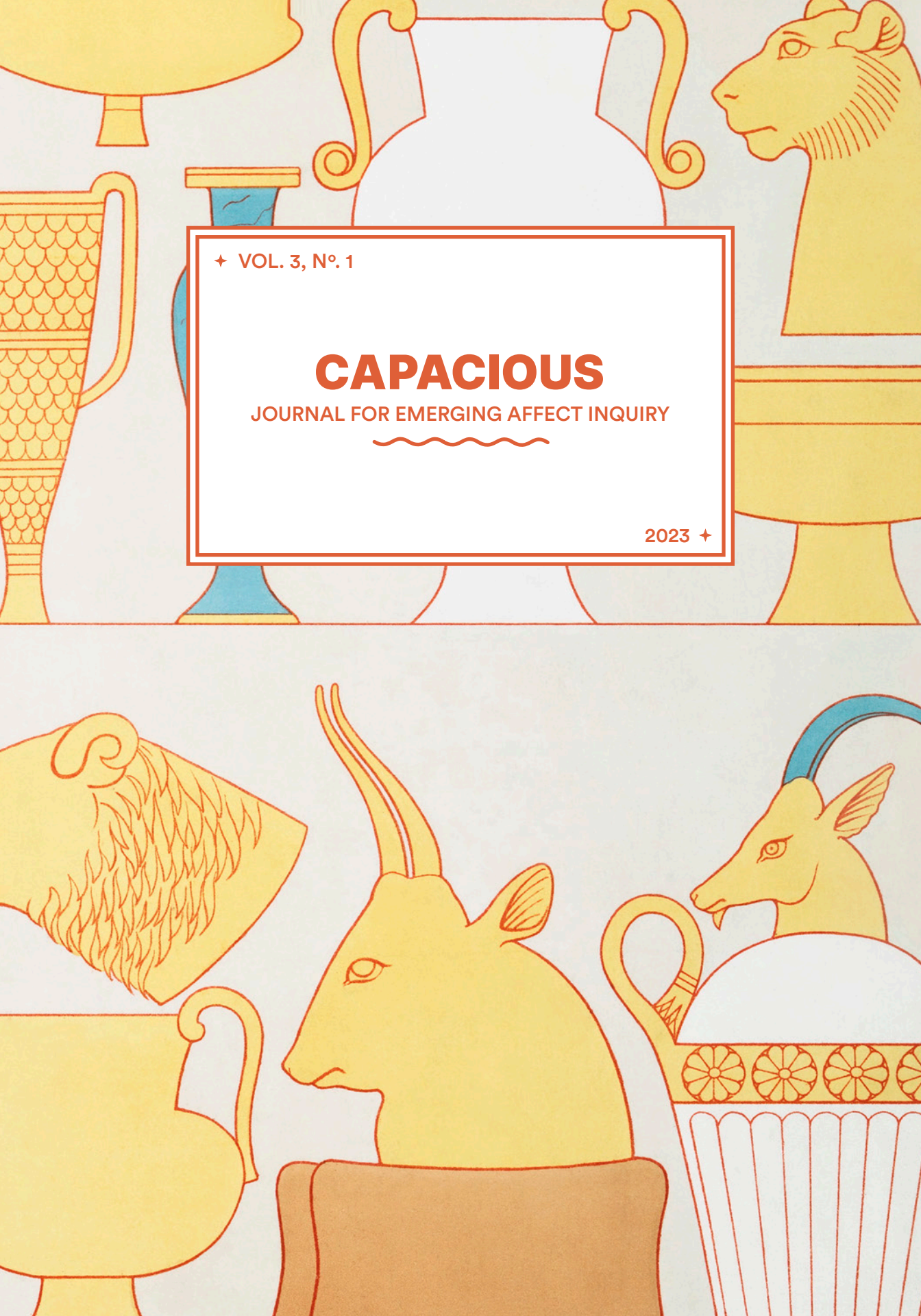

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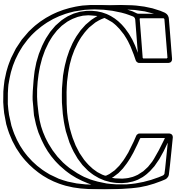

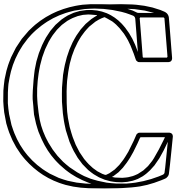

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Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry is an open access, peer-reviewed, international journal that is, first and foremost, dedicated to the publication of writings and similar creative works on affect by degree-seeking students (Masters, PhD, brilliant undergraduates) across any and all academic disciplines. Secondarily, the journal also welcomes contributions from early-career researchers, recent post-graduates, those approaching their study of affect independent of academia (by choice or not), and, on occasion, an established scholar with an 'emerging' idea that opens up new avenues for affect inquiry. The principal aim of *Capacious* is to 'make room' for a wide diversity of approaches and emerging voices to engage with ongoing conversations in and around affect studies.

This journal will champion work that resists:

- the critical ossification of affect inquiry into rigid theoretical postures
- the same dreary citational genealogies
- any too assured reiteration of disciplinary orthodoxies

The journal will always encourage the energies and enthusiasms, the fresh perspectives and provocations that younger scholars so often bring to bear on affect within and across unique and sometimes divergent fields of intellectual endeavor. *Capacious* seeks to avoid issuing formal 'calls for papers' and 'special theme issues.' Submissions to this journal are accepted at anytime and are welcome to pursue any and all topic areas or approaches relating to affect.

Our not-so-secret wish is that essays and issues will forever remain capacious and rangy: emerging from various disciplines and conceptual [t]angles. Indeed, our aim for every journal issue would be that its collected essays not really coalesce all that much, but rather rub up against one another unexpectedly or shoot past each other without ever touching on quite the same disciplinary procedures, theoretical presuppositions or subject matter.

Capacious shall always endeavor to promote diverse bloom-spaces for affect's study over the dulling hum of any specific orthodoxy. From our own editorial practices down through the interstices of this journal's contents, the *Capacious* ethos is most thoroughly engaged by those critical-affective undertakings that find ways of 'making room.'

ca·pa·cious
kəˈpāSHəs/

adjective
having a lot of space inside; roomy.

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Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie,
Jean François Champollion (1790–1832)

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Plantes & Fleurs, Émile Prisse d'Avennes, 1878

TO AFFECT THEORY

Chris Ingraham
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Readers of *Capacious* are probably more prone than most to field, on occasion, a deceptively difficult question. For those curious enough to ask it, the question must seem straightforward enough: "What is affect theory?" Over the last several years, really for almost a decade now, this is a question I've been posed more times than I can remember. Yet, somehow, every time, whatever answer I've managed to get out seems to elude satisfying me—and often, I fear, whoever's looked to me for an answer. And that's a curious predicament to face for someone, at least measured by much of what I publish and teach, who should probably know just how to respond to such questions. How can I write about and train students in affect theory without having a definitive answer about what it even is? The truth is, I think the *not* knowing of affect theory is part of the point, that is, part of why—and how—affect theory matters. The key question to ask isn't what affect theory *is*, but what the doing of affect theory *does*.

There was a time, early on (from here in 2023, we'll say the mid-1990s count), when a set of practices and questions grouped under the vague heading of something called "affect theory" was becoming a semi-stable enough interest among scholars to be visible across different academic disciplines and sites of inquiry. Mind you, these weren't the earliest days—the ones that historical renderings anachronistically tend to evoke via Spinoza, Freud, or various other bellwethers who didn't realize "affect theory" was what they were up to—but they were early enough in the concrescence of something resembling a veritable field that Brian Massumi, writing in 1995, could reasonably observe a sort of discursive wild-west in studying affect. "The problem," he wrote then, "is that there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect. Our entire vocabulary has de-

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rived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure even across irreconcilable differences" (Massumi 1995, 88). In other words, right around the time that "affect" was becoming a more broadly legible area of interest in cultural theory, psychology, philosophy, communication, and otherwise, there was just no language—literally, there was no extant vocabulary—adequate to expressing the floating, liminal, asignifying, emergent yet elusive character of affects, at least not when understanding them in the now somewhat familiar way that distinguishes the noun called "affect" with the nouns called "feeling" or "emotion."

Thankfully, that time has now passed. As *Capacious* and many other examples attest, we now do have a whole conceptual apparatus, with an attendant vocabulary, that makes it easier to talk about affect in a more or less shared way, or at least through an argot that many of us invested in the study would recognize. Of course, a specialized vocabulary—all the *intensities* and *forces*, the *bodies* and *becomings*—can't solve the problem of representational language itself ultimately being inadequate to the task of capturing (in the sense of fully knowing or describing) the affectness of affect. Which is to say, representational language has a discouraging way of plowing through the undecidability of affect by reducing "it," first to a thing, and then to a thing fixed enough to presume that it's knowable and attached to a subject. But affect (and hence the question of what *affect theory* is) just isn't compatible with being calcified into a semiotic system premised on the notion that signs have a stable-enough thing to signify.

There are many ways into this kind of thinking, and readers here may not need to have them rehearsed, but let's look at one way of situating affect's very importance in its extralinguistic nature. Consider the human infant. Before the child can speak, they are a bundle of affects. Slobbering, curling up, stretching as far as their chubby arms can reach without touching anything at all. Sometimes they cry, sometimes they *wail*, sometimes they dimple-smile-coo for no apparent reason while all witnesses melt and the electricity flickers like magic. Whether stone-faced or reactive, the infant communicates with a primal, embodied force. Eating, pooping, sleeping, eventually the caretakers learn the signs. There, that's hunger: they're chewing on their hand. That there's constipation: their face is squeezed shut like a fist. Sleepy? Someone's getting a bit cranky. Even when these embodied "signs" become readable to someone who has learned them, they're still different from language in the common sense.

The infant has not yet come into language. Their body has things it needs to do, and it does them, the way the mother's body, in childbirth, took over from the mother, becoming a co-pilot with a yoke of its own. But the infant has much less control than a mother—most take months even just to crawl—and so what their bodies can and can't do is limited. There is, nevertheless, an evident *force* or *intensity* to the infant body's means of *becoming* satisfied through its relation with other bodies it encounters, from the nipple to the face to the blanky to the crib. These *forces*, *intensities*, *becomings* (notice our vocabulary words in action) are the things we might call "affects." And although the "affect" of these encounters doesn't quite belong to the infant, or to the crib, it emerges from encounters between them that impede or facilitate either's ability to act, *to be* infant, *to be* crib.[1]

If all goes well, the infant grows up, learns to get around, learns to speak, thinks *in* language, and their ways of becoming *through* embodied affects begin to seem less apparent. The grown child learns to label desire *as* desire (and as *their* desire), moving in the process further away from the undifferentiated affect-bundle of infancy. A wedge, a space, a time, a separation, an articulable awareness, has now mediated the immediacy (though nothing's immediate) of the once-infant's sensory being in the world. And yet, in the same way that the infant's embodied affects both produced its becoming and were produced by the other bodies that diminished or increased what it could do (think: the caretakers, cribs, pacifiers, etc.), so too with the grown-up, only the body parts have changed. The embodied affects are still there. The language and reasoning, the rules, the schedules, the organizational structures, and so forth, simply come to obfuscate the continual happening of embodied affectivity as we get older.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, building from Nietzsche but copping a phrase from an Artaud poem, have a name for this. They call something close to the undifferentiated affect-bundle a "body without organs" (2005, 149-166). The body without organs is a figure of thought for the potential of being an unregulated body, not so unlike the infant. Infants are a bundle of affects in part because they have not yet been regulated by—or subsumed into—the structures that encumber the free operation of their parts. And one of those structures, a very powerful one, is language. It accrues like a thin film over all our becoming, filtering our thoughts, our bodies, one's relation to oneself, but also to the not-me. This much is true for everyone: there's always a lot more not-me than me. Affect theory, in part, is a way of unencumbering that distinction. Affects are not merely personal. They are not merely other. They are in-between. More than me, less than we.

For anyone who has been around youngsters through the early phases of their becoming, the difference between an infant and the once-infant brought into language is pretty noticeable. It's not uncommon to hear parents, almost with an air of surprise, remark of their newly walking-talking toddlers that they're "like a little human." What this means isn't that the parents thought they'd birthed something else, but that the sorts of behaviors and movements through the world that they'd always associated with nearly every human they know are suddenly, as it were, identifiable in their own child. The earlier affect-bundle was hardly recognizable in this way. But with the settling of the film of language over our thoughts and physical encounters, a measure of autonomy, of decision-making, of articulable desire, invention, and self-awareness, all become more evident. These are among the wonderful gifts of language and animacy. And while humans aren't the only ones bearing these gifts, they have flourished in human people as a marvelous capacity that's enabled us brainy bipedals to create art and music and dance and story, all the secular miracles of human creation, let alone the many scientific and technological discoveries that have peeled back the sticker on the mysteries of the universe.

And yet, with the coming of these marvelous gifts, by coming *into* these gifts, the way some people might talk about "coming into some money," something's changed. The affect bundle that we all always are seems to have become muted, suppressed, attenuated, you choose the metaphor. Symbolic language just operates in a different order than affect—less front/back than side/side—nevertheless giving the impression of its primacy, so that affect can seem, by comparison, to be backgrounded.[2] The idea isn't to draw a hard line between affect here, language there. It's to think-feel the ways each is inadequate to the other by acknowledging the sharedness of their force in the world, while at the same time ceding that language isn't the only culprit explaining the empirical challenge of pointing to affect—*there!*—as something stable and coherent.

For instance, we all accumulate pasts, and with them parts we remember, parts we don't, and parts we misremember or fabricate altogether. These ostensibly personal histories literally change our bodies in their constant dramas of becoming, from weight gain to epigenetic switches to the residues of generational trauma, and that's why *feelings* tend to be personal (where *affects* aren't), both because they're attached to environmental stimuli that may not impact someone else, and because our bodies feel through the medium of our own distinct body. Even if each

person's unique physiology—from your DNA to your central nervous system—is 99.9% the same as every other human's, no two bodies are *wholly* the same because we all have different encounters as we move through the world. Feelings may be essentially personal because everyone has singular embodied experiences that make them register in different ways. But the example of the infant born already having intense needs and allures reveals that there is another aspect of becoming that precedes language and perhaps memory itself. In any case, it's different from either. We call it affect.

If this all is beginning to read like a prelude to some grand philosophy of affect, it's not. I'm merely trying to spread out an example that illustrates a basic point. Affect is something other than language, other than personal. "It" is a consequential tug that draws relations toward their force, a force that may or may not prove salient, that may or may not have anything to do with "feelings" or "meaning" at all. Affect precedes language but doesn't go away when we come into language. And affects certainly aren't only human. In fact, they're not even human. Just because humans use language differently than animals and plants, doesn't mean animals and plants don't have communicative language or that they aren't rich with affectivity and prone to affectability. The extralinguistic character of affects means that, to a certain degree, they are like an autonomic system over which any animate individual being, human or otherwise, has little or no control. Affects beat like hearts, circulate like blood, turn like a plant toward the sun.

This leads to one of affect theory's more controversial claims: namely, that affects precede consciousness.[3] If affect is preconscious, then it isn't something over which anyone can have ownership or control. Indeed, the very "it" of affect isn't. And if there is no consistent, knowable, and expressible "object" to point to as "an affect"—whereas that's not quite the case with a feeling or emotion—then it's harder to imagine a "subject" that could act upon "it." If affect is preconscious, in other words, it may also mean that nobody can mobilize or deploy affects for intentional, instrumental reasons. Affects are not the same as *pathos*, and though Aristotle surely tracked the rhetorical arts of using emotion as an influential mover of belief and action on others (2007), there yet remains an unruliness about the whole enterprise. With no "subject" of affects and no "affect" as object, it's harder for me to see how affect could be associated with intention, at least not without its most important *je ne sais quoi* being lost in translation.

Yet the preconscious happening of affectivity doesn't mean affects aren't impacted by language, or vice versa. Bodies are constantly interacting in ways that influence one another without that influence being identifiable except *after* it has already exerted its influential force (and even then, again, only imperfectly). After

all, as Massumi has said elsewhere, "No scientist has ever observed a force. Not even Newton saw gravity. Only force-effects are observable" (2002, 160). The same is true of affects: nobody has ever seen them, only their effects. Indeed, in one of their last interviews, Lauren Berlant takes the never-been-seen nature of affects further. "The thing about affect," they say there, "is that there is no direct evidence of it: but there is no direct evidence of anything, as all processes require refraction in solidity-approximating forms" (2020, 248). That's quite a statement from one of the more influential voices in affect theory. Not only is there no direct evidence that affect even exists; for Berlant, this simply isn't a problem. Rather, they say, "This forces us to think about mediation" (2020, 248).

Well, so how is affect mediated? What "solidity-approximating forms" does affect take? *Many ways*, *many forms*. But one of its mediating forms, and one that's prized in academic currency, is through language, bearing in mind that language, too, is nothing without the mediation of its delivery, whether in writing like what you're reading now, in speech, hand-signs, smoke signals, or otherwise. Affect and language are adjacencies that share an alongsidedness dependent upon a medium—in a way, a middle—which also at least partly determines what they can be and do. This doesn't mean language can fully "capture" or "represent" affect, any more than it means affect isn't also implicated in the mediation of language. It means that a language adequate "to affect theory" would be akin to stammering. It would be, as Foucault writes in a different context, a kind of murmuring, a "language about the outside of all language, speech about the invisible side of words" (1987, 25).[4] That's because language and affect each create different, though sometimes entangled, force-effects that operationalize dynamic sets of relations in social and material worlds. Just because those of language tend to be more discernible does not make language and affect coterminous. It's just that, by being adjacent to language, it ends up taking far more work to identify the effects of affects and find a vocabulary or method adequate to their extralinguistic (and, indeed, their infralinguistic) evanescence and complexity. Thinking-feeling the extra/infralinguistic happening of affect sure is an unpointed process.

The anthropologist Eduardo Kohn has done some interesting work on this front, and though he doesn't articulate it with affect theory outright, I think his work can be read as a way to make sense of affect's extralinguistic elusiveness. Kohn's research on the animacy of upper Amazonian forests in Ecuador resonates almost uncannily with Massumi's earlier claims about affect's language problem—or,

rather, with the problem facing those of us who want to write about affect using representational language but keep getting hung up on the old structural snares. Not unlike Massumi, Kohn suggests that a "more expansive understanding of representation is hard to appreciate because our social theory—whether humanist or posthumanist, structuralist or poststructuralist—conflates representation with language" (2013, 8). His concern is that most operationalized theories of language, and most human language use in practice, adhere to anthropocentric assumptions that fail to imagine other representational processes beyond those prominent among humans. Kohn makes a compelling argument that a social theory premised upon Charles Sanders Peirce's "weird" semiotics would be far more compatible with the many nonhuman, extralinguistic, and "nonsymbolic representational modalities [that] pervade the living world" (2013, 8). The trouble, though, Kohn suggests, is that human people continue to "conflate representation with language in the sense that we tend to think of how representation works in terms of our assumptions about how human language works" (8). What we ought to do instead, he argues, is acknowledge that "life is constitutively semiotic"—because neglecting to do so means that we will "fail to recognize that signs also exist well beyond the human (a fact that changes how we should think about human semiosis as well)" (2013, 9).

If the thread to affect theory is getting thin here, that's because affect isn't the thread Kohn is tugging. But it is ours, and so we might observe that the same problem Massumi noticed in 1995, about the lack of an adequate model of signification to theorize affect, is the one Kohn writes about (in considerably more detail) as foreclosing an openness to the communicative (and also *affective*) processes of nonhumans. Which is to say, although we may be getting closer to having operationalized what Massumi then called "the absence of an asignifying philosophy of affect" (1995, 88), our improving fluency in writing or talking about affect still cannot keep pace with the thinking-feeling of affect as something that may simply not be amenable to language, at least in the predominant representational modalities that Kohn identifies as anthropocentric.

How, if at all, does anthropocentrism figure into affect theory? The strong case might argue that, even just by using language as the means of our theorizing, we've already cordoned the realm of the affective into forms of reason and understanding delimited by a human perspective and semiotic system that is based upon anthropocentric givens. Because of that, in the strong case, all affect theory is born anthropocentric: it is biased toward privileging a "human affect theory," whereby "human" falls off as the taken-for-granted signifier. I'm not too compelled by the strong case, even if it's just hypothetical. But it's not a strawman either. The real reason to dismiss it isn't because it's not true. Many languages,

English among them, do privilege subject-object distinctions, actors and the acted-upon, and the grammatical "middle voice" that has been lost. As John Durham Peters observes of the lost middle voice, a sentence such as, "*The meal is eating* sounds weird—precisely because the agency is off; it's neither passive, with an unidentified agent, nor active, with an identified one" (2022, 2). We are accustomed to thinking and talking, on the one hand, in terms of someone or some thing who does something and, on the other, in terms of someone or some thing that has had something done to it or with it. A "more than me, less than we" approach to affect theory doesn't play nice with this way of languaging affectivity. Abiding Berlant's call for attending to mediation, the lost middle voice (in English, at least) may be the closest to an ideal available way to language affect, and to affect language. *The middle is affecting*.

To the extent that affects are in the middle, perhaps media studies—or, more specifically, *medium theory*, in the sense inherited from Marshall McLuhan—is another area that could help illuminate affect's importance or find the language sufficient to its being in-between subject and object. There might then be an unacknowledged strain of doing affect that passes through Innis-McLuhan-Peters, rather than the other lineages that are already getting written into affect theory's history.[5] But to accept medium theory as a somewhat homologous kin of affect theory would, at the same time, involve stretching how we think about genealogies of inquiry and ideas in the first place. In the main, Innis, McLuhan, and Peters, among others who do this work, have not engaged much with theorizing "affect" outright. How could they be doing affect theory? Yet, that materialist tradition of media studies, which attends to infrastructures, environments, and other seldom-noticed but consequential epistemic contexts of media, are making the same sorts of arguments about media as others make about affect: *the middle matters, even if it's hard to see it mattering*. As Peters puts it, "We are not skilled in knowing how to talk about entities that participate decisively in actions without causing them. To say that a medium matters is not to say that it played a causal role. The medium is in the middle, indispensable to what is going on, but neither the actor nor the acted-upon" (2022, 3). Could something similar not be said of affect?

Certainly, in the strain of affect that claps like a bolt from Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677/2018), bounces off Deleuze's echoing sense of affects as "becomings that go beyond those who live through them" (1995, 137), reverberates again in Massumi's virtual hollow of affects as "intensities" (1995, 2002), and rings still through

Thrift's sense of affects as "non-representational" (2008)—along with many other examples vibrating to similar frequencies—there remains an abiding problem. And that concerns the nigh near impossibility of representing the thinking-feeling of affects in language without already representing something else: a semi-capturable part, perhaps, but not affect's elusive excess. How to capture affects if the most essential "there" of affect is the excess that is not there? Life lives through affects-as-excess. No living being *has* them, because they escape. Affects tether *us* but exceed *me*. Affects are anthro-decentric.

In this sense, situating affect theory within the scenography of individual people just doesn't work. Even humanity itself is too narrow a scale. Opening the analysis to *all* beings (human or otherwise, living or otherwise) is also inadequate if the object of inquiry remains individuated: *your* affects, *my* affects. Deleuze reads Spinoza to have made that point long ago: nothing is ever separable from its relations (Deleuze, 1988).[6] Spinoza saw these relations as the basis of ethics: how each body, in the endeavor to carry on in its own essence, increases or diminishes the capacity of other bodies to do the same. What we've seen over the centuries since is that affect theory matters through a paradox: affects may be extralinguistic forces, emergent in the encounters between bodies, but the project of living ethically in relation with others requires using language to show that affects matter *because* they exceed language. And how to do that?

If the whole *raison d'*affect theory is that language cannot be the only show in town when it comes to making sense of the dynamic, embodied, and always-ongoing relationality that worlds all being, then it is precisely (read: not incidentally) the ways that affect *exceeds* language and subject-ownership that makes it so essential to study. And that creates a problem, because our received ways of studying, or at least of publishing research, whether in the context of academic institutions or in more public-facing venues, is almost invariably through the medium of language. Does it not then undermine the endeavor to think-feel what exceeds language if cramming that excess into language is the means by which to do so? What is the figure of thought, the material expression, adequate to affect theory without undermining the extra/infralinguistic nature of affect that makes it so important to begin with?

What I've been getting at isn't (or isn't only) the problem Elaine Scarry somewhere mentions, of writing a sentence being like wrestling an alligator. Overcoming the damned hard difficulty of saying exactly what you mean is trouble enough for the best of us. That's always going to be trouble. The problem of languaging affect is worse. It's the problem of trying to illuminate a shadow. It's the cat's problem of frantically chasing the watch-face's reflection jumping around

the room, only to paw it and find it's not even there. The point here is that what's become of this capacious area known broadly as affect theory has, more or less from the start, been beset by the *literal* impossibility of answering the question of what affect theory *is*. Assuming, at least, that describing affect *theory* requires some way of describing the *affect* that's being theorized, I just don't see how it's done. No doubt, there are objections a-plenty to this position. You might say, a cloud is extralinguistic, a bottlecap is other than language, and we can still talk about those. Why not affect? You might say, *all* language is imperfect description, there's *always* going to be something lost between a signifier and the thing signified, and that doesn't stop meaning from transpiring. Why would it with affect? Fair enough. These are legitimate objections. But, *but*, I keep coming back to this: neither the cloud nor the bottlecap, and certainly not the beautiful and necessary gifts of language, reach their distinctiveness *because* they are extralinguistic. Affect does. If affect were not extralinguistic, it would be just another flashpan term or framework, defined in tidy italics for academics to gargle until it lost its flavor. It wouldn't be, well, very capacious. And the capaciousness of affect is a big part of why it matters, why it keeps enticing.

In his book on definitional disputes, Edward Schiappa (2003) makes a distinction between facts of essence and facts of usage. A fact of usage, he suggests, is essentially an empirical question: how do people use this word in practice? Prototypical formal dictionary definitions document facts of usage: what a word is taken to mean in its most common ways of being used. That's quite different from a fact of essence, indeed the two are wholly incompatible. The latter says, who cares how people *use* a word, or what they take it to mean in practice if they're outright wrong about its essential meaning? What matters is what that word really means. For Schiappa, because facts of usage and facts of essence are such divergent approaches, these sorts of definitional disputes are best abandoned. We shouldn't look for facts of essence through some rationalist theory of Platonic forms that could probably never be verified anyway, but we also shouldn't rely on more empirically verifiable patterns to find facts of usage, which might be wildly off-base or inconsistent. Instead of thinking about definitions in terms of what something *is*, or even how a word is *used*, we ought to think in terms of how a word *ought* to be understood. This move—from *is* to *ought*—is the one that I keep coming back to whenever I field that deceptively difficult question: "What is affect theory?"

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The reality is, affect theory *is* a lot of things, and different things to different people. To ask what affect theory *is* implies there's a thing called "affect theory" that is coherent and stable enough to have something that "it" *is* in the first place. And to some degree, of course there is something called affect theory, and that thing, "affect theory" is certainly *some* things and not others, so it's at least partially knowable, if only from the shadows cast by what it isn't. At the same time, though, and seemingly more and more so all the time, there are so many differences in the range of work that could reasonably all be classified as "affect theory" that the tempting solution is to organize them into discrete strands (doing no favors for their similarities) or gumbo them all together (doing no favors for their distinctions). The Spinoza-Deleuze-Massumi strain that I work through is different from the psychological lineage of Freud-Tomkins-Sedgwick, or the activist-feminist one of Cvetkovich-Ahmed-Pedwell, which is different from whatever it would look like to include Innis-McLuhan-Peters, or the approaches of so-and-so and such-and-such, on and on. But the differences are seldom *entirely* different. In other words, even beyond putting "affects" into language, representing or classifying "affect theory" as a somewhat coherent and stable area of study still can't get around the colliding, overlapping, situationally convergent and divergent modes and histories of *doing* affect theory, which itself attests to affect's immunity to capture and regulation.

How then should I, or anyone asked the deceptively difficult question, best respond? The inescapable consequence that follows from understanding affects to be in-between, neither subject nor object, neither personal nor shared, outside language and prior to consciousness, is that they cannot be reduced thereto without that very reduction rendering them into something different, the way frying meat renders the fat off the bone. Language and affect are incommensurable. Or, to put it more mildly—since there's no doubt that language *is* affective, that language *affects* things—what matters most about affect simply isn't something the medium of language is equipped to capture, the way whistling is great for conveying a tune but just can't knit a sweater.

The *doing* of affect theory—as opposed to the work of describing what "affect" or even "affect theory" *is*—is what we ought to emphasize. Think the middle voice. Affect theory is affecting. What is affect theory? It's *to affect theory*. To change how it operates. To seek and feel for new language, for murmuring ways of worlding what defies capture but matters more than we can possibly say, or

prove, or launch an argument to justify. Otherwise, if anyone ever asks you the difficult question, it may be tempting to revert to the wisdom of young Wittgenstein: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (1921/2002). But that relinquishment would miss, or even risk giving up, what it really means to affect theory. And for that, the aged wisdom of Czeslaw Milosz may be best: "It is sometimes better to stammer from an excess of emotion than to speak in well-turned phrases" (1990, 110).

Endnotes

1. For more on the infant as an exemplar to distinguish affect from feeling and emotion, see Shouse, 2005. For more on the interpersonal world of the infant, see Stern, 1985.

2. I've written about the difference between "affective and symbolic orders" in *Gestures of Concern*. See Ingraham (2020, 39-42).

3. Variations on neurological (or quasi-neurological) arguments about affect preceding consciousness are widespread, including passes through John Dewey (1896), Alfred North Whitehead (1966, 153, 160), Nigel Thrift (2008, 186-187), Brian Massumi (1995, 89), Antonio Damasio (1999), and Tor Norretranders (1998, 221), not to mention the many who have drawn from and mobilized such arguments in subsequent research. Ruth Leys is one of the most ardent critics of this approach, lambasting the premise that affect is preconscious for various reasons, mostly that it's unsound science (see *The Ascent of Affect,* 2017). For any affect-curious-but-still-skeptical readers out there, Leys is the one to consult if you're looking to be dissuaded—or to prepare yourself better to defend affect-as-preconscious. For a critical response to Leys, see Donovan Schaefer's "Rationalist Nostalgia" (2022).

4. Thanks to the great DJ, captain, and champion of generosity, Greg Seigworth, for pointing me to this passage and the one from Berlant.

5. See, for example, the helpful inventory offered in Seigworth and Gregg's original *Affect Theory Reader* (2010), Margaret Wetherell's genealogy in *Affect and Emotion* (2012), or the more critical genealogy of Ruth Leys's *The Ascent of Affect* (2017).

6. Of course, neither Deleuze nor Spinoza can be credited with "discovering" immanent relationality, not least because Indigenous and Native peoples all over the planet have had that basic insight for ages, and not just as a contribution to philosophy.

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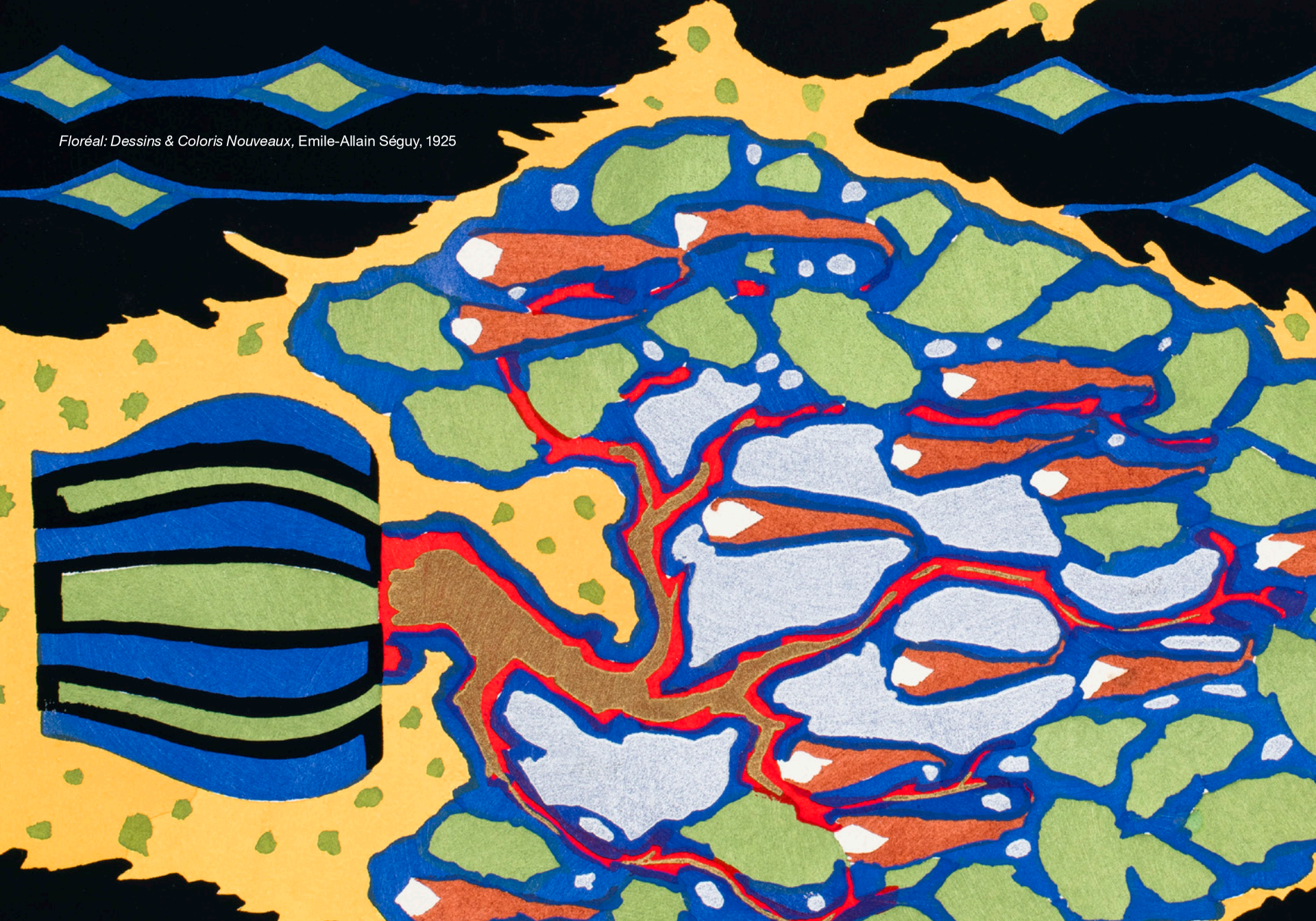

Floréal: Dessins & Coloris Nouveaux, Emile-Allain Séguy, 1925

Barrier Reef Molluscs and Planarians from The Great Barrier Reef of Australia, William Saville-Kent, *1893*

NOTES ON MAD LISTENING

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ABSTRACT

This essay takes shape around a selection of autoethnographic scenes detailing what I call 'mad listening.' The notes below take a mad first-person standpoint, drawn from my own experience of obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and generalized anxiety, among other crazed aspects of my unruly bodymind that evade diagnosis. Challenging the power that diagnoses hold—but not negating their importance for some people—I propose alternative ways of retheorizing these idiosyncratic experiences, through abstract intensities such as 'stickiness.' By de-medicalizing and de-pathologizing madness, my goal is to emphasize the persistent ambiguities and slippages of auditory perception that are not so easy to taxonomize. As such, I aim to chart a poetics of the perceptual glitch in relation to mad listening, without the footholds and straightjackets of psychiatric terminology. Linking mad praxis to other intersections of radical unreasoning, this essay presents further challenges to audist and phonocentric assumptions, which tend to abound where listening subjectivities are concerned.

KEYWORDS

sound, listening, madness, affect, phenomenology, autotheory

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Prelude

In her famous treatise on camp, Susan Sontag introduces the topic by saying that many things have been named but not described. This essay concerns the opposite: something described but not named. I am inclined to call it "mad listening." For me, this umbrella term encapsulates a wide range of neurodivergent orientations to sound, from hallucination to phobia to synesthesia to other experiential modes that you will not find in the DSM.

Mad listening should not be thought of as an essentialism or a universalism, nor does it occupy a binary with saneness. In articulating "mad" listening, I follow La Marr Jurelle Bruce (2020) in treating madness as a "floating signifier," which ranges from unruly phenomenology to psychiatric pathology to states of anger and rage, or any sense of difference experienced as a result of living within a psychonormative society (8). By mobilizing this term, I work toward centring people with lived experience, combating stereotypes, holding space for irrationality and unreason, troubling psychiatric discourse, and celebrating Mad Pride. This essay also moves alongside recent work by John Levack Drever (2019), whose concept of "auraldiversity" names and celebrates a wide range of hearing subjects and listening practices, while challenging "auraltypical archetypes" (20).

Following Kathleen Stewart (2007) and her theorization of ordinary affects, I present this essay as a loose assemblage of notes, riffs, anecdotes, vignettes, and fragments, in order to form a noncoherent "mass of resonances" (6). To that end, it would be most accurate to say that I am interested in conjuring an atmosphere rather than an argument—provocations and attunements and residues rather than "evaluative critique" (4). Much like Stewart, I want to create a "contact zone for analysis" that is not dependent on closure and clarity (5).

In the notes that follow, I attempt to illustrate my lifelong experience of non-normative auditory perception, which sometimes takes the form of an active practice (in listening "against the grain" of neurotypicality) and, at other times, comes on suddenly in a moment of disturbance and disorientation. To quote Sara Ahmed: "disorientation could be described here as the 'becoming oblique' of the world, a becoming that is at once interior and exterior" (2006, 163). Ahmed insists that it is a matter of irresolvable tension as to whether "the strangeness is in the object or in the body that is near the object" (163). Following Lisa Blackman (2017), a

majority of the scenarios described below are concerned with "anomalous experiences or threshold phenomena," wherein distinctions are unsettled between inner and outer, near and far, real and imaginary, material and immaterial (para. 6). If such thresholds are spaces of epistemic uncertainty, as Blackman suggests, then to listen madly is to inhabit such indeterminacy, perhaps even to embrace it. Though threshold phenomena are part of everyday experience, this does not mean that everyone is equally attuned or sensitized to them. Far from invoking a universal mad listener, this essay is ultimately a personal history, or an "autobiographical topography," to borrow a term from Kier-La Janisse (2015).

As topographies go, my position as a researcher, and my points of intersection, are as follows: I am a white settler scholar who identifies as mad and genderqueer. Appropriately, I would stress that this piece of writing only speaks to my experience of madness and mad listening, and although I aim to incorporate a plurality of critical voices in my work, I cannot claim to speak as one for the many. Nonetheless, Lauren Fournier (2021) reminds us that "the singular can be a gateway to the multiple. And in theorizing together we may, after all, hear ourselves" (319). In this way, I consider this research to be a means of adding my voice to the mad movement at large, rather than an impossible distillation of mad thought across numerous cultural contexts. Though I cannot speak for anyone else, I hope to signal-boost other critical voices, to welcome other mad-affirmed narratives, to open up space for further discussions and disruptions within academic practice, to question the processes and forms by which we produce knowledge, and to challenge the criteria by which particular kinds of knowledge are deemed valid. Quoting Robert McRuer, Mel Y. Chen (2004) defines cripistemologies as "seriously twisted ways of knowing in the current global order" (McRuer qtd. in Chen 173). The notes below seek to develop a twisted cripistemology of sorts, a partial and provisional perspective on madness and sensory knowledge working in opposition to sanism and stigma.

Notes on Mad Listening

> Is it the sea you hear in me,
> Its dissatisfactions?
> Or the voice of nothing, that was your madness?
>
> —Sylvia Plath, "Elm" (1962)

1. Wherever you are right now, I invite you to pause and listen, taking a moment to situate yourself. Whenever you are ready, try to pick out five sounds or felt-vibrations in your environment. A dripping faucet. The humming of an appliance.

A garbage truck backing up. Trees shaking in the wind. The call of an unfamiliar bird. Dull footsteps from the upstairs apartment. A buzzing off in the distance that could be a blender, or a circular saw, or a vacuum, or a pressure washer. It is hard to say. Doubt always creeps in.

2. Perhaps the most famous of all mad listeners is the "very dreadfully nervous" protagonist of Edgar Allen Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (121). After murdering a man, he is driven to confess his crime because of an unsettling sound that torments him from beneath the floorboards, where the body lies. He describes the sound as a low pulse, like that of a watch wrapped in cotton. In this story, Poe describes an insect called the deathwatch beetle, a critter known for making a very distinct hissing noise which resembles a heartbeat. The composer and sound theorist François J. Bonnet describes this fictional listening situation as an example of "panic listening." According to Bonnet (2015), hallucinations arise from the moment when "affects, desires, and phobias act directly upon perception, subjecting it to their own prerogatives" (170). If those five sounds you noticed earlier are still perceptible, what do they sound like now? What kind of affects, desires, and phobias are present? In what ways do they shape the noisy world around you, and vice versa?

3. In the early summer of this year, one of my neighbours backed over and flattened a baby crow with his truck—gruesome, I know. For weeks afterwards, two adult crows made relentless alarm calls in the tree outside our window—a much harsher cawing than usual, paired with strange dances upon the branches. I learned that this was an elaborate funerary ritual of sorts. Still, the sound was unbearable to me, and I entertained a number of desperate measures. Maybe we could face some speakers out the window and shout them away, like an auditory scarecrow (notwithstanding the environmental ethics of upsetting nature's acoustic balance in this way, but I hope you will forgive me). It was only a few hours later that I had completely forgotten about these schemes. At noon, I logged onto my online therapy appointment. I was having—still am having—a tough time with dissociation. My therapist and I talked about grounding techniques, strategies for reconnecting to the physical world, being present in sensation. Just then, as if conjured by thought, a bald eagle let out a majestic peal above our apartment. I could hear the crows battling with it, probably as it tried to raid their nest. The high-pitched piping of the eagle was impossible to ignore. Both of us took off our headphones and listened intently. The sound went on for a few

minutes like that, and I remember thinking: O.K. universe, what message are you trying to send me? There was something deeply earnest and spiritual about the moment, accompanied by embarrassing tears of wonder. My embarrassment was about to multiply, however—and you might have already guessed where this is going. Some germ of wisdom concerning my dissociation was extracted from the eagle scenario: *when in doubt, return to the birds, return to the birds, return to the birds*. I logged off with this thought circling profoundly in my head, stumbling into the living room like someone struck by a miracle. "Wasn't that incredible?" I said to my partner. I asked if she had seen it. She had no idea what I was talking about. "The eagle!" I said. Outrageous laughter ensued. Behind her, facing out the window: a portable speaker, connected to a laptop with the YouTube video still pulled up: "10 Hours of Eagle Sounds." For such a sophisticated organ as the ear, it is remarkably susceptible to mishearings. I could have sworn that the eagle was not a speaker in the opposite corner of my house but a creature of blood-and-bone whose piercing voice was conducted cleanly through the air and not bent through electrical circuits and distorted by apartment walls. Mad listening makes fools of us all.

4. To listen madly is to listen to things on the edge of perception and discernibility—the faint buzz of a dimmer switch or the sound of distant traffic through closed windows, or the false eagle circling its circuitry. To this end, Brian Kane (2014) reads one of Franz Kafka's short stories, "The Burrow," as an example of acousmatic listening, which refers to sounds whose sources cannot be determined (147). In Kafka's story, a mole tries to locate the source of a humming noise that reverberates throughout its underground channels. This mole comes up with seven possible explanations for the sound, but none of them are substantiated. Mad listening exists here, in the uncertain and uncomfortable threshold of unknowingness.

5. As Kane (2014) notes, one of the key features of acousmatic listening is that "under-determination of the sonic source encourages imaginative supplementation" (9). This is not to conflate madness with an overactive imagination, however—and yet, some have suggested as much. Drawing on the nineteenth-century historian Hippolyte Taine, Robin Mackay (2010) argues that hallucination could be considered "the basic fact of mental life" (12). Here, Mackay takes a universalist position in suggesting that all listening is inherently inflected with madness. "The potential for extravagant delirium," he writes, "is constitutive of the basic mechanisms of cognitive synthesis" (2010, 19). On the other hand, one should acknowledge that madness entails much more than divergent cognitive processing. This is evident in the heavily-pathologized concept of hallucination, which carries radically different connotations and consequences depending on its

usage, which is undoubtedly fraught. For people with the lived experience of voice hearing, so-called "auditory hallucinations" might result in institutionalization, incarceration, and other violent forms of psychiatrization. So as not to conflate everyday phenomenological quirks with lived experience, then, one must hold the exceptional and the common in constant tension.

6. At times, I experience this very tension within myself. The period of stillness before bed, for example, is often one of heightened and distorted awareness. My entire being is full of leftover energies from the day. Residual neurons seem to fire like the tiny pings of a warm engine after it is turned off. As a light and restless sleeper, I have become dependent on a steady drone of brown noise to help me shut off. Sometimes, when I am lying awake, I hear hushed voices, and sometimes faint music, emanating from within the static. But I am always less than sure that these sounds are coming from the speaker and not, in fact, someone in the next room or a conversation on the street far below. Certainty is not part of the equation. On a few occasions I have heard looping melodies that I am unable to distinguish as mind sounds or room sounds. The noise machine seems to create a bridge between these two spaces of mind and room. When this happens, I usually become quite anxious. It does not help that my partner never hears what I hear. I turn off the noise machine to see if these sounds might be coming from another apartment, or I put my head right next to the speaker in an attempt to locate these phantasms. Voices speak or sing in the soft hum. There are words, but not intelligible words. My first guess is that some kind of stray signal is cutting through, not unlike the way that old dental fillings would sometimes pick up radio signals. But there is also a long history of people hearing ghosts in the machine, otherwise known as Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP). The parapsychologist Konstantin Raudive, a student of Carl Jung, collected thousands of recordings of white noise, from which he extracted an abundance of uncanny phrases. According to Raudive (1971), "the voices often maintain that we do nothing but sleep. This is repeated under many different circumstances" (270). One of these radio voices, speaking in a combination of Swiss German and Latvian, was reported to have said to the experimenters: "Good day, we are the mad ones here" (1971, 111).

7. According to an experimental theory collective called The Occulture, "whether phenomena such as EVP are real or not is never really the question, entrenched as they are in the manifestation of differing hallucinatory registers of possibility" (Goodman et al. 2019, 111). The authors suggest that even the biggest EVP skeptic

"may also be playing with pareidolia"—a term that refers to a form of heightened pattern recognition wherein people tend to find meaning in random stimuli (Goodman et al. 2019, 111). The EVP skeptic finds a negative meaning, or what The Occulture calls a "negative hallucination" (Goodman et al. 2019, 111). In other words, the skeptic hears nothing but white noise because this is the only pattern that such a person can recognize. By turning hallucination inside out in this way, perhaps we might remove some of the stigma and pathologization from voice hearing.

8. If you were online in 2018, you probably heard about the "Yanny or Laurel" phenomenon. A short recording features a man pronouncing the word "Laurel," which can also be heard as "Yanny." Remarkably, the general population seems to be divided fifty-fifty on which one of these words is most audible. This glitch in the Matrix exposed not just the perceptual instability within us, but also the perceptual gaps between us, reminding us that listening is highly contextual and provisional, dependent on countless factors such as age, speaker placement, musical background, cultural context, and so on. We have a tendency to think that what is heard is a mirror of something concrete in the world, but this is not so. As one study from *Current Biology* puts it: "Sensory information is always fragmentary and noisy, so by nature it cannot unambiguously reflect the state of the world at every instant. Rather, perception must make inferences, which are often unconscious. These inferences draw prior information from past experience, be it long-term expertise or immediate context" (Pressnitzer et al. 2018, 741). Another study from Stanford suggests that 2% of the top 10,000 words in the English language could be polyperceivable, including pairs such as frank/strength, claimed/framed, settle/civil, or floral/family (Chandra et al. 2021, 1). If polyperceivability is so prevalent in spoken language, then perhaps to listen madly is to recognize that all hearing involves mishearing, and that the binary of mad and sane is confounded by the persistent presence of one inside the other.

9. People like to say that certain noises "drive them mad." I for one have no problem with nails on a chalkboard, whereas the very mention of this auditory image might make you wince. Recently, I read an article in the Harvard Health Blog that describes rain as a neutral sound, as compared to the disturbance of a crying baby (Cartreine 2017, n.p.). But really, if you think about it, there is no neutral sound, no neutral rain. You can bet that somewhere on the news, a meteorologist is shouting over a thunderstorm. In my experience, neutral-seeming sounds can be the most unpleasant. Take this scenario, for example: I recall sitting with my friend at the breakfast table one morning as he ate a plain bagel with jam. It was

not that he chewed with his mouth open, but that the muffled chomping of his cheeks was unbearable for reasons that are impossible to explain. The sound of the bagel overtakes one's entire body. I imagine it like a lifebuoy thrown over my head, pinning my arms to my sides. I feel trapped inside this sound. It is annoying enough to have been invented by someone who knows what they are doing. The hair on the back of my neck stands up, and I want to flee the room. I try to concentrate on other things, but the sound overrides my efforts. It bypasses my ears and goes straight into my spine. If I try to ignore it, I am drawn deeper into it. The background refuses to stay backgrounded. In moments such as this one, it almost feels like the most trivial stimuli could leap out and kill you. The house is full of potential triggers. A dripping faucet, a ticking clock. Just typing this makes my heart speed up, and I feel the urge to retreat to the soundproof room I have constructed in my mind, the room that no sound can enter, not even the neutral rain.

10. Even if a sound were neutral, it can quickly lose its supposed neutrality through repetition, which is a formal archetype—if not a cliché—of mad sound. The TV Tropes website, for example, has pages devoted to the "Madness Mantra" ("All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy") and Incessant Music Madness ("This is the song that never ends. Yes it goes on and on, my friends"). Whether we are talking about looping or chanting or muttering or stuttering, the idea of madness is often implicit. In Tom Murphy's 1985 play *Bailegangaire*, an elderly woman repeats the same story to her granddaughter every night without finishing it. The incessant repetition of the unfinished story starts to wear on her until, at last, she says that she is going crazy. She pauses to reflect on this statement, however, and decides that she is not crazy after all. Or rather, it is implied that she is not the crazy one. Her grandmother Mommo speaks in crazy-coded sentences: "The aspect silver of moon an' stars reflecting off the new impossibility" (2014, 79). One reviewer of this play, Bruce Weber, describes the grandmother as a "maddening and enraging" storyteller, whose incoherence is "tough to tolerate" (2002, n.p.). "There's a pretentiousness," says Weber, "about the playwright's insistence in letting Mommo try the audience's patience as well as her granddaughters'" (2002, n.p.). Let's agree that Weber's reaction is uncharitable at best. I use this example of *Bailegangaire* to model one of the ethical demands of mad listening—namely, that incoherence must not be simply tolerated, but also celebrated. To listen madly is to listen with madness, and not against it.

