



2019–2020 | VOL. 2, N^{OS.} 1–2

CAPACIOUS

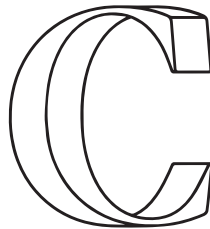
JOURNAL FOR EMERGING AFFECT INQUIRY

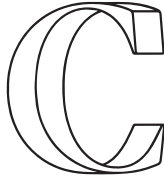


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JOURNAL FOR EMERGING AFFECT INQUIRY





Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry Vol. 2 Nos. 1–2

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ca·pa·cious

kə'pāSHəs/ 

adjective

having a lot of space inside; roomy.

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. Secondly, 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.'

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Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

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Capacious editorial team
August 2020

CAPACIOUS

EDITORS' PREFACE: CARE IS A DEFIANT ACT



i. Remembering Forward

Gregory J. Seigworth

MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY

3 Years...

The first issue of *Capacious* was released on July 28, 2017—three years to the day that I write this. There is a much longer story to tell here at another time. But, for now, the key details are: there was a bit of money left over from the Affect Theory: Worldings/Tensions/Futures conference in October 2015, and I was using it to create a website to house that conference's plenary talks along with a few interviews, graduate student profiles, miscellaneous art-theory intertwinings, etc. I'd hired a Millersville student to edit the videos and do some very basic web design.

At about the same time that this post-conference website was slowly coming together (March 2016), I was invited to give a presentation at a colloquium at Drew Theological School on affectivity and divinity. The first day of the colloquium was dedicated to graduate student presentations; the second speaker was Mathew Arthur. Mathew's talk on Indigenous knowledge-practices and affect was hands-down one of the best challenges to affect studies that I'd encountered in some time. Mel Chen (another of the invited keynotes) and I corralled Mathew almost

instantly after the panel wrapped up. This was someone who had something really going on *you could just tell*. Energies come off Mathew in waves, like the best vibes: instant felt-connection, generativity, a sense of intellectual curiosity and interpersonal grace. Besides a brilliant mind, Mathew is also, it turns out, a very gifted designer—web and otherwise—with an outsider sensibility that serves him well (at the time, the guy didn't even have a *proper academic degree* of any sort, ha!). Perfect.

There was something we could build together. I wasn't quite sure what as yet.

If I felt like I'd somehow swiped Mathew from Mel Chen, Wendy Truran was a gift passed along by Lisa Blackman. When I organized the #affectWTF conference in 2015, I'd asked both Heather Love and Lisa Blackman to join me as conference co-organizers and look over my shoulders, guiding me toward the right things and away from any silly missteps. A couple of months after the conference, Lisa pointed me to this absolutely stunning blogpost by a University of Illinois graduate student named Wendy Truran discussing all of the #affectWTF conference plenaries. I probably should've been embarrassed—after all, I'd been watching the plenary videos over and over, trying to figure out the best way to convey their contents only to find that Wendy had captured the whole thing in a single take—but I was too much in awe. I contacted Wendy and asked if we could use her writing as the connective tissue between the plenary videos. Yes! And I soon discovered that, beyond her unfailing capacity for bringing enhanced clarity to the most complex matters (usually with a sublime mix of hilarity and humility), Wendy also has a significant background in the publishing world—having worked as a senior publishing editor at SAGE (and prior to that at Routledge) before returning to school to work on her PhD. Perfect.

Maybe there was something beyond a post-conference website to build.

The third person to join the nucleus of our pre-*Capacious* crew was Bryan Behrenshausen. I have known Bryan since he was in his late teens. As a passionately theory-centric undergraduate in Millersville University's Communication and Theatre program and, for a while, my colleague in the department too, Bryan immerses himself in all things semiotic, cybernetic, and technological (especially videogames and vaporwave), affect (especially Spinoza, Deleuze & Guattari, and the collected work of Lawrence Grossberg), and intellectual prop-

erty/copyleft. Bryan is one of a handful of people who has actually co-written with Grossberg, and, at the 2015 #affectWTF conference, he was at Larry's side during his plenary presentation while also assisting with tech issues throughout the whole event. While working on his PhD at the University of North Carolina, Bryan was the managing editor at the journal *Cultural Studies* and joined the open source software company Red Hat. With his knowledge of the inner workings of an academic journal and various aspects of open access publishing, Bryan would be, well, a perfect complement to what Wendy and Mathew (and I) were already bringing.

The notion of starting a journal was now nudging its way much more distinctly into view. We knew that we could make something really unique and that we could manage the various parts of this operation from our respective and distinct capacities as a team. From July 28, 2017 to July 28, 2019 (Volume 1 nos. 1–4), this was the *Capacious* crew!

With this new issue, though, there is a change in the line-up. With increased duties at Red Hat and an adjunct teaching gig at Duke University, Bryan simply had too many other demands on his time and, so, we reluctantly released him from our *Capacious* clutches after the last issue. WE LOVE YOU, BRYAN! Oh, but we still consult with him (he even reviewed a submission earlier this year) and Bryan helped smooth the transition to his successor—Johnny Gainer. In 2015, Johnny was a senior in our Department of Communication and Theatre at Millersville, and he was my main tech-wizard for the #affectWTF conference. I still vividly remember the two of us loading everyone's PowerPoint presentations into the six conference rooms at the Ware Center the day before the conference began, already lightheaded with excitement over what was to come. Johnny has a total DIY-maker sensibility, loves testing out music and theories and gadgets that glitch and drone, and is insatiably curious about how things persist in their existence (see: his piece on sourdough starter). While Bryan is difficult to replace, Johnny—who finished his Masters degree at Villanova and is now teaching there part-time—is pretty damn perfect.

In just three years (a bit longer, counting the #affectWTF post-conference website),¹ we certainly feel as if *Capacious* (the journal) has made a dent in the world of affect studies, alongside the *Capacious* conference in 2018, the Society for the Study of Affect Summer School (#SSASS) in 2019, and our announcement (see the final pages of this issue) of a peer-reviewed open access academic press that will publish full-length books on affect inquiry—*Imbricate! Press*.

We'd like to say the future looks bright and perhaps it will be, but there's a couple of things to be said about this past year...

1 Year...

Totally by accident, issue no. 4 of *Capacious* came out the day before #SSASS kicked off and on the second anniversary of our inaugural issue: July 28, 2019. It will have taken us a bit over a year then, to get to Volume 2. This is a juggernaut of an issue, but, yeah, we would like to maintain a regular-sized two issues per year pace. (More than two per year would be fine too!) The passage of 365+ days can always feel like a very long time but, given recent events, the spacetime collapse of July 2019 into July 2020 feels we've now taken up residence on a different timeline, in another world.

There are practical production-related reasons why it has been a year between issues. For instance, one of the working rules at *Capacious* is that, because we are oriented first and foremost to fostering first publications by graduate students and early career researchers with lives already filled with deadlines and other pressures, we do not impose any strict deadline for revisions. We make general suggestions about the return of next drafts and periodically check in on submitters' general well-being, but we don't push. This has produced excellent final essays as folks work at a rate that suits them best, sometimes through more than a single set of revisions. But it also means that we usually have about an issue and a half of backlogged essays floating somewhere in-between revision and final acceptance. We have no plans to ever change our 'no pressure' ethos—particularly because our reviewers have been so gracious and generous and generative with their feedback. We work hard to be worthy of the title that some of our published essayists (and reviewers) have given us, that *Capacious* is a journal of 'care.'

But of course, the most significant factor affecting the operation of our journal over the past six-seven-eight months has been the global pandemic.² It's not going away anytime soon. In the pages to come, Mathew, Wendy, Johnny, and some of our contributors will address coronavirus directly. And in the ongoingness of Covid-19 and an increasingly ugly Presidential election season, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police has served as a necessary tipping point for Black Lives Matter to galvanize people like never before, not only in the United

States but around the world, to confront systemic racism in all of its most macro/micro-aggressive forms and colonialist formations. This is a most vital matter that cannot be allowed to go away anytime soon. Such forms of injustice and ongoing matters of alarm (and care) are among those concerns raised in this particular volume of *Capacious* and will absolutely persist into future issues.

The world feels like—and is— a far more wobbly and worrisome place than it was just one year ago. But there are also unprecedented opportunities for all kinds of viscerally-driven interventions, across multiple fronts, that can radically redraw the shape and substance of our shared existence. If one is looking for how affect studies figures into such moments, you might consider, as a couple of examples from this issue, the critical insights found in what can be learned (as alternative pedagogy) from retracing Cape Town's history of racial injustice through GIS mapping or what can be felt among comrades in the midst of a riot that simultaneously compels unfeeling the state. Here, and elsewhere in this issue, early career scholars (and a few established ones too) grapple with methods and practices for apprehending a particular phenomenon or event while also accounting for the potentials that are arrayed around it, potentials always yet to be fully realized (and often, yes, thwarted or diminished too).

“It is a poor sort of memory that only works backward,” as the Queen remarks in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. While this brief introduction to volume 2 has been mainly reflective, the hope is that the journal *Capacious* contributes to ways that we might also remember forward, toward one or several futures—a capaciousness that is not only about making space for new sets of encounters, but also about fabricating (more) time in its suspensions and blurrings, its poolings and unspoolings: bending time toward and around those future situations where hope feels more abundant, even more tangible than it does right now.

Endnotes

1. The #affectWTF website is absolutely worth visiting if you've not already checked it out at some point over the last few years: wtf.affect.com.

2. The coronavirus also necessitated the cancellation the 2020 #AffectMAPS conference planned for University of Kentucky in September 2020, organized so superbly by Jenny Rice. Sigh.

ii. Writing Pandemic Feels

Mathew Arthur

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

How to write out a pandemic? Lately, everything comes up short. Clipped, like a bad video edit or gasping for air but somehow drawn out too—every new scene or symptom ramping up a hypervigilance or getting ignored. Short fuse, short leash. The ambit for navigating movement gets slimmer. For some, quarantine is an opening up. For others, a dragging-on of debility. “In short supply” cues up abstractions like *the supply chain* or *enduring privation* and discriminates by making them real. Short on cash. Scrimping short ends. Pandemic short-circuits flows of goods, bads, and bodies. Its ethics are diffuse. Everywhere impinges. Time feels caught between aftermath and looming recurrence: impasse, interruption, repeat. Shared knowledge work goes online in choppy videochat intervals; sometimes it is alright to admit there’s a relief to being out of sync.

But duration and scale are slippery units of analysis for the thresholds of lockdown: small indiscretions or bursts of longing, impulse buys, ad hocs and makings do, barreling on with business as usual, pacing, killing time, taking a tone, or negotiating blurred increments of care and neglect. Pandemic is about what is being animated and how it hits the body as a tangle of forces. What kinds of convergences show up unannounced or cultivate in slow burn. What is lurking at the fringes or welling up. What sticks, gets blocked out, or lingers—and how it all stacks up. Virality exceeds the biological. Yes, it circulates in epidemiological diagrams and rumors—but also as missed rent payments, anti/productivity memes, public moods and political optimisms, spreadsheets, distributed computing genomics, breakups, and drone photos of mass graves. It writes itself into place, even into the climate. There is a charged citationality to crisis. Too much to think and feel with. Every surface, every blue-gloved touch casting thought into action. Or drawing a blank.

I spend most of my time caught on whatever shape attending-to should take. Long-form seems a cruel luxury when everyone is short on retention. There is no emergent sociality in neurotypical calls to *pay attention!* that shut out the irrepressible scintillations—or contagions—of world (Manning 2018, 13-14). Re-

sisting frontal modes of attention (the university, the expert, the text or task at hand, the LCD screen), emergence asks for diverse qualities of attending: building an ‘otherwise’ by forever studying—without credit—amassing instead a debt to each other in the nurses’ room, the squat, a backward glance, in bed (Moten & Harney 2010). I wonder how to write through this feeling of simultaneous overload and attenuation of genres, media objects, biopolitical pressures and categories, material infrastructures, and styles of knowing (from hard sciences to the pseudo, folk, armchair, or conspiratorial). What new kinds of literacies need to proliferate now? Especially when *social distancing* implies an asociality to the material fullness of the nonhuman world.

And, how to stay alive to the necessity of widespread intervention without reentrenching natural and social sciences’ totalizing claims on the body in ways that don’t neglect Indigenous and Afrofuturist technologies of ancestral and multispecies care, plant medicine, and ceremony? My science studies and new materialist training is to work para-epidemiologically, tracking viralities of nonhuman agency across nexuses of technology, relationship, and power. But writing this way requires relentless homework: staying with the analytic twists and turns by writing into ever-thicker gnarls of accountability and care (Dumit 2014, 350, 358). For me, this calls for writing with those interruptions and precarities that often elicit a rush of stories, starting in contaminating and indeterminate encounters at the interface of feminist technoscience and multispecies ethnography (Tsing 2015, 20, 37). I wonder, too, what other forms writing might take and whose genres of response might cipher this pandemic’s onslaught of forces?

What to do, then, with the barely-there literacies of something on the verge of collapse? Never quite holding shape. Or those consolidations that slip beneath our tracking of more familiar geometries? We might try to work out some of the knots, get at the connective tissues (Haraway 1997, 130). At the same time, I want to be on the lookout for those imbrications that give the illusion of seamlessness—what labors, suffers, and dies behind the scenes (Reser 2020). To write this way rides out ordinaries, generating concepts by attuning to the atmospheres of everyday life (Stewart 2010). It takes the moment of rush as an incitement to compose affecting images that knead the intensities—or indifferences—of an unfolding scene and its always-rearticulating body politics (Berlant 2019). At the same time, writing ‘shorts’ necessitates connecting composition’s atmospherics to capacity via disability studies—rooting knowledge work in the nonnegotiable value of bodily difference as fragments of *brilliant imperfection* (Clare 2017, xvii). What follows is a series of shorts, something like a lexicon, stitched up between other qualities of attending. A try at writing out pandemic.

Making Masks

These days, I write at the speed of sewing: cut, stitch, trim. Making DIY face masks as a small hack at worlding with a more tangible sense of care (fig. 1). Ten minutes apiece. Each made up of storied scraps: bedsheets and offcuts. No big theoretical intervention or painstaking tracing-out of relations: just frayed threads and a sense of assembling a shared intelligibility. DIY masks *might not work*. But my boyfriend and I cut and sew on the lone table in our basement apartment, taking turns with bad moods, meals, and university work to make masks for HIV+ and other immunocompromised friends. Three each in a Ziploc bag, with laser-printed instructions. *WASH BEFORE WEARING!* Put on clean. Take off carefully. Wash your hands. Civilizing imperatives that link queerness and misuse, colonialism and propriety (see Ahmed 2019). Good and bad feels and futurities are bound up in proximities to objects—and how they get passed around—in ways that jeopardize feminist, queer, and antiracist work (Ahmed 2009, 38–41, 50). But we risk each other with these gifts, relegating epidemiology's realist claims on the body to a wager of friendship, hijacking moral and methodological hygienes into messy capacities of trust.



Figure 1. DIY masks from fabric scraps and instructions, Mathew Arthur, 2020

How masks are taken up matters. Because care is speculative—as a theory and in practice: an affective mode that intervenes in how things *could be* (de la Bellacasa 2017, 66). Sewing masks, in this sense, is decolonial making: a guesswork of materializing ordinary relations of justice (Papadopoulos 2018, 18). But stitching together scraps for friends is gambling with specificities that hurt, speculatives that might kill. Maybe masks cite the loaded relationality of knowledge work, their authors never quite relieved of what their offerings might compose. What can theories and practices of care do when their object is out of control? Counterfeit N95 masks leaked into supply chains (Kavilanz 2020). Two black men, faces half-covered, kicked out of Walmart (Jan 2020). Centers for Disease Control debating t-shirt cotton or terrycloth (CDC 2020). Micrometre-scale particle negotiations felt on the skin as fear or safety. SARS throwback anti-Asian public transit racisms (Larsson 2020; Tai 2020). Medical workers with mask fatigue, pressure sores, or no PPE at all (Noble 2020). A blue-state senator wearing his 3M mask upside down—then, a republican with a gas mask (Guse 2020; Arciga 2020). And the pedagogy of feeling one’s own breath as an invisible threat.

