that centers Indigenous agency and autonomous governance over land in a way that challenges the U.S. government's implementation of borders and the relegation of Native peoples onto reservations.

Montoya understands that Indigenous experiences, from genocide to deterritorialization, are linked to the ongoing suffering of migrants, as both are the result of colonial violence; an understanding that is reflected in her decision to image migrant trails within the Tohono O'odham reservation. According to Katherine McKittrick, reservations are racial geographies that are designated "incongruous with humanness."[11] This emerges from the history of westward expansionism, as McKittrick explains,

> So, what was geographically at stake when the European center extended itself outward, toward a space that was at once 'nowhere' and inhabited by 'no one,' yet unexpectedly 'there' and 'inhabited,' are race and racial geographies. Indeed, a '*new* symbolic construct of race,' which coincided with post-1492 colonial arrangements, organized much of the world according to a racial logic. Native reservations, plantations, and formal and informal segregations are just some of the ways the lands of no one were carved up to distinguish between and regulate the relations of indigenous, nonindigenous, African, and colonial communities, with some geographies still being cast as uninhabitable for particular groups; sites such as reservations, slave quarters, and auction blocks were considered alongside racial specificities.[12]

Within the reservation, the Tohono O'odham is a sovereign nation without federal agencies that straddles the border, making it a more porous corridor for migration. However, because tribal members do not want government agencies, including ICE, on their reservation, they generally discourage migratory aid within their boundary, instead allowing humanitarian efforts, such as Human Borders, to place water stations just outside of the reservation.[13] In naming the image, *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak,* Montoya draws attention again to the desire lines that have been carved into the Earth's surface. Visually, she achieved this by deliberately placing water jugs along the edge of the most prominent desire line before taking the image. The jugs act as a guideway towards Baboquivari Peak, which is an important and sacred place in Tohono O'odham creation mythology as well as a navigational landmark for migrants.

Desire lines as they appear within Montoya's *Sed: Trail of Thirst* series are a process of wayfinding in the face of settler colonialism, they are guides that move people through their physical

9 While not illegal outright, humanitarians have been arrested for aiding migrants by providing water or supplying water stations. Mike Wilson was also the subject of a 2008 news story where he reported being explicitly asked to stop providing water for migrants by reservation police. Brady McCombs, "Reservation ban of water for migrants is reported," Arizona Daily Star, September 3, 2008, https://tucson.com/news/local/border/reservation-ban-of-water-for-migrants-is-reported/article_4ae656f5-ed1a-5dee-bb94-d093298374e8.html.

10 Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, *Unsettled Borders: The Militarized Science of Surveillance on Sacred Indigenous Land* (Duke University Press, 2022), 57.

11 Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *small axe* 42 (November 2013), 6.

12 McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 6.

13 PBS Newshour, "Tribe Divided Over Providing Water to Illegal Migrants Crossing Indian Land," September 16, 2008, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/social_issues-july-dec08-waterstations_09-16.

environment and enhance their understanding of space and place. As Wilson demonstrates, wayfinding occurs through the sharing of resources and the acknowledgement of a shared and sacred history. Their presence within the land brings the past into the present, offering paths to survival well into the future.[14]

14 I want to acknowledge what Felicity Shaeffer refers to in *Unsettled Borders* as "tracking footprints," she states, "to follow footprints entails an understanding of place undertaken through the study of material and ephemeral ancestral imprints left on the land as well as storied relations to place...The past is a well-worn path or trail, a footprint, that is alive as a companion that guides one's actions in the present-future." While this is not exactly how I have conceptualized desire lines as a means of wayfinding in the face of settler colonialism, which brings the past into the present, there are similarities that point to the possibility for migrant/Native solidarity.
Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, *Unsettled Borders,* 6-7.

Nothingness

PAUL LANDON









































Hosts of flakes flew into his face, melted there, and he anguished with the cold of them. They flew into his mouth, and died away with a weak, watery taste; flew against his eyelids so that he winked, overflowed his eye and made seeing as difficult as it was now almost impossible for other reasons: namely, the dazzling effect of all that whiteness, and the veiling of his field of vision, so that his sense of sight was almost put out of action. It was nothingness, white whirling nothingness, into which he looked when he forced himself to do so. Only at intervals did ghostly-seeming forms from the world of reality loom up before him: a stunted fir, a group of pines, even the pale silhouette of the hay-hut he had lately passed.

The Magic Mountain, Thomas Mann

I walked the snow-covered streets: houses and other buildings rendered as broken contour drawings. I tried to get my bearings. It was a small town; I would eventually find myself heading back to my apartment even if I was walking in circles. I would not find what I was not looking for: a public space, a library? a community centre? an art gallery? An exhibition was held there a long time ago and I went to the opening almost by chance. I knew the artist, so I showed up. He was surprised to see me, made the appropriate greetings, probably a friendly joke, and then went back to addressing the very receptive hometown public. There is not much more I remember. It was close to midsummer, and I must have returned to my accommodation in the lingering sunlight.

The town was unrecognizable so many years later, covered in the eternal snow of a winter that would not end. I could not project the mental map I had of it onto the suburban snowscape I was wandering through. I had provisional destinations: museums and libraries, to inform myself of the town's history and its function; a food and clothing industry had been replaced with the economies of tourism and regional administration. A remarkable location on the map was experienced as a pleasant yet unremarkable place to work and live. Behind the snowbanks and away from my veiled perception, in the dilating private and public constructions, people gathered among families, friends and co-workers carrying on with the significant vagaries of their everyday lives. One such gathering, one at which I participated many years ago, flickered briefly in my consciousness before being blurred by the white whirling nothingness.

(Hommage à Debussy: En plein air)

JUNG MI LEE AND JON SAKATA

Beaubourg – une galerie…

(…les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air…)

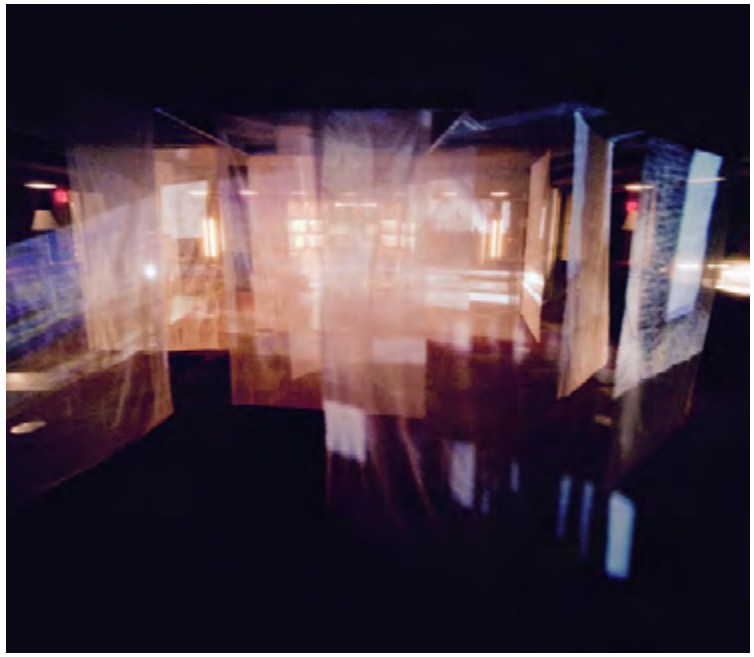
...terminal-like flows of peoples, murmuring hum, garish chatter, throngs of spectators bustling abuzz gawking at M. Giverny's works...

“ si
t ir
li n a n
ke ai as gs
I p d
to b
”

Frozen on far wall: large format photos – Venezia – Palazzo Ducale, Le Grand Canal, San Giorgio Maggiore. Each not only replicating the exact perspectives and settings Monet had painted a century earlier...

It is no longer the sound which refers to a landscape, but music develops a sonorous landscape which is internal to it: it is Liszt who set upon this idea of the sonorous landscape, with such an ambiguity that we no longer know if sound refers to an associated landscape or if, on the contrary, a landscape is so interiorized within sound that the landscape exists only in sound.[1]

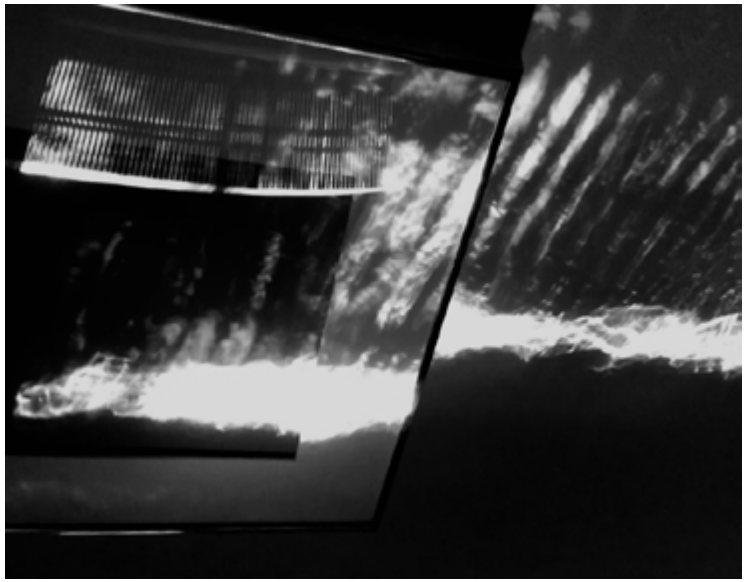
- Gilles Deleuze



(dis)array (2021) by Lee & Sakata

...but evoking startling atmospheres – haecceities…

"…peindre l'air…"



Untitled: For Robert Cogan, 1930-2021 (2023) by Lee & Sakata

...the wall was dark dust grey – matte and low-lit...

Memo: January 12, 2003

"Art does not render what is visible, but renders visible" (Klee)

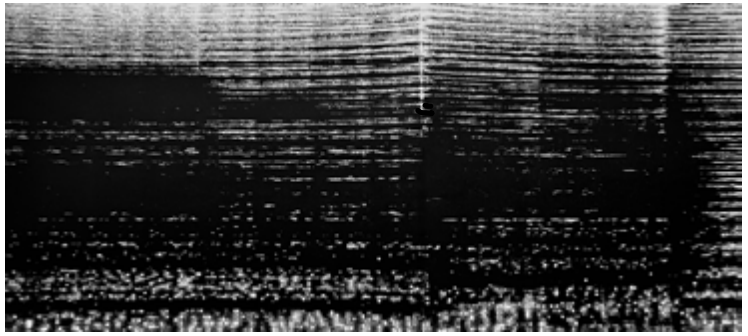
To render visible forces that are not themselves visible
(Deleuze after Klee)

Cézanne conveying temperature, humidity, seismics of
Mont Sainte-Victoire...

***

To render audible forces that are themselves inaudible

Haydn expressing through sound the 'creation of light'



Detail of spectrographic image of Haydn's 'Creation of Light" from
Die Schöpfung

...pas à pas, nearing the wall. les images. something very strange began taking place...

Memo: August 24, 2013

"zone of proximity" (Deleuze)
Seurat:
too close – all chromoluminarist technique
too far – grey/brown dullness
but then that step of path to climate —
air tingling away the rigid forms.

there was a time –
an extremely short amount of time ago in geologic terms –
when the Mediterranean Sea did not exist.
5.3 million years ago, over the course of a decade,
the flooding that created the Mediterranean Sea moved at an extraordinary rate:
40 meters per second.
At its height, the unleashed onslaught of water –
not to say, the sand, soil, debris of uprooted plants and animals in its wake –
rushed to over 100,000,000 cubic meters per second



After Fanon (2021) by Lee & Sakata

...crystal clarity became increasingly ablur,
until a few meters away –
x brushstrokes everywhere x

Maps…are superimposed in such a way that each map finds itself modified in the following map, rather than finding its origin in the preceding one: from one map to the next, it is not a matter of searching for an origin, but of evaluating *displacements*. Every map is a redistribution of impasses and breakthroughs, of thresholds and

enclosures. There is not only a reversal of directions, but also a difference in nature: the unconscious no longer deals with persons and objects, but with trajectories and becomings, it is no longer an unconscious of commemoration but one of mobilization, an unconscious whose objects take flight rather than remaining buried in the ground.[2]

- Gilles Deleuze

Memo: July 24, 2024

Distance // Color-Power // Light:
Seurat—(Monet)—Byzantine mosaics
(Deleuze/Maldiney – Plotinus and Byzantine Art)



Detail of ***-gon(e)*** (2024) by Lee & Sakata

these were not photographic stills at all . . .



-gon(e) (2024) by Lee & Sakata

. . . they were his 1908 paintings.

the the peel transverse (g) one
(b)rake away silhouette bases
or the of the (ir)
break epidermal immortal responses
the layers flesh that
(d')or of flowed. (a) (l) one
(r) (f) aces (g/l)ives.
that **belief** The
has for a domain of action, work (ing)
reference Actually, a behavior, of
only itself. to (o) philosophical
flow to enter and
the **contingent** the historical
flesh times field reflection
of jittering of is
the thought, put
have folds it blazin' back
made to of synapses is thought into (thru)
it factors firing necessary past the (ir)
uncertain, of for thought field
to number a passing of
have certain to (the)
made an work
it outside of
lose **memory** swirl thought
its of only
familiarity tear on
just mists condition
make swarming that
just the one
make morning clearly
air canvas a grasps
with chip problematization
dizzying to not
tastes release as
a of an
sensing cosmic arrangement
control accelerando dust of
to child play storms representations
mozart's stammer and but

elderly grace leaven rice as
the fight of light past right aromas a
to anywhere's shining through work
...images the cut grass emeralds glassing of (in)
an uninterrupted sound of deaf brilliance yet to come and missing
chain...

thought.[3]

...whose slaves we are...

Maybe nothing was said…

(*Hommage à JLG*)

Maybe nothing was said…

The earth is closing in on us
pushing us through the last passage
and we tear off our limbs to pass through.
The earth is squeezing us.
I wish we were its wheat Maybe nothing was said…
so we could die and live again.
I wish the earth was our mother
so she'd be kind to us.
I wish we were pictures on the rocks
for our dreams to carry as mirrors.
We saw the faces of those to be killed by the last
of us in the last defense of the soul.
We cried over their children's feast.
We saw the faces of those who'll throw
our children out of the windows of this last space.
Our star will hang up mirrors.
Where should we go after the last frontiers?
Where should the birds fly after the last sky?
Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air?
We will write our names with scarlet stream.
We will cut off the hand of the song
to be finished by our flesh.
We will die here, here in the last passage.
Here and here our blood will plant its olive tree.[4]

Mahmoud Darwish

(*Hommage à Debussy: En plein air*)

1. Deleuze, Gilles. “Conférence sur le temps musical – IRCAM, 1978.” http://www.le-terrier.net/deleuze/19ircam-78.htm. Trans. by the authors.

2. Deleuze, Gilles. “What Children Say.” *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997), 63.

3. Foucault, Michel. “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations.” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, New Press, 1997), 119.

4. Darwish, Mahmud. “The Earth is closing in on us.” *Victims of a Map : A Bilingual Anthology of Arabic Poetry (Adonis, Mahmud Darwish, Samil al-Qasim)*, ed. Abdullah al-Udhari (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 14.

A Lace Hat in a Puddle: An exchange of letters with the past

ELINA SALORANTA

Translation: Michael Garner



Jacob's Place 26/13 Aug. Thursday 1909[1]

Dear People!

I believe I have received all your letters and you presumably mine too. The last time I wrote cards to you from Mitau. That was when Jan left for a week in Riga to draw his altarpiece, as he said. Consequently I now have some peace and quiet again. I nevertheless think the solitude here is having an overly depressive effect on me. I have become so melancholic and nervous that I cannot tolerate anything. I frequently miss Father – especially at times like this – I loved him so unreservedly and he was always so good to me. I do not miss Jan in the slightest – I contemplate the future with him with nothing but dread.

1 At the start of the 20TH century, Latvia observed the Julian calendar, while Finland followed the Gregorian calendar. Elli's letter gives the date in both.

He is surely sick – no normal person behaves like he does. But whatever it is that is troubling him – it is impossible to know. And nor does he himself believe in doctors. While he was in Riga he went to see a doctor friend, who examined him and said he has Magenkatharr[2]*, and gave him Karlsbad water with large amounts of some sort of powder. That did not make it any better. I think he most probably has a worm – or then there is something wrong with his nerves.*

One day, for example, I had just got fresh butter from the Krahbant. – As soon as Jan put it in his mouth he started to feel sick, pronounced it bad butter and has not let it pass his lips in any form since, not even in food. – On the contrary he was aggrieved that I did not think it bad too. – With the best will in the world I could not detect anything wrong with it. – And yet I consider myself much more demanding with regard to butter than J. is.

Then when we were getting into the carriage to go to Mitau and Laila was wearing her white lace hat, Jan became enraged, insisted that he could not stand the hat, grabbed it off the child's head, crumpled it between his hands and threw it straight into a dirty puddle by the well. – No normal person behaves that way, there is actually something sick about it. Hardly a day passes without him yelling and criticizing us, usually for some trifle. – He is quiet for at most a few hours a day, i.e. when he is painting outside the home.

I have written to you about all this in the hopes that you might find some source of light for me. I cannot find any myself.[3]

Elli

2 German for gastroenteritis.

3 The letter is from the private collection of Elli's descendant Anto Leikola. I have abbreviated the letter, but have not changed the sentence order.

Helsinki, 26 August 2018

Dear Elli,

Thank you for your letter, which I received via numerous intermediaries. There is no trace of your postcards and it may be that something else has been lost, too, but as far as I know I have found the major part of your letters dating from 1885 onwards. Some of them are kept in archives, some of them are lying on my own work table. Would you have believed that you would end up being a subject of study one day?

It all began when I visited your home museum in Riga. Or rather, it's not actually *your* museum, it's your famous husband's, but let's not quibble. I went there a couple of years ago and my interest was aroused when I heard that you were from Finland and on top of that an artist, a trained singer. On my return home, I began to find out about you and got in touch with one of your relatives, who loaned me your letters. That relative, by the way, is your sister Anna's daughter's son, Anto, who was six years old when you died. He has also written about you himself and published your final letters from 1943.[4]

Last spring, I went to study your personal effects further in the Latvian Literature and Music Museum. There they had the other end of your correspondence, the letters and cards you got from Finland. The most touching was a letter in which your younger sister Liisi told you about the death of your brother Lauri in the spring of 1912. At the end of the letter Liisi had added a few words about Anna's daughter, who was born just a week before Lauri's death, and the sentence: "Eino is just bringing some coloured glass for us

4 Leikola, Anto. "Elli Rozentālen viimeiset kirjeet". Rozentāls-seuran jäsenlehti (Rozentals Society members' newsletter) 6/1993, 76–80.

to look at the solar eclipse."[5] On that day, April 17, 1912, there really was a solar eclipse, which I assume you watched from the other side of the Baltic Sea. Perhaps it momentarily united you with your siblings, who you missed so much. I actually intend to use Liisi's letter as the basis for a video piece, in which the movements of the heavenly bodies are juxtaposed with family photos taken by Lauri. Thus, the intimate will be linked with the cosmic, micro-history with macro-phenomena.

My plans also include another work that takes its starting point in your "dirty-puddle letter" from August 1909. There is something as universal as a solar eclipse about that letter; it speaks of loneliness and depression, of an inner black sun, as one contemporary philosopher – Julia Kristeva – would put it. In its structure the letter is an appeal for help, and since it begins with the words "Dear People", I see it as being addressed not to your siblings alone, but to the whole of humanity. The idea is to get viewers to reply to you in their minds, to join you in seeking "some source of light".

But before that, I will try to reply to you myself. This text is thus a letter from the present to the past, an attempt to speak to a woman whose life arouses my sympathy. At the same time, it is an attempt to write differently from the way that research texts are generally written, in a spirit of experimentation. One source of inspiration has been Anna Makkonen's book *Sinulle* [For You] (1996) which has a long and descriptive subtitle: "a novel that does not dare to speak its name or woman, rebellion, writing and history, i.e. what happened when the author of this book got her hands on a diary from 1905."[6] This is a pioneering work of Finnish experimental

5 Liisi's letter to Elli 17.4.1912, RMM.

6 *Sinulle – romaani joka ei uskalla sanoa nimeään tai nainen, kapina, kirjoitus ja historia, eli mitä tapahtui kun tämän kirjan tekijä sai käsiinsä erään päiväkirjan vuodelta 1905.* Not published in English.

research writing, a study of the manuscript of a diary novel made using the diary method.

Another important source of inspiration has been Maarit Leskelä-Kärki's doctoral thesis *Kirjoittaen maailmassa – Krohnin sisaret ja kirjallinen elämä*[7] [The Krohn Sisters: Lives in Writing] (2006). Of the sisters who are the subject of this dissertation Helmi was your classmate and Aino (Kallas) your friend, and when I read about them, it feels like I am reading about you. In Aino's diaries I have even encountered you in person: "I met Elli in the street today. She was shaky and nervous, spoke very quickly, about rooms, prices, butter..."[8] In the course of my work, I have also got to know Maarit personally, so that she has flown off the page to become a living partner in conversation.

In her most recent work *Toisten elämät*[9] [The Lives of Others] (2017) Maarit considers what art can offer biography research. One example that she investigates is *verse biography*, which takes the form of poetry, and which I see as having many aspects in common with my own work. As with verse biography, I, too, aim at concise expression, and nor am I trying to give a complete picture of you. I, too, shamelessly use you as a reflecting surface. But in art this is permitted, and Maarit also sees significance in the way that there are holes in the story: "Even though having gaps is already recognized in contemporary biography, the author of a written biography always has a need to fill in those gaps, to explain and interpret the silence. It is here that there could [...] lie the new, creative potential of verse biography for the field of biography writing: not to fill in the gaps, but to let the silence speak."[10]

7 Not published in English.
8 Diary entry 11.9.1916. Kallas 1954, 29.
9 Not published in English.
10 Leskelä-Kärki 2017, 201–202. When writing about verse biography Leskelä-Kärki cites Anna Jackson's article "The Verse Biography: Introduction" (2016).