11. The prospect of listening with another person by means of sharing their sensory subjectivity is nonetheless a fantasy. Allow me to offer an example from my personal life: I am among a small subset of people with so-called obsessive compulsive disorder who experiences something called sensorimotor obsessions or "Somatic OCD." This term refers to the tendency to fixate on autonomic bodily processes such as blinking and breathing to the point where they become distressing. Another common point of fixation is the heartbeat, feeling stuck in a constant awareness of one's pulse—the way it sounds and the way it feels, in combination. Like Poe's tell-tale heart, this noise rises above all other noises, forcing its way into every interaction and every conversation, to the point where one wants to rip up floorboards. I could include a sound effect here to demonstrate to you what this experience feels like—a subtle pulse in your left ear—but what would this communicate? Would this prepared imitational attempt, voluntarily experienced by you, validate my experience, or minimize it? After all, the heartbeat I am describing is not just a sound but an interpretation of a sound. As François J. Bonnet (2015) puts it, "the sound-object must be understood at once as the object formed by listening [...] and as the *objectal projection* of listening's desire" (136). For this reason, aural experiences of madness cannot be easily represented, since auditory simulations of such phenomena tend to lack what Bonnet (2015) calls "the affective import and the signifying framework" (140). For me, OCD is one such framework. It is not such a deterministic fact that it overrides the social construction of madness, but it nonetheless plays an active role in shaping the objects of my aural attention. To share one's listening, then, must involve an understanding of the frameworks inside of which certain sounds reverberate differently inside each of us, much like spiders and their webs.

12. I have always been sensitive to sound. Even the smallest noises can make me jump. I am told that the startle reflex comes from the inner ear, where the tensor tympani muscle experiences an acoustic reflex in the presence of particular sounds. To hear oneself hearing—to feel the musculature of one's ear responding to sound—is an incredibly strange and unnerving experience. In my former job as a cashier, I would have to count the register at the end of the day, flicking coins into a plastic tray. Every time I would flick a coin, my inner ear would click like a retractable pen, accompanied by a dull noise—always a microsecond delay, too, between the coin toss and the click, an echo-like call and response. There was a certain satisfaction to the reflex, but also an immense fatigue, like listening to a ball-peen hammer gently strike an anvil. I would play with this clicking effect until I had expended its novelty, much in the same way that one's tongue keeps returning to a sore tooth. The composer Maryanne Amacher (2008) has suggested that people themselves are instrument-like, since the ear has the potential to both receive and emit sound (10). To have one's sense perception inverted in

this way can be wonderfully destabilizing. I listen with my inner ear to my inner ear—a strange aural Möbius strip. I become a lightning rod, a feedback loop, a sound experiencing itself.

13. When I was twelve or thirteen, I went through an Oliver Sacks phase, absorbing his dubious but riveting clinical tales. I was particularly compelled by his description of a man named Stephen who dreamed he was a dog and woke up with a heightened sense of smell (2021). This was one of my first indications that the horizons of perception should not be taken for granted, that they can stretch and transform at any moment. Within a few months of reading this account, I experienced such a transformation firsthand. One afternoon, my friends and I went trekking through a peat bog just off the highway. Somewhere on our way out of the woods, as we tiptoed across river stones or clambered over a concrete drainage pipe, my hearing underwent a tenfold increase in volume, which I experienced as a rapid lightning-strike event. The gentle quietude of nature suddenly became noisier than the busiest intersection, painfully and supernaturally loud, and there was nothing I could do to reverse it. The slow-moving creek, not more than a stagnant trickle, now sounded like whitewater rapids, a high-decibel assault. I lagged behind my friends, desperately tugging on my earlobes as though they were on-off switches. Regretfully, I pretended like nothing was wrong at that moment. I hid the suffering. My friend's voices, their whispers even, sounded like vivid distortions. I tolerated this as best I could, and no one seemed to be able to tell that something was going on within me. Obviously, my auditory system had changed somehow. Some kind of gate had been left open, some threshold crossed. We parted ways, and I cupped my ears the entire way home. Coming up my driveway, I remember uncupping my ears and opening the front door as slowly as if I were defusing a bomb. Upon closing it behind me, the latch met the doorframe like a firing pin hitting a bullet. I ran upstairs, jumped into bed, cried softly, and fell asleep. When I woke up, it was like nothing had happened, and I was relieved that the bedsheets sounded like bedsheets.

14. There is a constant ringing within me. I first noticed it while wearing a pair of noise-cancelling headphones. Within the muffled silence of the earpads, I noticed all sorts of subtle impingements, the most prominent of which was a small, piercing tone in the upper range of my hearing. This tone comes and goes in waves. Sometimes it sounds tinny and shrill and other times it sounds like a weak drone, like a phone left off the hook. I can hear the sound change as I think about

its changing nature. Like any bothersome sensation, the more I try not to feel it, the more it grows. The ringing seems to intensify at night, but this is really just its reemergence from beneath the clamour of the day. Earplugs do not help. If anything, they trap you inside with this annoying pest—this guest who refuses to leave, this kettle that is always boiling, this mosquito that lives in my head and soundtracks my life. Though the sound lives primarily in my left ear, I can feel it resonate throughout my entire body like a nerve being pinched and iced. It was only when the ringing started to keep me awake at night that I decided to see an audiologist. He told me to wait three months and come back if it did not go away. That was almost a year ago, now. Last night I woke up with the same sensation, another hijacking. A body being yoked to an object to which it does not want to be bound. I have surprised myself with patience and tolerance and appreciation for this sound, its musicality and its beauty. I throw my head back in mad laughter at the sound's vibrating mockery. I have compassion for my captor, since it cannot be anything other than it is. But any silver lining is liable to tarnish after hours of wear. I toss and turn in anguish and would trade anything to make this sound go away. I picture a crucifix with the ears dripping blood.

15. Earworms are strange little mind-vampires. They are stickier than other songs, and if you hear one, it will play on a mental loop for hours, possibly even years. Like con artists they have tricks to get in your head. They are often tiny splinters of melody, and like splinters, they have a tendency to lodge under your skin. They are the musical equivalent of the hiccups, an involuntary and ephemeral glitch. Some of these earworms come from songs you actually know but cannot place—I am thinking of an insistent tune that I hummed for a couple of months that turned out to be a version of "Ticket to Ride" by the Carpenters. The song's outro, in particular, buried itself deep in my brain, the part where Karen and Richard repeat the words "think I'm gonna be sad," "think I'm gonna be sad," "think I'm gonna be sad," "think I'm gonna be sad," "think I'm gonna be sad." The lyrics have been expertly crafted to exploit a breach in one's consciousness, since they are literally disguised as a thought; and because the song slowly fades out on these words, failing to arrive at a final resolution, the melodic hook sinks even deeper. Fortunately, this is one of my more tolerable earworms. If they are good songs, like this one, then it is like a nice little bird that lands on my shoulder and sings to me. But if they are bad songs, then the earworm is like a gremlin that jumps on my back and zaps my brain repetitively with an electric cattle prod. Either way, the earworm becomes louder than anything else. It becomes everything I am, filling my world completely. It loops and loops and loops and, in its looping, it epitomizes the notion of going loopy. Earworms are one heightened phenomenon of my particular affliction; my mind is a sticky trap. But, eventually, even the stickiest of traps will dry up. Even the stickiest songs, even the stickiest thoughts, will release their hold.

16. Are earworms an empowerment or a vulnerability? The philosopher and sound studies scholar Eldritch Priest suggests that they can be both a technique of resistance and a product of contemporary capitalism's demands on one's nervous system. For Priest, earworms can be a form of inutile thinking—and thus an affront to cognitive capitalism—but they can also be a form of affective labour. In either case, he frames them not as a mental pathology but as a side effect of living in a "chaotic media sphere" that constantly places demands on one's attention (Fraser 2020, n.p.). As such, Priest (2020) wonders if the earworm could be thought of as a means of re-capturing one's attention "from the constant tug of outward distractions" (n.p.). The critical theorist Tang Yan (2016) similarly looks for liberatory potential in the earworm. According to Yan, "being worm-ized is being weak and abject and mad. Being worm-ized is being happy and strong and dancing like a dragon. Being worm-ized is being free from making a decision" (152). Priest goes even further to suggest that earworms "might actually arrest the flow of desire," by reclaiming a person's attention from capitalist forces of distraction (Fraser 2020, n.p.). Though this is a compelling idea, I am not convinced that negative attention is inherently better than positive distraction. There are some earworms so corrosive that I cannot even bring myself to name them, in case they latch on to me again—and when this happens, I am thankful for distractions, and long for them. If earworms are a threat to capitalism, perhaps it is in the sense of having laid awake all night, singing songs by the Carpenters, too tired to perform at one's job the next day. This formula requires a person to be expendable, however, in order to submit completely to wormization. Is it worth surrendering the sovereignty of one's attention for this political gesture? Perhaps not.

17. Mad listening is a multisensory, if not synaesthetic, affair. Sometimes, when I am wearing my headphones and I hear an unexpected high-frequency pitch, like the highest possible harmonic overtones played on a violin, I start to notice a burning smell in my nostrils, as though my brain has been poked with a hot needle and some of the smoke is coming out my nose. Researchers call this "smound," a portmanteau of smell and sound.

18. If the ear is the dominant sensory organ of hearing, then to listen madly is to detach hearing from this default site and locate it elsewhere—in other words: a non-cochlear listening. In the composer Peter Ablinger's 2010 piece, *Palastmusik für Infra- und Ultraschall* (2010), a wooden bench is fitted with special loudspeak-

ers that produce sub-auditory sound, which listeners experience as vibrations in their bodies. More recently, the composer Christine Sun Kim produced a work called *Elevator Pitch* (2019), which was "inspired by Kim's childhood memories of crowding elevators with her Deaf friends, and shouting so loudly that they could feel the vibrations of each others' voices" (Smithsonian, n.p.). Another example comes from David Cecchetto (2020), who describes wearing a pair of shoes with microphones attached, with audio signals being routed in real time to headphones, thereby creating a sense of listening through one's feet (n.p.). Cecchetto's account resonates with a passage from Daniel Paul Schreber's journals, published in 1903 as *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, in which he describes two little men whose voices he can hear in his feet (2001, 135). Though the former example should not serve as a direct simulation of the latter, both cases of foot-based hearing support a mad agenda. Whether through bench or elevator or shoes, to listen from a non-dominant point of reference is to unsettle one's given mode of listening, or what Ablinger (2010) calls "the spoon-fed patterns of human perception" (n.p.).

19. One also thinks of eye music or *Augenmusik*, visual scores that cannot be played by any classical standard. I remember sitting in the car as a child and waiting for the ticking of our turn signal to synchronize with the blinker of the car ahead—or watching the second hand of my old Seiko watch, with its fluorescent hands, tracing time's inaudible rhythm. These are but the simplest forms of seeing sound. In 1995, the poet Ella Mae Lentz conceived an ASL poem called "Eye Music," about the visual rhythms created by passing telephone poles along the roadside, a sine wave of rising and falling wires (Cripps 2017, n.p.). This form of visual listening is not inherently mad, but it shares a key feature of mad listening in its resistance to audist assumptions. If mad listening is to be a political strategy, then it must intersect with Deaf culture in challenging stigma and expanding the definition of listening itself.

20. Mad listening has an affinity for unwieldy compositions, repurposed and reappropriated technologies, imaginary sounds, and speculative instruments. As for the unwieldy, consider the famous pianist Éric Satie's 1893 composition, "Vexations," which asks the performer to repeat a motif eight hundred and forty times. As for acts of détournement or creative repurposing, consider the media artist Nam June Paik's 1963 installation, *Random Access Music* (1963), which disassembles a cassette deck and allows the listener to wave the playback head over numerous lines of tape that have been glued to the wall in a weblike pattern. Also consider the composer Raven Chacon's 2015 performance called *Report*, "a composition scored for an ensemble playing various caliber firearms" which seeks to turn instruments of power and violence "into mechanisms for musical resistance" (n.p.). As for sounds that do not exist, see the minimalist composer Tom

Johnson's collection of unplayable scores in his 1974 book *Imaginary Music*. And as for the speculative, see the experimental musician Tom Mudd's 2019 album *Brass Cultures* which was created with "digital models of physically impossible brass instruments" (n.p.). Each of these works radically disobeys the laws of listening, creating a possibility space for mad subjectivity—a liberated space of ambiguity, excess, and paradox.

21. Put it this way: mad sounds prompt mad listening. Things that are hard to say are often difficult to hear. Songs that are hard to sing are often difficult to harmonize with. Music that is hard to play is often difficult to follow.

22. In his book *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity*, La Marr Jurelle Bruce (2021) listens to the singer and rapper Lauryn Hill in the context of her fast-paced live performances. "Hill's manic delivery," writes Bruce, "like her occasionally hoarse vocals and cacophonous arrangements, resists *easylistening*. She solicits a nimble, attentive, difficult listening instead" (212). Here, Bruce does not romanticize mania, but treats Hill's music as an example of "madtime," a mad temporality that the author situates within black expressive culture and conceptualizes as a form of resistance against antiblack admonishments to pursue justice slowly and reasonably (2021, 206). In another chapter, Bruce writes about a mad jazz musician named Buddy Bolden, who is thought to have invented jazz, but whose life is scarcely documented. Bruce shares an anecdote from one of Bolden's greatest fans: fellow jazz musician Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, who claimed that Bolden was such a loud cornetist that his playing could be heard from twelve miles away, though this reminiscence defies the laws of physics and human physiology (Bruce 2021, 42). Bruce upholds Morton's story as an example of black radical creativity in the face of normative psychiatry, which seeks to denigrate, pathologize, and discredit such fantastical accounts. "Upon reading Morton's twelve mile testimony," writes Bruce, "a devout rationalist might dismiss it as deliberate fabrication, or a failure of memory, or a miscalculation of distance, or perhaps the product of delusion" (2021, 42). The task of mad methodology, according to Bruce, is to take such accounts seriously, and to find metaphysical truths in them, if not physical ones—to listen as an affirming earwitness to sounds that exceed reason and distance and probability. To paraphrase Bruce, the truth is that Bolden's cornet call "echoed across epochs" in order to influence future artists and writers such as himself (2021, 43).

23. Following Bruce (2021), we might discern other instances "where disclosures of pathology are also articulations of philosophy" (60). Take, for example, the phenomenon of the talking breast pump. According to Christine Cooper-Rompato (2013), "many women who pump their breast milk report that their pumps speak repeated words or phases" (182). She describes these phrases as auditory illusions, or examples of pareidolia (not unlike the electronic voice phenomena I mentioned earlier). Many of the phrases that Cooper-Rompato (2013) documents involve one bisyllabic word or expression repeated over and over again, such as "nipple," "get her," "fresh milk," "not yours," or "pump me" (186). "Several mothers," she tells us, "report hearing taunts about their insufficient milk production," including "no milk" or "no hope" (188). One woman reports hearing the phrase "crazy lady" (89). Another hears her pump speak the name of the comedian Tina Fey (194). Altogether, Cooper-Rompato understands the pump voices as an externalization of a mother's anxieties, which can take on a wide range of subject matter. Along these lines, one blogger understands the breast pump as "a window to her unconscious, a kind of supernatural or spiritual connection seeking to advise her" (199). In validating the perspectives of her research subjects, Cooper-Rompato depathologizes such acts of mad listening, highlighting instead the significance of the talking breast pump as an example of unruly phenomenology.

24. My own unruly bodymind becomes similarly stuck on repeated words and phrases. A few years ago, the expression "gravy train" came into my head suddenly and parked itself there. The phrase was meaningless to me, though this did not prevent me from ruminating on it. These two words fascinated me for reasons unknown. Perhaps it is the assonance of "gray" and "tray." Or perhaps there is some deeper psychological reason related to the semantic content. Though I had no emotional connection to this image, the thought was so relentlessly repetitive that I was forced to interpret it in every possible permutation. I looked for inciting events at the crossroads of food and finance. I thought about gravy and trains as separate entities. I discovered that the phrase belonged to a popular brand of dog food. I searched for evidence of childhood trauma. I wondered if maybe I felt that I was undeserving of success at the time this phrase dawned on me, like I was taking the easy route, riding the gravy train. Unlike the sounds of the talking breast pump, however, these words had no direct relevance to my life, that I could tell. They simply produced in me a kind of aesthetic frisson, of the "cellar door" variety. Like earworms, these intrusive phrases are another example of sonic stickiness, but the difference here is that instead of an external sound clinging to me, I hear these sounds intrasubjectively as internal dialogue, in my own voice. Not only are the words heard mentally, but they are also embodied as subvocalizations in the larynx, where small vocal muscles move in correspondence with internal speech. If you have ever experienced intrusive thoughts, especially those that are

far less benign than this example, you will know how hard it is to accept them and not try to suppress or neutralize them. They are called trains of thought for a reason. Even while talking to someone, or trying to read, this particular phrase would chug along beneath the surface of consciousness: gravy train, gravy train, gravy train, gravy train, gravy train, gravy train. In this way, mad listening is often a multifocal listening, being with two or more sounds at once, the ones in here and the ones out there, and everything in between.

25. Mad listening involves such literal acts of sonic subversion as the spoonerism, wherein the first letters of adjacent words are swapped: "to tease one's ears" becomes "to ease one's tears," and "to listen here" becomes "to hiss and leer." Such wordplay does not just undermine the hegemony of normative grammar, but tears at the roots (or perhaps "rears at the toots") of linearity, rationality, and order. This time last year, for a matter of weeks, I was so immersed in the habit of spoonerizing that it became something of a mad praxis, to the extent that I could not stop mentally swapping letters around, and this caused me a great deal of anxiety. In my head, other people's words echoed in reverse-order, mostly as nonsense, with occasional blips of meaning—the title of a movie like *First Cow* becoming *Cursed Foe*, for example. Often, these semi-successful spoonerisms will send me into lateral thoughts of cursed cows and first foes, then onward to first curses and first kisses. At the expense of my ability to focus while falling down deep wells of distraction and abstraction, this habit of listening for altered combinations of sound emerges as a potent reminder of language's power to remake reality.

26. In his essay "Earslips: Of Mishearings and Mondegreens," the literary scholar Steven Connor (2009) echoes my earlier claim that "all hearing is mishearing" (par. 29). Tracing the etymology of the word "mishearing," he notes that early uses carried a more active connotation, implying deliberate acts of auditory disobedience, unlike the simple mondegreen or the misheard song lyric. The poets and coauthors David Huebert and Andy Verboom (2017) have characterized deliberate mishearings as "full mondegreens," which refers to their formal approach of misconstruing and reshaping canonical poems in order to challenge their representational politics, or as Verboom puts it, "to bite the heads off some fathers" (par. 4). They rewrite William Carlos Williams's poem "The Red Wheelbarrow," for example, with the misheard title: "The Dead Feel Narrow." On the other hand, routine and systematic mishearings are fraught with epistemic violence and can be a form of silencing. The legal scholar James Parker and curator Joel Stern re-

mind us that mishearing is also "an auditory effect of colonialism," wherein white ears disregard Indigenous testimony (2019, 19). Speaking to the ethics of the full mondegreen, Huebert (2017) acknowledges that "there are many other poets and poems whose mondegreening by me would be a violent colonizing enterprise" (par. 4). As such, he chooses his mishearings carefully, grappling with source poems whose politics warrant thorough pushback. Rather than an unwillingness to hear, then, mad listening should model a willingness to hear differently—in defiance to, and not compliance with, systems of oppression. In doing so, the mad listener might work toward rethinking, rewriting, and re-sounding mad representation. Recently, I heard Elton John's "Madman Across the Water" for the first time, and searched for the song on a misheard lyrics website. There, someone has written the following mondegreen: "get a load of him, he's sewing sand."

27. In a recent article by Lennard J. Davis (2021), the author suggests that Deaf culture is less concerned with unheard sounds than it is with questions of access: "availability of interpreters, less discrimination, and better ways to communicate using technology," for example (par. 3). Davis goes on to say that his Deaf parents would sometimes "recount the inevitable story about someone who got their hearing back and was driven crazy by all the ambient noise in the world—cars, trucks, horns, rumbles, and even, yes, loud music and screeching birds" (par. 3). Here, as you might have noticed, Davis runs a red light through the intersection of deafness and madness. As Christopher Krentz (2006) reminds us, these two categories have been conflated since ancient times: "Aristotle is credited with saying that, of all the senses, hearing contributes most to intelligence and knowledge. The Romans classified deaf people who did not speak with the insane" (41). Moreover, many deaf people were incarcerated in nineteenth-century "lunatic asylums" (41). Mad listening must attend to this shared history of deaf madness and mad deafness.

28. In his autobiographical novel *A Journey Round My Skull*, Frigyes Karinthy provides a firsthand account of a craniotomy (or what used to be called trepanation), which he underwent after experiencing auditory hallucinations of passing trains. His description of the procedure is one of the most evocative and haunting sonic testimonies that one could imagine. Karinthy (2008) writes: "There was an infernal scream as the steel plunged into my skull. It sank more and more rapidly through the bone, and the pitch of its scream became louder and more piercing every second" (216). Then, he reports a "straining sensation, a feeling of pressure, a cracking sound, and a terrific wrench," as pieces of bone are broken off from his skull (220). "Each cracking sound," he says, "reminded me of taking the lid off a jam-jar, while the process as a whole was like splitting open a wooden packing-case, plank by plank (220). Karinthy's account provides invaluable historical

context for an exceptionally brutal example of mad listening. As the early modernist Dolly MacKinnon (2017) tells us: "The historical archive remains redolent with recoverable aspects of historical soundscapes," and "the political economy of sounds, silences, and noise is an innovative way to reclaim diverse cultural voices through partial past soundscapes" (101). Accordingly, mad listening should attune to this wider project of reclamation by way of centering the testimonies of people who have survived psychiatric and medical intervention.

29. A phenomenology of mad listening risks locating madness squarely within the individual, whereas the outer world of sound can be seriously crazy-making, from the idling of diesel engines, to the advertisements that play at double-volume, or the once-innocuous hum of the refrigerator, which now moans and wails like a vengeful ghost. The list goes on: there's the evil laughter of seagulls, the nightly sirens, the neighbour's bad taste in music, the everlasting construction noise, the hundred-decibel squeal of the skytrain, not to mention the sound technologies that have been weaponized and turned on the public, like the infamous Mosquito Device, which the company describes as an "ultrasonic anti-loitering solution used to disperse unwanted homeless and youth gatherings" (n.p.). Writing about this device, Mitchell Akiyama (2010) notes that young people in the twenty-tens found a way of reclaiming this sound by using it as a cellphone ringtone that most teachers were unable to hear (466). Akiyama concludes, however, that "this détournement does not amount to any real or practical immunity to sound," but instead has the unintended consequence of increasing prejudice against these antiauthoritarian youths. To listen madly is to take such risks, in full awareness that acts of resistance will always be met with resistance. The master's tools, in this case, may not be able to dismantle the master's house, but they might prevent him from overhearing our plans to strike when the moment is right.

30. Mad listening and queer listening share many qualities. The transdisciplinary scholar Nick Walker (2015) coined the term "neuroqueer" to identify the point at which queerness and neurodivergence meet. To engage in neuroqueering, writes Walker (2015), is to queer "one's own neurocognitive processes (and one's outward embodiment and expression of those processes) by intentionally altering them in ways that create significant and lasting increase in one's divergence from prevailing cultural standards of neuronormativity and heteronormativity" (n.p.). According to Sara Ahmed (2006), a queer politics of disorientation seeks to make the familiar strange, and "might even find joy and excitement in the horror" of

disalignment (4). As the philosopher Karoline Feyertag (2017) puts it, "at the core of the question of dizziness and queerness we find trouble in the sense of not feeling at ease with or in a given situation, feeling discomfort, disorientation and tumult—and also feeling a certain 'gender trouble,' a trouble of knowing where to belong" (par. 13). I relate this compound description to my own experience of dizziness and queerness, partly owing to an inner-ear impairment that I have had since childhood, in combination with partial hearing loss, leading to bouts of mild vertigo. These auditory phenomena are analogous to my sense of genderqueerness, to my vertiginous sense of self, which often feels confusing and overwhelming, but also joyful and exciting, in Ahmed's sense. Vertigo can be played with in the same way that gender can. I walk across the room as though strutting in stilettos for the first time, reaching out to walls and chairs to hold myself upright. I further relate this sense of disorientation to seeing the film *Call Me by Your Name* for the first time, and later hearing the song by Lil Nas X. What better example of mad listening is there than to be hailed by someone else's name, and to respond accordingly—and, in that exchange, to revel in disorientation.

31. Another recent film, *Memoria* (2021) by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, follows a woman named Jessica Holland who hears a mysterious banging noise that cannot be heard by others, and consequently she believes herself to be going mad. Like Kafka's mole, she tries to locate the origin of the sound to no avail, going so far as to recreate it in a recording studio, where she tells the audio engineer to imagine an enormous ball of concrete falling into a well. To my ears, it sounds like a combination of a bass drum, a door slam, and a controlled explosion. As it happens, I experienced a similar sound three months ago, which continues to haunt me. I can only describe it as a "crashing noise." If I close my eyes and focus, I can mentally recreate the sound's characteristic reverb profile, a sharp impulse response with a long echo. As if to taunt and trigger me, my fireplace has recently begun to make a very similar sound. In an unpredictable span of time after being shut off, the metal vent of my chimney will suddenly expand, creating a tremendous boom. After many nights beside the exploding fireplace, my startle response has not acclimatized in the slightest, even as I wait in nervous anticipation. And yet, in some sense, I am grateful for this disturbance, since it has helped me to retrain and reprocess the earlier crashing noise—as if to befriend it—not unlike the woman in the recording studio, trying to seize control over the sounds that seize us.

32. As a veteran of panic attacks, I know when one is about to arrive by the sudden muffling of the world, like invisible hands held over my ears: a sense of fullness, an accompanying feeling of dizziness, and a familiar walls-closing-in sensation. My sight seems tilt-shifted and my hearing seems phase-shifted, and for

a few minutes, everything is indistinct and unreal. Then comes the feeling that something worse is about to happen, though it never does. From the experiences I have collected in this essay, one should not get the impression, however, that mad listening is always panic-driven or pathological. Indeed, there are thousands of playlists available online devoted to calming anxiety. I prefer to listen to binaural beats in the delta range, a low tone that pulses at 2.5hz, which helps me to regulate my anxiety. For good reason, these tones have been called digital drugs, and some even claim that binaural beats can simulate the effects of actual psychedelics. Predictably, this trend has been subject to moral panic from parents who are wary of the potential dangers of so-called "i-dosing." As a freely-available resource, binaural beats are at once a form of self-care and a mad methodology, allowing listeners to experiment with perception and delight in disorientation. This essay has been one such experiment, and I hope you will consider conducting and sharing your own.

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DREAMING TOGETHER: ARTISTS MOBILIZING COLLECTIVE DREAMING METHODS FOR THE RADICAL IMAGINATION

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Dominant Western epistemology frames dreams and dreaming as largely meaningless noise produced by the unproductive brain at rest. Conversely, a popular romantic impulse insists that dreams are sources of metaphysical power and cosmic insight. Between these two extremes, a range of positions have taken form. Since the 18th century, artists have generally lionized dreams as gateways to the imagination and for inspiration. Freud and his followers framed dreams as encrypted clues into the nature of the unconscious and made the sharing of dreams central to the clinical practice of psychoanalysis. Recently, neuroscientists have posited the importance of dreams for the ability of the brain to learn from waking experiences. And the dream has become a powerful metaphor for personal and collective aspirations for change.

What all these approaches to dreams tend to have in common is the way they frame the dream as fundamentally individual, idiosyncratic, and private. But while indeed dreams may occur in the individual mind, every mind is fundamentally shaped by social forces. Further, while the immediate experience of dreaming may indeed be solipsistic, the act of recalling and sharing a dream (in speech, writing,

or art) are all deeply social, and it is here that dreams become most meaningful in waking life. While dreams are far from a pure realm of imaginative freedom, they do defy the conventional "reality principle" that governs our experience and interpretation of waking life and, as such, can awaken powerful imaginative challenges to the status quo. But this potential is only realized when the dream is *shared*, when, through language or symbolic or artistic expression, it becomes a common reference point for worldly matters held in common.

This essay explores how artists, both historically and in the contemporary moment, have sought to mobilize dreams as a collective method for cultivating and convoking the radical imagination, framed as a collective process rather than an individual quality of mind. In particular, this essay is concerned with the way artists use such approaches to imagine a world beyond systematic dispossession and oppression in the Northern hemisphere of the Americas. After briefly exploring dreams as social phenomena, this essay turns to the way Western artists have approached dreams as a gateway to radical imagination. It then explores the work of several artists who mobilize dreams as a system of gentrification, settler colonialism, and white supremacy.

The examples and theories presented in this essay strongly suggest that collective dreaming practices can be important methods for cultivating the radical imagination. Artists build on a variety of traditions to reconceptualize dreams beyond a modern, Enlightenment Eurocentric epistemology that would see them as merely the colorful exhaust of the brain machine. However, the artists discussed in this paper do not pursue the romantic or metaphysical notions that see dreams as sources of supernatural insight into the self or the world. Rather, in ways that resonate with and, in some cases, draw on recent insights from neurosciences and related fields, these artists approach dreams and dreaming as important processes by which humans process and come to learn about the changing, complex social world.

The Social Significance of Dreams

My focus is on artistic methodologies that concern sleep dreaming, by which I mean the kinds of dreaming that occur when the resting subject is unconscious and fluctuates between REM (random eye movement) and non-REM (NREM) sleep. However, as neuroscientists, psychologists, and philosophers agree, the

distinction between "sleep dreaming" and other forms of un- or semi-conscious cognition is blurry: dreaming can name a wide range of intentional and unintentional mental states or practices ranging from daydreaming, meditation, and lucid dreaming (Domhoff 2003). Many "non-Western" cultural and spiritual approaches to dreaming do not make a distinction between the kind experienced when unconscious (typically at night, in sleep) and those experienced when awake. My particular interest here are dreams that occur during sleep when the body is prone and what we have come to call the "conscious mind" is at rest (Povinelli 1995).

Let us place to one side psychological and spiritual theories of transpersonal dreaming, telepathic connection, and dreams as a literal portal between realities (Irwin 2020). We tend to imagine dreaming from a materialist standpoint as among the most individuated activities: in sleep, the brain drastically reduces the influence of sensory information, emblematized in the idiomatic expression that a dreamer is "dead to the world" (Leschziner 2019). Yet for at least a century, psychologists have theorized, and neuroscientists have concurred, that dreams are a vital part of how humans "process" information about a world shaped by social forces (Bal 2006). Among perhaps many other things, dreams represent a realm in which our minds "work through" what they have encountered in waking life. The waking life of a cooperative, social species (for whom the most important experiences are social) is fundamentally shaped not only by interpersonal experiences but social institutions, norms, ideas, habits, and identities. Almost everyone recalls a dream that reflects social anxieties or that reflects our social relationships. Our social experiences are "processed" in dreams, and dreams do transform us as social beings (Sliwinski 2017). As such, dreams are inherently and inevitably social, even if they occur within the individual body-mind.

While in highly materialist "Western" societies dreams are largely seen as frivolous, in many societies, dreams and dreaming are viewed as important sources of insight or even as parallel forms of reality that have a bearing on the material world (Schnepel 2005). Although it often goes unacknowledged in "Western" societies, it still rings true: dreams can, in a multitude of ways, affect waking behavior. Since at least Freud, psychologists have recognized that dreams offer a window into many aspects of the mind that are opaque to conscious thought (Ferguson 1996; Freud 2010). Non-Freudian therapists and researchers have attentively studied the role of dreams in psychological trauma and recovery from it (Davis and Hill 2005). Neurological injuries that hinder or prevent individuals from dreaming have dramatic consequences on waking life (Domhoff 2003).

Further, dreams are, for good reason, often associated with inspiration and aspiration. The artist is frequently presented as society's designated dreamer. In spite of the fact that most people seem to rarely actually dream unambiguously about a yearned-for future, the dream has become a powerful metaphor for such waking projections, emblematized in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I have a dream* speech, or the rousing verses of "I Dreamed a Dream" from the blockbuster musical *Les Miserables*.

Neuroscientific inquiries into human dreaming reveal it is extremely consequential for the fundamental process of learning (Leschziner 2019). As critical pedagogy scholars including Paolo Freire (2016) note, learning is the *sine qua non* of individual and social change. Fredric Jameson (1990) has fruitfully discussed this essential sense of social causality as a "cognitive map" of the world, an insight confirmed by recent neuroscientific and psychological theories of mind. At least one leading neuroscientist theorizes that the activity of the dreaming brain might be best understood as the uninhibited expression of that pivotal organ's "default system": the production of imaginative *narrative*, which is at the core of human cognition (Hobson 2014). Thus, while most of us experience dreams as individuals, they are profoundly social and socially consequential.

In this essay, my concern is limited to collective, intentional dreaming practices that advance under the banner of politicized or radical art. I am interested in how and why artists are experimenting with or rekindling traditions of bringing bodies together in physical proximity with the goal of contributing to the transformation of society. I am not interested in art and artists that seek to *represent* sleep, dreams or dreaming. Nor am I concerned with how artists find or share inspiration or insight in dreams, nor even those who seek to understand dreams or dreaming. Rather, I am particularly interested in works that seek to *mobilize* dreaming as a *participatory and collective methodology* for opening the radical imagination as a cooperative practice. Even more particularly, I am interested in work that mobilizes collective dreaming to grapple explicitly with the social injustice of racial capitalism in the northern hemisphere of the Americas.

This accords with my own approach to the radical imagination developed with Alex Khasnabsih: as "not a thing that individuals *possess* in greater or lesser quantities but as a collective *process*, something that groups *do* and do together" (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014). The radical imagination is then key to the vitality of social movements and for transforming society. Drawing on the work of philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, the radical imagination is not simply the capacity to imagine the

world against the grain of dominant ideologies but a much more elemental aspect of human society: all social institutions and all human identities and subjecthoods are formed from the way the imagination shapes behavior and cooperation and, in turn, the way such formations shape the imagination (Castoriadis 1997a). This dialectic between the imaginary and the material is in constant flux. Castoriadis uses the metaphor of magma to describe the way the power of the imagination as a social force flows, usually unrecognized, through a society that is made of institutions and identities that are, in fact, the solidified and petrified remains of its previous eruptions of the imagination. Their destiny is to be swept away by future eruptions, which will then harden into new institutional formations (Castoriadis 1997b).

That dreams are expressions of the imagination is not in doubt. Our theorization of the radical imagination via Castoriadis helps us reckon with the way that dreaming might be developed as a methodology for cultivating the radical imagination. It is not simply that in dreams the imagination is unfettered by the inhibitions of the waking mind or the imposition of what Herbert Marcuse (drawing on Freud) called the "reality principle" whereby today's ephemeral social institutions and formations (even if catastrophic) are taken for eternal or natural (Marcuse 1974). It is also that, as Sharon Sliwinski (2017) argues, through dreaming and, importantly, through *sharing* dreams we can come to view society and power relations anew and recast our own individual and collective roles. Sliwinski builds on and extends Freud's observation that dreaming, recalling one's dream, and sharing one's dream with another or others are three very distinct and sometimes only minimally related actions. For Sliwinski, the dream that is vocalized or otherwise represented to the world (to one's analyst, in poetry or art, or with friends and intimates) is of the most critical value not because it necessarily provides a window into the soul of the dreamer but because it becomes a shared resource or text for understanding the world and the circumstance within which the dream was dreamt and shared. Here, Sliwinski draws on Hannah Arendt's notion of politics as the shared space of appearances and utterance, where matters of common concern come to be formulated dialogically.

Art and Dreams

Dreaming has long been a central theme in world art and literature. Collective dreaming practices, or social practices of dream interpretation, occur in a variety of world civilizations (Mageo and Sheriff 2021). In medieval Europe, dreams were the source of many religious and revolutionary prophetic visions, some

of which led to significant social upheaval (Cohn 2004). But it would likely be fair to say that the European enlightenment inherited a skepticism towards the importance of dreams and gave it a scientific and rationalist justification. While various strands of early and later romanticism prized the dream as a source of *individual* insight and motivation (Ford 1997), the idea that dreams were *socially* significant was relegated either to the margins or associated with the "primitive" societies Europeans licensed themselves to colonize, enslave or destroy.

As early as the 18th-century, artists and intellectuals began to develop a rhetoric of the figure of the artist as a dreamer and increasingly took dreams as inspiration (Lindop 2004). But it was not until the 20th century that radical artists from the European tradition began to explore dreaming not as an inspiration or a theme for art, but as a methodology for awakening or liberating the imagination.

It was in the wake of the First World War that the early Surrealists turned to dreams, notably André Breton, who, during the war, had been conscripted to work in the neurological ward of a French military hospital in Nantes, where he witnessed no shortage of nightmares (Spector 1989). It was perhaps in this capacity that he was first exposed to the then-unorthodox practices of psychoanalysis and the importance that Freud placed on dreams, though the two men would only meet in 1921. By that time, Breton and his colleagues had already been drawing on dreams as prompts for automatic writing exercises. Breton was not yet a communist, but like the other early surrealists he was a pacifist and a radical internationalist. Dreams offered not only a personal escape from ongoing catastrophe but a channel by which the artistic, personal and, importantly, the political imagination might escape their damming and harnessing by convention.

Initially, for Breton and the early surrealists, these problems were largely framed around how to overcome habituated personal inhibitions to grasp for insight, freedom and creativity stifled by social norms, artistic conventions and dominant ideologies. Later, however, dreams came to be seen as offering solutions to significant shared sociological, political and even economic problems. Jack J. Spector (1989) argues that the surrealists' fascination with the dream marks a major transition of the movement from a largely aesthetic and poetic to a more political register. What began as a set of practices where dreams and dream interpretation were prompts for individual acts of imagination developed, in 1925, into experiments in collective dreaming and dream-sharing that spoke to a "vision of an egalitar-

ian community of 'liberated egos'" (Spector 1989, 294). They saw dreaming as a worldly (rather than metaphysical) practice through which the mind reflects on and can surpass a socially-shaped reality (Jiménez 2013).

Breton was to come to praise Lenin and Trotsky as political visionaries who, thanks to the power of the Marxist dialectic, could essentially know, embody, and bring about the dreams of the proletarian masses and save humanity from capitalism (Jiménez 2013, 308–9). Here, Breton echoed tendencies in early Soviet Constructivism and later Cosmism, which saw the Communist Party and its theorist-leaders as, in some sense, the "dreamer in chief," the unique historical dialectical emergence of a new kind of consciousness that could synthesize the dreams of the oppressed and make them real (Groys 2018).

The influence of Marxism and Freud on surrealism is well documented, but Robin D.G. Kelley (2002) alerts us to the importance of Afro-diasporan thought. Surrealism inherited from both dadaism and primitivism a fascination with non-European art as well as with shamanism and other traditions that highly prized dreaming as a methodology of prophetic vision, healing, or communion with the world. Surrealists were also ardently anti-colonial and also took inspiration from the wave of revolts against French and other European empires in the wake of the First World War. Kelley likewise argues that, while the surrealists were to initially dismiss music, they nonetheless formed in an age when the main challenge to dominant European cultural norms was coming from blues and early jazz forms developed by Black people in the Americas and echoing across what Paul Gilroy (1995) calls the Black Atlantic. Indeed, Kelley refutes the idea that it was the European surrealists who influenced the radical Caribbean surrealists, notably Aimé Césaire and Susan Césaire (nee Roussi); rather, these revolutionaries drew on European surrealism to supplement a rich Afro-Diasporan tradition of collective or consequential dreaming inherited from West Africa and finding expression in Haitian Vodou, obeah, and ritual-based spiritualities (Richardson 1996). Kelley relates how, for Susan Césaire, surrealism and the blurring of the line between waking and dreaming allowed Black diaspora radicals to liberate their imaginations from the ideologies, norms, values and narratives instilled by colonial educational regimes, not only allowing for the development of more autonomous anti-colonial thought but also, through that autonomy, to connect to the universal struggle for liberation.

Thus, for Kelley, dreams are not simply the nighttime perambulations of the vexed individual brain but collectively cultivated and refined visions. These visions are sometimes explicit and encourage the envisioning of a new world of justice and peace, but often latent or implicit, hanging unspoken but undeniable in the ways

that Black artists and musicians validate and express Black beauty, grace, and pleasure in a world that seeks to annihilate them. A similar argument is made by Phanuel Antwi (2021) in regard to the transoceanic "soundings" of dub poetry, which he frames as a method of anti-colonial dreaming, and also by Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2009) regarding Reggaeton in Puerto Rico and its diaspora.

Kelley echoes Ernst Bloch's (1996) concept of the "forward dream," the way that utopianism operates as a powerful social force not through fully-developed utopian schemes but through the way that small hopes, daydreams, revenge fantasies, and practices of daily life reflect or refract worlds that might yet be. For Kelley, such dreams come not from idle fancy or the power of the romantic imagination but from struggles large and small. These might be the great and historical struggles of coordinated movements for liberation, but they can equally emerge from the zone of what James C. Scott (1990) calls "infrapolitics": the multitude of tiny refusals or rebellions that are so central to the lives of the oppressed. Small acts of dignity, solidarity, compassion, and resistance draw on and contribute to a kind of subterranean dream reservoir. Tensions build and eruptions happen, either in the form of individual creative inspiration or mass revolt. Though dreams are among the most idiosyncratic, private, and intimate of our experiences, their inspiration, and resonance are social and shared, a factor compounded when our waking, social body-mind recalls a dream and especially when we share a dream in speech or writing or other creative media. We might, then, liken dreams to a commons to which each person contributes and from which each draws sustenance (Haiven 2016).

Dreaming as Artistic Method

Within the US art world, experiments in intentional public or social dreaming came to prominence again in the post-war years, including conceptual work by Andy Warhol, Goeffrey Hendricks, Chris Burden, and Marina Abramović. Potential political power of sleep and dreams was broadcast by Yoko Ono and John Lennon's "bed-ins" for peace.

In a process represented in her photographic piece *Institutional Dream Series (Sleeping in Public), 1972–73,* conceptual artist Laurie Anderson intentionally fell asleep in public places in New York City and sought to have dreams unique to

those spaces to better understand the city and its inhabitants. Institutions included public libraries, courthouses, and amusement parks. "[I was] trying to sleep in different public places to see if the place can color my dreams," she reflected (Goldberg 2000, 39).

It was perhaps not coincidental that these institutions hovered on the brink of catastrophe. Though the star-crossed World Trade Centre would be inaugurated as the world's tallest building in 1972, the city's economic turmoil was already boiling under the surface in ways that would result in a catastrophic financial crisis three years later. As David Harvey (2008) has argued, this crisis allowed the city to become the platform for drastic and draconian experiments in what would come to be known as neoliberal austerity. As fellow geographer Neil Smith (1996) argues, the crisis (which was due in part to the failures of the US Federal and New York State governments, as well as rampant corruption and suburban white flight) ushered in a phase of "urban revanchism" where problems of crime, unemployment and poverty were blamed on poor, working and racialized people, justifying massive investments in policing and cuts to social spending, including on public institutions such as those in which Anderson dreamed. Already by 1972, artists in Anderson's circles were complaining that rents were increasing and, further still, that the aura of impoverished bohemian chic to which they contributed was attracting well-heeled non-artists and property speculators in a process that was to come to be known as gentrification--although the impact on Black, Puerto Rican, and other marginalized and working-class communities would be far more devastating (Schulman 2013).

Little has been written about Anderson's *Institutional Dream*, but it signals what seems to be an inaugural event in a genealogy of politicized practices that mobilize collective or public dreaming as a vehicle for understanding or critiquing society or social institutions (Modern 2014). Anderson has not spoken or written extensively about this work, but I would hazard that it speaks to the desire to achieve some intimacy with the city, its people, and its institutions that is otherwise inhibited or constrained in waking life. Beyond the daring physical vulnerability of the act and beyond the episodic ways the performance or experiment gave Anderson access to and afforded conversations with citizens, the practice strives towards a methodology for encountering and apprehending some aspect of the shared sublime of the built environment. To dream in an institution is to, in some sense, dream *for* the institution, or *with/in* it. An "institution" is a combination of many things: the built structures itself, resonant with the histories of the increasingly global array of materials of which it is formed and the labor through which they were assembled; the particular force fields and power relations that gave rise to that institution and bestowed authority or meaning upon

it; and the individuals who staff it (from bosses to cleaners) or are caught up in it. Here we might fruitfully draw on Castoriadis's argument (reminiscent of Max Weber) that society is composed of institutions that range from the physically monumental and dangerous (police, corporations) to the powerfully intangible (marriage). But, for Castoriadis (1997a), all of these institutions are, ultimately, structures of the shared imagination that, in their turn, shape the imagination. Imaginary "instituting" is a fundamental human social process, an open dialectic where, from the "magma" of the social imagination, new institutions are formed that then shape the magma's flow, always threatened by future eruptions of the tectonic radical imagination. Without edging into the realm of metaphysics, might dreams be made of this same magma?

Already in 1972, when Anderson undertook *Institutional Dream*, dreaming methodology might be said to use the dream as a form of research into a shift occurring at the otherwise imperceptible level of society itself, symptomatically expressed in its built environment, institutions, and the even more ineffable social atmosphere.

Inspired by Anderson's enigmatic piece, in 2016 the then-San Francisco-based social practice artist Cassie Thornton sought to adapt a dreaming methodology for more explicitly activist purposes when she was commissioned by union organizers among precarious academic workers at Mills College to make an intervention on that private university campus to link their concerns with those of heavily indebted students.[1] Thornton had recently come to prominence as an MFA student at the nearby private California College for the Arts for transforming her and her cohort's massive debt-loads into the subject of her work, arguing that such institutions were really intended to produce debt and debtors, not art or artists (La Berge and Hannah, 2015). Inspired by the anti-debt politics of the Occupy movement and its offshoot Strike Debt (of which she was a part), Thornton had staged participatory spectacles to break the taboos around discussing debt, including hiring an actor to play a heavily indebted student and have dramatic public breakdowns on behalf of all those for whom the public catastrophe of financial abandonment had been rendered a lonely private anxiety. This followed on several years of participatory practice using forms of hypnosis or guided meditation to, one-on-one or in small groups, ask student debtors to visualize their debt and transform it from amorphous personal shame to an externalized object. Thornton had referred to these as forms of "psychic architecture."

At Mills College, Thornton worked with her hosts to recruit student and union activists to sleep as a group in the entry rotunda of the main administration building, through which the university's handsomely paid senior management team passed to reach their offices and which also led on to both the student "financial assistance" and human resources offices. Camping overnight in that space, which at the time afforded students and staff 24-hour access, created an ample opportunity for those gathered to talk together about their financial anxieties as workers and students and find solidarity and common cause. While the unfamiliar and inhospitable environment meant that few of the participants got a good night's rest, when they arose in the morning, they shared those dreams which they remembered and sought to use these as a way of understanding not only their own hopes and fears but those of the institution itself.

Thornton reprised this methodology again nearly a decade later, in 2021, in the remote Canadian city of Thunder Bay, notorious for violent anti-Indigenous racism linked to its status as a logistics and extraction hub in that nation's settler colonial capitalist economy (Haiven 2019). The dire context of settler colonialism is important to illuminate: in the preceding years, the city of Thunder Bay had seen among the nation's highest rates of murder, hate crimes, fatal, and non-fatal drug overdose, with these tragedies disproportionately affecting the city's Indigenous people who, by conservative government statistics represent some 13% of the population (20-25% is a more credible estimate). The city's police force had been found grossly incompetent and systemically racist by two high-profile investigations. A book, which became a Canadian bestseller, had investigated the suspicious deaths of seven young Indigenous people whose remains had been found in the city's rivers over the preceding decade (Talaga 2017).[2] Activists and advocates in the city routinely reported responses ranging from official indifference to harassment and threats and the political, business, and institutional leaders propounded a narrative that framed Thunder Bay as the victim of an unearned "bad reputation" and at risk from what was presented as a foreign Indigenous problem (neglecting, of course, on whose stolen land the city was built…).[3]

In this context, Thornton was part of a team of researchers, including the present author, invited by the city's public library system to provide a report on how it might restitute the stolen lands on which its building rested to the Indigenous Anishinaabe people, from whom they had been stolen. As part of this larger project, Thornton, in consultation with local Anishinaabe elder, artist, and activist Ma-Nee Chacaby, adapted her methodology of Institutional Dreaming to gather several Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of or guests to the city to stay overnight in the library and have a dream on its behalf. Thornton and her collaborators brought together eight people who did not identify as men

to sleep overnight in one of the popular branches of the city's library system in order to collectively dream of a way beyond the ongoing catastrophe. This is a context where it was not politically or ethically feasible or desirable to simply evict non-indigenous citizens and where the question of even restoring indigenous legal title to the land was vexed by profound jurisdictional and political issues deriving from over 300 years of colonial rule and its fragmentation of Indigenous communities and governance structures. While some years before, the Canadian government had dedicated itself to an agenda of reconciliation with Indigenous people and communities, there was growing cynicism towards these policies which preserved the rights of Canadian and international extractive and logistics corporations to run roughshod over Indigenous lands and ignore community concerns as very little was done to improve the lives of millions of Indigenous people disproportionately living in poverty or at risk of premature death (Daigle 2019). In this sense, the institutional dreaming initiative at the public library defied, on the one hand, the liberal capitalist reconciliation agenda of the state and, on the other, a tendency towards hopelessness and isolation in the face of catastrophe.

Freedom Dreams

Collective dreaming processes for the radical imagination seem most important when undertaken within systems and structures of institutionalized power that appear to be the natural order of reality, such as settler colonialism. It is also surely the case with white supremacy, which as hooks, Kelley, and Gilroy have shown, deeply structure the imaginations of both those who benefit and those who suffer. As such, the radical uprisings associated with the slogan "Black Lives Matter" over the better part of the last decade appear not only as a set of political demands but an epistemic and ontological challenge to a white supremacist society (Imarisha, Horstmann, and Kelley 2016). They have been accompanied by several artistic experiments in collective dreaming.