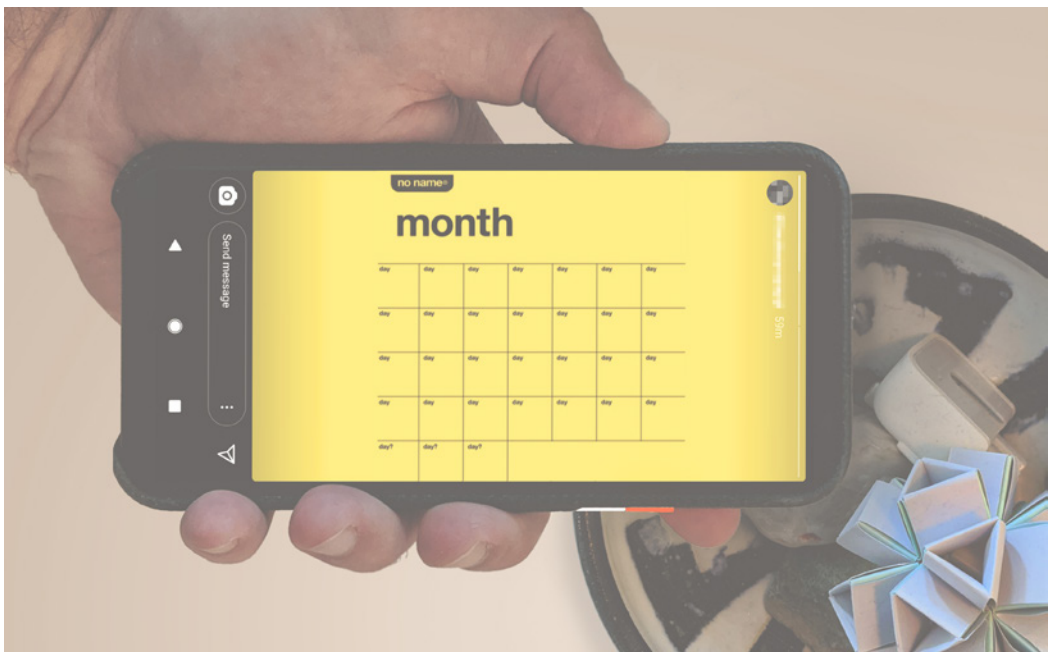


Figure 2. no name® (a Canadian grocery brand) #blursday meme, @ehcanadamemes, 2020

#blursday

Time feels weird. *The last two weeks have been a strange ten years* (Colbert in Quan 2020). #blursday is pandemic coming into form as a feeling of time trending on Twitter (Berlant & Stewart 2019, 109). It stretches out the present with scope-creeping domesticities, hangovers, professionalisms, streaming video, and oversleep. Days collapse into a dark-mode user interface, online shopping cart grid, anxious infographic, or COVID-19 meme (fig. 2). The screen's aberrant movements organize sensorimotor flows, conjuring the failure of time as time itself (Deleuze 1989, 36). Linking movement, temporality, and subject-making troubles eugenic notions of time as a prognosis of life spans and phases (Puar 2009). It shows that allegiance to a mainstream version of time—even #blursday—naturalizes the non-innocence of technology, ingrains a politics of mobility, and exposes some bodies to potential injury (Samuels 2017). I pull away from my phone, ask my boyfriend *what day is it?* The lag between question and answer is our own queer temporality, the loadedness of being out of sync. *Thursday*, he says. The day Amazon warehouse workers walk out (Ha 2020).

Doomscrolling

Doomscrolling is compulsive swiping through pandemic-related headlines, graphs, and tweets. It is an urge that practices the body into dystopian feeling: an affective becoming-indebted to the way things are through gesture—or a bad news world interfacing the body as a tic (eg. Seigworth 2016). Doomscrolling is killing time as an investment in feeling on top of things—a feedback loop of testing for encroachment. *How close, how long, how much, how bad?* Again. It mistakes use patterns, forms of connectivity, and attentional modes for reality as a symptom of its own debt.

Skype *Bioinsecurites*

In the first weeks of pandemic, we meet online to read Neel Ahuja's *Bioinsecurities* together (fig. 3). Ten in the morning in Vancouver, one o'clock in Lancaster, and six at night in Berlin. Two of us co-edit an affect studies journal, some of us met at Freie Universität for Affective Societies's "Power of Immersion" spring school, others are Harawayan theorists, black studies scholars, performance artists, free

school educators in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, mentors, and friends. We read aloud through pixelation, timezones, and choreographed mic-muting to cultivate attention from unmooredness. Pausing between sections, we animate the text’s interstices by registering a collective mood, layering on local COVID-19 happenings, or indexing disruptions to colonial configurings of species life (like recent rail blockades across Canada to protest a no-consent pipeline on unceded Wet’suwet’en lands). Our voices stumble over histories of the biopolitical policing of state, species, and body borders; politics that hitch hope to bodily vulnerability and game gendered or racialized fears of infection and species contact; and technologies hatched to manage biological processes. Every so often, the Skype connection glitches out into compression artifacts—distorted faces and robot voices surfacing the soft and hardware underneath.



Figure 3. *Bioinsecurites* reading group Skype hangout with Neel Ahuja, Mathew Arthur, 2020

As it translates affecting forces into information at the join of life, nonlife, and death (Haraway 1991, 161-164), pandemic relies on code and connectivity, too: public health demographics and databases, genome mapping computing infrastructures, surveillance and emergency services networks, or supply chain management algorithms. We sense out both Ahuja’s text and Skype as linking bodies, institutions, media, and technologies in articulating disease interventions that

wrangle circulating forces and forms of species contact (2016, 195). Our improvised meetings likewise condense deadly circulations: the mass-mobilizations of minerals or day laborers and sprawling landscapes of displacement and ruin that make up the screens, circuits, wifi towers, and server farms that afford our connectivity (eg. Mbembe 2020). We read to get a grip on pandemic, meanwhile training our own capacities for connection into yet another imperial form of species life.

Unintentional ASMR

Crisis is not without production value. Bonnie Henry, British Columbia's health officer, gives a daily video briefing in hushed tones. *With her voice, this virus thing doesn't seem that upsetting* (William-Ross 2020). Not unlike a BBC *Planet Earth II* timelapse of fungi blooming and bioluminescing in the dark: the eerie unfolding is kept in check by the narrator's awestruck calm. Henry is fast becoming a cult figure in YouTube ASMR circles, alongside quarantine mukbang (a Korean portmanteau of "eating" and "broadcast") and soft-spoken Coronavirus testing roleplay videos. A genre of YouTube or TikTok video and real-life situation, ASMR exploits sound's capacity to render atmospheres and associations (Gallagher 2016), eliciting a tingling sensation in the scalp or spine in response to auditory-tactile stimuli.

I watch whispered nail art tutorials and rustling product unboxings or towel folding videos to manage anxiety. A coping strategy for capitalism, by capitalism. ASMR slows my catastrophic thinking, but not without suspicion that a pedagogy is snuck in with voice and gesture. Henry's shushed modulations conflate the viscerally felt with big data epidemiological approaches and big-box economic concerns. Feeling better *rings true*. Voice soothes with pitch, pacing, tone—but also in numbers, risk management tactics, and a stable sense of world. I wonder about other health atmospherics, too: feelings of sterility, a missed call, bedside trustiness, Dr. Google, the spa-like, fad diets, dollar store aromatherapy diffusers, lingering smells of bleach or chlorine, metal, the color white, or soft chafings of a paper gown. What exclusionary worlds do they lodge in the body, inflected as a reassuring diagnostic?

Neologisms

There it is, a thing that will be repeated (Berlant & Stewart 2019, 32). Quaranteens, quaranteams, quarantinis. Coming of age indoors. The people you live with (or would choose to) in lockdown. Day drinking. Neologisms happen when words are not enough and still in high demand. They get at the emergent sharedness of unstable materialities and feels: living arrangements, anxieties, cliques, retoolings, jokes, perceived injustices. Neologisms are freshly minted and attributional, they loosely assemble people, fads, objects, genres, events, machines, or epochs into form as a capacity of noticing. They can become force-guiding imperatives, but mostly they entrain: as happens when a new-to-you thing is suddenly *everywhere*. Even as a provocation or reclaiming, any neologism is ultimately self-defeating. As the name sticks and gets mainstreamed, it loses its queer aptitude.

Genre Flailing¹

Early in the pandemic, Soderbergh's *Contagion* (with Gwyneth Paltrow as patient zero) and Netflix' own *Tiger King* (featuring gay polygamist zookeeper-turned-felon, Joe Exotic; fig. 4) are trending. Incel hackers are Zoom-bombing online classrooms with Pornhub screenshots (eg. Paul 2020). Fans are making mash-ups of Grimes' "You'll Miss Me When I'm Not Around"—from her climate change album, *Miss Anthropocene*—and everyone's favorite quarantine video game, *Animal Crossing* (Khan 2020; Wasylak 2020). Trump's word-salad pandemic briefings beat out *The Bachelor* in ratings and Trudeau's *speaking moistly* spawns autotuned remixes (Haring 2020; Estima 2020). Pandemic is a genre flail and a heightening of crisis as genre (Berlant 2018; 2011, 7). Genre flailing attests to the ordinariness of pandemic—the usual litanies of spectacle, shock, escapism, hand-wringing, burlesquing, policy promises, careerism, and PR spins (2018, 157). Then, the biowarfare conspiracies, technodystopias, and ecofacisms: *Corona is the cure, humans are the disease!* (Hesman Saey 2020; Hudson 2020; Han 2020). Genre habituates the experience of an unfolding situation. It can stunt the possibility of an event taking shape otherwise (Berlant 2011, 6). Literary genres and genres of life are fused in what capacities of feeling, perceiving, making, and connecting they prime—what affections they cultivate (eg. Hickey-Moody 2013, 88). Another genre of pandemic's ordinariness is domesticity. Binge-watching *Tiger King's* underworld tale of big cat breeding. Making Instagrammable sourdough (Goode 2020). Having a cheat day. Tidying up, *I'll get to that later*. Flail.



Figure 4. Watching *Tiger King* on Netflix

Pandemic Maps

Every couple of hours, I check the Johns Hopkins University pandemic map (fig. 5). COVID-19 shows up as hyperrealist datafications and mappings of life and death that swap bodily vicissitudes for data aggregates and models. In pandemic, a realist map has its charm. Maps gain realism in historical condensations of scientific ways of looking—but also by harnessing bodies to circulating patterns of desire or terror. They mobilize health or suffering to intersect with animate socialities and economic agendas (Mattern 2018, 20). In the first days of pandemic, checking the map was a matter of thresholding: not blowing things out of proportion, getting serious. The JHU map works proportionally, a dataviz tactic that pins data to geography using symbols to quantify scale. When scales are too extreme, some symbols become illegible. Problems of scale break literacies. As pandemic maps splice species contact and material liveliness into regulatory apparatuses and governable borders, literacy becomes a matter of life and death (eg. Snaza 2019).

Infrastructural Affect

Health system overloads, airline shutdowns, internet data overages and outages, supply chains snags, slaughterhouse closures, bureaucratic backlogs, empty streets—infrastructure gets noticed when it breaks (Star 1999, 382). Infrastructure is relational (380). It connects and moves. It embodies standardizations and classificatory habits: species configurings, a version of the body, medical grades, credentials, forms of mobility, plugs, wires, product ratings, and certifications. There is a pedagogy to what scaffolds us. Infrastructures and communities of practice are mutually shaped by convention (381). And all of these are at the mercy of what hardened material capacities have come before: undersea internet conduits, for example, that follow colonial spice and slave trade routes (382; Starosielski 2015). Infrastructures train bodies into forms of sovereignty (eg. Knox 2017, 373)—but they also have the capacity to affect a new politics of togetherness (367).



Figure 5. Checking the JHU Center for Systems Science and Engineering pandemic map

“Money Means Nothing”

From the surrounds of Italy’s collective PTSD, theorist Franco Berardi announces, *money means nothing*. Leaning into outbreak’s capitalist glitch means merely surrendering to the microflows of production-interrupting critters—like the virus—to find renewed pleasure in the long-denied mortality that makes us feel alive (2020). But capital is just another genre in crisis. There are other affectivities of debt. Confagricoltura—a large-scale Italian agribusiness lobby—has petitioned the government to flex the *Decreto Flussi* or “flows decree” immigration loophole to allow for an influx of hundreds of thousands of precarious non-EU agricultural workers (Fortuna 2020). Here in Canada, temporary foreign workers are “excluded” from travel bans (Canadian Press 2020). Injustice is a matter of how the planet is *made fruitful*; eating and killing cannot be hygienically uncoupled (Latour 2020; Haraway 2008). Meanwhile, HelloFresh’s stocks soar and precarious DoorDash and UberEats gig economy workers deliver takeout with no protective gear (Glickman 2020; Webb 2020). Health capitalisms amp up orthorexias: linking plant-based diets, immunity, and social media visual cultures (McCarthy 2020). But jerry-rigging an anticapitalist otherwise from viral ruin will necessitate changes both ethological and affective, a revisioning of *the biological* that cultivates other tastes—opens to new attachments—both alimentary and theoretical (eg. Probyn 1999).

Plantationocene

Plantationocene is an epochal genre—an alternative to anthropocene—that links money and slave agricultures in the historical and ongoing global relocation and forced labor of plants, animals, microbes, and people (Haraway et al. 2016). Plantation agricultures are a pandemic-friendly means to configure species life. They set up *deadly discontinuities*: genocide, dispossession, captivity, exploitation, and extraction. With no regard for intergenerational patterns of care, agricultures of scale consolidate some players and kill off others (Haraway in Mitman 2019; Haraway 2016, 137). Plantationocene is not a timespan—it is an attention span, a term that burnishes transformative possibilities of historical and future noticing. It knots appetite, violence, and theory.



Figure 6. Fermenting raisin yeast for sourdough, Mathew Arthur, 2020

Species Jump

Huanan Seafood Market, bat, pangolin, virus, human, Nadia the COVID-19-infected tiger at the Bronx Zoo (Knibb 2020)—the pandemic imaginary thrums with species anxieties. Species is not always the right unit of expression (Tsing 2015, 162). It is a term that relies on borders, muzzling Indigenous diplomacies of nonhuman encounter as feeling and knowing (TallBear 2015, 234). Still, it points at the relentlessly particular (Haraway 2018, 164) and frames the threat of what passes between us. Species jumps happen, though, all the time. But how to embody the risks? What contour or texture does feeling take? Activating the queer potentials of species contact is a training in capacities and feels: accompanyings, companionships, tones of regard, manners of touch (164; see also Wendy's piece on touch in the concluding section). The point is not to domesticate—in lockdown everyone is planting seeds, baking bread. Instead, we might practice the risks of togetherness. We might look for confusions of human and nonhuman capacity, for a sense of messiness that disrupts sanitizing colonial force (Arthur &

Jentink 2019, 153), crafting species pedagogies of compost or fermentation (fig. 6) that stir up alternative economies of labor and attention, richer citationalities, and a queerer sense of scale and duration (see Johnny's piece in the following section). Over and over, we might write out the patchy unknowabilities of difference, threading together feels and attentions toward a new pace of life together.

Endnotes

1. See Berlant, L. Genre Flailing. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*. 1 (2), pp. 156-162.

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iii. Fermenting Relations

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Hand dipped in starter, Jean-Luc Gallic, 2020

Lately, I find myself sharing space with a newly-formed co-inhabitant. Just out of reach from any direct sunlight, we cross-contaminate and intimately touch. Here lie bubbling connections, violent fermentations, and sticky compounds. Usually, I never fully get the culture off my fingers—instead I let it dry and cake on for the next handwashing. Over the past few weeks, the gooey culture seems healthier, stronger, and more alive in my presence. Its ultimate fate guided by my anxieties and excitements while living with the pandemic.

Since the onset of the global pandemic, sourdough bread baking has exploded in popularity with Google searches for “bread” hitting an all-time high in March 2020 (McCarron 2020). Like wild yeast, the popularity seems to have saturated the air of the world-at-home and given rise to a flood of social media posts and articles illuminating active starters and Instagrammable loaves. In fact, so many

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have returned to and adopted this form of ancient baking that along with the shortages of fresh produce, toilet paper, and sanitizer, active yeast has begun to disappear from grocery store shelves (Makalintal 2020). These shortages surrounding food security and its overall infrastructure can be seen as relational (see Mathew's piece in the previous section) as acts of *stocking-up* and *settling-into* domesticity—in quarantine—meet with feverish anxieties concerning the unseen virus and troubling biopolitics. Essential workers strike for better PPE while rallies to “re-open the country” occur (Jaafari 2020). State-controlled initiatives develop self-policing, over-policing during mass protests, and growing fears of one's own breath (see Mathew's piece in the previous section) are felt during chants of “I can't breathe.”