Apart from verse biography I have learned from Maarit about the concept of "empathic reading", which gives the researcher, too, permission to empathize. Empathic readers do not idealize scholarly distance, but rather hurl themselves into a close relationship with the subject of their research. They, nevertheless, know that they are interpreting someone else through their own experiences, and therefore try to be aware of what is going on in their own minds. Thus, the empathic reader is also an ethical reader.[11]

In history research nowadays there is much talk of empathy and ethicality, of the human dignity of the dead. For example, the recently published *Historiantutkimuksen etiikka*[12] [The Ethics of Historical Research] (2017) warns against the human voyeuristic urge and reminds us that we should not humiliate people who have been abused by revealing the details of their suffering.[13] This prompts the question: What right do I have to read your letters and to reveal the dirty laundry of your marriage? Would it not be fairer to leave you in peace? On the other hand, I find your letters full of significance, so that they absolutely *should* be published. Besides, you are not a novice with regard to publicity. A whole book about you will soon be published,[14] and a picture of you hangs on the wall of the Latvian National Museum of Art; after all, you were Jan's muse.

Yes, Janis Rozentāls, the Latvian Gallen-Kallela[15]. He was already a recognized painter when you met. That encounter is legendary, and the story has been recounted on numerous occasions, but let us

11 Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 78–85.
12 Not published in English.
13 Vainio-Korhonen 2017, 37–40.
14 Saara Vaherjoki-Honkala's biography of Elli will be published in Finnish by Nemo in 2020.
15 Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931) was a painter, now considered Finland's national artist.

tell it once again: it was November 1902, and you had just begun your tour of the Baltics. In Latvia you received an invitation to a party for Riga's intelligentsia, to which Jan was also invited. The host of the evening asked you to perform and, after your performance, he asked Jan whether he had liked you – presumably meaning your voice. "I certainly did," Jan replied, "She is my future wife!" Four days later, you were engaged.[16]

The letter that you sent home after the engagement is quite moving: "Be glad and rejoice, you human souls [...] since for the first time in my life I have known the great, noble love of a true man." Then comes a description: "He is 36 years old, tall, dark, beautiful body, a handsome man, large, deep, brown eyes that so tenderly, so wonderfully, gaze into my soul – without passion or fervour." At the end there is a further message to me and other contemporary readers: "Let not even a hair's breadth of doubt or pessimistic viewpoints arise in those of you who read these lines."[17]

*

In your letters you talk in very warm tones about your father, and I, too, am deeply attached to him. Such care and concern radiates from Theodor Forssell that I myself feel I am getting my own share of it. When I told Maarit about this, she exclaimed: "They should write biographies about men like that!"[18] It is true: Theodor was a truly great man, a good father.

Maarit is generally of the view that biography writing about men requires an update. She says that it has hardly been analysed, and

16 Vaherjoki-Honkala 2006, 57.
17 Elli's letter home 8./21.11.1902, Anto Leikola's private collection.
18 Conversation in Café Engel, Helsinki 7.5.2018.

no gender-sensitive biographies have been written about men, nor the kinds of accounts in which interest focuses on life's private, intimate side.[19]

Well, look no further... This text directs its interest not just at private life, but even goes as far as stomach ailments. I agree, by the way, that Jan had a worm, and I have a name for it, too: the romantic myth of the artist. This is well known to cause nausea and unpredictable behaviour.

Sorry, I didn't mean to make fun of the issue. But I can't help thinking that Jan's rages were somehow linked to your time's idea of what it means to be an artist. At the start of the 20th century, the artist was still seen as being an exceptional individual, a genius, and was given more licence than others. An especially great deal was permitted to those who had national "utility or publicity value", as Tere Vadén would say.[20]

Did you ever get Laila's hat clean again? I have a good stain remover.

Nowadays, there are good deworming medicines, too, but the romantic myth of the artist is a stubborn one and I fear that it parasitizes many of us. Fortunately there is a book that makes it easy to identify: *Kuvataiteilija taidemaailmassa. Tapaustutkimus kuvataiteellisen toiminnan sosiaalipsykologisista merkityksistä*[21] [The visual artist in the artworld. Case study of the social psychological significance of work in the visual arts] (1991). The author, Vappu Lepistö, has already moved on to where you, too, are, so do give her my regards if you see her. I, in fact, very much like Vappu's approach: she trained

19 Leskelä-Kärki 2017, 219.
20 Vadén 2006, 408–409.
21 Not published in English.

as both a visual artist and a sociologist, and did not hide the personal nature of her study.

At the start of the book Vappu reminds us that there is nothing wrong with myths in themselves; they are part of the symbolic meaning system with which we poor human souls attempt to see order in the world. But, when they are unconscious, myths can lead to tragic outcomes, since mythical thinking is by nature dichotomous. The most fundamental of these dichotomies is the opposition between nature and culture. In art this can be seen as the notion of the inner compulsion to create, which society [or a spouse] seeks to suffocate.[22]

Vappu divides the artist myth of the Romantic Age into two parts, the genius myth and the bohemian myth. In both of them art is seen as a higher category than life. Both also emphasize the marginality and psychological exceptionalism of the artist. This applies particularly to the genius, who is in touch with both divine and demonic forces. Not even the secular genius is safe, since, as Vappu points out, psychoanalytic theory has carried on the idea of the link between creativity and madness – the arguments have simply changed and, in place of the supernatural, we speak of the unconscious. Sociology has not, however, fallen for the same tale, rather, by the 1920s, it was already defining genius as "someone who brings value". Among the best are the dead geniuses, since they are no longer able to destroy their reputations or to adopt positions contrary to the interests of the authorities that benefit from them.[23]

Vappu sums up the Bohemian myth with the quotation: "I am not like you are, engineer Ekgren."[24] The background to the myth lies

22 Lepistö 1991, 42–48.

23 Lepistö 1991, 45–50.

24 Lepistö 1991, 51. The quotation "I am not like you are, engineer Ekgren" (*Jag är inte som du ingenjör Ekgren*) is the opening line of the book *Dandy* (1975) by the Swedish poet Erik Fylkeson.

in the Paris of start of the 19th century, where the sons of wealthy families began to rebel against their fathers by dressing in "artistic" costumes. Later on, they were joined by proletarian artists, and figures such as Gauguin and van Gogh, who rejected western civilization in its entirety. In this game the bourgeoisie also had its supporters, who were called "salon artists".[25] If you promise not to tell anyone, I can reveal that I think Jan was one of those, at least when it comes to his portraits...

Today, hardly anyone cares about standing out from the "engineer Ekgrens", since bohemianism has lost its power to enchant. The bohemian ideals of the 19th century, nevertheless, live on in today's countercultures.[26] In the aftermath of Romanticism, there are also three mythical artist types moving among us, for whom Vappu used the appellations "the hermit", "the viveur" and "the martyr". What distinguishes them is their attitude to the dichotomy between life and art.

The hermit withdraws from the worlds and rejects life. Or more correctly: for the hermit, art is life, but it means renouncing human happiness and direct connections with other people. According to Vappu, this model reflects the old Faustian theme, in which the artist sells 'his' soul to the devil.[27]

The viveur does not withdraw but accumulates experiences and makes "experiments" on both 'himself' and others. As an example of this Vappu quotes Mika Waltari's *Koiranheisipuu* (*The Tree of Dreams*)[28] from 1953: "Why couldn't I be satisfied with a small, quiet

25 Lepistö 1991, 51.

26 Lepistö 1991, 53.

27 Lepistö 1991, 55.

28 Waltari's *Koiranheisipuu* has been published in English under the title *The Tree of Dreams and other stories*. Translation Lily Leino, Alan Beesley & Paul Sjöblom. New York: Pocket Books (1966).

life... my joy, my happiness, my success, everything, I had to smash everything to pieces time after time in order to achieve something... I knew that I would torment everyone I loved, to the point of despair."[29]

The third artist type, the martyr, is linked to the previous two, but here there is an emphasis on the artist's own suffering. Creativity is like a cross that the artist has to bear.[30] The myth of the suffering artist may also reflect the envy that society feels towards the self-realizing individual. There is an attempt to, as it were, punish the artist for 'his' privileged status.[31]

I identify with these models, especially the hermit and the martyr – it would, of course, be inappropriate for a woman to accumulate experiences. Anne E. Boyd, who has studied 19th-century women writers in the USA, has said that, with women, the romantic myth of the artist is easily combined with the image of the humble, self-sacrificing, ideal woman.[32] Besides being modest, this woman is industrious, since because of her gender she has not been endowed with the gift of genius. So, she has no alternative other than to work and wait, as the author of *Little Women* (1869), Louisa May Alcott, exhorts.[33]

There is, however, a way round all this. You hinted at it in the letter in which you wondered what made you fall in love with Jan. Written on the letter are the words: "For Anna only", but will you permit me to share a clue: "Your sister was superficial in her youth. – I had always wanted to be 'a great man's wife', I was not satisfied with everyday people. You understand me, my love – not so that I

29 Lepistö 1991, 57.
30 Lepistö 1991, 58.
31 Lepistö 1991, 50.
32 Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 612.
33 Boyd 2004, 170.

could possess a famous name, but out of great love and respect for art. – That was my motive."[34]

So, a woman who loves art can become great by seeking out the companionship of a "great man". Aino Kallas alludes to the same thing when contemplating her relationship with Eino Leino: "My dream of greatness has always been to be close to a great, creative genius."[35] And, as we know, before Eino, that genius was Jan.

It happened seven years after the dirty-puddle letter, in summer 1916. You had by then moved to Finland to escape the First World War and Aino stayed with you for a couple of weeks. Jan began to paint a portrait of her – although replacing the head with that of a maid – and to go for moonlight walks with her. Being a farsighted woman Aino recorded the romance in her diary, which she published in the 1950s. In case you have not got hold of that book, I reproduce here the description of one walk: "We walked and walked, what roads we took I do not know, here, there. All of a sudden, we began to talk about women and love [...] 'I used to be always in love,' he said, 'for brief intervals, but I always loved only one woman at a time. And I always knew: that woman is for me, when I go to her, she will not refuse me, my intuition told me so. I have never once been sent packing.'"[36]

Judging by all of this, Jan was a "viveur", that's his diagnosis. But let us allow him to carry on (in Aino's voice): "A couple of years back, I made the acquaintance of a Polish damoiselle, I saw her in a railway carriage, her outward appearance and movements appealed to me, I decided to see whether I could manage to sway her. I sat down and began looking at her, quite rightly, after a moment she

34 Elli's letter to Anna 18.1.1909, HKA.
35 Diary entry 2.3.1917. Kallas 1954, 66.
36 Diary entry 16.7.1916. Kallas 1954, 25.

displayed clear signs of agitation. She tried to put her hat box on the rack, but supposedly could not reach, so I helped her. That turned into an affair that lasted a week. I got her an apartment near our home, we were constantly together. The first time, Elli was jealous. It was as if she feared it could develop into something more serious."[37]

Do you know, I am beginning to have my suspicions about that altarpiece that Jan said he was going to paint. Was there talk of it in society?

À propos of rumours – in one letter you ask if it is true that Helmi Krohn and Erkki Melartin considered marriage.[38] Researchers are not completely certain about this, but it is generally thought that their relationship was platonic.

Maarit has analysed that relationship in more detail, as has Vesa Vares, who has studied Helmi's value world. From their analyses it is clear that the notion of love in the 19th century and also at the start of the 20th century was broader than it is nowadays. Love came in many varieties, and not all of it came down to a couple relationship. Friendship was different, as well, and could involve expressions of affection that nowadays would be interpreted as sexual.[39] Erkki's and Helmi's relationship, too, was intimate, but not erotic. It was an intellectual partnership, a dialogue between two creative people.[40]

Was your friendship with Erkki also like that? Or am I simply projecting on it my own hopes of sharing creativity? Erkki was your fellow student and it is said that he sent you his songs. On one tour before your marriage you spent a night in the home of Erkki's aunt – in his room – and you posted a card from there that told of at least some degree of closeness: "Life is indeed wonderful sometimes – and

37 Ibid.
38 Elli's letter to Anna 17/30.9.1913, HKA.
39 Vares 2005, 84 and Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 552.
40 Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 519–530.

yet occasionally so bitter, bitter! – No, be gone, sad thoughts, otherwise I will start to weep – and you, too, are so far away, but you do always understand me, don't you, Erkki?"[41]

I have, by the way, wondered how you felt about not being able to go on tournées any more? Did you suffer from having to give up your career? Or do you think that question absurd, *so 21st century*? After all, you had absorbed the Fennoman duty ethic, as Vesa would say. "Among the educated upper classes the highest goal of bringing up girls was to raise mothers for the new cultured homes [...] The most important thing was to learn to run a household, to do well in society, to speak foreign languages – and to think rightly, in a self-sacrificing way."[42]

Fortunately the cultured home had a piano, and when the children had grown up, you began taking singing lessons again. Occasionally, you also got to go to concerts, and it is comforting to know that it brought you happiness: "At such times, I enjoy myself so indescribably, I forget for a moment my motherly heartaches and financial worries – I live solely in the moment, and give myself over to it."[43]

Ah! I think I have found a "source of light"! It is the piano, music, maybe also letter writing, since "once solitude has been named, we are less alone."[44]

*

41 Vaherjoki-Honkala 2006, 55. The quotation is from Elli's postcard to Erkki on 3.7.1899 (National Library of Finland, Manuscript Collection, Erkki Melartin archive).
42 Vares 2005, 55.
43 Elli's letter to Anna 30/13.11.1907, HKA.
44 Kristeva 1989, 91.



Let us return once more to that dirty puddle. I see how the lace hat floats on its surface, and soon sinks.

I see the carriage into which you were stepping, and I hear how Laila bursts into tears, even if there is no mention of it in the letter.

What happened next?

In a letter sent on August 30 you say that you and Jan had had a "furious scene". "I cried the whole day – I was quite sick. My last hope of getting to be with you in Finland had gone. He will not agree to a divorce on any terms. – He says he loves me so much (!) – I can leave my home if I want, he said – but he will on no account give me the children."[45]

45 Elli's letter to Anna 30.8.1909, HKA.

So, you planned a divorce. Nowadays, getting divorced is commonplace, but many women (and men) still experience similar things to you. That is why your letters are important.

Your letters also have importance because they challenge our romantic fantasies about both love and being an artist. And that is what's liberating!

I am not, however, ready to give up all fantasies, and that is why I am putting one more quotation at the end here. It is from the letter that you wrote in February 1910, after your return to Riga from a winter holiday: "So, I arrived here – and Jan's welcome was downright magnificent. Celebratory meal, flowers, confectionary – and he himself was in a fantastic mood and truly superlatively happy, so those first days went by in one big whirl. – Then he took me to his studio, which was likewise in festive garb. – There in front of me and finished was a large, beautiful winter landscape of Kokenhusen[46] [...] A great success! – Moreover, he had made a great picture of me, a very fine one, after that photograph by Badje that you have there (head down, curls hanging loose, in profile). It does indeed suit me to live with him when he is in that sort of mood – and at times like that life is so good and easy. – We have talked a lot and been together during these days. I am not bitter at him since I know so well what is going on at the root of it all, that root is noble and good, the surface just so often intolerable. [...] Nowadays, I am healthy and with that quite plump looking since I feel so invigorated in both soul and body! A new zest for life has awoken within me, and the past is buried!"[47]

Best regards,
Elina

46 The German name for Koknese, Latvia.
47 Elli's letter to Anna 28/10.2.1910, HKA.

Printed sources:

Boyd, Anne E. (2004) *Writing for immortality. Women and the emergence of high literary culture in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Kallas, Aino (1954) *Päiväkirja vuosilta 1916–1921*. Helsinki: Otava.
Kristeva, Julia (1989) *Black Sun*. Translation Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press. French original 1987.
Lepistö, Vappu (1991) *Kuvataiteilija taidemaailmassa. Tapaustutkimus kuvataiteellisen toiminnan sosiaalipsykologisista merkityksistä.* Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto.
Leskelä-Kärki, Maarit (2006) *Kirjoittaen maailmassa. Krohnin sisaret ja kirjallinen elämä*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
Leskelä-Kärki, Maarit (2017) *Toisten elämät. Kirjoituksia elämäkerroista*. Vantaa: Avain.
Vadén, Tere (2006) "Nerous, yksilö, lahja". In Taava Koskinen (ed.) *Kirjoituksia neroudesta. Myytit, kultit, persoonat*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
Vaherjoki-Honkala, Saara (2006) "Elli Forssell-Rozentāle. Taiteilijan muusa aikalaislähteiden valossa". In Marjo Mela (ed.) *Janis ja Elli Rozentāls. Elämää ja taidetta*. Helsinki: Rozentāls-seura.
Vainio-Korhonen, Kirsi (2017) "Vastuullinen historia". In Satu Lidman, Anu Koskivirta and Jari Eilola (ed.) *Historiantutkimuksen etiikka*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
Vares, Vesa (2005) *Helmi Krohn 1871–1913. Naisen velvollisuusetiikka ja yksilön ratkaisu.* Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Archive sources:

Anto Leikola's private collection.
Helsinki City Archives (HKA). Anna Suolahti collection.
Latvian Literature and Music Museum / Rakstniecības un mūzikas muzejs (RMM). Elli Rozentāle collection.

This essay was originally written in Finnish and published in the anthology *Suo, kuokka ja diversiteetti* edited by Leevi Lehto and Markku Eskelinen (ntamo 2018).

The images are from Elina Saloranta's video piece *A letter from Elli* (2019). The video can be viewed on the website of Av-arkki, The Centre for Finnish Media Art (www.av-arkki.fi).

A Short Walk: Tracking the Shadows of my Desire Lines Across the Research

ADESOLA AKINLEYE

I go for a walk to consider 'Desire Lines'. I am disorientated by jet lag but I know London is a great thinking partner for me. It is a cold winter early evening, slightly damp. I am expecting I might follow some informal architectural paths people have tracked onto the fformal design of the city: desire lines.[1] But as I walk, I find my own memories track lines of desire across my present, across the paths I walk.

Prelude:

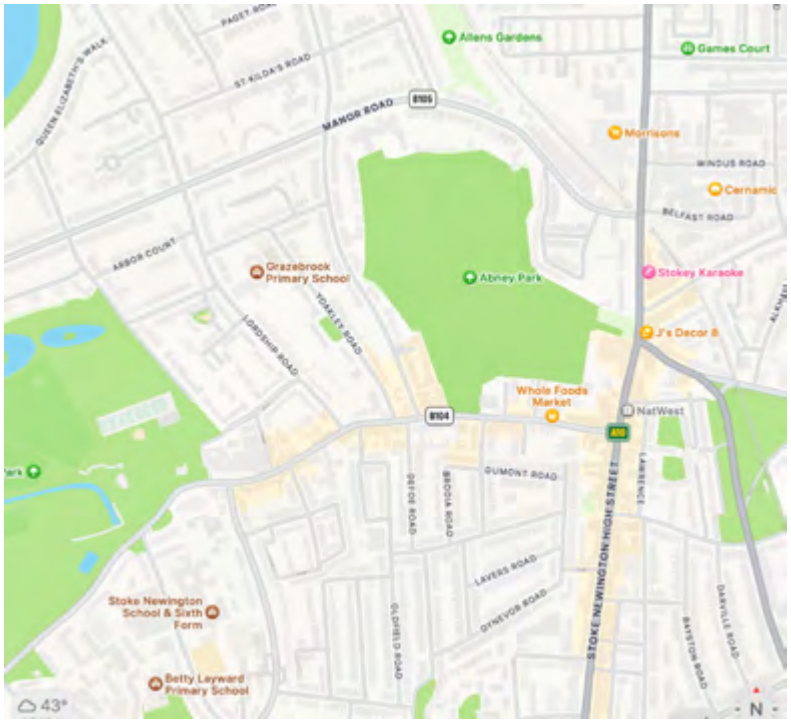
Research, world, and I are all in flux, in movement, not fixed. We are in relationship with each other. Therefore, there is no neutral position from which I am independent of world around or neutral position from which Researched is independent of me. Given this, this short text is an Étude into what it means to me to be present within my research process. I am responding particularly to why the notions of being biased/unbiased are redundant from my embodied relational perspective. Rather than attempt to deny my presence or attempt 'neutrality,' I am suggesting alternatively my desires track lines vital to my reflexive understanding of *how* I am within the moving contextual rhythms that are research, particularly at difficult points in a research process.

Soundtrack:

Somewhere in my past Joan Baez sings[2] *'And you, who do you think I am? Yes you, who do you say I am? Once when I was flying past the steeple, the bells were ringing in my ears. I was counting the broken-hearted people, and I was following their tears...'*

1 In architecture and urban planning, desire lines are unplanned, unofficial paths forged by users of the space.

2 Baez, Joan "Who do you think I am". *Gone From Danger*, Collector's Edition (CD) 1997. Written by Sinead Lohan



Choreography:

I step out of Stoke Newington Station onto the busy pavement at the junction of Stamford Hill and Manor Road, London. From the station entrance, my eyes are drawn across the intersection to the small set of five or six houses nestled into the northwest corner of the crossroads. These houses front onto Manor Road with their backs teetering on the edge of a gully where the railway runs to and from the station. They are sandwiched, neat little houses. You were there, in the house that has a red door, years ago. You sat in the front room looking out of the window at the traffic and stood in the back kitchen pouring tea from a teapot listening to the trains rattle past.

You were, in your early twenties, full of potential, lots of possible next steps: stay in London? move back to the USA? about to go on a trip? You explored a choreographic idea in the living room for a moment while others were upstairs. Dancing around the big chairs in the front room designing a ballet for premieres to come. Behind the red door, You were full of possibilities, amazing to me, fresh, vital, and multidirectional like the junction I always look across to remember You by. All street junctions have a slight essence of Stamford-Hill-and-Manor-Road, the warm tea, and my own possibility. **I remember You, my desire to always have that attractive sense of possibility.** It is a strong desire, one that keeps me going at difficult times. I would not be willing to leave You or forget You because in moments far from this corner, a long way from the red door, I need You.

I turn left out of the station, away from the red-door-house and walk down the slight incline of Stamford Hill Road, as it changes its name to Stoke Newington High Street. I pass the Jamaican Patty Restaurant, past the Hasidic Jewish supermarket called 'The Egg' to the next set of lights, where I cross the road. I am walking past shops that have changed hands now. The buildings are the same, but inside them, new offers wait. There is a health food and fresh vegetable deli where there used to be a rundown boarded-up place. There is a small gym that has a workout room I note as a potential future rehearsal space. I continue walking down the road past a restaurant which looks closed today, I zig-zag through the people waiting at the bus stops and reach the corner of Stoke Newington High Street and Church Street. And suddenly, as if I did not know You would be there, I see You again. In the pub on the corner. You are smaller than your red-door-self at the junction. You are quiet, sitting at a table at the edge of discomfort, in the noisy pub, feeling a little inexperienced, not a drinker. Remember that time You sat in that pub and let the people around You arrive and order drinks, and You sat with

your discomfort and waited with it. A desire line is the route that reveals what compels: a desire line is the well-worn path by which my memory becomes my identity. **I track a desire line – a path toward patience and tolerance for uncertainty** laid by the energy of acknowledging who I have been, You in discomfort there waiting.