Josie Roland Hodson (2021) explores a series of recent artworks that dwell on "Black rest" in the context of the white supremacist culture of the United States. In a series of recent participatory works, she is seeking a "Black sleep aesthetics: a visual poetics of somnolence that acts as a refusal of and reparation for the

enduring myths of Black sleeplessness or nonsomnia, indolence, and extraordinary industry." Hodson is concerned with "the liberatory space of the Black unconscious" that insists on "a fugitive withdrawal from the present terms of engagement," emphasizing, in the face of the individuating discourses that see sleep and dreams as largely inconsequential and private affairs, "projects that are produced through modes of collaboration": acting "out the productive sociality to be found in Black sleep, delivering new possibilities for the intimate act of 'sleeping together.'"

Such inquiry is justified given that Black people in the United States suffer poorer sleep health than any other measured racial population, contributing to many other forms of ill health, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, and mental distress (Hicken *et al.* 2013). This sleeplessness is largely due to the impacts of systemic as well as interpersonal racism, ranging from anxiety-inducing hostility, legitimate fear of police or the accumulated impacts of what has come to be termed "microaggressions." But they can also result from the ways structural and systemic racism play out in patterns of employment, housing, nutrition, and access to preventative or primary medicine, in other words, through institutions.

This is compounded, Hodson explains, by the experience of living within a set of contradictory racist mythologies that hold Black people to be both, on the one hand, capable of supernatural endurance and suffering and, on the other, typically idle, indolent and shiftless. A similar vicious ideology has informed hegemonic depictions of people of the Caribbean. It is haunted by the enduring legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in which Black people were systematically denied rest through overwork, terrorism, or predation. In this era, enslaved and Black people were presumed, contradictorily, to be both nearly insatiable in their hunger to sleep (often attributed to their tropical origins) thus denying their owners or employers of work time and also, at the same time, childish and irresponsible in remaining awake to socialize when they ought to have been reproducing their labor power through sleep. Hodson shows that, indeed, these myths persist. Such myths serve to justify surveillance, discipline, and denial of autonomy both to individuals and to whole populations. They are intimately connected to racist excuses for the impoverishment of the Global South which presume that racialized populations there are both overly excitable and overly indolent due to genetics, climate, or culture (Silva 2007). It has, for instance, characterized the framing of Puerto Rico in the wake of debt-fueled austerity and multiple "natural" disasters, where the island's people are blamed for their misfortune for being inherently both lazily dependent and frenetically ungovernable (Lloréns 2018).

Under this profound material and cultural pressure, Black dreaming has emerged as a powerful set of methodologies of refusal and radical imagining. While much has been made of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.s "I have a dream" speech, this is only the most prominent (and often, as Cornel West (King 2015) argues, decontextualized and sanitized) of a wide range of ways the notion of the dream is deployed both literally and metaphorically in struggles for Black liberation, as Kelley (2002) argues. For Hodson, "attending to contemporary artists observing predicaments of Black sleeplessness allows us to more keenly identify the shape of oppressive practices that constrain Black freedom today," in a moment when "constant technological surveillance, the explosion of incarceration and the criminalizing of everyday life, the extraordinary health disparities caused in part by environmental and medical racisms, homelessness and dispossession born of racist housing policies, and hyperexploitative labor conditions that require that Black people work more for less" (2021, 14).

Hodson (2021, 9) focuses on three remarkable practices that "show quieter approaches to imagining life outside of its present crises, alternative modes of being to be found in somnolent fugitivity: a reclamation of stolen time, returning collective freedom dreams to the space of the unconscious." These practices "insist on principles of collectivity if we are to alter the conditions of our sleepless discontent. These works enact an ethos of mutuality that suggests that the recuperation of sleep is not revolutionary as an individual project."

In Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa's project *Black Power Naps* (or *Siestas Negras*) the Afro-Latinx artists occupy or reclaim space in art institutions and in temporary installations in public space to gather Black people to sleep, rest, nap, laze, cuddle, meditate or relax to "propose sleep as an act of queer temporal rebellion against colonial incursion" (Hodson 2021, 23). These efforts are enhanced and emblematized by the creation, use, consumption, and display of "sleep technologies," ranging from herbal and pharmaceutical supplements to sculptural beds and cushions.

Similarly, since 2016 poet, theologian, and performance artist Trish Hersey has inaugurated or hosted a number of events, performances installations, or participatory opportunities under the banner of the "Nap Ministry" and under her supervision as the "Nap Bishop." Drawing on traditions of Black prophesy and liberation theology, here, the right of Black people to rest is presented as sacred, whereas in conventional discourse and life under racial capitalism, it is profaned.

Hodson pays special attention to a cycle of performance rituals under the title of *Black Womexn Dreaming* convened in the San Francisco Bay area by choreographers Amara Tabot Smith and Ellen Sebastian Chang as part of their community-collaborative project House/Full of Blackwomen. Taking as inspiration the legend that abolitionist militant Harriet Tubman suffered from narcolepsy and received strategic information about evading capture in her dreams, *Black Womexn Dreaming* "drew from the spirit of the Underground Railroad and its principle of freedom through fugitivity, in which no guiding map nor sanctioned geography was available: In order to find the destination, participants were guided only by landmarks" (2021, 21). The participatory performances saw members of the collective welcome guests, all of them "Black women- and femme-identified people," into a cell-phone-free "space of covert refuge for its participants...where rest, relaxation, and dreaming of many kinds was encouraged and fostered." Hodson notes that by "refusing to record or document the process" the artists sought to provide "a space free of the imperative to perform or produce" and so "obstruct[ed] cultural hegemony's enduring fixation with representation, producing no graspable object for consumption or voyeurism and instead deploying Black privacy in an anti-Black society that desires to see the Black abject as fuel for its project." After the performance, participants were invited to share their dreams in a common book. The book, however, is not an object of display, but rather a shared testimony.

Conclusion

Such processes and methods remain experimental. Perhaps this is not entirely a bad thing. Silicon Valley and its global competitors are eager to "disrupt" (i.e. commercialize, commodify and financialize) "sleeptech" through the integration of new digital technologies (Glazer Baron *et al.* 2022). Dreaming is quickly becoming an investable opportunity as firms seek to develop methods and technologies to help cognitive workers and managers harness the creative power of their dreams to better compete and "innovate" (Chia 2022). Here, reality follows art, vivifying earlier nightmares from science fiction. In visionary anarchist writer Ursula K. Le Guin's classic novel, *The Lathe of Heaven,* a near-future world is almost destroyed when an egotistical psychiatrist uses technology to shape the mind of a patient whose dreams have the power to shape reality. In the 2008 independent film *Sleep Dealer*, dispossessed Mexican migrant workers are put into a dreamlike state and connected to computers so they can operate drones to pick fruit and build skyscrapers in an America they are forbidden to enter. And in the 2010 blockbuster Hollywood film *Inception* the dreamscape becomes a site of corporate espionage and manipulation.

In the face of the threat of the instrumentalization of dreams in the name or perpetuating systems of domination and profit, the contemporary artists explored here are instantiating different protocols where dreaming is conceived in some sense as a commons: a shared "resource" for meaning-making, discovery and, potentially, resistance.

Endnotes

1. Personal communication.

2. The book also triggered the creation of an investigative podcast which was to rise to the top of both social commentary and true crime charts in Canada. It was widely downloaded around the world. The podcast can be found at https://www.canadaland.com/shows/thunder-bay/

3.See season 02, episode 01 of Thunder Bay (podcast) https://www.canadaland.com/shows/thunder-bay/

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Re-Enactment of Hotel Dance by Paula Guzzanti (Carolien Hermans)

LET'S PLAY: RE-ENACTMENT OF AFFECTIVE TRACES THROUGH DANCE IMPROVIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This essay aims to explore the relationship between dance improvization and children's play in terms of affective resonances. Dance improvization and play are seen as activities that bring kinetic/kinaesthetic and affective dimensions of experience to the fore. I argue that bodily affects play a crucial role in organizing our lived experiences. Affects and intensities contribute to our feeling of being alive, and it's exactly this life energy that I find evident in both physical play and dance improvization. The first part of the essay consists of a theoretical exploration of several related concepts such as affects, affective resonances, and intensities/forces in relation to the moving body. In the second part the theoretical concepts are applied to physical play and dance improvizational practice. Artistic research is used to shed light on basic elements that children's physical play and dance improvization share with one another, specifically how affects and intensities that were once felt in a spontaneous play event can be re-lived and re-actualized through dance improvizational practice.

KEYWORDS

affective resonances, in-between, dance improvization, play moods, play practices

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Affect

There are many different approaches toward affect (for an overview see the introductory chapter of Seigworth & Gregg 2010). Roughly, two dominant views can be distinguished. In the first view, rooted in psychology and neuroscience, affect is considered an elemental state. In the second view, rooted in process philosophy, affect is treated as an intensive force (Ott 2017). In this essay, I follow the second line of thought. In process philosophy, affect is treated as a force, a prepersonal intensity. Massumi (1995), in line with Spinoza and Deleuze, makes a distinction between emotion and affect. According to Massumi (1987), an emotion "is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal" (880). Emotion is qualified intensity, while affect is unqualified intensity. Affect is considered a force, "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (Massumi 1987, xvi). Massumi locates affect in the relational dynamic rather than the interiority of a psychological subject (while emotion is the interiorization of qualified intensity).

Affects are world-involving; they are directed to our surroundings (Bower & Gallagher 2013). Affective states are not inside us, hidden in our inner psyche, they are out there and intrinsically related to our surroundings. "The experienced space around us is always charged with affective qualities" (Fuchs 2016, 196). Objects and environments have expressive qualities: some of which we register and some we don't. This depends on how valuable and relevant the expressive qualities are to us. In other words, in order to become part of our perceptual experience or attentional field, objects and surroundings need to have an affective appeal (Bower & Gallagher 2013). Affects are part of all modes of experience. Affects is that what motivates us, thrives; in its most simple form it is a movement toward (attractive) or a movement away from something (repulsive) that has caught our attention. In other words, "we are moved to move toward or against or away" (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, 267). Affects and movements are dynamically congruent: we move, are moved and are being moved. We charge our movements with affects, and they motivate us. Affects are thus not understood here as inner feeling states, but as gripping dynamic forces that unfold within the relational dynamic. Affects are moving phenomena that are movingly experienced (Sheets-Johnstone 2018). Affect is potential, the pre-personal capacity to become, to act and to be

acted upon (Clough 2008). It exists prior to any individuation or identification, and as such it includes the nonhuman as well as the human. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) locate affects in the in-between:

> Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves (1).

According to Seigworth and Gregg (2010), affect is born in in-between-ness, or to put another word to it, in the not-yet. The not-yet finds itself on the passage between virtual and actual, in "an emergent futurity" (4) at the intersection of being and becoming. The in-between and the not-yet are specifically relevant for this research. In the next section I take a closer look at these concepts and their relevance for dance improvizational practice.

Dance Improvization

Midgelow (2012), influenced by the work of Braidotti and Deleuze, considers dance improvization in/as nomadism, as coordinated change and transition: "Improvizers are comfortable with transitions and change; they do not cling to illusions of permanence and stability in their dance. Instead, they enact a kind of embodiment that celebrates processes and emphasizes emergence and becoming" (2). Improvization, as a nomadic practice, is seen as a practice of change, as a "continuous process of creative transformations" (Smelik 2016, 167). It is a process where dancers participate in movements, in lines of flight that open up new ways of becoming. It is a dynamic, multiple process that sets out a network of relations and connections with others. The dancers attend to what is happening in the moment in order to connect to the present, to what has been, and to what is yet to come. This requires an openness to whatever presents itself in the moment and a bodily readiness to engage with creative potential that is on its way.

Manning (2009) refers to this as "the elasticity of the almost", "the not-yet", i.e. the moment "where anything can happen when bodies are poised in a togetherness that begins to take shape. The next movement has not yet come, the past movement is passing. No step is taken and yet in this elastic the microperception of every possible step can almost be felt" (4). According to Manning (2009), bodies are not fixed 'things,' but bodies are in constant change, in flux. Improvization therefore is an instable and dynamic process, where movements are "on the verge of expression" (14); in other words movements are always on its way, always becoming. It is the in-between that propels and instigates the improvization. Manning (2009) considers dance improvization a relational practice. According to her, there is "no such thing as a body that is not relational" (xviii). In improvization, it is not (only) the body, but the relation (with others, with selves, with the environment) that is being moved. Manning (2009) speaks of body-worlding: bodies are always excessive, always more than one, always directly linked to the world. In line with Whitehead (and process philosophy in general), she argues that Western thinking has too long be occupied with identity formation, ego, and a pre-existent, stable reality. Body-worlding refers to the invisible, but palpable link between bodies and worlds.

Through active sensing, the dancers explore the relational dimensions of improvization. The dancers listen, tune in and respond to whatever pops up in the present moment. The dancers become sensitive to otherness – and this in turn may lead to a shared awareness and collective agency. In other words, the interaction itself becomes the source of creative exploration and dancers often refer to this as the moment where the dance starts to unfold by itself. In this process, the dancers don't lose themselves, they are not consumed by this otherness, but they become "part of a shared practice in which risk and ambiguity are possible, in which the dancers implicitly acknowledge the need to be vulnerable to the process, open to the consequences and to the effect of each other's responses" (Midgelow 2012, 9).

Mühlhoff (2015) refers to this as affective resonance, i.e. "processes of social interaction whose progression is dynamically shaped in an entanglement of moving and being-moved, affecting and being-affected" (1001). Affective resonance is a process that unfolds within the relational entanglement. It cannot be attributed to individual inner feeling states. In other words, affects are "a jointly created dynamic, and shaped within the relational interplay" (Mühlhoff 2015,1002). The relational here must not be understood as solely human. Affects pass from body to

body and this includes the human, non-human, part-body and anything else for which there is no proper term (Seigworth & Gregg 2010). Bennett (2010) speaks in this context of vibrant matter, the capacity of things (materials, commodities, edibles) to affect us. Vital matter flows through bodies, through the human and the non-human. Even more, the relational emerges not as clearly fixed oppositional elements (such as body/mind, chaos/order, spontaneous/planned, free/constrained, safe/risky etc.) but as "muddy" (Seigworth & Gregg 2010, 4). Manning (2009) sees relational movement as the undoing of dichotomies, since movement is always on its way, it never stops, it reaches out to the not-yet.

Children's Physical Play

Children's physical play is here roughly defined as a creative activity initiated by children that brings the kinetic/kinaesthetic and affective dimensions of the body to the fore (Sheets-Johnstone 2003). Harker (2005) considers play as a polymorphous, dynamic process that takes place at the intersection of being and becoming: "Playing has no identity (being) itself, except as a secondary characteristic of its conceptual differentiation (becoming)—the identity of difference" (52). According to Harker (2005), playing is an activity in which the affective register is heightened. I agree. In my artistic practice, I have captured many spontaneous physical play events of my own children as well as other children – and the thing that struck me the most were the intensities and forces that were expressed in a disruptive and messy way. This has made me to believe that play is an activity where movements and affects are pushed to the fore. Play opens up: it not only takes place in space and time but it also creates its own space and time. Lester (2013) adds to this, that play may be seen as "desiring to affect and be affected by creating uncertainty and disturbance, and to play with the relationship between disequilibrium and balance" (137). Play breaks up the conventional and habitual: it multiplies, it shoots in different directions, it connects a multiplicity of meanings, it opens the door to the not-yet, and it invites the participants to dynamically shift from being to becoming.

Play is a transformative act. Play can be seen as a practice of becoming different: it is not a 'becoming adult' (also not when children are playing 'mommy and daddy') but a way to engage with the not-yet (Kane & Petri 2014). Children's play "marks a time/space in which ever-present virtuals are actualized, producing moments in which children are *becoming-different"* (Lester 2013, 131, emphasis in original). Play then should not be understood as a fixed phenomenon, but as a fluid, dynamic and relational activity. Hewes (2014) points to the disruptive dimensions of (physical)

play: the rowdy and rambunctious. Where adults move around as efficiently as possible, children slide, jump, gallop, skip, and hop around. Children wind their way through the landscape: every obstacle (a bank, a pole, a hedge, a well, a ditch) is dynamically incorporated into their own bodily structure. Movements are stripped down or dressed up with fringes and exaggerations, a too much, a too fast, a too little, or too soon, with an internal logic that is equally disruptive and disturbing. In play, children creatively weave their internal bodily structures into the external structures of the environment. Play, in this sense, is a bodily practice of doing, un-doing, and redoing. It doesn't exist in a fixed form, but instead, it is a fluid practice that is situation-dependent (Mouritsen 1999).

Karoff (2013) also considers play as a practice, as something that children do. She furthermore distinguishes two dimensions of play: play practices and play moods; "play practice is the concept of all the doing in the playing activity and play moods is the particular concept of sense and feeling of being, which is what we are drawn to when we play" (1). Play moods can be seen as ways of affective engagement. A play mood is a way of relating to the world: it is not an internal state, nor a fixed entity. A play mood neither comes from the inside nor from the outside, but it arises out of our interaction with the world. Play mood is "not confined to a specific meaning, but open and ready for meaning to be articulated as something specific, even though the specification has not yet happened" (Karoff 2013, 10). Play mood within this context must not be understood as an internal, mental state (a category, a fixed entity) but as an affective tone that emerges and comes into being within the encounter between self, other, and world.

Based on her field research, Karoff (2013) defines four types of play practices as well as four types of play moods. The first play practice is *sliding,* that is characterized by a strong repetitive rhythm, flow, and minimal change (for example stringing beads or puzzling). The second play practice is *shifting,* that is, again, characterized by a strong repetitive rhythm but this time the rhythm is a catalyst for surprise and chance (for example jumping on the trampoline or a roller coaster). The third play practice is *displaying,* that is characterizedby change, and showing yourself off (for example a kid's dance). The fourth play practice is *fleeting,* that is characterized by excessiveness, and breaking with the ongoing (regular) rhythm of a play activity often leading to crazy, exaggerated forms (for example bending and breaking barbie dolls, putting their heads off etc.). Each type of play practice has its own play mood: *devotion* (flow, concentration, focus) is related to sliding, *intensity* (unpredictability,

change) is related to shifting, *tension* (performing, showing off) is related to displaying, and *euphoria* (silliness, laughter, exaggeration) is related to exceeding. Karoff's four types of play practices and play moods will be used in the next paragraph as a way to structure and analyze children's play and dance improvizational practice.

At this point, I want to shift from a more theoretical to a more practice led approach. In my own artistic research, I examine basic elements of both dance improvization and children's play events from an enactive perspective. Two artistic events are relevant for this article: the hotel dance of my 10-year-old daughter, Lisa, and subsequently the re-enactment of the event in one improvized dance solo. However, before I discuss the outcomes of the research, I will first provide an outline of the methodological approach.

Methodological approach

My artistic practice entails the exploration and examination of basic elements of children's physical play and dance improvization from an embodied, enactive perspective. In this article, the spontaneous hotel dance of my 10-year-old daughter at the Brittania Hotel in Coventry, and the re-enactment of the hotel dance by a professional dancer serve as an artistic case study. The goal of the re-enactment is not to imitate or copy the original play event but to grasp and re-actualize the affective traces of the hotel dance, mediated through a set of images. The body of the dancer becomes a resonating channel, a passage through which affects, intensities, and forces can travel that are then expressed in movement. The hotel dance is photographed as well as videotaped. After a technical screening, 243 images remain. The photographs are ordered and arranged around three main themes: 1) building up intensity through rhythm, repetition and variation, 2) heightening – moving towards the excessive, 3) and dramatizing/staging. The three themes are discussed below in detail. Only a small selection of images (15 images in total) is handed over to the professional dancer. I specifically chose images that display full body movement (like jumping) that have a clear spatial dimension (high, low, on the ground, trying to touch the ceiling) and that are expressive (in terms of qualitative movement dynamics). Permission was obtained via a written consent form that was signed by the non-investigating parent (the father) and Lisa herself. The consent letter included: (1) informed and voluntary consent, (2) use of data obtained during the artistic experiments, (3) the use of images for publication and 4) use of personal names. The professional dancer also signed a consent letter.

Artistic Insights

As I already mentioned, three themes are identified in the hotel dance: 1) building up intensity through rhythm, repetition and variation, 2) heightening – moving towards the superfluous, 3) and dramatizing/staging. The themes are discussed below.

Building up intensity through rhythm, repetition and variation

The hotel dance starts with Lisa putting on music, "Despacito" by Luis Fonsi, a Spanish song with a strong rhythm and a recurring melody. The song "Despacito" is several times repeated during the hotel dance event. The song seems to serve as a "refrain," "a kind of sound territoriality" (Deleuze & Guattari, in Seigworth 2003, 96) that reassures and comforts Lisa. The ritualistic replaying of the song serves as an organizing principle for the hotel dance. It creates "temporary order in the midst of chaos" (Seigworth 2003, 96). Since Lisa is not familiar with the Spanish language, meaning doesn't arise from the words themselves but from the melodic and rhythmic contours of the song. The hotel dance starts with culturally established games and movements, such as the water bottle flip (i.e. throwing a bottle of water so that it does one complete flip and lands upright) and the dab (i.e. a gesture in which a person drops his head in the bent crook of an upwardly angled arm). Lisa puts on the music ("Despacito") and begins to make some culturally established dance steps that she has learned in her street dance class. She repeats the dance steps several times and after some time, Lisa starts to add her own movements to the dance steps.

This sequence is all about hopping, jumping, and shaking (of the shoulders and upper torso in big circular movements). Lisa explores the possibilities of each movement through repetition and variation. What is most noticeable in this dance sequence is the building up of intensity and energy. First, Lisa simply performs dance steps, but gradually she becomes more and more engaged until she fully embraces the movements. The shaking becomes a real shaking. The hopping becomes a real hopping. The jumping becomes a real jumping. Lisa surrenders to the movements, and she finds joy and excitement in this surrender. The dynamic features of the movements are explored through amplification, refinement, and repetition. The dance sequence also has a strong rhythmical component (a regular repeated pattern of movement) and a pulse (a regular succession of discrete movements through time) since Lisa performs the movements on the beat. The building

up of intensity and energy through repetition and variation can be placed under the second category of Karoff's model (2013): *shifting* (play practice) and *intensity* (play mood). The sequence is characterized by a strong repetitive rhythm. Over time, the movement itself becomes intensified. This produces a high, elevated sense of aliveness where repetition and change/unpredictability go hand in hand.

Heightening: towards the superfluously

In the beginning of the hotel dance event, culturally established movements from popular culture form the overtone. Gradually, however, improvized play takes over and exploration of the room (movements such as jumping, crawling, rolling) and objects in the room (the curtains, window, chair, bed, floor) become the source and inspiration of Lisa's hotel dance. In the exploration of the room and objects in the room, the following actions can be distinguished: crawling on the bed, sliding off the bed, sliding off the chair, moving on the floor, standing on the chair, jumping from chair to bed, bouncing/falling on the bed, head roll, shoulder roll, and handstand on the bed, trying to touch the ceiling, trying to touch the upper side of the doorframe. Every action is repeated, each time performed with small variations and adjustments. Different layers of the space are used: high (standing on chair), middle (standing up) and low (lying on the bed and sliding to the floor). In each successive action, Lisa uses more force, pressure, and weight and, as a result, the falling and bouncing become more intense. The small variations seem necessary 1) to explore the wideness and range of a particular movement and 2) to explore the affective tone of a movement.

At a certain point however, Lisa abandons the rhythm and skips the beat. She breaks with the flow and continuity of movement, and instead she challenges herself to make bizarre/creative movements. It is a too much, a too big, it exceeds habitual and conventional ways of movement exploration. Movements are exaggerated in terms of energy, force, and arousal. Examples are crawling on the floor, sliding from the chair in a clownish way, mowing with the legs, laughing and making faces. Exaggeration, in this case, adds to the expressivity of a movement. This theme corresponds with Karoff's (2013) fourth category: *exceeding* (play practice) and *euphoria* (play mood). Exceeding is characterized by bizarre movement forms that contains explosive, brisk, and abundant elements. Euphoria is characterised by "an intense expectation of silliness where you are ready for both others and your own silliness" (9). Laughing, funny faces, and absurd/silly movements are certainly displayed in Lisa's hotel dance.

Dramatizing/Staging

The hotel dance has a performative character. The presence of a spectator (in this case me) is necessary for the unfolding of the event. Lisa's gestures, expressions, and movements are clearly addressed to me. Even more, Lisa is fully aware of the fact that she is being watched. Through the watching and the being watched, the play event transforms into a spectacle where intensities and affects are dramatized and put to the front. Even more, Lisa builds up tension and plays with the expectations of the spectator (me). This becomes most clear in the following example. At a certain point, Lisa throws herself onto the bed and when she bounces up, she takes the pajamas along. At first, she keeps the pajamas and looks at me in a provocative, secretive way (in an 'I-am-about-to-do-something-but-I-am-not-telling-you-what way). She swings the pajamas around and then finally, she throws them into my face. This little sequence follows an embodied dramatic structure (from introduction, development, climax, to resolution). According to Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen (2015) the narrative four-part structure reflects "the four states of arousal that regulate the flow of interest and the pleasure of engagement" (3). The four-part sequence exhibits an initiation toward the goal (throwing the pajamas), a rhythmic timing and a climactic contact with (in this case) the pajamas. In other words, the action chain produces affective valences and opens up the imagination. Throwing the pajamas is a dramatic, provocative, and communicative act in which Lisa deliberately invites me, the spectator, to play along.

Lisa incorporates expressive gestures, expressions, and pretend play in her movement exploration. She, for example, uses the hairbrush as a microphone and with this gesture she explicitly stages her play as performative. Finally, Lisa uses the little hallway of the hotel room as a place where she can exit and enter the performative space. In other words, the hallway is used to enter and exit 'the stage.'

This theme strongly resonates with Karoff's (2013) third category: *displaying* (play practice) and *tension* (play mood). Displaying is characterized by "showing off, putting yourself on a stage" (8-9). Tension is characterized by a "readiness to show yourself," and "an awareness that you are looked at" (8-9). From beginning to end, Lisa is aware of my presence. Together, we create a space of playing and watching. Through the staging of the play event, imaginative registers are opened that allow for the experimentation and testing of different selves. The stage exists in the in-between, in the intersection of being and becoming.

Re-enactment of the hotel dance

In this phase of the artistic research, I hand over the photo material to Paula Guzzanti, a dance artist and scholar based in Ireland/Malta. This time I want to explore how affects can travel through different bodies and different media. I am specifically interested in affective resonances, i.e., the affective interplay between two or more bodies (Mühlhoff 2015). Affective resonance usually refers to the gripping dynamic forces that are experienced in the direct embodied interaction between two or more agents. However, in my artistic research I am interested in how affects can resonate in different bodies through the re-enactment of a past event. Photography is not only used to capture the affects expressed in the spontaneous play event, but it is also used as a medium to transport affects from one body to the other body. Within the re-enactment the dancer should be sensitive to the affective potentials that arise at the present moment. The photographs contain affective traces, and the task of the dancer is to pick these affective traces up and to let them resonate in her own body. The affective dynamic works on the dancer, it makes her move—not in an externally determined way, but in her own way— thereby creating her/their own lines of actualization. The aim is not to fix the hotel dance in its singular, original form but to unlock, release, and actualize the affects that are still at work. The re-enactment is an unfolding of differential forces: it is less about imitation, resemblance, and similarity but more about affective potential that is re-actualized by the dancer. For this reason, I decide to hand-over only a limited set of fifteen photographs (and not the video footage) – so that there are enough holes and gaps, enough in-betweens. For is it in the in-between that affective potentialities may emerge.

Re-enactment: Paula Guzzanti

I met Paula on two occasions. First, at the ADiE (Artistic Doctorates in Europe) in Stockholm (19 - 23 March 2018) and a second time in Chichester – again in the context of the ADiE research intensive 'researching in/as motion' (25-29 June 2018). I contacted Paula in July 2018 to ask if she would like to participate in my artistic research and when she agreed, I sent her a set of fifteen images by we-transfer (see Hermans 2018).

Dear Paula,

It was really nice to see you a second time. In Chichester I asked if you would like to participate in my artistic research. Underneath I will explain a bit more.

One step in my research is to spontaneously capture physical play (and also dance) of children. This material I then hand over to professional dancers, with the aim to re-enact an event of which they initially were not part of. I am specifically interested in energy, intensity, affects, having fun/enjoying, being in the moment and also in excessiveness and overabundance.

In your case, I would like to ask to re-enact a hotel-dance of my daughter. Last year I went with my daughter (Lisa, at that time 10 years old) to a conference in Coventry where we did a performance lecture together on 'the animal body'. When we were back at the hotel (in Coventry) my daughter spontaneously started to dance and I captured that with the camera. I refer to this little instant dance as 'hotel dance'.

What I would like to ask you is the following: look at the pictures first, choose 3 to 4 images that resonate or appeal to you (in whatever way, you don't have to explain this, the resonance can be entirely on an affective non-linguistic level) and then you try to recapture the energy, the affects, or just something that grabs you and takes you along. It's quite important that you don't think too much about it, so that the body and the affects it produces guide you. The comment can/should be quite short, since I am mostly interested in your initial embodied response.

It would be great if you film (or in another way) document this response. If you feel any hesitations, please let me know. Kind regards, Carolien (2nd of July 2018)

Hello Carolien, thanks for asking me to do this task. I got a sense of powerful rapture and force from watching the images. I watched them once and responded with an improvization where I incorporated what there was in the studio. When I arrived there was a theatre setting, and I decide to work with that -in a way it resonated with the hotel space. Then I thought that I wanted to have a second go but without the influence of the furniture. Working in a clear space was an invitation to played [sic]

with voice, which is very much part of my practice. The material is very raw, as you will see. If I was to create or continue to work with this material, I will be looking at the force and the rapture that I received as a first affect in my body. I found that in the first improv I was holding on too much on the body shapes that I saw in the photos. I feel that the second improv has a fresher approach to the task. Looking forward to hearing your thoughts! Paula (10th of July, 2018).

As becomes clear in the email exchange, Paula decides to have two improvization sessions, the first time she is surrounded by a theatrical setting, the second time she finds herself in an empty studio. Paula doesn't use music, instead she uses her voice and her breathing to engage in rhythm, repetition and affectivity. The three themes identified in Lisa's hotel dance (that were not communicated to Paula) are also central themes in Paula's improvizations: 1) building up intensity through rhythm, repetition and variation, 2) heightening – moving towards the superfluous, 3) and dramatizing/staging.

Paula's first improvization is initially somewhat cautious and explorative. She is searching for embodied ways to tap into the affects that are displayed in the imagery. At first, Paula's movements are organized around elements such as rhythm and repetition. She uses repetition and slight variations to increase intensity and to sense the affects that emerge within the kinetic/kinaesthetic unfolding of the improv. Only after some time, Paula allows herself to engage with change and the unpredictable – as she starts playing more freely with movement patterns that are initiated by hands, arms, and upper torso (see Figure 1). In Karoff's model (2003), this is called a *'shifting'* from an initial (careful) exploration towards more surprise and taking chances.

Paula also incorporates element of the space and the objects in her improvization. She plays with the cushion, she sits in the chair, she touches the table with her foot and she drops to the couch several times. Excessiveness enters the room. She plumps on the couch, let gravity do the work while her legs float in the air. She slides off the couch, again with gravity on her side, and ends up to the floor. Sudden ruptures and changes appear – here a foot, there an arm while the head loosely balances on the head. She plays with duration, with direction – prolonging the interval to the max. Karoff (2013) refers to this as *exceeding*, that is, skipping the rhythm, being out of tune, allowing the body to express itself in absurd, creative forms. Even more, the theatrical space plays a vital role in the improvization. In her first improvization, she incorporates the theatrical attributes that are left in

the space (such as a couch, chair, lamp, carpet and side-table). Paula decides to use this décor, and this contributes to the 'performativity' of her dance improvization. The objects itself create a stage, and the only thing Paula needs to do is to enter this stage and to perform her movements in front of an absent audience. The third category of Karoff (*displaying)* is therefore already available to her, since it is the theatricality of the space that turns her movements into a spectacle. See Figure 2 for some visual correspondences between Paula's re-enactment and Lisa's hotel dance.

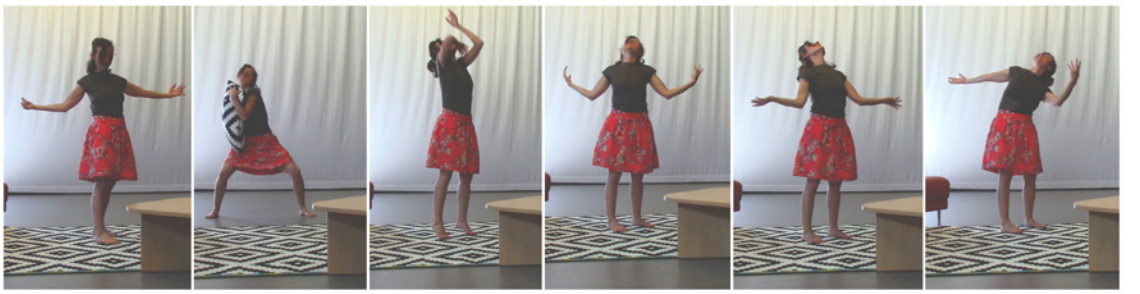

Figure 1. Expressive arm movements

In addition, drama and performativity are clearly present in the first improvization of Paula. Narrative gestures and expressiveness contribute to the felt intensity that is at play here. The voice itself is used to express affects and intensities in a melodic and rhythmical way. Both Lisa and Paula display a "serious attention to having fun" (Hermans 2018, 320). Not only do they both laugh out loud, but they also dedicate themselves entirely to this serious, yet playful endeavor.

In the second improvization, this time in an empty studio, the improvization process becomes more internal and less dependent on external cues. Paula now tries to access the affective traces through her voice. In fact, the voice becomes an outlet of affects. The vocalizations are delicate expressions and sensitive responses to the affective traces that resonate in her body. The vocalizations are accompanied by movements, and together dramatic structures are created. Paula uses her voice as a way to let the affects move through her body. She uses vocalizations to regulate emerging affects and intensities. The vocalizations are abstract actualizations (in terms of timbre, pitch, melody and pulse) of the affective traces that Paula intuitively picks up from the set of images. Or as she describes it herself: "tuning into the force and the rapture that I receive as a first affect in my body."

It must be noted that there are differences as well. Lisa's attention is all over the place. She tends to quickly shift from one thing to the other without giving full (conscious) attention to the affects that are produced. In Paula's case, attention is more directed and more channeled. Paula consciously tunes in to the felt dynamics, movements are carefully placed in space, as she listens to what is needed now. In Lisa's case, there is an explosion of affects, an outburst, not yet channeled, with many peaks in her energy while she quickly jumps from one thing to the other. There are leaps and holes, there is sloppiness, there is distraction too in her dance. Both are fully absorbed, yet, in very different ways. They both pick up, gather, listen, collect, and express. In Paula's case, there is a trained sensitivity (that is the result of her professional dance practice) while Lisa's sensitivity is rougher and more unstructured. Paula is more aware of the situational constraints while Lisa plays with the constraints on a more subconscious level.

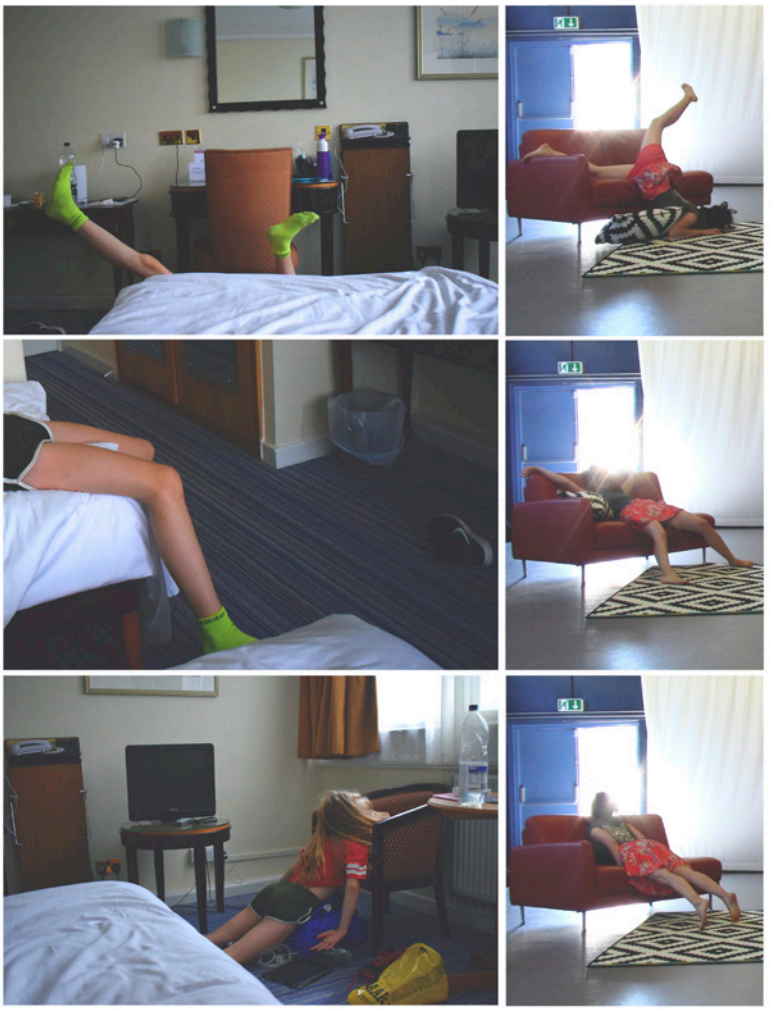

Figure 2. Re-Enactment of Hotel Dance by Paula Guzzanti (Carolien Hermans)

Discussion

In this article, I have explored how affects/intensities can travel through different bodies in physical play and dance improvization. The artistic research project consists of three phases: 1) the original play event (hotel dance), 2) the capturing, ordering and selecting of a set of photographs, and 3) the re-enactment of the hotel dance in an improvized dance solo. Photography is not only used here to capture the affects/intensities expressed in the spontaneous play event, but also as a medium to transport affects/intensities from one body to the other body.

The spontaneous hotel dance of my daughter forms the backbone of this research project. In the analysis of the 243 images, three main themes were distinguished: 1) building up intensity through rhythm, repetition, and variation, 2) heightening—moving towards the superfluous, 3) and dramatizing/staging. Even more, I use Karoff's (2013) theory on play practices and plays moods as a tool for visual analysis. The first theme (building up intensity) corresponds with *shifting/intensity*, the second theme (heightening – moving towards the superfluous) with *exceeding/euphoria* and the third theme (dramatizing/staging) with *displaying/tension.* Only one of Karoff's category was missing: *sliding/devotion*. This category refers to play activities that have a strong, repetitive rhythm, with a minimum of change, a certain quietness and a deep absorption/concentration. Lisa's hotel dance was from beginning to end full of energy, with a high arousal level and rich of "brisk and lively body movements" (Sheets-Johnstone 2003, 416). Sliding/devotion often takes place in play activities that have a strong repetitive character such as stringing beads or puzzling. In Lisa's hotel dance, this simply didn't occur.

Although Karoff's model has been very useful, I found the play activities more relevant than the play moods. There are two reasons for this. First of all, the play activities are formulated as verbs (as action and movement words) while play moods are described as nouns (as states of being). Since movements and affects are dynamically congruent (Sheets-Johnstone 2018), I prefer to speak in verbs instead of nouns also when it comes to affects and moods. Second, in this article affects are considered prepersonal intensities that emerge at the threshold of being and becoming. Karoff considers play moods as state of beings and, although she clearly states that play moods emerge in the in-between-ness of inside and outside, it remains unclear if play moods should be considered as qualified or unqualified intensities (emotions versus affects). I therefore suggest to speak of 'affective tones'

instead of 'moods' and consequently use verbs instead of nouns: *tensioning* instead of *tension*, *intensifying* instead of *intensity* etc. In this case, movement-words might help to make the transition between being and becoming.

In this article, I used visual ethnography as a research method to explore how affects can travel in-between bodies (within the context of play and dance improvization). The visual analysis resulted in the identification of three themes (also referred to as kinetic melodies). In future research, however, I would further elaborate on the email correspondence. The short comments of Paula were very helpful, and, in future research, these (email) conversations could definitely add to a more in-depth analysis of the re-enactive process and the way affects travel through different (moving) bodies. Questions like 'How did you approach the imagery? What kind of embodied entrances did you find? Could you describe in movements terms what kind of affects you experienced? Where and how did it resonate in your body?' would be good starting points for such a conversation.

I want to close off this article with some final thoughts on the relationship between affects and play/dance improvization. Affects play a vital role in the way we make sense of the world and of each other: through coordinated patterns we exchange dynamic forces and intensities. Affects emerge in the interaction with the world and with other. Physical play and dance improvization can be seen as unique examples where affects travel through bodies in a creative and playful way. This is because play and dance improvization are both able to bypass the narratives/habits of daily life and as a result, the dynamics of experience (rhythm, repetition, variation) can come to the fore. Affective resonances (Mühlhoff 2015) usually take on shape in direct face-to-face contact. In this article, however, I have argued that affective resonances can also be experienced in our interaction with things and our surroundings. The hotel dance is a good example of how affects resonate in the playful interaction with the room. Even more, affective traces can be picked up by others through re-enactment: not in an identical or similar way, but in processes of differentiation. Enactment must thus not be understood as a rehearsal or repetition of the same, but as the actualization of affective potential. In other words, re-enactment creates its own relational dynamic, as affective traces are picked up and taken further. In the re-enactment the body of the dancer becomes a vessel through which new affective potential is actualized.

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Choke technique in Brazilian ju-jitsu, Yossigur, 2016

BJJ'S DIARY: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW NORMAL

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Situation

A situation is a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event.

—Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (2011, 5)

On 23rd November 2019, I sent a WhatsApp message to my *escrima*[1] instructor: 'I have had to pause all commitments for the time being because my daughter has an attachment disorder and needs 100% of my time at the moment. […] I'll be back when I can.' In response, he offered to look after the *escrima* class I was teaching. But, I replied: 'I've cancelled everything.' Then:

> I don't know what my future looks like anymore. Nothing is predictable one moment to the next so I can't commit to anything. Something that was meant to help me deal with stress was just becoming a source of stress, so it had to go. If and when [the situation improves] I'll pick stuff up again. For now it's just batten down the hatches.

After a few more exchanges over the next week or so, one of my last ever messages to him, on 18th December 2019, was this:

> Sorry I couldn't make it [to the Christmas meal]. But evenings remain very difficult. Anyway, after having this break and taking stock of my life, I have decided I will also be taking a break from *escrima*. I am not able to fit it in and I've been thinking more about what I want and need at the moment. I've always wanted to learn BJJ and I've found a lunchtime class that fits with my life, so I'm doing that for the time being. If things change, I will get back to you. But for now, I hope all goes well. Best wishes, Paul.

We realized that one of our adopted daughters had complex psychological and emotional problems early on, before she was two. We began to speculate that she had an attachment disorder when she was three. Over time, she has been formally diagnosed with this and other issues.[2] In 2019, she was thirteen. By that time, we had locks on bedroom doors and kitchen cupboards. Even though they were both teenagers, our daughters could not be left at home alone, for many reasons. My partner and I had both, at different times, had breakdowns. I was diagnosed with anxiety and signs of depression, and prescribed antidepressants (a prescription I never collected). We saw more of social workers, psychologists, therapists, counsellors, teachers, and the occasional police officer than we did of our friends. I had given up trying to go out, other than for exercise, and even then, plans to get out for an hour or two for exercise were always likely to be scuppered. I became used to planning work trips and even organizing conferences, only to have to cancel at the last minute. Work commitments were hard to honor, especially if they meant being out of the house later than usual. We relied on the understanding of our employers. We needed our families to help us if we were to get any kind of break. Yet stress arose at work and cracks and rifts developed in our families, as our relatives could or would not believe or comprehend what we would tell them about our situation. It was tough. My messages to my *escrima* instructor in late 2019 coincide with it all coming to yet another head.

Perturbation

Perturbation is Deleuze's word for disturbances in the atmosphere that constitute situations whose shape can only be forged by continuous reaction and transversal movement, releasing subjects from the normativity of intuition and making them available for alternative ordinaries.

—Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (2011, 6)

I took my first Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) class on the lunchtime of Tuesday 17th December 2019. I was 48 years old. BJJ can be described loosely as a ground-fighting, grappling, or 'wrestling' style of martial art. Until that first class, I had only practiced striking-based martial arts, and tai chi (*taiji*). So, BJJ was a massive change for me. My wife was shocked that I even wanted to try it, and even more shocked when I liked (loved) it. She reminded me that for many years I had vociferously critiqued, disdained, scorned, disparaged and even ridiculed BJJ. I have no precise memory of this, but I believe her, as it aligns with my memories of my *escrima* instructor's often vehement outbursts about it.

In weapons-based styles like escrima, one invests a lot of faith in the idea of devastating an opponent with your weapon, fists, feet, knees, or elbows, before they could get anywhere near being able to grab hold of you and grapple you to submission. Because of this investment, critiques of BJJ by weapons-stylists are frequent. They are also predictable and symptomatic: they express a way of thinking and reasoning required for pugilistic practice. The main version runs like this: there are many good reasons to avoid 'going to the ground' in a fight; therefore, a style that embraces going to the ground *as its first principle and overarching strategy* is reckless, or even ridiculous.[3]

The catch is that, if one takes this idea to heart, then one might marginalize or reject training for ground-fighting. As a consequence, one develops no ground-fighting skills and this can become a source of anxiety—because many fights (both in combat sports and in the 'real world') *do* go to the ground. Therefore, the principled rejection of training for ground-fighting may be the thing that turns out to be reckless.

In my own case, I think my criticisms of grappling and ground-fighting had arisen as part of a quasi-obligatory, almost ritualistic, catechism-style proclamation of faith in the kind of *escrima* that we practiced.[4] As in: 'We don't train for/like *that* because we believe it makes much more sense to train for/like *this*'. Nonetheless, this mantra could not fully silence a nagging, unresolved issue: I didn't know *how* to grapple or fight on the ground; so what would happen if I ever had to? Hence, both the anxiety and the curiosity.

Furthermore, a number of factors conspired one day to make me realize—with a clarity and force that had hitherto eluded me—that, *really*, I personally was unlikely, in future, ever to need to fight in an *escrima* style (i.e., hitting), and that,

really, by far the most likely form of physical conflict I might find myself involved in would mainly require me to subdue the physical aggression of someone—and most likely someone I know and love. As a matter of fact, a number of tense and explosive situations at home had led me to realise that *everything* that *escrima* trained me to do was a really bad idea in most situations. I realized that my escrima-trained flinch reflex would cause me to react in exactly the wrong way in tense, surprise, or 'physical' situations. At that point, it was like a bubble burst in my belief system, and I had a complete perspectival transformation.

So, my switch from *escrima* to BJJ was not *merely* a 'martial arts matter'. It was not an 'internal' matter of a subjective choice between one hobby and another. Rather, it was strongly connected to the perturbations I was experiencing and the situation unfolding in my family life. I also remember my cessation of escrima feeling like a renunciation – a necessary purge, part of a transformative rethinking and almost revolutionary reconfiguring of my values, orientations and daily life practice. In the run up to this moment, I had perhaps been in the situation that Lauren Berlant (2011) in *Cruel Optimism* calls 'impasse,' in which I slowly realized that my established attachments were becoming 'cruel.' Orientations, attachments, values, and practices that I had long been deeply invested in were no longer *enabling* but were now *actively obstructing* my flourishing. To combine two of Berlant's terms, this amounted to a kind of crisis of optimism, and hence a crisis of desire, fantasy, investment, attachment, and ultimately also identity.

Cruel Optimism

In Berlant's (2011) terms, "attachment is optimistic" (1). It is a "force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene" (1-2). In other words, for Berlant, attachment is *promissory*. Initially, this can involve excitement about "the change that's gonna come" (2) thanks to this new investment. But this will quickly settle down: if the optimism endures and the attachment continues, it will become incorporated into (either structured by or structuring within) everyday life. In Berlant's (2011) words: "one of optimism's ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality, that place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of the good-life genres that a person or a world has seen fit to formu-

late" (2). However, attachment becomes what Berlant (2011) calls "cruel" when a situation emerges in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1):

> It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially (1).

Strictly speaking, then, Berlant's approach would be more likely to identify the proper issue here as the dynamics of family life, parenthood, adoption, and their connection to enduring fantasies about 'the good life'. Indeed, her organizing question at the very beginning of *Cruel Optimism* is: "Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies – say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work – when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds?" (2). From here, the key question might seem to be: why stay attached to an adoptive relationship, or the fantasy of parenthood as promising the good life? However, this is the same as asking: why stay attached to a child, who needs to be looked after? The sheer volume and weight of answers giving very clear and compelling reasons why one should not give up on a child in your care would be deafening.[5]

Moreover, Berlant (2011) does not actually pursue her first question, and instead explores a second, rather easier, field of enquiry: "What happens," she asks, "when those fantasies start to fray?" (2). She suggests that there are a range of likely responses: "depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash" (2). Certainly, during our years as adoptive parents, we have experienced each of these, in different ways, at different times. Nonetheless, what I will be concerned with in what follows is when, in late 2019, I made a change in an apparently minor, apparently unrelated part of my life. In effect, I identified my hobby practice of *escrima* as being a now-cruel attachment, one that was actively impeding my aims. Shortly after, I identified BJJ as a new source of optimism—a new promissory place and project. A *kind* of 'solution' to my problems—even if only in the therapeutic (Marxists might say 'imaginary') form of helping me to cope with my situation, and even if only by giving me an occasional enjoyable break from it.