While keeping bodies *in* and *isolated* is essential to efforts bent on slowing the spread of COVID-19, agency over these movements is not equal—with some forced indoors while others out into the streets (Arnold 2020). Fears of the unseen, between each other and our things, causes us to begin to develop a “numbness” towards rearrangements, haphazard barriers, and boundaries built between one another (Wołodźko 2020). With an increased awareness of the things around us and the simultaneous asociality that comes with being physically distant, what is it about these emergent spaces that can be and should be amplified? Can the reorganization of human/nonhuman meetings—with sticky things like sourdough starter—challenge the heightened attention turns toward the *unseen* under the pandemic?

We get home, disrobe for the virus, disrobe from the protest. Shower. Wash our hands. The house is silent (given what just happened): long gazes, exhausted routines. I remember the dough left out to rise, I mindlessly start kneading it to prepare for a bake. Wait, did I wash my hands again? I check between my fingers for the distinct orange powdered residue that is left from tear-gas. The fiery taste is still in my mouth. I knead, feeling the dough, repeatedly turning it over without looking.

To counter the coziness stemming from settling into the pandemic, this short thread hopes to add to the attunements sewn into Mathew's piece *Writing Pandemic Feels*. Here, I hope to draw attention to the trend of sourdough bread baking in order to tease out the messy, volatile interruptions that come with touching, eating, and tasting the unseen—the microscopic bits we encounter while being home in our daily lives. Taking the increased interest in sourdough bread baking seriously will require a critical look at the microbial elements of sourdough

starters and the messy, speculative work that comes with making *through* amateur bio-art as an active labor of care during the pandemic. Possibly, through attuning to these alternative labors and working-with the lack of control felt with fermentation, the microbial, and the contaminated, a potential for new knowledges and connections can emerge from ambiguities as boundaries between human/nonhuman start to fall apart. These knowledges challenge colonial configurations and anxieties concerning microbial species so that we may discover our own agencies in connecting with one another even in isolation (see Mathew's piece in the previous section).

Most days my sourdough starter can be found sitting, fermenting its composition of flour, water, salt, and yeast. However, it is never just sitting. When combined, this mixture bursts and expands on a microscopic scale—the yeast and glucose (from the flour) meet to form carbon dioxide, raising the concoction into bubbles of sticky goo (Dunn 2018). Gently pushing against its top to make itself known, daily burpings help it release tension. These small moments of communication and repetitive visits lead to a mutual caring for the starter—fulfilling intimate connections while in isolation. Care in this regard can be giving, but it can also be a violent disturbance to its being—cutting, ripping, and removing of large amounts of starter is done continuously and infinitely to feed and grow the culture. Shortly before going into quarantine, I acquired my starter for sourdough bread from a friend who offered recommendations for maintenance and care. This friend had acquired starter fragments, an ancestor to my starter, from someone else. Through the passing down of portions, these starters were cut from previous starters that may have been maintained for years elsewhere.

The culture of yeast is everywhere in my home. Confined to jars, stuck to floors, sitting out on the table, crumbs in the bed. Sometimes the contents of the jar seem to change in hue, sometimes I cannot tell if there is anything different about it at all. Today, bubbling and bouncing, the gaseous contents have burst out of the lid, running down the sides and pooling on the surrounding counter. I too am eager to escape, to open up, to feel things and be messy again. I accidentally get starter on my hand. It is sticky. It tastes surprisingly good.

Through each contact, the microbial composition of the starter is changed: an assemblage of bits and pieces from before dictates what future state it will be in tomorrow. What is unique to sourdough, and to the fermentation process, is this ability for a continuing evolution through its feedback and transient nature;

passing from person to person, imprinting memories of what worked and what did not (Hey 2017). Different baking methods brought to the meeting with fermented sourdough alongside improvised tricks (that just so happen to pay off) open potentials for knowledge production that reflect what Maya Hey calls *making-do*. Making-do with this assemblage, amassing both the starters' histories and the bakers', is as much an experimental and sensual research method as it is a learned practice of paying attention to the "ambient conditions" that surround our daily lives (Hey 2017, 86). If your house feels a bit too cold, or if the air quality has changed with the humidity outside, you must adapt along with the material conditions that guide your starter. The gaseous openings that glue the bread together get all over you as *you* get all over it. Slowly, you knead the dough with your hands instead of a mixer, the body gauging and weighing shapes and pressures like a measuring tool (Dunn 2018). Pulling, tucking, feeling its "skin" over and over.

Making-do with your starter, you begin to develop your own sensibilities of care: an ethical way of touching the dough that is as unconscious as it is conscious (Sutton 2006, 314). So much of the starter imprints on us. The microbiome of the hands of those who bake often tend to be closer to the biomes of the loaves they cook than the biomes of a human (Reese & Madden 2020). An interface between hand and dough, the mixing of microbiomes connects as a lingering in-between space, a split moment of chance and underlying influence. Maybe you forgot to wash your hands again? Maybe the filter for the tap was left unchanged? Small interruptions, unconscious decisions made in the middle of the night when you are too tired to bake, these are so often the factors that influence your breads.

This agitation to concepts of the human and nonhuman as bounded is a fundamental reconfiguration, an always-developing spatial realm of confusion to where our bodies might begin and end amongst the microbial, amongst the virus (see Mathew's piece in the previous section). When you build on shifting memories and speculative recommendations, always looking for potential adjustments for better growth, and never knowing for sure if the starter is pleased, you give room to biological transitions and affective capacities. An affective potential arises in the overlooked richness that comes with shifting privileges over the anthropocentric narrative (Bennett 2001) and towards the histories and labors held in all microbiomes—human, baker, dough, or otherwise. Slowly, you learn how to handle the sticky mass, adding more flour when needed, feeling for shorter intervals of kneading when the dough is wet, ditching the timer, instead adding a sample taste to your sensual/temporal map.



Starter float test, Jean-Luc Gallic, 2020

Mold has grown on top of my starter. I skim it off and stir in a handful of fresh flour to feed it. No time to worry, like a wound for something I must bake this week to get my mind and hands into something.

Sourdough bread is a blending—a chimera of sorts—that thrives on a necessary contamination, a necessary vulnerability. In this sense, experimenting with the concept of contamination during fermentation adds another potential to the DIY ethics of bio-art, a potential of risk, of anxiety, and of fear that attaches itself to the objects at hand: microbes, viruses, disease. Amidst the global pandemic, fear has been established through the declaration of boundaries as affective designations that—in order to be reproduced or reconfigured—require openings, leaks, and floods (Ahmed 2004). These shifting configurations are met with genre flailing (Berlant 2018). We rush to make sense of the anxieties and insecurities surrounding Zoom privacy leaks, of a favorite celebrity catching COVID, of yet another infectious cruise ship in limbo. The “pandemic imaginary” of fear continuously expands and time blurs (see Mathew’s piece in the previous section). In contrast, the mandate to stay at home is pitched as a patriotic and active duty against border anxieties during crisis, against any unplanned cross-contamination

with an invisible *other*. Working with the starter gives us unconscious moments of breaking these boundaries of constructed fear—daily repetition with the fermenting starter is risky but also sediments in daily life as a regularity. To fully become a body, we experiment with the limits and capacities of the starter as it experiments with us. Bits of family members, strangers, animalia, and ourselves are devoured through the daily bread. In 2011, exploring the limits of infection, a woman used her own vaginal yeast as the active agent in a sourdough starter (Rees 2015). In 2019, Seamus Blackley (creator of Xbox) extracted ancient yeast (found embedded in an Egyptian clay bowl) to develop a 4,000-year-old starter (Machemer 2006). These risks, in exploring the limits of sourdough baking as a bio-art, also extend the limits of what it means to exist with a body amongst other affective things.

Is getting take-out safe? Should I use plastic face shields or cloth masks? Can singing project aerosols further than speaking? Risk follows an attunement with all bodies that might come in contact with—and create potential transformations through—our objects, human or not. Between one another, we are interfaced with speculative risks (DIY masks, homemade hand-sanitizer) treading in active futures of *what could be* but also in what could kill (see Mathew's piece in the previous section). The microbial elements that make sharing our bread potentially dangerous—unseen instigators of fear—are the same agents that have many touting sourdough as a “superfood” well-suited to COVID-19, as the sourdough microbiome adds infection-fighting healthy flora to the gut (Counihan & Van Esterik 2012). Similarly, during the 1854 Cholera outbreak, those who drank more beer had a better chance of fighting off the virus; the microbiome found in their gut was stronger (Dunn 2018). As uncertainty about the spread of COVID-19 circulates, repairing and refocusing our conceptions of ‘the biological’ is urgently important. As paranoia fuels shared narratives, extractive powers hope to capitalize off our widespread isolation.

Another repetition, another day in quarantine. Today, I nervously open its top, exposing it, always surprised by the ‘pop!’ sound that it makes, always waiting for the final explosion to end the experiment all together.

Working with sourdough is an active realm of attuning to underlying forces, a trust in tasting and eating bits of shared histories, fears, and desires. On this intimate level, being aware that we are never alone and *never have been*—due to

the microbiome that pervades us—can help to nuance responsibilities toward a productive politics of care, one that requires a reevaluation of our nonhuman counterparts. To do this requires that we consider the “behind the scenes” labors of our everyday life as an ethics of care (see Mathew’s piece in the previous section). This thread hopes to push the trend of sourdough bread baking further, to create/ to offer/to present an active force against the fear of the microscopic and the food/ sustenance shortages outside of us. Time spent with a starter’s microbiome can get snagged on openings, a potential for peeking inside our infrastructure, an infrastructure that is increasingly black-boxed. We must stay with these forms of interruption in fermentation, a potential to uncover knowledges that disregard borders during a time when so much is being closed off or shut down.

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iv. Surviving Touch

Wendy J. Truran

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“These fragments I have shored against my ruin”

The Waste Land, T. S. Eliot

There is so much death,
I am not sure how to live.

There is so much loss,
I am not sure how to begin.

There is so much hurt,
I am not sure how
to cradle your pain.

I cannot intellectualize this crisis.

I cannot live in my head—
that is no safe place.



Colossal bronze statue of Constantine I: Capitoline Museum, Rome, Wendy Truran, 2016

Cleverness in Quarantine

I cannot do cleverness in quarantine. My friend finds calm in collectively reading cleverness. I am glad. He finds community and comfort in theory, and in voices, and in minds. I am comforted that he is comforted, but his comfort is not mine.

I can't clever right now. Certainly not the kind of clever the academy demands: the critique, the articulate outrage, the intellectualizing, the performance of objectivity, the claims to knowing (more than), the expectation to do and to produce evermore 'now that you are home and aren't doing anything.'

No.

Who's Zooming Who?

Being in contact is not the same thing as being in touch.

To touch is to make visceral contact: affective, it doesn't have to be physical, but it must be *something*.



Colossal statue of Constantine: right hand, Capitoline Museum, Rome, Wendy Truran, 2016

“TOUCH ME. SOFT
EYES. SOFT SOFT
SOFT HAND. I AM
LONELY HERE. O,
TOUCH ME SOON,
NOW. WHAT IS THAT
WORD KNOWN TO
ALL MEN? I AM
QUIET HERE ALONE.
SAD TOO. TOUCH,
TOUCH ME.”

Ulysses, James Joyce

Attuning to Suffering

On a zoom call a Black storyteller tells a story. She tells us that the lack of touch (physical and emotional) has led her to wish she was no longer alive.

“COVID and the lockdown have drastically affected me in that area, because there is no touch or quality when you live alone.”

She voices her pain, her suffering, her nearness to unbeing: “I don’t know how to accurately explain to you... the desperation, the grief, the emptiness of not being touched”

...but we feel the flesh of her words...

“also I don’t know how to describe what it feels like when you get that first warm body that is touching you.”

Her rescuer is not human.

She lives and she creates from her brush with non-being.

I cannot embrace you,
but I can hold your precious corpus cradled in my open earpalms.¹

We are Creatures

Comfort like rhythm, a deep hum, slow sway side-to-side-to-side
slidepushscrape against our sidefaces—greetings, affections,
transmissions
Buried in soft silky existence, such pulsing, purring, pure vitality
Trilling, brrrbbing, touch and tenderness



We are Creatures, Wendy Truran, 2020

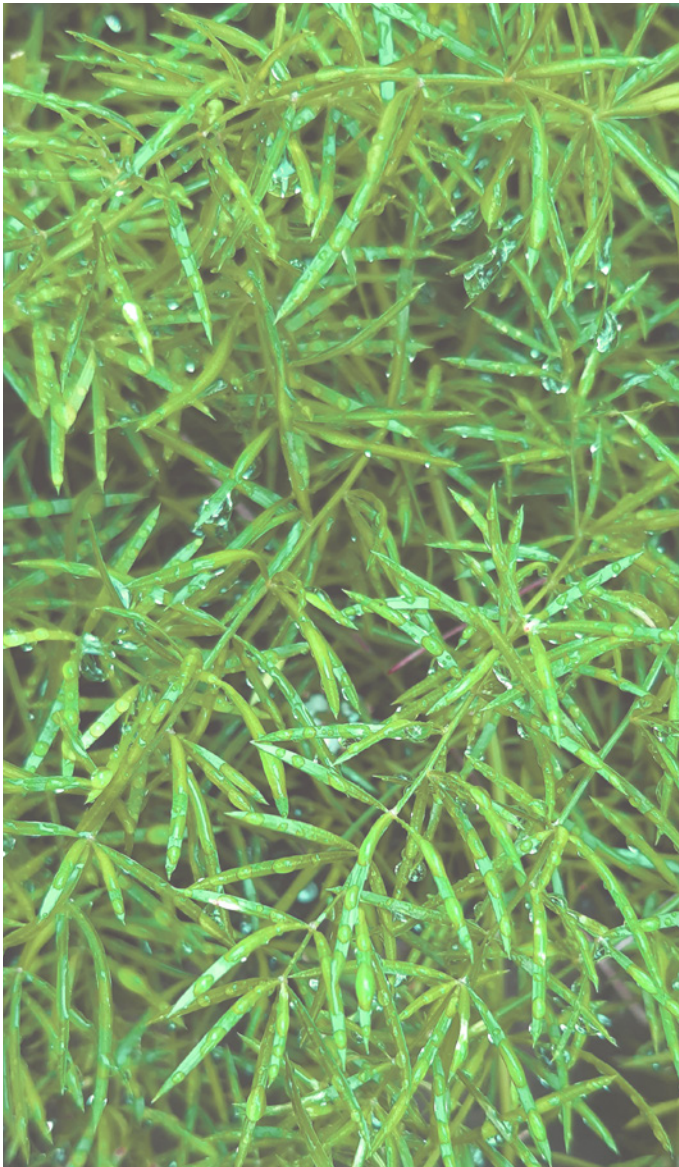
I am saved
Under the soft-warmth-weight of hummmmming pulsation my racing,
frightened heart slows
Pelt-scent softness
Healing
Unified
Assembled
I deep-know, in my bones and in my blood that we creatures *are*

Porosity of creatureliness
they are not mine—we are *us*
and *ours*



Brothers, Wendy Truran, 2020

Fern (left) and green pepper (right), Atlanta, Wendy Truran, 2020



I Surround Myself with Living Things

To remind myself that I am a living thing.
To encounter the fact that non-human thriving might mean human extinction.
To acknowledge that human cruelty is pernicious.
To feel in my marrow that life persists.

Solanum lycopersicum

I don't see them grow – they change in leaps and bound, surging into themselves. So unapologetic, glorious, jubilant, never questioning their right to exist or to shine their jewels into our faces. I steal their fruits though. I colonize the plant, taking their fruit. Is it really a kinship when you steal? No matter how lovingly or appreciatively—whiteness, again. I am sorry—but not sorry enough to not care for them. Care can be cruel. I touch leaves, pluck taut rubies. I am punched by a peppery surprise that makes me gasp with pleasure. I do not know the words that will express the scent of tomatoes. I need them in a different way than for food or energy. I plant myself into the earth with their roots, touch-smell fresh dirt—so clean and pure. I tend them, they offer me joy as they flourish. Attachment to life, an existence, reminding me of life as I shy from death. Red treasures ripped from their homes and transplanted for my selfish benefit. It is an old story, an old-new story. I spend summer tending and I seek to cultivate a better justice. There is no individual: assemble, march, scream, survive, grow again.

I hear myself think—I am never in the place I should be. I never feel I am in the right place. When I came to this country, I started digging in the dirt for the first time, I wanted a little garden. I do not feel rooted in America. Like an orchid, I am epiphytic. I live here, my tendrils extend and increase, but I grow in a medium I was not meant for, there is always transplant shock. But then again, we all grow in a land we were not meant for. This earth is not ours, it never was. I surround myself with living things not to escape from death, or rage, or injustice, but to stay with death and rage and injustice.