I turn the corner and cross Church Street. I pass the card shops, the barbers, the metal earring place. Each is located as much within my history as within the geography of the street. I look across the road to the shop that used to be a restaurant until the restaurant grew too big and had to move around the corner by the bus stops. I know these buildings' secrets, which used to be what, how they have changed and moved and redesigned themselves. I pass the school and abruptly stop. Oh, a new shop altogether – a Bubble Tea place. 'I love Bubble Tea' I say under my breath like a mantra. My dear friend from Hong Kong introduced it to late-forties-me. Giggling, You took a sip of the drink she held out to You 'what is it!!' You laughed. **I track a desire line – a brave path towards wonder**, worn by the sound of my laughter. I look at the shop front and read the menu with my friend's eyes, shining with Boston Chinatown discovery, reading the ingredients to look for vegan options with Hong Kong summer knowing. Hmm, I might buy a tea on my way back. I keep walking. I cross the road (Church Street) to go and look more closely at particular shop fronts. Each brings You back to me. You used to visit the homeopath in that building. You looked at hats in that shop.

I lived a few streets from here as a toddler. I knew Church Street as *the place on the other side of the park*. Clissold Park where my parents or my grandmother would bring me nearly every day. That is where I am walking to now. As the street winds down towards the park, shops turn into public buildings: a church, the Town Hall. With less shop lights flooding onto the pavement, the street gets darker. By the time I reach the entrance to the park, there is very

little lighting. A person jogging pushes past me at the park entrance, where I falter at the sudden lack of visibility. But I know this place from when I was very small. It is a home. You came here looking up to your grandmother's face, holding hands, holding a bag of stale bread to feed the ducks in the other hand. You would stand up against the railing between the pond and pathway. In the dark now I look for the little pond.

This is where You could see turtles on the pond edge camouflaged within the grey mud of the banks, and of course, where the ducks and geese lived.

It is so dark I cannot see anything I recognize, no landmarks to bring You back. You are just present in memory that is sensations, textures tastes of two-year-old You. Nonetheless I want to capture the moment of being here in this old place. I get out my phone camera. I have the flash setting turned off because it would overexpose the darkness of the park and I would lose the evening quality of the moment. I look around for more joggers! When all is clear, I stand in the middle of the path and take a picture of the tree line with a bit of the pond in the foreground. You walked past those trees on the other side of the park daily, with your grandma. Because I have the flash off the camera phone takes a few seconds for the shutter to capture the treeline image. The image slowly appears.





I look over the phone screen, Oh! and there is the little café where You might stop for a tea and ice-cream. 'I must get a photograph of that!' I say out loud to myself. I like this long exposure memory, it captures the sense of darkness.

I can see the lights around the café with a slight glare in the picture which also illustrates how the picture is of the dark. I am standing in the dark and I know the things around me but I cannot quite see them. I can see them more clearly through the pictures I am taking; the long exposure brings them into view. I take a picture looking back at the church steeple and the signpost with the different routes across the park.

It is time to go. It is time to walk back up the High Street to get the train. It is hard to leave You here in the park holding hands



with Grandma. **I track a desire line – to the unwritten, the trust in the known *and* the unseen** worn by my grandma's weathered hands leading me through the park. I want to take something of this moment with me. On the ground there is a painted sign. It is to tell bicyclists and joggers that there are children and families walking in the park. It depicts a little person holding the hand of a bigger person. I think "I'll take one more picture of the painted sign." The painted sign, that so neatly depicts little You and grandma. I stop on the path to take the picture of You.

And there I am, not the child reaching up to hold hands: the picture captures me, of now, standing taking the picture (a shadow of myself?). I could not see with this light, but the long exposure captures You/me. Desire lines are usually spatial traces across geographies over time. The desire lines of my walk are memory traces across time over geographies. These desire lines are the way embodied memory becomes into methodology. I am not lost, even as a shadow of myself, You/me are still traceable by following my desire lines.

I look at the picture that captures the unexpected presence of *now*. "Oh, I am in the picture." I say out loud.

Coda:

I walk back up Church Street to the train station. I wish I could wander with You and stay with You for longer in the park, laughing with friends, in the pub, by the window listening to the trains. All the aspirations of what I am. I walk a little faster, going back, shedding pieces of myself: moments I will bump into the next time I am here.

I can never be neutral (biased or unbiased) to be so would be to be without the history of my desires, and my loves, presences that track into the *now* like seams, fault lines, paths linking my pasts and futures to the moment. I am of all of You, in the flux of context. Lines of desire (desire lines) that mark You/me, the rich veins of memory



that contextualize my presence. Rather than attempt to neutralise them I use them to chisel out an outline, to notice myself in the picture (in the research). I try to notice the tread of these paths across the research. I am not neutral because I am not singular or fixed, and yet, "I am *always* in the picture." When I recognize my own desire lines across the context of the research then I have some equipment for the seeing the shifting context of my shadow within the work. Brave, I try to chase my desire lines and know them as moments, caught in the movement of context.

Joan Baez sings '*...I am not sinking in the sadness, I am not throwing bitter stones. I do not worry who will mind me, I am not dancing alone. But you, who do you think I am? Yes you, who do you say I am?*

Programme Notes:

When I am researching, I am pursuing something new. This could be a clearer clarification on something (comparative research or a historiography), or a new perspective to look at an idea or an issue (a critical inquiry or hermeneutic), or an exploration of a new arrangement of things (such as the practice-based-research exploration of new arrangements of movements that create a dance or a new arrangement of shapes and colours that create a work of visual art). As a choreographer and dancer I presume embodiment, along with coming from Indigenous-Africanist worldviews (*Mitákuye Oyás'iŋn*: *we are all related;* Ubuntu: *I am because we are*), relationality is principle, particularly, to the axiology and ontology of my research.

The research process changes my relationship with the things I am researching. This is because I understand them differently when I find out more about them. In researching we find out more broadly or more deeply or from new perspectives. Then we also

communicate that to others, which in itself creates a new relationship with things, we become an ambassador for an idea/'fact'/notion. We become the parent of a theory/art work, an advocate for the existence of something new (to us). Thus, our relationship with things has changed through the researching. When I research, I find out something new (to me), from my relational perspective then, everything changes. The thing being researched (the Researched) changes because I know it better/differently, because of this, the rest of the world changes as the thing being researched is situated in the world. I change because my relationship with the Researched and the world we are situated in has changed. I change because my relationship with the Researched and the world we are situated in has changed. Learning something today can suddenly alter how I understand an event from ten years ago. The event has not 'changed' (because it was never fixed anyway), but its position within the network of relations has. Although new knowledge also reaches backward, altering the significance of what came before, You/me is not lost because just as a desire line is usually a path of desire overcoming spatial planning, these desire lines of my evening walk seem to become lived experience overcoming linear space-time. These desire lines are a personal time/space anchoring rhythm in the multiplicity of the whirl of the paradigm shift of new knowledge's *change of everything*.

Joan Baez sings 'Is it winter where you are? Try to find *me* if you can.'

Score for a More-Than-Human World

ADRIANA DAVID



Score for a More-than-Human World is a dance score created in 2020 that explores the intricate interplay of various natural energies involved in the growth of a "Three Sisters" plantation, which includes corn, beans, and squash. This piece serves as a choreographic notation that captures the essence of these plants' symbiotic relationship and the diverse energies that contribute to their development.

This dance score invites audiences to reflect on the interconnectedness of natural systems and their energetic contributions to life. Through movement notation, it aims to evoke a deeper understanding of ecological relationships and promote awareness of our environment's complexities.

I want to reveal the essence of agriculture—the phenomenology of growth. Perhaps, through our appreciation of nature, we will learn to care for it more deeply. The pleasure of nature lies in its constant change; we experience joy as we witness living organisms transform and grow at their own pace, driven by various invisible energies.

Indigenous agricultural practices in both the United States and Mexico are based on a companion species system for corn, which includes beans, squash, and many other plants such as tomatoes and chilies. Native American tribes refer to this system as the Three Sisters, while in Mexico, it is known as Milpa. These three species are typically grown together because they help maintain balanced and healthy soil for future crops.

This practice is a prime example of mutualism among different living beings. Maize is the tallest and strongest plant in this triad and requires large quantities of nitrogen to thrive. Beans are planted a couple of weeks after corn, allowing them to climb around the corn stalks. Through their roots, beans fix nitrogen into the soil, facilitating the growth of their larger companion. Meanwhile, squash, as a creeping plant, covers the ground to protect the soil from erosion and drying out. Its broad leaves act as mulch,

retaining moisture in the soil and contributing to the survival of its companions.

Corn, like wheat and rice, was adopted and adapted in specific places on Earth. Its isolated successes depended on the region's soil type, climate, ecosystem, culture, and adaptation process. This is the kind of feminist objectivity that Donna Haraway describes: location and situated knowledge are what make our vision objective, cooperative, and ethical. Corn is in fact a very particular species of nature, since, in order to maintain its presence, it needs human energy for its adaptation and reproduction. The grains on the cob are well attached to the cob and, in order to disperse, require human action to detach them and replant them at the right time. Here, the human being has an important role in the network, but never more important than the other actors in history.

"Hacer Milpa" (to make Milpa) is to activate an exchange of energies, rhythms, and extraordinary choreographies. The seed of each species that makes up this crop association takes energy from nutrients, water and heat from the soil to begin its transformation process. As the cycles advance and plant organisms continue to develop, the leaves take on a more important role in history, as they capture energy from the air in the form of carbon dioxide and nitrogen, which dissipates to their roots, back to the soil, and finally part of it is returned to the atmosphere. Each species that makes up a milpa follows its normal transformation cycle, without ever interfering with the cycle of its companions in the network, including humans. These are isolated but linked times, where each being cooperates in the present for the balance of the whole. In addition to the three main species of the milpa, each bioclimatic zone of the territory defines its milpa with its own inhabitants, its own animals and its own plants. The milpa can host up to 60 different edible species, such as quelites, chile, tomato, miltomate, jaltomate, or tejocote and





white sapote in temperate zones, or nopal and agave in arid zones. The milpa is a hyper-localized system whose balance promotes immense agro-biodiversity. It allows for a diverse and nutritious diet at all times of the year thanks to the different cycles it hosts. The milpa is, in effect, an excellent example of mutualism in this more-than-human world. It is a self-regulating natural organization that depends on human energy, without hierarchies, for its survival. This energy is an energy of body and mind, which penetrates both senses of collaboration; the human being, over many years, rather than domesticating the system, becomes integrated into the network as a supportive and community-based being. This being, sensitive to its inner and outer world, is a being that perceives and embodies systems and thus, takes care of the localized balance, it is a being that accepts other senses apart from vision, it perceives the world through its entire body, through smell, hearing, taste and also touch. This is how Maria Puig de la Bellacasa defines it in her book *Matters of Care*, suggesting that touch, as a two-way sense, gives us an opportunity to really maintain our networks through care and affection.

When the corn cycle comes to an end, the grains begin to appear in the plant as a resilient strategy for the survival of the species. The corn begins to form seeds and concentrate its energy on the creation and dissipation of genes for future generations. This is the beginning of the stage of death for the plant. The seeds contain the energy of the past and the future locked in an incredibly strong container. When they are introduced into the earth, they release their energy stored in the soil in the form of roots that become exchange agents between the underground and upper world of nutrients. Seeds are carriers of life stories and resilience, they are the sensors that we must perceive, and also learn to translate the situated knowledge that they give us in order to relearn to self-regulate in a democratic way in this more-than-human world.

The Silent action of the greens vs. human machines.

We produce energy, dissipate it, transform it.

We are bones with cells metabolizing air, starlight and water

Dissipation of energy is what's important

The land we inhabit is cosmos made, not man made.

There is silence.

Silence of the greens transforming energy into different forms within this environment.

In silence, the different nutrients travel from element to element of our earth to allow for the becoming of each plant.

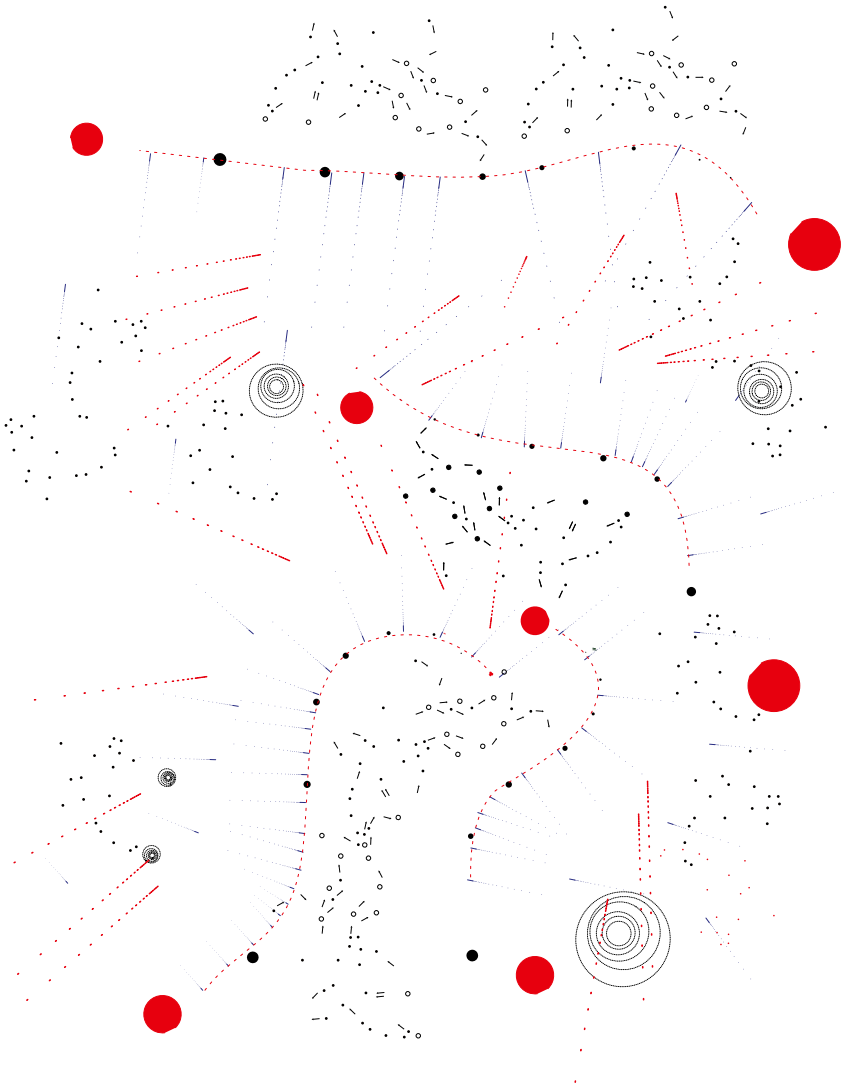
In agriculture there is never dormancy,

There is constant activity initiated by human energy.

However, it is a free energy.

The greens create, transform and, dissipate energy,

each at a different pace.





Terrain

HENNA-RIIKKA HALONEN



Some notes for reading:

If we assume the Terrain is neither an academic text, nor a script, nor a map, nor a novel—but instead, see it as a **prompt**—then in here, it lingers as a **trace**, an imprint on the landscape, neither fully written nor finished.

It hesitates, it is a breath before the sentence, a pause where meaning has yet to solidify.[1]

And now, as a prompt, it is an **opening** rather than a closure. It does not dictate but beckons. It is forward-looking, fragmentary, yet charged and urgent, like a radioactive fossil, pulsing with unrealized futures.

1 Terrain refers to the physical features of the land, including elevation, slope, and landforms, often described as topographical relief, which highlights variations in height. A **Digital Terrain Model (DTM)** is a computer-generated representation of the bare Earth's surface, excluding vegetation and buildings. While a **Digital Surface Model (DSM)** is useful for landscape modeling, city modeling, and visualization, a **DTM** is often required for flood or drainage modeling, land-use studies, geological applications, and planetary science.

This textual landscape quivers (an endless tide of unspoken code)

I am a ghostly outline barely tethered to this world. Translucent, yes, but even translucency has its undeniable privileges.

My presence is regularly met with suspicion, the kind reserved for those who have yet to earn trust, a brittle, necessary tension.

If only I wanted nothing from these situations and spaces, nothing from the organisms and beings that inhabit them. Then, perhaps, my existence would unspool into something simpler, almost weightless. But to live without desire or need, what kind of life is that? As impossible as stepping outside time.

I will discover this tomorrow, or perhaps I uncovered it yesterday.

Two thought experiments come to mind, perhaps destined to eventually fold into one another. The first is an anachronism: the condition of finding oneself at the wrong time. Hence, what happens to an agent or object when it is misplaced or dropped into the past, the future, or another dimension where time has come unmoored?

Is time travel always doomed to failure, then? A pursuit forever tangled in the snares of alienation. To slip through time is to be perpetually out of sync. The past rejects you; the future cannot yet embrace you. Even the present becomes elusive, a shifting terrain where nothing holds still long enough to be understood.

But isn't that the essence of living? To live at the edge of belonging, hovering in a state of continual becoming? This paradox of needing and rejecting, desiring and doubting, is the rhythm of my existence. And so, I wonder: is the failure of temporal travel not a failure at all, but the inevitable cost of venturing beyond the boundaries of the known?

The second thought experiment somewhat overrides the first one as it suggests that we already live in the future. This has been articulated by Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik as following:

Time is changing. Not only are we living in a new time or an accelerated time, but the direction of time itself has changed. We are no longer in linear time in the sense that the past has been, followed by the present and then the future. It is rather the opposite: the future happens before the present; time comes from the future. If people have the idea that time is gone, or that time no longer makes sense, or that it is not what it used to be, the reason is that they - or we all - have problems getting used to living in such a speculative time.[2]

The now and here of the work from the future is recorded in words, images and sounds; it is painted as landscapes and compositions, and visible as traces that constantly expand the living, breathing space of the present.

The future is involved in shaping what is now, and even more so, what times are our contemporaries.

Imagine the ground beneath you vanishing, not with a crash, but with a quiet dissolution, as though the earth has simply chosen to forget itself. You are suspended, not in freefall, but in space without edges, without coordinates. The horizon has slipped away, taking its promises with it. If you follow me—if you can feel this void eating into you as it eats away at itself—then perhaps you can sense the paradox: that in losing a point of reference, space begins to grow. It grows by folding, by smouldering. It grows through the ache of perception, the groping for a boundary that no longer exists.

2 Avanessian, Malik, 2016

To wander is to expand. But how do you wander without the sun to fix your path, without stars to puncture the dark? How do you make use of this outside-ness, this dizzying exile?

Find a character from someone else's story.

In its silence now louder than the voices it once held

Think of **J.G. Ballard's** novel *Concrete Island***.** The island is a wound in the city's body, a place where the past clings to shards of stone and steel, and the future piles up in the broken guts of machines. It is both archive and prophecy: the cracked bones of an older world and the rusting entrails of a world that hasn't yet learned to stop breaking itself. Ballard's landscapes are not meant to be merely seen. They must be heard—word by word, sound by sound, curve by curve. The rubble whispers stories. The shadows fold meaning into themselves. The island's surface is only a skin; underneath it lies the whole tangled organism of history and possibility.[3]

Now let's envision **Rene Magritte**'s *The Annunciation* and then recall the way Ballard described this painting:

A rocky path leads among dusty olive trees. Suddenly a strange structure blocks our way. At first glance it seems to be some kind of pavilion. A white lattice hangs like a curtain over the dark facade. Two elongated chess-men stand to one side. Then we see that this is in no sense a pavilion where we may rest. This terrifying structure is a neuronic totem, its rounded and connected forms are a fragment of our own nervous systems, perhaps an insoluble code that contains the operating formulae for our own passage through time and space. The annunciation is that of a unique event, the first externalization of a neural interval.[4]

3 See Jeanette Baxter, 2016
4 Ballard, 1966

The painting is a riddle, and Ballard's words are not a solution but a character.

Each stroke of the brush, each word, is both surface and depth, both object and meaning. The rocky path, the sky where clouds negotiate dominion, the stillness of objects arranged like in dreams—they don't invite you to look but to read and listen. They demand that you wander, not aimlessly, but deliberately, into the fractures, where reality splits into infinities.

All those objects, like **Gilles Deleuze's** *radioactive fossils*, wounds that cut through time itself, are not merely static remnants. [5] They are active carriers of temporal complexity, connecting the past to the present, suggesting possible futures. They are "radioactive" because they emit potential, projecting traces of time ahead.

This is the task: to see the forgotten histories embedded in the rocks, to feel the weight of an exhausted future in the debris, to confront the neuronic totem that blocks your path.

It is here that the act of perception expands the terrain, turning the actual into the virtual, the pictorial into the temporal, the fixed into the fluid. To stand in this space is to be both lost and found, to inhabit the stretch of time that refuses to be named.

Magritte's painting is a portal, words are the path.

5 Gilles Deleuze's concept of the radioactive fossil is a metaphorical idea that emerges from his engagement with time, temporality, and the ways past and future coexist in dynamic tension. While it is not a term Deleuze explicitly formalizes as a singular concept, it can be understood through his broader philosophical framework, particularly his thoughts on time, virtuality, and materiality in works like *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*.

Future fossils calcify in silence,
plastic bones and silicon hearts
pressed into layers of sediment



The museum in ruins, the institution collapsed into itself. The walls crumble into the dust of forgotten intentions. The air is thick with the weight of something irreversible.

Among the debris, disintegrated bodies, half-dissolved and veiled in layers of wreckage, emerge as cryptic markers of what was and what could not endure. Unidentified and unrecognizable, these forms are both flesh and stone, both relics and warnings. Time itself seems to hesitate here, its threads tangled in the decay, its rhythm slowed to a pulse that barely stirs the air.





Map of refusal

Listening is listening to the *hush-rush* of crushed grass, the *scuffle-shuffle* of soil underfoot, the *whis-snap* of branches swayed aside. They *murmur* where paths ought to have been, inverting what was planned into what is lived. The future's faint whisper is tangled in their traces,

but whose future do they hold? Whose steps carve them out? What remains and what can grow here? NOW thick with meaning.

In these times, the soil bears the weight of contradictions—too much poison in the roots, too little time for repair. We live in the uneven tempo of toxic ecologies, where timelines split apart like fracturing stones. The sparrow's future grows shorter, and the plastic molecules stretch infinitely. Our footprints, each one a question, press into spaces where time thins. *Whisshh*... the trees are calling: where is tomorrow, and for whom does it wait?