My 'good life' fantasies in one realm of my life (parenthood) were well and truly fraying, but I could and would not let go. Instead, I jettisoned other aspects of my life, and replaced them with new attachments. This putatively 'minor' change in

one realm had profound knock-on effects in all others. It actually felt like a kind of 'conversion', as described by Peter Sloterdijk (2013) in his long philosophical reflection on discipline, training, conversion, and embodied change, *You Must Change Your Life*:

> All increases of a mental or bodily kind begin with a secession from the ordinary. This is usually accompanied by a forceful rejection of the past – not infrequently assisted by such affects as disgust, regret and complete rejection of the earlier mode of being. (217)

Feel Notes

Certainly, starting BJJ instantly felt profound and transformative. After my first class, I suspected it would be important to try to capture my thoughts and feelings, as I encountered them. So I started a diary. I had no clear picture of its point, purpose, or potential future use, but I just had an inkling that something important was happening and that I should be capturing the changes I was feeling. I knew this would not be a *training* journal, in which I reflected on lessons or techniques. Nor would it be some kind of formal ethnographic 'field notes.' Rather, it would be what I came to think of as 'feel notes.' So: not '*field* notes', but '*feel* notes'. Neither an ethnography nor an autoethnography, but reflections on the often perturbing, often revelatory new feelings I was encountering in starting this new practice, one that was in many ways astonishing to me.[6]

To me, the term 'feel notes' evoked not only anthropological field notes but also—and more importantly—Raymond Williams' important notion of a 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1977). Williams offered the term 'structure of feeling' as a tool to help orient those interested in sensing, mapping, or capturing an unfolding present. In my case, this would be the experiential transformations that might soon be lost and forgotten simply by receding into the tapestry of the unremarkable and hence unremarked ordinariness of a new everyday life. I wanted to capture what it felt like before BJJ became regular, familiar, and normal to me—to capture what was new and remarkable in BJJ as a field of experiences and transformations, before those became something else, fell from view, and hence became invisible to me.

How it all *felt* seemed to be the most important dimension that I needed to capture. This is unsurprising if, as Berlant (2011) argues, "the present is perceived, first, affectively"; if it is "not at first an object but a mediated affect"; if it is "a thing

that is sensed and under constant revision" (4). It may develop a kind of 'form', although this will always be a 'sense' – or, indeed, a structure of feeling – and if its "conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now" (Berlant 2011, 4).

Beginning

An immediate consequence (that surprised me) of ditching *escrima* and starting BJJ was an emotional outpouring. This is very present in the first entries of my feel notes. I wrote my notes on the train or bus to and from my BJJ lessons. I named the file 'BJJ's Diary'. I did this because I liked the sonic and syllabic allusion this made to *Bridget Jones' Diary*. I think I was drawn to this title because I wondered whether I might end up writing some kind of memoir anchored in taking up BJJ at 48 years old. This idea itself was no doubt connected to the spontaneous outpouring of emotion that overwhelmed the first few entries. I seemed angry, and I directed that anger towards my former practice, or rather, my former instructor.[7]

At the same time, my new practice instantly led to an explosion of new enthusiasm. On 31st December 2019—New Year's Eve—I went training. In my diary, I noted that I would 'never have voluntarily gone to *escrima* over the festive period. That's because the pleasure in *escrima* is a principled pleasure. It's the satisfaction of telling yourself you've done the right thing. [But] BJJ is […] inherently pleasurable all the way through.' So, I actively *wanted* to do it. There was no 'should': only 'want.' I also noted a new concern about hygiene, both personal and environmental: 'toenails must be trimmed too. And clean. And do my feet smell? What about between the toes? In the shower every day I have been cleaning with considerably more diligence.' Similarly, because BJJ requires flexibility, 'I am tending to want to stretch. This means hands on the floor and face closer to the floor. So I am seeing more dirt. So I am cleaning.' I speculated about the origins of *feng shui*, and invented an exercise-based creation narrative.

I was struck by my new perspectives on practices I once thought I had abandoned. I had practiced yoga twenty years before, but became bored of it. Now, however, because BJJ requires flexibility, I returned to it, with fresh eyes, and gusto.
But most of all, I was struck by the profound physical intimacy of 'rolling' (the term for BJJ's specific type of sparring). This intimacy was simultaneously a source of worry (related to both hygiene and ego), and competitiveness, but also bonding. For, BJJ rolling provides a rare form of physical intimacy among

adults. From the outside, it might look *only* like competition or combat; but from the inside, within the activity, there is teaching and learning, joking alongside choking, care, collaboration, and concern. All of this, in modern everyday life, is both incredibly rare and also deeply affecting.

In these early experiences, I was struck by the renegotiation both of personal boundaries and also of relationships. In BJJ, you are always physically connected with your partner. This may be one grip on a collar or wrist, but it is more likely to be all of your or their body-weight pressing into anywhere and everywhere on your body. Nowhere is off-limits. Everything comes into contact with everything, and skin is only separated from skin by either a loose cotton 'gi' (uniform) or very thin Lycra or Spandex (when training 'no-gi').

There are also various forms of fear, discomfort, and sometimes terror. This is not just because of the frequency of pain and its proximity to potentially lethal consequences. It often relates to the spectral presence of a violent sexual dimension. Facing the new experiences of body clamped against body is not just a matter of combat. It can initially feel like sexual aggression. As such, it is immediately necessary to learn new meanings for certain taboo areas of the body and their movement. Normally, in life, the groin, hips and butt mean sex, micturition, and defecation. They are the very nerve-centre of intimacy and privacy. But in BJJ, that entire area means weight, strength, power, control. The genitals and the anus are present, sure, but they are surrounded by the largest muscle groups in the body: thighs, lower back, glutes, core. This area is also the body's centre of gravity. So, in BJJ, this entire region becomes functional as the principal centre of power in combat. Learning that it is *this*, and learning to ignore all of the ingrained intensities of feeling about this area and sex, micturition, and defecation, is an enormous but necessary task.

Translated into the terms set out in the famous opening paragraph of Deleuze and Guattari's (1984) *Anti-Oedipus*, you might say that, in BJJ, the "private parts" of a body—a machine that at other times also "shits and fucks" (1)—become parts of a very different kind of machine: the overarching BJJ machine is made up of grappling, wrestling machines. In these, BJJ "is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts" (1). Closer inspection reveals "machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 1). One

part attempts to reconfigure parts to become a levering-machine, turning another part into a fulcrum. One part "produces a flow that the other interrupts" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 1). And so on.

We could read the entirety of *Anti-Oedipus* in this way, and find apt redescriptions of BJJ's transformation or reterritorialization of intimate and taboo body parts and connections into publicly acceptable machinic relations. But, when I was on page one of learning BJJ, it is as if I was also on page one of Brian Massumi's (2002) *Parables for the Virtual*, whose opening observations echo and amplify exactly where I was 'at':

> When I think of my body […], two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?
>
> If you start from an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, the slightest, most literal displacement convokes a qualitative difference, because as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling, and feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably. Qualitative difference: immediately the issue is change. Felt and unforeseen. (1)

In BJJ, what moves you to notice your own body movements (and limitations) and your own sensations, and even your own memories, in entirely new ways, is the other person's body. On Tuesday 7th January 2020, I reflected upon my claustrophobic panic upon feeling crushed under a heavy body and struggling to breathe. I noted that, each time I found myself crushed under a heavy man's body, the experience always reminded me of hiding under the bedclothes as a child, to shield myself from the ghosts and monsters, whilst always taking great care to preserve a clear air-way through the sheets, in order to breathe fresh air.[8] On Sunday 12th January 2020, I speculated that learning BJJ is like learning a foreign language with one's body. Working out how to get one's body to do new things, to move into new positions, to distribute weight, and to do *this* while also doing *that*, is an immense task. I reflected on the relationship of this to the important work of words and phrases, realizing that I *need* words and phrases. I use words and phrases to orientate myself, or to give myself 'handles' to cling to. I wrote in my journal that I craved more phrases to 'fight to' while sparring: 'Little conceptual handles to grab onto and try to implement [in order] to clear the haze and cloud and smoke over the biomechanics of fighting […] Giving conceptual maps, networks, grids.'

Sloterdijk (2013) argues that the apparent silence of those in training, whether in monastic orders or meditation, belies a whole world of 'endo-rhetorical' practice, in which the subject-in-training repeats to themselves the key words and phrases required to practice well. Ultimately, for Sloterdijk, any adoption of any kind of disciplined 'practicing life' is ethical.

In my diary, I also reflect on the ethos. I know one must not generalize an ethos from an instance. But if, in my former *escrima* class, there had been an ethos that involved disparaging BJJ because BJJ did not seem to face up to certain aspects of combat (which escrima insists is structured around violent strikes), so, in my first BJJ club, certain other pugilistic martial arts and self-defence approaches were equally or correspondingly disdained. In my first club, the coach confided that he felt compelled to watch and then become agitated by the social media output of a particular school of 'street' self-defence:

> Before class, as we sit around in a circle doing independent stretches, pre-formal warmup, [coach] holds forth on the hilarity of [these street self-defence] videos. […] He discusses [their] approach to being attacked, and notes that at one point the narrator says something like 'so you take out your knife and…' [Coach] recounts this and, with a laugh, says that if you are carrying around a knife then 'perhaps you are part of the problem and not the solution'. Loved that. Very concise and precise.

My delight in this, I realize now, attested to a profound perspective change happening in me. In *escrima* circles, there is sometimes discussion about what kinds of things a person could legally carry, that could function, if needed, as weapons. From my BJJ coach's perspective, that very logic, that direction of thinking, already signalled a problem: if you are considering (or are already) carrying a weapon—even if justified by an appeal to (potential)[9] self-defence—*you are already becoming the problem*. This resonated well with my recent rejection of all pugilistic responses.

The Joy of BJJ

But one question vexed me more than others: what—*precisely*—was I actually enjoying about BJJ? My long entry for Tuesday 14th January 2020 is dominated by a reflection on whether or not I might apply to my university's research ethics committee for permission to carry out a formal research project focusing on BJJ,

and whether my rambling and disorganized notes were already somehow a part of it, or whether any subsequent research project would take a different form. It was in this entry that I first use the phrase 'feel notes.'

After some reflection on whether my diary was the basis for either a memoire, an ethnography, an autoethnography, or something else, and after some reflection on the paperwork and guidelines used by my university in its ethical approval processes for research projects, I pose the question of enjoyment directly. I wrote: 'Anyway, there I am, under some massive lump of a bloke, who is inching his way all around me, looking for an arm bar or a choke […]. And I'm thinking, "what is it about this that I am enjoying?" And it's definitely hard to pin down.' I entertain a number of possible answers: am I merely enjoying learning something completely new? Am I enjoying something that takes me back to childhood play-fighting? Is this a kind of play therapy? Am I enjoying learning things about my body and using it in a very different way? Is it a fantasy of invincibility? Or is it something to do with the immediate and enforced friendship caused by such bodily intimacy? Is it a sense of feeling physically alive? Wrestling with young strong people and surviving (or not)? Is this about male bonding, or about escaping the confines of normal gendered boundaries?

On 17th January 2020, my ruminations on what exactly was so pleasurable about BJJ continued:

> Yesterday I met with [a researcher who practices BJJ and MMA] and we discussed my possible research question of why precisely and exactly BJJ is so enjoyable. He said it is like a near-death experience. Every roll you are fighting for your life, your breath. Every time you come up for air, so to speak, whether victorious or not, you are coming back from the brink. In this sense, his thesis agrees with Alex Channon's article about 'edge-work.'[10] You take yourself to the edge. That is thrilling and educational and boundary pushing and limit moving in itself.

This was corroborated somewhat the same day: after attending a lunchtime session at a different club in another town, I found I was hugely disappointed that we had not rolled at the end of the session. I realized that something about the thrill of rolling is definitely a strong dimension of the enjoyment. But, at the same time, much of what surrounds the intensity of the rolls is also important: the sociality, and the almost immediate and palpable improvements in physical health, to name only two obvious things. On 18th January 2020, I wrote: 'Yesterday, as I was walking home, I felt in my bones that after exactly one month of training, I feel so much more full of energy. I walk faster. I don't get sleepy as often. I feel stronger. I feel more flexible. More grounded. More mobile.'

Lockdown

The entries discussed above were written in my first month of training BJJ, between 18th December 2019 and 18th January 2020. By the end of the month – approximately six weeks into training – I refer to BJJ as 'normal' for the first time. On Friday 28th February 2020, I wrote:

> I also think I may have moved out of the 'this is so weird and unusual phase' into a 'this is normal' phase. The high is the same, but it does not seem connected with profundity. I had anxiety dreams the other night about losing my ability to kick and punch and 'fight'. I dreamt I was useless.

Little did I know how fleeting that particular 'new normal' phase would be. By Friday 13th March, health experts and BJJ luminaries were publicly advocating the cessation of BJJ training because of the spread of Covid-19. On Tuesday 17th March, I made the decision to pause my BJJ training, 'for a while.' I thought it might be for three weeks or so. Little did I know that it would last more than a year, until 17th May 2021. During the rest of 2020, and into 2021, I dreamed of BJJ almost every night. Unlike the dreams I was having in February 2020 about losing my other martial arts skills ('my ability to kick and punch and "fight"'), my BJJ dreams were always about a surprise return to training. These were not unlike the dreams I occasionally still have, since the death of my father in 2003, in which I am filled with surprise and delight to see him, followed by an increasingly sad realization that this can't be real, because I know he is gone. My BJJ dreams only started to become less frequent after about nine months in the wilderness.

My desolation at the loss of BJJ throughout the first year of the pandemic was profound. I got writer's block—well, as close to writer's block as I've ever had—largely because of this loss. All my research and writing projects went on hold. I couldn't focus on anything. I was not someone who used lockdowns as a time to learn a new self-improving skill. I was on pause. Dormant. Eventually, after some time, and with what felt like Herculean effort, I managed to write some short blog essays, and, in due course, one academic article, in which I attempted to capture something of the structure of feeling of enforced isolation as a martial artist in a time when it was not at all certain that group training would *ever* return again (Bowman 2020). It felt like bereavement.

Springtime

Over a year after the first lockdown, the British government allowed a return to indoor sports, on Monday 17th May 2021. I attended the first ever class of a newly opened BJJ club. I immediately joined. The journey to and from this club was a six mile cycle along a rural canal towpath. This mode of travel meant that I could no longer keep a diary while thoughts and experiences were fresh in my mind. But the emotional and psychological effects of cycling through a bucolic landscape actually seemed to remove my desire or interest in keeping a diary at all. I now just felt content.

Aside from breaks for occasional minor injuries, holidays, work, and family commitments, I have trained an average of 2-3 times per week since then. On 11th May 2022, I was awarded my blue belt. This felt like the greatest achievement of my entire life. However, BJJ never again felt as profound as it had at first. In fact, as I write these words, it is already hard to remember how it felt before BJJ became my new normal. Nonetheless, if I carry out an introspective inventory of my current constellation of affective responses, values, and opinions, I note some significant changes. For instance, where before I could and would view many different kinds of martial arts with curiosity, interest, and appreciation, I confess that I currently mainly view them with a kind of vague pity. This is not the arrogance of an old man who thinks, conceitedly or tiredly, 'been there, done that.' It feels rather more akin to what Peter Sloterdijk regards as an inevitable part of the process of conversion. (Or, as I often hear in my own head, the voice of Forrest Whittaker, quoting from the samurai text, *Hagakure*, in the film *Ghost Dog*: in 'the practising life,' you reach a point where you should be able to 'hear about all *Ways* and become more and more in accord with your own.')

Sloterdijk (2013) argues that all forms of conversion involve a profound change in affects. He argues that the convert is someone who turns their back on and 'leaves' an older form of everyday life, entering into a new realm of practice with inevitably new values: "The leaver cultivates a battle-ready attention to their own interior and retains a hostile suspicion towards the new exterior, which had previously stood for the surrounding world as such" (217). He then continues into his observations about conversion being "usually accompanied by a forceful rejection of the past—not infrequently assisted by such affects as disgust, regret, and complete rejection of the earlier mode of being" (217).

Although his discussion of 'conversion' is informed by images of religious and ascetic practice, for Sloterdijk such realms are only interesting to the extent that they provide *generalizable* examples, that illustrate what happens everywhere and all the time, in all of the various kinds of micro and macro-conversions we undergo in changes in lifestyle and in taking up new practices. After conversion, Sloterdijk (2013) suggests: "The attitude of the correctly practising individual in relation to their earlier existence is described by Hindus as *vairagya*, which translates as 'detachment' and refers to a mildly disgusted indifference towards everyday pleasures and concerns" (219). Certainly, in my case, I have lost all interest in pugilistic practices, and actually, for the first time in my entire life, I now view punching and kicking as crude and inelegant. Unethical, even. This is a radical transformation for me, who has, over the course of many years, invested huge amounts of time training in twelve different martial arts.

Conclusions?

What is the relevance of 'my situation' for anyone or anything else? First, it seems important to state the obvious and propose that 'my' situations and decisions are not entirely my own. An ungenerous reading of my situation might regard it disparagingly, as being primarily about a white, middle-aged, middle-class man taking up a trivial new hobby. However, the aim of this reflection has not been to valorize this or that individual person's (or social demographic's) hobbies. Rather, it has been trying to take seriously Berlant's (2011) idea of "structures of relationality"' in attachment and how these relate to structures of feeling, and hence orientations, investments, interpretations and actions. Certainly, one might focus on the extent to which my switch of hobby was a purely individual, idiosyncratic, and trivial matter, from which no wider lessons can be derived. But it seems more interesting to ask whether it casts any light on anything more widely relevant.

One possibility is that my situation intersects with another of Berlant's (2011) concerns. She asks: "how can it be said that aesthetically mediated affective responses exemplify a shared *historical* sense?" (3) Certainly, my turn to BJJ at a time of perceived crisis and a sense of impasse was not entirely random, nor simply individual or idiosyncratic. Yes, a lifetime of personally believing that I 'need' to practice martial arts has a bearing. Other people will choose other things. Yet, my 'individual choice' was neither completely aleatory nor made in a vacuum.

Brazilian jiu-jitsu was in the ascendent in in 2019. It had increasingly been said to be the fastest growing martial art (and one of the fastest growing sports) in the world over previous years (Blum 2016; Bowman 2021). So, instead of being connected only to my individual psychology, perhaps my turn to BJJ could be connected to something to do with the *zeitgeist*, or new formations.

I think it is important to see such a situation as both singular *and* generalizable—as inevitably but uniquely connected to, reflective of, and interacting with, broader cultural movements and changes. This connection of ostensibly individual sensations and changes with broader emerging forms of new presents is what links affect studies with ideology studies, discourse studies and historical studies. In Berlant's words:

> affect theory is another phase in the history of ideology theory; the moment of the affective turn brings us back to the encounter of what is sensed with what is known and what has impact in a new but also recognizable way. To think about sensual matter that is elsewhere to sovereign consciousness but that has historical significance in domains of subjectivity requires following the course from what's singular—the subject's irreducible specificity—to the means by which the matter of the senses becomes general within a collectively lived situation. (53)

For me, on a personal level, I cannot think of another practice that would nourish my ability to continue parenting two deeply traumatized children, whose 'issues' get larger and more present and complex as they grow. No other practice meets my needs and gives me as much resilience and enjoyment as BJJ. And I am clearly not alone. Other martial artists joke that BJJ is a cult, that former friends are 'lost' to it. All of which must add up … to *something*.

A non-affect-sensitive approach to 'ideology' or 'discourse' might be tempted to take the small step of the giant leap into generalizing statements. For instance, an approach that used Slavoj Žižek's framework might come to count BJJ among the current "sublime objects" of ideology (Žižek 1989)—as a practice that might *seem* to run counter in many ways to the dominant ideology, but that, as a practice, is 'really' what Žižek (2001) might call contemporary capitalism's "perfect ideological supplement" (12). There is definitely something in this. But totalizing perspectives tend to gloss over specific details. Such perspectives remain half blind to the complexities and potentialities of *situations*. And, as Berlant (2011) puts it: "A situation is a state of things in which *something* that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life" (5), "releasing subjects from the normativity of intuition and making them available for alternative ordinaries" (6). Or, as you sometimes hear people in BJJ circles say: 'If you don't roll, you don't know.'

Endnotes

1. *Escrima* is a Filipino martial art, sometimes alternatively known as *Kali* or *Arnis*. It is most recognisable for its distinctive use of one or two short rattan canes, although it also involves empty-handed strikes, kicks, locks, and throws.

2. I am not a psychologist, just a parent. But in my experience, one quick way to gain a sense of attachment disorders is to look at the Coventry Scale: a table showing the difference in reactions to different social situations between children on the autism spectrum and those with attachment disorders. One version is here: https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/virtual-school/coventrygrid.pdf [accessed 9th November 2022].

3. BJJ is an offshoot of Japanese jujutsu and judo. It became famous and successful by focusing (much more than other styles) on ground fighting (Law 2008; Jose Cairus 2012; José Cairus 2020).

4. Peter Sloterdijk—who we return to in this article—argues that investment in any form of discipline requires the manipulation of words and affects, to orchestrate and manage the active and passionate disinvestment from other possible alternative worlds of practice and their worldviews (See Sloterdijk 2013).

5. Of course, such a chorus might not necessarily reflect what is *best* for all concerned, but may rather constitute a force of what Rey Chow once called "coercive mimeticism"—i.e., constant micro-judgements and expectations that police people's behaviour into line (Chow 2002).

6. As Sloterdijk notes, the most passionate conversions are those of adults, "who realize halfway through their lives that ordinary human existence is no longer enough. The beginning [of their conversion is] not education but seduction by the amazing. The effects that move humans to secede come purely from the school of wonder" (Sloterdijk 213: 273).

7. On the 'structural' generality of this 'psychological' dynamic of changes in affect, Sloterdijk (e.g., Sloterdijk 2013, 217) has much to say that supplements the work of Berlant, and indeed Williams.

8. Being 'taken back' to childhood is not uncommon for neophytes in BJJ rolling. For instance, DS Farrer describes being crushed under an opponent and remembering hearing his father's heartbeat when being cuddled as a young child (Farrer 2019).

9. On the consequences of a potential future threat, see Massumi (2010).

10. See Channon (2020). See also Lyng (2005).

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Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie,
Jean François Champollion (1790–1832)

Abandoned mall interior,
photographer unknown
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GHOST IN THE MALL: THE AFFECTIVE AND HAUNTOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF DEAD MALL RUINS

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ABSTRACT
Dead malls haunt the internet. These malls are either left abandoned to decay, to be slowly reclaimed by nature, or are dying with few shops and fewer people, open but eerily empty and quiet. Dead malls are dreamworlds, portals to the dreams of the past (Buck-Morss, 1995; 2000)—a time when the mall was a mecca of mass consumer-capitalist society. The affects of these dreams imbue the mall—a sense of hope and optimism for a new world promised by consumer culture, global connectivity, and technological advances. But these promised worlds never arrived, they have fallen into ruin and nothing has come to replace them. An internet scene has grown in these ruins. They call themselves "dead mall enthusiasts"—an intimate public that shares and expresses worldviews, memories, and affects centered around the figure of the dead mall. Enthusiasts sense the affective intensities of decaying 20th century consumer-capitalist futures that haunt these ruins—they sense "hauntological affects". The dead mall and its enthusiasts alert us to our affective potential; they remind us of our ability to imagine the future.

KEYWORDS
dead mall, YouTube, Reddit, affect, hauntology

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What Grows in the Rubble and Ruin

One of my first encounters with the dead mall was on YouTube. I came across a video, "DEAD MALL SERIES: FOREST FAIR VILLAGE MALL Ft. Music by Dan Mason." The thumbnail was of a mall – marked by a lack of people and shops, of life and vitality, of mood lighting, plants, fountains, and soothing Muzak. The video began with a shot that panned over a vast arcade and food court with kitschy 90s nautical themed blue and red decor, then zoomed in on signs with stock imagery of grilled sandwiches and smiling faces that have been stained with time, and looked up at a neon light – "GREAT STEAK" – switched off and sitting above a stall, eerily clean despite being empty. The sound of buzzing lights hummed in the background. A mallsoft track was quietly introduced as someone softly narrated, "Hey everyone this is Dan Bell, and this is my video tour of the Forest Fair Village Mall in Forest Park, Ohio." There was a certain aura, a feeling – a pull of the chest, an uneasy and difficult-to-place sense of nostalgia. I was drawn to the feelings – the hauntological affects – of the dead mall.

During the late 20th century, the mall was considered a mecca of consumer-capitalist civilization (Dovey 2008; Ritzer 2010). It was an essential consumer interior in capitalist societies (Sloterdijk 2013) – as Jameson (2003) wrote, "The world in which we were trapped is in fact a shopping mall" (77). However, by the end of the twentieth century, the roof started to cave in, the dust started accumulating, and the mold slowly crawled up the walls. The exterior world began to intrude on this interior world of comfort and consumption.

Now we are left with dead malls, "petrified utopias" (Beauchamp 2018) that sit on the edges of highways and the peripheries of suburbs. By 2011 one-third of American shopping malls were economically viable (Scharoun 2011, 235). Changes in consumer culture and retail – the shift towards specialty, leisure, and entertainment retail spaces, the rise of Big Box stores like Target and Walmart, online shopping, as well as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis – have been instrumental in the decline of the mall (Dovey 2008; Parlette & Cowen 2011; Ritzer 2010; Scharoun 2011). Now some malls are either dead, left abandoned to be slowly reclaimed by nature, or are dying with few shops and fewer people, open but eerily empty and quiet.

Despite the rubble seeming dead and inert, ruins are lively places – places where unexpected things may emerge. I approach the dead mall like Anna Tsing (2015) does the abandoned industrial forests where matsutake mushrooms grow. Matsutake only grow in abandoned forests, in capitalist ruins, picked by communities mostly made up of disenfranchized cultural minorities. The matsutake alerts us to an important question: what grows on the edges of our capitalist worlds, in our capitalist ruins? Inspired by Tsing, I practice an "art of noticing" – looking with a hopeful eye at the ruins of dead malls. In these ruins are groups of enthusiasts for whom the mall was once central to their childhoods and communities. They nostalgically and critically reflect on the mall ruin many others have readily forgotten. These enthusiasts are like the matsutake pickers, exploring ruined capitalist landscapes in the hope of discovering what might grow in them.

While not all malls are dying, the figure of the dead mall haunts the internet – appearing in colorful r/vaporwave edits, in eerie TikTok videos of empty mall "backrooms," and in urban explorations of YouTubers. Dead mall enthusiasts form an online scene, a digital intimate public that expresses and shares worldviews, memories, and affects with one another online (Dobson, Carah & Robards 2018). Enthusiasts document and discuss their explorations and experiences through photography, videos, and text-posts on social media platforms, such as Reddit and YouTube, and websites such as Labelscar.com and DeadMalls.com. I explore two online spaces where the dead mall scene appears – the r/deadmalls subreddit and the "Dead Mall Series" by the YouTuber Dan Bell. On r/deadmalls over 130,000 members post images, videos and reflections on dead malls. Dan Bell began to film dead and dying malls in 2014 after he noticed the slow death of his childhood malls in Maryland. He wishes to archive and, in a way, preserve these malls digitally (Garcia 2019). Bell is a central figure in the dead mall scene, whose YouTube channel has almost 600,000 subscribers.

To enthusiasts, the dead mall is a feeling. The vast open spaces of the dead mall, empty of people and life, is teeming with affect – the melancholy hallways, the nostalgic memories of childhoods spent in the mall, the lingering hope for the prosperity malls were supposed to bring. I use the concept of affect to focus on how the dead mall is felt and experienced rather than just what it means and represents. When analysing and examining affect through texts such as comments or video narrations, Massumi (1995) and Clough (2018; 2008) may caution that we are examining emotion instead. However, Wetherell (2012) proposes affect and discourse are deeply entangled (52). The privileging of the "non-conscious" and the "non-narrative" over the discursive creates a "fragile basis" for social research on affect (Wetherell 2012, 53). Instead, "…we need an approach to discourse which is eclectic and which stresses the relational, dialogic and distributed aspects

of meaning-making" (Wetherell 2012, 53). We affect, are affected, and attempt to express affect in our textual practices. Affect circulates throughout the networks and texts of digital cultures (Castro et al. 2021; Dobson, Carah & Robards 2018; Lovelock 2019; Rajagopalan 2019).

Enthusiasts use language to express their affective experiences of the dead mall in ways distinct from articulations of affect through emotional language. There are a few strategies dead mall enthusiasts employ to do this. Enthusiasts often relate the affects of one text to another. Take this comment from a subreddit post that asks if people find dead malls peaceful:

> …for me, there's this sad serenity to these malls. like the sad serenity I get when listening to, "everywhere at the end of time," or mall-soft-styled music. it's the same feeling I get when looking at some photos of Chernobyl…

Beyond calling the mall sad and serene, this enthusiast evokes the feeling of particular music—the vaporwave subgenre 'mall soft' and the album "everywhere at the end of time"—to express the affects they feel towards the dead mall. Enthusiasts attempt to invoke affects in one another through creating these associations. In r/deadmalls, commenters encourage fellow enthusiasts to listen to certain songs while viewing dead mall imagery. Under a r/deadmalls post of a vintage TIME magazine cover, one commenter encouraged other Redditors to listen to the Synthwave song "Everything is Going to Be Ok" while viewing.

Even further, enthusiasts point to the unnarratable and bodily nature of affect.

> Hi I was wondering if any of you get a weird feeling when you watch a dead mall video, it's hard to explain, but basically I feel emptiness in my chest…It's really weird, I can't stop thinking about those videos. Can someone explain to me what the heck is happening with me right now? (post on r/deadmalls)

Rather than examine the socio-economic reasons why malls died (Ferreira & Paiva 2017; Tokosh 2018) or the impact this has had on local communities (Parlette & Cowen 2011), I explore how the dead mall appears online, the affective reflections of the dead mall enthusiasts, and how these reflections open up critical potentials to reimagine the future. Dead malls, and the enthusiasts who are left to reckon with them, embody the shared affective experience of life amid the ruins of mass

consumption. Like the pickers who follow the autumn scent of the matsutake, the dead mall enthusiasts see, hear, and *feel* the decaying dreams and lost futures resonant in the dead mall.

We are all, in a way, dead mall enthusiasts and matsutake pickers—we all live in ruin, in the rubble of failed dreamworlds. Enthusiasts and matsutake pickers unveil ways we can further explore the blasted landscapes which have become our "collective home" (Tsing 2015). What animates this piece are three aporias or tensions I found in my research—a tension between nostalgic longing and critique, a tension between history-feeling and future-feeling, and finally a tension between dreaming and awakening. Each section examines these tensions as sites to explore the politics of futurity under capitalism and the potential of the dead mall and its enthusiasts to spur an imagination for alternative futures.

A Nostalgic Gaze: Between Longing and Critique

The mall is an ambivalent and contradictory space—between past and future, interior and exterior, real and fake, public and private, and leisure and work (Crawford 1992 & Fiske 2011). The original mall architect, Victor Gruen, was himself a "contradictory" figure. Gruen saw the mall as a socialist-utopian experiment to build a space both for consumption and community, to bring sociality into what he saw as an alienated America (Hardwick 2004; Scharoun 2012). In his initial plans malls would not only have shops, but also community centers, children' play areas, public eating spaces, exhibits, public events, and other social goods and services (Hardwick 2004, 134). Gruen wanted to sustain these two separate and opposing agendas. While Gruen later denounced developers who built malls catered solely for consumption (Scharoun 2012, 14), the mall continues to be an ambivalent space.

Crawford (1992) writes on this contradiction of the mall, "proximity has established an inescapable behavioral link between human needs—for recreation, public life, and social interaction—and the commercial activities of the mall, between pleasure and profit in an enlarged version of 'adjacent attraction'" (15). There is a struggle here between how the mall is used by those who enter (a space for socializing and community) and the mall's built space for commerciality and consumption. Spatial practices can escape and exceed the conceptions of designers and managers (Parlette & Cowen 2011, 795). As Fiske (2011) observes, every day mall practices "…negotiate these structures, oppose and challenge them, evade their control, exploit their weaknesses, trick them, turn them against themselves and their producers" (26).

The ambivalent nature of the mall is also apparent in the contradictory *nostalgic* reflections of the dead mall enthusiasts. Enthusiasts often struggle between feelings of loss and longing towards the mall and the space of community it once provided and critical views of the mall as a space of mass consumer-capitalism. Affective, nostalgic recollections reveal that malls have a central place in the hearts of their enthusiasts. Malls give limited but important spaces of autonomy (Fiske 2011) for women (Morris 1995), the elderly, and teenagers (Scharoun 2012), particularly Black teenagers (Chin 2001). Specifically, they play an essential role in local communities. With the rise of dead malls, enthusiasts reflect that the American suburb has lost one of its last community spaces. One enthusiast under a r/deadmalls post comments, "RIP Christown Mall, a special place in all the hearts of the Phoenix Metropolitan area." Enthusiasts, like this commenter, often express their personal experiences of dead malls they live close to and emphasize the importance of these malls to the area. Local communities miss malls, even protesting to save them from destruction (Parlette & Cowen 2011).

Especially common in the comment sections of YouTube videos and Reddit posts are commenters reminiscing on their childhood and youth. Enthusiasts write that the mall was a space for them to experience freedom and independence for the first time—to socialize with friends, get their first jobs, and start dating. An enthusiast under a r/deadmalls post of a mall they recognize comments:

> I lived near this mall when I was young. I spent my middle school and high school years going there. It was THE hangout on weekends. I have dozens of movie ticket stubs from all the movies I saw at Carmike Cinemas. I remember every spot having a store. Packed on the weekends and holidays. Eating at the Chik-fil-a in the food court…Working at an art gallery when I was 16… First dinner date at Spinnakers. As for so many of us, it was a place where we grew up. I'll be sad one day when they tear it down or turn it into something else. But I'll always have those memories.

This enthusiast emphasizes just how central the mall was to how they grew up and, with its looming destruction, the sadness they feel when they think of the mall being replaced. Many enthusiasts express feeling loss and longing for their childhood and youth, a space for community, and an older way of life. As one enthusiast expresses under a r/deadmalls post that asks, "Why do we like looking at/visiting dead malls so much?"

> You know, the Grand Budapest Hotel has a subplot in which the building is essentially like a living person, a character, in our lives. It grows and changes and eventually dies with us. Our memories, our lives, and the hours we spent there escaping our parents playing video games at Time Out will forever be lost like dust in the wind.

It is more than just a building to those in the dead mall scene. It is living and breathing, growing and changing. The mall "lives and dies" with its enthusiasts.

Critics of malls see them as depoliticizing, exploitative, and even zombifying (Dovey 2008; McRobbie 1997; McGuigan 1998). Enthusiasts will often reflect on the environmental impact of these malls, such as this r/deadmall commenter, "It is just a shameful waste of resources, like a lot of posts on this sub. I can tell it was beautiful once upon a time, it's just maddening that so much real waste is littering so much of our country." This enthusiast, like many others, expresses anger, dismay, and frustration towards the waste of money, space, and materials the mall embodies.

However, these critical views do not negate the affection enthusiasts have for the mall. Enthusiasts attempt to reconcile these seemingly contradictory perspectives. They reckon with a ruin that is both a marker of the wastefulness of mass consumer capitalism and a place once central to their communities, childhoods, and lives.

A commenter from a r/deadmalls post articulates this contradiction between longing and critique:

> Yes, they make me feel nostalgic and kind of sad for reasons I'm not completely sure of. It must be hypocritical because I'm pretty disdainful of rampant commercialism but I think malls in the 80s and 90s are just the best.

Another enthusiast replies and explains that this is not necessarily hypocritical:

> I feel like malls were as much of a social hub as a commercial hub in many instances, so I'd argue it's not hypocritical to miss malls while still being disdainful of greed is good commercialism of the 80s and 90s.

Dead mall enthusiasts' expressions of nostalgia, their affective expressions of loss and longing, *underpin* their critical reflections. Enthusiasts have experienced the failures of mass consumer capitalism first-hand. They have grown up with the mall and now watch, in shock, as it becomes ready for the wrecking ball. The loss and longing enthusiasts feel is foremostly a nostalgia for the mall as a communal and social space rather than a consumer space. Spaces for community

and sociality are not found in the big box stores that have come to replace the mall (Beauchamp 2018; Parlette & Cowen 2011). The mall ruin is a testament to certain failures—not only the failures of mass consumer-capitalism, but also the failure of a certain utopian dream for a community space in an otherwise alienated American suburbia.

Mall Dreamworlds and Catastrophe

> "I think it is still hitting people with slow motion shock that the 20th century is really over."
>
> —Commenter

The slow death of the mall marks the mall's shift from a place of hope, of future-feeling to one of nostalgia, of history-feeling. These two affects are fundamentally entangled—enthusiasts are nostalgic for the future as they linger in the "dreams of another place and another time" (Boym 2001, 41).

Videos and images of dead malls contain ghostly whispers from past consumer cultures—spectral traces of long-lost dreamworlds. In a video tour of the Owings Mills Mall at night, Dan Bell intercuts news footage from different eras of the mall with his video tour in the present. At the beginning of the video, he uses footage from the mall's opening day in 1986. In the clip, the news anchor narrates,

> …champagne, gold dust and pink feathers heralded in a new era for Owings Mills. Today's opening of the Owings Mill's fashion mall does not only mean a new high fashion place to shop, it also means lots of new development and jobs.

The mall promised to usher in a new world of prosperity and progress (Pusca 2009; Xavier 2018). Footage of the mall in Bell's video bursts with life—the corridors and balconies are filled with people who smile and cheer as feathers shower over them. Suddenly the video cuts to Dan Bell entering the mall in the present—devoid of human activity, eerie, quiet, and empty. Bell pans over vacant arcades which seem to stretch for eternity (see figure 1), walks through entire wings of the mall with no stores, and looks up at withering palm trees.

Figure 1. A quiet dead mall arcade at night, screencap from *Super Dead, Creepy Owings Mills Mall at Night **DEMOLISHED**** (Dan Bell, 2015)

Through this juxtaposition between past and present, Dan Bell captures an aura, a trace of an outdated dreamworld. Under another one of Dan Bell's videos, *Neon Dream Surreal Night Tour of an Abandoned Mall*, an enthusiast describes a particular feeling they had exploring a dead mall:

> …have you ever been in one of these places and momentarily felt like you were surrounded by a thriving environment? like all of the sudden the mall was bustling with shoppers and employees?

There is an affective trace that lingers in these ruins—a presence of a long-lost past. Enthusiasts sense it.

Dreamworlds were the collective utopias of the 20th century (Buck-Morss 2000). Capitalist mass utopias imagined a world that transformed nature and overcame scarcity. These utopian narratives were expressed in consumer interiors. The material expressions of mass consumer capitalism, the promises of its new industrial power, were the 19th-century arcades Walter Benjamin encountered (Buck-Morss 1995, 5). Malls are the arcades of the late 20th century (Friedberg 1993; Jameson 2003). As Crawford (1992) explains, the mall was imagined as a utopia, one which provided housing, food, and an endless supply of goods (19).

Collective dreamworlds have ended in catastrophe; they have become ruins. Dreams of abundance led to the exploitation of people and environments, to the dissolution of middle-class prosperity (Buck-Morss 2000; Dovey 2008). Dead mall enthusiasts explicitly reflect on the catastrophic end of the 20th century and its associated dreamworlds. A comment thread from Dan Bell's video*Super Dead, Creepy Owings Mills Mall at Night **DEMOLISHED***, delves into a discussion on the death of 20th-century futures,

> I think it is still hitting people with slow motion shock that the 20th century is really over. If you personally remember and experienced the excitement of the 80s when high end malls opened, it is so hard to connect that to what now exists, post-recession, post urban change, post internet shopping. In the 80s, this looked like the start of a big new world of wealth for everyone. In fact, it was the last gasp of 20th century general prosperity.

Another commenter replies, "Spot on! I live in Illinois, Chicagoland Area, malls that flourished when I was young, are dying. So sad man. I'm NEVER political, but we are in big trouble with the disappearing of the Middle Class." 20th-century prosperity has had its last gasp, and even those of us who are 'non-political' are left to watch in shock as these utopias collapse "into a burned-out nostalgia" (Beauchamp 2017).

Dead mall enthusiasts further remark that nothing has come to replace these dying dreamworlds. One commenter states in an r/deadmalls comment thread, "then without even realising it they [malls] seemed to represent something of the past instead of the future." Underneath an r/deadmalls subreddit post that asks why people are fascinated by dead malls, a thread begins a dialogue on this crisis. It begins with a commenter explaining why they enjoy viewing dead malls, "... they are a reminder that we are in a period of transition. End stage capitalism. what will we worship next as the golden calf is finally put to rest?." This comment stimulates further discussion. An enthusiast further down this thread asks, "Does end stage capitalism even exist or are we stuck in late-stage capitalism until it completely destroys the environment and depletes our resources?" Someone else replies, "not sure. i was hoping we'd move on to Star Trek instead of Mad Max." We were promised a utopia but, instead, got dystopia. Enthusiasts observe that dreamworlds have passed, malls have risen and fallen, and now their ghosts surround us. They reflect that future-feeling has become past-feeling.

The death of malls occurs against a moment defined by capitalist realism (Fisher 2009). With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent rise of liberal capitalism came the death of any competing ideology or reality (Fisher 2009, 6) and the solidification of capitalism as the first global ideological form (Buck-Morss 2000, ix). We face a contemporary crisis characterized by our inability to imagine the future (Fisher 2012; 2013), to dream collectively (Buck-Morss 2000), and attain the good life (Berlant 2011). As the refrain goes, it has become "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Fisher 2009, 2). An enthusiast beneath Dan Bell's video *From Decadent to Dirt: The Last of Owings Mills* comments:

> One thing about this series that really creeps me out is that the malls are indicative of something larger going on in the USA and the rest of the western world. The world I remember from the 80's and 90's has been steadily dying ever since. The middle classes shrink…Every day the ghost image of times past grows stronger. I feel like these malls are dying along with our sense of place and perhaps even our hopes for the future.

Enthusiasts are grappling with the cultural shifts Mark Fisher also reckoned with. We went from attending mall openings that showered us in feathers and gold dust and promised a bright new world to being incapable of imagining a new world altogether. Capitalism no longer needs to convince us by creating dreamworlds because it has become a naturalized reality—it is a fact, not a value. There is no need for a utopian vision to sell to the masses, no reason to build collective dreamworlds or to create spectacular mall interiors to enchant those who enter. The dead mall scene expresses the experience of living in a world of capitalist realism—the enthusiasts know it and feel it. The hopelessness, shock, and sadness—these are the affects enthusiasts feel when reflecting on the death of the mall and its associated dreamworlds. Malls are dying along with our "hopes for the future" as enthusiasts put it.

Haunting, Feeling, Dreaming: On Reclaiming Failed Futures

There is political potential in the memories of adults who watched on as their promised utopias in childhood became dystopias in adulthood (Buck-Morss 1995). Dreamworlds have been disenchanted; the dream has been recognized as a dream. However, critical nostalgic reflections are not enough to see beyond the closed

horizons of capitalist realism. There needs to be a reclaiming of collective dreaming (Buck-Morss 1995). Even though dreamworlds have ended in catastrophe, catastrophe continues with or without dreamworlds (Buck-Morss 2000). There is a key tension here, one between dreaming and awakening. This contradiction, I argue, is what animates the political affective potential of the dead mall and its enthusiasts. It is to awaken from the dreamworld of the mall and rescue the desire for social transformation that remains in the rubble and ruin. To open up a space for new alternative dreams to be dreamt—for new mall futures.

While the dead mall scene does not present us with a new world to imagine, one outside of capitalist realism, enthusiasts recognize and rescue the *impulses* of imagining the future. They are reminded of *how* to collectively dream, not only the contents of these dreams. When we find ourselves in a moment where we can no longer imagine alternative realities, being reminded of these practices acquires a critical potential—"When the present has given up on the future, we must listen for the relics of the future in the unactivated potentials of the past" (Fisher 2013, 53). Mark Fisher presents the concept of hauntology to argue that failed futures, despite their death, persist in the present. Hauntology's refusal to give up on the future has a political dimension because it does not accommodate capitalist realism's enclosed atmosphere (Fisher 2014, 24). In a time of cancelled futures, we should embrace this haunting. To remember how to dream collectively is to begin loosening capitalism's grip over reality.

Traces of lost futures bubble up (Fisher 2013) in the videos, pictures and sounds of the dead mall scene. Hauntological works are an artistic mode that bring outdated futures to the present (Tanner 2016, 36), through animation (Schofield 2019), film (Fisher 2012; Riley 2017), music (Fisher 2013; Cole 2020; Horta 2017; Tanner 2016) and even geomatics mapping (Zembylas et al. 2019). Dan Bell's videos are hauntological works. In the introduction sequences for his dead mall series, Bell remixes media from mass consumer-capitalist cultures. Videos of outdated home shopping channels, TV ads, music videos, and movies intercut with one another as vaporwave music that remixes slowed down and echoed out Muzak, Japanese city-pop, and 80s pop tunes plays overtop. In the introduction sequence for the video, *The $100 Mall: The Disaster of Pittsburgh Mills*, youthful faces, neon bikinis, sandy beaches, bright blue swimming pools, palm trees and sunsets fill the screen with funky vaporwave music by artist Lush Crayon playing in the background.

What bubbles up in Dan Bell's remixed culture-jammed introductions are affects of past consumer-capitalist cultures. Bell reveals the pure joy and energy found in these remixed mediascapes. In the introductory sequence for Bell's video, *From the 80s to the 70s: Galleria at Erieview OHIO & Eden Mall NC*, Bell remixes an early 2000s Japanese advertisement for a new mall. The remixed sequence is full of color, smiling faces, wind machines, and young women shopping, with upbeat electronic music by "Robots with Rayguns" (see figures 2 and 3).

Figures 2 (left) and 3 (right). Screencaps from culture-jammed introduction for the *80s to the 70s: Galleria at Erieview OHIO & Eden Mall* (Dan Bell, 2017)

Bell's remixes teem with affect. As Koc (2017) writes similarly on vaporwave's "lifeworld,"

> …in technicoloured hues, evoking a faded memory of a time predating the unemotional starkness of postmodernity—a place in a long-lost past captured on a discarded VHS cassette, a place where colourful expressions and frenzied cries of hope and purpose would burst across the cultural landscape (66).

These remixes of past mass consumer cultures are overflowing with affects that seem to burst out from the screen (Koc 2017), have complex affective intensities (Killeen 2018), and invoke an elation that seems impossible now (Cole 2020).

Recollections by dead mall enthusiasts on *how* the future was once collectively imagined are tied up with reflections on how this practice once *felt*. Haunting is an "affective operation" (Zembylas et al. 2019, 29). Enthusiasts' expressions of the dreamworlds of the mall almost always center on affect. Take this comment in a r/deadmalls subreddit thread;

> the mood was that everyone felt that the 80s were the start of something. Everyone might become wealthy or at least middle class. A chicken in every pot. But instead, the 80s were the end of the old ways of doing things, the high point, and we misread the exuberance…

Enthusiasts reflect the "mood" of late 20th century dreamworlds. The air was different: from the "excitement of the 80s," or malls as "new bright & shiny in the '80s—a sign of our economic boom and forward thinking," and the "optimism of the 90s…[when] most of us believed society would continue to get better and better." A commenter under Dan Bell's video, *From Decadent to Dirt: The last of Owings Mills,* further expresses these feelings,

> The 80s and 90s had a real sense of optimism. It was the beginning of "the future"—things were new and exciting. Music was innovative, movies were original and fashion was daring. People embraced the birth of the home computer and the arrival of the internet…

The future had a certain feeling. The dead mall scene channels, shares, and feels these hauntological affects. Through Dan Bell's culture-jammed sequences and dead mall enthusiasts' nostalgic reflections the affectual appeal of the mass consumer cultures of the past are re-evaluated. Atkinson (2018) writes that scholars

of affect must think through "[how] might affect be used in service to revolution and to what ends?" (v). Hauntological affect offers one avenue for social revolution—we need to remember how to feel, dream, and imagine before we set about building new dreamworlds.

As the enchantment of mass consumer capitalist utopias wears off, as the phantasmagoria of the interior world of the mall becomes transparent (Dovey 2008; Ritzer 2010), we begin to recognize "this dream *as a* dream" (Benjamin 1999). Buckmorss (1995) writes on the goal of Benjamin's project, "A materialist history that disenchants the industrial dreamworld of commodities, and yet rescues the utopian desire that it engendered for the purpose of social transformation: this was to have been the goal of Benjamin's fairy tale" (7).

In the dead mall the dream of mass consumer culture is disenchanted—the stores are closed, there are no products on the shelf, no running water fountains, no more vibrant exciting consumer interiors. And yet, as the enthusiasts' reflections demonstrate, the utopian desires of the mall remain a spectral affectual trace haunting the hallways once filled with people and products.

Perhaps the social desire rescued is not the mass consumer capitalist dream of the mall, but what the mall was remembered for by those who continue to linger in its ruins—the space for sociality and community, a civic heart in the suburb. A dream not only held by the enthusiasts but by the original mall inventor, Victor Gruen, whose failed visions of the mall utopias seem to bubble up in enthusiasts' nostalgic reflections. While some enthusiasts desire malls to be repurposed for capital—condos, luxury apartments, movie sets, and so on, many also want the mall to be repurposed for social goods—community spaces, study areas, libraries and housing shelters. In an r/deadmalls comment thread, one enthusiast remarks dead malls "…make me hopeful for more sustainable redevelopment projects that benefit the community." One enthusiast further reflects under a Dan Bell YouTube video:

> Malls and most retail places in general were very different as to how they are now. People went to them to purchase goods, sure. But they also filled a sort of community role as well. It wasn't uncommon to go to a K-mart of a mall and see people just sitting there, talking. not buying anything...It was the atmosphere, the tone...You walk into a Walmart and you just want to leave. It's cold, everyone looks miserable and the stores are completely void of personality or style…Could malls make a real return? Possibly…they will never be as profitable as they once were, but they could still fill a role as the community gathering place. A feeling that is slowly dying out in modern America.

What the hauntological affectual traces of the dead mall enable is not dreaming of more mass consumer spaces, but more spaces of community, an opening of space for collective dreaming outside of the capitalist frame. The hauntological affects of the dead mall and the enthusiasts who sense them remind us that our abilities to dream and "feel" alternative futures are always in play.

A Manifesto for the Dead Mall

If fake plants, water fountains, and potted palm trees are simulations of nature within the mall, in the dead mall fake plants disintegrate, water fountains cease to function, and potted palm trees wilt. Like in a forest when a large tree falls and gives light to the small plants down below, the dead mall roof caves in to let the sun and weather through. And in between the cracks of the concrete, in the decaying elevator shafts, and broken escalators, nature thrives. Unlike the mall that must simulate nature, nature reclaims the dead mall. In dead mall ruins, lost dreamworlds and alternative futures emerge. We can envision a new world growing up from the bombed-out spaces and blasted landscapes we now call home. We are reminded that ruins are not just to be reckoned with but to be dreamed in.