My Tomatoes, Wendy Truran, 2020

[Fragments from] The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

When despair of the world grows in me
 ...
 I go and lie down where the wood drake
 rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds
 I come into the peace of wild things
 ...
 I come into the presence of still water.
 ...
 For a time
 I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Fragile

I watch the birds being alive.

Orchids, Atlanta Botanical Gardens
Wendy Truran, 2018



HUMMINGBIRD.....magic
 magic
 magical
 magic perfection hope joy wonder.

It's so fragile, it'll be killed, it'll be hurt, how can something so fragile and beautiful live in this world? It *is* alive though. It is alive and I feel touched by joy because it exists.

Sometimes I can hardly bear how beautiful and precious life is.
 Sometimes I can't bear how despicable we humans are.

CARE for others can be a radical act, a political statement,
a queering of consumption.

Care is a defiant **ACT** against the death drive “you might get me,
YOU shit, but you won’t get every living thing”



Holding Paws with Argento, Wendy Truran, 2020

I hope

My care is tender hope. My garden is growing hope.

My cultivation of love in the face of fuckery is wild, desperate,
indelible, demanding, **HOPE.**

CAPACIOUS

Crafting Colour

I add the 'u' to color because I am making for others.

I give them my imperfect offerings.



Scraps, Kathleen Royston, 2020

I am compelled to create, crafting to repudiate covid, imperfect, unsellable, playful, pleasurable making—the antithesis of academic production.

I am ravenous in my need for beauty and colour. I luxuriate in pigments; the vibrancy drowns my anxiety.

My friend creates colour. Tactile colour. She mixes it and stirs it in pots and pours it on texture. She shares her gift and I can touch colour, weave strands together and move colour through my fingers. Her colours soothe my heartaches, synaesthetic ASMR I strokescroll the images that calm me through colourtouch.

She helped me to make colour one time—it filled me with joy. For once, the vision in my bodymind came out into the world and it was beautiful.²

Beauty helps me feel alive. Beauty helps me stay alive.

Beauty reminds me what being alive is for.

It saves lives.

I always hope.

“the tongue, organ of taste, is also, as flesh, the medium of touch,”
—Christopher Long

Tasting Touch

We die if we don't taste. No other sense is as vital.

Aristotle thought taste was a form of touch, the foundation of all sentient life.

I channel my anxiety into the alchemy of baking and cocktails.

I make and taste, tongue pleasure through pastries.

I deliver tasty treats to those I cannot touch but who are within reach.

I hope to sweeten a moment for them. To remind them of pleasure and connections.

I hope they are touched enough to feel.

“sensation, after all, is not simply a matter of knowledge but also of pleasure”
—Pascal Massie

Spawn of Fantasies
Silted the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage

“Song to Joannes,” Mina Loy



Dale Chihuly, *Chihuly Through the Looking Glass*,
Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Wendy Truran, 2011

Toothsome Language

Making tasty words. I love to experience words with bite and texture. Texture is a toothsome word, *textura*, you bite into the 'x' and spit out sound with the 't', to end with a buttery smooth 'urrrr.'

My favorite swearword is a lovely word to say—it starts with a compression of the lips and then a ballooning breath, low—lulling into a lullaby of lll's halfway—BREATHE IN BIG O, then a phlegmy back-throat clearing, harsh-sounding, uvula wagging scrape towards the susseration of a sssssssssssssss to close.³

I want to understand otherwise. I want to include the touch-taste of words in our comprehension and communication of affect. Language can be textured and felicitous, we can sense language for pleasure and not make sense of it always.


Meaning can move us, change us, shift us—"I am touched by your words" but how do we read feelingly?⁴ Language makes impressions upon our bodyminds, most often leaving scars.

Why do the bruises of language linger and its caresses land so lightly?

I don't want to lose language because it can be lush. It can tongue our imagination into combinations other than thought.

Ich fühl mich traurigsorgeangsttrauer.

Survival



My touch is not your touch, your body is not my body,
but your matter matters to me



Dale Chihuly, *Chihuly Through the Looking Glass*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Wendy Truran, 2011

Endnotes

1. You can listen to Courtney Cook tell her story, “A Cat Named Cake,” in the Transformative Narratives Audio archive ” (forthcoming Fall 2020) <https://sdie.gatech.edu/transformative-narratives/audio-stories>
2. To see the colors my friend creates and the one I helped to create see Republica Unicornia <https://republicaunicornia.com/collections/yarn/products/empress-wendy-bfl-sock-yarn>
3. Uvula is another tasty word to chew on and the flesh sack itself helps us say it (uvula: oo-voo-la; you-vu-la; uvu-la). The uvula is the dangling punchbag at the back of your throat that spottily slips food into your oesophagus (such a pretty-looking word) and keeps food out of your nose. It also helps us produce complex speech sounds.
4. For more on reading feelingly see Vicki Mahaffey and Wendy J. Truran, “Feeling Ulysses: An Address to the Cyclopean Reader.” *Ulysses: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Philip Kitcher Oxford University Press, 2020.



Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

CAPACIOUS

FEELING OUT NEW CONJUNCTURES: POST-LIBERAL AFFECTS AND COMMONS COMMITMENTS



Julie A. Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim

ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

Crisis Scenes

The obituaries here are filled with young people. Heroin is ravaging our hometowns in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Sometimes laced with an elephant tranquilizer, it is killing a person a day around here. Like so many other communities these days, our social media feeds are dotted with homages to the dead; we find ourselves tallying up the people we knew, friends of friends, acquaintances. Here narcan has saved many, but quite a few others are fed up, calling for a three strikes rule. They ask, “why should we pay to save addicts who made the stupid decision to use? Let ‘em all die, that’ll solve the problem.” The employees at the local methadone clinic are starting to think of themselves as hospice workers for the young.

It's an old story. For as long as we can remember, our corner of the state has been falling apart. The downtown core slowly lost population, while the surrounding small towns, separated from the city by miles of small family-owned farms, lost local business to the big-box stores. Even the big boxes are now starting to shut down one-by-one. Like the rest of the postindustrial Rust Belt, good-paying steady jobs at the once-numerous manufacturing plants have slowly trickled away, replaced by minimum wage service jobs with unpredictable hours. Homes, deemed too expensive to maintain, became unlivable, and residents with some capital fled to the suburbs. Still, there's a kind of hardiness to the place. Winters are long and intense: snow rolls across the lake in white-out bands. Those in the rural areas are long-familiar with the composting and chicken raising that are now so trendy. Folks have always done what they have to do, working long hours, taking care of their neighbors. But there's been a kind of settling in, and the burdens feel heavier. So many young people are dying.

Standing in line at Walmart, waiting to purchase supplies for the elementary school Halloween party, Emily ignores a phone call from her brother. He texts: a friend's husband—a neighbor's son—has died. At least Facebook posts make it seem that way. Emily makes her purchase, Facebook stalks. Suicide. 28 years old. She starts to text her brother back and realizes their last three texting exchanges have been about a young person's death. It's not that they don't talk a lot. Official data tell the same story. A recent statewide youth survey found that nearly 50% of 10th graders in our county had felt depressed most days in the last year; nearly 45% felt they were 'no good at all'; and over 30% said they sometimes felt that 'life is not worth it.' The numbers were several percentage points higher than statewide averages.

Since 2016, there's been serious talk of shutting down public schools. The district serves the poorest students in the state, many of whom need services for English as a second language or special education, and it ranks in the bottom 4% of state funding per pupil. Desperate, the city school district, serving 12,000 students and facing a twelve million dollar deficit, launched a media campaign, releasing a YouTube video detailing the crisis. It lingers on a photo of six black teenage boys crumpled on a front porch after several of the district's high schoolers were shot in a string of incidents in July 2015. All of them hold their faces in their hands; one of them is kneeling, his head on the ground in despair: "Those are our children," the superintendent says. Another administrator reflects how he could send

his son to the nicer school, down the road in the suburbs: “But I don’t, because I believe in our schools and I believe in our teachers.” Suddenly, our town is in the national news, in a *Huffington Post* article about the death of public education. The article circulates. Suburbanites revealed that some of the well-funded schools in the area refuse to accept tuition-paying students from other towns: “Where will these kids go to school?,” they wonder. Months later, after small wins for funding from Harrisburg, the district opts to combine its two high schools. Before they can start the necessary renovations at the school that will remain open, fire breaks out there, forcing the district to cancel the final few weeks of classes.

Blue Trump signs dot the town. Some of them are huge, ten feet by six feet, and they feel aggressive. Two Latinx students in our classes tell us that their nice next-door neighbors, the ones who help them out occasionally and always say “hi,” put up a Trump sign. Our students, with their own Black Lives Matter sign, feel scared. And puzzled. Facebook posts seethe with anger about Trump signs and “cocksuckers” who steal them. Some suggest lining the signs with razor blades: thieves will need Obamacare now! The local paper asks, “Why are Trump signs dominating our area? Analysts say they’ve never seen anything like it.” The local Democratic party chairman says the Hillary signs haven’t been delivered yet, and really, it’s not the yard signs that matter anyways: the important campaigning is on social media. A friend of ours is running for state representative, and door-knocking with him is so disheartening. Most all of the registered Democrats we meet are unwilling to even talk. They don’t have signs; Trump v Clinton is a joke, they tell us. To top it off, our local Democratic field office isn’t at all interested in the data we collect. Their algorithms focus on the wealthier turfs atop the hill where the professional classes live. Our friend loses, of course. The district has been gerrymandered to ensure it remains red regardless.

Very soon after the election, the national news shows up. We’re at the center of it: a long-blue county that’s gone red, a microcosm of the Trump story in our lost jobs, abandoned factories, broken dreams. The local labor union leader tries to explain to the reporters that folks make desperate choices during hard times; a middle-age white woman fist-pumps while she listens to a Trump speech and tells the reporter, through tears, that her brother was one of five men who took their own lives during one round of layoffs. Another man packs up his house, details his low-wage prospects, and notes that the house has been tough to sell in the wake of the school district crisis. “This town is a sinking ship,” he says, “you’d be crazy not to get off.” This publicity is not good: the town’s been pinning its hopes on tourism. The visitors’ bureau launches a hashtag campaign. Social media

erupt with photos of vibrant sunsets—better than Hawaii!—and a local photographer highlights his talents with a triumphant montage of locals at work and play. Somebody starts a Facebook page called “Raise Our Town’s Self Esteem!” and urges members to share positive news. Still, things feel bleak.

Online, the feelings churn. Trump supporters cackle on their feeds: liberal snowflakes can suck it. Others mourn, registering their disbelief and anger at what’s unfolding. The frantic search on the left for an appropriate response to Trump, while global, the pressure bears down on where we live with a decided sharpness. Our town’s name is cast around dismally: uttering it communicates how hopeless the people and their politics are, how terribly behind it is, how much we all have to bear to go on living here. Endless chatter about our white working class voters, incessant arguing about race, gender, and class and what gets to matter, ongoing debates about diversity and social justice bolstered by casual snobbery or pedantry toward rural communities and the ‘white trash’ that live there: our daily lives are increasingly plastered with social media commentary. As the new (ab)normal sets in, our liberal friends post accounts of homophobic, sexist, racist encounters. They wonder, “why should we try to understand the white working class Trump voters if we have to endure stuff like this? Why should we have to be fair-minded?”

We do our best to abstain. The scene is bigger than Trump, and we know it. Yet he continues to eat up the space of our relationships and our sense of possibility. Little hands stand in for bigger problems: they overwhelm and overdetermine our scenes. Jodi Dean (2010) argues that we live in the era of communicative capitalism. Processes of capital accumulation now hinge predominantly on the production and exploitation of communication flows: share, comment, recommend, follow, link, like, love. The system is designed to maximize, capture, quantify, and monetize our collective sociality (Dean 2010). What is so frustrating about this situation is how completely inadequate our daily lives feel when we’re stuck in communicative capitalism. What is so heartbreaking is that all this talking, tweeting, sharing about Trump only extends the conditions that made Trump possible in the first place.

And meanwhile the earth keeps heating up. Fossil fuels have pretty much destroyed everything. This realization hums in the background of everything.

Cultural Studies and Conjunctural Analysis

It is commonplace to assert that we live in an age of crisis. Indeed, for over four decades, neoliberalism has governed through crisis, and now it has reached its own impasse. The biggest symptom is Trump. As Nancy Fraser suggests, the political crisis of Trump is indicative of a more general hegemonic crisis (2017). Trump's victory marked a defeat for progressive neoliberalism, which was built on "a real and powerful alliance of two unlikely bedfellows": on the one hand, social movements focused on diversity and inclusion and, on the other, leading economic players like Wall Street and Silicon Valley. "What held this odd couple together was a distinctive combination of views about distribution and recognition," Fraser explains. "The progressive-neoliberal bloc combined an expropriative, plutocratic economic program with a liberal-meritocratic politics of recognition" (Fraser 2017). For a time, progressive neoliberalism won out over what Fraser calls, "reactionary neoliberalism." Reactionary neoliberalism is the right frontier of neoliberalism, which professes to care about small business and local jobs, and decidedly not diversity and inclusion, but was actually "committed to bolstering finance, military production, and extractive energy, all to the principal benefit of the global one percent" (Fraser 2017). But in-between the right's "reactionary neoliberalism" and the left's "progressive neoliberalism" was a growing gap where the mundane everyday brutalities of financial capitalism refract and fester.

Trump stepped into this hegemonic gap, exposing and exploiting it. We are interested in thinking about what might be done in the presence of this gap, in the face of Trump, in this moment of conjunctural breakdown. Cultural studies grew up within the cementing and advancement of neoliberal hegemony. How should cultural studies intervene, and what might it become, in this moment of crisis? So much of the story of this crisis is that people are checking out, cashing out, or digging in their heels and staking their claims. Ennui and political fervor seem to entwine. But despite the morass of our media worlds with boundaries drawn, stalemates reached, everyday life in the postindustrial Rust Belt is increasingly rife with "fissures and faultlines" that portend new potentialities, new conjunctures (Grossberg 1997, 257).

As Lawrence Grossberg suggests, the left itself seems ill-equipped to take on this world-building work, too caught up in "pessimism, 'hyperinflated' into moral outrage and panic" to see the cracks and gaps, much less productively intervene (Grossberg 2017, n.p.). When crisis is the backdrop to daily life, righteous refusal

dominates the narrative, and it has no taste or tolerance for conjunctural analysis. But, “[c]hange does not just happen,” Grossberg reminds us, “[T]he new does not just appear and the old disappear. The ground has to be prepared, the work has to be done to reshape the old and give shape to the new” (Grossberg 2017, n.p.). To set ourselves up to participate in the hard and uncertain work that lies ahead, we need to figure out how to feel out new conjunctures, to be in the world in new ways, to experiment with more egalitarian forms of living that might be possible, and cultivate the materials we need to transform these possibilities into realities. We must double down on cultural studies’ commitment to everyday life, specifically to what Melissa Gregg calls, a “desire for the mundane”: an “urge to hear how cultural changes land in the context of people’s everyday” (Gregg 2004, 369). In times of crisis, breakdown, and transition, honing in and acting on this desire for the mundane becomes vital groundwork: work that forces us to venture outside our ‘echo chambers’ and into unexplored territories and unknown relationships, inhabiting our own bodies and communities in new and almost certain to be uneasy and uncomfortable ways. Indeed, to prepare the ground, we need to begin “where people actually are” and approach them, as Grossberg puts it, “with a sense of humility, a willingness to accept that people may have different positions and beliefs, and that one’s own positions might need to adapt to others’ perceptions and demands. We have to seek ways of dealing with the complexities, ambiguities and uncertainties, of translating and living with our differences” (Grossberg 2017, n.p.).