This is my map of refusal. It does not seek what is given; it seeks what is lucid. These lines are promises of futurity not in the smooth lines of asphalt but in the *scuff-rough* crumble of defiance.

Urban planners rarely sketch on blank pages.

The character redraws the lines, over and over, with their feet.

An archive of an exhausted future,
where dreams of progress
curdle into towers of technological refuse

And yet, where does this futurity belong? Not in the crystalline visions of glittering high-rises or the utopias pinned on some "nowhere." The future is here, crooked and dirt-streaked, braided into spaces where shadows linger, and light refracts. It is the clearing, the break, the unmaking.

Zzz-chk-chk... echoes the axe of Walter Benjamin's destructive character, clearing away, making room for what? Their task is not vengeance; it is a necessity. Their destruction is not an end but a breathing, fresh air spilling through the space they have torn open.[6]

6 Benjamin, 1931

The desire line insists: 'Here. Not there. This way, not that.' It thrums with futurity, as if to say: this is the sign, the crack, the possibility. In its silent urgency, it asks: Where can life still breathe? Where does space remain for all the timelines, human and more-than-human, that stretch and coil and clash here, now?

Listen closer. *Crisshh... whoomp...* The sounds tell us this: to imagine futures is not merely to think of when, but to feel where, to sense for whom. The desire line does not end. It extends, questioning its own unfinishedness. It hums: Make room. Clear the way. The horizon is not there, but here, here, here.

The images hums with a pulse, slippery and restless, like an organ beating underwater. It is carnal, flesh and tendon and oil slick. It is planets spinning too close to their orbits. It is a breathing question: Can you imagine what you are not yet meant to imagine?

Here are machines that purr and growl, bioprints that curl like tendrils of seaweed, and organs humming with electric currents. Here are hybrid animals, slippery, feathered, scaled, and furred, walking with impossible grace through a landscape that is half-liquid, half-dream. Bodies ooze and leak; they stitch themselves back together with wires, with moss, with instinct. Everything is plugged in. Everything is alive but also dead.

Tongues stretched to their limits.



A giant fish arches through the haze, its scales glinting like lost galaxies. Petrified hybrids, caught between being and becoming.

What does it mean to grow differently? To stop growing at all? To leak, to fail, to sprawl out in a glorious, polysemantic mess?

It is a future that is multiple, an intertwining of the aquatic, the technological, and the post-planetary. It invites you to drown in it, to become it, to fail spectacularly in imagining what is not yet yours to imagine.

References:

Avanessian Armen and Malik Suhail, eds. *The Speculative Time Complex*, Revised transcript of a conversation held in Berlin, 29 January 2016.

Ballard JG. *The Coming Of The Unconscious*, New Worlds, July 1966

Baxter Jeanette, *Sounding Surrealist Historiography: Listening to Concrete Island,* 2016

Benjamin Walter, Destructive Character (1931), VADEMECUM: 77 Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places (pp.62-63), 2020

Deleuze Gilles, *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*

Fisher Mark. *The Weird and the Erie*, UKBooks, 2016

Groys Boris. "From Writing to Prompting: AI as Zeitgeist Machine," E-Flux, 2023

Gunkel, Henriette; Hameed, Ayesha and O'Sullivan, Simon D., eds. 2017. *Futures and Fictions*. London: Repeater.

O'Sullivan Simon. *Fictioning the Landscape, Visual cultures*, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK

Taylor James S. *Poetic knowledge: the recovery of education*, 1943-. Publication date: 1998.

Images:

1. *A white canvas with a surreal landscape, featuring various objects like mountains and rocks, white sculpture-like figures, spheres of different sizes in a light green colour, and other abstract elements. The background is a grey gradient that enhances the contrast between the different shapes and colours on the canvas. This artwork has an organic feel to it, giving off a soft lighting as if from natural sunlight. It appears to be rendered in watercolour, adding depth and texture to its surface. --ar 128:71*
2. *A beautiful painting of two figures in light yellow and aquamarine, in a glass room, in the style of Hajime Sorayama. A white man with his head resting on one hand, smooth skin, full-body portrait, posing in the style of Alberto Vargas. Bright light blue background, foggy and misty atmosphere, ray tracing, ultra-high definition, detailed, hyper-realistic. --ar 128:71*
3. *A surreal pastel installation with translucent vertical panels in soft yellow and green gradients. Glossy reflective floor. Abstract smooth animal sculptures—stylized horses and reclining creatures—glowing with diffused ambient light. Minimal pale-green vase in the foreground. Dreamlike, ethereal atmosphere, soft illumination, high-detail volumetric light, futuristic gallery aesthetic. --ar 128:71*
4. *A large room with light pink and mint green walls, white abstract shapes on the floor, a ball in front of one wall, and an open door behind it. The scene is illuminated by soft lighting that creates reflections from puddles on the ground. This composition emphasizes the contrast between geometric elements and fluid water surfaces, creating a surreal atmosphere. --ar 128:7*
5. *3D rendering of a group of white marble statues lounging in the water, inside an empty modern pool room with large windows and soft pastel green walls, minimalist style, volumetric lighting, perspective, geometric shapes, minimalism, digital art, hazy light reflections on the surface of the water, surreal, floating figures, pastels, muted colors, tranquil atmosphere, calm mood. --ar 128:71*
6. *A surreal, pastel-colored painting of a future space, machines, bioprints, organs, hybrid animals, bodies of water, fleshy conglomerations of matter that consume and leak, that are ecologically plugged in and technologically augmented. --ar 128:71*

We Rape the Landscape We Can See

LEAH POOLE OSOWSKI

In the dusk, the fox lopes the lawn at its diagonal, jumps the wall, his mouth full of feathers.
Hold your breath to keep his pace.

The same blue hour opens the day but is nothing like dusk.

Their thrum preceding their bodies, their roam imitating the word *while*. Their length of time.
Their even though.

We can walk across the bay, but the bluefish will chase us back.

In every room, someone occurs, remembering.

The shortest distance between two places is running.

A crawl-speed undoing. Waterspouts, a dim alarm, a white crane flying impossibly slow.
The language of ice in glasses dilating a room.
The blues deepen in knots. Ballet of tenses. The gulf of crossing a hallway.

Crumple the thin paper of your parameters to flame.

All the light, pinpricks and lace. Beckon in hydrangea.

Try to understand time as non-linear. Like running towards the woods.

Earliest memory: a green path through the backyard brush to the house behind. I struggle to access my childhood unassisted. But prompted, it sometimes appears. This too a diagonal.

Extremity: as hand, as boundary, as magnitude.

Lay physics down and slowly undress her.

The water snake's tendency of effortless division.

Decide against eroding into air.

Trees full of apricots, hours full of pits. To hold desire and evenly consume the sphere of it.
How not to get caught in the ending.

Your lagoon hands holding anything they can get their heat on. Dusk a dish thrown at a wall.

Yelling *transience*, yelling *vantage*.

For time paused.

All I want to do is keep my months out of your fingertips. Tunnels in the lawn imploding.

Many of these lines first appeared in *Exceeds Us* (Saturnalia, 2023).

Toward the People's Cosmos: Space Exploration as Civic Art Practice

KATARZYNA BALUG

Performing Acts of Imagination

On July 15, 1969, the eve of the Apollo 11 launch, Reverend Ralph Abernathy arrived at the launch site in Cape Canaveral with 25 Southern African American families, four mules, and two wagons. Part of the Poor People's Campaign started by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., they were not there to protest the launch that would land two men on the moon; they were there to complicate it. Americans were told over and over that the moon trip was 'for all mankind.' But how to reconcile NASA's enormous budget, in service of a Cold War Space Race, with the perpetual struggle to meet basic needs experienced by millions across America? Abernathy was there to claim *space* for the country's overlooked communities in the Apollo fanfare. His well-televised performance amplified the urgency of the war on poverty, a move recognized by NASA Administrator Tom Paine in their encounter at the launch site: "I hope you will hitch your mule wagons to our rockets and use the space program as a spur to the nation to tackle problems boldly in other areas." And indeed, Abernathy and other civil rights leaders pushed NASA and the federal government to improve social security and welfare programs, and lead in non-discriminatory hiring practices, with varying success.[1] In taking the Poor People's Campaign to the launch site, Abernathy intervened into the imaginary of the Space Race to startling effect.

Similarly startling an intervention, though on a different register, was a 2000 artwork by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar in Skohall, a city

1 Patricia Rossi recounts Abernathy's presence at Cape Canaveral in Patricia Rossi, "The Launching of Apollo 11: A Necessary Mission in the Space Race vs. Superfluous Government Spending," in J. Bret Bennington and Rodney F. Hill, eds. *After Apollo: Cultural Legacies of the Race to the Moon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2023), 74-90. On NASA's engagement with civil rights and desegregation, see Brian C. Odom and Stephen P. Waring, eds. *NASA and the Long Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019).

with a population of 10,000 who are mostly employed by the local paper mill. Invited to make a public artwork for the Swedish town, Jaar was told that there were no arts institutions because the small city's residents did not need them. In response, he built a museum out of paper, an homage to the town, and invited local artists to exhibit their work. 24 hours later, he burned it down. Seven years later, Jaar was invited to Skoghall again, this time with an offer to design a permanent cultural institution.[2]

These very different *actions* by Abernathy and Jaar share a commonality. Both demonstrate the catalytic power of performing imagined realities, seemingly out of reach, as if they already existed: it would take normalizing equal rights and economic opportunity for Southern Black families to unequivocally support the Apollo program; Skoghall was indeed a town that could support a museum. The imagination, whether artistic, sociotechnical, or social, provides a crucial bridge between the impossible and the possible.[3] It allows

2 Scott Thorp, "Alfredo Jaar: A Model of Thinking," *Artpulse*, accessed June 23, 2025, http://artpulsemagazine.com/alfredo-jaar-a-model-of-thinking.

3 The role of imagination in creating the conditions for change in society has been the subject of interdisciplinary scholarship since Aristotle. In addition to seminal twentieth-century thought on social imaginaries by Cornelius Castoriadis (Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987) and on sociotechnical imaginaries by Sheila Jasonoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (consolidated in Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity : Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)), recent scholarship has continued to deliberate the agentic capacity of the imagination. For its role in the urban environment, see Katarzyna Balug, "The Imagination Paradox: Participation or Performance of Visioning the City," *Geoforum* 102 (June 2019): 278–86. On fiction's contributions to the authority of seventeenth-century science, see Frédérique Aït-Toutati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); on the autonomy of the architectural imagination in giving form to novel ways of thinking, see K. Michael Hays, "Architecture's Appearance and The Practices of Imagination," *Log* 37 (2016), part of a special issue on the architectural imagination.

us to critically reflect on our existing reality by engaging with alternatives, before these are materially accessible. This chapter centers on the artistic imagination as related to outer space. In particular, it positions human space exploration as a permission slip to reimagine social formations and ecological relations on Earth. As the possibility of becoming unmoored from the planet again comes into focus, it aligns the topic of space with community-engaged art that aims to catalyze locally-relevant actions.

Centuries before space travel was technically feasible, literature was an important vehicle in preparing the human imagination for it. In two early science fiction novels, for example, astronomer Johannes Kepler explored the geographies of the moon and Earth, while playwright Cyrano de Bergerac grappled with the science required for launch; both envisioned the possibility of inhabiting a distant world by describing our human dramas in alien civilizations.[4] The NASA rocketeer who would put astronauts on the moon understood that Americans had to be able to imagine a journey to space before they would support his mission. Wernher von Braun had dreamed of going to Mars since he was a young man in Germany's amateur rocket association. After the war, he moved to the US to reconfigure the V2 rocket, which he had designed under the Nazis, for space travel. For von Braun, the moon was a necessary compromise on the path to Mars, an attainable goal that would catalyze public buy-in for more distant space travel. Throughout the 1950s, von Braun engineered rockets while working to popularize his ideas about exploring space. In speeches and writing, he made

4 Johannes Kepler, *Somnium; the Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967). Savinien Cyrano De Bergerac, *Other Worlds*, trans. Geoffrey Strachan, new edition (London: New English Library Ltd, 1976). For treatment of these two novels, see Christian Schneider, "Cosmic Dreams," *Daphnis* 45, no. 3–4 (2017): 541–62.

regular reference to Jules Verne's 1865 lunar voyage, and wrote his own science fiction novel about Mars.[5] Under his guidance, the popular *Collier's* magazine produced eight issues that consistently and persuasively made the case for human-led space exploration within a foreseeable future.[6] Soon after, he partnered with Walt Disney to create three family-friendly episodes on space travel for the Disneyland TV series. For Disney, these were a means to promote his new theme park; for von Braun, the series was a way to bring space to the American household through another popular medium. Collaboration with Disney's animators delighted von Braun, who, working out his lunar trajectory for the show, found that they were equally passionate about the technical details.[7] Through both print media and television, von Braun and colleagues *performed* space travel, preparing Americans' imagination for when it became reality. And it worked: in 1949, only 15% Americans thought it possible that "men in rockets will be able to reach the moon in the next 50 years." By 1955, it was 38%.[8]

In spring of 1962, NASA launched its Artist in Space program, just months after President Kennedy announced America's mission to send man to the moon in his famous Moonshot speech at Rice University. The agency recognized that the massive infrastructure, high risk, and overwhelming emotions of space launches could be

5 For von Braun's own writing, see: Wernher von Braun, *Project Mars: A Technical Tale*, Apogee Books Science Fiction 2 (Burlington, Ont.: Apogee Books Science Fiction, 2006) and Wernher von Braun, "Crossing the Last Frontier" in "Man Will Conquer Space Soon: Top Scientists Tell How in 15 Startling Pages," *Collier's*, March (1952). 24-29.

6 Chris Robinson, "Selling Space Travel: The Disney Version," in Bennington, Bret J., and Rodney F. Hill, eds. *After Apollo: Cultural Legacies of the Race to the Moon* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2023), 48-73.

7 Robinson, "Selling Space Travel."

8 Reference to a 1949 Gallup poll in Robinson, "Selling Space Travel," 70.

an obstacle to public support. Artists, it was hoped, could capture and translate the sublime endeavor into a palatable, human experience.[9] Artists had a unique power to represent, depoliticize, and re-encode into the national identity the feats of a space race fueled by Cold War politics and funded by American taxes. The federal agency needed to 'sell' the average citizen on its space programs, and it would do so through artworks. Selected artists had nearly unfettered unfettered access to the launch sites. In exchange, NASA requested any and all of their roughest in-situ sketches, which captured their raw experience as witnesses.[10]

Imagining Mars to Reimagine Earth

We have come around to von Braun's boyhood dream: astronauts are preparing to return to the moon, this time as a means to Mars, the next frontier. With participants from new nations, private sector players, and more diverse crews, much has changed since Apollo. The planetary context has changed too. Whereas early images from space first made visceral the limits of our planet, today we are well-aware that climate change impacts our historical understanding of modernity as well as our planetary future.[11] Though we maintain political borders, our infrastructures are entangled across vast geographies, and we rely on vast shared networks of satellites and submarine cables.

Space exploration in the context of global warming and an interdependent but unequal world presents an existential dilemma. What will happen to our identity of being integrally Earth-bound once humans establish lunar or Martian settlements? In the book *Star Ark*, living systems architect Rachel Armstrong describes plans for Project Persephone, an interstellar spaceship meant to sustain humans for millennia, and its overlaps with earthly concerns. To conceive of what such an enclosed world might entail, she asks "[o]n what basis [and based on what assumptions] do we construct our ideas about the world, the cosmos, and the way in which its perceived reality unfolds?" She urges designers to tend to "curating those values and ideas that may inform how we live together."[12] Just as von Braun realized in the 1950s, the feasibility of a cosmic humanity hinges on the stories we tell about it. These stories serve to domesticate the cosmos so that we can imagine it as a habitable place, while their distance from Earth frees us to envision the worlds we desire, unhindered by familiar constraints.[13] However, while we project outward from Earth, we inevitably reflect on and envision the possibilities of our lived futures on the home planet.[14]

9 Anne Collins Goodyear, *The Relationship of Art to Science and Technology in the United States, 1957-1971: Five Case Studies*, Dissertation (Austin: University of Texas, 2002). James Dean, "The Artist and Space," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 3, no. 3 (1978): 244–59.

10 In addition to the NASA-sponsored program, art in response to the Space Age reverberated across the world. On Latin American space-inspired art, see Sarah J. Montross, *Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas* (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 2015), and on European examples, see Stephen Petersen, *Space-Age Aesthetics: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and the Postwar European Avant-Garde*, Refiguring Modernism 11 (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

11 On the impact of early Earth images from space, see Benjamin Lazier, "Earthrise; or, The Globalization of the World Picture," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 602–30. On the impact of climate change on human society, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

12 Rachel Armstrong, *Star Ark: A Living, Self-Sustaining Spaceship*, 1st ed., Space Exploration (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 3.

13 Lisa Messeri, *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds*, Experimental Futures (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

14 Here I rely on Ernst Bloch's foundational work on utopia as an anticipatory process of envisioning attuned to latent possibilities in the present. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). For a contemporary meditation

As with the earlier space race, today the predominant narrative is of the hero who outcompetes and conquers the extraterrestrial landscape. Contemporary renderings of Mars show a geo-engineered, soon-to-be-verdant planet, an alien Arcadia, while the desire to "plant the American flag on Mars" affirms it as the next frontier.[15] The current space race centers colonization of the inhospitable Red Planet by, essentially, taming it to support human life. Today's images of orbiting (rather than grounded) space colonies likewise depict a leisure society of comfort, ease, and freedom from Earth's toils. Such visions of extra-planetary life have accompanied narratives of lunar and Martian exploration since at least the 1950s. The still-best-known images of lushly landscaped orbital colonies, developed in workshops led by Princeton physicist Gerard O'Neill in 1975, resemble suburban paradise. Complete with cocktail parties, tennis clubs, and swimming pools, they assure us that aspirations of the good life will remain unchanged in space, other than variable gravity serving as a novel form of entertainment.[16] For Jeff Bezos, who studied under O'Neill at Princeton in the 1970s and now runs the space company Blue Origin, this vision remains a guiding light.[17]

Explore, exploit, experience, settle — these are the objectives that space architect Brent Sherwood lays out as most likely to guide

on how art and science together tell the stories of our place in the universe, with examples from across the globe, see Nia Imara, "Painting the Cosmos," in *Painting the Cosmos* (United States: BenBella Books, 2025).

15 Brad Tabas describes this Arcadian vision in Brad Tabas, "On Astropastoral in the Anthropocene," *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2021): 192–206. The flag quote is from Donald Trump's inaugural address, in which he claimed the stars were our Manifest Destiny, January 20, 2025.

16 The workshops were held at NASA Ames in collaboration with Princeton and Stanford universities. Gerard K. O'Neill, *The High Frontier: Human Colonies in Space* (New York: Morrow, 1977).

17 Tabas, "On Astropastoral," 196.

decision-making in space.[18] Sherwood views a lunar settlement as the most reasonable pursuit; others prioritize either Martian or rotating colonies. Regardless of site preference, the prevalent assumption is that the resources that astronauts bring with them will serve to extract and exploit ancient stores of gases and minerals contained in lunar, asteroid, or martian soils, or the atmosphere of the latter. Elon Musk's mentor, aerospace engineer Robert Zubrin, posits that it is relatively no more difficult to establish a sequence of missions to colonize Mars than it was to send astronauts to the moon. Zubrin believes that we can readily tap into Mars's supply of gases and metals relevant to industrial society, and ultimately terraform the planet by thickening its atmosphere enough to live on the surface. In an act of redemption, the behaviors that caused global warming, and *unintentionally* strained life on earth, will be the same behaviors that will make Mars habitable. Zubrin considers this framework, Mars Direct, a 'minimalist, live-off-the-land approach' since it prioritizes using Martian resources.[19]

However, if we build up industries to foster global warming on Mars, what happens once the Martian atmosphere thickens enough? We have yet to find an 'off' button on earth — will we find ourselves with two over-extended planets? As Earth's climates become more

18 Brent Sherwood, "Guest Statement: Space Architecture Education—Site, Program, and Meaning," in Sandra Hauplik-Meusburger and Olga Bannova, *Space Architecture Education for Engineers and Architects: Designing and Planning beyond Earth*, 1st ed., Space and Society (Cham: Springer, 2016), 34-50.

19 Zubrin developed this approach in the 1990s and continues to publicize it. Robert Zubrin, "Colonising the Red Planet: Humans to Mars in Our Time," *Architectural Design* 84 (2014), 46-53. The notion of minimizing material resources is commonly linked with sustainability in building practices on Earth. However, Elisa Iturbe's framework of 'carbon modernity' captures a paradox: modern architecture evolved within capitalist frameworks, so that even as its methods and materials change, it often continues to serve exploitative ends. Elisa Iturbe, "Architecture and the Death of Carbon Modernity," *Log*, no. 47 (2019): 10–23.

extreme, we understand the costs of bending landscapes to our will. Does a verdant Arcadia still make sense as a *blueprint* for life in space? Or are there alternatives?

Interdisciplinary scholars and activists who share a concern about Earth's changing climate provide alternative blueprints for new narratives and paths forward. Botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer and anthropologist Anna Tsing, respectively, study indigenous knowledge and life's ability to adapt and eventually flourish in precarious conditions.[20] Insights untethered from the logics of extractive modernity can be glimpsed in stories of how mushrooms communicate in forests, how green walls lower internal temperatures, or in artificial — and artful — coral reefs that support endangered reef organisms.[21] As we continue to develop Earth's coastlines, we also begin to design for life with water. We envision canals that could replace roads in Miami Beach, and design places meant to be *under* water much of the time. Alternatives bubble up and gain traction. These alternatives do not downplay human influence, but imagine collaborations between our technological capacities and the internal tendencies of the non-human forces with which we engage.[22]

As enthusiasm for manned space exploration builds, imagined alternatives for how to go about it likewise abound from inter-

20 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

21 Mushroom: Tsing, *The Mushroom;* green walls: Stephen R. Kellert, Judith Heerwagen, and Martin Mador, *Biophilic Design: The Theory, Science, and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2008); manmade reefs: "The ReefLine," The ReefLine, accessed June 26, 2025, https://thereefline.org.

22 Among many texts on human engagement with non-human but agency-possessing entities, see: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) or Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 1–18.

disciplinary sources. Religion scholar Mary Jane Rubenstein asks what it would be like to take as example not the industrial development logics prevalent on Earth today, which perpetuate a near-fanatic drive to control the environment, but instead the lessons of traditional ecological knowledge.[23] What does an eco-aligned ethos of space exploration look like? From religion to astrophysics, researchers are asking questions informed by environmental, social, and ethical concerns:

– Based on what kind of society and governance structures should we model our first space settlements?
– What might be our goals once we land off-world?
– Who will go? Will there be any benefit to humanity on Earth?
– What are the alternatives to a mindset of space *colonization*?[24]

The search for answers to such ideological questions sets an alternative course for the entire space program, from the design of the first lunar space station, to space treaties and policies. Perhaps it will be possible to settle or explore without exploiting.