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Egyptien, Albert Racinet, 1888
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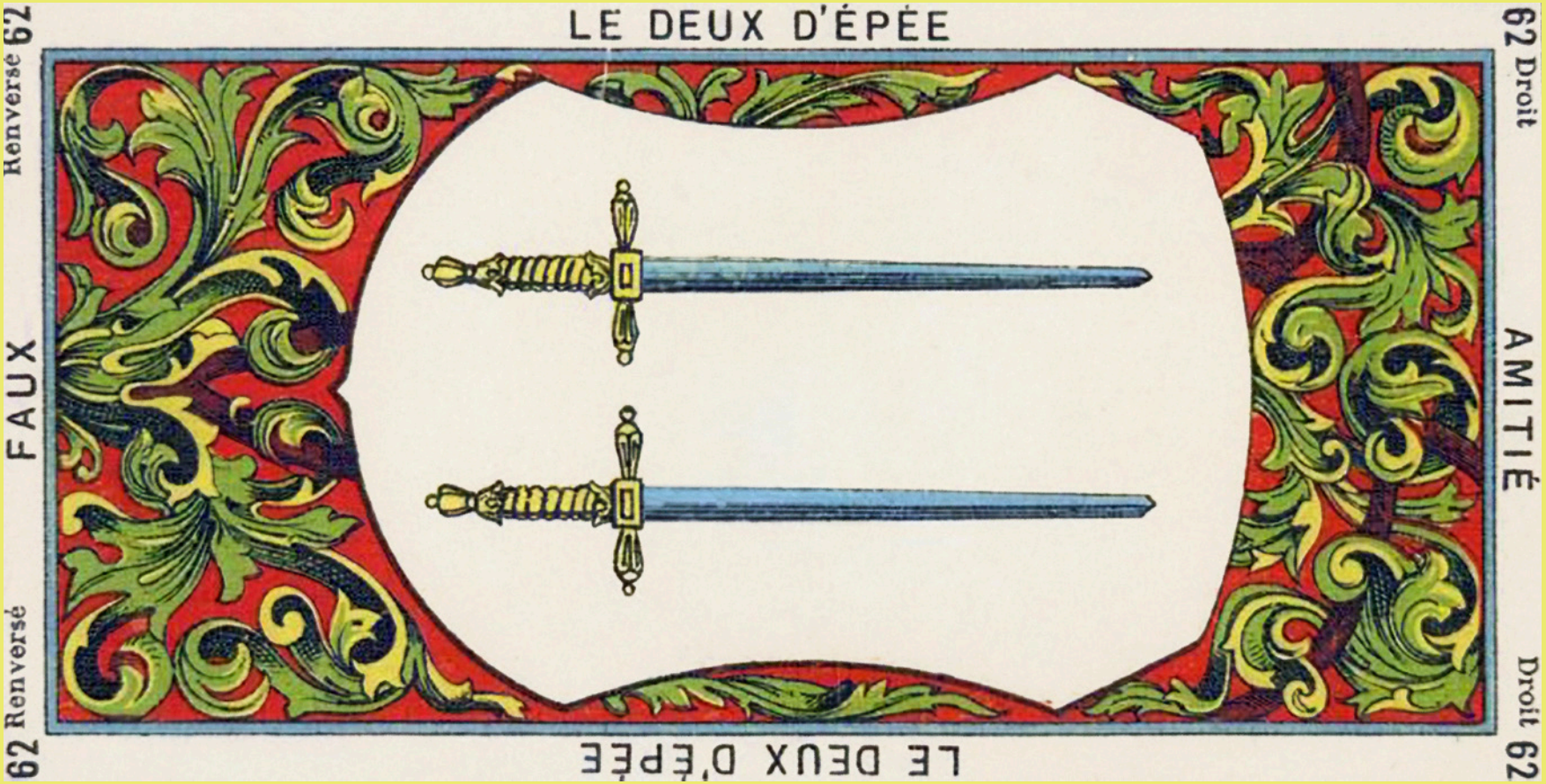
Two of Swords, Etteilla tarot
Jean-Baptiste Alliette, 1770



FASCIASTIC ARCHITECTURE:

A conversation between Qigong (Dominic Pettman) and Psychoanalysis (Carla Nappi)

Dominic Pettman
THE NEW SCHOOL

Carla Nappi
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Editor's Introduction

In this *Capacious* 'Dialogue,' Dominic Pettman and Carla Nappi uncover some of the embodying sensibilities and incorporeal resonances that might be strung between their pandemic coping mechanisms of *qigong* and psychoanalysis respectively. Pettman and Nappi's capacity for locating commonalities and divergences across these different practices of care—alongside their own specifically-lived meshings of world-and-self—makes for a compelling and generative conversation. As they probe their way toward crosswired potentials for healing and coping, the transference/countertransference between the analyst and analysand joins with the subtly shifting energies of *qigong* to convey insight into the living tissue of inter-/extra-human relation. Producing between them, experientially and conceptually, something akin to what Gilbert Simondon meant by 'transindividuation' but also spun slightly otherwise, Pettman and Nappi enact a collaborative feeling-thinking aloud where affect is ever-present, on the line, palpable.

—Greg Seigworth, co-editor-in-chief

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DOMINIC: In this conversation we're going to stage a brief encounter, as it were—or non-encounter—between two very different practices: *qigong* and psychoanalysis. We do this because we have a hunch that there's something to be gleaned by putting incommensurable elements or approaches together; especially when both are ways of thinking about embodiment (as well as embodying thought). So to say, we're going to see if there's an overlap in the Venn Diagram here between *qigong* and psychoanalysis, when it comes to questions of health, mindfulness, somatic focus, practices of attention, organology, and so on.

Surprisingly, perhaps—given your expertise in histories of Chinese medicine, and my familiarity with Freud's legacy in critical theory—you will be speaking on behalf of psychoanalysis and I will be piping up for *qigong*. We do this because we're both complete newbies at both disciplines (if we can call them that, for convenience), and are keen to get more of a handle on what we perhaps only now sense intuitively.

Does that sound right to you? Any opening preambles or gambits?

CARLA: Sounds right! I hesitate to claim expertise in anything, these days—I'm not sure I'm terribly interested in expertise as a kind of relation—but it is true that I've researched and written about Chinese medicine and its histories for a couple of decades. And I should be clear that my engagement with psychoanalysis is as a patient/practitioner, and not as a theorist per se. (That bears mentioning here because I find that what I have to say about analysis as experience, and what colleagues who have studied but not experienced analysis have to say about things, are often quite different.)

DOMINIC: Very good! In *qigong*, one of the first things a novice learns is 'the grand opening.' In this gesture, you lift your arms mindfully from your sides—as if making a vertical snow angel—before continuing the motion over your head and into a prayer position. This movement is designed to open the body to the *qi* energy that is all around us all the time: to make the body more receptive to the flows in the environment before embarking on any specific routine. The grand opening is designed to counter the habitual instinct of the body—of the self—to turn inward on itself; to operate in a way distinct from, and sometimes even against, the world. So it's in that spirit that I'm opening this dialogue with you today. I'm inviting a whole host of forces into the room, through the wires of the internet, and between us, so that we can explore some ideas that I instinctively feel are connected, but currently lack the clarity or knowledge to join the dots.

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As already intimated, we have a hunch that there are potentially illuminating resonances to be found between *qigong* and psychoanalysis, even as they emerge in very different contexts, and for very different reasons. (Although maybe not *quite* so different, when you boil it down.) I came to *qigong* quite recently, as a coping mechanism during the pandemic. I've been practicing at least ninety minutes a day, however, and credit it with keeping me sane and relatively healthy (*touch wood*) during the extended lockdowns and subsequent para-agoraphobia. I also know that you decided to embark on a psychoanalytic journey in that fateful year of 2020, and you also credit this form of therapy with similar salutary powers.

(As a side-note, I must admit, to this point in time, I've resisted the analyst's couch. For one thing, I'm cheap; and for another, I'm from an Anglo-Australian background in which it is implicitly understood that leasing one's mind to the latest iteration of Viennese witch-doctory still seems exotic and unnecessary. [Especially as my own tribe has no truck with 'feelings.'] By the same token, I understand you are also resistant to practicing something like *qigong*, at least on your own steam, since you are a specialist in Chinese history and culture—especially early modern Chinese medicine—and it would just be too on the nose to participate in something so close to your expertise.)

In any case, let's overthink this situation together.

Since I've been reading psychoanalytic texts for many years now, I would enjoy testing my own pet theories against your own real-world experience of the practice; just as I think it would be intriguing to test my hopelessly naive grasp of Chinese thought—through the prism of *qigong*—against your deep knowledge of the terms and correspondences that I so casually toss around in my mind, as I close my eyes and soak up the energy of the cosmos.

Some of the guiding questions for this back-and-forth might therefore be something on the order of: 'What does the *qigong* conception of the body have to say to the psychoanalytic account of the mind, and vice versa? What happens when we map the terminology of one 'philosophy' on top of the other? What assumptions does each orientation make about what a body (or mind) is—how it works, what it needs, what it does, and what threatens its functionality or integrity? What might the 'organology' of Chinese thought have in common with a post-Freudian understanding of 'healthy' somatic subjectivity? And how might these very different practices nevertheless have something productive or revealing to say to each other? (or better yet, to say to *us*, in a kind of unusual—yet suggestive—duet?')

I'm sure you have your own questions, just as I'm sure that other questions will emerge during the course of our conversation. But just as there is a niche sub-genre of academic reflections on 'the dialogue between philosophy and poetry' or 'the encounter between art and ontology,' and so on, I sense—perhaps selfishly—that I'll learn something important from constellating key terms such as 'practice,' 'discipline,' 'body,' 'mind,' 'affect,' 'organ,' 'narrative,' 'trauma,' 'transfer,' 'energy,' 'identity,' 'symptom,' 'health,' and so on, with you, and through your specific way of threading such concerns in daily life. (Or what passes for daily life in the time of long social covid.)

To start with something more concrete, can you maybe get the ball rolling by saying something about your first year of psychoanalysis; why you finally decided to give it a try, and what has struck you most about the process?

CARLA: A tarot card made me cry. It was late September in the midst of the first year of the pandemic, and I was on Zoom experiencing my very first Tarot reading, and we got to the Two of Swords and the floodgates opened. This was my first clue that everything was not, in fact, 'fine' and I was also not 'doing fine,' despite my efforts to convince myself otherwise. (I was very extremely highly-not-fine, and I'm not sure if that was obvious to others, but it was so inconvenient to admit it to myself that I simply buried my not-at-all-fine-itude in sensory comforts and coping strategies.) And so when a friend texted soon after, mentioned that her psychoanalyst had a rare opening for new patients, and asked whether I was interested, there was no question. Sign me up.

This was all new for me. And we were doing it in a pandemic. And so after an initial Zoom to set things up, we started speaking on the phone—my analyst and me—three times per week, and my 'couch' was my guest bed or my comfy chair or my desk chair, and I occasionally had to answer the door and move boxes of groceries or whatever into the house during a session. So my experience of psychoanalysis thus far has been shaped by those material conditions.

We started with the Two of Swords, to try to understand what was happening there in my reaction to it. This was my 'grand opening,' in a manner of speaking. And while it involved, as yours does in *qigong*, a pair of lifted arms, in the case of the card those arms are clutching swords, their lift representing not so much of an opening as a closing, a kind of paralysis, a turning inward. The woman with

the arms is seated, and she's blindfolded, and she is faced away from the flowing water just behind her. And I recognized myself in her, and so our task, early in my analysis, was also a kind of 'grand opening.'

It's hard to summarize the experience of the years that have followed the Two of Swords. I think I'll wind up turning aspects of that time over, for us to look at together, gradually in the course of the conversation. (Here are my cards! Come play with me!) But one of the most striking aspects of the experience, for me, has been an opening out to be able to look at my own past without immediately turning away from it and trying to move on. (I've learned, in the process, that I'm very good at going somewhere, that I know how to GO somewhere, but I still have a lot to learn about how to BE somewhere.) It's a kind of opening of the arms, inviting it all in, in a way that feels resonant with an invitation to the cosmic *Qi* to come flow into the body. Perhaps we can think of the past (of our own individual pasts, which are constantly being remade and coming into and out of being in the present) as a kind of cosmic and individual force, akin to *qi*…

DOMINIC: There are two swords in a foundational *qigong* routine, in fact. My first real lesson was in the *Yi Jin Jing* (which translates literally as 'muscle/tendon change classic'), which combines twelve distinct movements in a pre-defined order. Each movement is given a name, like 'pushing the mountain' or 'pulling the bull's tail,' and corresponds to a vital organ (which in turn represents a key emotion or affect). The seventh movement is called 'Drawing the Sword,' and you kind of squat down before pushing upward again, pulling an invisible sword out from an imaginary scabbard, located between your shoulder blades. You do this twelve times with your left hand, and then the same again with your right hand. After completing the motion, you close your eyes and 'nourish the *qi*' that you just created, visualizing, in this case, the bladder. As you picture the shining *qi*, energizing your bladder, you feel stagnation 'melt into progress.' Of course, as an academic, I can't help but pull at the threads of words and ideas, so my restless literal-mindedness often pops up like an obnoxious puppet. 'But what *constitutes* progress?' it asks, 'in a world in which the very notion seems to have stagnated—socially, historically, politically, and even temporally, in the time of lockdown?' Moreover, my mental pedant continues unhelpfully, 'what counts as *progress* when it comes to the personal sphere? Progress on one's work? On one's spiritual path?' . . . My teacher does not give much philosophical guidance here, which is probably the right way to go about it—to leave the interpretation of the concept to each practitioner. For indeed, the question of whether we are making objective progress or not matters little, since it's hard to find the right criteria to

measure this. (Especially since most metrics are extremely coercive and normative, if not outright dubious.) So the important thing, on a personal level, is to *feel* that one is making progress; that one is not stuck in a rut, or merely a creature of increasingly entropic habit.

So we're already circling a couple of themes that I'd like to tease out further as we talk, and it might be helpful to name them at this point. One is the borderline between the self or individual, and the wider world: even the cosmos. This borderline can be—like many border zones—a site of tension or conflict; while also helping to illuminate both entities that sit so adjacent to each other. What work do we need to do to maintain this border or boundary in contrast to crossing it? And how does this border help maintain—or, alternatively threaten—the relation? In both *qigong* and therapy, there is a constant toggling—both in the subject and the process itself —between hyper-personalization and depersonalization. We are revealed as very much intimately ourselves, while simultaneously being revealed as extremely generic, and subject to the same forces and flows as everybody else. (A realization that can be either insulting or liberating, depending on your state of mind.)

The second theme is a kind of 'organology' of health or wellness, in these two contrasting traditions. *Qigong*, as I sketched above, is extremely organ-centric. The topography of the body is mapped very much by 'organic' landmarks, and diagrammed between them. (And as anyone who has received acupuncture or reflexology knows, different organs are mapped on to the various points and meridians that span the body, like an invisible subway map.) Psychoanalysis is a very different approach, of course, but it is also acutely aware of how disease or disturbance can be manifested via certain organs, which themselves are forever at the mercy of the great, locked, and chaotic control-room of the mind (especially the unconscious mind.) I'm interested in the ways in which these two different forms of healing praxis 'read' the body, and interpret its various gestures, blockages, flows, and architectures.

CARLA: These thoughts are so timely, for me, and thank you for them. I'm thinking a lot about organs these days. As I write this, my mother was recently diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer. It all happened rather suddenly—the diagnosis, I mean, and also the fallout from it—and we're all stumbling around trying to process it and do whatever comes next and be what we need ourselves and each other to be. We're not very good at it, yet. It's hard, and painful, and

clumsy, and messy. And the first days of conversations with the doctors who were doing tests on my mother were strewn with organs: Where has the cancer spread? Where can they see it? Can they break off bits of my mother to touch it? What is a pancreas anyway?

This kind of experience connects you to people. (That first day, touching down at Newark Airport to see my family after not having traveled—not even a bus!—for more than a year and a half in the pandemic, I felt the deepest sense of connection with the other people walking through the airport, washing over me and through me like a wave, a sense that we were all dealing with, had dealt with, would eventually deal with loss and death and tragedy, and it was something profound and beautiful and moving.) You tell people what's happening, and you learn about others' experiences with cancers, with loss. And because there is now a multigenerational history of pancreatic cancer in my family, I'm now understanding my own body, my organs, as they are connected to those of the other women in my family: my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, all living and dying with pancreatic cancer. My sister's organs and mine, siblings in an adventure we're now embarking on as we learn about genomic counseling. There's this sense of specific somatic connection with the women who came before you and the women living beside you...and a fear of the same, and an effort to separate your body, your organs, from whatever toxic net is trying to draw you in.

I've been talking a lot, in psychoanalysis, about the way I'm processing all of this as a physical experience. The way I'm feeling the inside of my body as a congested space, swampy, strewn with a kind of phlegm. Thinking about the difference between digestion (the way I had framed my goal for processing these experiences), and congestion (the way I actually felt inside my body): the one a kind of integration and metabolism into the self, the other a bodily response to a sense of invasion by things that aren't meant to be inside you. Maybe my body is having an allergic reaction to the ghosts of past traumas experienced by the women who came before me. Maybe it's a manifestation of a kind of boundary between myself and the wider cosmos, myself and my own history (the history of my family), where that boundary is marked by a visceral reaction to the ghosts of organs that aren't supposed to be there. What do you do when you feel that your insides are being haunted by organs that aren't your own? And that your body is mounting a defense against them? And that the effluvia of that defense is filling you up and sticking you in place? (Is that a kind of stuckness? What does 'progress' out of that state look like?)

In my psychoanalysis so far, we have never talked very much about dreams, and this experience is somehow changing that. I'm dreaming of damp, swampy houses, of mildewy fabric and furniture in disarray, of ambivalent senses of home, of the inevitable loss that comes with a sense that you belong somewhere, to someone, with someone.

I'm wondering about the dreamscapes that accompany your qigong experience, and I'm struck by the contrast between the well–ordered choreography of your *qigong* experience, and the swamp and chaos that my psychoanalysis is trying to guide me into and through.

DOMINIC: As you know, I'm terribly sorry about your mother's diagnosis —far more sorry than the phatic conventions of commiseration require. Indeed, this touches directly on one of our themes: the extent to which one person's grief or sorrow is shared by those who care about them. I have never met your mother. Through this one degree of separation, however, I have become aware of a kind of invisible postpartum umbilical cord that suddenly connects all three of us. The body, in other words, is never limited to the physical organism, but extended into psychic, empathic space.

Otherwise, that's a beautiful experience —in Newark, of all places! What an unexpected location for an almost mystical epiphany. The way you describe this sudden and profound sense of connection to arbitrary, generic humanity reminds me of a neologism that's gaining popularity: *sonder*. We can trace this term to John Koenig's (2021) *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, where it is defined as, "the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk" (123). Sonder is thus the inverse of what the young folks are starting to call, MCS, or 'main-character syndrome'—a default mode for most of us natural narcissists.

In any case, these recent experiences of yours are prompting me to really ponder the *qigong* concept of *san jiao*, which was explained to me as the organic 'cling–film' that holds the organs together, inside the body, and also acts as a kind of medium or conduit for these same organs to communicate, and work together. (In so-called

Western medicine, we would call *san jiao* the fascia.) There's a special movement, as part of the *qigong* routine —called 'crouching tiger'—to encourage the *san jiao* to transition from a state of fragmentation into one of cohesion and harmony. I wonder, then, if we might think of affect as a kind of psychosomatic *san jiao* or fascia, holding people close, and in place—so they don't jumble around like a bunch of loose potatoes—but that also works to keep each individual distinct from each other. (For you can't have communication without at least some form of minimal separation or distance.)

Psychoanalysis is replete with instances of people *projecting* themselves outside of themselves, and often even losing themselves in the process, inside an/other. I'm thinking here, especially of that mysterious mental-emotional catapulting operation known as *cathexis*, where we launch our intangible selfhood like a projectile into the heart of the being of the privileged other. Hence we fall in love, just as we bungee jump into affection. For the Freudian, the patient's integrity and autonomy are both always at stake, and also forever in question.

Clearly metaphors are decisive here, as they are everywhere, since metaphors orient and structure our thinking. For Freud, the subconscious was a seething cauldron, and the memory, a mystic writing pad. For critics of Freud, his method described little more than a sad family drama, trapped in the limited gestures of a kitchen-sink theater. For *qigong*—or at least for the form of *qigong* I'm familiar with—the body is often described as a sponge, floating in an ocean of *qi*, and soaking up the universal energy. Neither psychoanalysis nor *qigong* qualify as a science, though it's possible to earn qualifications in both. But they both attempt to free the spirit or psyche (which literally means 'soul,' let's recall) from stagnation, repetition, suffocation, and repression. They both seek to encourage a healthy circulation of mental and physical energy from various blockages, in the body and mind. (So to say, both psychoanalysis and *qigong* are fundamentally anti-Cartesian, since they understand the mind and body to form a mobius strip.)

I'll have to think about dreams a little more, since I don't have a ready response at this moment. (My dreams are often so banal and so obvious as to be caricatured, to the point where I feel it's probably redundant to have them analyzed.) But obviously your swampy sub-psyche is telling you something important about the topography of your soul (vis-à-vis the souls of those close to you). Indeed, you're reminding me now how many dreams I have where solid ground gives way to a dangerous body of water!

But to return to dry land for a while, I am interested in correspondences, and the vital role they play in both these approaches to human hermeneutics and intervention. For while Freud famously quipped that "a cigar is sometimes just a cigar," the wry humor relies on the assumption that most of the time a cigar is precisely something else. The shrink is thus ever on the lookout for errant objects, saturated in buried meanings. A shoe may correspond to a feeling that corresponds to a time that corresponds to an atmosphere that corresponds to an event that corresponds to a symptom that in turn adds up to an unconscious and internalized libidinal economy. Whereas in *qigong*, an organ corresponds to an affect that corresponds to a color that corresponds to a movement that corresponds to a symptom that adds up to a suboptimal holistic flow. (Or lack of flow.)

Given your deep dive into early modern Chinese medicine, do you see any suggestive parallels between these types of psychosomatic correspondences? Or is it simply misguided to compare and contrast them? Is this merely apples and oranges? . . . Moreover, is there anything inevitable or 'objective' about the way that certain organs are mapped onto certain affects or symptoms? In our own old European legacy, we still think of courage as somehow located in the gallbladder, or melancholy in the spleen. Just as leeches are making a comeback in some modern hospitals, since they do in fact have excellent blood-congealing and cleaning properties, might there be something actually, empirically *true* about some of the old humoral understandings of the body?

CARLA: I love the idea of affect as a kind of fascia that holds people close. And in my experience of the history of Chinese medicine, the kind of correlative correspondence that you mention (with a symptom correlated with a color, a season, an organ, etc., often subsumed under the rubric of the '5 Phases' or *wuxing*) also acts as a kind of fascia that does that. The *wuxing* might be understood as a kind of cosmic fascia, holding not only people but all things under heaven (as the saying goes) close, in a sense. And insofar as *qigong* is efficacious as a healing practice, it relies on that fascia as substrate for its effects.

If understood that way, then both *qigong* and psychoanalysis might free the psyche, as you put it, by grounding or rooting it within a context of relationships that the practitioner/patient finds themselves within: in the one case with the cosmos and everything inside of it, in the other case with the analyst and a storytelling fabric of people, objects, experiences, and ideas from the past, present,

and future. In both cases, the self is what it is only and always as it emerges from a system of constantly metamorphosing relations with others, where the possible metamorphoses are bounded by certain rules or norms that govern the entities in the system.

In my experience, the frequency of psychoanalytic meetings (3-4 times per week, every week, for years) is crucial for making that possible in an analytic context: people without experience in analysis are always shocked by how often I meet with my analyst. And if your model for psychotherapy looks like meeting with your therapist for an hour every three weeks, I get it: psychoanalysis sounds like a part-time job. And it is a huge commitment of time and attention. But that frequency is necessary in order to collaboratively make the tissue, the fascia, that allows the work to be done. And that work extends to not only how you experience the relationship between your thoughts, or your experience of your relationships, but also how you inhabit your physical body. So I think there's a kind of correspondence at work that shapes things at the level of organs, there, too.

DOMINIC: The idea of analysis itself building up the 'tissue' (discursive, affective) necessary for the continuation and deepening of the process itself intrigues me. As already mentioned, through the power of inwardly-focused attention—and the corresponding movements—fascia allows all those separate organs to function fully as a *qi*-infused organism. A lot of the practice is about reinforcing proper relations, scales, and boundaries. When meditating, we are encouraged to think of our body as a sponge, floating in an ocean of *qi*. We are to invite fresh infusions of this universal energy into our system. When practicing as a group in 'real life,' we might also practice 'group healing' in which the famous 'ommm' sound links everyone in the room, in a kind of improvised chord/cord; or—better—sonic fascia. On the one hand, you are 'working on yourself' as it were—piece by piece (even as each piece is indexed to the whole). But on the other hand, you are working with alterity: other people, the environment, the weather, the time of day, the time of year, the world mood, and so on. At the end of the day, however, you must do 'the grand closing' to 'seal in' all the good *qi* that you just borrowed from the universe. (An action which leaves you still tingling with a sense of recent cosmic connection, but also a re-traced sense of subjective distinction from the General Flow of Things.)

In the case of psychoanalysis, there is a lot of talk about transference and counter-transference, where the analysand projects a lot of 'stuff' onto the analyst, which in turn is reflected or refracted back in various ways. But if we continue the fascia metaphor or conceit, there arises a question to what degree the process might be considered to be transindividual, or co-constitutive. As we may ask with

all intimate, dynamic relationships, is there a kind of 'inter-body' or 'meta-mind' being created between two monads . . . a bridge that recreates or redefines the two sides of the bank that it is spanning in real-time (so to speak)?

You've written a book about a foundational medical text, and the way that pharmacological knowledge is produced through discourse; through narration, and the act of cataloging, writing, describing, and so on. Your latest book ingenuously stages a meeting between a group of translators who lived and worked in different contexts, but whom—thanks to your own methodological innovation—are now exhumed and learning from each other. (Or arguing with each other, or both.) These are all forms of transduction, I suppose, or transindividuation.

Can you say a bit more about how your 'philosophy' of knowledge creation and sharing also influences the way you approach 'the talking cure'? Can you see connections to your key themes or techniques, when it comes to making sense of your own past, rather than the past of, say, 'China' (considered, falsely, of course, as a unified entity). Does your habit of teasing at the loose threads also apply when thinking about your own history, on the level of the self, of the individual?

CARLA: As a historian, one of the most interesting aspects of the psychoanalytic process, for me, is how it throws into relief the relationship between something we might call 'the past,' and my own past. This is where scale becomes interesting. My own past comes into being, as object, insofar as it's shaped by the past of my family: not only the scales of the dialogic (in terms of the psychoanalytic encounter) and the familial are relevant here, but also the generational becomes a vital scale to think with, especially when you're looking at histories of trauma and the way they shape histories of selves, families, generations.

Time and its materiality become a crucible for a kind of alchemy with individuals and their combinations, and this creates what we retrospectively identify and understand to be 'history' at these scales. The historical individual exists in, and is created by, time. And we know that time works differently at different points in the generation of an individual: think of the difference between the temporality of germination, for example, in contrast to the temporality of growth and harvest, in vegetal histories. Germination, growth, maturity, harvest: these are distinct ways of bringing forth an individual through energetic and material relations in time. And so, if history is an art of storytelling in time, and time itself doesn't

stay stable in the course of the history of a single plant or person, it follows that making sense of the past (my past, our past) at different scales is always going to be a creative and provisional act. There is no one true story. There are ways of getting history wrong, but there aren't, I would argue, ways of getting it right. The psychoanalytic encounter seems to work along those lines: it gives a patient access to experiences of time that might otherwise remain distant or unknowable, and access to a collaborative storytelling partner that helps to identify and relate objects and individuals that swim in those temporalities.

I keep using the term 'scale' here, but perhaps that deserves some rethinking, too. Like time periods and historical eras, which don't exist of themselves but instead serve as tools to work with and lenses to look through when we try to tell stories about the past and its relationships to the present and future (…whatever and whenever those are, as I'm not sure the present or future exist in any real, experienced way…) maybe scale functions similarly. The self, the family, the generation, the nation, the planet: we can think of all of these as simply ways of relating and combining individuals in time, if we understand 'individual' to be something like the object in our immediate view that we recognize as an object when we look, and that disappears when we look away.

DOMINIC: This makes me think of those grueling training regimes and rituals that one might encounter in Shaolin Temple, and other such disciplinary centers. Time becomes the medium of literally in-corporating techniques that both enhance the powers and sensitivities of the self, while evacuating the snares and false detours of the ego. The more organically you can embody a tradition—connected by the fascia of pedagogy—the more successfully you simultaneously shed and honor your own singularity. Perhaps if *qigong* and psychoanalysis were indeed personified, and encountered each other while walking in opposite directions in the forest, they would recognize a certain *yin* within each other's *yang*. Psychoanalysis might walk on understanding itself as a martial art of the mind, while *qigong* would intuit itself as a dynamic, physical form of psychoanalysis. (More a case of 'psycheanalysis,' involving the whole soul.)

I suppose I'm circling a couple of inchoate thoughts or questions: the first being something about the extent to which psychoanalysis is not the narcissistic, individualistic indulgence it is so often caricatured to be, but rather something much more transductive, collaborative, or (however you want to imagine this) 'pluralizing.' Does it play with, stretch, test, etc. the borders of self—whether historically, in the present, or in a hoped-for future—in order to help reinforce the potential and flourishing of the individual? Or is there a larger cohesive project going on, on a different scale or register?

The second inchoate thought or question is related, in terms of the vulgar distinction between body and mind. Again, psychoanalysis is considered to prioritize the mind, even as many symptoms present themselves through the body. (How could they not?) . . . But might there be a way to be a bit less blunt or Cartesian about health, and not divide things up as, on the one side, physiological health, and on the other, mental health. Of course there are many practitioners, in many traditions, that consider themselves 'holistic' because they see a person as a mobius strip, when it comes to the impossibility of definitely separating the mind from the body. But have you found that you think of your body differently since you started analysis? Might certain physical symptoms or manifestations (or even pathologies) be something other than an effect caused by a psychic blockage or trauma?

(I'm thinking how Funkadelic have a song: "Free your mind and your ass will follow" . . . but Freud's legacy—especially Wilhelm Reich—sought to flip this equation in certain ways . . . "free your ass, and your mind will follow.")

CARLA: So, I'll start by saying that I definitely don't experience psychoanalysis as a 'narcissistic, individualistic indulgence': as a human, a writer, and a historian, I really have experienced it as being vital to all three of those selves. There's something about the way vocalized language—and here I'm thinking of your 'sonic fascia,' as the voice is crucial—changes what/where/how the body is, how it's experienced, what its boundaries are, and who it encompasses.

(One really fascinating aspect of all of this, as I mentioned earlier, is that I began psychoanalysis via cell phone during the pandemic, and we've continued as such. I've never met my analyst in person: I've never been to his office. We talk about this aspect of our analysis, sometimes, and I think the COVID era of medical and therapeutic treatment has raised all sorts of new ways of thinking and practicing the relationship between the physical and virtual experiences of the body...and perhaps further undoing (or at least changing) what so many of us often assume to be a divide or difference between the virtual and physical. There's a lot you can do, in other words, just using the [tech-mediated] voice.)

I'm struck by your description of the *san jiao* as 'cling wrap,' and I'm thinking about whether and how that phenomenon translates to the analytic setting. I think, for me, there is an important kind of work that the practice of analysis does as a kind of bringing-together: not necessarily in creating a 'meta-mind'

or transindividual, because I do have a clear sense of the distinctness of analyst and analysand in that relation. But maybe there's another sense in which there is a kind of binding together in that analysis (for me) does help alleviate a sense of being alone in the world: you're always there with not only your analyst but also your past selves, the selves that emerge from your various relations...so what kind of binding is that? I think the conversation does become a kind of collaborative weaving, but when I think of fabric I think of openness and porosity, and when I think of cling wrap there's a kind of plastic closedness that doesn't quite work in this context. I'm not sure that it's the fabric (or fascia) that's important, so much as the weaving or tissue-forming process.

DOMINIC: Yes, agreed. The weaving process itself is key!

What we're calling fascia, or *san jiao*, has an extra-somatic equivalent; no less essential for being hard to see or grasp. This is a way of pointing to the various abstract, but consequential, tissues that scaffold and connect us: language, gesture, affect, mood, empathy, attention, love, bjork humor, media, technology, education, ideology, the social contract, the superego, architecture, and so on. Indeed, they don't just *connect* us, after the fact, but *create, shape, and generate* us in very literal ways—the synapses creating the nodes. (It's the task of media studies especially to log the distinctive affordances of each, so that we're not simply talking in vague, hot-swappable generalities.)

In this context I think about singing, especially singing with others. The voice is arguably the most intimate and personal part of ourselves: a sonic signature of our singularity. But it is also a way to weave ourselves with others to the degree that we lose ourselves; at least temporarily, and in the best sense. (So we can return to ourselves restored and re-energized.) In his book, *Morning Star*, Karl Knausgaard (2021) uses the example of a choir to illustrate his belated epiphany that, "Meaning wasn't in me, meaning wasn't in another, meaning arose in the encounter between us" (64). Another Scandinavian, Bjork, also equates singing with a literal bonding function, not just between mother and child, but also Icelandic citizens in general. (Or anyone interested enough to learn the songs.) For his part, and in a different register, the Reverend Al Sharpton puts this specific fascia into a more urgent and historical context, in the recent documentary, *The Summer of Soul*: "Gospel was more than religious," he notes. "Gospel was the therapy for the stress and pressure of being Black in America. We didn't go to a psychiatrist, we didn't go lay on a couch, we didn't know anything about therapists, but we knew Mahalia Jackson." This brings us back to psychoanalysis, suggesting that even lying on a sofa, and attempting to articulate one's personal pain, is a bodily

experience: to cease biting one's tongue, to let the larynx take the shape of your trauma (for everyone has trauma, to differing degrees), to sing this experience and burden into a different kind of exo-somatic being, is a soulful achievement. The question then becomes one of valence: how many connections can you cultivate and sustain—for what purpose, and for how long—between not only yourself and a therapist, but a choir, a community, a generation, and so on?

The question—or even mystery—that has obsessed me my entire adult life, is individuation. How does it happen? What stubborn private particles allow for what we call 'character' or even 'spirit,' in contrast to the generic nature or condition of being? How does singularity trouble or emerge from Giorgio Agamben (1990) called "whateverbeing"? And how does whateverness per se insist or persist in the individual? (An individual who is also, always already, "dividual," as Deleuze insisted). This is why I think the recent work on transindividuation is so important and fascinating. It allows a political critique informed by a deeper understanding of ontological condition. (And I mean 'political' in the sense of making a clear diagnosis of the challenges we face—challenges deliberately assembled and exacerbated, in many ways, by the elites—to hinder us living up to our potential as bodies, minds, souls, together). Freeing ourselves from tyranny—as those inspiring intellectuals in the 1960s and 70s saw—was not simply becoming Marxist, and seizing the modes of production, but also becoming neo-Freudian, in the sense of taking more control of the means of (self)-perception. (Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Frantz Fanon, early Wilhelm Reich, etc.)

In short, I wonder if we need to ultimately choose between Team Leibniz, in which the individual is very much a monad, withdrawn from any true communication or contact, or Team Spinoza, in which the individual is but an extension of the one indivisible substance . . . all different fungal shoots, connected to the same mycelium. Rather than toggle between self and world, or self and society, what about smaller units or sub-systems: the dyad, the polycule, the sense8, the phalanstery, and so on? (Something Roland Barthes (2013) became very interested in, later in his life—the 'medium-sized community.')

We all know, on a cognitive level, that we can't control the world, but we *can* control—at least to a significant degree—our relationship to it (something not quite captured by the word 'agency'). But *feeling* this knowledge, and incorporating it, living it, enacting it—well, that is another matter.

CAPACIOUS

One way we can create pathways to alternative futures is through language. If we can name something, we can bring various corollaries or iterations into being. This is one of the main lessons we're belatedly learning from Sylvia Wynter: that language is not merely cultural or symbolic but can literally penetrate and inhabit the body—and especially the neo-cortex—acting as a Trojan horse for racist reflexes, among other semio-physiological phenomena. This more-than-linguistic power of language is also one of the reasons why I have a high tolerance for Lacan's terrible puns, even in French. So to say, 'fasciaism' is a rather awkward term. But it could also name a counter-force to fascism. *Fasciasm*: a very different kind of connecting tissue that works on the body politic in non-exclusionary, compassionate ways.i

CARLA: I've gone through so many variations, over the years, of attempts to make sense of my own sense of individuality: where is it, how is it, where does it come from, what responsibilities does it entail. What conditions or circumstances—what contexts—drive us to feel that asserting our individuality is important, why do we seek to be recognized as individuals by the other, and in what does that individuality inhere: is it something that exists at a given point in time? Or is it necessarily diachronic, only emerging from, or as, a particular genealogy in time? (In other words, is my individuality always an ongoing process, resisting static description?).

I keep being drawn back to your image of the mycelium, that sometimes vast network out of sight that sends up the fruits that we see and recognize as (sometimes tasty, sometimes toxic) individuals. Am I just a fruiting body of something much larger and ultimately unmappable that holds me and forms me, that sends me out with one mission: send something out into the world, that it might land somewhere and itself become part of the mycelial network, and on and on... I find myself thinking, lately, amid the general mortality stuff marking the past year or so, of what it might be that I send off into the world before the fruit of me rots back into the ground to nourish the fungal fascia—is it a fungal fascia? And I keep coming back to this: be here, say what you have to say. That sounds so easy, doesn't it? So simple. And some of us find it so hard to authorize ourselves to do it.

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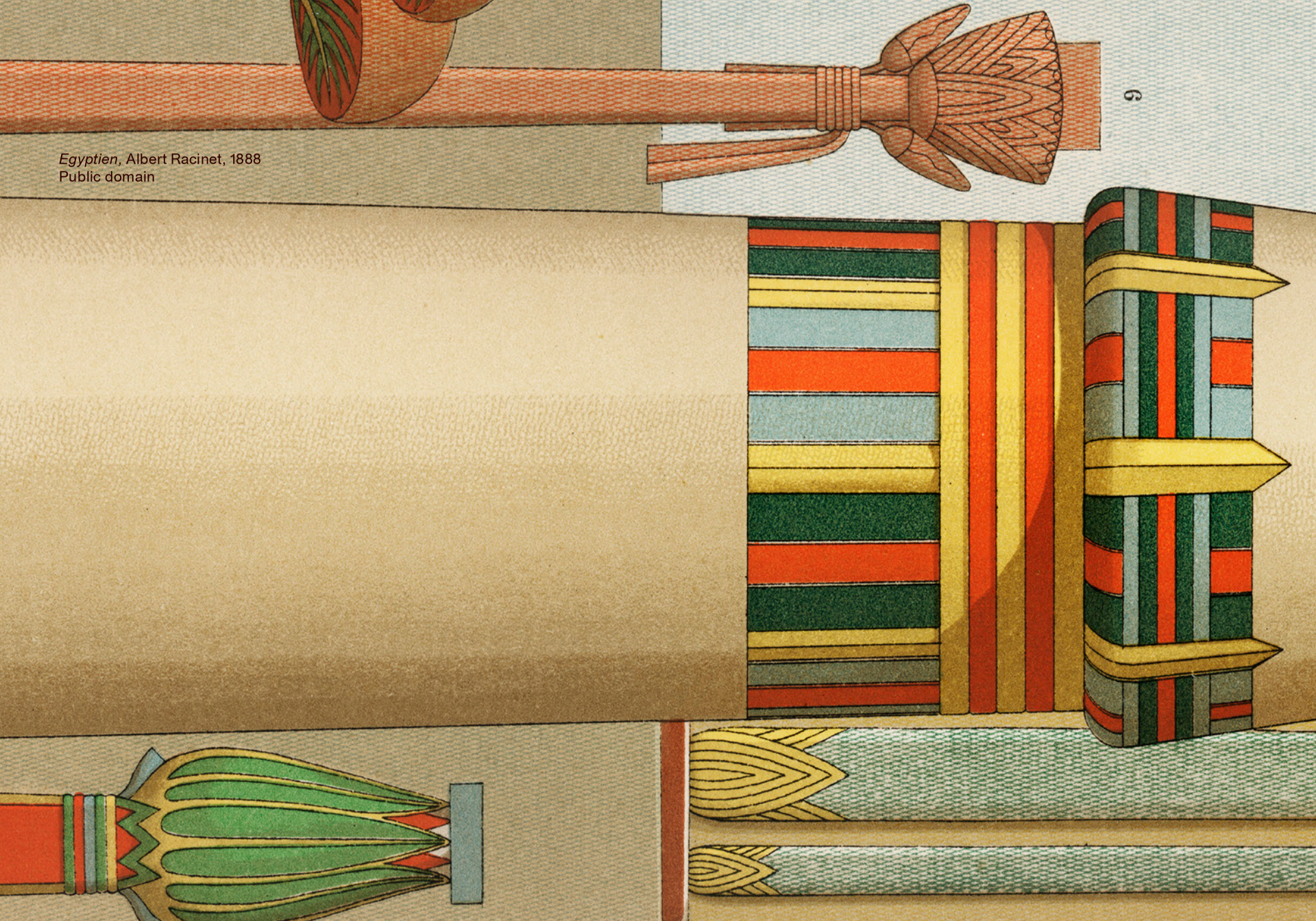

Egyptien, Albert Racinet, 1888
Public domain

I think he'd have done the same, Alana Brekelmans, 2019

THE FALL: AN AFFECTIVE METHODOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

While the impossibility of neutral observation has become a truism in ethnographic practice, ideals of ethnographic evidence frequently remain tied to a particular notion of 'being there' and bearing witness. This essay critically questions observation in ethnography, asking what happens when a researcher's ethnographic gaze fails due to overwhelming affective forces that collapse time and space. In doing so, it takes up Stephen Muecke's discussion of fictocriticism as an act of 'falling' into concepts and using percepts to climb back out. I ask what this iterative engagement with affective forces and critical theory means for focalising ethnographic accounts, and how one might come to position ethnographic practice and evidence as an ongoing process of thinking as affect and bodily disposition. I ground this discussion in an autoethnography of inter-personal and political affects in relation to narratives of belonging and nationalism in 'Outback' Australia.

KEYWORDS

ethnography, affect, focalisation, Australian studies, grief, failure

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The thesis examiner wants me to explain the gaps in my ethnography. "In the defense," She writes, "I'd like to explore questions of her autoethnographic practice and thinking as affect or bodily disposition." I had glossed over this in my methodology section, mentioning that my thinking about multiple contested belongings in Outback Australia had often resisted logical ordering, coming to me as affect, as poetics, as fleeting imagery, often long after the events. I had quoted Her, saying I'd wished I could have better captured "the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies" (Stewart 2007, 1-2). I had tried to acknowledge the gap, saying that in piecing together the logical ethnographic argument of a Ph.D. thesis, 'something' (Berlant 2007a, 2007b) had exceeded the structure: 'something,' I suppose She would say, that "throws itself together" (Stewart 2007, 1) in "the slippage, or gap, between sign and referent, event and meaning" (Stewart 1996, 26).

What I had to explain, then, was the fall.

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In an early draft of my methodology chapter I tried to write about it, the fall into the field on my first day in Northwest Queensland. It begins with me standing in the corner of the cattle yards on a blistering day, awkward in my brand-new work shirt and boots. The crew at the cattle station—what Americans might call a 'ranch'—were nervous about my presence. I was entangled with this station in a way that opened up gaps and fissures in simple narratives of land and legacy, and they knew it. It was the land that, in an act of state-sanctioned theft of Indigenous country, my great-grandfather had taken up over a hundred years before. It was the station that he had passed down to his son, and his, such that the place and my maternal family's name had become synonymous. But in all that had come to pass over the years I had not been there before, nor had I spent much time with my family, or worked with cattle since I was in my teens. Then there was also the question of what the hell I was doing. I was there to do work, but not the usual work of the socio-spatial assemblages of the station. I was there as an ethnographer, whatever that meant. After some discussion, the station owners, my aunt and uncle David and Loretta, had decided that I would not partake in the 'yard work' of branding, dehorning, and vaccinating calves, but that I could observe the process from some distance. So, I stood by the timber railings, notebook in

hand. The part of me that wanted to belong in rural Australia felt rejected, useless, in a way. The part of me that wanted to belong in anthropology hoped I could work out what to take notes on. All the while I felt haunted by the sedimentation of spoken and unspoken narratives of that place, and my own relationship with the ghosts of the past.

The cattle yards were set up so that, through the opening and closing of various sliding gates, the Brahman calves would be ushered up a 'race' and into the 'crush', that is, a small crate that would restrict the calf's movements. Most 'crushes' are manual and involve encouraging the beast forward until a lever can be pulled, sliding bars on either side of its neck to trap it. This is the type of crush that I had grown up using on the small rural property my mother had owned, that I would see on other properties in Outback Queensland, and that, playing the role of participant-observer, I would come to use myself. But David preferred to use a modern electronic setup. He told me that he'd seen an advertisement for the electronic crush on TV, where three beautiful young women, each with blonde hair, tagged and dehorned a calf at incredible speed. He'd reckoned that it looked like a pretty good investment.

The crew assembled in their places. There was my aunt and uncle; Bett, my older cousin who lived and worked on the family property; Emily, a young woman employed for the season while she decided whether or not to go back to medical school; and Martin, a teenager chasing big dreams of being a 'ringer'.[1] I watched the first gangly brahman calf with too-big ears step forward into the crate. Bett pressed a button and with an electronic whir, the sides of the crush closed in on the calf, then rotated to pick the calf up and tip it onto its right side. It bellowed, tongue lolling from the side of its mouth, hooves paddling the air. The workers sprung into action. Emily administered a vaccine into the calf's rectum. Loretta noted its details down for DNA testing. Martin chose a plastic ear tag and yelled the number out to David, who picked up the associated numbered irons from the furnace and held the hot brand to the calf's flank, burning the numbers into the flesh. At the same time, Beth pierced the tag into the calf's ear. She picked up the 'dehorners'—large pincers used to cut the nascent horn from the calf's head. As the dehorners clenched shut the calf bellowed. Blood spurted out in a high fountain from the incision and onto Bette's shirt. In a moment, David had pressed the button again and the calf was tipped back to vertical, placed on its hooves. The gates opened. With a shake of the head, the calf trotted back to the herd, trailing blood behind it. "Just like a little kid scraping its knee," David said to me, grinning.

The morning continued like that. If I focused amid the flurry of motion, electronic whirring, opening and shutting of gates, squirting, bellowing, yelling of numbers, and snipping, I could hear the sizzle of hair and skin, smell the acrid burning flesh, the heady scent of blood and horn.

Mostly I was struck by the matter-of-factness of it all. It was a violence that was completely ordinary, wholly to be expected, something I'd seen in other yards long before in my childhood. By the time they were done, the ground beneath my boot soles was sticky with blood, the scent metallic in the mid-morning heat, and I was vaguely surprised to find myself bored.

After the branding and dehorning, I joined Beth, Loretta, and Emily to 'mother up' the newly branded calves. Beth and Loretta rode on horseback amongst the herd of heifers while Emily and I worked on foot in the next yard. We'd shoo a calf through the gate and call out its new brand number, then Beth and Loretta would observe which cow the calf went to and write down the corresponding cow's number. By doing this, they were able to keep a record of which numbered calf belonged to which numbered cow. I tried to do my job of ushering the calves through the gate but I kept getting in the way. Eventually, I was asked to stand aside, once again relegated to the fence-line to observe.

There a peculiar panic seized my body. It started as a tingling in my limbs, then grew to a heaviness in my chest. In the dust of the cattle yard, so similar to the dusty cattle yards at the property on which I'd grown up, an old memory had emerged. It was the kind of visceral, elusive charge that could be nostalgia or trauma or just an ordinary moment dislodged from temporality that comes to take control of your body. My heart raced. My vision tunneled. I held the rail for support and breathed deeply. What happened next is a blur. Maybe it was the blood I'd just seen, the heat, the fatigue from the two long days' drive to get there, the confusion of not knowing what to do, a jolt of the past, a deep melancholia. Maybe it was something that wasn't mine but an inherited *something* that came from the stories of pain and heartache, drought and alcoholism, land and longing, tied to that place. Maybe it was a combination of it all. Whatever it was, at that moment the world began to slide away into absence.

The other women found me on the ground, passed out amid the dust.

They bundled me into the old Suzuki that had no doors and a cracked windscreen. As I came to, I protested that I was fine and that I should stay and keep taking notes. They ignored me. After that, I was not allowed to work in the yards at the station again.

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In a paper entitled 'The Fall: fictocritical writing' Stephen Muecke (2002) asks what it means to fall into a viscerally felt idea. Muecke draws upon the Deleuzian distinction between concepts and percepts. Concepts are what are used in and arise from criticism, circulating as a kind of currency. Percepts are the hard-hitting perceptions and affects that arise through art. They are singular and distinct. Muecke suggests that in fictocritical writing, a reader may be attracted by artistic percepts and then 'fall' into the concepts of criticism. This, he explains, is not a unidirectional process, because through acts of engaging with art, we can fall again and again. We fall for the art, but through the things we learn in criticism, we may climb back out, aware of the percept but willing to fall all over again.

I first read Muecke's paper on my way out to the field, sitting in a caravan[2] parked amid horse stables at my father's small property, awaiting ethics approval so I could begin interviews. It was probably the longest I had spent with my father in a decade, but I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn from him about my fieldsite in Outback Queensland where he had lived and worked when he was young, and where he had met my mother. Over 'smoko',[3] I would sit with him on the 'verandah'[4] overlooking his paddocks and ask him questions about 'Outback culture.' In response, he would shrug or mumble a few words, then go back to staring into the middle distance. Most afternoons I'd retreat to the caravan to read, telling myself theory would prepare me for what I was about to encounter. I remember breathing in the dusty air and scent of livestock as I highlighted passages from Muecke's paper. I liked how it was written. I liked the ideas. But in hindsight, I didn't really get it. I had to fall myself.