What follows is a modest proposal for how cultural studies scholars might orient ourselves, our teaching, research, and writing toward a conjuncture in transition. In some ways, what we have to say is nothing new, for cultural studies is defined by its interventionist orientation, ‘radical contextualism,’ ‘intellectual modesty,’ and commitment to meeting folks where they are, where things come to matter. But this project is perhaps more pressing and more difficult right now, and the stakes, in many ways, are higher than ever. As Trump and talk of Trump threaten to overdetermine our scenes, we need to be able to sense what else is happening, to feel out what else might be immanent and possible in social relations, so we can tell better stories. This feeling-out conjunctural work might take the form of what Kathleen Stewart calls “slow ethnography” (Stewart 2017a). Slow ethnography tunes into affective registers, stays with emerging sensibilities and everyday forms of falling apart and pulling together. This kind of ethnography rhymes with the intensities of its crisis scenes, the ways that things come to move and matter. It

resists the urge to land on a narrative, to figure writing and critique as a way of reproducing the world and representing our own authority. Or, as Stewart puts it, slow ethnography forgoes “the dualist dead ends of modernist, humanist social science and its unfortunate affective habits of snapping at the world as if the whole point of being and thinking is just to catch it in a lie” (2017a). Indeed, rather than marking down and solidifying events, locking them into place and laying out the boundaries around them, slow ethnography takes research as risk-taking, a humming-along-with the world. “Structure is prismatic,” Stewart says in an interview. She continues, “agency is not the clear and intentional act of a subject but an energetics” (Stewart in Kenner 2012, n.p.). We must then, “hold attention to the pressure points of the compositionality of life in situations of all kinds. This is where new structures of attention...are begging new political questions” (Stewart in Kenner 2012, n.p.). As Anand Pandian and Stuart McLean (2017) write, “in the midst of these perilous and uncertain circumstances, ethnographic writing has a crucial role to play in setting loose other kinds of compelling tales” (7).

“Feel Out, Go Out, Try Out”

In a recent *Social Theory* post titled “Big Man,” Lauren Berlant (2017) analyzes all the “flailing” around in the aftermath of Trump, as people struggle to find their genre of response to the crisis.¹ Of Michelle Obama’s famous punchline, “When they [Trump supporters] go low, we go high,” Berlant writes, “I hate its hygienic politics. When they go low, we ‘feel out, go out, try out’ is more like it.”

So much of what we see in our newsfeeds, of what passes for critical or left discourse, amounts to some version of hygienic politics. Liberalism is built on hygienic politics: good citizens are clean and proper; they control their bodies and desires. Historically, black and brown bodies, queer bodies, working class folks, and unruly women were deemed not capable of good citizenship. Progressive neoliberalism, however, welcomes a diversity of good citizens, provided they are aligned with the new demands of neoliberal capitalism. Meritocracy (people get what they earn) and diversity (market access and inclusion) harmonize into a moralizing frame built on thick distinctions between virtuous subjects (those who work hard, make good choices, assume personal responsibility, and thus deserve to rise to the top) and ‘deplorable’ disposable subjects (‘thugs,’ ‘white trash,’ and others who have failed to take control of their lives and can thus be relegated to social death). After all, we still have to account for why some are winners and others are losers. We still have to find ways to make the dispossession of individuals and communities a rational, just affair.

We live in one of those places of “slow death,” where populations, their capacities, and their investments have been worn down (Berlant 2007). It shouldn’t be hard to understand why the hygienic, moralizing politics of progressive neoliberalism don’t always resonate here, even with those who might, too, be up for something progressive, even new. Trump exploited that gap, and with his election something snapped. Life online and off intensified, felt more raw. People were “flailing.” Trump was everywhere, consuming senses, opening up old wounds and broken promises, but also making new things possible. “When crisis is ordinary,” Berlant asserts, “flailing...can be fabulously unimaginative, a litany of lists of things to do, to pay attention to, say, to stop saying, to discipline and sanction.” But flailing can also open something up: “this is what it means to make elbow room amid crisis” (Berlant 2017).

Just days after the election, in the midst of an onslaught of commentary, prognosticating, and hand-wringing, an invitation to a secret Facebook group arrived. The convener was searching for a salve, a source of strength and inspiration to live on in a new era. She had been reflecting a lot, trying to figure her genre of response, and she realized that she wanted to gather close the women around her, open space for collaborative care of the self and community. This was to be a non-obligatory space, determinedly open to myriad ideas to both nurture members and generate plans for collective action. At once expansive (inviting new ideas, new members) and enclosed (espousing a clear ethos, emphasizing privacy), the group sought to offer both solace and empowerment. Members posted inspiring literature, ideas for political action, details of troubling encounters at work and in the community. These moments of digital connection, formed against the backdrop of more publically shared frustration and exhaustion with living in Trump country, come to represent a kind of safe space to which we can turn when the weight of Trump country is just too much.

Elsewhere, groups organizing against Trump multiply across the region, while local community efforts that had been humming along slowly suddenly got a jolt of energy. An investment cooperative is established to collectivize ownership of and rehabilitate neglected commercial spaces. Folks finally get to work building a teen center, a project that has been discussed for nearly a decade. Most noticeably, a group called True Grit forms. Inspired by a pop-up cafe that opened for a week the previous year on the town square, the small group starts organizing neighborhood clean-ups and free, family-friendly community events.

They have no budget and rely on social media and the goodwill and resources of local businesses, government, and organizations to make things happen. True Grit organizes many of their events in public parks which have been neglected for years due to budget deficits and cutbacks. Hundreds of people (and sometimes over a thousand) show up to play games, eat food, and learn about different initiatives. At one event in a large, poorly kept field dotted by a small playground and shadowed by a hollowed out, defunct public school, hundreds of bodies linger, play, eat, talk. People line up with their kids and dogs for the free pizza, hot dogs, and ice cream that have been donated. These lines spill into crowds waiting to fill out a community survey about what matters to them. People from all over town are chatting it up, taking up dead space and making it live again. What was happening is hard to describe; it's somewhere between a janky fair and a serious meeting, and it feels unprecedented.

Just as social media seems suddenly overrun with Trump talk and commentary, local scenes feel suddenly overrun with groups, events, open-mic nights, fundraisers, meetings, projects, organizations. People are hungry for connection and doing. Folks are coming together in a multiplicity of ways to resist and try to repair what's broken.

Berlant's recent work addresses the affective life of conjunctural breakdown and repair and proposes the commons as a pedagogy for these transitional and troubled times. Berlant's proposal to "feel out, go out, try out," is the opposite of progressive neoliberalism's hygienic politics. In the face of Trump, instead of moralizing and drawing lines, let's see what else we might do, what else might be possible. What's at stake for Berlant is the problem of reproduction. Everyone senses the breakdown. Glitches are everywhere. Repair efforts multiply in myriad forms. Resistance feels more mandatory than ever. The question becomes: how do we ensure that our repairs and resistances don't reproduce the same structures, relations, and attachments that are wearing us down in the first place? Here's where the commons can help.

It is crucial to understand what the commons is and is not in Berlant's thinking. Berlant is wary of prominent left discourses of the common/commons; the commons is not a particular politics (anti-privatization) or ontology (living labor) (Berlant 2016). These approaches tend to be idealist and obfuscating, unable to deal with the "ordinary affects" (Stewart 2007) that attend to everyday life with other people. Berlant explains that, "[i]n order for the common and the commons

to be something other than pure abstraction or compulsive repair that collapses what's better into what feels better, we must see what can be done to the dynamics of attraction and aversion—the dynamics of attachment and attention—that mark and manage the overpresence of the world” (Berlant 2016, 399). For Berlant then, the commons is about experimenting with what new attachments and fantasies, and what forms and experiences might be possible:

A genuine commons commitment involves a willingness to trash the fantasy that equality can be generated by redistributing money a little and having good manners. It involves embracing the discomfort of affective experience in a truly open social life that no one has ever experienced. It requires more adaptable infrastructures. Keep forcing the existing infrastructures to do what they don't know how to do (Berlant 2017).

Thinking about the commons as a pedagogy for feeling out, trying out, going out is about unlearning so we can sense and see what else might be possible in social relations. This unlearning of liberalism (and neoliberalism) at the level of everyday life with other people requires an affectively attuned, low theory of conjuncture, what Berlant calls an infrastructural analysis.

An infrastructural analysis helps us see that what we commonly call “structure” is not what we usually call it, an intractable principle of continuity across time and space, but is really a convergence of force and value in patterns of movement that's only solid when seen from a distance. Objects are always looser than they appear. Objectness is only a semblance, a seeming, a project effect of interest in a thing we are trying to stabilize. Thus, I am redefining “structure” here as *that which organizes transformation* and “infrastructure” as that which binds us to the world in movement and keeps the world practically bound to itself; and I am proposing that one task for makers of critical social form is to offer not just judgement about positions and practices in the world, but terms of transition that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself (Berlant 2016, 394, italics in original).

For Berlant infrastructures are affective. They are “structures of feeling”: “one's obligation to show up to life in a certain way” (Berlant 2015). To realize new forms of living we must work at the level of infrastructure to explore “terms of transition,” that might transform, “the dynamics of attraction and aversion” that manage and overdetermine everyday sociality (Berlant 2016, 399). We need to tend to and work on the rifts and run-ins, the encounters and scrapes that alter the landscape and move folks in new ways.

Despite the proliferation of commons desires, liberal infrastructures are not easily let go. For Berlant then the commons must be a commitment to experimenting with commons infrastructures, to working in and thinking from the hard work of being with others. Berlant's commons pedagogy asks us, "to break our own hold on the world" (Berlant 2017), and recognize that everyday life is, "actively null, delightfully animated, stressful, intimate, alien, and uncanny" (Berlant 2016, 399). For everyday life with others is difficult at best. People have baggage, wounds, desires, investments, histories, and positions that don't always, if ever, line up with our own. The commons asks us to engage the discomfort, rage, aggression, despair, and all the other unhygienic affects that surge in the course of being with others. The work of the commons is figuring out how to open possibilities for new, collective forms of living while reckoning with ambivalences that animate and complicate our desires for community and solidarity (Berlant 2016).

Post-election it seems that people are up for experimenting with commons infrastructures. The Facebook group fashions itself as a commons infrastructure where all women are actively cared for and can work together to resist and garner strength from collectivity. The group is also, though, a retreat from the commons. It desires a space that is safe, private, and protected. It yearns for the commons but also, and understandably, can't bear it. People are too frustrated, raw, and angry. The group remains stuck within liberal infrastructures, forging "individualized solidarities," where the aim of collectivity is buttressing individual capacities for resisting and surviving (Wilson and Yochim 2017, 137-168). As Berlant insists, though, commons work requires a "confidence in an apartness" (2016, 399) and a "decision to self-threaten" (2017); for the commons cannot be "a gesture of pastoral repair of the broken world, especially if you need repair to feel like repair, or solidarity to feel as likeness" (2017).

True Grit is also experimenting with the commons, trying to force "existing infrastructures to do what they don't know know do." Their commons commitment is public, fueled by what Lynne Segal (2017) calls moments of collective joy, "when we are most fully absorbed or lost in something clearly bigger than ourselves...caught up with others in public spaces" (263). True Grit is all about collective doing and experimenting with what people might be up for; they seem to be trying to work on the dynamics of community attachments and attention, of what we can do and who we can be together in this place. Yet, True Grit's commons pedagogy also easily slips back into an individual affair. True Grit's leaders quickly became local heroes and celebrities; their efforts are regularly featured in local newspapers and praised on the numerous local Facebook groups

and pages that have popped up over the past several years. The group's leader, a rambling local business owner, was given a key to the city and named the town's "Person of the Year." And to be sure, there is also something 'bro-ish' about True Grit. They are the doers, the movers and shakers, the men of action, though their group includes women (black and white) and they partner with the local Showing up for the Racial Justice (SURJ) chapter, as well as countless other local groups and programs. Ultimately, attributing a particular politics to True Grit feels strained and unproductive. Sometimes the efforts feel like "pastoral repair," but there's also a looseness and openness that seems to be reaching for a new sociality.

Meander and Attune

What might it mean for us, as cultural studies scholars, to also "feel out, go out, try out" in response to Trump? Amidst all the "flailing" and frantic efforts to repair and resist, how might we help to identify the terms of transition for a new conjuncture? How can we participate in the material production of post-liberal, commons infrastructures that people are working on?

To feel out what commons infrastructures and new social forms might be possible, we need to attune ourselves to ordinary affects and everyday compositions, to explore how things are hanging together for folks, or not. This attention to the compositionality of everyday scenes and the affective infrastructures that try to hold them together requires a willingness to meander through ordinary spaces, to check out the mood in different places and see what else might be happening. New ways of being in the world, Ben Highmore writes, "emerge out of unnoticed and unremarkable materials..., out of something that a minute ago seemed completely in the grip of convention" (2017, n.p.). Potentialities simmer - starting in ways that are hard to articulate - at the level of shared feelings, atmospheres, inklings. Stewart's work, especially, teaches us to linger on things that seem like they *might* come to matter. Careful and deliberate experimental work in ethnography, "fashions itself like a tuning fork that learns its note through small, incremental experiments made in fits and starts. It lurches or sails into some kind of capacity to be with matter-practice-thought-feelings that stretch beyond the representational register of signification to etch uses and forms, frictions, constraints, motions, and lines leading out onto a landscape of sociality and dream" (Stewart 2017b, 226-27).

Meandering and attuning might mean moving outside of the lines of our disciplines and our identities, opening up to experimenting with common infrastructures that we might not yet see or want to see. It might move us to reconsider boundaries and judgments and adjust our own attachments and attention. It also might mean approaching our work from a seriously playful place, trying out ideas, tracking potential new paths, following impressions that hint at something emergent. However, we inhabit a world where this sort of experimental work with the commons is difficult, at best, even as new dynamics and pressure points proliferate. Caught in the churn of neoliberal academia, we must hurry to build CVs and stake claims. Too often we turn away from what *might be* happening, too anxious to get things done to meander around and attune to the ordinary swells beneath our feet.

We want to suggest that this sensibility of meandering and attuning might also require demediating, turning away from or refusing the logics of media culture. Mark Andrejevic (2013) has brilliantly analyzed information glut. But communicative capitalism also creates mediation glut, as we find ourselves caught in ever-churning affective networks of mediated communication. Everything feels directed at *us*, begging our response, prodding our commitments, investments, attachments, modulating our feelings and sensibilities. Everything gets explained, worked over, reworked—it is affect overload and opinion overload. The speed of it all is disorienting and overwhelming. This mediation glut lays down shifty but stern boundaries; it charts out “mattering maps” (Grossberg 1992) designed specifically for us, tightening our senses to the point that it’s hard to feel anything else. One way to think about communicative capitalism is as a giant tuning fork, one that is constantly doing the tuning for all of us. This tuning fork runs on feedback loops to create “feed-forward loops,” feeling out the future for us (Hansen 2015).

Pursuing the sense that something *else* might be happening—something other than what a disciplinary or digital conversation might have us believe—is work that requires us to slow down. Slowness is not about time per se, but a sensibility of drawing out the ordinary, of giving mundane moments—where life is happening and keeps going—their due. This slowness can shift us away from the deluge of communicative capitalism and toward fermenting matters, new connections, shared feelings. It demands that we renounce what the Paper Boat Collective identifies as the “defensive irony and detachment” in so much critical scholarship. Instead, they urge writing that “is captivated, vulnerable, and implicated, writing

nurtured in pain and fear, writing that courts joy and seeks knowledge in the uncertainty and excess of attachment, writing that puts its authors, its readers, even itself, at risk” (Paper Boat Collective 2017, 14–15). This sensibility pulls back on the angling to argument in order to pay attention to the earnest and productive tensions that make up everyday life.

Slowing down is also the work of apprehending new worlds. Highmore (2017) reflects upon how:

writing that is endlessly attracted to the frayed edges of our attachments and purposefully attuned to the simultaneity of irreconcilable realities, might foster a range of moods. It may flirt at times with wistfulness, often it will be perplexed, sometimes anxious, but it will always, at heart, be a forward-leaning kind of striving ... It would doggedly search out the insignificant, not out of a desire for obscurity, but as a working strategy for loosening the normative grip of a world already marked with significance ... In that refusal to meet the world as it is already revealed to us, there is a modest gamble that another incipient world is, perhaps, already with us (n.p.).

A pursuit like this requires that we are open to failure, to false starts, and the painstakingly slow work of finding the right words for something not yet articulated. We need to let go of the desire to make things hold together, to master a world or scene, and instead listen for and experiment with how things might move, or might hang together more loosely.

This slow sensibility of meandering and attuning is akin to Jenny Odell’s idea of doing nothing, which she describes as, “a series of movements: 1) a dropping out; 2) a lateral movement outward to things and people that are around us; and 3) a movement downward into place” (xi). For Odell, doing nothing is “resistance-in-place” (xvi). When we immerse ourselves in our places, we refuse to have our worlds defined by communicative capitalism’s feed-forward loops. By redirecting our attention “outward to things and people that are around us,” we find new frames of reference, new social forms.

In urgent times, “doing nothing” might seem frivolous, even irresponsible: when things are breaking down and falling apart, do we really have time to feel things out?² But, as Highmore (2017) puts it, “the knowledge of what will help you survive and thrive and what won’t, isn’t given in advance, or not with any certainty” (n.p.). Sussing out what might help us build common lives with others, while seemingly incomprehensible and immovable forces bear down, takes opening

up to what people are trying out and tuning into shared encounters. It understands that looking at and listening to those things with care *is* the work of the commons.