23 Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Astrotopia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

24 Several recent volumes present and address these questions. See: Erika Nesvold, *Off-Earth: Ethical Questions and Quandaries for Living in Outer Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023), Sarah Stewart Johnson, *The Sirens of Mars: Searching for Life on Another World* (New York: Crown, 2020). Rebecca Boyle, *Our Moon: How Earth's Celestial Companion Transformed the Planet, Guided Evolution, and Made Us Who We Are* (New York: Random House, 2024). Notably, these are texts by women, two of whom are trained in the sciences (Nesvold in astrophysics and Stewart Johnson in planetary sciences).

Space as Public Practice

In 2020, a white paper for the Planetary Science and Astrobiology Decadal Survey, which makes recommendations to NASA and the National Science Foundation, concluded with one fundamental, surprising suggestion for the future of space exploration: a call for community input.[25] The paper did not prescribe how this might take place, leaving an opening to shape space as a community-based agenda. With Elon Musk's access to the presidential circle at the dawn of Donald Trump's second term and NASA's planned return to the moon, it is timely to consider how the objects and systems we build for space exploration condition our imagination and understanding of life, on Earth and in the cosmos. In other words, how can the ingenious technologies, creative capacities, and capital resources expended on space help us envision and co-produce a world for all its people? And in turn, how can we reorient space exploration initiatives to adopt rather than overwrite plural, place-based, and non-dominant ways of knowing and being long practiced by communities across the globe?

To address these questions, imagining off-Earth worlds must become a common concern for the average planetary citizen, from descendants of Abernathy's parishioners to the paper mill workers of Skoghall. As we become unmoored from Earth, we need cross-disciplinary conversations to grapple with the epistemological and ontological registers of this feat. What is the scientific, technical, political, and ecological work necessary to facilitate space travel; what new research and resources will *being* in space enable? What worlds do we imagine as we consider the cosmos as a physical and

25 Frank Tavares, et al. "Ethical Exploration and the Role of Planetary Protection in Disrupting Colonial Practices: A submission to the Planetary Science and Astrobiology Decadal Survey 2023-2032," 2020. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2010.08344

metaphysical environment? What kinds of infrastructure and logics does exploring space call forth on Earth?

Several academic engagements between humanities scholars and scientists have begun to elucidate strategies to tackle an interplanetary realm. The Center for Science and the Imagination at Arizona State University and Florida International University's Science and Fiction lab are pioneering exchanges in imagination through interdisciplinary course modules accessible to all faculty.[26] Through a collaboration between the FIU lab and the University of Birmingham, Ilija Rašović, a nanomaterials scientist at Birmingham, and I have developed a module on emergent systems that bridged his research with the history of NASA life support tests through the experimental poetry movement called Oulipo. This three-week module can be inserted into any course; I used it in a graduate seminar titled *Architecture, Environment, and the Moonshot* to engage students in thinking through the contingencies of closed-loop systems design for space. Our discussions elicited questions such as: *Is it possible to colonize empty worlds? Who ought to clean the toilets on Mars? Why might US citizens support space exploration?* Through intense reading discussions, students recognized how their sense of civic agency correlated to their assumptions concerning the politics of future space travel, and how these in turn revealed their disposition about our climate future. Following the seminar, I organized a symposium on the imagination and space exploration in collaboration with faculty from several departments, opening a wide-ranging conversation on humanity's pursuit of space in south Florida. The next step is to bring questions of space exploration to Miami's communities.

26 "Center for Science and the Imagination," Center for Science and the Imagination, accessed June 26, 2025, https://csi.asu.edu/ and "Science & Fiction Lab," Science & Fiction Lab, accessed April 15, 2025, https://www.scienceandfiction.fiu.edu.

The new space race offers an alternate-world displacement that is conducive to reflection on local conditions. While science opens up the very possibility of leaving, the humanities help us see the blind spots of scientifically informed decisions, and keep generational questions close at hand as we grapple with short-term survival. The late Bruno Latour dedicated his career to unearthing the social consequences of scientific norms, arguing that "the sciences are now and will remain from now on so intermingled with the entire culture that we need to turn to the humanities to understand how they really function."[27] He spent his last years working with dance, performance, and exhibitions as media through which to represent the urgency of climate change across disciplinary silos, to make palatable its consequences in a phenomenal as much as an intellectual way. In a related vein, anthropologist Lisa Messeri has examined planetary scientists' extensive efforts to make place out of exoplanets, in order to make these largely inaccessible phenomena more relatable.[28] What she calls planetary imagination helps us spatialize alien worlds, making them more conceivable.

Even before NASA's formation, von Braun understood that the arts are a channel through which to inflict upon the American public a desire to witness the mysteries of the moon. Abernathy's congregation's unannounced presence at the Apollo 11 launch claimed space for an overlooked population at the heart of the Space Race. Inspired by the performative civic actions that protested oppressive conditions worldwide throughout the 1960s, community-engaged artists like Jaar have since engaged public space as a site in which to imagine and act out improved social conditions. In the 1980s, when

27 Bruno Latour, "Introduction," *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge; Malden: Polity, 2017), 4.

28 Messeri, *Placing Outer Space*

the Polish communist regime failed to provide for basic needs, activist art groups like the Orange Alternative performed happenings and public acts of service, for example handing out toilet paper and sanitary napkins, to gatherings of thousands. They took on the folkloric persona of a dwarf — a small, unthreatening creature — so that if the military police were to arrest them, they would be put in the absurd position of arresting a person in a floppy orange hat and underwear, carrying bags full of pads.[29] In the 1990s, Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal became a councilor for Rio de Janeiro. Once in office, he modified his Theater of the Oppressed methods as 'Legislative Theater,' through which he developed citizen-centric laws in participatory street performances across the city's favelas, whose populations were normally left out of formal urbanization procedures.[30] Art, according to Jacques Rancière, is not only part of a representational regime, but its own aesthetic condition through which it becomes possible to transform how we live, move, and see in the world.[31] Its acts of imagining are more than symbolic. They bring forth glimpses of worlds previously impossible to conceive, which can resonate as much as material acts. Space offers a permission slip to reimagine society from the ground up; urban civic space provides a site from which to do so. In the process, we inadvertently envision alternative futures for inhabiting Earth.

In urban planning, the term 'desire line' is the term for an unplanned, informal trail, a footpath caused by human or animal

29 Barbara Górska, Ben Koschalka, and Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury w Krakowie, *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, happeningiem w komunizm/Happening Against Communism by the Orange Alternative* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2011).

30 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, New ed., Get Political ; 6 (London: Pluto, 2008).

31 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London; Continuum, 2004).

traffic. Its presence manifests public desire, which the official trail fails to satisfy. But desire lines are not always easy to formalize, and sometimes they are met with downright resistance because they operate outside of normative planning. Counter to the dominant pathways being drawn by today's space barons — Musk and Bezos chief among them — are emergent desire lines that provide valuable correctives. The space race is at a crossroads. On one hand, we can carry out Space 2.0 much the same way we developed Earth: through extraction, colonization and relentless pursuit of the next frontier, regardless of the human and environmental consequences. However, historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has warned that, given how our past practices have transformed the planet, historical outcomes no longer serve as a reliable model for future results.[32] Instead, space can provide an opportunity to untether from the past, imagine anew, and consider how to co-exist with our familiar and unfamiliar worlds and with each other. Art is well-poised to generate desire lines for the future of space exploration, so that the first space civilizations don't repeat our mistakes and can help us to reimagine possibilities on Earth.

32 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

Vertical Dreameries – Descending Desire Lines

DENISE ZIEGLER

Introduction

Desire lines are formed by walking a path continuously over time. Desire lines can usually be found on a horizontal plane. But what if they are transposed into a vertical field of operation? The following three short texts ponder vertical lines on text pages, cattle paths on an alpine pasture, and the topographic sediments left in a coffee cup.

1

I have a collection of lines on text pages.

"Draw a line straight down the middle of this text page from top to bottom without touching the letters or dividing the words" – this is what I have been asking people to do on various occasions. "Squint, so that the lines on the page become blurred, grey stripes. This highlights the spaces between the words and the lines." Sometimes, the spaces between the words are aligned on consecutive lines, forming an 'abyss' into which the gaze can sink. I get the same feeling just before I fall asleep when my eyes can no longer focus on the text in the book I'm reading, and I just go from one line to the next without understanding a single word.

2

As a child, I used to play on a steep slope in a nearby pasture that was covered with cow paths.[1] I remember very vividly one occasion

1 Except for goats, all cattle living in alpine pastures walk parallel to the hillside in rows, eating as they go. As a consequence, the soil becomes compressed, and terraces are formed on the slopes. The alpine cattle eat with their bodies parallel to the slope to avoid pressure on the digestive organs. This habit must be learned by animals unfamiliar with alpine life. This knowledge is passed on from the animals experienced in alpine life to the new arrivals. Cattle paths can cover entire slopes in regular forms. The development of the alpine region by humans and cattle has led to a fundamental change in the entire vegetation at


un senso di ripugnanza, come se si trattasse di crea
umane, ai tempi in cui assieme con la terra, si compra
o si ereditavano i servi, che al destino della terr
legati. Estrasse il coltello, ne fece scattare la lama, s
ntì in mano solido e ben bilanciato. Si voltò di botto
se a correre, si fermò, si voltò di nuovo, bilanciò i
lo e lo lanciò contro il più grosso degli olivi. Il coltell
in aria, compì la sua traettoria e si infisse vibrand
io nel punto in cui aveva immaginato che dovesse in
si. Sapeva lanciare un coltello. Poteva usarlo da lontan
vicino, e renderlo micidiale come una pistola. Si avvi
all'albero a passi lenti, strappò il coltello infisso pro
mente nella corteccia grigia e rugosa dell'olivo, lo lan
li là, a un altro albero e la lama si infisse obbediente
a prenderlo, lo richiuse, se lo rimise in tasca. Nel te
nto, che il notaio Pintus aveva letto a voce alta, c'er
o che gli olivi di Balanotti erano millecinquantasette
obe potuto contarli. Non che il loro numero avess
rtanza, ma era curioso di verificare se Don Francesc
a davvero quanti olivi c'erano a Balanotti. Nel testa
o era anche indicato il numero dei meli, dei peri, de
orli, tutto, ed era detto che Raimondo Collu, contadin
ni settanta, lo serviva con fedeltà e sollecitudine d
anni e che, per questa ragione l'erede Angelo Ura
be dovuto continuare a tenerlo al proprio servizio fin
norte. Queste parole, che gli erano rimaste impresse
cero lo stesso effetto di quando il notaio le aveva
con tono minaccioso, come se fosse stato Don Fran
in persona a rivolgersi a lui: Don Francesco par
così dall'oltretomba perché nessuno si attentasse a di
dire alle sue ultime volontà, come invece avevano fatt
sua madre per primi, rinunciando alle ricche terre d
ldus e dell'Acquacotta. Ora, il ragazzo, nella solitu
dell'oliveto, si sentiva in colpa per avere suggerito eg
a sua madre quella rinuncia. Avevano rinunciato all
di Saboddus, dell'Acquacotta e al bestiame, e in cam
Fulgheri non avevano fatto opposizione per Balanotti

when, just for a short while, openings in the ground appeared along the cow paths. All the solid matter, grass and dirt, caved in, and I could go inside the slope. I played with the imaginary creatures living below the surface, chasing them through sub-terrestrial tunnels and sliding down from the cow paths of the upper part of the slope to the ones further down. The restrictions imposed by solid matter were gone, and I could move wherever my imagination guided me. Then, the slope returned to its solid form and left me on this side of the cow paths. Ever since, cow paths on a slope have signified to me the power of imaginative experiential desires that can open up worlds beyond the physical laws of matter.

3

Drinking coffee is an activity that consists not only of taking sips of coffee but also of the time in between the sips. Coffee is often drunk while doing something else: having a conversation, reading or browsing the news, or looking out of the window. Hence, the breaks between the sips are an essential part of coffee drinking. When we drink coffee, the level of the liquid in the cup gets lower one sip at a time. In some coffee cups, the intervals between the sips manifest themselves as horizontal coffee-stained lines on the inside of the coffee cup. Hence, I will propose a new description for drinking coffee: when you drink coffee, you deposit desire lines of time on the inside of the coffee cup while slowly making your way to the bottom of the cup. What is left in the cup is a chronological topography of line-shaped sediments of coffee.

alpine altitude. The alpine pastures, which often look to us today like an idealized image of untouched nature, are so strongly influenced by humans that we should describe them as cultural landscapes. (Bätzing, 2005. pp. 92–93)



Final Remark

Situated on steep slopes and tilted planes, the desire lines described above engage the reader's imagination in experiential enterprises of giving in, sinking, and falling. They evoke transitions to different states of mind. In the three chapters of this text, vertical desire lines follow the laws of gravity, but they also dissolve the concept through uplifting imagination and dreameries. The vertical desire lines described here are temporary in their appearance. This is why it is important to be observant and notice them before they are gone and washed out of the coffee cup. They suggest a descending strategy by providing a position on a slope or on a verge. Vertical desire lines work with *and* go beyond the physical laws of matter, creating imaginative topographies that emphasize the potential of giving in and letting go.

References

Bätzing, Werner 2015. *Die Alpen - Geschichte und Zukunft einer europäischen Kulturlandschaft*, 3. Aufl. Verlag C. H. Beck, München.

Ziegler, Denise 1999. *Collection of Lines on Text Pages* report – Künstler verlegen Künstler, Basel.

Images:

1. Denise Ziegler: Line on a text page.
   Photo: Denise Ziegler
2. Cattle paths on an alpine slope in Lenk, Switzerland.
   Photo: Franziska Ruf
3. Topography of coffee drinking.
   Photo: Denise Ziegler



Yearning and Learning to See through Film

BRUNO GUARANÁ

Sometimes a film changes you. It was 2003 in a movie theater somewhere in Brazil that I saw a gigantic, wide-eyed, freshly battered face stare at me from the screen. In the opening moments of Karim Aïnouz's film *Madame Satã*, an offscreen voice reads a prison sentence that serves to introduce that face as that of a petty criminal to viewers.[1] The long list of crimes gradually exposes the efforts of the authoritarian Brazilian state of the 1930s to, above all, regulate race and sexuality. The stillness of the camera, mirrored by the stillness of those eyes, gave me the impression that time had stopped, perhaps indicating echoes of these regulations decades later. Despite realizing as much, I could not have known then, upon watching it for the first time, that this would be the film that made me want to not just watch, but to read films.

If the film's opening filled me with confusion, fear, empathy, and despair, its ending thrust me into a state of energetic, productive anger. At the closing, an announcer calls the character from offscreen not by his legal name, but by his "drag name," Madame Satã. Cheers follow. Those once-lifeless eyes seem to have turned into sequins, now blinding me. What begins as a possible historical narrative—a biopic of João Francisco dos Santos, at once a confounding historical and mythical figure—wraps up as a palimpsest of images and sounds, some brighter and louder than others, that envelops me, the viewer, in sensations, not facts. Although I feel many things, I shall never know what those feelings ultimately amount to.

It finally becomes clear that, as it unfolds, *Madame Satã* engages the viewer in a purposely fruitless attempt to decipher its main character, buoyed in a kind of poetic melodrama whose meaning

1 For more on the film, see, for example, Bruno Guaraná, "Twenty Queers of *Madame Satã*." *Film Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (Fall 2022): 45–53.

refuses to be contained by the corners of its frames. The more I try, the less I find myself able to articulate the multitude of meanings I detect and feelings I experience upon watching it. Knowing that I will never satisfy the yearning to know more, why bother returning to the film many times over?

Perhaps enchanted by what Saidiya Hartman might here call "critical fabulation"—the telling of stories otherwise left out of traditional archives and historiographies—though profoundly moved, I still found myself dissatisfied with how little knowing the film afforded me.[2] It is as though the film begged me to learn more, to not stop at the aesthetic experience. And return to it I do; frequently, if only as a reminder of not just what cinema can do, but also of what we can do to and with films.

In the grandiose scale of the close-up, I wondered what those eyes were telling me. Were they asking for help? Were they shutting me off? Was their refusal to wander a request that I avert my gaze away from them? Were they—in their separation from the space that surrounds them—looking back at me?[3] This tension, to me, remains at the core of any critical textual analysis with which I engage today. I look at films now the way I once looked at those eyes.

My first serious encounter with *Madame Satã* took place years later, through an interest in film form, particularly in how the film dealt with representing violence. Rather than making a spectacle out of what Žižek would call acts of "subjective violence," the film opts for presenting its aftermath (a tired, beaten face, swollen eyes meeting the gaze of the viewer's), or for averting, blocking,

2 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14

3 For a comprehensive study of the close-up in film and film theory, see Mary Ann Doane, *Bigger Than Life: The Close-Up and Scale in the Cinema* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2021).

or distancing the camera.[4] Subverting vision as cinema's apparent privileged sensory modality, the film underexposes scenes to force viewers to engage with other senses.[5] That was why, I thought then, I had been compelled to revisit the film.

Later I found myself connecting that form with the film's conditions of production and circulation.[6] Now I was interested in the economy of film production in the Brazilian context and in sociological and ethical understandings of representation, considering relations of race, gender, and sexuality as they pertain to the Brazilian reality—in the 1930s, when the narrative takes place, and in the 2000s, when the film is released. If the main character subverts systemic forms of oppression, could he also not teach viewers how to do the same? And which viewers did the film address? Was it, after all, the film's subversive potential that drew me to it?

If subversive, the film must not be seen to exist in a vacuum. What other media texts does it dialogue with? A dive into cultural studies helps to unravel the relationship between popular culture and media as a discursive practice, and of this film in particular as one of many "situated utterances."[7] In short, to truly assess the significance of this film vis-à-vis Brazilian culture—whether or not the film has been seen widely—one must account for not only social structures but also for who speaks, what is said, how it is articulated, and who is being addressed. Suddenly, my investment in the

4 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).

5 On the predominance of the visual in cinema and other media, see, for instance, W.J.T. Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media." *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 2 (2005): 257–266.

6 Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse." In *Writings on Media: History of the Present*, edited by Charlotte Brunsdon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 247–66.

7 See Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 131.

film had been eclipsed by the structures that made it possible in the first place.

It was only later—much later—that I finally admitted to the most basic of facts about the object of analysis I so frequently reinvoked. My return should be justified by my unapologetic love for the film and by the fact that my pleasure in watching it remains inexhaustible. It is widely understood that what moves us to the movie theater is a desire to see—frequently theorized in psychoanalytical terms.[8] What is easy to overlook is the personal passion that moves each of us to see and to know, and what our bodies experience when in contact with the film.[9] I came to realize I have always already been invested in the film, perhaps because it spoke my language, perhaps because it taught me to see, to listen, to feel, and to long for my own culture, or perhaps because we encountered each other in our formative years (the budding film student witnessing an inflection moment in Brazilian film production). Or maybe it is because I have helplessly fallen for the film's deliberate sensuousness.[10]

Whatever the reason may be, it seems like *Madame Satã*, in the yearning that it produces, has managed to open new doors upon each return so that I approach it from a different angle, with different questions. As I have tried to delineate here, the film has (sometimes

8 See, for example, Christian Metz, "The Passion for Perceiving" in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 58–68; and, for a feminist critique of classical cinema and its pleasures, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

9 See Vivian Sobchack, "Phenomenology and the Film Experience," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, edited by Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 36–58; Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

10 On cinema's ideological effects, see Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974): 39–47.

inadvertently) led me through a journey across Film Theory. It may echo already established theories and methods as much as anticipate ways of seeing yet unknown or untheorized. Although I may indeed be obsessed with the film, I can revel in the comfort that this obsession has carved multiple useful paths for me, however meandering. My only hope is that what remains latent in *Madame Satã* continues to elude me, so that my search will not come to an end.

For sometimes a film can change you; at other times, it is you who can change the film.

Na, na, na... we have been failing prolifically!

Or

After the neuroprolix 'lens of in-tension': shaping a guide for artistic unpredictability.

ANDRÉ ALVES

Navigation to sections 1, 2, and 3.

The landscape of *Na, na, na, na, na... We have been failing prolifically* brings together a diverse environment of thought. The result is not an open terrain that can be easily captured through a mapping overview. Each of these environments advances certain lines of argument in their own right. And yet, their difference emerges from a shared underlying ground—one I do not wish the reader to miss. In this spirit, I offer a brief navigation through the tripartite structure of the text, along with a summary of the atmosphere characterizing each section.

The section *Better to not fail at all* addresses certainty and predictability as values upheld by positivist epistemologies, which privilege clarity and align with the risk-averse mindset characteristic of capitalist productivism. One wonders how the rambling and chance of curiosity and imaginative work feels in such a landscape. What does artistic creation work look like in such grounds?

The text progresses into an increasingly entangled terrain, with the section *We have been failing prolifically* introducing a shift in tone and writing format. One is made witness to a fictional encounter between writer Samuel Beckett and a support group for neurodivergent subjects named The Untamable Tension. The terminology 'neurodivergent,' commonly accepted to refer to non-dominant neurotype subjects, will be replaced in this text by the term 'neuroprolix.' I am attempting to find language that resists reproducing binary logics—center and margins, sameness and otherness—by emphasizing certain qualities, namely the tension experienced by a body that feels stuck in the effort to communicate. In this context, I turn to the term 'prolix' (which, among other meanings, refers to verbose or overly extended communication) to situate non-neuronormative subjects as prolific language producers who nevertheless face challenges in channeling that expression.

The dialogue between Beckett and The Untamable Tension unfolds as a conversation between the unnamed, the unnamable, and the energy that arises in the making of language. While Beckett invites us into a productive practice of rehearsal—to continuously try and fail better, shaping what might be called a practice of 'study'—The Untamable Tension invites us to remain, and not rush away, from the sensation of tension that creative attention draws us into.

The section *After the neuroprolix 'lens of in-tension': shaping a guide for artistic unpredictability* does not offer the awe of treasures found at the end of a rainbow. In fact, the opposite may be closer to the truth. The clearing opens onto a landscape that immediately feels arid. And yet, an invisible atmosphere of feeling draws us into its difference. Perhaps this is the effect of the 'lens of in-tension' we have been wearing since our encounter with Beckett and The Untamable Tension. We walk with a different art and sense held in the heart—a tension for which there are no names, and no sense of predictability. We move intentionally, listening.