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It was July 2019 when I initially tried to write about my experience of falling in the field, two years after it had happened. I had reached something of a crisis point in my research, in that I no longer knew what I was writing about. I had gone out to the field to do something about stories and the existential role of these stories in people's lives. I'd pitched it to the university as a reimagining of the 'bush yarn', a sub-genre of Australian nationalistic folktales told in rural regions, with strong parallels with the American Wild West genre. I suggested that we

needed to critically re-evaluate the role these stories played in a time where the environments, identities, and projects that frequently formed a central part of these narratives were contested. But by 2019 I'd come to realize another reason for choosing to study Outback Queensland was more personal, and probably had to do with my own deep and ambivalent feelings about rural Australia. In going 'out West' to the Outback I hoped to grapple with an imagined origin place in the nationalistic grand narrative—a settler-colonial chronototope associated with the impossible 'out there' and 'back then' (See Rose 2004). But it was also something of an origin point of my own existence. I wanted to follow narrative traces that were also in my own flesh. That would probably explain why I spent most of the fieldwork crying rather than observing. Why else do fieldwork in a place where my great-grandfather had invaded Indigenous lands, the place in which my mother had grown up, and where my father had ventured as a young man to partake in the activities he'd heard about in legend? Why else do fieldwork amid the kind of rural life I thought that I had long ago rejected, a culture in which I never felt I belonged? Why else engage with scenarios that would re-enact the embodied movements of my exiled inner child, continuously evoking some of my most shameful and deeply buried memories? Why else keep returning, again and again, to the question of what it means to call stolen land home, and how to tell a story of such a place?

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Joan Didion (2006, 185) famously wrote that "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." People like to use this quote to speak about the power of narrative to make sense of the world. But they often forget that Didion was probably more interested in the failure of narrative: "We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience…Or at least we do for a while." We take percepts and string them into plots and structures, forming concepts that might lend some sense of order to a universe that constantly eludes explanation. But then we fall once again into the fragmentary moment.

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I was stuck (Cvetkovich, 17; 32). Unable to fall asleep, I lay awake turning over my conflicted emotions about how to represent the people and place I had encountered in my fieldwork. And so, years after my fieldwork, after months of spiraling around the same questions, I sat in my kitchen at 3 am to write what I thought might be an easy methodological anecdote about losing consciousness in fieldwork. I had hoped that in doing so I could open the door for a discussion of embodied observation, of how my own body and emotions interacted with the field, the bodies, and emotions of others, to produce an affect charged with tensions of memory and politics and identity. Riffing on Spinoza (1994, 155) I wanted to think through the fall in relation to questions of what a body can 'do'—or, 'in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 257). If my body failed and revealed my unbelonging in the scenario, the bodies of the workers demonstrated their sense of belonging in the work environment. The workers had moved together in productive unity, embodying a contemporary revisioning of the modernist grand narrative of 'The Outback Legend' (Ward 2003), where brawn, efficiency, and domination over animals unite with technical innovation. The body of the calf merged with both human and non-human movement in this moment, where the worker's care or violence against that body remains open for interpretation. Bodies, human and non-human, were in affective circulation with events, narratives, and ideologies.

I wanted to communicate that despite my attempts to introduce myself in the scene through a neutral ethnographic gaze, my body, and its affective connections betrayed me. It had collapsed into 'an infinite history of traces without an inventory' (Singh 2018, 18). There was a gap. I had tried to inhabit the role of the objective participant observer, but a confluence of some things—my queerness, my vegan-ness, my craziness, my left-wingness, the dust, the heat, the bellowing beasts, the memories—flooded my body. I fell. What had I let slip in that gap between sign and referent, event and meaning, where ethnographic observation failed and where, paradoxically, my presence as an observer was emphasized? What could be said of my own bodily traces in the dirt? I wanted to express that for all I had seen, or thought I had seen, for all I had been present for, *something* was absent in my writing. There were so many more moments my body had been flooded with intensities, queries, and paradoxical pulls, that I'd ended up covered in dust, unaware of what was going on.

I'd written up to the point where I'd lost consciousness when I got the phone call saying my father had died.

Figure 1. T*races: My father's hat and coat outside his home*, Central Queensland (2019)

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When I was an undergraduate student my lecturer in critical theory introduced Nietzsche's (See Nietzsche (1993 [1873]) concept of truth through the image of falling. Life, my critical theory teacher said, is mainly made up of metaphors and concepts, structures we use to make sense of things. But every now and again these concepts fail us. It is like when you go to take a step and realize the ground is not where you thought it would be. You feel an electric jolt through your body, a panic. Perhaps you try, unsuccessfully, to fight it. Perhaps you let go. Then there's the concept again, the ground beneath your feet. But, in between, you fall for an instant into something truer than truth.

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At the funeral, I placed my father's wide-brimmed 'cowboy' hat on his coffin with some eucalyptus leaves and hoped it wasn't too much of an Australian cliche. We played the theme song from *Lonesome Dove* because it was the only sad music anyone could really ever remember him listening to, and I tried not to think about the settler-colonial undertones of the film, of the notion of White pastoralists coming to 'tame the wilderness' in a frontier land, the way the story of the frontier reproduced in Westerns had been used in other settler-colonial contexts as far away as Australia to lend legitimacy to a narrative of settler belonging, and how both my father and I were a part of that narrative making.

After, at the pub, stories I had heard often about him took on new life, grew to mythic proportions, and circulated. Everyone wanted to talk about my father as the Outback legend. An anonymous person sent a floral arrangement of Australian natives that included a stock whip and branding iron. I was told of how my father was a 'true Aussie battler' who fought bushfires, forded flooded rivers, survived droughts, and broke in wild horses. I couldn't help but deconstruct the stories for their adherence to a settler-colonial narrative. I didn't point out that he never really saw himself that way, or that some of the stories were simply not true, or that his old *bushy*[5] *mates*[6] were finding sentimental comfort in the evocation of a nationalistic trope that was easier to grasp than the complexities of a real human being but was still just as full of paradox. Instead, I sat and drank with men in checked shirts and cowboy hats as they waxed nostalgic about the good old days of rodeos and horse breaking before their respective bustups. I imagined their bodies much younger, working amid the dust of a stockyard, and all the times they must have fallen in the dirt.

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Stories do, of course, do real work in the world. The anthropologist Michael Jackson (2013) argues that storytelling is a "purposeful action" where storytellers and listeners attempt to make sense of their individual, subjective, experiences in relation to the social, intersubjective, world. At the social level, sharing stories helps create a sense of solidarity within a group, thereby reaffirming a group's existence. At the individual level, one can use stories to recover a sense of agency and view oneself as an active subject in the face of events beyond one's control.

But sometimes, the power of stories rests in their ability to give images to a given moment. Joseph Russo (2022), writing of the particular kind of 'hard luck' stories men like my father's mates are prone to telling, suggests that stories are also what we turn to when we are 'stuck.' Rather than actively trying to reposition one's existential status or reclaim a sense of subjectivity, 'hard-luck stories trace the movement and resonance in the void left by life without a genre—the persisting of time and voice in the space of stuckness' (4). These are stories that point to the failure of those other stories we tell in order to live, repositioning the bodily traces of that failure into a series of sensations and images. Stuckness, writes Cvetkvovich (2012, 20) is an image that connotes the spatial, temporal, and bodily state of impasse.

If an impasse is a build-up of concepts that forces one to slow down or stop, maybe these moments of stuckness evoked by cowboys at a wake held in a pub in 'the Beef Capital of Australia' are where the cross-generational residue of nationalistic concepts and blood and booze and dirt has accumulated. I see this stickiness and then also the moment of coming unstuck as part of the interplay of concepts and percepts. Sometimes, we follow a percept, even a percept of 'stuckness', and all at once we fall into some new creative possibility. Then the stories start to build up all over again.

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Late that night after the last rounds we pried ourselves from the sticky floor of the pub. The men staggered out onto the sidewalk, walking shoulder to shoulder to keep each other from falling. I'd told my older cousin, the owner of a fuel trucking business with a brood of active kids and a drought-stricken farm somewhere else out west, that we would give him a lift back to his hotel. Exhausted, I sat in the

front passenger seat, fighting off nausea and dread, while the driver navigated the empty streets. Thinking of some sentimental memory of childhood, I turned to share it with my cousin. We had picked up the wrong guy.

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There is a period after sudden change where you try to make sense of things using a logical narrative structure. My father's partner spoke again and again of my father's fall. Him falling. Her trying to revive him. The long wait for the ambulance. The fact that none of it made sense. We had the story but no plot. A plot, Forster (1955, 86) writes, is different from a story in that in a plot 'the time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.' We'd talk about these plotless events over smoko, and again as we drank beers in the evening.

Perhaps looking for answers, we sorted through the old metal toolbox where my father stored his 'important things.' We lay the faded photographs of favorite horses and long-ago lovers and letters from banks like pieces of evidence or tarot cards to be read for some clue of the past or future, and which ultimately we were unable to decipher. I packed up his saddlery shed. Someone wanted to buy the 'useful' things, so I sorted the broken eye-glasses, ketchup bottles filled with glue, stolen mugs, scraps of leather, hand-written notes, ideas no one had ever got around to patenting, and rodeo buckles from the tools that still worked. I wondered what such an archive that spilled over with seemingly incongruous materialities and incommensurate domains said about life. Or about the archive for that matter.

In between, echoing my time at the property on the way out to the field, I would sit in the caravan in the horse stables and try to read the books and papers that, under some fundamental misunderstanding that grief might lend itself to productivity, I had taken from my office the day after I learned of my father's death. I had chosen the books because in my crisis of how to represent the strange, arresting experiences that formed gaps in my fieldwork I had remembered Muecke's paper about concepts and percepts, and wondered if reading anthropologists who used poetry and non-representational writing to think through ethnographic moments might help me give form to affect and bodily disposition. How had others attempted cartography of the gap, the something, the slippage, that occurs in ethnography?

I kept returning to Michael Jackson's (2018) assertion that 'space and time are not essentially different realities, but different ways of apprehending basic human experiences of relative nearness and remoteness, presence and absence' (122). What, I wondered, of those moments of collapse, when the dust of the stables smelled just like the dust of my childhood, of the dusty days spent with my father as we sat on the veranda, of the dust of my fieldwork? What of these gaps in time and space do I feel as I fall through in those moments?

The other book I had brought with me, Ronato Rosaldo's (2014) *The Day of Shelly's Death*, is a collection of poetry recounting the death of Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, the author's wife after she fell from a cliff during fieldwork in the Philippines. The fall itself is a gap in the text, focalized not through the eyes of those who saw it but through a recounting of another fall in the same place (8). What does this gap in a book retelling the fall some thirty years after the fact say of space and time in mourning? Or thinking? Or affect and bodily disposition? 'The material of poetry is not so much the raw event as the traces it leaves,' Rosaldo (102) writes.

I read this late into the night and considered what it all meant for my own experiences of being absent in the field and my father's absence. What story do we turn to, do we construct and reconstruct, from the traces—the 'vestigia'—of an absent event where the traces are not signs or images per se, but irreducible affects? What is the space and time of one's own embodied archive?

At dawn, the horse in the stable beside me would start pawing at the metal gate. Bang. Bang. Bang. Echoing into the frigid winter night. From within the caravan, I inhaled the dust and listened time and time again to the falling of hooves, thinking of the imprint it would make (See Spinoza 1994, 131).

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In another West across the world, E Cram (2022, 6) evokes "the nonlinear traces" of settler colonialism's "enduring materiality and sedimentation" through the notion of "land lines." Land lines, as "the ecological, energetic, and affective inheritance" of frontier construction, can be found in archives, museums, and narratives—those things that are collected to turn the dead into nationalistic tropes, half-knowledges that fill the living with *wanting*. But the trace is also in the land itself, in the places of collective memory and familial mythology, where violence has been waged,

Figure 2. *Archives: My father's saddlery before I packed it up*, Central Queensland (2019)

lives lived, and the metaphorical body of the state and the real bodies of individuals intermingle in systems of governance. The book traces land lines through these sites of memory and their violent inheritances, demonstrating ways in which attention to one's own bodily affordances and traces can resist colonial tendencies.

The book begins with a conversation between the author's father and the author. "You know", the author's father says, "they say if you really love this place, you have to bury your nose down deep and smell the blood in the soil" (xi).

When reading this, I laughed: how does one end up with their nose buried in the soil? How does one get back up again?

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After that, you could say I fell apart a bit. I returned to the city, ended a long-term relationship, stopped sleeping, and took to lying on the lino floor of my unfurnished subleased room because it meant I could fall no further. I tried going back to the university, but could make no sense of my field notes or what I had already written. All I had to show for ten months of fieldwork were collections of fragmentary moments about fragmented identities in a place that existed more tangibly in myth than reality. My ethnographic gaze had failed me. Or I failed it.

'You're telling me you didn't do real fieldwork?' my supervisor said incredulously when I confessed my fear that I had failed completely at capturing the bush yarns and events I'd set out to record. I wanted to tell him about the gap, the slippage, the feelings that flooded me so entirely with *something* that I was unable to do anything but feel. I wanted to tell him that it was all embodied archives without indexes, that the questions I wanted to interrogate were between the sense of being overcome and the time when you find yourself lying in the dust. Instead, I said that I suppose I hadn't done real fieldwork and that I should probably drop out of the course.

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In her metaphorical memoir, *Lying*, Lauren Slater (2000) recounts her experiences with epilepsy, or mental illness, or Munchausen's Disease, or all of those things. It is a strange kind of memoir, one that actively resists truth, objectivity, and teleology in favor of feeling. The unreliable narrator, Lauren, speaks of sensory forces that turn to the ruptures of seizure, leaving gaps in time and space and rendering truth

uneasy. As part of learning to live with her illness, she must learn how to fall; learning to fall properly protects an epileptic from unnecessary injury. While reading this text, readers too must fall into a memoir we are explicitly told is filled with lies. Midway through the text, the narrator addresses a potential publisher through numbered points, one of which requests that the text be sold as 'a book that takes up residence in the murky gap between genres and, by its stubborn self-position there, forces us to consider important things' (270). The list concludes:

> 18. Look here.
> 19. This is where I am.
> (Slater 2000, 277)

As readers then, we are asked to search for the focalizing narrator in the space between the text, the fall from line to line, somewhere amid the self-conscious theorizing and array of narrative elements deployed to demonstrate that theorizing.

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I didn't drop out of the doctorate program in the end. Instead, a senior academic asked for me to come to her office. She had heard I was struggling after my father's death. I said I wasn't sure it was so much the death as the fact that I hadn't really observed what I should have in the field. Instead of taking neat notes I had been overcome. I had, I kept saying, too many gaps in my data. And too many feelings in my body.

'I see you are feeling emotional about your fieldwork', she said. 'So write about those feelings.'

She gave me permission to fall.

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Following the publication of Bronslaw 'Father of Ethnography' Malinowski's diaries in 1967, there was a crisis of representation in anthropology (See Geertz 1988; Marcus & Clifford 1986; Rosaldo 1989). The field Malinowski wrote of in his journals was different from that he wrote of in his ethnography. His ethnographic gaze seemed split. This, combined with the post-structural zeitgeist, meant that the myth of the neutral ethnographic observer, to the extent it was still believed in, fell from favor.

And yet, despite some thirty or so years of disciplinary soul searching since then, in anthropology there is still some clinging to the truth of witnessing, to the idea that ethnography is some kind of rational act of observation that emerges from the field. The classic tale of our discipline is one that follows the participant observer from the early foibles of fieldwork, the misunderstandings, and the mistakes, to where they come to understand social life, eventually departing the field to write up something that weaves ethnographic narrative with analysis. An ethnographic truth or anthropological evidence rests in having been there, and having seen a particular happening. Generally, we don't like to talk about the gaps in the ethnographic gaze and the unreliable focalization of the narrative. But there are inevitably moments when our concepts and pre-existing narratives fail us. If ideas are, as Spinoza would have it, formed through the body and the body is always being affected, ideas form reflexively and iteratively in relation to multiple affects (See Pethick 2015, 50). Later we retrospectively piece something together, thinking with affects and bodily dispositions that arise in relation to, but often temporally and spatially distanced from, the field. Through a creative curlicue of ethnographic writing, we focalize it all as if from the observer we should have been. To quote Lauren Slater, 'we create all sorts of lies, all sorts of stories and metaphors, to avoid the final truth, which is the fact of falling' (2000, 325).

The final act of falling is the affective something, the felt experience, the embodied act of being overcome, such that the gaze fails and all one knows is a sense of a moment being 'thrown together' through bodily affiliations with disparate times and places. Some ethnographers (Hickey-Moody 2019; Lau 2008; Varley 2008; see also Halberstam 2011; Law 2004; Singh 2017) have come to engage with this fact of falling—the times when our gaze fails, becomes obscured, turns myopic—as an essential part of the ethnographic process. They advocate for ethnography focalized in relation to falling and failure.

In another vein, Russo (2017, 6) emphasizes the affective transmission of ethnographic observation, 'the interplay of simultaneous affective states: those that are observed and those that influence the trajectory of observation' as part of a process of contending with the flow of incommensurable elements that emerge in the making and unmaking of worlds. Here, the affective incommensurability and 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005) of worlds are central to ethnographic thinking as a means of grappling with the meeting of disparate social elements, power structures, ideologies, and affects. Importantly, this way of thinking acknowledges that

'affective transmission' (Brennan 2004) does not end after we exit the field. Rather, ethnography is an ongoing process of examining the incommensurate moments, theories, and gaps in the attempt to create some kind of story about a time and a place. To this, I'd add that it is a process that is necessarily embodied, with the ethnographic urge to do such grappling with a bodily disposition towards the world.

Viewed in this way, we fall, again and again, for the affective intensity where past and present and truth and fiction collapse into an arresting moment that always, always, exceeds the event itself. Sometimes, using concepts we can make our way out, only to fall again.

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For the Ilgongot of the Phillipines, there is a particular 'overwhelming force' that arises in grief. Ilgongot men told Rosaldo (1989) that this force can be dissipated through the act of ambushing a victim, cutting off their head, and then discarding that head. Dismissing this account as too simplistic, Rosaldo tried out a number of anthropological theories to explain the practice. It took him 14 years and deep reflections on his own engagement with such an affective 'force' of grief to really understand what they meant. His thinking about this affective force which had no translation in English had to be affective and bodily. Ethnographic truth here resided not in unwavering observation and detailed description but an awareness of one's own subjectivity as being constantly repositioned in relation to the forces that surround the researcher both in and out of the field. It is a way of conceiving thought as something that is felt (Pethick 2015, 3). It is also this thinking that led him to return, time and time again, to rewrite Shelly's death through poetic form, as a fictocritical journey with concepts and percepts.

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In the period between submitting my thesis and the thesis defense, I performed in a butoh work about Deleuze and Guattari's theory of a Body Without Organs, choreographed by Saara Roppola. There is a point in the choreography where the dancers' bodies undergo metamorphosis. We had been desiring machines and catatonic patients. Soon we would birth the world. But to get there, we had to perform the axis point, the moment where everything changes and pasts and future choreographies are given new meaning. We stood on the balls of our feet with legs crossed, balancing precariously as our bodies constricted and reformed, our arms spasming, our heads yanking back. The music rose to a high crescendo.

Then, we fell.

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In the end my thesis became about the narratives people in Outback Queensland construct from the ruins and cruel optimisms (Berlant 2011) of modernist ideology to express or legitimate a sense of belonging in the shadow of unfulfilled settler colonial dreams. I contemplate the traces of inheritance through the bodily, spatial, and temporal acts of going 'out West.' The text keeps returning to the moments where the world of the now fades away and one finds oneself with their nose buried "down deep," where the scent of "blood in the soil" is unavoidable. There is an inescapability to this scent of blood in settler colonial Australia, perhaps because of the multiple impossibilities of ever returning home (Boym 2001; Massey 2005, 124). It speaks to stuckness, tracing not one narrative, but being overcome by incommensurate moments, by falling into the gaps in these narratives and the way we relate to a world that is constantly throwing itself together, and thus is not stable enough to ever truly grasp in a coherent narrative form. We plot and replot our lives as our reference points shift (Hastrup 2005; Vigh 2009). In doing so, we rarely keep both eyes on it in order to focalize our narratives from one perspective, but rather we draw from ruptured multiplicities to string together a series of gaps in such a way that we pay attention to the weave rather than the absence it delineates. I wrote in my methodology that perhaps a work of fictocriticism, a falling between the lines of the text, would have been more fitting as an ethnography, but it didn't fit the criteria for a thesis at my university. So, I was left to explain how I leaned into the ruptures in the stories we tell ourselves in order to live, following the traces rather than the events across time and space, sifting through mutable debris of material realities of life and death. What I needed to convey to the examiner was how I leaned in so far, I fell into the affective entanglements of an ordinary amid the decomposing identities of nationalistic myth in a time where grand narratives have failed and modernism's promises of belonging are scattered as rubble in the dust. Thinking as affect or bodily disposition, I needed to say, involves falling, using theory to climb back up, and falling all over again.

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Endnotes

1. 'Ringer' is an Australian English term for someone who is skilled at working with cattle and horses on stations (ranches), akin to a 'gaucho' or 'cowboy' in the Americas. While 'cowboy' may be used as a descriptive or term of endearment in Outback Australia in reference to the Hollywood Western, on stations it also refers to a role of someone undertaking menial work around the homestead.

2. 'Caravan' is an Australian English term for 'trailer.'

3. 'Smoko' is an Australian English term for a short break from work, traditionally to have a cigarette and tea.

4. 'Veranda' is an Australian English term for 'porch.'

5. 'Bushy' is an Australian English term referring to Australians from rural areas who embody a certain set of rural ideals. Such rural areas are commonly referred to as 'the bush.'

6. 'Mate' is an Australian English term referring to both friends and also a moralistic ideal of gendered behavior.

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AN ACCIDENTAL JOURNEY: TOWARDS NEW MATERIALISMS THROUGH SLOW ONTOLOGY

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My journey started in England several years ago. As a secondary school teacher, I grew gradually more and more disillusioned with the system of endless testing and the surveillance both students and staff were under. In the end, the demands of the job and the alienation I felt led to me leaving the job utterly exhausted. It even led to me to leaving London, my home of twenty-odd years, for my native Eastern Finland. I craved to be somewhere quiet, with a slower pace of life, and nature at my doorstep. I needed to slow down.

With no job and all the free time on my hands, I threw myself at foraging for berries, baking and making jam, weaving, knitting, swimming, and running while honing my research proposal for a PhD place at the University of Eastern Finland. I also applied and got a place at an animal husbandry course at the local college. I imagined I would go to college during the day and work on my PhD in the evenings and weekends. The rhythms of London, of rushing, achieving, and competing were hard to let go. I had not yet attuned to the different rhythms of my new old home (Mark 2019-2020).

Until I hit a wall and I had to accept that I couldn't do it anymore. Until the insomnia and anxiety and depression forced me to seek help so I could start the long journey towards recovery. A journey I am still on.

The first spring of my recovery coincided with the first Covid 19 pandemic spring. While others mourned the loss of social engagements, I embraced the opportunity to stay at home and slow down. I embraced watching my seedlings grow in preparation for my first full summer back in Finland. I also embraced the First Nations philosophies about their relationship with nature and the land, as told, for example, by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2015). I, too, surrounded myself with living things and attempted to (re)plant myself into the soil (Truran 2019–2020). Nature forced me to slow down as I couldn't rush the seedlings; they grew when they were ready. I discovered an ontological Slowness with a capital S (Ulmer 2017).

I also tentatively approached Deleuze and Guattari, dipping in and out of *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), at times exhilarated by their writing and other times cursing them. But no matter how frustrated I grew with their often incomprehensible (to me) thoughts and theories, something kept me going back to them. I was fascinated with rhizomes, bodies without organs and lines of flight. I started drawing pictures to help me understand their work. Like Guttorm (2012), their writing made me vibrate with possibilities, although I didn't know (and still don't really know) what these possibilities might be. I began to feel charged with energy, looking for opportunities to make new compounds and join new rhizomes.

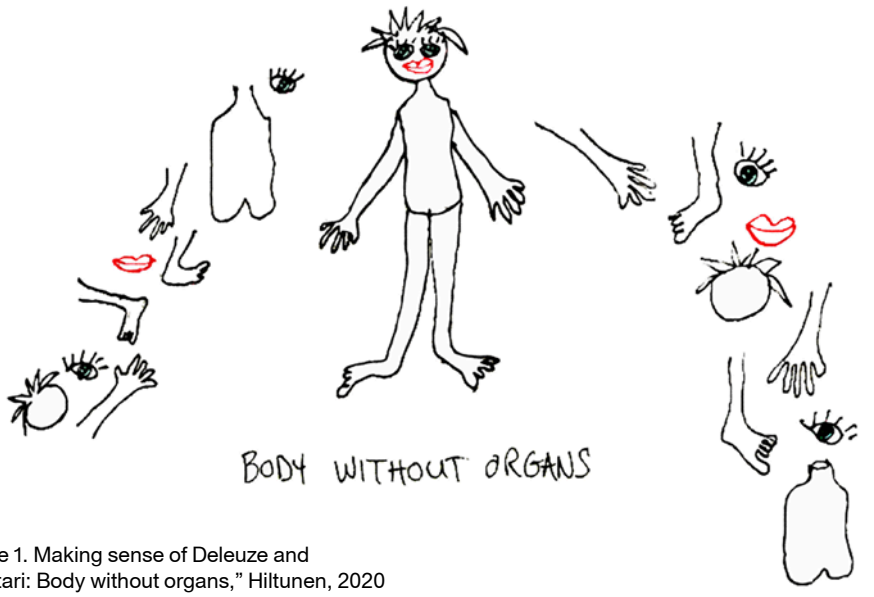

Figure 1. Making sense of Deleuze and Guattari: Body without organs," Hiltunen, 2020

In the autumn of 2020, I started doing fieldwork for my thesis on students' experiences of selective education in Finland. I had a clear structure in mind and a range of theories I was going to use in the analysis of my data. I was going to be Foucault's detached "Great Observer" (St. Pierre 2021, 483) of the goings on in the classrooms and corridors. However, my body thought otherwise. It became an intensely physical experience for me. I tensed up when the teacher did not discipline students as I would have done, and I cringed inwardly when I compared my teacher self to the teachers who I thought were better at their jobs than I had ever been. I tried to blend into the background in classrooms where I was being ignored and confidently took my space in classrooms where I was made to feel welcome. I was caught in a vortex of becoming-student, becoming-teacher, becoming-researcher:

> "I notice myself getting annoyed again because some of the boys still have not done any of the tasks set." (An extract from field notes on 1 October 2020)

> "I notice myself really getting into the task. The students are also fully concentrated on it and the notebooks that I can see from my desk look very neat. I, too, want to take notes and put my hand up to answer questions. The teacher is funny. I love school!" (An extract from field notes on 21 October 2020)

As I was having these physical reactions, I started to also pay more attention to what clues the bodies of the students gave about how they might be feeling. The yawning and stretching, the hugging and the hunching over mobile phones. And I listened to their stories of joy and the stories of discomfort and boredom. I went back to Deleuze and Guattari. Or, to be more accurate, to Spinoza via Deleuze and Guattari. To affects as joy and sadness, improving or diminishing a body's capacity to act (Deleuze 1988). I began to wonder what lines of flight were possible for students and what made them possible? And what were the becomings that resulted from this?

According to my research plan I should have been busily writing my first article by now. Instead, I went back to baking and knitting. I went for long walks with my dogs and cross-country skiing and ice swimming. I became vegan and re-territorialized my body (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) by getting tattoos depicting cow parsley and Mother Earth as part of my becoming-earth. In the spring I started kayaking again and felt that, much like floating in a kayak on a lake, I was floating in the middle of my research material, turning this way and that, waiting to see what caught my attention. I carried on practicing being *Slow*.

In addition to floating I was composting, literally and figuratively (Haraway 2016). I let everything I was reading and seeing and hearing and thinking mingle together and fertilize each other. I was seeing and reading diffractively (Barad 2007). I saw rhizomes in my strawberry patch unexpectedly thriving in the midst of wildflowers, watching bees becoming-dandelions, and thinking about the entanglements and assemblages that brought joy and sadness to the students in my research.

The need to make sense of my research visually continued beyond my illustrations of Deleuze and Guattari's work. Like a magpie I collected images and sounds, some online and some in real life, that I used to construct my freshly developing view of where and who I was. I bought watercolors and enrolled on a beginner's course combining watercolors and mindfulness, finding child-like joy in the simplest of exercises. The pictures I drew and painted were my "[l]ove letters" (Guttorm 2012, 601) to Deleuze and Guattari and my version of Slow science.

Figure 2. Watercolour mindfulness: Reterritorialization, Hiltunen, 2020.

My second fieldwork period pushed me further towards Slow science. I started to listen more. I sat in the lessons with my eyes closed, listening to the hum of the air conditioning system, finding it soothing. I paid attention to the clicks and taps of pencils, erasers, and feet, and felt the presence of the desks through the sounds. I tuned into the vibrations of matter (Bennett 2010). In my notebook the vibrations turned themselves into a poem:

> I listen:
> Chatting continues and the girls whisper
> Pencils tapping on a table
> Pages turning
> Sniffling and coughing
> Low hum
> The zipper of a pencil case and the opening of a cupboard door
> Somebody gets a message on their phone
> I hear hammering from somewhere in the school
> A sigh.
> (An extract from field notes on 8 November 2021)

I was "writing slow ontology" (Ulmer 2017) by verbally recording the soundscape around me. The sounds of the classroom drew my attention to the intra-action of the human and more-than-human actants. They pulled me back into thinking of the extended rhizomes we were part of in that classroom: the mobile phones keep us connected to the world outside the classroom; the person hammering tends to the building we spend most of our week in; the humming air conditioning system cycles the air we breathe between the inside and the outside.

The slowing down allowed me to pay closer attention to what was going on in the classroom and what the students were telling me with their words and bodies. I saw the assemblages that united some while excluding others. I thought about the becomings that I witnessed and the ones I could only guess at. I practiced moving away from the teacher/student/researcher "I" at the centre of it all towards "an ontology of immanence where thought does not begin with an 'I'" (St.Pierre 2021, 488) by paying closer attention to the role of more-than-human actants in the everyday of school.

Around that time I realised that I was ready to start writing. I had given myself sufficient time and opportunity to compost my fieldwork material with all that I had come across during the two years I had been working on my PhD. I had made new assemblages that nurtured my thinking, taken my lines of flight into new directions, and "people[d] my desert" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 293).

As a doctoral researcher I have the luxury of time. I am not (yet) under pressure to publish or perish. I can make "jerky moves and unpredictable leaps forward—at the same time, however, [I can] creep about on a very slow time scale" (Slow Science Academy 2010). My uncertainty is tolerated; I can be "surely unsure" (Guttorm 2012). My science can be messy.

However, I want to carry on being messy beyond my PhD. I want a future that appreciates "the slow knowledge of the gardener" (Stengers 2018, 124). I want to carry on writing love letters to Deleuze and Guattari and finding joy in new, exciting rhizomes that send me on new lines of flight. I want to be among those who leave the conventional, dogmatic "I" (the somewhat uncomfortably 'knowing' subject and object of this text) behind and concentrate on "[making] way for the arrival of the new, the yet to come" (St. Pierre 2021, 482).

As I write this, I'm in the middle of tending to my tomato seedlings in preparation for my third summer back in Finland. This ritual has become my refrain (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), my 'song,' a portable act of territorialization that follows the rhythms of the Earth and creates order in chaos. Next spring I'll be living in a different city in Finland but wherever I am, I will return to my tomato seedling refrain while I reterritorialize myself. And I look forward to doing it slowly.

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MTA Mask Force, Marc A. Hermann, 2020

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A SUBWAY STORY: BOUNDARIES, TRANSMISSION, AND COVID-19

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ABSTRACT
In a brief autoethnographic vignette, I explore manifestations of the transmission of affect in the New York City subway system amid the rise of the Delta variant of Covid-19 in the summer of 2021. I relate the transmissibility of affect to the contagion of Covid-19, particularly as both are approached in the subway, a place marked by proximity among strangers. Finally, I investigate the social construction of disgust and its involvement in organizing social proximity through the movement of affect in the subway.

KEYWORDS
urban, affect, anthropology, subway, Covid-19

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Figure 1. *MTA Stop the Spread Campaign* (Margalit Katz, 2021).

July 6th, 2021, 2:00 pm

On my way into Manhattan on the C train, a young Black man gets on at Utica Avenue. He wears new yellow Jordan's, jeans, a belt, a heather grey t-shirt, sunglasses, and a fresh single-use blue surgical mask. As he gets on the train, I hear him repeatedly mutter, "Ohhh man, oh shit, bro! Don't do it!" He snickers to himself in a low, gravelly tone. He sits down on the bench diagonal from me. As the train barrels through the darkness, he continues to speak, and directs his gaze toward the window across from him, almost as if to talk to someone on the other side of the glass. Suddenly, he takes his t-shirt off. He flexes his bicep muscles and lets out a deep growl. He pulls his shirt back over his head, but only partly, leaving one sleeve flapping on top of his bare right shoulder. His back and chiseled abdomen remain exposed. The young white woman closest to him looks up at him out of the corner of her eye.

I look down for a moment to take notes when suddenly I hear a loud smacking sound, as if someone just slapped another person. I look up, and once again, smacking sounds, only this time I see the source—the half-shirtless man jolts and pounds his fist into his own abdomen. The sound of skin slapping against skin ricochets down the car. A white man in a suit looks up from his phone and over at the half-shirtless man. At the next stop a white man in dirty, tattered clothing gets on and launches into his panhandling spiel. His

> speech remains stable as he tells his story, but I am wary of the potential for his tone to flip, to curse us out for not helping him. Although in many cases, people are moved to give by pity or guilt or some other affect, on this ride everyone inspects their shoes. No one donates a cent, so we avoid the pang of envy of other passengers more generous than ourselves. The panhandler passes the half-shirtless man, and I hold my breath. However, to my surprise, the half-shirtless man does not engage. The presumably homeless panhandler moves on to the next car. The half-shirtless guy continues to mutter and sporadically punch himself in various parts of his body. A middle-aged white man who sits close to the end of the car lets out a cough that seems to dispel the tension. The half-shirtless man hangs his head and remains silent for several stops. Then, for no apparent reason, he jerks his head up and bangs his palm on the metal pole, hard. The pole vibrates and rings for what feels like minutes. No one else so much as stirs. At Fulton Street in Manhattan, he stands up and bolts off the train, his sleeve still hanging off his naked back.

In these sounds, sights, smells, movements, and stillnesses, serendipitous feelings of tension, connection, and inexplicability arise, subside, and re-emerge in the subway car. The experience of physical proximity in the subway makes it a potent environment for observing the movement of affect and its social meaning.1 As the primary mode of transportation in New York City, the subway mobilizes New Yorkers from every corner of the city. It is one of the only places that individuals from disparate backgrounds regularly come into close contact with each other. As diverse as New York is, boundaries are pre-constructed by neighborhood, socio-economic class, ethnicity, gender, and race, and are only reified by the perceived threat of proximity to the 'other.' Despite socio-cultural and physical boundaries in places of close proximity, like the subway, the borders between individuals become blurred. The social interpenetrability that results is an inherently affective phenomenon. In order to mitigate anxieties surrounding this transmission of affect in enclosed space, passengers have employed social distancing since long before Covid-19 (Brennan 2015). To avoid viral and affective contamination, passengers tend to disperse within subway cars, maximizing the distance between themselves and strangers. The pursuit of personal space surpasses a mere desire for physical comfort and a range of movement. In the subway, "personal space may be defined as that area surrounding, or belonging to, a person, which is cathected consciously or unconsciously to the self" (Fried and DeFazio 1974, 49). In other words, we imagine our affective selves as projected beyond our skin. To reassert our boundaries, despite our uncontained bodies, we distance ourselves from others.

Other ways to distance are to avoid meeting another's gaze via what Erving Goffman (1980) calls civil inattention, and to adopt what Georg Simmel (1950) refers to as a "blasé attitude," or nonchalance (Boy 2021). These performances reinforce the boundary between the individual and any affective "impressions" or potential

that they encounter (Brennan 2015). During rush hours, when physical contact is impossible to avoid, tension and discomfort can build as passengers struggle to maintain their physical and affective integrity. During the pandemic, the entanglement of physical and non-physical forms of interpersonal permeability could be observed in a heightened way.

July 6th, 2021, 2:04 pm

> The coughing man continues to cough. He's wearing a striped t-shirt and no mask. He looks like a disheveled version of Jerry Seinfeld. A young Brown guy on the other end of the car wearing an army green t-shirt and a camouflage-print backpack stands up with purpose and tears down the car. He takes a seat directly across from me, which puts me on edge. He appears erratic and flicks his MetroCard over and over in his hand rapidly before he sprints to the other end of the train, his shoes thundering down the linoleum aisle. As the doors open, he cuts in front of the white man in the suit, who grimaces. They both get off.

> The coughing man wheezes again. It's getting ridiculous, and I want to ask if anyone has an extra mask for him, but I don't. A rail-thin Black woman wearing a wifebeater, sweatpants, and flip flops barges through the gangway door, then turns back and yells something I can't make out to someone in the other car. She rushes to the end of the car and sits in the corner. She closes her eyes. Suddenly she opens her eyes and yells something I can't catch, then jumps off at the next stop. When the doors open at West 4th Street, the coughing man coughs up gelatinous globs of green phlegm and spits them onto the platform three times. He notices me looking at him and says something I can't hear. He hangs his head and appears distressed. The erratic guy from long before jumps back on and sits down right next to the coughing dude. I guess he never actually got off the train, he just switched cars. After about one minute he springs up again and jets off. I feel antsy, like there's tension building, like a bubble that eventually needs to pop.

Affect or "intensity" as Brian Massumi (2002) defines it, "is…a nonconscious… autonomic remainder" (Massumi 2002, 25). In other words, for Massumi (2002), affect is an other-than-conscious free-floating "potential" that escapes confinement in an individual being in the form of emotion (35). However, as Sara Ahmed (2004) notes, these intensities exist neither inside nor outside an individual—rather, "they 'affect' the very distinction of inside and outside in the first place" (28). During my train ride, I became aware of the unclaimed affect within the car, prior to the moment it was converted into emotion. Emotion, according to Massumi

(2002), is affect contextualized, "owned and recognized" (28). The "remainder" of affect, however, moves between individual bodies and evolves, prior to being owned or "captured" (Massumi 2002). These remnants of intensity develop as "unactualized, inseparable from but unassimilable to any *particular*, functionally anchored perspective" until they are captured (Massumi 2002, 35). Ahmed, however, would argue that, despite this process of transformation and conversion, affect can never, even momentarily, exist completely unclaimed or captured. She flags this partial capture as an example of the "stickiness" of affect and the ways in which it permeates the boundaries of individuals and connects them to each other through shared affect (Ahmed 2004). The uncaptured portion of intensity, despite constant movement and development, is often undetectable until its moment of capture (Massumi 2002). Thus, people often describe the capture of intensity as sudden, as I do in the scene above when I use language that conveys an abrupt turn or flareup, such as my description of a passenger's apparent "eruption." At the same time, since I observed the same setting for an extended period, I was able to discern a growing tension, or the transformation of the uncaptured "remainder" as it underwent various evolutions and micro-captures that justified the outburst as a mere continuity in the arc of the affect's trajectory.

The affect that I felt accumulate and explode can also be understood not just as movement and capture, but also as transmission between individual bodies that have captured affect. The free-floating, unbounded remainder that Massumi (2002) describes is not captured intentionally—it is transmitted. Affect is social and can arise from within and outside of individuals, as "the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another" (Brennan 2015, 3). Transmission can manifest emotionally, physically, and biologically. As the transmission of affect connects humans to each other, it highlights the boundaries, or lack thereof, through which affect permeates (Ahmed 2004). Much as our physical borders are undetectable until the moment of contact with another body, our boundaries are reified by our exchange of affect (Ahmed 2004).

In response to this contagion of affect and the interpersonal connection it causes, we develop methods of self-containment to defend our boundaries via physical and emotional means. Again, it is only in relation to a defined 'other' that we can identify our own borders. Thus, processes of self-containment require a foil, or "other" who can transmit and/or capture affect (Brennan 2015). However, Brennan (2015) argues that Western society does not legitimize the transmission of affect as real—the idea that emotions and bodies are permeable by invisible forces

counters the entire individualized belief system surrounding affect. As a result, we urgently reproduce the constructed illusion of the bounded body as well as norm-based boundaries—such as social distancing—in an attempt to prevent and dismiss the possibility of transmission. (Brennan 2015).

July 6th, 2021, 2:11 pm

> Another splitting cough cuts through the silent car. Finally, someone cracks. A person I read as Latinx and gender non-conforming sitting across from the coughing man erupts, "YOU WANNA FUCKING COUGH UP A STORM BUT NOT WEAR A MASK?!? IT'S FUCKING DISGUSTING!" They get up and dart toward the opposite end of the car. Their booming voice startles me, and I'm impressed by their ability to project. As they pass me, I nod my head at them, but they ignore me and sit almost as far from the coughing man as possible. He replies with a weak, "oh fUck yOU." No one else even looks up. The person continues their tirade: "COPS GIVING OUT TICKETS BUT NOTHING? ANOTHER STRAIN IS GOING AROUND!" I shoot them a look to convey my gratitude, but they seem too riled up to notice. The guy across from me listens to music through his headphones and drums a beat. The coughing guy looks at his combatant and mutters, "Fuck you, fa—." I can't tell if he says 'fat- something' or 'faggot.' He rises to get off at 59th and once again yells, "have a nice day fa—" but again I can't hear what he says because he's so soft-spoken. His rival bellows, "YO GET YOURSELF CHECKED OUT! YOU HAVE THAT COUGH BUT IT MIGHT HAVE GONE TO YOUR BRAIN! HOW ARE YOU GONNA YELL AT *ME* BECAUSE *YOU* DONT HAVE A MASK ON?!?" The closing doors jingle plays as the coughing man walks up the steps on the platform. The person who spoke up shakes their head, and we exchange a glance. I shake my head and smirk. The bubble has popped.

In the summer of 2021, due the ubiquity of information on the transmission of Covid-19, the public experienced a heightened awareness of the permeability of the body via the breath.2 The transmission of affect happened to follow the same trajectory as the potential transmission of Covid-19. The presence of Covid-19 highlights our interconnectedness, as well as our separation, from other humans and threatens to violate our already partial boundaries. Perhaps the coughing man's intrusion and refusal to maintain physical boundaries reminded his angry fellow-rider of the impossibility of sealed borders. Covid-19 exposes the illusion of enclosed physical bodies, sometimes with fatal consequences, only amplifying the existing anxiety surrounding proximity in the subway.

The implicit impetus for the conflict was the other passenger's fear of catching Covid-19 from the coughing man. However, the focus placed on this concern conceals the looming contagion of affect. Would this interaction have happened if not for the intrusions of the shirtless man, the screaming woman, the running man, and the panhandler just a few minutes prior? To what extent had their presence agitated the affect in the car through their transgressions, building the tension, the intensity that I also experienced, such that it needed to be transformed and stabilized via capture and transmission? I wondered if the anger the passenger conveyed was an expression of discomfort with the transgressions and their subsequent transmission of affect. Similarly, I wondered to what extent their anger stemmed from the larger context of death, loss, and precarity outside the subway, their own accumulated 'potential' they brought into the subway to transmit. To what extent was Covid-19 and the (absence of the) mask, as the available social symbol of the virus, a catalyst for the passenger to make sense of and express their discomfort, their pain? There is no way to know for sure. I only know the tension and release I felt as affects accumulated and dispersed.

Although the social distancing practiced during Covid-19 is distinct from that solely brought on by the transmission of affect in situations of physical proximity, it is still surprisingly affective. If we did not develop intense affective attachments and reservations surrounding Covid-19, we might not so vehemently abide by or disobey the medical knowledge that informs our behavior and the science-based precautions deemed necessary to avoid transmission. Consequently, the transmission of affect about Covid-19 brought about by news coverage and political polarization is one of the very forces determining whether people follow Covid-19 precautions and, thereby, also impacts the transmission of Covid-19 in the subway. Affectively charged opinions and the lengths that people are willing to go to abide by new norms compel us to 'other' those with opposing views. We must separate ourselves from those 'others' whose breath threatens to permeate us. In Covid-times, these 'others' either penetrate us through an infringement on our personal liberties (such as to go without a mask) or through a potential or imagined transmission of Covid-19. Therefore, we can view the structure of feeling of Covid-affect not as a novel form of sociality in the subway but as a routine—if exacerbated—manipulation of affect to negotiate boundary formation.

The involvement of disgust, an embodied sensation, in the conflicts surrounding Covid-19 further illustrates the relation between the transmission of affect and the transmission of Covid-19. During my affectively charged ride on the C train, I felt the visceral sensation of disgust as the man spat mucus onto the platform. Everything indicated that the person who yelled at him also acted out of disgust,

along with other emotions (anger, perhaps fear). The production and expression of the feeling of disgust depends upon our immersion within hierarchical social structures. In the West, disgust is often described as corporeal in ways that other emotions are not. It is a sensation frequently felt in the stomach and, in cases of extreme disgust, can produce nausea.

The physicality of disgust, however, is often conflated with instinct (Durham 2011). Due to this conflation, Deborah Durham (2011) argues that the visceral nature of disgust is precisely the source of its power. She claims that disgust is naturalized and unchallenged because of its physical nature. However, like Mary Douglas' (1966) definition of dirt, as "matter out of place," disgust is relational (Durham 2011). Nothing is inherently, universally, or naturally dirty or disgusting. Georges Bataille (1986) explains, "We imagine that it is the stink of excrement that makes us feel sick. But would it stink if we had not thought it was disgusting in the first place? We do not take long to forget what trouble we go to pass on to our children the aversions that make us…human beings" (38). Here Bataille (1986) upends the claim of visceral essentialism, arguing that disgust, due to its dependency on taboo, humanizes, but in doing so, animalizes the object or 'other' and, by extension, organizes social hierarchies.

Durham (2011) takes the argument for the social construction of disgust one step further. She adopts William Miller's (1997) cultural argument in *The Anatomy of Disgust* that something becomes disgusting only when it threatens to contaminate the self through proximity. Accordingly, if we go by developments in the West, "The unwashed poor are pathetic, admirable or disapproved, and different while living in distant fields; when they come into the cities in masses with industrialization, they become disgusting, as people [the emergent bourgeoisie] draw up new moral and aesthetic boundaries" (Durham 2011, 148). The historical European imagination of certain ethnic groups as malodorous similarly works to construct moral boundaries by evoking disgust and motivating social distance between ethnic groups. Durham (2011) argues that, as this classist, racist, xenophobic mentality suggests, disgust requires imagining the self in proximity to or as the object of disgust. Disgust creates relation between the object of disgust and the "sphere of intimacy of the disgusted bourgeoisie," which threatens the elite (Durham 2011, 149). In bridging subject and object and defining them as oppositional, disgust creates and reifies identities and borders, much like affect more broadly (Ahmed 2004). This argument speaks to the ways bourgeois values became naturalized as the norm, assisted by the physicality of disgust (Durham 2011).

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This physical proximity among strangers in the subway creates a sense of intimacy with the 'other.' Passengers choose to fill their commute time in a variety of ways: reading, listening to music, closing their eyes and resting. Many people, however, engage in the solitary contemplation of their surroundings. During this time, I become keenly aware of the ephemeral nature of the setting. I know that I might never see the people in my company again. I do not know them or anything about them. This empathetic contemplation amid physical proximity elicits curiosity and an artificially augmented sense of intimacy with other passengers. Yet this imagination of proximity, despite efforts to maintain social distance, establishes the prime conditions for disgust to incubate. If someone in tattered clothing, dirty socks, and no shoes stumbles down the car, I may instinctively recoil. I do not feel disgusted because the clothing or the person are inherently disgusting, but because I imagine myself as that person or in physical contact with them and my mind and body have been trained to reject this idea.

This visible new form of radical social difference further promotes disgust because disgust involves a relation to an 'other.' Our fear of contagion deepens in the company of someone, like the coughing man, who improperly wears or fails to wear a mask, because with this behavior, the likelihood for transmission rises. But with the emergence of Covid-19 our sensation of disgust goes beyond this knowledge. The presence or absence of a face mask has been commonly interpreted as indicating political affiliation. Non-compliance with the mask mandate in spaces like the subway pointed to the position assumed by the far right and by politicians toward whom many liberal New Yorkers feel disgust. Conversely, anti-maskers might feel disgust as they are surrounded by mandate-abiding liberals whose presence galvanizes anti-maskers' revulsion at the idea of wearing a mask themselves. The coughing man's disgust toward masked people only escalated when he was verbally attacked by someone in a violation of civil inattention, transferring affect to him. Hence, the disgust directed at the coughing man converted, probably alongside anger and shame, into emotion, which he expressed through his use of profanity. Perhaps a subconscious discomfort with the transmissibility of affect was the reason the coughing man also reaffirmed boundaries by labeling the passenger as a member of a stigmatized identity, an 'other.'

Yet this socially constructed experience of disgust, in which we imagine or experience proximity to the 'other,' does not only urge us to maintain distance. Rather, it incites a conflicting push-pull tension, also inspiring shared spectatorship and fascination among those who ostracize the 'other' because of his behavior. In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai (2004) remarks on the pleasure of the experience of disgust, which not only stems from the process of social exclusion disgust entails, but also from the human fascination with transgression. While taboo dictates limits, or so-

cial norms, they are "only there to be overreached. Fear and horror are not the real and final reaction; on the contrary, they are a temptation to overstep the bounds" (Bataille 1986, 144). Those who animate disgust by transgressing taboo in public, like the man coughing up mucus, are not merely dismissed as disgusting. They attract attention—we often may feel disgusted, but we cannot peel our gaze away.

Ngai underscores the way that disgust not only warns us to assert our boundaries via the fantasy of proximity, which creates a tension between ourselves and an 'other'—it is itself an act of othering in which we locate ourselves within a group. She reminds us of Miller's observation, that, because disgust is learned, as Bataille (1986) demonstrates, "the avowal of disgust expects concurrence" (Miller 1997, 194). The sensation of disgust, Ngai (2004) writes, "seeks to include or draw others into its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability" (336). Through shared experience of disgust, social groups communicate shared taste or refinement.