Increasingly, we find our own work to be preoccupied with meandering and attuning. We also try to pass this sensibility along to our students. We've been spending our summers collaborating closely with a few students on our research. Much of our work with them is exploratory, taking advantage of the slowed-down, quieter time on campus to talk through new theories and feel out what's happening in town. In Summer 2017, two of our students started interviewing, tentatively reaching out to, community members and asking to sit with them and talk through how it's been, living in the Rust Belt. Throughout this process, our students started moving through town in new ways, spending more time off campus than on, recognizing community members, and spending time with them in their apartments, at the local coffee shop, and in our new games store, more a hangout than a place of business. So much of what these students were doing was about coming to inhabit their community in new ways. Moving away from the comfort of campus, up on a hill above town, and situating themselves in the hubs of local encounters, in the thresholds.

Occupy the Thresholds

In *Transformation Now!: Toward a Post-Operational Politics of Change*, AnaLouise Keating draws on womanist thought and indigenous science to argue for threshold theorizing—claiming it as critical work that: “facilitate[s] and enact[s] movements ‘betwixt and between’ divergent worlds, enabling us to establish fresh connections among distinct (and sometimes contradictory) perspectives, realities, peoples, theories, texts, and/or worldviews” (Keating 2012, 10). To engage in this threshold theorizing, though, we need to be willing to occupy the thresholds, those, “transitional, in-between spaces where new beginnings, and unexpected combinations can occur” (Keating 2012, 10). Thresholds are spaces of deborderization where common infrastructures can be sensed and constructed. For as Achille Mbembe insists, “[t]he political cannot be reduced to the painstaking management of emotionally safe spaces and shared atmospheres. Radical agency is not about the sharing of boundaries. It is about deborderization....The political in our time must start from the imperative to reconstruct the world in common” (Bangstad, Nilsen and Eliseeva, 2019).

Working on and in these thresholds requires what Keating calls a post-oppositional sensibility. Being post-oppositional is not about ignoring political antagonisms or forgetting histories of exploitation and oppression; nor is it about empathy or forgiveness. It is about orienting ourselves to our shared vulnerabilities, our interdependencies, and our radical interconnectivity, and being open to exploring these. Occupying the thresholds allows us to become uncertain, bridging between existing worlds and common infrastructures.

This post-oppositional orientation is not easy to cultivate, much less sustain, as opposition to one another is what we learn from what Keating (2012) calls “self-enclosed individualism” (171-175). We draw increasingly hard and fast boundaries around the self in order to secure it, amplify it. We walk around feeling “mutually exclusive” to the world, “evaluating all action in egocentric terms” (Keating 2012, 171). Indeed, while the neoliberal conjuncture swells with untenability, we’ve internalized “neoliberal reason,” accepted our fates as “competing human capitals,” and that’s hard to shake, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty (Brown 2015, 17-45). Competition has become commonsense, a powerful structure of feeling that shapes how we experience our world and our sense of what’s possible to do and be, alone and together. This infrastructure hardens the socially constructed, liberal, humanist lines between self and other, and self and world, making opposition feel inherent and necessary. It chokes collective imagination and doing: it’s me against you, me against the world. Our desires for commons infrastructures and our capacities for alternative forms of attachment and relation run up against this oppositional sensibility.

Occupying thresholds is inherently risky work. One of our students, a child of immigrants, a Muslim who’d ventured to the college from a large cosmopolitan city, had spent most of his college career volunteering in the community. He knew the surrounding area well, had fallen in love with the non-profits where he volunteered, was self-possessed and charismatic in his interactions with new people. But moving his body through the white rural Rust Belt also felt so precarious. His name marked him right off-the-bat, called attention to this ethnicity, to the Islamic religion and culture that both felt in his bones and not-quite his own. His interactions with strangers bore that mark, set him to the task of placing people at ease, using his easy smile and gentle demeanor to connect with folks beyond the surface.

During our work together with him, we stumble upon Common Threads, a “Youth Café” advertised by a simple sign on the state highway on the way into town. It felt promising, this space for young people. We searched online, found their Facebook page, read their vision: “[t]he mission of Common Threads is to be a gathering place where young people can socialize free of negative influences and where they connect and find [a common thread].” And also, its “café setting” is a place, “to have conversations with young people and ultimately offer them the hope of Jesus Christ.” We’re not so sure about this, but we decide to check it out. Our student shares in his research journal that he’s excited but nervous. He’s been outside of the town proper before, volunteering, and he has dealt with so many microaggressions. Determined to go in with an open mind, he thinks it better to show up in person—emailing ahead means that he’ll have to use his full name, which, in his words, “can often be a deterrent.” We drive over together, talk on the way about how it might go, how to think about a space that claims to be both “common” and evangelical.

To enter the space, we all need to work on altering our aversions and attention. As Berlant insists, a commons commitment means “losing one’s ground” (2017). Julie and Emily feel a bit bad: are we placing this student in too many uncomfortable situations? Are we asking too much, evoking emotional strain? All of the talk of community-based work, challenging the town-gown divide, opening up to uncertainty, feeling out, trying out—is it just asking this student, and others, to take on too much risk? We opt for honesty, talk about it, take care. What is it that these folks are looking for as they seek common ground? What’s happening there? What are they trying out, and how is it going?

When we arrive at Common Threads, a genial couple, white, smiling, gray-haired, greet us in the gravel driveway, offering lemonade and ushering us to sit at a picnic table on the covered patio. Before Emily can even ask a question, Earl begins, “God put us on a vision for a café in this area.” We settle in to listen. Common Threads began to germinate after a teenager in the small town a few miles from the college took his own life. The adults got together, talked about how their kids didn’t have much to do; drugs and alcohol were filling in the void. Earl and Denise had been hosting thirty-five kids for youth ministry in their home every week, and they thought it was time to start looking for a bigger place. Eventually, the community raised \$150,000 to purchase and renovate the 11-acre property we’re sitting on. It’s tree-filled, bordered by a large creek, has a large field where kids play football, basketball hoops, barbeque pits. There are two buildings filled with comfy furniture, pool tables, games. The couple started host-

ing “fifth quarters” after Friday night high school football games. The gatherings “just explode with kids,” and on Monday nights, they host “more serious” youth group meetings with young people who “want to know about the Lord.” They emphasize, though, that Common Threads doesn’t require church-going; it’s a safe space for everyone. Denise elaborates, “It’s cool how God has always involved us in community efforts, it’s just hasn’t ever been about ‘come to our church,’ it’s, it’s, it’s about coming together and doing the work of the Lord together.”

Earl and Denise spend Friday nights hanging out casually with the kids, sitting down for conversations when they look lonely, answering questions that they bring up. Earl involves some of the young men in projects around the grounds, teaching them to use tools. They feel “heartbroken” listening to young people who say they just don’t like to be at home, with their families. For Earl and Denise, the central problem to tackle is the lack of familial “stability” and a loss of core values: “It’s our only true hope,” Denise explains. In a culture of instability, everyone feels empty, and “Jesus Christ is steadfast.... He is the only thing that can fill that hole.” We have spent entire semesters critiquing “family values,” and so we have to work to keep listening. Denise goes on, “Our hearts’ desire is that we’re always, unapologetically, willing to share what this is truly about here ... [B]ut we know full well that, that’s going to prevent some people from coming here, but at the same time we haven’t found that happening yet.” Earl explains the inspiration for their name, referring to the Bible to explain that in Romans, Paul says that the common thread between Christians and non-Christians is a “yearning ... to get back to God.” They’re trying to fight the perception among some around town that they’re “the Christian place,” though. A few have asked what they’re going to do if “the bad kids” show up, and they’re adamant: they want the bad kids too. If they’re of legal age, they can smoke on the grounds, and Earl and Denise tread cautiously as they work to support kids while giving them—and their parents—space to make decisions about what’s best. Denise says, “it’s about love and grace and forgiveness. It’s not about judgmentalism and we only want certain kids here.”

Our student is curious and inspired by the unfamiliar, uneasy connection we have made. Deborderization, turns out, is intriguing, even exhilarating. He wants to go back to Common Threads for the Friday night gatherings, but public transportation is nearly non-existent, so getting there feels impossible. Earl immediately offers to drive out to pick him up; it’s probably 30 minutes, round trip. The

next day they drive over together in Earl's old blue pickup truck, chatting about all the ways the community has donated to Common Threads, time, money, materials. Our student returns from this experience awakened. He can't wait to spend more time with the kids from the Youth Cafe. Cameron, one of the Friday night regulars, was waiting to welcome him and immediately took him under his wing, introducing our student to the other youth, telling him about his passion for Common Threads, and simply sharing his experiences. A few other youth joined Cameron and our student, and they spent the evening chatting about their lives. Our student reports back, he can't believe how nice and welcoming everyone was, and he learned so much more about this community. He's floored. A new energy hovers around him: he feels tuned into this place, more familiar with the people, intimately allied with their worries. The group wanted to talk, were ready to relate. Their community feels under siege. Money problems are everywhere, folks are burned out, heroin has stolen too many lives.

Make Kin

Our flailing about in response to our crisis scenes—Trump, the slow and unbearable death of youth, schools, jobs, cities, the planet, hope itself— is sometimes, as Donna Haraway (2016) points out, what Kim Stanley Robinson called in *2312*, “The Dithering ... a state of indecisive agitation” (Stanley Robinson cited in Haraway 2016, 102). In exigent times, though, what's called for is “staying with the trouble.” “Staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present,” Haraway explains, “not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (1). For the incomprehensible devastations we are witnessing, human and nonhuman alike, demand an unwavering commitment to the ongoingness of life, to this thick and transitional present.

Haraway tells us that staying with the trouble is about nurturing our capacities for “making kin”:

Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become—with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplacé, entangled and worldly. Alone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude. Neither despair nor hope is tuned to the senses, to mindful matter, to material semiotics, to mortal earthlings in thick copresence (94).

What we were doing at Common Threads was “making oddkin,” finding ways of tuning into “thick copresence,” even as our theories and infrastructures summoned us to turn our backs. As Haraway insists, we must become what she calls chthonic ones: “[r]eplete with tentacles, feelers,” and having “no truck with ideologues” (2). “Kin is an assembling sort of word,” says Haraway (103). New conjunctions need new assemblages, demand a slowed-down becoming-with that leaves us vulnerable, uncertain. This work is the opposite of developing a thick skin. But it also envelops us in the thick ongoingness—protective, murky, promising, like hot compost piles.

We are living and working in troubled, transitional times: “unnecessary killing” and “necessary resurgence” are happening before our eyes (Haraway 2016, 1). In the brokenness of the world, previous affiliations and attachments are coming unhinged. Folks are “flailing,” “dithering,” trying to figure out what might make for a more liveable life, open, perhaps, to new forms, genres, common infrastructures. But emerging conjunctions aren’t readily nameable; they must be sensed and nurtured before they can be known. The most vital work to be done, therefore, is feeling work, care work, temp work. Desiring the mundane, meandering and attuning, stepping out of(f)line, occupying everyday thresholds, staying with the trouble, making kin in the heart of ambivalences and uncertainties that make up everyday life with other people—this is how we might cultivate the materials we need to make a new world.

Endnotes

1. See Berlant’s excellent discussion of “genre flailing” and “critical humorlessness” in Berlant, L. *Genre Flailing*. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*. 1 (2), pp. 156-162.

2. This essay was written well before COVID-19. Currently we are wondering how this prolonged moment of uncertainty and crisis might be engendering new sensibilities of interconnection, of what might and must, be possible. How might shutting down have opened up new spaces for attention to shift and worlds to reshape?

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Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020



District Six in Cape Town, 2019
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A PEDAGOGY OF HAUNTOLOGY: DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM WITH GIS



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how a *pedagogy of hauntology* might be enacted in a higher education curriculum, taking into account the ghosts of South Africa's apartheid and colonial past. To do so, the paper focuses on the ways in which Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and analysis reveal the absent/presences of the there/then, here/now and the effects of the past/present on people's lives and the land. Situated in engineering education in a South African university of technology, the paper shows that GIS can be used to animate hitherto occluded injustices of the past by means of a micro-instance of activism in the form of a story-telling intervention. By telling the story of apartheid violence related to District Six in Cape Town through the lens of GIS, we demonstrate how the affectivity and materiality of forced removals and violent dispossession become revived through useful pedagogical concepts such as sensibility towards nonlinear time, in/determinacy and dis/continuity to address the specters of the past/present.

KEYWORDS

decolonization, land, Geographic Information Systems, forced removals, affectivity, materiality, pedagogy, curriculum, hauntology, cartography

Introduction

One story that I tell in my GIS class is the story of District Six. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) has recently renamed its Cape Town campus the District Six campus, because the campus is situated on the site of District Six, possibly the most iconic site of Apartheid's violent dispossession and forced removals. Whilst teaching on the campus, I asked myself a simple question: what was here before? What ghosts haunt this place? I then realized that I could answer these questions using the technology that I teach. What follows is one of many stories that have been iteratively co-produced by an assemblage of (amongst other things) students, myself, and GIS technology. A version of the story I tell can be viewed here. (Siddique, Instructor of GIS)

District Six was a densely populated, inner-city working class area that was inhabited by a diverse, multi-racial group of people. It was a melting pot of slaves, immigrants, merchants, artisans, gangsters, and professionals; it was a testimony to the strength of diversity, and was targeted by the racist National Party government who destroyed the neighborhood and forcibly removed the inhabitants to far-flung apartheid ghettos on the Cape Flats. The forced removals started in 1968, and by the mid-1980s, the diverse, vibrant community of District Six was silenced.

The exploration of District Six, sometimes considered to be a 'void,' in that it appears to be an empty expanse of land from which people were forcibly removed, constitutes a study of 'haunting,' where the memory of sedimented tracings are written into the world. The ghosts which linger in District Six exert an impact on everyday life of those who traverse this territory in the center of Cape Town, impacting the taken-for-granted realities of the past, present and future of the city. These ghosts, which are not simply dead people, but which appear in the shape of new and old buildings, and natural environments, survive and challenge the present transformed landscape.

Long before legalized apartheid was instituted, dispossession of land from indigenous populations and systematic exploitation began with the colonial wars of conquest by the Dutch and British colonists from the seventeenth century onwards.¹ Blacks were forced off their land, charged taxes on their property and forced to become a cheap labor force serving the needs of the colonists. Buttressed by apartheid legislation, the nationalist party government was responsible for approximately 3.5 million people being forcibly removed from their land and hundreds of thousands from their houses.

In 1994 the multiple legacies of forced removals were still in place. The first attempt to recreate and transform South Africa and reverse major aspects of dispossession and dehumanization is set out in the Constitution. It confirms the right to equality in including the right to own land anywhere in the country. In Section 25 it defines and requires redistribution, restitution, and security of tenure.

South Africa has made little progress in any aspect of redressing the legacy of dispossession. Despite billions of rands that have been spent there is very little to be shown in terms of the real transformation of the land ownership regime. South Africa's land question is not going to go away soon.

As higher education instructors, we often wonder how to approach pedagogically the 'difficult' issue of forced removals and the ghosts of South Africa's apartheid and colonial past. How can we teach about/learn from "ghostly matters" (Gordon 2008) and the ghosts of the past/present (Derrida 1994; Young 2006) in a manner that shows a sensibility toward this haunting and does not wash out or make invisible the very real questions of land, settlement, and occupation (Tuck and Yang 2012)? What pedagogical practices constitute "learning to live with ghosts" (Derrida 1994, xviii) in a society such as South Africa, which is still haunted by the spatialized and racialized violences of forced relocations and land dispossession? And, to move a step further, in which ways can we engage in decolonizing education within the colonizing university (la paperson 2017)? These questions drive our exploration in this paper.

In particular, we explore how a *pedagogy of hauntology* may be enacted in a higher education curriculum, taking into account the ghosts of South Africa's apartheid and colonial past. Jacques Derrida (1994) coined the word "hauntology," a play on the word 'ontology' which sounds like hauntology in French. Derrida's hauntology is premised on an indeterminate relationship between then and now, present and absent, being and non-being. Discussing "hauntology" in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (1994) understands it as an ongoing conversation with the ghosts of the past; the aim of this conversation is to invent a different future rather than fixing the past. In Derrida's case, hauntology particularly addresses the specters of communism that haunt Europe, but he suggests that haunting actually belongs to the structure of every hegemony. In the case of District Six, hauntology addresses the ghosts of apartheid, colonialism, racism, and oppression that are brought forth by the geomatics mapping and analysis that is put to use in the GIS course. These ghosts are not necessarily people, but also streets, public amenities, and houses. They constitute humans and non-humans alike- haunting is material(ist).