I. Better to not fail at all.

My eyes automatically roll whenever a fellow artist, an art teacher, or a student cites Samuel Beckett's legendary line from the 1983 story *Worstward Ho*: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." It's not so much the cliché that irks me, but the misquoting, the halving, of the sentence. In full, it reads: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." The subtle encouragement and the hint of tentativeness tied to trying and experimenting of the first half sentence have not reached the popularity of the more deliberate notes of the will to try, to fail, and the projected improvement. Super-duper, and yet, not everyone feels equal levels of comfort in relation to experimentation and testing. The act of trying, daring to risk, to feel its poor outcomes, is far from being a neutral impulse.

The opposite might be more accurate, given the fine tuning of our biological imprint to vigilance, risk awareness, fear responses, avoidance of pain and discomfort—embarrassment included—as means to assure safety, reassurance, and comfort.

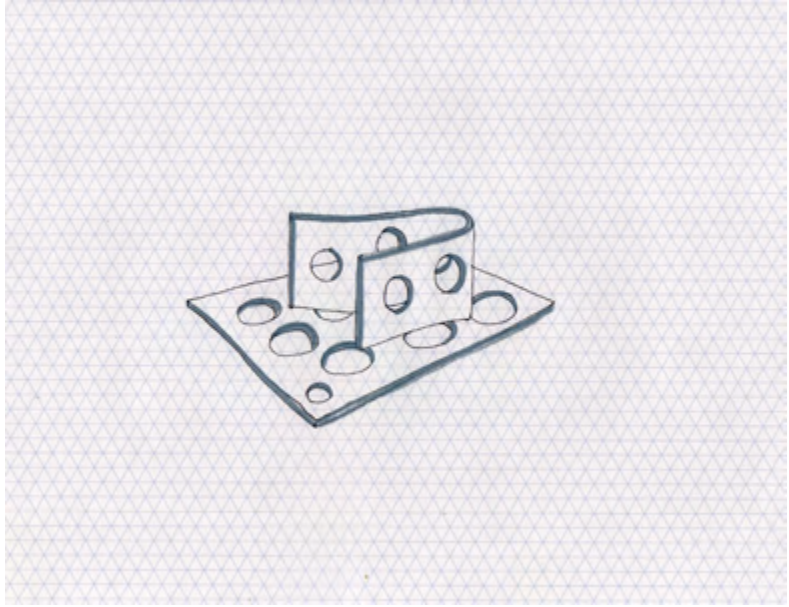
Training for a poetics of failure? The delicate balance between trying out and development proposed by Beckett stands little chance under dominant logics of efficacy and competitiveness, which demand that we perform—always better, endlessly better. Experimentation may be welcomed, but only insofar as it conforms to the politics of the already established. It is as if experimentation and imagination have been tuned to the risk-free cadence of profit-driven capitalism—limited to identifiable returns and constrained to follow "forms that are supposed to be valued, and less and less based on the 'efficacy' that forms might offer as channels for presenting differences" (Rolnik 1996:45).

The logic of capitalist, risk-averse efficacy is intolerant of anything that disrupts the predictability of expected outcomes—or the pace at which they are delivered. I call it life on a calculus spreadsheet: a constant, well organized, table of contents. Such a system fosters modes of existence designed to prevent detours, unknown turns, serendipity, missed opportunities, or the danger of falling behind... which are framed as moral evidence of poor agency or lack of control on the part of the subject.

Even the self-determined artist of today may struggle to stay with failure, to dwell in the prolix or the unformed. Artmaking and aesthetic language have become serious business—the foundation of a lucrative creative culture sustained by art institutions, markets, and industries. These systems are not peripheral but integral to the "capitalistic rationalization, *thingification*, and commercialization" of everything (Lipovetsky 2014:139). In such a context, the pressures of visibility, coherence, and market value often displace the uncertain,

processual, or deviant aspects of artistic inquiry. At what point did studio practice began to limit itself to studio perfect or studio product?

A sign of this is quickly found in the lack of room—within the bulk of formal training in the arts—for time matters: to waste time, to be out of time, to take time, allowing all in good time. Nor is there space for the deadlocks of imagination and productiveness. Nope. The literary interest in creative blocks, in tense temporalities—the felt temporality of an impasse between nameless tensions, figured in yet hard to figure out, to come to sense—is no longer a beloved currency. This detraction reveals more than a mere poetic disinterest or mismatches in ways of doing. In a "worldwide class structure of speed capitalists" (Illich 1974:29), where there is no time to spare, creative impasses are likely perceived as inefficient agency—ultimately reinforcing the subjectivation of the subject as a lesser good.



Grammar of In-tension:
[Play] /manifests as\ Let Loose.

To stay with failure, to dwell in the prolix or the unformed, is not a retreat from agency but a reorientation of it. At stake is the ongoing erasure of modes of learning and becoming familiar that privilege unpredictability, unexpected turns, and the provisional nature of rehearsal. These modes make space for tentative testing, for loosened temporalities, and for the kind of openness that allows forms to emerge gradually—where the nameless can arrive to language in its own time and terms. What is threatened is a poetics of process and the generative potential of not-yet-knowing.

The seeming inability to tolerate the unknown, hesitations, digressions... that get in the way of efficient predictability are epistemological evidence of the ways in which topical capitalistic societies dwindle attentional skill and confine imaginative muscle (Hopkins 2024:123). After all, as writer Joseph Brodsky put it in his speech at the occasion of the Nobel Prize ceremony (Eaton 1997:335), aesthetics is the mother of ethics. Each aesthetic reality contributes to shape a more precise ethical reality, by summoning attention, noticing formless senses, and bringing those to shape at their own pace. As design ethics expert James Williams observes, to be in touch with attention might be the most poignant moral and political struggle of our time, since the dimensions of focus and the imagination of 'what ifs' is prerequisite to all struggles (Hopkins 2024:108).

The possibility of art to sustain such confrontation might require the art of waiting. For the artist does not always know where to look and how to do so. In 1817, John Keats proposed the concept of *negative capability* to describe the importance of remaining intentionally with uncertainty in the work of poetry (de Mendonça 2020: online). Moments of disorientation—creative blocks, detours from the known—do not necessarily lead to emptiness, but certainly so to feeling unnamed atmospheres of sense. Like negative capability, philosopher Joseph Vogl speaks of "tarrying," a mode of thought that

does not insist on the modern, western 'either/or' polarities of action/contemplation, intervention/passivity, decisiveness/withdrawal, instead reinstating a world of possibilities, "an artistry of errancy that performs a constant movement of evasion" (Vogl 2007:118). Both negative capability and tarrying are modalities to flex listening, to attune with those vibrations that don't find a place, a name, a form, in the familiar repertoires.

Curiosity might be the secret—and sacred—ingredient to crack the horizon of predictability. After all, curiosity could be described as a pull, a pulsion, an attraction, an intentional drive towards a 'something else: what is it?', that won't stop still. But is curiosity automatic? As any other muscle curiosity needs regular flexing or will be lost to languor. The vibrant, restless, and often adamant force of its pulls is conditional for the encounter with awe and wonder, and to counter the numbness of interest—which one discerns as depression.

There is little writing dedicated to the impact of what artists' fears might have over artistic creation. And yet, to stay within unfamiliar grounds is not always an easy, pleasant, or a peaceful call. To handle the pull of curiosity, one needs trust. Or at least, some level of comfort that it won't hurt. Without such a trust, 'failing better' is no fun but scare.

The curiosity and imagination of an artist is no exception. Little attention has been specifically given to provide artists with means to oust discomfort. And yet, one is often met with the unstained truism claiming that artists are exceptionally talented walkers of the ropes of instability and openness. Today's creativity-based culture is less compelled to study 'what ifs', 'not-there-yet', and to 'fail better', than to profit from spectacle certainty. Arts schools follow along. The 'unsure' artist asks, where to go to dare failing better?

In today's risk-averse, neoliberal landscape—structured to avoid precarity at all costs—the politics of rehearsal and experimentation

that Samuel Beckett advocates may appear as mere poetic fluff, if not entirely untenable. The reality is that not everyone possesses the privilege to embrace—or afford—the possibility of failure, artists included. Nevertheless, despite prevailing pressures to ensure predictability and preempt every move, the possibility of making meaning beyond the rigid binary of success and failure remains open. The question, then, is whether one can listen—and learn—from those who continue to walk in alternative paths.

II. We have been failing prolifically!

> Before diving into Section II, a small suggestion:
> Take a moment to step away from the text.
> Put on Ini Kamoze's 1994 track "Here Comes the Hotstepper." Let the onomatopoeic chorus—"Nah, na-na-na-nah. Na-na-na-na, na-na--na, na-na-na. Na-na-na-nah"—catch your attention and settle into your mind. No pressure, yet while you're at it, see if you can let your fascia loosen a bit.

Rather than bringing sleep, nights deliver Beckett insomnia. Daydreaming and dreaming while asleep are different matters, and Beckett plays with possible names to the state of dreaming awake at night. This offers a good image of what keeps insomnia alive: the vulnerability of his mind to automatic and relentless currents of thought, of the unpredictable association, nameless insights produced by his cortex.

Ever tried to fall asleep. Ever failed. Try again. Insomnia. Fail better.

Insomnia disjoints the sense of time and space. Complex emotions creep in, and energy drains away. There is only so much one can do in such a state. Sometimes reading is possible. Sometimes

reading is out of the question. More than not, the body can do little more than keep the eyes shut and wander in thought.

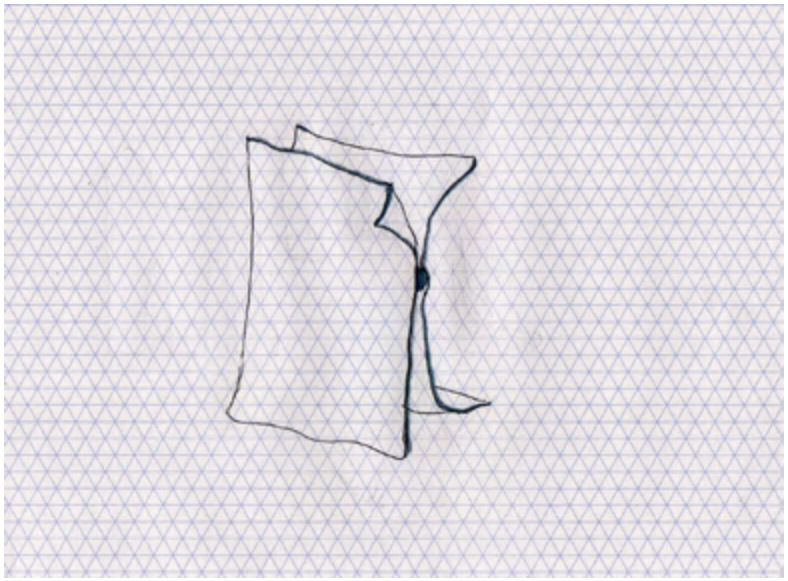
Beckett is not famed for being a people person, and the prospect of a group gathering holds little appeal to him. Neither the entrance through the back doors nor the text *The Untamable Tension* on the poster by the entrance improves the situation. This is a person that values pauses and stillness, and the hint of a pulsing energy offer little comfort. His unease is confirmed the moment he steps inside the building. The volume of a rhythmic chants surge as he moves down the corridor. A looping onomatopoetic *nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na...* that makes Beckett wonder if such chain of *nays* forms some type of refusal. But refusal to what?

> nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Beckett feels the vibration of the *na-na-na-nah...* in his hand reaching for the doorknob. Inside the room it will surely feel louder. Pause. Beckett exhales and pushes the door open. As expected, the *na-na-na-nah* hits him, but none of the people in the room seem interested in dance. Some people stand, a few are sitting or sprawled across couches arranged in a squared position. There are no explicit social cues to follow in sight.

Beckett makes his way towards the couches, drawn to the symmetry of the square. The group remains largely indifferent to his arrival, although a few establish eye contact, nod at him. He remains pokerfaced. The person closest to him leans in and whispers, "*Stay soft*". *Soft* is a reverse of *hard*, and these words make him suddenly aware of a possible mismatch between his outward demeanor and his inner state. He wonders: Do I look hard? Do I feel hard?

> nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...



Grammar of In-tension:
[Interest] /manifests as\ In Consistency.

Without warning, the music stops. The room falls still, save for the murmur of conversation and the rustling of people settling into the couches. Someone stares at Beckett—longer, sterner?—than social decorum calls for. Another, unfazed by the silence, continues crunching on a bag of potato chips. A voice finally breaks the hush: "So, fellow *NeuroProlix*ers... what have you failed to accomplish this week?"

The question sparks amusement. Beckett is perplexed. *NeuroProlix*ers*?* "Pardon," he interrupts. "Is this not an *insomniacs'* support group?"

Laughter ripples through the room. Beckett remains still. The creases on his face deepen, the lining of his facial wrinkles sharpening a rigid appearance.

"I don't know what brought you here," the speaker replies, "but do you assume a NeuroProlix person sleeps soundly?"

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

"You see, mister... wrinkles; everyone in this room struggles to shut down. Often also, to shut up." Laughter all around. "Day in, night out, our bodies are coursed through by—let's call it—intensities of affect, barely perceptible yet ongoing vibrations that keep our attention in a state of vigilance. Whether visible to others or not, these registers are always there. These are the lines of our story. How about you? What keeps *you* awake?"

Beckett does not find a quick answer. The square holds still, except for the crisp eater turning the bag upside down hunting any last crumbs. He notices the spellbound effect the crumpling sound of the crisp bag has over the *stay soft* person next to him. A swooshing sound rises in the room suggesting a growing impatience while Beckett takes time letting any word out.

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Becket sits with interlaced fingers resting on his lap. His head tilts slightly to the right. Arched eyebrows. "My mind hunts for words," Beckett replies. "I daydream about the lack of words and giving names to the unnamable. At night, the words haunt me in return—a stream of thought that won't rest and won't let me sleep. *Don't get too attached; the words you find today won't hold for long*, they say. And yet, it is unclear if their tone addresses failure or the never-ending loop of attention in thoughts about loops. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. Ever tried. Fail to *bed* her. Failing to put language—*that indisputable generative it*—to sleep."

"Well, well, well..." the speaker resumes. "It seems that your insomnia has brought you to the right place after all. Any NeuroProlix person in this room gets what you have just described. Our

non-neuronormative brains have strong wills to run astray, linger to run, or run on their own... which is perceived in a pathologizing manner as cognitive deficit, deviation, divergence from the line. And yet, none of us deals with a lacking brain. The opposite is truer. The science standing on our side describes it as an excessive presence of the brain. An excess of attention, or rather, paying identical attention to all sensorial, imaginative, environmental stimuli. Such a challenge with 'stimulus overselectivity' (Lovaas et al., 2007) leads to overload, shutdowns... Could those be read as different modes of insomnia?"

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

A soft presence sitting next to Beckett gazes at the floor: "In these meetings, we often use the magnet metaphor to describe how curiosity emerges from cortices as metal to the force of a magnet. Attention is pulled to it: *what it is*, our curiosity wonders. It's a thirsty type of chase, that will tap around as a sniffing predator until *getting it*. Curiosity is so deeply attracted, with such a keen and close focus that, to others, we might come across as stuck in inertia."

"Our mind sure follows behind. You know... 'retarded.' Pun intended," adds the snacker.

Laughter across the hall.

A different, softer voice takes over. Beckett cannot trace its source. "And then, as if following some unseen logic, the magnet flips around: the grip holding curiosity and attention steadily is let loose—or rather, chucked. The mind starts feeling out of touch, no longer knowing where to direct the pouring of its attention. Attention disperses, scatters. The mind does not know what to do."

Beckett plays with his hands wondering whereas the mind can feel. He forms a square with his fingers, imagining people rotating steadfastly along its borders. The direction of their spin will flip every now and then. At times, one walker is pushed out, another is pulled in, as if moved by the force of a flipping magnet. A never-ending play of reversal and replacement.

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

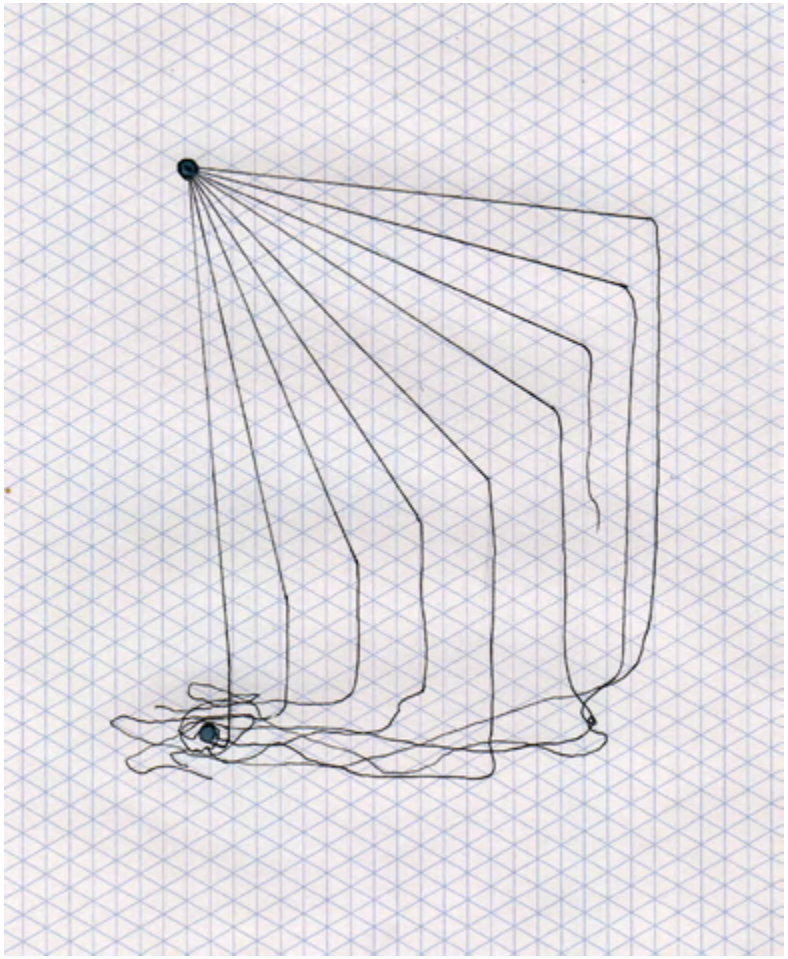
"Forget the *will* of the mind."—adds the snacker. "Apparently"—nibbling from different packages—"these brains of ours seem to have serious cravings for an oxymoronic type of mind. The haphazard flip of the pull of curiosity, the flip from estimated direction to digression, will drive the mind nuts. Should the mind follow the changing appetites of curiosity or keep up with the 'right' course of things previously planned? What a mind-fuck! It's as if our brains, instead of satiating the rule of default executive functioning, feed its goal-directed conduct, needed instead to trip on it. To mind-wander."

To *mind-wander*, Beckett thinks. At last, *the* words holding the unnamable sense dreaming without being asleep.

The snacker resumes: "I just had the best idea to capture the intention of the mind to satisfy, to *know*, what the heck is curiosity craving for: a neatly prepared family meal that is about to turn to chaos." Laughter takes over the room. "*Dinner is set*, goes the mind to itself. Yes, I've paid attention to your likes. You're welcome. What's that? No, you know perfectly well that dessert comes last. First comes the fibers and vitamins, then protein and then carbs. Only then the sugar. Oh, have you lost interest? Or, oh no, does it taste poorly? Then why are you scattering the food all over? No, it's not supposed to be fun. Food is not a toy. It's serious stuff. Eat now. Your head is in the clouds again. Get yourself in order. Are you stalling

just to mess with me? You must be ‘out of your mind’ and you’re getting on my nerves too. Ok, no dessert for you.”

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...



Grammar of In-tension:
[Novelty] /manifests as\ In Tensification.

The speaker takes the floor: “What a treat! It is the impulse of the mind to uphold its familiar course of action that will break it down. There’s more to it than losing energy in tracking attention. Losing sight of attention-to-attention.

The brain does not agree with the lack of predictability and ‘lacks’ of consistency. And therefore, the mind tries to set everything in order, almost as if editing curiosity as it emerges. The mode (I am sure you are closely familiar with) commonly known as rumination. A focus that focuses on the behavior of focus. One role that gets in the way of the other... It’s a lot to focus on. The mind freezes.”

“Freezes?” muses the snacker, “More likely a meltdown... The mind starts munching itself. Nham, nham, nham...”

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

The stern gazer cuts in: “A prolific craving looking for

Something...
What is happening...
Not sure what to do...
Am I out of touch...
Is it fantasy...
Or is it fantastical?
No, you’re sensing it right...
Come on, think straight...
Believing it to see it...
What can I do...
Can’t get you...
Out of my head...
Na, na, na. Na-na-na-na-na. Na, na, na...”

Without warning the entire group joins in a singing:
"Here comes the hard thinker (think it all)
I'm a lyrical sager (think it all)
Attentive to attention (think it all)
Making sense like that (think it all)
nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na..."

A sense of amusement takes over the room. Beckett is clueless about what just went on. The speaker grins and carries on. "The shift of gears of the mind trying to hold back, figure out, and moving forth, towards, *nameless* somethings, will rush the brain engine. Pressure starts to build. The temperature of the cortex starts to rise. The body hardware panics along. An automatic response kicks in; the nervous system overheats, unable to shutoff that endless na-na-na-nah na-na-na-na... and shuts down."

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

"Today's creative-culture economy," warrants the softy next to Beckett, "would love to clench the potential of such tenacious minds. But the unpredictability of its focus, the enjoyment of chasing rabbit and carefree testing, deems it an unreliable source of profit."

"Right on!" The crisp eater jumps in, voice dripping with playful mockery. "Oh, how unpredictable this—*you*—are... Could this be made more *concrete*? ... It's rather *'complex'* to follow such train of thought, not so... straightforward... Wouldn't it be *interesting* to map, I mean, to draw, those prolific lines of thought..."

A throaty sound cracks the atmosphere. The stern starer is now standing with slightly open arms: "Prolific minds!! Overshot, hyped minds. Of prolific motions. Mind spilling. Words spilling. Prolix minds. Going astray. Getting late. Leaving things undone..."

"Or, just as often," returns the speaker, "done with too much effort, too intensely, too tensely. Prolific moves ever failing to settle down... ever trying, better trying.

Well, look no further, mister: we have been failing prolifically."