Like disgust, the shame that the coughing man may or may not have felt highlights the separation (or lack thereof) between the self and others. Calling on Silvan Tomkins, Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995) note how shame marks the individual as other, or strange, to other individuals. They go on to argue that "shame, like disgust and contempt, is activated by drawing a boundary line or barrier" (520). Berlant adds that certain marginalized groups, perhaps like conservatives or anti-maskers in New York City, experience shaming and, as a result, adopt a "shamed" subjectivity. The performance of shamelessness, on the other hand, can be a form of political refusal, or a way to claim freedom (Berlant 2008). One might argue that the coughing man was shameless in his choice not to wear a mask, openly refusing to conform to the social norm of masking. Berlant (2008) argues that when someone performs shamelessness, others often react negatively, "not having skills for maintaining composure amidst the deflation of their fantasy about how their world is organized" (209). Perhaps the other person yelled because they felt attacked by the coughing man's refusal to maintain the norm of boundary formation through masking.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the illumination of our physical permeability spread through the growing knowledge of how the airborne virus circulates in crowds, the subway lost millions of customers due to anxiety of contagion. For those who continued to ride the subway, this anxiety solidified pre-existing boundaries and enforced new ones, such as wearing facial masks and

social distancing. In this way, the material transmission of Covid-19 mirrors the transmission of affect. We construct social boundaries to contain both. Methods of virus avoidance, such as social distancing, are informed by the pre-existing normative techniques of affect management in the subway. Consequently, conflicts that arise surrounding the enforcement of boundaries invented to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 are also affectively charged. Thus, the tension surrounding Covid-19 has become a means of communicating anxieties about transmissions of affect at large.

Endnotes

1. In this vignette I have intentionally identified the racial presentation of the individuals involved, with conscious consideration of my positionality as a white person and the impact of my words, their ability to perpetuate racial bias, and the value of such details in the context of this story. In the subway, where I cannot know someone's background or how they identify, I have made assumptions based on phenotype, behavior, general appearance, etc. At the same time, recognizing that racial and ethnic biases play a large role, both implicitly and explicitly, in social interaction and in the affects that emerge from proximity, I have flagged racial indicators in this story to highlight tensions and connections between individuals that may have been racially motivated, or that require racial markers to better illustrate the affective tension created by boundaries, proximity, and otherness.

2. While a novel realization for many, such awareness is commonplace for individuals with disabilities and chronic illness, and has long been studied in Disability Studies. However, the emergence of Covid-19 marked widespread consciousness across all identity and cultural groups in the city for the first time.

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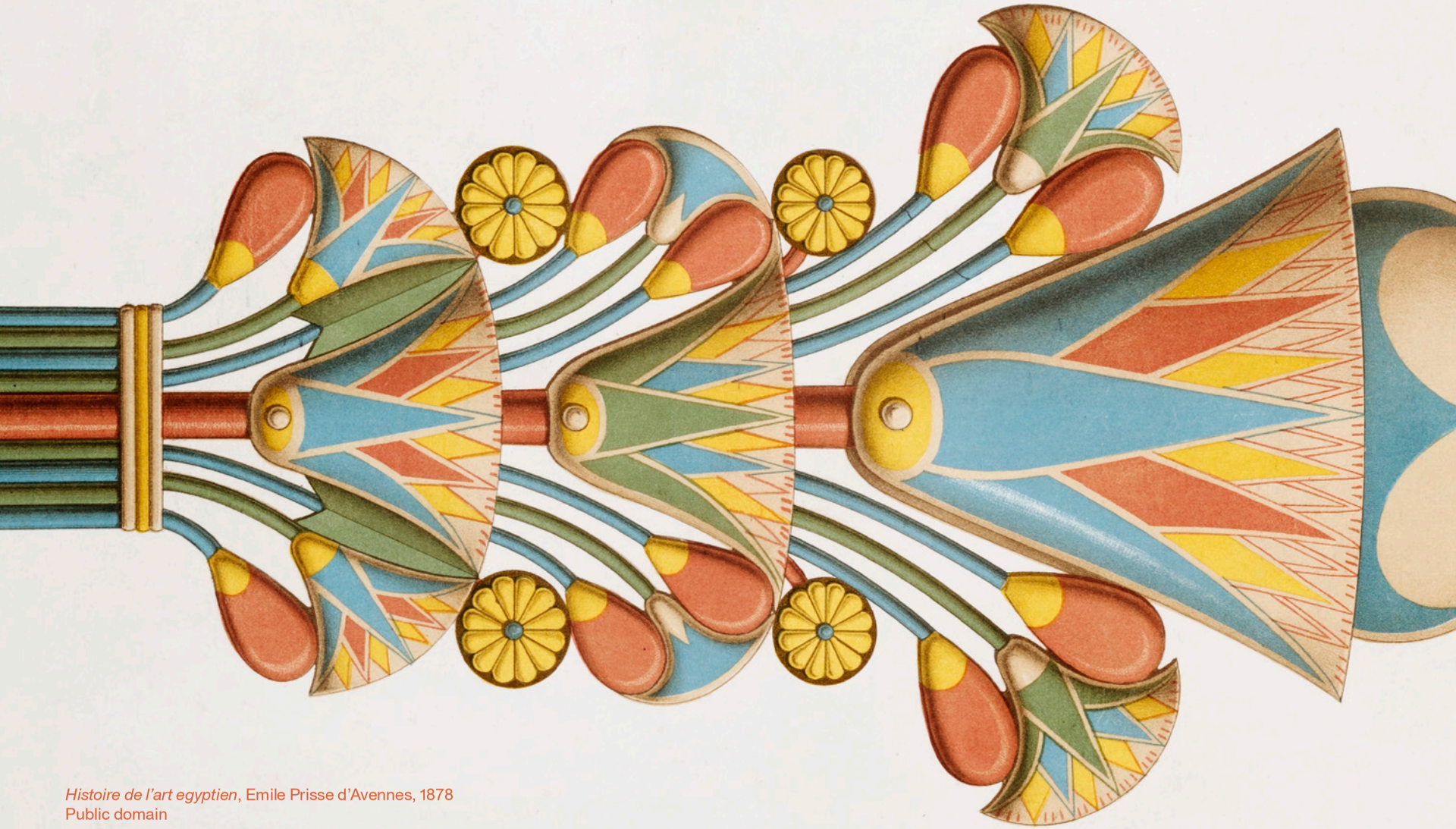

Histoire de l'art egyptien, Emile Prisse d'Avennes, 1878
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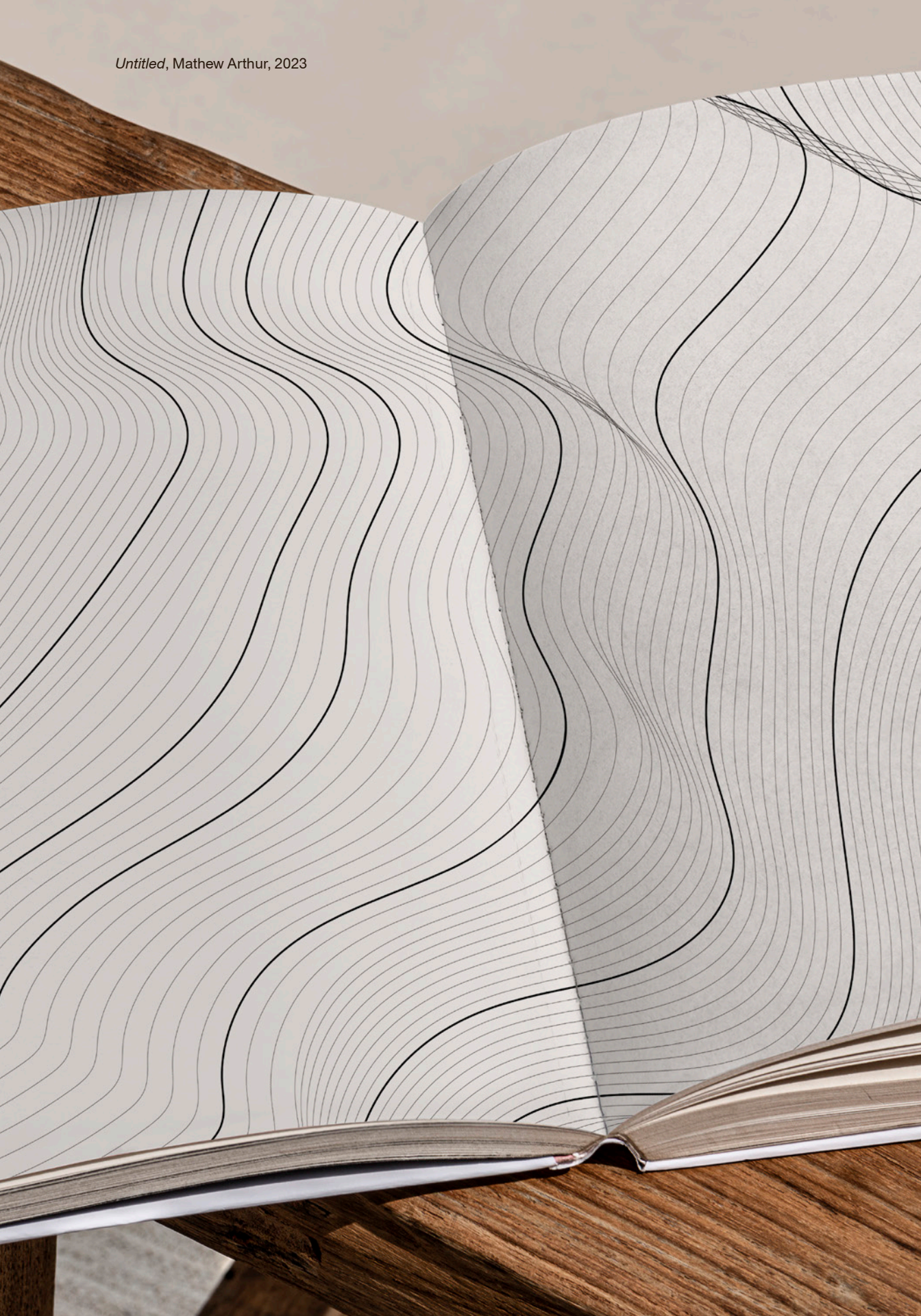


Untitled, Mathew Arthur, 2023

Book Review:

IMMERSIVE CARTOGRAPHY AND POST-QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Desiree Foerster
UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Rousell, D. (2021). *Immersive Cartography and Post-Qualitative Inquiry: A Speculative Adventure in Research-Creation*. New York: Routledge, 184 pages, $49.95 (paperback)

The Anthropocene is not only the newly proposed name for our geological age, but it is also a figure of thought that serves, within many disciplines, to question the constitution of the human being in the face of acute problems, such as climate change, social inequality, and species extinction. David Rousell's "Immersive Cartography and Post-Qualitative Inquiry," is not just another comment in this discourse. It is much more. It is a beautiful example of research creation that takes seriously the impact of 21st century philosophy on research by mapping the ways that new aesthetics can arise through speculative practices. These practices can carry people beyond their unique cognitive position into a constantly changing world of permeation with intensities and non-human forces.

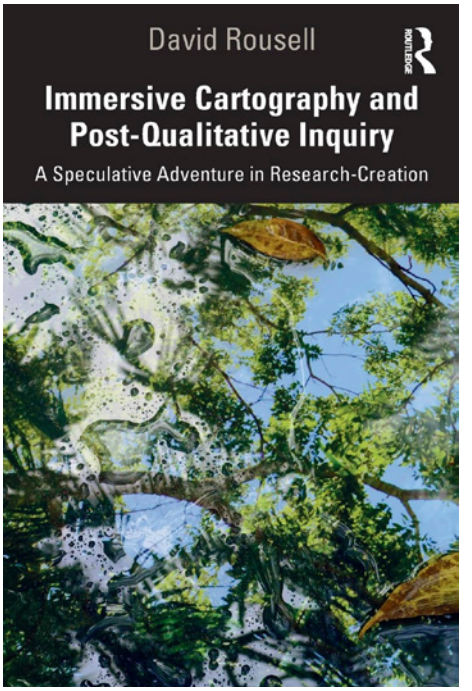
I have much to say about this book, but I will focus on three main areas of concern. What each area has in common, is that it poses a challenge to existing academic methods and vocabulary. What I will pay attention to, and which is pertinent to my own research interests, are the following: (1) research creation, (2)

aesthetics, and (3) learning environments. These areas are connected throughout the book through phenomenological observations, creative practice, and with special attention to affect theory, process philosophy, and new materialisms.

Research Creation: Getting Caught Up with Problems

Rousell embraces research creation as a new form of knowledge creation, as it was first defined in the Canadian academic context. Research creation focuses on the intersection of art practice, theoretical concepts, and research. Research creation is fundamentally experimental and transdisciplinary, and the output is less important than the process that precedes it. As Rousell (2021) formulates, not the 'what' but the 'how' of inquiry is key. It is not, as Rousell (2021) states, a problem-solving exercise, "but a way of getting caught up in the problem itself as a field that is productive for speculative thinking and creative experimentation" (130). Rarely have I read an academic text that combines this "getting caught up" with theoretical rigor so naturally.

The research creation project that lies at the center of this book is "States and Territories," a project that Rousell developed over four years on an Australian university campus. It involved the creation of site-specific artworks, digital networks, and pedagogical interventions into learning environments ranging across the arts, humanities, and sciences. One of the important contributions that Rousell makes here is that he demonstrates how concepts are an important component of research creation. Since concepts in research creation are not the focus of critical analysis, as they would be in a hermeneutic or deconstructive approach, it is important to determine their role and importance in this still-new method. As Rousell emphasizes, in research creation, concepts become an



integral part of creative analysis, leading to what the book simultaneously describes and illustrates: the ongoing unfolding of a cartography. Concepts become prompts for experimentation and collective exploration, and they enable the transformation of the milieus to which they belong. Through this dynamic entanglement, they also "shift their tonality" (Rousell 2021, xvii). If this shift makes concepts seem inconsistent, Rousell stresses, the immersive cartography that he aims to create and to become part of is working. Frictions and inconsistencies are welcome phases of the research creation process. They might lead to new practices and new perspectives that can ease these frictions, or they might indicate that new concepts are necessary to grasp a new dimension or phenomenon allowed to surface within an immersive cartography. This search for new conceptual frameworks places an immersive cartography as research creation in a posthuman context of knowledge creation.

Research creation as a knowledge practice takes seriously the posthuman decentralization of the autonomous human subject as a consequence of the philosophical considerations of the 21st century. Rousell outlines, in detail, his engagement with the process ontology of Alfred N. Whitehead, the metaphysical philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and the philosophies of affect of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi. The main questions in this context are as follows: How can research become speculative? What is speculative practice, and why is it important in the context of the planetary crisis in which we find ourselves? These questions gesture toward the other reason for taking the posthuman decentralized subject seriously: the need to rethink the roles that humans can play in facing climate change. While the Anthropocene thesis suggests seeing the human as a global force that impacts every aspect of the planet; political, Indigenous, and Black studies scholars have reminded us that the suggested unity of human agency is fragmented. Not all people are equally responsible for climate change, and not all are equally affected. What is needed, therefore, is an understanding of difference and the multiple entanglements that create the reality we are urged to confront and respond to. What we need is a "relational production of difference" (Rousell 2021, 26). What Rousell's book responds to is this urgency to relate to difference, to learn to deal with crises, and to develop new perspectives that exhibit an understanding of processes and transformations as the basis of what makes our existence on this planet possible. What this engagement with new perspectives brings to our attention is the need to rethink how we perceive and evaluate our environments and those with whom we share them. Crucial, then, is the question of how an immersive cartography can sensitize us to new phenomena and previously unrecognized interrelationships. As Rousell (2021) explains, the "shifting sense of trans-qualitative porosity and relationality has foregrounded the need for an expanded aesthetics capable of grasping the shifting qualities of life under these changing conditions" (26). To grasp does not mean to objectify. Rather, as I understand it, it means attuning towards something that can

never be subsumed under existing representations of the real, an attunement that involves our whole sensuous being, a form of *prehending* for those of us familiar with Whiteheadian terminology.

Aesthetics: The Mapping of Physical and Conceptual Movements

This way of prehending the shifting qualities of life is central to the next topic of the book that I wish to dwell on: aesthetics. Aesthetics are not understood as the appreciation of beauty that, again, puts a perceiving, validating human subject at its center. Aesthetics is engaged in the sense of the Greek word from which it originates, *aesthesis*, which pertains to the senses and perception. What this orientation allows is attention to feelings and the patterns that underlie them: intensities, differences, affects, and relations. Attending to the senses rather than comprehension also allows us to recognize other sensing bodies, bodies that are not human but that nevertheless stand in a reciprocal relationship with the world surrounding them. I am specifically thinking about the plywood cubes at the center of many of the experiments that this book describes, which seem to have offered a lure to the author from the very first encounter. Rousell (2021) describes this moment of an imaginary leap:

> I was intrigued by the possibility that the cubes could become operative, agentic, and cartographic, that they could somehow become immersive in their capacity to map and reconfigure physical and conceptual movements from the ground up. This was a pivotal shift in perspective in what became my doctoral project "States and Territories", laying the seeds for the approach to inquiry that I call immersive cartography (2).

Rousell's "immersive cartography," which is a concept, method, and collective practice simultaneously, creates a framework for thinking about how we can attune to new patterns of aesthetic experience in our environments so that they become productive. That is, this new framework is not merely noticeable, but it leads to the formation of new perspectives, actions, and connections. Such aesthetics, which are above all ecological, "resituates inquiry within a more-than human field of felt relations and co-compositions. This ecological aesthetics seeks to take account of that which precedes, exceeds, proceeds, and, importantly, implicates human life as one of innumerable elements, forces, and modes of earthly existence" (Rousell 2021, 27).

The book thus contributes to the turn toward the ecological currently underway in the humanities as a form of updated posthumanism. As Rousell (2021) states, "What has been broadly termed the posthuman condition could also be termed the ecological condition: a time in which ecology has become a primary figuration through which life is governed, distributed, managed, studied, manipulated, sensed, felt, experienced, and sustained" (45). Instead of falling into the terminological trap of fetishizing everything ecological, he adds a clear, reflective perspective on the "ecologisation of contemporary life" when asking how the production of new ecologies of concepts, practices, and forms of knowledge combine (Rousell 2021, 50). His book provides vivid examples of how this might look. Central to all of them is the orientation to felt experience, as it opens and permeates more-than-human milieus, thus freeing itself from the objectifying grip of an anthropocentric perspective. To capture this aesthetics of the felt experience of the more-than-human milieu without losing it to objectification, Rousell maps the intensities that enable experience. Such mapping cannot aim to create representations. Rather, it immerses the experiencing subject within a new middle.

Milieus, as different versions of this new middle, are not understood here as something static, but instead as intrinsically dynamic, co-composing, and inter-penetrating territories. Following Deleuze, Rousell (2021) uses the term milieu "as a trajectory, which is to say, a vector of intensive and extensive movement" (3). In this way, he makes the term fruitful for thinking about experience as an attunement in which a "body is moved by a map of intensity, to the extent that the map charts the movement of desiring forces which orientate and propel a body to think and act, in other words, that make a body 'become.' Intensity, in this sense, refers to the force of felt vitality that constitutes a body through movement" (Rousell 2021, 42). Getting caught up in this intensity, immersive cartography turns pure potential into actual percepts and affects. An immersive cartography must be constantly becoming, as well, reaching toward what exceeds representation. An aesthetics that engages with what exceeds our visual senses or cognitive grasp necessarily involves the whole sensorium of bodies, including the pre-reflective dimensions of human experience. The cubes, for instance, that are central to the "States and Territories" project, are themselves engaged as an assemblage of materials, perspectives, and intensive milieus that gain perceptual autonomy. Rousell photographs particular places across the university campus and attaches them to the cubes, which are then reinstated into the places he originally documented. In other cases, the cubes' surfaces are covered with glass that reflects their surroundings. These cubes engage the observer's whole body; one must move around them, perhaps kneel on the floor, and tilt one's head to attend to the numerous emerging relationships within the perceptual milieu. As Rousell (2021) puts it, fittingly, "Each cube becomes a perceptual lure and proposition for thinking–feeling–sensing the environment differently, in

ways that are not bound by the constraints of human cognition, perception, and reflexive consciousness" (36). As such a perceptual lure, we not only get the chance to experience the environment differently but also, how our sensing and sensitive body interrelates us with it.

Learning Environments for a Re-Enchantment of the Everyday

Rousell's immersive cartography is difficult to imagine within the marked, enclosed space of the museum. Instead, what he proposes with his projects is the creation of dynamic, transformative learning environments. He then documents how the environmental artworks and digital interfaces created for the "States and Territories" project allow for new pedagogical trajectories. Pedagogical concepts are treated as productive gestures that can shift, be overturned, or replaced. At the center of this pedagogy is the re-enchantment of the everyday. Learning thus becomes eco-aesthetic and open to affects and sensations.

This emphasis on the significance of affect within learning environments expands the discourse on affect to an ethical dimension that goes beyond humans. In this context, I see Rousell's immersive cartography in a fruitful dialogue with Marjolein Oele's (2020) recent publication, "E-Co-Affectivity: Exploring Pathos at Life's Material Interfaces." Oele (2020) explores how place, time, and beings emerge as they are and then become affected together. This question underlines the ethical implications of a turn to affectivity. If we consider that all living beings become what they are through reciprocity with what affects them (5), then learning environments that are radically open to more-than-human relationships become platforms for ethico-aesthetic engagement, or a "relational ethics of co-existence" (Rousell 2021, xxiii). Their ethical implications lie in considering various forms of affective lives and their interdependence for transformation (Oele 2020, 6). This approach is especially important in the face of an ecological crisis. Echoing Isabelle Stengers (2017), it is people's task to shift their affective response toward Gaia—her alternative calling (both a name and a lure) for the Earth in the Anthropocene. Names, Stengers (2017) emphasizes, can make us feel and think in the mode they call for. This is why our current task as academic scholars, researchers, humans, and living beings who are intrinsically interdependent with others is to deeply consider the words we use to describe the many

crises we are experiencing. However, this interdependence rarely manifests itself in the language and concepts of colonial nations. Consequently, new learning environments are crucial for attuning us to what forgoes the conceptual and phenomenological capture of solid objects.

The projects that were part of "States and Territories" allowed this attunement through explicating the effects that co-compose particular learning environments, some of which are of an atmospheric nature. Paying attention to the thermodynamic relations among the cubes' materiality, the atmospheric surroundings, and the sensing bodies, students begin to attune to non-visual, inner-bodily senses, as they discuss the relative warmth or coolness of the environment in relation to its internal and external dynamics. A student talks about feeling the warmth of the sun outside and finding ways to bring that warmth inside. Creaturely comfort, freedom of movement, and metabolism become affectively associated with social feelings of belonging conducive to learning and engagement (Rousell 2021, 74).

Accordingly, Rousell's adventure into new learning environments invites human agents, as well as atmospheric processes and glass and plywood cubes, to reconfigure the sensible conditions that enable learning. This again redefines human agency at a time when it is becoming clearer how disastrous of an effect our misunderstanding of human agency has on our environments.

What is evident in Rousell's engagement of research creation, his aesthetic theory and practice, as well as his engagement with learning environments is, that, while Rousell (2021) takes posthuman criticism of human uniqueness seriously, he does not deny agency to humans. Yet he does not herald agency as the ability to grasp and explore the world and oneself as an object. The agency that Rousell promotes is not one that keeps the world at a distance. On the contrary, this agency consists of opening oneself to alien, non-human milieus, as well as the non-human within oneself. This approach demands taking processes, rather than objects, seriously and following them without expecting to confirm preconceived theories. In turning to the non-human alien forces that are part of our being, he opens us to new opportunities for experience, value creation, and, most importantly, learning. As Rousell (2021) demonstrates, human agency comprises the ability to feel, to prehend, to remember, and thereby to relate. In this manner, the immersive cartography of Rousell (2021) gestures toward a much-needed non-anthropocentric "'social science' of data ecologies and felt intensities" (79).

Before closing my review, I would like to briefly note how this book expands relations beyond the written word. On numerous occasions, Rousell refers to the project documentation on his website, which includes videos, texts, and images.

The experiments he describes enliven the often-abstract concepts of Whitehead and Deleuze and invite readers to engage with their immediate surroundings while reading the book. The experiments add lived experience to the logical comprehension of the developed concepts and descriptions and help create yet again new learning environments, which begin with the reader attending to Rousell's book.

As a media scholar engaged with multi-disciplinary discourse, I can confirm that *Immersive Cartographies* is a text that invites readers from various disciplines. Even though Rousell places his questions within the context of the social sciences, he transcends the discipline's supposed boundaries by proposing important methodological and epistemological shifts in perspective that are applicable to almost any discipline. What Roussell's book does most of all, and with clarity and the stimulation of the reader's imagination, is to take reality seriously and engage with it. Roussell's immersive cartography cannot simply be reduced to a formula. It must be evoked repeatedly by each new reader and at each encounter, and carried forward into new contexts.

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Book Review:

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF METABOLIC PROCESSES

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Foerster, D. (2021). *Aesthetic Experience of Metabolic Processes*. Lüneburg: Meson Press, 184 pages, open access, $31.00 (paperback)

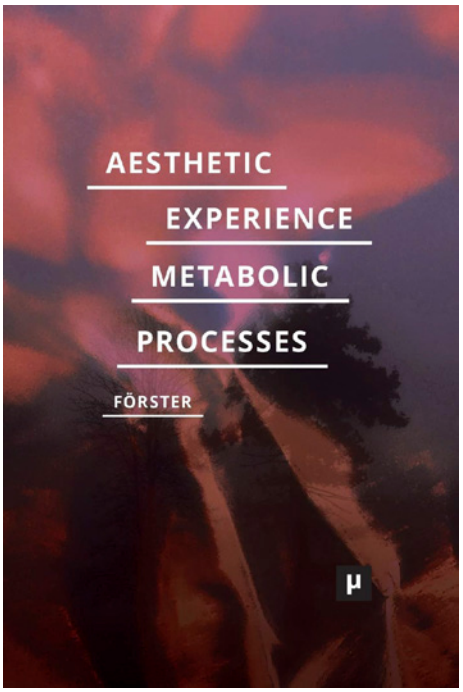
Shared Forms of Metabolic Subjectivity

Stepping out of a climate-controlled airplane into the thickness of Bangkok's humidity and pollution. Encountering a pocket of cool, hyper-oxygenated air while hiking a sweltering mountainside in the tropics. An architectural installation which carefully modulates temperature, light, and oxygen levels to provoke disorientating bio-chemical effects in human bodies. An artificial pond which generates billowing clouds of oxygen and water vapour in a Warsaw neighborhood. These are several of the many working examples which Desiree Foerster uses to elaborate an aesthetics of metabolic activity in her recent book *Aesthetic Experience of Metabolic Processes* (2021). The book draws on Foerster's PhD thesis completed at University of Potsdam and extended through research residencies at the Topological Media Lab at Concordia and the Synthesis Center at Arizona State University.

Foerster states the primary question guiding her project in the book's introduction: "Can a shift to the aesthetic mode of perception allow us to attune to the metabolic processes that are the condition of life itself?"(18). Her approach to this question oscillates primarily between the detailed elaboration of philosophical and scientific concepts, and a "phenomenological self-analysis" of metabolic processes as they are encountered within particular environments (14). In doing so, Foerster carefully threads an impressive array of theoretical and empirical perspectives, extending her primary grounding in art history and media studies into nuanced rapprochements between phenomenology and process philosophy, affect studies and the cognitive sciences, new materialism and biology, architecture and meteorology, amongst numerous other disciplinary crossings and intermixtures. Whitehead's (1929/1978) speculative empiricism is engaged alongside classical phenomenological accounts from Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) and Heidegger (1927/2008), while Samantha Frost's (2015) biocultural take on new materialism is read alongside enactivist theories in the cognitive neurosciences. While these differing genealogies of thought often introduce conflicting onto-epistemological commitments and implications, Foerster works synthetically to treat these differences as generative contrasts rather than incommensurable oppositions. This is arguably a benefit of engaging aesthetics as an overarching philosophical orientation to the project: multiple and different theoretical and empirical approaches can be sensed, felt, embodied, and experienced *together*, even if they logically contradict.

As Foerster makes clear, what comes to matter for this work is, "the *how* of our experience" rather than the *what* (18). Foerster is invested in exploring how "perception itself can be experienced as processual" (16), and specifically how this processual experiencing of aesthetic perception can provide access to the role of metabolic activity in shaping subjectivity. Foerster argues that metabolic activity is one of many examples of "a processuality that underlies all perceivable phenomena" (55), but that this activity potentially holds great significance because it is shared across all forms of life. Foerster is invested not only in cultivating ways to *sense* metabolic activity, but in evaluating these sensations of metabolic activity as a source of conceptual knowledge and interpretive meaning-making. Immersive architectural environments and prototypes serve as metabolic testbeds for Foerster's theoretical project, with experimental works such as Phillipe Rahm's *Hormonorium*, Joanna Rajkowska's *Oxygenator*, and Ecologic Studio's *Urban Algae Canopy* providing fascinating case studies of metabolic activity at work in the wild.

These architectural case studies are approached primarily through Foerster's "phenomenological self-analysis" of their effects on her own body and thinking. Through this analysis, Foerster looks to cultivate new perspectives on social and ecological crises which are predicated on the "metabolic interrelatedness of human subjects and their environments" (55). She turns to immersive artworks and architectural environments as interfaces that bring aesthetic awareness to this interrelatedness, and can potentially generate a shift toward an aesthetic perception which values the processual (and often invisible) dimensions of relational experience. Foerster associates this shift with practices of attunement to metabolic activity that generate new "habits of care" (121), and coins the term "metabolic subjectivity" to describe the subjective perspective enabled by such attunements and the habits of care they provoke. Beyond this, the political stakes and implications of the project do not often appear to be a primary focus of the text. This is understandable given the ambitious theoretical project that Foerster lays out for herself, and the detailed integration of philosophical and scientific concepts that becomes necessary to complete this project.



To develop the concept of metabolic subjectivity, Foerster puts into play several fascinating concepts derived from the biological and cognitive sciences. These include the concept of "interoception," which refers to the perception of internal bodily processes, and the concept of "stigmergy," which is used to describe emergent patterns of self-organization indirectly coordinated through the environment. Where interoception contributes to a grammar for sensing and articulating intensive shifts in bodily processes and dispositions, stigmergy helps us become sensitized to the ways that bodily intensities are coordinated by dispersed environmental forces that enable bodies to make aesthetic contact with one another in novel ways. Taken together, the two terms achieve a far-from-equilibrium balancing act which resists the reduction of experience to either internal (bodily) or external (environmental) agencies.

This configuration of philosophical and scientific concepts is particularly compelling in Foerster's discussion of *Urban Algae Canopy* (2015), an architectural experiment by Ecologic Studio involving the growth of photosynthetic micro-algae

in public spaces in Milan. The micro-algae grow within transparent panels that form a pavilion that people can enter from the street. They feed off the carbon dioxide exhaled by the passing visitors, while digital sensors mediate the flow of nutrients to the algae based on shifting patterns of sunlight, moisture, and the number of human bodies that daily enter the space. This establishes a metabolic feedback loop between human bodies, sensors, and algae which can be witnessed in the shifting growth patterns within the panels. Here Foerster uses the concept of stigmergy to analyse the indirect coordination of bodies and metabolic activity through the shared milieu of an environmental interface. Whitehead's concepts of "prehension," "intensity," and "society" are brought into play to develop an account of this multispecies environment as the creation of "shared metabolic pathways" between humans, algae, and digital sensors (119). Foerster theorises this nexus of metabolic pathways as a prehensive intensification of experience which generates a new "stigmergic reality" as a "shared form" of subjectivity (120). Thinking with Whitehead, Foerster describes how the intensification of a process renders it distinct from the vague and teeming atmospherics of the processual background. Intensity, in this reading, is what makes the processual phenomena which create this "stigmergic reality" sensible and perceptible from differentiated perspectives within the same event. As Foerster explains:

> A number of processes that constitute perceivable phenomena register in the aesthetic milieu of *Urban Algae Canopy*: The changes in air quality, light intensity, and hue happen without ever forming an end-state or suggesting an original state. The differentiations become perceivable because they cross certain thresholds and change their intensity (121).

I appreciate the transdisciplinary ambition of this project, and the attention to detail which animates the philosophical elaborations throughout the book.

While I found that certain disjunctions between different philosophical traditions were passed over in the project's pursuit of a novel synthesis, I was happy to puzzle over several of these as I continued to read. What would it mean to read Whitehead as a phenomenologist of aesthetic experience? Could Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body be reworked through affect theory to operate outside the bounds of intentionality, representation, and the human subject? These questions led me to consider what might be driving this project's apparent desire to hold onto the phenomenological image of an internalized, self-possessed subject. To my reading, this transcendental image of the phenomenological sub-

ject seemed to be the cost of entry for accompanying Foerster on this journey into aesthetic experiences of metabolic activity. What is at stake in continuing to locate subjectivity in the body rather than dispersed in the immanence of the world at large?

One of the issues with adhering to a phenomenological model of subjectivity while affirming the transformative agency of the environment is that it potentially occludes other ways of experiencing and conceptualizing body-environment relations which do not begin and end with the human subject. I am thinking of First Nations and Indigenous peoples who locate subjectivity within the immanent relationality of more-than-human ecologies and lifeways, or what Bawaka Country (2015) describe as a "diversity beyond measure, beyond comprehension" (277). I am also thinking of Fred Moten's (2018) (dis)location of Black studies within the "exhaust and exhaustion" of phenomenology (x), as a paraontological zone of aesthetic excess and immanent sociality which lives appositionally and thrives on no-thing. As Moten asks: "What if phenomenology were improperly, generatively (mis)understood as a set of protocols for the immanent critique (degeneration, corrosion, corruption) of its object, namely the transcendental subject of phenomenology?" (x) I mention these examples not to challenge Foerster's engagement with the phenomenological tradition, but rather because I read a kind of degeneration, corruption, and general agitation of the phenomenological subject happening throughout her text. While the phenomenological subject sometimes felt like an avatar that I needed to don in order to walk-through the theories and examples elaborated through the text, I also felt this avatar breaking up and dispersing itself metabolically into the environment to gather mutant intensities of subjectivity that no longer felt human. If our subjectivity is composed of metabolic intensities that agitate across all scales and degrees of the body-environment nexus, is it even possible to contain a subject in a body anymore?

This potential to break up and metabolically disperse subjectivity across scales and orders of existence is perhaps what exhilarates me the most about Foerster's project. I found this most fully realized in the book's final chapter, *Dwelling in Atmospheres*, which narrates a series of experiments that Foerster undertook with colleagues during residences at the Synthesis Centre and Topological Media Lab. The experiments involved the use of an aquarium, heating plates, ultrasonic atomizers, lighting and projection rigs, and various fans to generate cloud-like formations of water vapour that were responsive to human interaction. This leads Foerster to undertake a detailed study of the transductive processes at work in the experiment, drawing on Simondon's (1989/2016) theories of technical and organic individuation through the dephasing of an associated milieu. As elaborated further through Whitehead's (1929/1978) "positive" (realized) and "negative" (unrealized)

prehensions, Foerster offers an intimate account of how her experiment's vapour cloud comes into being through its own processual concrescence of energetic and affective potentials. As Foerster argues, to the extent that the clouds "gain an experiential dimension themselves," any "attunement towards this experiential dimension creates a new potential for relationships and actions in and with the milieu" (153). Within this theoretical formulation, what emerges as a subject is not located in one body or another but in the *event* of a "shared affectability" which produces a new aesthetic form (and experience) of life-living. According to Foerster, this formulation also offers a reworked conceptual modelling of "climate" which holds promise for cultivating new habits of social and environmental care. Regardless of the political ramifications beyond the affective life of Foerster's experiment, I finished the text feeling buoyed by the possibility of a metabolic subjectivity which does not require us to choose between our selves and our environments.

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Book Review:

LIFE-DESTROYING DIAGRAMS

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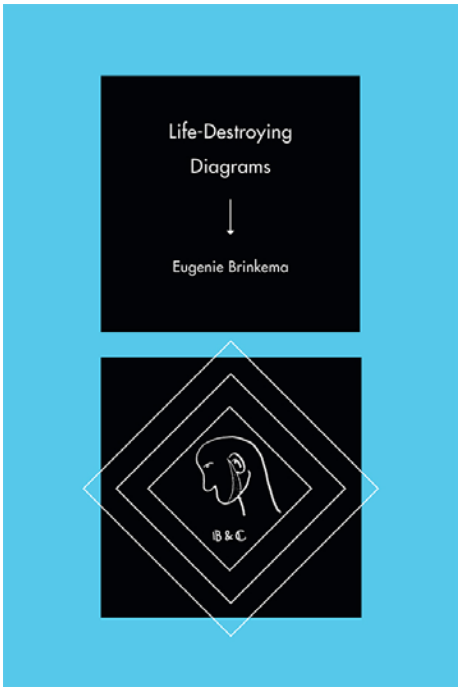
Brinkema, E. (2022). *Life-Destroying Diagrams*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 496 pages, $31.95 (paperback).

Readers may wonder why the new issue of a journal encouraging the exploration of affect includes a review of Eugenie Brinkema's new book, *Life-Destroying Diagrams* (2022). But a critical drive towards affect studies permeates most of Brinkema's oeuvre, ranging from *The Forms of the Affects* (2014), her first book, to several articles. Her latest academic work is also underpinned by similar, polemical arguments. By unsettling the main approaches to affect and introducing new thoughts to the debate, Brinkema remains one of the most energizing scholars in this field. The main assumption of *Life-Destroying Diagrams* is that the affective potential of horror and romantic films lies in their formal structure. She notes that:

> radical formalism is a mode of reading derived from aesthetic objects, derived from thinking the intimate relation of death and violence and horror to questions of form. *If horror films formalize the violence of ontology and a violent ethics given structure through aesthetic elements, then only a radical formalism can account for how death functions in these texts* (author's italics, Brinkema 2022, 44).

Overturning the idea that it is the narrative, a character, or the context of a film that generates affects, Brinkema focuses upon the affective forms of cinema. Note that she deploys the plural form *affects*, departing from most affect scholars, who emphasize affect as singular and different from idiosyncratic and individually experienced *emotions* or *feelings*. Not only does Brinkema believe in different *affects*

(the title of her first book is, significantly, *The Forms of the Affects*) but she does not approach forms and formal structures as if they are vehicles yielding affects or metaphors for affects. Forms *are* affects themselves: a certain organized form, a specific design, a structure, an order is the formal expression of an affect.



Brinkema (2022) thus takes on an arduous and provocative task as she examines form as the affective source within the context of two of the most emblematic bodily genres: horror and romantic films. Like her first book, *Life-Destroying Diagrams* sprang from a frustration vis-à-vis the ways in which traditional methodologies conceptualize affect, particularly within the field of film studies. Brinkema contests the aura of ineffability and ambiguity surrounding the notion of affect, which scholars tend to approach through alternate modalities to representational thinking and through the discipline of academic classification. Affect is, therefore, often framed as what it is not rather than in terms of what it theoretically affords: "not semiosis, not meaning, not structure, not apparatus" (Brinkema 2014, xii). Unlike the main affective accounts, Brinkema advocates for a closer inspection of affect in order to release it from the often vague and sometimes esoteric onto-epistemological positions on which it is grounded. *Life-Destroying Diagrams* is most polemical regarding phenomenology; phenomenologists tend to flatten any affective discourse into what Brinkema (2022) terms "neck essentialism" (6; 108). This refers to how affect can be reduced to a matter of mere bodily arousal and sensory stimulations resisting definition and clear categorization. She clarifies in an interview:

> Of course I have wept at movies, I have shuddered, and have had embodied reactions; I just don't think these reactions are that interesting. I don't actually think they're speculatively generative; I would be intellectually mortified to produce a kind of diaristic account because I just can't imagine that anyone else would be that interested in what my body does (Anger & Jirsa 2019, 77).

Hence the specific modalities through which the sensorium is stimulated on an idiosyncratic, personal level offer a weak contribution, according to Brinkema. Likewise, she deems unconvincing those affective accounts given by cognitivists, idealists, and Deleuzians drawing upon Brian Massumi's mediation of Deleuze notion of affect.

Brinkema (2022) is intrigued by two cinematic extremizations of the body as a site of visceral stimulation and corporeal experience (horrors and romances). By examining films such as the *Final Destination* franchise (2000–2011), *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011), *The Human Centipede* saga (2009–2015), *Rubber* (2010), *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (2013), *Amour* (2012), and *The Lobster* (2015), Brinkema brilliantly engages with the mapping of affects through close scrutiny of sequences, lists, diagrams, charts, maps, databases, colours, and sounds. Her rigorous analysis of the affective forms of such films seems to respond to critiques levelled at Brinkema's first book, which was accused of a paucity of cinematic examples. Her latest book overflows with detailed filmic analyses which mainly emerge from unusual or unprecedented perspectives (privileging a counter-intuitive formal understanding of practices of mutilation and torture in horror films, for instance). The profundity of this analysis is impressive, although some readers might feel overwhelmed by its vast erudition. The abundance of quotations and audacious comparisons, which engage with an array of continental philosophers (Adorno, Badiou, Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) and psychoanalysts (Freud, Lacan, Jung), sometimes risk distracting from the main focus of the book: affective formalism in cinema.

Whilst *The Forms of the Affects* concludes by advocating for a further exploration of formalism in order to disclose its hidden potentialities, *Life-Destroying Diagrams* answers that call, showing how form might make films affective. Nevertheless, some issues in this book remain open to some extent. Brinkema's very conceptualization of form is not univocal and seems to encompass at least two contrasting meanings. On the one hand—and in a more conventional line of thinking—'form' pertains to any aesthetic and formal device in cinema, such as the composition of images, sounds, montage, rhythm. On the other hand, by 'form' Brinkema often refers to a more abstract realm, that of a geometry, an ordered array of things, a structure. This can be "the death design" (Brinkema 2022, 74), the formal logic through which an immanent manifestation of death chases its victims in *Final Destination*. Or "thanatology" (2022, 58), the preparation for death in *Amour*, or even the dichotomy up/down, visible/invisible in *The Cabin in the Woods*. Moreover, Brinkema (2022) expels any trace of sensuality

and idiosyncratic experience from her discourse, mentioning nonetheless minor, major, negative, and positive affects. This inevitably introduces a hint of personal taste as individual experience into the frame. How can an affect be classified as minor or negative if not by relating it to a scale of values, even unconsciously? Does Brinkema rather refer here to how affects are categorized within taxonomies of value according to common sense and not according to her personally? Or, in a Deleuzian vein, is this a voluntarily polyvocal concept aimed at disclosing new and even contradictory openings?

Furthermore, *Life-Destroying Diagrams* is limited to case studies addressing an ordered structure or pattern. It would be generative to explore how Brinkema's radical formalism would function in relation to more chaotic, disrupted forms, or even, to anti-forms. *Life-Destroying Diagrams* revolves around the assumption that the more carefully designed an order, the more affective its results: Would the converse work as well? The more deconstructed, the more affective it is? How would her argument apply to all the genres that exist between the two polarities of horror and romance, those lacking extreme bodily solicitations? In this case, we enter upon even more slippery and unstable terrain, in which affects are mobilized through less obvious and spectacular means, whilst remaining active and resonant.

A discourse worthy of further examination—indeed one of the most outstanding passages of the book—is Brinkema's coupling of formalism and fascism, an issue which drew the attention of Susan Sontag (1975) and Jack Halberstam (2011), respectively. The Fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany were undoubtedly obsessed with certain ideal forms. This was reflected in the many architectural examples still visible around Europe which embody power as grounded on a specific and elaborately conceived design. A fascination with form recurred too in the public manifestations of such dictatorial regimes: think of the uniforms' design and the geometries of ordered lines of soldiers at rallies in Rome and Nuremberg. Here was a massive aestheticization of certain tenets of order, control, which visually and formally erased differences and flaws in the name of a specific paradigm of sameness and uniformity. As Brinkema argues, this is inherently intertwined with the idea of race purity, a sort of formalization of a biological programme, perceived and promoted as superior. Returning to the cinema, how could one understand films such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) or *Olympia* (1938) without reading these as the formalization of a certain model of the body, of its powers and affordances? Would it make sense to extend Brinkema's

methodology to the phenomenon of the Holocaust? Wasn't the Holocaust another aestheticization of a certain politics and ethics, a *Weltanschauung* grounded on the erasure of any differing subjectivity?

Finally, the form of a book about formalism cannot be overlooked. Brinkema's writing style in *Life-Destroying Diagrams* is unique, dense but passionate. Each section could be read aloud as a ballad with its own rhythm, almost a specific musicality. It is like a virtuoso aural performance, in which her academic writing often detours into poetic narration, intertwining philosophy and psychoanalysis within a texture carefully embroidered with quotations, digressions into literature and poetry, deviations, interludes, footnotes, footnotes of footnotes and even footnotes of footnotes' footnotes! If Brinkema often draws upon Deleuze, she certainly cannot be considered a Deleuzian scholar. Nevertheless, *Life-Destroying Diagrams* does perform something profoundly Deleuzian in its attempt to restore affect to the realm of multiplicity and difference. Whilst some accounts tend to crystallize or reify affect within a univocal systematization, Brinkema advocates for a plurality of different and specific affects, opening the debate up to new and unexpected modalities of thinking about affectivity.

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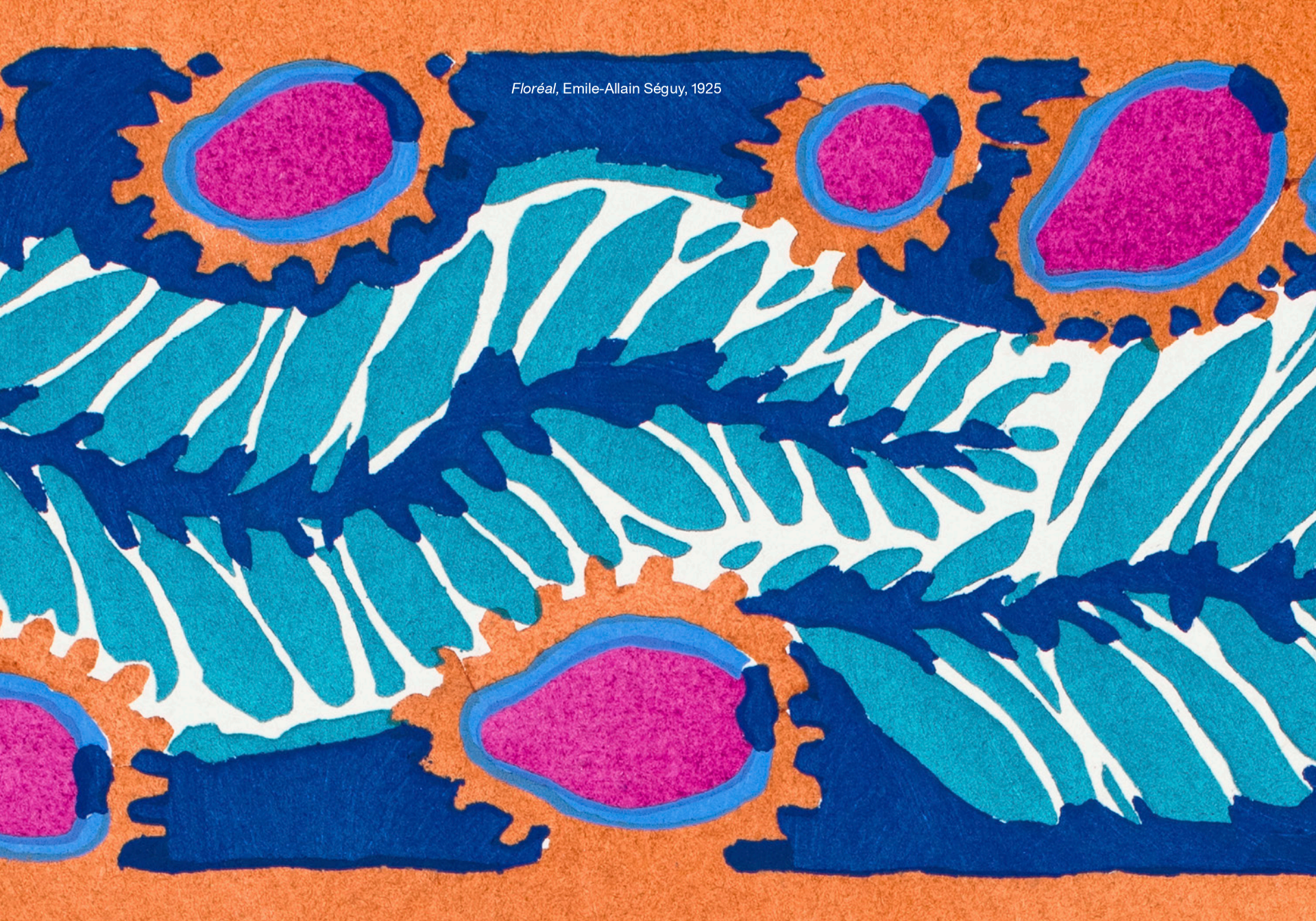

Floréal, Emile-Allain Séguy, 1925

Book Review:

TRANS CARE

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Malatino, H (2020). *Trans Care*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 79 pages, $10.00 (paperback).

I have come to imagine Hil Malatino's award winning book, *Trans Care* (2020), as the Little Yellow Book. As I write this, it sits above me, shining brightly on my bookshelf, a beacon of optimism and caution, nestled snugly between Dean Spade's golden yellow spine of *Normal Life* (2015) and Adrienne Rich's cream yellow of *Of Woman Born* (1995). Unlike a Little Black Book that conjures images of addresses or embarrassing secrets that only the paper, pen, and I share, Malatino's Little Yellow Book is an open and intimate exploration of care labor and care ethics that sheds light on the radical power of trans(ing) care. By centering the "rhythms of the trans mundane," of trans people's everyday lives, *Trans Care* investigates and destabilizes the ways affective and political economies of care operate to privilege those who can reproduce colonial/modern, middle class, reprotypical practices of family and punish those who cannot or will not reproduce this family form (Malatino 2020, 5). Even though *Trans Care* is written for queer and trans audiences, and written by someone who is queer and trans, the book simultaneously invites all people to engage with one another differently and declares that they do so. *Trans* care: not only because of the overwhelming physical, emotional, and material violence inflicted upon trans people, especially Black trans women and trans women of color, but as Malatino (2020) notes, "we're impossible without each other" (73). Ultimately, *Trans Care* advocates that it is our interdependence, gender variant or not, that enables us to move towards a world that sustains us all.