But haunting is not only material(ist), it is also embodied and works as an affective operation. Embodied hauntologies (Gordon 2008) work with atmospheres, traces, fragments, contagions, gaps, absences and displaced actors and agencies that register affectively (Blackman 2015, 2019). Affect is disclosed in these fleeting fragments, traces, and embodied reactions and in felt intensities and sensations (Seigworth and Gregg 2010), which are not accessible to conscious control or reason (Blackman 2019). The storytelling intervention with which we experiment in this paper works as an affective contiguous process that is performed and modulated with GIS. The affective encounter is a force exerted upon the students that exceeds discrete bounded individuated human bodies (Blackman 2019). In this sense, the story of District Six through the lens of GIS produces moments of haunting, felt as contagious presences/absences of the effects of forced removals.

In this paper, we argue for the importance of radically rethinking “unilinear time”—that is, “the continuous unfolding of the past into the future” (Barad 2017, 22). We do this through a pedagogy of hauntology in order not only to recognize the affectivity and materiality of forced removals, but also to potentiate ways of taking responsibility for the living presence of apartheid ghosts. Situated in engineering education in a South African university of technology, this paper explores how the curriculum can be used to animate occluded injustices of the past by means of a micro-instance of activism in the form of a storytelling intervention. By telling the story of apartheid violence related to District Six in Cape Town through the lens of GIS, we show how sensibility towards nonlinear time, in/determinacy and dis/continuity are useful to address the specters of the past/present.

Siddique’s Story

This is a story of maps and of ghosts. Ghosts of the living, of the dead, and of those yet to be. South Africa has a long history of contestation. During colonial times and apartheid, indigenous and other people were forcibly moved around the country at the will of the racist government.

Acts like the Natives Land Act 1913, the Native Trust and Land Act 1936, the Asiatic Land Tenure, and Indian Representation Act 1946 were precursors to the Group Areas Act 1950, The Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act 1951, and The Natives Resettlement 1954. These Acts, including the Group Areas Act were proposed, conceived and systematized by maps.

For example, the map in Figure 1, entitled “the Model Apartheid City” provided guidelines on how to segregate cities and towns across the country. Note how the primary factor that determined location was race. White group areas were separated from all other group areas by means of barriers such as railway lines or industrial areas. The plan was effectively and violently implemented, and we are still haunted by this map today.

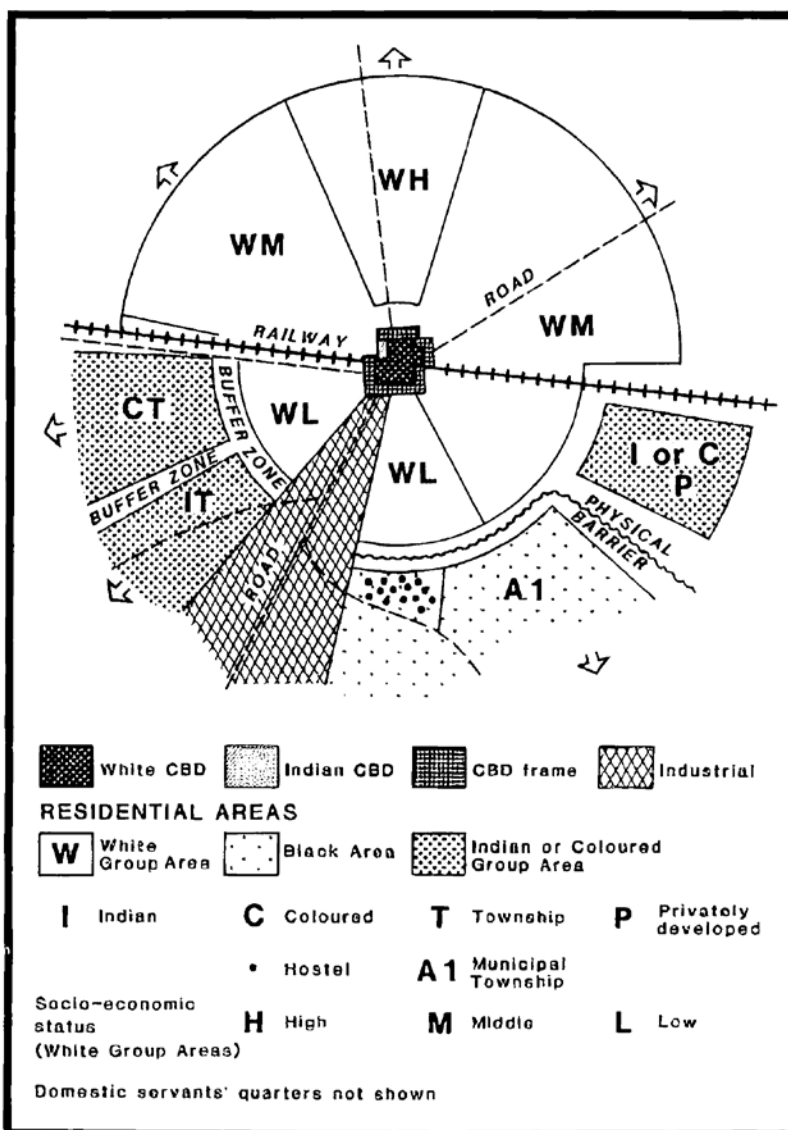


Figure 1. The model Apartheid city (Source: Christopher, 1994: 107)

The destruction of District Six was a direct result of such maps. GIS technology can help to produce an analysis of the old District Six and its relation to the present. I want to take a trip through time using maps of District Six and focus on our campus.

Here is a map showing a recent aerial image of the site. The red line is the outline of the old District Six, which was declared a Whites-only area in 1966.



Figure 2. District Six, 2011

Right in the middle of the site is CPUT. Let's zoom in to our campus:



Figure 3. CPUT campus, 2011

Now let's go back to various epochs, starting at 1862:



Figure 4. District Six detail, 1862

About half of the area was empty land. The label on the map calls the area Kanala Dorp. Kanala is a Malay word meaning ‘help one another’. In 1867, it was named the sixth district of Cape Town, or District Six.

Next, let's go to an aerial image of 1926:

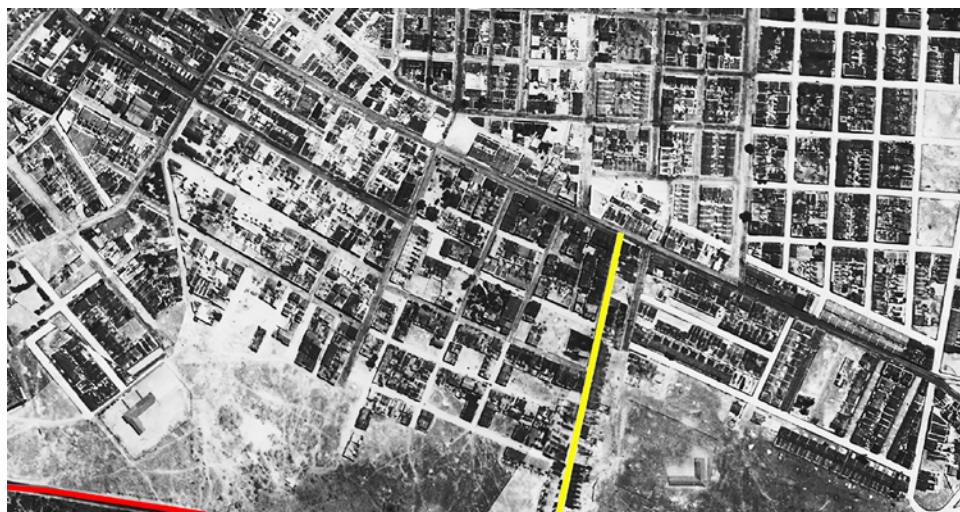


Figure 5. District Six detail, 1926

This is the oldest aerial image we have of District Six. At the time, the government leaders were Jan Smuts and General JBM Hertzog. In the decade before this picture, the infamous Natives Land Act was implemented in 1913. This was the Act that had perhaps the most profound effect on Black South Africa. With it, the

catastrophic mass forced migration of race groups started. Sol Plaatje criticized the Natives Land Act and identified the parallels between natives and animals. He said this in 1914:

In addition to these native duties and taxes, it is also part of “the black man’s burden” to pay all duties levied by the favoured race. With the increasing difficulty of finding openings to earn the money for paying these multifarious taxes, the dumb pack-ox, being inarticulate in the Councils of State, has no means of making known to its ‘keeper’ that the burden is straining its back to breaking point (Plaatje 1914, 19).

The yellow line on the map (Figure 5) is Horstley Street, an important street in the history of District Six. In the early 1900s, the White population was concerned by the growing Black population in Cape Town, and proposed a need for a Black location. District Six contained many African dock workers who wanted cheap accommodation, and Horstley Street landlords willingly catered for this demand, packing large numbers of people into little houses. In February 1901, the plague broke out, and the Black residents of Horstley Street were quickly blamed for being the source of the infection. This paved the way for the first forced removals from District Six. They were made to move to Ndabeni, Cape Town’s first Black township. It was later found that the plague was caused by Argentinian fodder that was imported for horses during the Boer War.

Here is a picture of what Horstley Street looked like:



Figure 6. Historical Horstley Street

And here is a picture of the remains of Horstley Street today, just behind CPUT campus:



Figure 7. Horstley Street today

The remains of Horstley Street sit in a state of limbo, surrounded by bush growing on the rubble of the houses that were demolished over 40 years ago. In modern Cape Town, there is a co-presence of multiple time zones.

Let's continue. Here is the aerial image from 1945, just after World War II:



Figure 8. District Six detail, 1945

South Africa was called the Union of South Africa, and in 1948 the Afrikaner-dominated National Party led by DF Malan, was in power. In the 1940s, the Cape Town municipality had started to make plans to demolish houses in District Six under slum clearance. It was around this time that Cissie Gool served on the Cape Town city council. A woman ahead of her time, she was called Cape Town's Joan of Arc. She was the first Black woman in the country to serve in local government, and represented District Six in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. This was remarkable, considering that this was during a time when she did not have the right to vote. In 1962, she received an LLB degree, becoming the first woman of color at the Cape Bar.

Let's go to 1953:



Figure 9. District Six detail, 1953

As you can see in Figure 9, District Six was fully built. In 1953, the residents of District Six did not know what was about to hit them. Some of the most repressive apartheid laws were promulgated in the 1950s, such as the Group Areas Act 1950, the Natives Resettlement Act 1954 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 1953. By means of the Population Registration Act 1950, new identities were imposed upon people. People were now officially 'White,' 'Native,' or 'Colored.'

The next aerial image is from 1968:



Figure 10. District Six detail, 1968

In 1966, the government declared District Six a whites only area under the Group Areas Act, with the removals starting in 1968. In Figure 10 you can see that most of District Six is intact, apart from the western section which shows where some of the first demolitions and forced removals happened. This was the block bounded by Caledon, DeVilliers, Stone, and Clifton Streets. If I show the current map in relation to the 1968 map (Figure 11), you can see that this block correlates to the location of the Engineering building of CPUT.

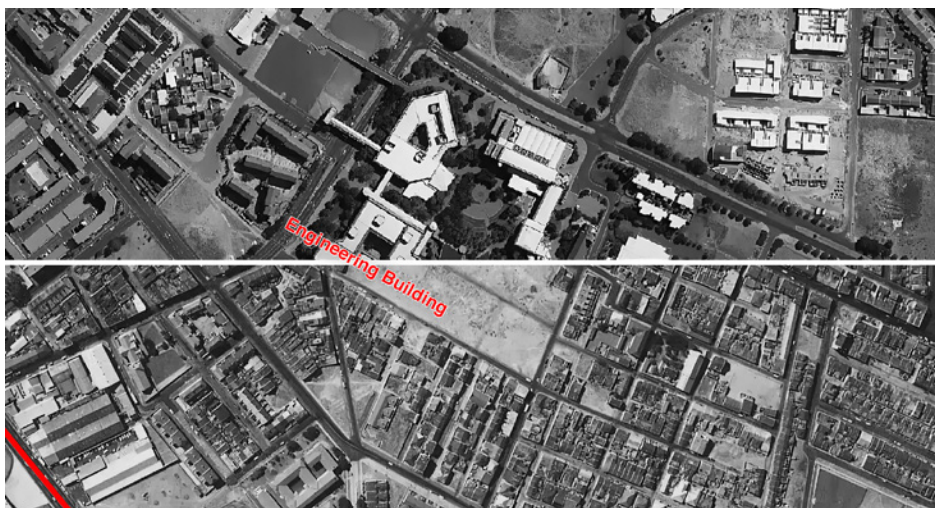


Figure 11. District Six detail, 2011 (top) over District Six map, 1968 (bottom)

Our building is situated at the epicenter of the destruction.

The Extension of University Education Act No. 45 of 1959 banned Black students from attending White universities. The Cape Technical college was formed for White students, and the Peninsula Technical College for Colored students. These would later go on to become Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon. In the 1990s, they would merge to form CPUT.

Other highlights (or lowlights) from the 1960s: The African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) are banned. Robben Island was turned into a prison. In 1962, Abdullah Ibrahim, or Dollar Brand, the famous jazz musician from District Six, went into exile in Europe because of government harassment.

Now let's go to 1977:



Figure 12. District Six detail, 1977

By the late 1970s, the destruction of District Six was in full effect. You can see many of the buildings in the western section are gone.

What else happened in the 1970s? The 1970 Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act stripped Blacks of their South African Citizenship, and in 1977, the homelands of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei gained so-called independence or self-government. Black people were then removed from urban centers such as Cape Town, to the homelands on a large scale. Their movement was curtailed and policed by means of the pass laws. Blacks were made to carry the despised pass

books when travelling outside the homelands. Hundreds of thousands of people per year were arrested for pass law offences. White youths were now forced to do 2 years of military service. In 1978, P.W. Botha replaced John Voster as Prime Minister. In addition, 1978 was international anti-apartheid year.

A year before, Steve Biko was murdered in police detention. In 1970, he said:

Celebrated achievements by whites in the field of science – which he understands only hazily – serve to make him rather convinced of the futility of resistance and to throw away any hopes that change may ever come. All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity (Biko 2004, 31).

Like Sol Plaatje over 50 years before, Biko drew parallels between Black bodies and animals. Both Biko and Plaatje troubled the binary between civilized colonizer/primitive native.

Let's go further, to 1983:



Figure 13. District Six detail, 1983

In 1983, the full force of the destruction can be observed. District Six was demolished, and by this time more than sixty thousand people were forcibly removed. It looks like a war zone.

Notice that there were only a few buildings left standing, these were mainly churches and mosques. Ellesmere Street Mosque, the Moravian Chapel and St Marks church are all still standing on our campus. Cape Technikon, a Whites-only institution, was built shortly after this image was taken, and the first buildings appeared in 1986.

Now let's go to 2011:

Figure 14. District Six historical sites over 2011 imagery



If I show a layer of the old District Six sites, we can work out where they were in relation to where we are today. On our campus is the location of important sites like the Hanover building, the Little Wonder Shop, the Taj Restaurant, the Post Office, the Fish Market, the Star Cinema, the Public Wash House and perhaps the most iconic site of District Six, the Seven Steps. It was situated at the corner of Hanover Lane and Hanover Street. It was the very heart of District Six, and right now, its location is near an entrance to the administrative building.

The land of District Six would be surveyed and re-surveyed by White surveying students at Cape Technikon, and then later by racially diverse groups at CPUT. Many surveying students would pay close attention to the scientific method of surveying the land, but the significance of the land itself would escape them. The Apartheid state was particularly effective at silencing voices.

This is only one story of the place that people came to know as District Six, and the university that came to be known as CPUT. CPUT can be seen as it is now, sitting at the foot of Table Mountain. Or, if we look close enough, we can sense the ghosts of this place. We must not ignore the ghosts of the past, as we make maps of the present. In our cartographies, what gestures are we making to the ghosts of the future?

Hauntology and Temporal Diffraction

Siddique's story of District Six and CPUT can be seen as a hauntological tale of temporal diffraction. Looking at the campus of CPUT today, the sedimented remnants of District Six, which appear not to be there, only become visible through a temporal diffraction, where the past is not something which is left behind, but exists in the present—where temporalities are entangled and thickly threaded through one another. Temporal diffraction means that as a result of the energy-time indeterminacy principle, a given particle can be in a state of superposition at different times – thus one particle can materially co-exist in multiple spaces and times—here and there, and yesterday, today and tomorrow (Barad 2017).