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Sighs from the softie next to Becket, before turning to him to say: "It's not only today's risk-free zeitgeist that gets in the way of *failing better*. All brains are naturally wired to avoid potential flops, events that might scare and scar. A body will keep the score of its aching tunes. One needs tools to withstand failure. Cognitive and emotional tools that the mass schooling model does not invites us to practice. Levels of comfort, capability and willingness to deal with wrongdoing, unpleasantness, bear the sting of fruitless efforts, of disapproval. To borrow your expression, tools to '*fail better*.'"

A quieting feel takes over the room.

"Indeed." Retorques the speaker. "Or it will simply act as rhetorical play. Stoic, egotistical, babble. Which, not surprisingly, resonates with the politics of self-sufficiency and self-governance of the Teflon-capitalism we live in."

"Would it be possible," the softie returns, "that the rumination keeping you awake is not an intellectual appraisal of the axiom *failing better*, but a call of curiosity felt in your body to shape those tools?"

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Beckett holds that thought with unease. Is he able to suggest tools to deal with failure, to encourage the 'fail better' logic of rehearsal, or is he also stuck in mere intellectual fantasy? The outlook of his stern blue gaze is deceptive. A stare that does not read

the room, but trying to grasp something there-but-not-there, something under the radar, visually imperceptible.

Up to this point, Becket's gaze has remained enclosed to the square alignment of couches missing the backdrop of the room, failing to notice the whiteboards leaning against the walls, the piles of chairs and tables, the large rolls of carpets, cardboard boxes with the word 'pillows' on them, how the walls are filled with drawings of geometric forms, likely diagrams... and more significantly, and perplexingly, the colorful header board with the text '*Other*Wise Learning.' The realization he entered a classroom brings softness to his hardened facial expression. *The Untamable Tension* makes room for a pedagogy!

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

The speaker notices Beckett's eyes wander. That exact point when curiosity sparks mindful attention out of its sleep. "I see our study material caught your interest. Well, in this place we come up with tools and strategies to study attention matters. Our departure point is the brain. The observation of how each brain comes up with unique layouts to interact, to register, to react... to external—as well as to embodied—stimuli. We have come to see such an interface for noticing a sort of 'fascia of attention'; a flexible structure bonding, holding, different modes of attention."

"Prolific attention," the starer cries.

"Well... supporting AND confining attention," adds the snacker. "No matter the stretching talent of such a *fascia of attention*, only so much 'attentions' can be taken in. When the range of stretch reaches its peak, flexibility turns to stiffness, and contraction starts making its appearance. That's when things get interesting. The neat arrangement of various and conflicting types of awarenesses,

different speeds of noticing, and varying degrees of focus begins to clutter, get pressed, juxtaposed, upsetting the pattern of predicable forms of attentiveness."

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

"One might begin to feel like they're losing their mind." Adds the speaker. "That the mind no longer finds clues to recognize how the brain is moving. Disorientation triggers hypervigilance and defensive impulses. The tension that started to build up in the mind quickly spreads to the body."

Someone in the group remarks: "As if asking the body to help taking the tension away, to press it out, to bring the brain back to reason."

"Rather than pressing it out, expressing it," adds the soft voice next to Beckett. "Our study tries to sit with/in that charge. To follow the behavior of such *in-tension*, listen to its lessons, and draw a plethora of cognition maps. A study of *in-tension*."

"Prolific! A prolific in-tension! A prolix mapping!" cries the starer—giving the group the oddest of smirks. His reaction brings exclamations of cheer to the room.

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Beckett is beginning to lose his thread of thought. 'Intention' is a causal concept, a relational qualifier, a connecting line between expectation and effect. He asks: "An *intention* to do exactly *what*?"

Different voices overlap saying: "No, no... Not 'intention', but *In*—pause—*Tension*. In, with, the tension."

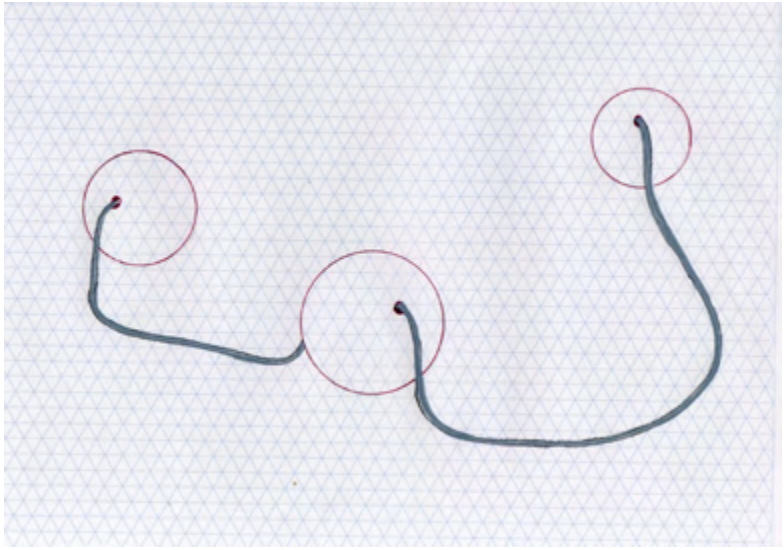
The fuss caused by Beckett's mix-up brings him an ear-to-ear grin. He corrects himself, hyphenating the word: "The study tends to *in-tension*?"

The speaker resumes calmly. “Yes. Studies, learns from, by staying with/in or nearby that tension. In-the-tension brought to the mind by the stretch and contraction of the fascia of attention. Clarity of sense clearly grasshops away with the unexpected—uninvited—movements of curiosity.”

The snacker complements: “Plus, the mind detests acknowledging its limited willpower. The mind starts feeling its control thinning, its energy wandering to some unknown intention. Panic kicks in the moment the mind feels drifting on its own.”

The starer now holds a standing, bent position, with arms raised. His throat releases a low, humming, siren-like sound, filling the room. “Mmeeeeeeeeeww... Attention, attention! Focus on the loose. Alert, attention.”

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...



Grammar of In-tension:
[Competition, connection, and collaboration] /manifests as\ With/Holding.

“Hypervigilance mode, three, two, one...” the snacker interrupts, which adds to the general amusement. “The mind doesn’t get *where is attention wandering to?* What a naughty, naughty distraction. And so, the chase of attention-to-attention begins. The mind rushes whatever is left of its ruled focus to track that abundant, disparate, disperse, mindless attention.”

“A prolific tension. Prolix attention,” yelps the starer.

“Yes, a prolific tension,” agrees the speaker. “This, however, is neither welcomed nor is it graspable under the neuronormative lens on the brain and its narrative of a balanced, stable functioning. There’s more to it than a change in the order of things, change in structure and patterns of thought. From a neuronormative standpoint, those tensions pushing the loosening of known configurations, even the rearrangement of constellations of thought forth will trigger the hypervigilance of the mind, but also, move the body. Hyperarousal is the other side of hypervigilance. The mind not only seems to lose sense of things: it also loses *body*.”

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Beckett feels a little touched. He’s forgotten how to connect with sensations even while thinking about them. Sudden, little aches manifest in different parts of his chest, stomach, and right leg. He wonders, why the right hand? Could the ongoing rash and twitch be manifesting my difficulty coping with the arousal of feeling?

The starer looks at him differently now. In a softer gaze. Even a suave smile. And then, to Beckett’s surprise and unease, tears begin to roll from the starer’s eyes. Beckett wants to understand what this is all about. He feels the impulse to offer help, and yet something within holds him back. He fails to reach out.

A sharp, acidic sensation begins to cage his chest—something he recognizes as a trace of fear. He frowns, his gaze tightening inward, searching for the source of that fear in his mind, all while facing the starer, now both smiling and crying.

The soft speaker lands a hand over Beckett's. The unexpected touch freezes his body and cuts his rumination. "Stay soft," the soft speaker reminds him. And as these words echo internally, the temperature in Beckett's body starts to rise, the frowning of his forehead begins to loosen, he—finally!—removes his sunglasses. He briefly meditates where his thoughts went.

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

The speaker cuts in. "As I mentioned earlier, the neuronormative mentality struggles with grasshopping brains. As soon as attention begins to feel untamable, the mind reacts, putting on its *lens of recognition*—a comparative lens that figures out what is not familiar to cognition. All light casts shadow, and along with the *lens of recognition* comes a *lens of exposure*—a generative lens that figures with/in the limits of cognition. A combined used of these spectacles guides the prolific study of *in-tension*

"A prolix mapping!" yelps the starer (continuing to tear).

"Better handover this chap a treat, no?," says the snacker heading towards the starer with little snack bags.

The speaker also stands up, moving past the couches, no longer looking at the group but addressing the diagrams on the walls. "Each way of noticing—neuronormative or prolix—*shapes* a language for the *nameless* way it meets our common, and yet, impossible to fully name, reality."

Beckett had already noticed the presence of a fidgety figure in the group. But only now this figure sets itself lose from the couch,

standing up, moving in space, shaping dynamic lines. Beckett reflects whether to call it writing or dance.

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Someone from behind says: "The Untamable Tension is not working to undo neuronormative perceptions and to contest the pathologizing tone of its concepts and logic. You know the drill. The 'deficit of attention,' 'hyperactivity,' 'cortisol dopamine swing,' 'cognitive retardation,' concepts that are often followed by the suggestion of emotional immaturity. Although the revision of these matters is likely to happen as by-product of our study of in-tension."

The speaker explains: "It's important to add here that our study does not claim that neuroprolix brains possess a kind of innate immunity or some unique ease to manage unpredictable, destabilizing, pulls of curiosity. In fact, the opposite might be closer to truth. The neuroprolix brain is a contradictory machine. A brain that can follow all the wandering shifts of its curiosity. And yet, that is hardly able to sit back and watch without onsetting drawings for the emergence taking shape."

"A prolix, ever-changing draawwiiiiinnng," chants the dancer.

"Lines that hurt!," adds the person next to Beckett with intensity.

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

The last words feed commotion in the room. Some folks stand and clap. Beckett finds himself moved. Some people begin to howl. The impulse to shout also resounds in Beckett's body. But he never tried that before, and the inadequacy keeps him still. The sit-in has clearly come to an end.

It takes Beckett a minute to realize that a hand met his left elbow. He looks at the grabbing hand. What words capture the sense of holding a hinging? The soft voice repeats its charm: "Stay soft. Stay soft. Let the tension teach you."

People move towards the posters on the wall.

The dancer holds its pace to share: "The body is not opposing the mind. After all, the brain is also *body*. And that is why the study of in-tension must depart from the body-stage. As I dance, I wonder if the brain feels happy or thinks happy? So many resisters of sense cross the body. Some are easily figured out, while others call for a deeper listening. Pay attention to the body: can you notice the extent that our body goes to take care of us?"

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

The words of the dancer fill Beckett's chest with growing warmth. He only realized the tears release when he notices the abundance of delicate smiles thrown at him by the people across the room. Beckett untucks himself from the square area and starts to move closer to the speaker, who is addresses the line drawings and illustrations postered on the wall: "If the cycle of attention-to-attention is pushed too far, it will move the brain and the limbic system—where are the diagrams showing this? Ah, there!—will bring the body to hyperarousal, overload, meltdown."

Beckett recognizes the snacker's hasty manner of speaking before his hands come to push Beckett towards the group: "The neuroprolix can benefit a lot from the study of in-tension. To start with, to add as many maps of neurobiological particularism as possible. From the paradoxes of in-tension, one might find ways to allow the coexistence of contrasting speeds, and possibly, to come to navigate them with ease. Take for instance, the capability to tarry attention

without minding the 'loss' of control, to play with the set order of things, with predictability, or to refrain from putting on the lens of straightforward reading... Good thing none of us thinks straight!"

Amusement in the room.

The speaker adds: "The study of in-tension is a never-ending work of reading and writing singularity. So, here you have us, mister wrinkles: your ever-trying, ever-failing, in-tension study group."

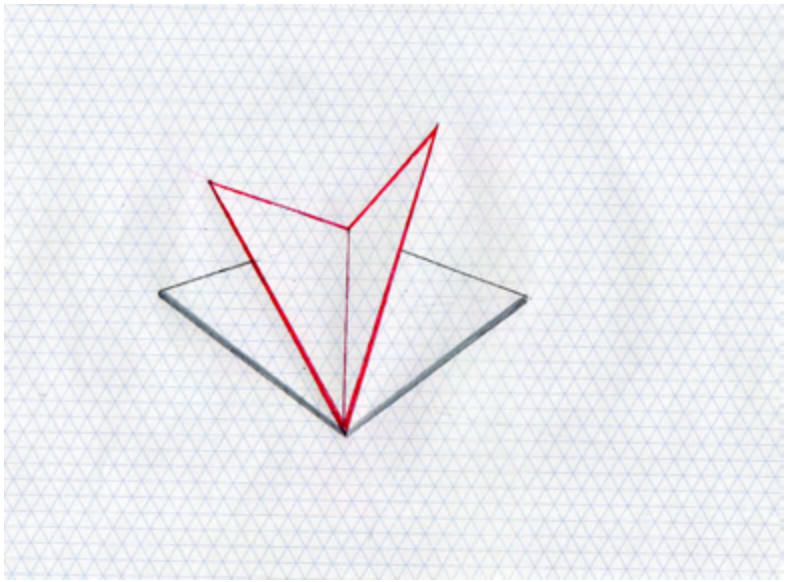
nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

Beckett looks at the diagrams on the walls. Outlines paired with words—'Lens of recognition,' 'Lens of Exposure,' 'Figuring Out,' 'Figuring With/In,' 'Overview,' 'Infravision,' 'Manifest Action,' 'Firm vs Rigid,' 'Outlining,' 'Overthinking'... —seemingly shaping a language on its own terms.

The speaker approaches Beckett. "Oh, I see you found the *Grammar of In-tension*. Shaping this atlas was particularly challenging for The Untamable Tension. Not only because collective work is challenging, but because, as might you be able to tell by now, the ways this study group comes to sense are often closer to a funfair feel." The group laughs. "Seriously though. Just picture the lengths this people struggling with intelligibility had to go through in order to craft a collectively agreed, intelligible, lexicon of in-tension."

"Gee, and often of getting stuck together. In a state of co-motion." Laughter, cut by the starer crying "A prolific commotion!"

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...



Grammar of In-tension
[Hurry up, urgency] /manifests as\ Now/Here.

Beckett's eyes lock on a diagram subtitled "the squarest." A red line square folds in two, with halves rising upwards. It's a see-through square. Not a surface, but an outline. The fold of the square is placed atop the diagonal of a penciled square shape. It is not clear to Becket what the grey shape outlines. Is it tracing the departing position of the folded red square? Is it a shadow? Or a puzzling presence, the contour of a question on which square variation is the fairest of them all.

The speaker and the gentle speaker manage a couple of folders and paper. As usual, the soft speaker approaches Beckett with little eye contact: "Is a flapping brain less square than a quiet one? Is a standing brain less peaceful than a resting one? Don't let these diagrams fool you into thinking that intellectual tools offer the right insight. After all, the body is the stage as well as reader for all this adventure."

The room comes into a quieter mood as people gather around different activities. Beckett is startled by a sudden rush of children. Had he miss these presences all along? The gentle speaker approaches him: "Our neuroprolix brains need to run free. Not loose. Free of interruptions to its singular pace."

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

The speaker complements. "We don't run according to the clocks of assembly lines. Impediments to flow will register as emotionally taxing. And in the worst-case scenario, trigger hyperarousal mode: the brain will begin to freeze, the mind will come to a shutdown, the body into a meltdown. Dissociation will claim its rule."

"That's why The Untamable Tension put so much effort developing tactics to fail better," explains the gentle bystander. Shaping tools for the neuroprolix brain to remain atop of its 'nervousness,' no longer dissociative and aggressively reactive, but empowered by listening to difference."

The speaker. "Strategies pushing nameless impressions to known sense."

"So, what do you say?" hollers the snacker from a nearby table: "Do you want to give these tools to fail-better a try?"

nah, na-na-na-nah; na-na-na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na...

III. After the neuroprolix 'lens of in-tension': shaping a guide for artistic unpredictability.

Let's take a moment to contemplate how predictability inhibits those micropolitics emerging unnamed and unexpectedly in creative practice. I wonder if artists would try better or fail more if intentionally experimenting with the logic of a neuroprolix 'lens of in-tension.'

What sustains the trope of artists as agents supposedly better equipped to deal with the unexplained, the unexpected, and the unpredictable? If this were the result of a well-trained relationship with the ineffable and with the aesthetic qualities emerging from within creative practices, one would expect it to be reflected in the curricula of art education. However, a quick look at its content suggests otherwise—or rather, reveals a lack of explicit opportunities to cultivate competence or ease in engaging with unexpected events and with senses that are not-yet-there.

I wonder why these lexicons remain so muted within artistic education, and what is lost to the world when their silence becomes deafening. Turning to the politics of tryouts, of playfulness, and of the generation of unpredictable data as called for by Beckett comes into conflict with the tendency of artistic research to rush toward commodification—translating the findings of experimentation into pre-existing and previously validated platforms for presenting and disseminating knowledge production in the arts.

However, such a cry for the yet-not-there might not trouble all artists. In fact, many aspire to reach a stage in their creative practice where a specific lexicon and aesthetic begins to shape a familiar, singular artistic signature. Beyond that, artists often benefit from the value that systems of reception and commercialization attribute to those signatures—as signs of matured experimentation and evidence of reliable productivism.

Concerns with predictability in the arts are not to be approached through a simple for-or-against logic, but rather by detecting and countering the forces that attempt to bind difference to sameness. On a neurobiological level, familiar recognition makes sense to the brain: it soothes attention or at least avoids triggering the alertness of focus. The seduction of such stillness lures the brain into a mindless walk along the mapped paths of ideological command—a

map for controlled movement. Attention flows along the fixed lines of a predetermined reading and the prescribed ways of interpreting it. Eyes tethered to the map will fail to register the unexpected, the minor appearances 'vibrating' across the landscape. And yet, at times, a walker may feel the sensuous touch of veiled atmospheres—those moments when the unpredictable stirrings of a 'different' seize attention. A nameless sensation turns intentional listening on. It is felt. But can it be mapped?

Recognition does not rely on "seeing to believe," but on the beliefs that allow us to see. Following the turning of days into nights as if a sun could go to sleep and dream till the dawn breaks. As the term 'recognition' implies, insight is a revolving event. A (re) turn to (cognized) forms of intelligibility and readership. Knowing [sight] as result of existing ways [in] of knowing. The unintelligible speaks in unyielded language. In a mismatch with the map of familiar intelligibility. Such a 'difference' calls for the expansion of readership, "a call for the invention of new *possibles* to incorporate the sensitive mutation asking for passage into the map of set meaning" (Rolnik 2006; online). And yet, not all brains will be able to follow. Or at least, to return to the neuro-epistemological critique raised by The Untamable Tension, to follow along straight lines.

As another trope about the creative mind would have it, artists' brains are somehow 'different.' Implicit in such a belief, however, is a neuronormative reductivity—one that assumes certain modes of orientation, of reading, and of intelligibility make more sense, or carry more value, than others. But there are many kinds of thinking. Linear thinking, for instance—thinking geared toward prediction—is not inherently problematic. As Ursula K. Le Guin reminds us (through her move away from the model of fiction-as-writing-of-action-that-moves), linear thinking is like a quick and sharp throw of a spear that either hits or misses (Le Guin, 1989). The issue lies

in our attachment to such metaphors of linearity. These mentalities constrain idea generation. They flatten—if not erase—other possible modes of movement, of thought, and of creative action.

The supposed exceptionality of the artist's brain is a falsehood—a remnant of a sectarian, elitist, modernist credo that frames the brain not as a dynamic process of continuous rewriting, but as a fixed result. Moreover, to argue that artists possess a unique cognitive 'talent' for navigating the unpredictability of strangeness only risks alienating those whose minds feel challenged—not knowing whether they should focus more or let focus go, think harder or think less, tighten their mental structures or admit uncertainty. So then, what determines the value of this perceived distinctiveness? Does it arise from a well-behaved attention—or from one that resists being disciplined?

An array of processes of attention conspire to map emerging senses but getting there is not under control. Or, at least, under the sole control of cognition and the horizon of straightforward thinking and sense-making. You know, those "tyrannies of the quantifiable, of the predictable" (Solnit, 2016, podcast) that are only able to know through anticipated outcomes and the clarity of measurability. The Untamable Tension reminds us that clarity can be so bright that it blinds. That the mind might try to hold processes of attention so tightly that curiosity makes its own mind to escape. In the many pockets of curiosity there is pleasure for strangeness, unfolded plans, forgotten items, banal interests crumpled and crumbled to special things... evidence of an attraction and of a time together. As the members of The Untamable Tension explain to Beckett, a 'lens of in-tension' moves a sense of time defined by waiting, by listening deeply to emerging insights—literally, to a seeing with/in, inwards, with/held in the flesh—that will call us to inspect how attention thinks and reads them.

Just a few more lines—I promise—and you'll be there. As I wrote about attention, openness, and the brain's capacities—about the artist's skill in staying unsettled—a curious, quiet idea began to take shape. It inscribed itself subtly, but persistently. As these lines unfold, I feel my body tensing. Understandably so, putting myself on the spot has always been taxing. What ensues is some notes from my own experience as a neuroprolix person that is constantly failing to meet the capitalistic timelines for a "life on a spreadsheet" (Alves 2021:151). I offer it as a basis for intellectual adventure, not as a universal truth.

The brain enjoys predictability. And yet, the way my neuroprolix brain follows threads—or tangles them—makes completion unpredictable, and often, impossible to guarantee. Getting lost or behind wouldn't be that bad, were it not for the tension my body holds and the aftertaste of trying and failing. A resentment even, from not being able to accomplish expected the levels and rhythms of productivity that most people seem apt to get at. Shoot... this is the voice of my ableist self-attacking part.

The valued productivity of linear logic takes on a different reading when considered in the context of autism. Here, straightness of response—reacting immediately and in a direct way—is not interpreted as efficiency or sensibility, but rather pathologized. Rigid thinking, they say. That the brains of autistic subjects are set to face manifold challenges, among which are the troubled verbal expression, holding an unresponsive body, feeling out of touch. It is said that the maturation of such a brain does not handle verbal language well. That emotions are expressed inadequately—too intense, too pressing—eliciting fear or discomfort in those involved. That social cueing is an unavailable art, one that must be painstakingly crafted through mimicry, through copycat readings of how society behaves. Nah, na-na-na-nah... the list of hurdles goes on and on.