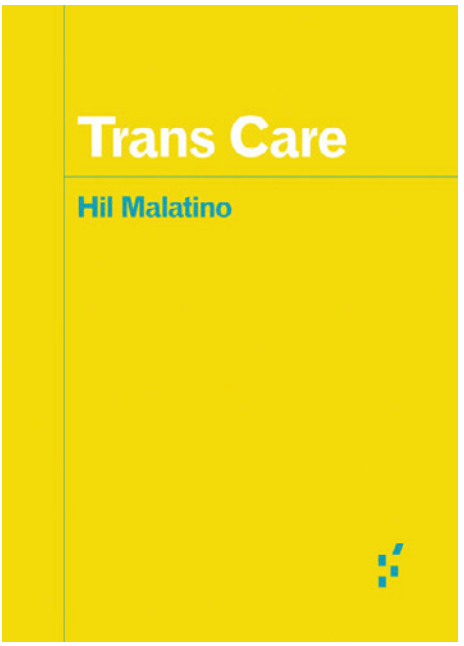
Grounded in the histories and intensities of the present, Malatino's Little Yellow Book begins by taking us through personal stories and current events that set up a relatively straightforward 'trans care' concept: to care and be cared for necessitates survival. However, as trans people, particularly Black, Brown, and Indigenous trans people, are legally being "defined out of existence," or are quite literally disappeared through incarceration, murder, and death by suicide at disproportionate rates than their cisgender (or cisgender passing) counterparts, *Trans Care* asks: how *do* trans people survive against such intense and deep trans antagonisms when traditional forms of respite and care, like family or healthcare, inflict so much harm?

In asking this question, *Trans Care* illustrates that trans survival is about finding ways to live with and through anti-trans logics as a way to undo them. Namely, to be trans is to create space, sometimes material, sometimes abstract, by weaving in and out of degrees of visibility and drawing on diverse temporalities. We find and latch on to things, and others, that keep us tethered to a sense of self (like Fall Out Boy fandom or specters in the archive) in spite of continuous attacks on trans ontologies. For instance, Malatino (2020) offers up forgetting as an act of trans survival. Forgetting, while usual for everyone, is often an escape hatch for trans people from covert and overt ways interpersonal and institutional transphobia repeatedly insists throughout our lives that we 'don't exist' or that our bodies are 'too much.' We (try to) forget things like misgendering, misnaming, lack of workplace policies that support or protect trans employees, parent's continuous statements that they 'lost their child,' not knowing whether or not to use the 'Ladies'' or the 'Gentlemen's', insisting we are 'too sensitive,' and inquisitive looks searching our face and body for some inkling of the 'right' Gender. One time, during therapy, I told my therapist that it weirds me out that I seem to not have as many 'memories' as my peers. Her response was basically, "it makes sense you don't have many memories. Why would your brain want to hold on to all of the times you felt uncomfortable and out-of-place?"

For a majority of the trans people who do survive, *Trans Care* points out that they end up on a path towards what people inaccurately imagine as burnout. Malatino (2020) proposes that using burnout as a framework for understanding trans experiences is limited in its ability to capture the complex and blurry boundaries of who is caring and who is being cared for in trans lives. Soaked in neoliberal, entrepreneurial speak, burnout insidiously facilitates a hierarchical structure of

care that enables the individual carer's "fatigue, stress, and trauma" to affectively transfer to an other or others, exacerbating already drained trans emotional reservoirs (25). When, in fact, in trans collectives and communities "any act of caring is simultaneously an act of maintaining those minimal networks of support that sustain you," and eschewing hierarchical models (Malatino 2020, 24). *Trans Care* suggests that *care webs*, a crip-femme reworking of mutual aid developed by scholar Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018), more accurately describes the care trans people do. Care webs put us with and besides other trans people regardless of how friendly or knowledgeable we are which ensures our flourishing and survival. Our care webs grow and strengthen when we share packing and tucking advice in Facebook groups, or teach one another how to read syringes and inject needles, or wink at the cutie whose voice has just the right tangy, honey smooth tenor. Perhaps to flirt unabashedly is a form of trans survival and care: to love another trans person is to love one's own transness.

In a deft conceptual move, *Trans Care* asserts that care is not abstract, and because of this, it is integral to our ways of doing. This concept in and of itself is not necessarily new as care politics have been central in feminist critique. However, in combining this understanding with the view that gender is what we 'do' – not who we *are* – shifts how "gender recognition is sustained by a web of forces that we don't control" and not just about the individual's ability to 'perform' a gender (Malatino 2020, 37). Put otherwise, we do a gender and hope that the other grants us the desired recognition of that gender. Thus, the crux of trans care is about "*how* we care and *who* cares for these assemblages we are" (Malatino 2020, 40). Again, stressing interdependence over independence. *Trans Care* insists that one way of transing care means leaving behind the concept of "transcestors" and intellectually dancing with the "specters of the gender spectrum" who haunt the archive, differing from popular re-imaginations of history that aim to "reclaim" potential trans ancestors as a way to defend today's gender politics. *Trans Care* articulates that we will never "know them" but we can be "deeply implicated [with them] in our current conditions of possibility" for they are part and parcel to current conditions of possibility (Malatino 2020, 59). Other times, *Trans Care* and the other literature it engages with—Dean Spade, Aren Aizura,



Amy Marvin, Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson—argue we must decenter practices and conceptualizations of family that are rooted in white, cis heteronormative, capitalist ideologies that inflict and sustain institutional, systemic, and interpersonal oppressions. Care work, then, is needed, desired, and wanted but it does not need to be (and should not be) performed through a neoliberal tit-for-tat framework that sustains the mythical family, chosen or not.

In his coda, Malatino (2020) beautifully depicts his decades long relationship with a "similarly abandoned…voluntary gender worker" from his youth that helped shape his definitions of care (71). On the one hand, I wholeheartedly agree that care *is* "about a certain kind of faithfulness and a certain kind of obligation: about what we owe each other" (Malatino 2020, 72). That care *is* "a commitment to show up for all of those folks engaged in the necessary and integral care work that supports trans lives" (Malatino 2020, 72). However, on the other hand, as more and more middle class white trans youth (and adults) gain access to trans healthcare and are folded back into heteropatriarchal structures of family through their ability to enact and bolster transnormative logics, we need to continuously interrogate the affective orientation of obligation and commitment that undergirds the institution of family *and* care. Historically, the institution of family affectively mobilizes obligation, emotional debt, and material and abstract forms of inheritance that coerce people into maintaining normative ways of being that harm and hurt, including that of transness. So, I simply caution—as I have no answers to this problem—we must continuously interrogate trans's relationship to family even in the moments of undoing it.

At only seventy-two pages this Little Yellow Book does so much work, especially for an exhausted "voluntary gender worker" like Malatino. *Trans Care* succeeds in its quest to explore how care operates in the everyday lives of trans people outside of the realm of the family as a site that engenders violence, sometimes in the name of care. In the end, *Trans Care* is a brilliant Little Yellow Book that reminds us to show up and care.

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Sunset Drive-In, Amarillo, Texas, John Margolies, 1977 (detail)

Book Review:

HARD LUCK AND HEAVY RAIN

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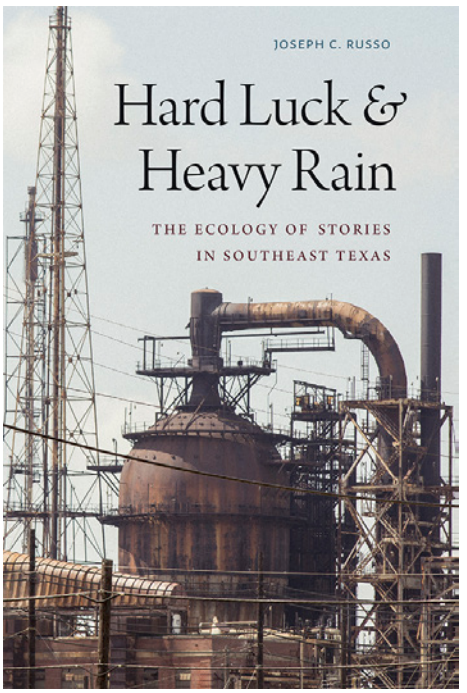
Russo, J.C. (2022). *Hard Luck and Heavy Rain: The Ecology of Stories in Southeast Texas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 152 pages, $23.95 (paperback)

The discipline of socio-cultural anthropology has a tendency to routinely self-perform biopsies. In recent decades, concepts once thought central to anthropology and its aligned practice of ethnography have been painfully extracted for scrutiny in the laboratory of disciplinary debate, with the same samples often brought under the microscope with cyclical regularity: humans have been decentred as the primary subject of ethnographies, culture as an analytical term has been questioned, the possibility of legibility or comparison across lines of difference has been refuted, and the question of how to represent all that an ethnographer encounters or fails to encounter in 'the field' (itself a contested term) looms large. Such contention speaks to a time when both difference and mutability are pronounced.

Joseph C. Russo's new ethnography *Hard Luck and Heavy Rain: The Ecology of Stories in South East Texas* responds to these tensions within the discipline, and within modernity more broadly, in poetic and nuanced ways.

The book begins in classic ethnographic fashion, with the trope of crossing a 'threshold' into the field. But it quickly becomes apparent that this is not an ethnography in the classical sense. Rather than a threshold into a 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967) of the exotic rites of passage historically theorised by anthropology, the opening lyrically draws together an abundance of the ordinary through an ecology of human and non-human forms—birds, rivers, roadkill, vehicles, refineries, truckers, alligators—drawing 'you', the implied near-outsider-reader, into a liminality that, while characterised by difference, feels uncannily familiar. Here Russo invites 'you' through 'a gateway into a circulation of feeling' (6). This is the liminality of stuckness, which Russo explores through sensitive engagement with the genre of 'hard luck stories' he found told among the rural white 'characters' of South East Texas.

Where other anthropologists of narrative have tended to emphasise the existential role of story in social life (see especially Hastrup 2005; Jackson 2013) Russo traces story as an articulation of the impasse that exists in the ruins of grand narratives of the American Dream. Following the likes of Lauren Berlant (2011, 4) and Ann Cvetkovich (2012, 20), Russo locates stuckness as both a socio-spatial political state where a future is uncertain and a symptom of the ongoing production of the present. Hard Luck stories thus speak not only to a state of 'stuckness' but also the 'stickiness' of an event and the accrual of feeling.



Through an introduction and four chapters, Russo 'visits with' a range of 'characters' who tell stories of a world that always already outstrips one's ability to grasp it. In this trembling time-space (Stewart 1996) of stories, the abject is given relief by humour, the fictive and the real blur together, and racial politics is unconstrained by redemptive narrative forms that seek to move toward innocence (See Tuck and Yang 2012). In doing so, Russo charts the affective circulation and strange temporality that is evoked in the performance of character in relation to a place that is at

once a geographic locale and a social imaginary, where stories 'didn't merely describe, but situated, gestured toward, and performed the elements of their cultural real' (46). Here metaphorical and literal elements of doctrine blur in conversations of end-times, autonomy, and herbal supplements as some characters search for a higher truth or meaning, others negotiate individuality and community in relation to zones of difference, and others just try to get by.

The incommensurate moments Russo presents (see Russo 2017) beautifully conjure up the 'throwntogetherness' (81, see also Massey 2005) of bodies in a region subject to an atmosphere of capitalism and pollution. This is most apparent in Russo's attention to 'bodies under the film' of cancer in the book's final chapter. Here bodies—whether starting work at dawn, driving down roads, smoking amid the flashing lights of a casino, or undergoing radiation treatment—are in a process of becoming with atmospheres of 'slow violence' in a region permeated by the petrochemical industry. Through intimate moments with such bodies, Russo brings together threads from previous chapters, interweaving themes of precarity and conspiracy, environment and alterity, conservativism and care. And yet there is no point where the threads in this book are tied off, nor could there be any ethnographic satisfaction in such a conclusion. In lieu of conclusion, Russo keeps us wondering about the ongoingness of life even in the face of death, of how 'life lived at the level of throwing oneself repeatedly into intense encounters of the body and the environment becomes a way of being in the world, being a character in a story about grappling with life at different levels, and of life not letting up' (113).

This sentiment brings us back to anthropology, to this moment where everything is in question, where I seem to be one of many anthropologists asking what we are really doing, or should be doing, in ethnography. One of the greatest achievements of this book is the treatment of difference, its gentle suggestions for ethnographic ways of responding to difference, and gestures towards ways beyond ethnographic impasse. Russo's empathetic attention to the 'near-Others' of South Texas breaks up the exoticism often still imbedded within the anthropological project while nonetheless continuing an anthropological tradition of studying difference and its affective resonances. Because of both the close relative nearness yet difference of 'characters' to the author and many of the assumed readers, it would be tempting to fall back on known caricatures of 'rural whites of the liberal imaginary' (5) in the 'us and them' discourse of Trump-era politics. Such a binary, of course, is a part of a broader political impasse that acts to overlook the structural complexities of socio-political issues by relegating blame for all ills to an abstract Other (in this case, the 'bad whites' (7) of the South), and Russo delicately avoids this through the generous close attention of ethnography, without recourse to abstraction. Russo takes seriously 'The Texan" as 'an emergent character' (5) that is inescapably tied

to but not bound by archetype and always in a state of emerging-with a broader ecology, giving each 'character' a kind of consideration and that shows how they always exceed the text. While occasionally Russo's own thoughts and politics come to the fore, making the ethnographic focalisation uncomfortably apparent, the worlds that characters construct are often left unremarked upon. This resistance to ethnographic categorisation and analysis feels at times unsettling, and I suspect this affect of 'epistemic disconcertment' (Verran 2013) is precisely Russo's objective.

In doing so, Russo demonstrates how not only in encounters with radical difference but also in anthropologies with near-Others there is a meeting of worlds, an ontological collision between the ethnographer and those they work with but also those who anthropologists group together in a 'field' that produces 'a different ordinary' (84). Through storytelling Russo breathes new life into de la Cadena's (2011, 28) theories of 'not only' and recent ethnographic discussions about the need to control equivocations and open to multiplicity. Russo juxtaposes moments of everyday politics and poetics, revelling in the excess generated by incommensurate moments that bring one to the fissures in the standard onto-epistemic frameworks of the assumed 'you' of the reader. In this sense, the 'characters' become co-researchers and co-theorisers through the act of storytelling and a presentation of the excess of regionality.

This excessive and collaborative nature of the characters and worlds Russo presents thereby responds to questions about the possibility of discussing emotion and affect across lines of difference in anthropology. As Yael Navaro (2017) notes, the genealogies of affect theory do not necessarily hold up against the multiple ontologies and geographies anthropologists engage with. Like Navaro and Stewart (2007) before her, Russo shows how one might theorise affect by allowing affect to emerge from the domain of social everyday. Rather than impose affective theoretical categorisation or focus on the experiences of the ethnographer, Russo evokes the arresting flow of life as it is in a given time and space, often in the words of characters themselves. Concepts here arise in the fractured processes of worlding, where moments are thrown together as part of an 'ecology' of affects in circulation.

The near-Others of South East Texas thereby open a door to interrogating difference and affect through generative forms of theorisation that might be built upon in far reaching ethnographic scenarios. A question arising from this ethnography might be how ethnographers could approach difference in various contexts, apply-

ing new techniques and opening up to a multiplicity of ethnographic approaches in response to the affective atmospheres and politics encountered. While at times I felt myself craving more anthropological critique, especially in relation to the presumed 'near-other' status of the reader and question of who ethnography is really for, Russo's resistance to standard anthropological writing, treatment of story as within a more-than-human ecology, and attentiveness to difference hints at the vast potentialities of non-representational and affective ethnographies in anthropology.

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Woman measuring thigh
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THE FUTURE

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hunger. longing.
seven years, one and a half weeks, always and never now and now again, again today.
and then a life. gone.

The anorexic body's experience and comprehension of future is the condition of a constant not-yet actualized potential. The anorexic paradox is that in the middle of an unlivable life she [sic] keeps all opportunities of life—all kinds of potential—open. Future can be anything because it never really arrives. The condition becomes an embodied portraying of the difference between hope and unbearable longing.

the future is accessible. printed on a pink t-shirt. hopefully on someone hopeful.
the future is accessible.
is it?
I mean, yes, sure, I know, it arrives, attacks, now, now, now, there it was.
and now it's gone. done. passed. again.

I am forty kilos on forty square meters. the heaviest forty kilos that ever existed, ever to exist. my legs can't carry my forty kilos, I'm not sure if the floor can. I am three hundred calories, every day, again, again. I am the reiteration, the tourettes of restriction, repeat repeat repeat, exactly the same, pumpkin, three hundred calories of pumpkin, cut in this way, the same way, the same number, eating this way, the same number, orange reiteration, reduced to reduction, repetition, less, less less, lighter, heavier and heavier. again and again, while it always ends tomorrow. please. let it end tomorrow. let me be something else tomorrow. or monday. or at least before Christmas. at some point.

my skin is orange. a result of the combination of my three hundred orange calories and liver failure.

it is killing. killing everything every day long before I die.

suddenly seven years past, vanished. a fall and seven years. seven years later. and seven years later and seven years again, half a life, more than half a life and everything alive. seven years for lea. again. and again.

I wish for a me in any other version, I long, dream of a me in another version, any other version, astronaut, gardener, or someone's wife, mother, just someone's. some kind of someone's. I crave any kind of other future, I wish for a brain tumor or diabetes while fearing my own now, disgusted with my present, rejecting it, my own present and my own future, my own delay, distortion, destruction of myself.

I keep repeating while dreaming. my other versions are there. right there. while I repeat my unlivable now.

the horror-covered anxious compulsive repetitive procrastination from life that becomes life.

echo. no resonance.
repetition, no difference.
the refrain is stuck, compulsive, on repeat, broken vinyl with a soundless mute screaming panic.
the death of differance.
this is real praxis. so beautiful in theory. only in theory.
sorry derrida.

the becoming of absolutely no becoming. while I maintain myself the only way I know how.

the now evaporates, now is the dream of the next now, everything one could be, I could be, maybe is, maybe will be in the next now, or next week. strangulating the now in a pillow while I look away, look towards the not-yet or soon-yet or maybe-soon. for the now is unbearable. everything is future while nothing is. a future which is everything, could be anything, but never comes.

the excruciating now. unbearable.
too heavy. i can't bear it. Or myself.

the condition of potential.
the lived space of impossible possibility.

everything, everything counts, everything must, will, I will, i will be, do, do and be it all all all.
in a moment. tomorrow.
when I am no longer sick.

seventeen years for lea.
renewal? re-now-al?
nope.

I have a now and a not-now.
Not a this-afternoon. I don't have a tomorrow.
I have a tonight, because I fear it. the night.
And then I have future.
Future-everything, future undefined.

The embodied experience of anorexia offers the lie of its own alternative temporality. The chronology has stopped. chronology stopped here, is standing still from where I stand, from where I cannot stand, in this unmovable, static now, past, past tense, imperfectum, absolutely perfect unlived repeated imperfect. the becoming of no-becoming.

I long.

I long and I hope from this static position, the position of none-actualization, none-consequence, pure potential.
this body, body of hunger, hunger, hunger and bones makes it impossible to test life, to live, which makes everything, all possible possibilities of life possible.

the anorexic paradox:

the imprisonment in impossibility makes every possibility possible. life is never tested, tried, refuted, learned.

The exhausted, exhausted, exhausted condition of eternal inexhaustible potential. suffering. Suffering potent with future. future. future will be here in a second, just a moment, tomorrow. always in a second, soon. postponed. and therefore never.

braindead, shapeless, hopeful condition, imaginative, filled with spirit, dreams, fantasies. Fantasies about food. Food, food more food and all other kinds of life.
but I am not alive.
I cannot leave my sofa, I piss in my pants because the bathroom is too far away, I cannot cobble together words or sentences, I need a walker to get to my shower, drained from imagination, deleted fantasy, strangulated poetry from bone to bone, the skeleton, the heavy heavy heavy thinness, the heavy heavy heavy bones. the heavy loyal bones, tying me to my bed, imprisoned in routine, compulsive repetition, the evil
peace
.

and still I hug my bones for protection, protecting me, protecting them, if anyone tries to take them away.

Life is to dream about future. from this state of death. from here life is to dream about a future, long for a future, a long for any other time.
wasted life.
potent nothing.
fiction.

wasted life

someone came in. you need sugar, give her some juice. I scream.

longing is too heavy to bear, everything is too heavy to bear, groceries and trust. I carry the idea, the vision, the conception that longing will transform to real possibility to something real in a moment, tomorrow, after my next impatient treatment, thursday, this summer, in a moment, when I'm recovered
I lock myself up with my anorexia nervosa, DSM-5.
anorexia nervosa, nervous, nerve-less.

I am sitting right here and I will keep on dreaming and forget that there is a problem, forget and dream, forget, silent, invisibly visible, real, detached, hopeless full of hope, full of future.

FOR I WILL DO ALL OF LIFE. ALL OF LIFE. IN A MOMENT. I JUST NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO COME AND SAVE ME.

swimming in scarcity, imagining abundance, a life not for me. I do not speak, spill it, perceived, persuaded, overwritten, overdone, overdo. over. I go over and under the radar. Measurable enough for BMI's silently taken up space, the smaller the louder. muted freedom. I am more in the less, close, closer, close to something while others and other is further and further away. maybe I'm intact, enough, exactly precise and everything, allowed to be, to take place the second before zero

the future is accessible.
the future is accessible. as life?
as hope, as dream, cruel optimism.
berlant.
the future is accessible as illusion.
help.

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AFFECTIVE EVENT WRITING: AN ENTRY POINT FOR COLLECTIVE ATTUNEMENT

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> It is precisely this sense of Foucault's notion of problematization that is centrally at stake in what follows: a form of experimentation which implicates ourselves in our present, requiring that one allows oneself to be touched by what the present presents in the form of a test, and allowing what touches us the power to modify the relation we entertain to our own reasons. (Stengers, 2019, p. 3)

We published the co-edited book "Affects, Interfaces, Events" with *Imbricate! Press* in June 2021.[1] The book is the outcome of a collective research project in which we tried to grasp the crude details of affective interfacial events (Thomsen, Kofoed, & Fritsch, 2021).[2] In the project we immersed ourselves in artwork, archives, interaction design, #metoo testimonies, media, urban design, digital assault, and more to explore how affects are interfacially embedded in events. We took up Isabelle Stenger's (2019) invitation to experiment with "implicating ourselves," and to allow "the touch of the present moment" to "modify the relation we entertain to our own reasons" (3). We did so through a variety of well-known research formats—seminars, talks, writing retreats—but also by exploring formats for collectively scrutinizing such affective interfacial events. This involved embodied and situated workshop formats, protyping new interfaces, urban interventions, and transdisciplinary forms of not only collective writing, but also reading aloud and listening. In our initial funding application, we had stated that the interfacial

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affordances of affective events would need new methodologies, as these "cannot be accounted for by traditional analytical methods and descriptions of communication in terms of meaning and representation" (Fritsch & Thomsen 2013, 2). These exploratory formats were ways to meet this claim for new methodologies.

In order to address these questions within this particular research we read our favorite thinkers and acquainted ourselves with those we did not yet know. We repeated the often-quoted Spinoza concept: affect is the ability to affect and be affected. We thought we knew what we were doing.

But something escaped us. Or rather; *something* fell out in the transition from a lived research project to a published volume. This *something* was an important force in our collective process of inquiry and experimentation. A scent of writing jointly, of reading aloud and listening, of finding vocabulary, and of walking alongside ineffable knowing. This is a story about the disappearance of a driving force in the project.

It is here we follow Katherine Stewart's (2008) work on affect as something that "remains obscure and unspeakable but is nonetheless real" (1016). With a mode of experimentation that we have come to think of as *affective event writing,* we try to approach this disappearing *something* that was nonetheless tangibly real.

Affective Methodologies

One of the recurring conundrums in affect philosophy and affect studies seems to be how to make ephemeral, emergent, autonomous affective dimensions of what we study come to life, and how to re-enact it in text (as is often the preferred output of the research, even though we see many other examples occurring). Affective event writings have provided us with a space and pace in which we seek to move beyond the self-indulgence of our own experiences and life events to, again taking inspiration from Stewart (2011), create "new spaces for thinking about and imagining what might be going on when we pay attention to the charged ephemeral atmospheres of events and allow them upfront entrance in to writing and thinking" (445).

While much of the terrain of affective methodologies has been carved out, methodologies for grasping ineffable affectivity are always needed (Coleman & Ringrose 2013; Knudsen, Krogh, & Stage 2022; Knudsen & Stage 2015; Lury & Wakeford 2012; MacLure 2020; Springgay & Truman 2018). In keeping with the experimentation noted by Stengers above we share Springgay & Truman's (2018) call to collective thinking in the presence of others, and to catalogue such experimental enterprise as methodology. The experiment we have set in place is also in line with Knudsen et al's (2022) interest in how "experiments produce, modulate and circulate experiential intensity, shifts in attention and movements between bodily states" (2). We add affective event writing to the list of possible methodologies that allow us to creatively engage in sensing an affective-material world through experimenting with ourselves in a sort of "plural dynamics of collective apprenticeship," to borrow another sentence from Isabelle Stengers (2018, 42). To talk of collective apprenticeship allows us to underline both the experiential and experimental part of the enterprise and to highlight how what we engaged in, happened in and beyond individual bodies of flesh, text, and technologies.

The Temporality of Publishing

It has already been more than two years since we submitted the full manuscript ready for review, and more than a year since the book was launched. What was lost in the core products of five years of research was indeed the love, care, receiving and treatment of the mundane, and not-so-mundane life events alongside the world entrenching events that happened during the project. Indeed, those particular five years of research were not a smooth stretch of life for any of us. Much of this is difficult to fit into the research products and outcomes as we know them. The reasons are obvious; there is no need for confessions of personal life events such as navigating your family and yourself through severe illness, breakups, weddings, chemotherapy and other treatments as happened throughout the working years of this project. It happens to most of us. Yet, we found ourselves stretched between having no urge whatsoever to confess personal details of our own lives and knowing that these events merged with and altered our scholarly work, and deepened our understanding of the entanglements between affects, interfaces, and events. Following Haraway (2017), this essay can be seen as the result of staying with the trouble posed by the feeling of having abandoned a sensuous knowing of methodology, a feeling of not quite having arrived at articulating that *something* which escaped us. Now, it finally seems that we can

tell the story of affective event writings as a methodology specifically aimed at collectively attuning to affective phenomena through intimate encounters with life and world events. Further, by actually sharing some of these writings, we also have an opportunity to show a glimpse of what was left out.

In the following, we do not suggest any naïve correspondence between the scrutiny of the personal phenomena we explore and the analysis of artwork, blogs, design etc we engaged in. We do not assume ready transposition or transparency between what we have ourselves felt or how we have felt it and the cases we explore. What we do assume: affective event writings provide an 'entry point' into how to feel-think affectivity in interfacial events.

To set the scene, we will give an example of a text emerging from one of our affective event-writings.[3] We then present in more detail the inspiration for how the experiment was invented and how it works. Following this, we contextualize more broadly aspects of the methodology in relation to previous work in affect studies, academic writing, and text production. Concurrently, we give examples of event writings and how they move the research process. We conclude by reflecting on the experimentation and how it might open new entry points for affect studies.

Affective Event Writing #1

> I had said yes to pizzas. A Tuesday evening in January, we have just come home from school and work. I was exhausted from having persuaded my youngest to attend school, exhausted from having taken in and slowly, slowly grasping that his dad is in fact about to receive electrochock-treatment, ECT. It was then I agreed to pizzas. A friend calls to see if we are okay. My voice shatters when I confirm that we are indeed all right. He says that he will be there shortly.
>
> My eldest's friend is there, too. It is the day after the night when I woke up with this weird sense of alert. Five messages from the closed psychiatric ward. Devastatingly broken-hearted messages. The despair no longer mine whirls into my body through these short messages. The friend who called is a mutual friend.

> With this incomprehensible depth of despair now woven into my bones, I set the table while the youngest rushes down the stairs. Quite ordinary swift feet on the stairs, quite ordinary pizzas, quite ordinary giggly and teasing teenage girls—while the catastrophe tilts us in slow motion. My friend stumbles in the door, two bottles of wine under one arm, and more pizza. Everybody laughs, hugs, and plays a board game that reveals our tastes in liquorice, male actors, glasses, left side driving, and boob sizes. We breath in the relief of normality and everyday pleasures, while the catastrophe simultaneously breathes through us. In each of us.
>
> The youngest signs out. The eldest and her friend do the opposite and demand yet another round of games. In hiccups of laughter, we ridicule my friend for his ignorance and salute the girls for how transparent they are to each other.
>
> I breathe through the night before. And then hold my breath as I think of the coming night. In agreement we ask the ward to take his phone. We play. I breathe. The girls leave, giggling as they disappear into her room. A quite ordinary Tuesday with teenagers in each their room. An extraordinary Tuesday, the day after nightly messages and now knowing the inside of psychiatric treatment, locked doors, and closed wards. My friend looks at me and we know that now is so obviously dividing into the between of a before and an after. We each drink our wine. His red, mine white. We share the moment when the horror of it all surfaces for us both. We sense the children next door and agree to do ordinariness all the while.

Inspirations for Affective Event Writing

We offer a few examples here to showcase the traces of what was left out. The intention is not to dwell upon the contents or scrutinize the details of our own experiences. It is rather a way of implicating ourselves, as Stengers reminds us. We have tried to engage in this with caution so as to not get lost in our own visceral events by looking for all the contradictions and ambivalences, both in the very concrete figurations and in what we might believe we can learn from it. Actually, it has been a training in paying attention (Berlant 2017, 13).The above text is from our very first affective event writing session carried out as part of a research event in October 2018. At the time, we did not know exactly what we were doing, and how the experiment would mature over the years. We did know, however, that we were searching for a way to carve out a space in the research project that would allow us to engage with the core concepts in the project—affects, interfaces, events—through the optics of the sensuous, lived experience of the project participants. And we did know that writing was part of such an enterprise.

The impetus for thinking about such sessions was inspired by a number of writ-

ing practices; feminist writer Laurel Richardson (2005) and her foundational understanding of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson 2005), the feminist tradition of auto-ethnography (Ellis, 2003; Ellis & Rawicki 2013), and not least of all, collective biography work (Davies & Gannon 2006), in which body and theory are assumed to not only entangle, but to "generate theory from memory" (Davies & Gannon 2006, 14). Moreover, the inspiration for our own sessions also drew on the intentions embedded in creative writing, particularly the 'takes' unfolded by Kim Lasky (2013) and Sissel Lie (2012). A particular statement in Laurel Richardson's 2001 paper has been of importance in how we have allowed this form of experimentation to unfold. She says, "I have come to absolutely respect the power, mystery and complexity of writing […] its effects are surprisingly complex, rich, and rhizomatic, having unexpected consequences for the writer and the reader" (34).

This particular statement vested us with courage to investigate personal matters as an entry point to empirical analysis as she—and others—had carved the way to navigate the perils of writing about our own life (Richardson 2001, 37) but not to stay with the individual joys or crises. To us it became a matter of allowing the individual to enter the collective, so to speak.

The Format of Affective Event Writing

The format of the affective event writings is rather simple: each participant chooses an affective event happening within the timeframe of the project. It needs no qualifications in terms of affective color or tonality. We write in each other's presence during a time span of 20 minutes. After this, we read our texts aloud one after the other, without any edits, carefully listening to each text. In the end there is room for comments. The reading aloud and the careful listening is as much a part of the affective event writing sessions as the actual writing itself. Here we draw on Les Back's (2007) work on the art of listening, as well as Bronwyn Davies' (2021) ideas of emergent listening as a reminder of an attentive manner of listening for the more than what we already know (21). Reading out loud and listening are manners of not leaving the written with the writer, to attune ourselves to attentively listen for what might be there, and to be touched even though we may not be living the ECT treatment, the tiny screens, or the

pizzas ourselves. In manners of listening that cracked open rather than closed around taken-for-granted assumptions we found our thinking touched, too. Writing-reading aloud-listening became our experimental cocktail.

The event-writing technique differs from that of collective biography work as the exercise stops when the texts are read aloud, making room for only a few thoughts of response. No further writing, no reworking the texts across authors, as in the well-established tradition by Davies & Gannon (2006). The purpose is not to refine the texts themselves but to excavate the affectivity of the written interfacial event by moving beyond the limited event in favor of letting sensing and imagination nourish the writing, reading, and listening. This, of course, also entails enduring moments of confusion as stepping stones into the event.

What ensued from the initial writing session was a sequence of remarkable events in themselves; the writing, the sharing, the listening, and the entanglements between concepts, research and lived experience allowed otherwise dispersed aspects to merge. The produced texts were different in how the exact entanglement played out, but they all contributed to carving out a space for collective attunement, intensifying our shared understanding, not so much of each other, but the research project we were all immersed in. *Event Writing #1* weaves together ECT treatment, tiny affective screens, hints of what will come, and ruptured temporality; a life changing event in all its ordinary and extraordinary complexity that opened tiny new insights into what we meant by affective events and affective interfaces. Just as we realized that these insights did not reside with the one who experienced it but rippled through the group.

The different texts all provided lived experience to the seeming ruptures and ripples from life-trajectories, allowing us to study within the group the thinking-feeling of affective events. This became in itself a small-scale exploration of events of "snapping us to attention together, and correlating our diversity to the affective charge that brings and that energizes the whole situation," as Brian Massumi (2015) suggests when talking of how "we are all in on the event together, but we are in it together differently" (115). The affective charge of the event writings indeed energized the whole situation differently, offering another perspective onto the "analytic and methodological framework" as initially promised by the research project (Fritsch & Thomsen, 2013, 4). Based on the first experiment, we initiated recurrent event writing sessions to both online and offline meetings to excavate and possibly trace conjunctions and affinities between the project's 'take,' the changes occurring in our individual lives, and global events.

This initial felt-thinking spurred the curious attunement across bodies of flesh, text, and technologies. It is here Massumi's concept of differential attunement helps us grasp how we were in the writing together. This became a core to the affective event writing. About differential attunement, Massumi (2015) says:

> We each come with a different set of tendencies, habits, and action potentials. That's what I mean by differential attunement: a collective in-bracing in the immediacy of an affective event, but differently in each case. "Attunement" refers to the direct capture of attention and energies by the event. "Differential" refers to the fact that we each are taken into the event from a different angle, and move out of it following our own singular trajectories, riding the waves in our own inimitable way (115).

This goes for world events such a covid lockdown, the war in Ukraine, and for small scale events such as writing sessions addressing personal events. The event snaps us together. It attunes us collectively, differently. With affective event writings we make what we lived ourselves relevant for how analysis can be capacitated. What we experience in the making of our daily lives thus allows us to attune ourselves to the specificities of affective interfacial events.

So what are the details of how we did this?

Yielding: The Spacetime of Affective Event Writing

The 'take' of an affective event writing is, as mentioned, simple: find the event and enter it. Then, remain still and stay with it. These steps resemble the three tattvas of how a yin yoga practice can be described (Clark 2012). To settle and allow the sensations to be felt is of course a well known methodological practice. Do we need yogic instructions to refine a well-known 'take,' one could ask? Indeed, we do.

The *spaciousness* crafted in the event-writing is *slow* and holds the promise of staying with the intensity built up by softly staying slow. Here we not only draw on tattvas of yoga but also on Truman & Springgay's (2018) timely reminder that slowness is not necessarily about variations in speed (15). It is about speed. But also about hesitation, to create openings and unsettling, and to allow this pace to happen in bodies and beyond the individual body. It is about how we are in it

together, how we are together differently and how that energizes the situation. Contrary to other academic practices with a higher pace and rhythm we found a need to shift pace to be able to enter that particular kind of spaciousness. To forgo the well-known pace of much academic practice in favor of this particular slowness, we needed assistance, an elaborate language. So, Bernie Clark's (2012) words worked to remind us how to "come into the pose to an appropriate depth" (33) and enabled a foundational trail for how to *enter*. In yin yoga this is often referred to as "playing our edges" (Clark 2012, 33).

We bring in the resemblance with yin yoga instructions to stress how bodily posture and attunement to intensity, and the pace of yielding, matters in how to event-write. We do indeed play with our edges by entering in this particularly slow manner. We find how the affectivity of edgy events has perhaps been what has cracked the subtleties of affects open to us, as we pursued them by remaining still and staying with the intensities crafted by this entrance. In bodies, and beyond individual bodies. Not as a wrestle, as Clark (2012) reminds us, but rather an attentively staying with the event and the exposure to intimacy, hesitation, and openings that were often found there. Wrestling with or attacking a case to enter it would be a different approach, but not the one that we pursued here. This particular approach of entering as embodied yielding to events opens a caring and ethically nurturing path that somehow asks us to walk also alongside the shadows of what we might access at a different pace. Pace is at stake in the next example.

Affective Event Writing #2

> I have made up a shell of concentration. However porous it is. It receives intrusions and disruptions from both inside and outside. It is as if I am growing a flair, a new affective capacity. Or an incapacity: I cannot endure more electronic, digitally mediated sound. Be it intimate conversations with my sister, updates from friends, yoga-classes, vivas, doctoral assessments or lectures. Not even our Head of Department's welcoming online 'open door' window each Friday afternoon speaks to me. They all enter my tired ear with the same electronic sound. The extra affective capacity does not want to cooperate. It longs for real life voices. Perhaps it is not even a real capacity being cultivated—perhaps it is more of a hyper-insensitivity. A capacity so detail-oriented to digital sound and the absence of real life voices that does not want to be overwhelmed. This new sense resists and is in dire opposition.
>
> The rest of my in/capacitated body, however, does not resist the new added-on sense. It wants to rest, it desires the break, it dreams of a silence which does not tear and scratch in the transmission itself. It is at war with itself as it knows that this unbearable sound is the current connection to bodies, voices,

> skin, kisses, and shared thinking. So this sense which perhaps even does not want to grow itself needs to cultivate itself as it is now the only sense, the only channel that connects bodies these days.

This second affective event-writing example was created during an online session in the research team during Covid-lockdown. The above testimony was written after the first few weeks of solitude with teenagers and online teaching. It addresses sensory temporality and how ripples of screens also serve as an entry point to take seriously the sensations. Not merely of the micro events of our own lives, but of the immense intensities of macro world-spanning events such as the pandemic, the ongoing climate crisis, Black Lives Matter, and #metoo, and take them into a closer view. And most importantly we found the courage to embrace these sensations as entwined with our thinking, not merely as testimonies to personal life event, not as something exterior to our research, but as intimately folded into it.

Tons of testimonies and special issues on all parts of living during lockdown have been published since 2020. We do not assume this short piece to lay out lockdown experiences any better than those. What we want to showcase here are the minute attentive attunements to bodies-screens-affect-world events that spurred new insights into how to grasp what might be at stake in interfacial events. The third example of an affective event writing starts with a different kind of event.

Affective Event Writing #3

> On Tuesday the 29th of March 2022, the Danish soccer player, Christian Eriksen, made his first appearance with the Danish National team, 9 months after he fell to the ground with a heart attack on live television in the home field of Denmark, Parken, during the European Championships 2020, played in the Summer of 2021 due to corona. Finally, people had a break from the pandemic and were allowed to meet again in public—maybe a bit too soon, but it seems everybody was ready to take the risk.
>
> The heart attack happened in Denmark's first match and was broadcast to millions of people. For obvious ethical reasons, no footage now exists of the live event, which I was watching with two friends. But I remember the feeling of uneasiness slowly seeping from the screen into the room; why did he fall, when no one was around him? Why did he fall in this particular

> manner—without being able to use his hands to soften the fall? I remember the voice of the commentator, the look of the audience, and the faces in tears of his teammates when they formed a circle around him while the doctors were giving him heart massage and saving his life on the playing field. I remember staring at the screen, people finding their mobile phones to seek live updates, more news, and the unbearable thought that he might in fact not come back. The ambulance taking Eriksen to the hospital, rumours spreading that he had been sitting up when taken to the hospital, the picture of Eriksen in the hospital bed an hour later, and the fact that the match was played after the players had heard he was okay.
>
> I remember the sound footage of the viral video of the Danish and Icelandic audience shouting in a call-response manner: Christian–Eriksen.
>
> Later in the evening, we saw the lights of an ambulance passing by in the small villa road where we were watching the match. This was a weird doubling of the intensity on the screen, suddenly becoming very palpable almost right next to us. The urgency was spreading, proliferating. We later found out that a person in one of the neighboring houses had gone into shock after seeing the live event of Eriksen's collapse and had to be taken to the hospital for observation.

In many ways, the third affective event writing example reenacts a lived affective interface event par excellence; the affective intensity of the heart attack being live-broadcast across the world, the uncertainty of not knowing, the entanglement of broadcast and internet-based media that allowed for the event to travel and for people to attune to the event; the feeling that you as a person are being folded into an event that is bigger than you, the very palpable consequences of this affective intensity as it enters a living body in a neighboring house. You are braced into the event, which proliferates and mutates freely through entangled screens and bodies. In the initial application, we had mentioned Felix Baumgartner and his free fall from outer space as an example par excellence of a real-time interface event. At the time that was the better example of a collective anxiety and excitement stemming from a human body in free fall in space, broadcast in real-time through the internet. However, the case of Christian Eriksen is an even stronger activation of the core concepts of affects, interfaces, and events and how they entangle. Multiple bodies, screens, temporalities, and affect were immediately lived and sensed by all imbricated into the event.

This latter affective event writing was written outside of the regular, collective writing sessions. It was not set up as a writing session, but almost as an event entering into the keyboard, the fingers tapping as a response to the felt experience of living this event. It showcases a different potential of the event writing practice; here, the text becomes a way of sharing the immediacy of the felt, lived experience with the research group at a later point in time.

The Promise of Entry Points

Throughout the latter part of our collective research process we worked with these affective event writings as quite a rigorous affective methodology, and as an experimental writing format producing a particular genre of texts. These are not literary text, nor therapeutic texts, nor academic texts. They are an affective means of grasping the ineffable, yet real, and they serve as entry points for how to feel-think affectivity in interfacial events. Therefore, the texts are not to be evaluated or assessed by any literary standards or qualities, but to be discussed as experiments and as methodologically relevant.

The writings, readings aloud, and listening to ECT treatments, growing new sensory in/capacities and Christian Eriksen's collapse did not make their way into the edited book, but the effects of these and other writings are nonetheless traceable. We think of the affective event writings as experiments with sensing the lived quality of the concepts and affective insights that spur new thinking, writings, and shared becomings that none of us had hitherto managed to incorporate into academic text. They became the entry-points for how to feel-think the affectivity in interfacial events. The words often arrived through not-knowing, but spurred by an urge to know. As Richardson (2001) reminds us, "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it" (35). An affective methodology of reading aloud, and carefully listening became the means through which to enter.

We did not know before we started event-writing. We came to know, but not necessarily what we might have wanted to know. What emerged across the different affective event writings was the potentiality of getting to know our data differently, of getting to know concepts differently. Through that entry point we moved kind of sideways as we entered and re-entered cases, concepts, design, artwork, and with the attunements of affective interfacial events that were our own. Perhaps re-addressing the events now allows us to extend the responsibilities of such unfinished business?

Closing with Assistance from Berlant

In this essay, we have presented affective event writings as an experiment and as a methodology. When we organized out first writing session, it felt risky. Things could have simply not taken off, the sharing and listening to both what we already knew and did not know yet could have led to a non-event, could have folded in on itself. Instead, we found an untapped resource through the entry points that did more than care for individual bodies that have lived through break ups, treatments, or witnessed the collapse of other bodies. Basically, we follow Lauren Berlant's approach to attention which Seigworth (2012) characterizes as calling "a body into new modes of attention: to hums, to incoherence and ambivalence, to history's coming-into-and-falling-away-from forms and genres" (346) and found ourselves noticing interfacial events differently. We found ourselves having entered not just the specificity of Christian Eriksen's collapse, of lockdown, or of witnessing ECT treatment differently but having opened the possibility of *entering* all manner of affective interfacial events. The promise of entry points enlarged beyond specificity.

So what, then, is the promise? We could suggest that a particular attunement to screens is what emerged as a specific attentive analytical focus. Just like we could suggest that the testimony to ECT treatment allowed us to grasp ineffable sorrow in interview transcripts, or attuned us to the multiple forms that temporality might have as we felt its puncture as well as how it rippled over us. This is true. But it would, however, also be quite a cruel simplification of what was at stake, a poor translation of how and why there is rich attunement and lived quality of concepts to be found and cultivated in affective event writings. Rather than something specific, the affective event writings became an energizing facility. We cannot be any more specific about this. But we found we have navigated *something* that we would otherwise have pushed aside. We paused with the tenderness of having had entry points, instead of letting the same tenderness derail us.

In this manner, the affective event writings held a generative creative tension which perhaps allowed Spinoza's 'to be affected' dimension more openly into the academic process of thinking, writing, reading, and listening, but nonetheless without the ability to point directly at how an event-writing leads us to specific analysis. It has a this-ness to it, yet also an ineffable capability that can ripple away. Rather than specific analytical strategies carved out for us, we find the

accumulated texts to be generative spaces for cultivating an analytical sensitivity and a bodily acuteness through the events of writing, reading aloud, and listening. A need for spaciousness requires much more than space to flourish; a need for slowness affords much more than tempo.

There was no immediate analytic genre available. So, we looked for an essay to embrace care, yogic entrance-practices, memory work-inspiration and the like to sop up what we thought was missing. Throughout these pages we have addressed it as if something 'was left out' (of what has been published). This way of phrasing it possibly implies that we made a deliberate decision to not include this *something*, in the anthology. In hindsight, perhaps it is more accurate to say that maybe things have been left in the text as imperceptible traces that color the framing of the chapters, anyway.

Endnotes

1. We are grateful to Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen, Dorthe Staunæs, and the editors of *Capacious* who all read previous versions of this essay and so helped it find its shape.

2. Apart from ourselves, the 'we' includes Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen, Søren Rasmussen, Kristine Samson, Camilla Møhring Reestorff, and Thomas Markussen. The project was funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark (IRFD), 2015-2021.

3. Originally all event writings were written in Danish. The texts presented here are translated into English and slightly reworked for the purpose of this essay.

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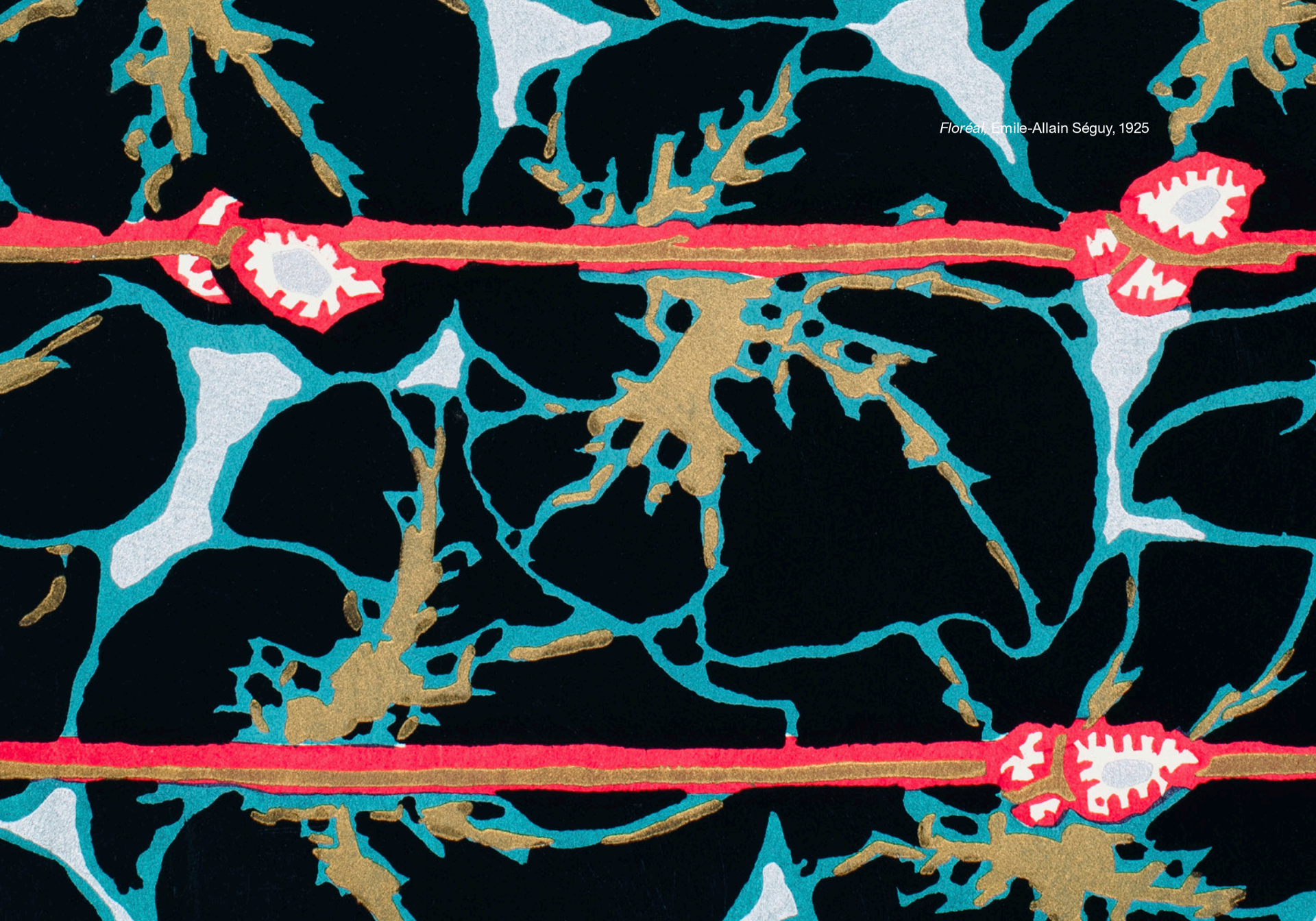

Floréal, Emile-Allain Séguy, 1925

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Vases of the Land of Kafa, from Histoire de l'art égyptien, Émile Prisse d'Avennes, 1878

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