Yet entangled thinking runs alongside—and perhaps even grates against—such linear logic. Allow yourself to feel the intensity my oxen brain is known for when I ask: have you ever witnessed an autistic meltdown? What does it look like from the outside? Can you perceive how the fabric of reality is tearing, ripping all sense apart inside the skull? Will you hear the contradictory cacophony rising as the dance of words collapses into stillness? Will you sense—will you respond—with supporting tenderness, when the eyes freeze in a kind of stare that seems to look at everything and nothing all at once? Will you know that this is the moment calling for a gentle touch, one that lands on my arm to say: you and I are together—together; together as a body, in this now, here, in this nowhere of silence that holds all sense?

It is often said that art is a helpful means to recover from burnouts and meltdowns. But what happens when those states of mind falling apart are encased in the skull of an artist? What kind of artistic strategies will one set in place to reignite the power of imagination and interest in difference, in deviations from known forms?

Nah, na-na-na-nah... I have no straight answers for these questions. They are posed here to signal the need of an urgent missing work: the mapping of challenges neuroprolix brains will also meet within the landscape of the arts. Such an analysis and critique will have to focus the overlooked ways through which forms of neuronormative ableism are perpetuated within sites of artistic training, experimentation, and display.

Tension is not simply force—it emerges in the attempt to hold or direct force. These harnessing builds intensity, often felt as something to be relieved. Yet not all tension signals constraint or control. Nah, na-na-na-nah... Consider listening: an intentional, receptive form of holding that does not dominate, but directs attention with care. It's often claimed that losing control opens

space for difference. But let's pause before equating freedom with detachment or autonomy. Such narratives can serve both libertarian ideals and neoliberal individualism. Losing control may be thrilling—until it crosses an unseen threshold where beauty collapses. After all, is the power of a raging bull in its force, or in the fence that holds it?

Making sense differently doesn't align with the demands of risk-averse, neuronormative infrastructures. Nah, na-na-na-nah... As The Untamable Tension reminds us, neuroprolix minds—marked by poor self-regulation and scattered executive function—resist the logic of capitalistic smooth efficacy. To meet idealized standards of productivity, such minds are often required to suppress their difference and stay 'on track.' The cost of this difference is paid in measures of adaptation—stretching oneself to fit. And here, my mind flickers to a memory: an early dawn, a page from an *X-Men* comic, where Paige Guthrie runs alone, chasing 'fitting to' with every stride.

> "Dawn. Nature's way of saying, 'Here ya go... Take another shot. Try again. Here's a whole new day in which to succeed. To give reality to the dreams you had the night before. This is Paige Guthrie, who has as little time for sleep as she does for dreams. She is a mutant. Nature's way of saying, 'Here ya go...' a little something extra. Try harder. You've been given genetically altered abilities which separate you from the rest of the human race. Deal with it." (Bachalo and Lobdell 2013:1).

And yet, if done alone and at your own expense, what good does it serve—other than to reinforce the violence and precarity embedded in the neoliberal-Teflon ideal of self-sufficiency? "Deal with it" on your own cuts against the ecology of connectivity that enables

the neuroprolix brain to survive—let alone thrive—within a neuronormative regime. The neuroprolix cortex doesn't need taming; it needs support. A village or two. Oh, angels of co-regulation: thank you for holding space.

To play seriously
To let loose
To follow the pull of curiosity
To get in there
To listen to the action of new tensions
To try
To try to withhold it
To lean,
To try to hold it within
To let it carry you
To let it pull you
To let yourself in its net.
To hurry up
To know that
To feel in-tension is a now/here

This essay nears its end. These closing remarks may feel rushed or unresolved—which, in a way, reflects the nervous pressure that deadlines stir in me. Originally, this section aimed to sketch a 'lens of in-tension' workshop for artists, drawing from neurodiversity-informed pedagogies. That outline remains unwritten. This text has yet to shape a working framework where artists might engage intentionally with their attention capital in respect to unpredictability. In my imagination, such a workshop would weave together creative making, collaboration, and practices for tracing attention—how it feels, moves, focuses, and deviates—alongside mapping tools

(drawing, diagramming, writing) to track the mental reconfigurations stirred by process. It's not there yet. But my curiosity is pulling me toward it—and time will tell.

The feeling of such a pull became more intense as I came across PINCH, a framework developed by (neuroprolix) social scientists Diane Dempster and Elaine Taylor-Klaus (2024) in support of parenting of youth diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder)—a dwindling terminology, in favor of VAST (Variable Attention Stimulus Trait). From deficit to expansiveness: vast, prolific, exuberant, prolix, loud, spectrum. A shift in language makes so much sense!

A PINCH framework operates through a series of adaptive strategies—Play, Interest, Novelty, Competition, connection and collaboration, and Hurry-up/Urgency—designed to support scattered or divergent attentional patterns in moving toward task completion. While these strategies may inadvertently align with neuronormative expectations of efficiency and predictable outcomes, PINCH's broader purpose is to reposition neuroprolix sense-making processes in relation to time: the misalignment with clocked time, the experience of losing track of time, and the difficulty of thinking in timely, linear sequences. Dempster and Taylor-Klaus suggest that for PINCH to realize its full potential, it must attune to the rhythms of cognition and attention—that is, to recognize and map diverse attentional behaviors, to tolerate their unpredictability, and to harness their generative capacity.

Pinch me awake if this sounds like pure speculation, but can you sense the resonance between the aims of a PINCH-informed practice and the exploration of a 'lens of in-tension' proposed by *The Untamable Tension*?

Contributors

Dr. Adesola Akinleye, (she/they) is an artist-scholar whose choreographic work bridges art, technology and social inquiry. Adesola draws out connections between movement, identity and environment. Adesola is co-artistic director of DancingStrong Movement Lab and Associate Professor at Texas Woman's University, directing the PhD in Dance. Adesola is a former Fellow at the Centre for Arts, Science and Technology in ACT at MIT, and Theatrum Mundi. Grounded in Afro-Indigenous perspectives, Adesola explores dance as an embodied method for witnessing, remembering, and listening. Adesola's work engages the relationship between physical Self and environment as a 'living archive', revealing the intricate relationships between movement identity and environment: Place. Primary to Adesola's practice is an urgent commitment to kinship across the web of human and non-human that reflects principles inherent in many Afro-Indigenous worldviews. Adesola's publications include the monograph Dance, Architecture and Engineering and the monograph Dancing Place: Scores of the City, Scores of the Shore written with Dr Helen Kindred. Commissions include site-specific work at The Hayward Gallery Southbank London and digital film-art for RIBA. Adesola's current XR project, Space+Dance+Digital, uses augmented reality (AR) to craft common spaces of movement that deepen the engagement between digital futures and embodied practices.

André Alves
Neuroqueer; FoC-him; 1981
I write poems, fiction, and academic texts. I am an artist, educator, learning activist, dyslexic writer, and methodological agnostic. I research and develop artistic and pedagogical approaches aiming

to rehabilitate practices of attention and attentive listening. One example is the project *A Never-Ending Thirst: Artistic Reforms to Neoliberal-Teflon Imperviousness,* which formed the basis of my PhD in Philosophy in Fine Art (Artistic Practice) at the University of Gothenburg (2021). I am a neuroqueer person and an activist for a neuroinclusive culture. I live in open rebellion against the cult of efficiency — according to what? — the predetermined rhythms and tidy timelines worshipped by capitalism. I disrupt, derail, and occasionally nap through the hustle. I battle biscuits... and lose.
www.theandrealves.com
https://contacacos.blogspot.com/
https://ikeepthingsalive.blogspot.com/

Katarzyna Balug, **PhD** is a historian of modern and contemporary architecture. Her research explores feedback loops between techno-political change and subjectivity as mediated by architectural experiments. Balug's current book project examines air-filled inflatable structures prevalent in the 1960s as a prescient meditation on human relations with the planet and its environment informed by the Space Race. Her curatorial work and public art practice reflect her commitment to making knowledge accessible and cultivating public space as a site of critique. Balug's writing been published in, among others, *Geoforum*, *Critical Sociology* (co-authored), and the edited volume *NASA in the American South* (University of Florida Press). She holds a Ph.D. in Architecture from Harvard University and was previously a lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Isabel Marie Barbosa (they/them) is a disabled and genderqueer transdisciplinary artist and researcher. Through an embodied research practice that inverts the hierarchy of the senses and prioritizes intimate, relationally-transmitted knowledge, their work explores the various intersections between food, queerness, philosophy, and art. They have a particular interest in immersive modalities that engage the body holistically, and create experiential pieces that involve audiences as embodied participants—whether through writing, installation, performance, or shared meal. Residing in Brooklyn and working to finish a Master of Arts in Gastronomy, their everyday life is focused on cultivating community care and eating well.

Adriana David is an architect with honors from Universidad Iberoamericana. She holds a master's degree from Harvard University GSD in the Art Design and the Public Domain program, as well as a master's in Scenic Design from IED Madrid. Her work lies at the intersection of architecture and the natural world. Her research focuses particularly on Food Sovereignty as a mechanism to restore the broken bond between human beings and nature. She is continuously exploring multidisciplinary approaches to engage with environmental health through public space. Her recent projects include LIMBO urban seedbanks, a choreography for a more-than-human world, a performance dinner on the impact of today's impact of agribusiness on food and a set of tools to achieve Harvard's Food Sovereignty for the future. She is the founder of DOMA, a spatial design studio based in Mexico City working at the intersection between architecture, ecology and public space. Her practice varies considerably in scale. She has collaborated with the Papalote Children's Museum, the Mexican Housing Commission, the Ministry of Agrarian, Land, and Urban Development and the Ministry of Culture as Architecture jury member on several occasions. Adriana is the recipient of different grants such as FONCA for Young Creators 2013 and the Co investment Grant in 2016, both from the Mexico Ministry of Culture, to support LIMBO, and TEOCINTLE: Sustainable Food

Festival in Mexico City. In 2020, she received the Harvard Mellon Urban Initiative Grant and in 2019, LIMBO was awarded Best Environmental Action in the City by PREMIOS CIUDAD. Her work has been exhibited at the GSD Kirkland Gallery, Tamayo Museum of Modern Art, San Ildefonso Museum, MEXTRÓPOLI and Design Week festivals, among others.
www.doma.mx
www.limbosemillas.com
Contact: adriana@doma.mx
IG: @domamx, @limbosemillas.mx

Bruno Guaraná is Master Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at Boston University's College of Communication. Originally from Recife, Brazil, he earned his PhD in Cinema Studies from New York University and his MA in Film from Columbia University. His current work explores negotiations of cultural citizenship in contemporary Brazilian media through an intersectional approach. He is a contributing editor for Film Quarterly.

Dr. Henna-Riikka Halonen is a visual artist/researcher who uses a wide range of artistic techniques and historical and cultural references, including theatre, literature, and cinema. Her works are often responses to a specific context or a site aiming to highlight our need to structure experiences as fiction to gain an understanding of them. By creating speculative systems or worlds, her work explores our relationship to materials, objects, words, and living and non-living beings. Halonen has worked on and produced many collaborative and large-scale projects and commissions in Israel, Ireland, France, Finland, Sweden, and the UK, and has shown her work widely in international exhibitions and festivals such as the Incheon Biennale of Women Artists, South Korea, IFFR, Rotterdam, Hayward Gallery

London, 2017, Biennale of Sydney 2014, Lilith Performance Studio. Malmo, Centre Pompidou, Paris, and most recently at Gus Fisher Gallery, New Zealand. Halonen graduated with an MFA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, London in 2006. She completed a Doctorate at the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki in 2020. Currently, she is working as a Visiting Researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki, and as a Senior Lecturer of Contemporary Art at Turku Art Academy, Finland.

Samantha Jones is a dancer, musician, and scholar whose work focuses on the relationship between movement and music. Specializing in Irish traditional music and dance, Samantha examines the intersections of memory, movement, and identity. She earned her doctorate in ethnomusicology from Harvard University, where she also completed a postdoctoral fellowship. She holds a master's degree from Boston University and bachelor's degrees in music and cognitive science from the University of Connecticut. Samantha's research has been recognized and supported by the New York Public Library Short-Term Research Fellowship and the Society for Ethnomusicology Nadia and Nicholas Nahumck Fellowship. She has lectured at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, and Tufts University. In addition to her scholarship, Samantha is an instructor of youth Irish dance in the greater Boston area.

Paul Landon's visual art practice and research focus on notions of wandering, architecture and urban transformation. He works with video, sound, photography, drawing and the relationships these media have with the built environment and with spatio-temporal perception. Paul Landon is a professor of Visual and Media Arts at the École des arts visuels et médiatiques of the Université du Québec

à Montréal. He completed a Doctorate in Fine Arts at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, in 2016.
paullandon.com

Concert pianists and transdisciplinary artists **Jung Mi Lee** and **Jon Sakata** are active in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. A sampling of venues and institutions that they have performed and creatively worked at offers a glimpse into the diverse are(n)as that they are engaged with: *Radialsystem V* (Berlin), *Färgfabriken Kunsthalle* (Stockholm), the *Exhibition Pavilion of the National Museum of Architecture* (Oslo), *Bagsværd Kirke* (Copenhagen), *Myyrmäki Kirkko* (Vantaa), *Gyllensbergsalen - Sandels Cultural Centre* (Helsinki), *Estonian History Museum* (Tallinn); Beijing Central, Shanghai, China National, Wuhan and Xi'an Conservatories; Boston, Harvard, Montreal, New Mexico, Porto Alegre, Tallinn, Tsinghua, Tufts Universities; The New School (NYC), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon Center for Arts in Society, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Williams College Multicultural Center, Goethe-Institut (Boston), Japanese-American Cultural Center (Los Angeles), Conference in Interdisciplinary Musicology 2005 (Montreal), 2nd International Conference on Music and the Environment (Tallinn), 3rd International Conference on Chinese Music (Boston), 4th International Conference on Analytical Approaches to World Music (New York City), 33rd Annual Donald J. Robb Composer's Symposium, (Albuquerque), Talloires International Composer's Symposium (Annecy), ILLUMINUS-2015 (Boston). Since 2009, Jung Mi and Jon have been collaborating with architects in Europe and the United States exploring the interstices between Music and Architecture: conducting research, designing multimedia installations and giving experimental concerts in Europe and the US. Highlights have included three concert tours in northern Europe engaging architects, arts

institutions, and public in key modernist and contemporary works by Alvar Aalto, Sverre Fehn, Jørn Utzon, Juha Leiviskä, Gerhard Spangenberg, Petra Gipp in music spanning from J.S. Bach, Schumann, Brahms, Ravel, Schoenberg to Donatoni, Holliger, Cage, Cogan, Liang. Exhibition and installation design collaborators include architect John Stephen Ellis AIA, transdisciplinary artist Nobuho Nagasawa, architect and artist Rob Trumbour AIA, painter Deborah Barlow, poet Todd Hearon, artist and curator Lauren O'Neal, architect Rolf Backmann, poet Willie Perdomo, architect and artist Bruce MacNelly. Jung Mi and Jon live in Exeter, New Hampshire and have taught on the music faculty at Phillips Exeter Academy since the mid-1990's.
www.sakalees.com

Stephanie Misa is a visual artist and researcher whose work centers on decolonizing methodologies. Her artistic practice connects multicultural collaboration, curating, and feminist criticism. In her work, Misa examines phenomena related to the orality and richness of multilingualism. She has shown works at the Heidelberg Kunstverein (2025), Vienna Secession (2023), Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt (2023), RMIT Gallery, Melbourne (2023), Depo Istanbul (2023), KODA House Governor's Island, NYC (2022), The KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021), the 9th Bucharest Biennale (2021) to name a few, and was awarded the Art Merita Prize for Artistic Research in 2021. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and has a master's from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at NYU. She is currently a doctoral researcher at the University of Arts in Helsinki. She lives and works in Vienna and lectures at the Department of Artistic Strategies at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, where she leads a Philippine Research platform called the *Island Tides Intiative*.

Dr. Lauren O'Neal (editor) is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, educator, and nonprofit administrator. O'Neal has exhibited and performed at venues including the Theater Academy Helsinki, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Portland Art Museum, and has been a recipient of residencies and grants from the Vermont Studio Center, the Somerville Arts Council, and Frame Contemporary Art Finland. O'Neal has taught at Boston University, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, the University of the Arts Helsinki, and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Previously, she was director and curator of the Lamont Gallery at Phillips Exeter Academy and was a visiting fellow at the Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. O'Neal presents her research at conferences including the College Art Association Conference, the Nordic Forum for Dance Research, and the European Artistic Network Conference. O'Neal's doctoral research at the University of the Arts Helsinki explored the intersection of choreographic thinking and curatorial practice. Currently, she is a research affiliate at the Uniarts (Finland) Research Institute, and a board member of the *Journal for Artistic Research* and the Brickbottom Artists Association.

Leah Poole Osowski is the author of *hover over her* (Kent State University Press, 2016), winner of the Wick Poetry Prize, and *Exceeds Us* (Saturnalia, 2023), winner of the Alma Award. Her work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *ZYZZYVA,* and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She was a former emerging writer in residence at Penn State Altoona and is the advisory poetry editor of *Raleigh Review*.
http://www.leahpooleosowski.com/

Dr. EL Putnam is an artist-philosopher working in performance art, video, sound, and digital media. Their practice focuses on borders and entanglements, particularly the interplay of the corporeal with the machinic. They explore hidden histories and emotional experiences, testing the limits of their un-representability as they take the familiar and make it strange. Treating art as inherently participatory, their work opens intersubjective spaces that offer multiple conceptual and aesthetic points of entry through alchemical diffractions of experience. Beyond creating works rich in cultural and political meaning, they investigate how aesthetic pleasure can function as a critical strategy to captivate audiences while exposing them to provocative ideas. EL actively presents artworks and performances across the United States, Europe, and beyond. They have received funding from Culture Ireland, the Arts Council of Ireland, and Westmeath County Council. Exhibitions of note include *Under the Feet of Shadows* with Mike McCormack at Mart Gallery in Dublin, Ireland (2024) and CIACLA in Los Angeles, CA (2025), the solo exhibition *PseudoRandom* at Emerson Contemporary in Boston, MA, USA (2023), and Living Canvas in Dublin, Ireland (2022). Recent publications include the monograph *The Maternal, Digital Subjectivity, and the Aesthetics of Interruption* (Bloomsbury 2022) and *Livestreaming: An Aesthetics and Ethics of Technical Encounter* (University of Minnesota Press 2024). They are Associate Professor in Digital Media at Maynooth University in Ireland and hold a PhD from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

Elina Saloranta is a visual artist living in Helsinki. Her background is in experimental film, which she studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999–2001. In 2018 she completed her doctoral thesis at the University of the Arts Helsinki and began a postdoc project in which she exchanged letters with some 19th century

women. The project resulted in three video pieces and essays and a number of participatory performances in which the audience was invited to write letters as well. The essay "A lace hat in a puddle" was Saloranta's first letter to the past. It was originally written in Finnish and published in the anthology *Suo, kuokka ja diversiteetti* edited by Leevi Lehto and Markku Eskelinen (ntamo 2018). After the essay, Saloranta also made a video piece (*A letter from Elli*) based on the same archival material. The video can be viewed on the website of Av-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art (www.av-arkki.fi). In addition to her artistic work, Saloranta works as a writing teacher at the University of the Arts Helsinki's Academy of Fine Arts.

Composer **Riikka Talvitie** finished her artistic doctorate in spring 2023 at the University of the Arts Helsinki. In her doctoral thesis *Muuttuva säveltäjä: kohti dialogisia käytäntöjä* (*The Composer in Flux: Towards Dialogic Practice*) she explores on the composer's interaction with other agents during the compositional process. The central aim of the research is to expand a composer's practice towards collaborative, dialogical and social ways of working, and second to reflect how sharing the authorship may gradually change composers' particular position in the tradition of Western culture. In her artistic work, Talvitie particularly enjoys working with text and dramaturgy. She has also collaborated with artists in various fields, especially in theatre and performing arts. She is currently a lecturer in composition at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and her research has recently focused on the pedagogy of composition. Talvitie has participated in several pedagogical development projects, such as the 'Equity in Composing' in 2019-2020, which examined gender equality in the field of art music composition. She has also held several positions of trust, such as Vice President of The Society of Finnish Composers, and written articles on composition

for various publications. In the spring of 2025, Talvitie worked as an invited artist in residence at Saari Manor, focusing on the ecological practices of the composer. She was awarded the State Prize for Music in 2022.

Madison Treece is a Professor of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design, specializing in modern and contemporary Latin American and Chicanx/Latinx art and visual culture. She received her Ph.D. in Visual Studies from the History of Art and Visual Culture Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her work examines contemporary landscape photography of the U.S./Mexico border to determine how artists image the land to address border policy and migration. She holds an M.A. in Art History and Museum Studies from Tufts University and a B.A. in Art History from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Denise Ziegler, DFA, is a Helsinki-based visual artist and researcher of public space, who currently works as a senior university lecturer at Transdisciplinary Art Studies (TAITE) at the Department of Art and Media at the School of Arts, Design and Architecture at Aalto University. In her artistic practice and research, she questions the concepts of urban space and public art. In a post-Beuysian vein, an artist workshop is extended to public space to work with its mechanisms and possibilities. Ziegler has made permanent and temporary works in and for public space, and her practice includes assemblages, sculptures, drawings, paintings, videos, literary-visual works, and writing.

Lauren O'Neal
Desire Lines in Artistic Research

Art theoretical writings from the Academy of Fine Arts (24)

PUBLISHER
Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki
© University of the Arts Helsinki and writer

COVER IMAGE
Choreographic notation of Milpa process, as part of the project Score for a More Than Human World, by Adriana David, 2020

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Marjo Malin

PRINTING
Grano, 2026

ISBN 978-952-353-507-7 (printed)
ISBN 978-952-353-508-4 (pdf)
ISSN 2343-1008 (printed)
ISSN 3087-839X (pdf)

The publication is available in the University of the Arts publication archive Taju.
https://taju.uniarts.fi/

ART THEORETICAL WRITINGS FROM THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS
24

You've probably seen desire lines—those worn, informal trails that traverse diagonally across the grass in a park—rather than the rectilinear concrete sidewalks around the park that planners intended you to follow. *Desire Lines in Artistic Research* draws from the concept of the desire line to examine how curiosity and desire drive artistic research and practice, and what directions this inquiry takes. This anthology, a diverse set of desires ranging from gastronomy and composition to poetry and space travel, situates the desire line as both methodology and subject. The texts offer insights into how we encounter and negotiate given conditions in order to reimagine the limitations these conditions propose.

UNIARTS HELSINKI
ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

ISSN 2343-1008
ISBN 978-952-353-507-7
9 789523 535077