Temporal diffraction is made possible with Siddique's use of geomatics mapping tools. These make evident the ghostly presences of roads, buildings, and cultural activities of District Six upon which the White campus of Cape Technikon was built. These techniques are used to animate and make visible the organized systemic violence perpetrated over an extended period through apartheid laws, which would otherwise be occluded. The geomatics mapping shows how apartheid laws and social structures continue to bleed into the presence of life on the CPUT campus. In this way, geomatics tools usefully reveal temporal diffraction. As Karen Barad (2017) notes, hauntings are not just subjective human experiences, where a recollection of the past makes itself present in a subjective way. Quantum field theory allows us to understand how hauntings are lively indeterminacies of time-being, materially constitutive of matter itself, showing the “dynamism of ontological indeterminacy of time-being, being-time in its materiality” (Barad 2017, G113). The geomatics mapping makes it possible to apprehend the materiality of organized and systematic colonial and apartheid forces, revealing the systemic destruction of buildings and social fabric which appear removed from human vision in current times.

Furthermore, Siddique's storytelling intervention provides a cartography of District Six through its material and affective presence and endurance within a haunted crafted political space. In this sense, it is a study of a 'haunting.' The ghosts that linger in District Six exert a force on Siddique's students as well as on all who listen to the story, and on the visual mapping against the grain of what this territory looks like today. These ghosts, in the shape of old buildings

and natural environments, survive and challenge the present transformed landscape. As Gordon notes: “[t]he ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (2008, 8). In this case, the abusive laws of the apartheid machinery, and their impacts on the human, the non-human and the more-than-human are revealed through the deployment of cartography. In the context of critical posthumanism, “cartography is a theoretically-based and politically-informed reading of the present” (Braidotti 2002, 2).

Thus, overlaying the terrain in District Six through GIS mapping shows important apartheid processes of destruction with its organized violence perpetuated on the land, the buildings, and the humans. This has a profound effect on those that hear the story, such as the students and audiences where Siddique tells the story. People often cry when hearing it, particularly those whose family members were forcibly removed from the area. The affects also travel with the YouTube video now available online. The concrete material and affective affordances of GIS mapping allows students and other audiences to apprehend that humans were living and doing things in this space. It also illuminates how the concrete and material space where students are studying can be regarded anew with a hauntological understanding of what has happened and what may happen in the future. The GIS mapping invites “a renewed focus on registers and modalities of attending to the world that exceed conscious rational thought, or that exist at the edge of consciousness” (Blackman 2019, ix).

District Six hauntings, then, may be seen as lively indeterminacies of time-being, materially constitutive of matter itself—indeed, of everything and nothing. In this sense, hauntings are “not mere rememberings of a past (assumed to be) left behind (in actuality) but rather the dynamism of ontological indeterminacy of time-being/being-time in its materiality” (Barad 2017, G113). The cartographic tools used by Siddique are helpful in that they show that hauntings are physical material-discursive marks sedimented on the land, as part of “spacetime-mattering,” and which have potent affective force (Barad 2017, 179). The way that Siddique uses geomatics mapping in the classroom helps to show how space, time, and matter are not external determinate givens, but are bound up with each other, being produced in the phenomenon of District Six. The spatio-temporal mappings reveal how the material arrangements of District Six and the CPUT campus extend across time and are mutually enfolded with each other, iteratively reconfiguring each other.

We would argue, then, that the affective potential of technologies like GIS is harnessed in/through a *pedagogy of hauntology*. A pedagogy of hauntology works as an affective contiguous process that is performed and modulated within GIS techniques. In the many affective iterations of the District Six story, anger, sadness, and confusion contribute to an interrogation of the role of surveying and mapping in the furthering of apartheid. Being able to come to terms with, and disidentify from, certain aspects of the colonial past is important in the process of becoming.

GIS mapping need not be “cartographic, positivist, imperialist” (McKittrick 2006, xiii). In its affordances of looking at space hauntologically, GIS produces a new vantage point for material-discursive imaginings for the students and those who see Siddique’s presentations and YouTube video on District Six – the past-present-future space and its meaning. What appears to be fixed and settled infrastructure of the university is actually shifting and uneven, sitting on a highly contested site, the history of which has been erased. The university and its Engineering Building are located on the ruins of apartheid demolition of District Six and the displacement of human beings.

Through the lenses of a hauntological approach in District Six, Siddique proposes a reconceptualization of District Six ghosts that are material, as well as affective and exist in, through, and beyond non-human, human, and more-than-human subject/objects. Rather than standing as representations of something or someone that was destroyed and disappeared, District Six ghosts are retained in the material and affective subjects/objects and the physical environment in the aftermath of forced relocations. The ghosts of District Six are phenomena and affects, the material objects, the land, the roads, the buildings, the violence, the loss, and the pain. It is the presence of such ghosts in the shape of material objects, affects and land in District Six that formulates Siddique’s pedagogical methodology.

As pedagogic methodology, hauntology reframes histories of loss and absence and uses them as points of departure to revivify or bring back to life the complex materialities and affects that emerge from haunting. We would argue, then, that this methodology provides openings for renewed pedagogical engagements with entanglements of responsibility and justice in higher education. This methodology is what we would call a *pedagogy of hauntology*, that is, a pedagogy which interrogates narratives that offer closure or erasure and instead underscores the importance of the ethico-onto-epistemological openings created by ontological in/determinacy of time/being, where the past is not left behind but is diffracted

through the present and the future. A pedagogy of hauntology is one which engages in the intensive labor of paying close and careful attention and responding to the lively materiality of ghosts of colonialism and apartheid. What we think is past and forgotten is revealed as a forceful presence affecting everyday life. In the last part of the essay, we discuss how a pedagogy of hauntology might make a contribution to the ongoing process of decolonizing higher education.

Decolonizing Higher Education: The Contribution of a Pedagogy of Hauntology

In their influential essay “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonization brings about real questions of land, settlement, and occupation. Land, according to Barad, “is not a property or territory; it is a time-being marked by its own wounds and vitality, a layered material geo-neuro-bio-graphy of bones and bodies, ashes and earth, where death and life meet” (2018, 238).

“To understand the possibilities for a decolonizing university,” then, adds la paperson, “we must begin with a discussion of colonialism and its technologies at the material and affective level, “to settle, to self-sustain, to seduce, and to school” (2017, xxii). Settler colonialism is a set of technologies, says la paperson (2017), that reappropriate land and remake bodies and affects. If land is the prime concern of settler colonialism, then land as a biopolitical target is also the prime concern of decolonization. A decolonizing university, therefore:

is not just about decolonizing the “representational” work of knowledge production that we associate with universities [...] It is about the steam and pistons, the waterworks, the groundworks, the investments, the emplacements, the institutional-governmental-capitalist rhizomatics of the university (la paperson 2017, 32).

The question, then, is, what can we do, as higher education instructors, to expose the materiality and affectivity of a colonial university--the ruins, traces, fragments, gaps, absences and displaced actors and agencies that register affectively?

Siddique’s storytelling intervention in the GIS class aims to make visible the coloniality of apartheid through a hauntological approach, using the tools of his profession that bring to the surface the affectivity and materiality of the forced

relocations in District Six which has been rendered invisible through dis/continuous chronological periods. The geomatics tools show how these dis/continuous periods (then and now) can be seen to bleed through each other by tracing and re/turning the ghosts of the apartheid machinery which used abusive systems of power and organized forces to destroy property, land, and people's lives. The marks on the land which are revealed through the techniques are situated on the very location that students were studying engineering - they are "ghostly non/existence" in multiple places at the same time (there/here, then/now) (Barad 2018, 231). This alerts students to the ghostly matters of apartheid, and to the effects of the colonial past on the people and the land of District Six. As Barad says, "The past is not closed . . . 'past' and 'future' are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world's intra-activity" (2010, 261).

In this sense, Siddique's storytelling intervention performs a sort of an epistemic disobedience to normative expectations in higher education institutions, particularly in such fields as engineering. GIS within the frame of a pedagogy of hauntology troubles and queers the colonial approach which renders Whites as the normative ontological, epistemological, and ethical category and directs our attention toward 'that' which has been muted or rendered passive by coloniality. Hauntology can inspire and support decolonization processes at the university level by showing how temporalities and spaces are entangled and threaded through one another and how these matter.

We would, therefore, argue that interventions which are grounded in a hauntological decolonizing pedagogy within the colonizing university entail two important principles:

1. An emphasis on revealing the absent/presences of the there/then, here/now and the effects of the past/present/future on people's lives and the environment;
2. A curricular emphasis on identifying and challenging the affective investments that underlie varied responses toward coloniality—by students and instructors alike.

A hauntological decolonizing pedagogy does not only make subjugated knowledges key points of reference in the curriculum, while troubling how Eurocentric supremacy continues to inform what legitimate knowledge is. It is also attentive to questions of how presences/absences have materialized. It emphasizes the need to mobilize new tools that expose the ongoing sufferings as a result of coloniality. More importantly, a hauntological decolonizing pedagogy is attentive to how

questions of presences/absences have materialized, and it emphasizes the need to mobilize new tools that expose the ongoing sufferings as a result of coloniality. Time, space, and pedagogy are troubled and queered by the re/turning of matter, place, people and events, rather than simply being revisited. From this perspective, the relationship between affect and social justice in the context of hauntological decolonizing pedagogy is not simply about the creation of affective connections and openings that acknowledge suffering. Complicity to coloniality has to be recognized and become part of a pedagogy that exposes the absent/presences of the there/then here/now and the effects of the past/present on people's lives and the environment (Zembylas 2019).

Furthermore, the contribution of a hauntological decolonizing pedagogy is that it recognizes the affective complexities of engaging with the ghosts of the past/present. Consequently, it is not driven by a naïve perception that sentimentalizes this engagement or idealizes resistance (Zembylas 2016). On the contrary, a hauntological decolonizing pedagogy acknowledges that there are no uncontaminated spaces of resistance and that any resistance has to take place within the available structures of power. This implies that a hauntological decolonizing pedagogy exceeds humanistic frameworks, discourses, and practices by bringing into the pedagogical, ethical, and political spaces of learning the entanglement of human and more-than-human (Zembylas 2018). This pedagogical approach can alter the possibilities of promoting social justice agendas, precisely because it generates spaces for contesting social inequalities and provide openings for new political claims that do not naturalize the past or the present, but see it as “getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts” (Derrida 1994, xix).

Conclusion

The District Six story utilizes the power of genealogy to relate students' embedded locations in the socio-political system. It traces entanglements of land, politics, and race. Through the story students are invited to inhabit the university campus and the city of Cape Town differently yet are all connected to it by virtue of shared timespace. Furthermore, students are aware that the story is a result of peer involvement on the site of District Six over years. Their intra-actions with the land are an iterative project which engenders a retelling of the story - a collab-

orative effort across time, inspired by ghosts. An example of student involvement is the calculation of the positions of important destroyed buildings, and then the physical marking out of the locations on the ground. They see the site differently by engaging with the ghostly absent/present buildings.

Historical mapping and spatio-temporal GIS analysis brings the past into the present in a tangible, material sense. Students whose families were affected by the forced removals of District Six are direct products of District Six, and are re-connected to their past. This story facilitates hauntological encounters across difference.

The process of epistemic delinking from colonial epistemologies and pedagogical practices is not a simple intellectual project in higher education, a mere deconstruction of terminologies that replace colonial with postcolonial/decolonial terms and discourses, but rather a delinking from a deeply embedded western-centric, colonial epistemological and ontological frame (Mignolo 2011). For this to happen in higher education, we need all the inspiration and support we can get from decolonial and hauntological approaches.

Endnotes

1. Compared to the North American or other contexts where it is considered normal to capitalize the word 'indigenous', here it is not capitalized because it is uncommon to do so in the S. African context.

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Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

CAPACIOUS

REVIEW: ATMOSPHERES



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Griffero, Tonino (2014). *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 174 pp., \$59.99 (paperback).

Atmosphere, like most concepts in theories of affect, enjoys no unanimous definition. Its genealogy in Western thought is, one could say, diffuse, and its contemporary applications are claimed by the hard sciences and humanities alike. Tonino Griffero's *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (2014) both presents and responds to this defining elusiveness as it intervenes on and expands our understanding of atmosphere's qualities, capabilities, and importance. Under Griffero's pen (translated in this edition from Italian to English by Sarah De Sanctis), the concept is presented as airy by nature, both tangible and intangible, and so pervasive that it disappears from sight. Stitching the ontological with the phenomenological, the sensorial with the cognitive, and the subjective with the trans-subjective, Griffero's text provides a detailed and generative entry into the components that constitute and contour atmospheres.

To begin, *Atmospheres* in many ways mimics its concept of study. It is, overall, as nebulous and multifaceted as the construction it traces, built from numerous (and generously footnoted) sections, subsections, and sub-subsections and populated with frequent references to canonical continental philosophy and its

less canonical, more recent descendants. As such, in the same way that multiple subjects can inhabit a single atmosphere and perceive it differently, so will every reader attune to the components that call to them, whether they be related to atmospheric perception, a history of atmosphere, or (Griffero's neologism) atmospherology—the text's three main chapters. So as to maintain transparency in my own focus, guiding my reading of Griffero's *Atmospheres* are the following questions: what space for inquiry does atmosphere open up, both as an affective concept and as an analytical, aesthetic framework? How does it relate to other similarly diffuse, large-scale constructions like (the one I am most familiar with) moods? How might one bring atmosphere beyond the pages of Griffero's text to, for example, read or think atmospherically? The following ruminations gesture toward possible responses.

It is difficult to substantiate what atmosphere might do for critical thinkers and cultural critics without first knowing the concept's parameters. Griffero recognizes this and dedicates much of his text to offering what are not so much definitions as they are approximations: descriptions of what atmospheres are and are not, how they are manifest, and the similar constructions and frameworks they might relate to. As such, we learn that atmospheres can be “prototypic (objective, external, unintentional), derivative (objective, external, intentionally produced) and even quite spurious in their relatedness (subjective and projective)” (144). They can be registered through sight, smell, times of days, materials, physical spaces, objects, subjects, networks of both objects and subjects, and even formulations independent and prior to subject-object distinctions. They relate to but are supposedly distinct from concepts such as climate, ambience, aura, habitus, and mood, although the author never explicitly makes clear how. Griffero nods to atmosphere's ambiguous quality (which seems to increase the more one seeks to define) in his aptly titled introduction, “Not to Leave Vagueness (but to Stay in it in the Right Way),” where he says atmospheres are “a state that is hardly defined not because it is rare and unusual, but, on the contrary, because it is omnipresent—even though at times unnoticed—as the emotive situation. [It] is something we all know” (1).

Quickly reframing what “we all know,” Griffero enters into a discussion of atmospheric perception in Chapter One. Because atmospheres are not things but rather “contextual conditions of perception” (144), and because perception is a form of communication between atmosphere and the “felt-body,” atmospheric

perception pushes us to take into account the big picture—the atmosphere—and register existence as “a holistic and emotional being-in-the-world” (15). Continuing, the text leads us towards the analogous idea of perceiving atmospherically. Ultimately explained as perception *according to* something as opposed to the perception *of* something (144), Griffero uses atmospheres to reframe the very tenets of being—registering, perceiving, making sense of (or not), (un)knowing—away from, for example, humanism’s individual subject that has long held the privileged position of the perceiver. The forms these perceptions take rely on the aesthetics of atmosphere, or fleeting moments of perception and comprehension that elude analytical explanation and direct tangibility. In other words, engaging atmospherically means moving above, beyond, and through the more static forms of knowing and being with which we are accustomed—an affect theorist’s delight.

Following this is a broad, sweeping presentation of (as Chapter Two is titled) the “History of the Concept of Atmosphere.” Tracing connections to climate and landscape, explaining it in relation to the sensorial, and more, this chapter does the most work towards substantiating atmospheres in terms of where they have come from and their various aesthetic dimensions. Particularly interesting is when Griffero outlines an atmospheric perception of art that advocates for seeing “what the work irradiates” instead of “what the work is made of” (83), or rather, the arrangement, setting, or surroundings depicted and the world that the art object brings into being. (The author situates visual art, poetry, cinema, and music as primed for such readings.) This discussion leads to the text’s final chapter, “Atmospherology,” in which the author presents larger philosophical implications for engaging atmosphere. The section touches on notions such as permeation (outside feelings moving inward to permeate), metaphor (which atmosphere is not, since it is a “quasi-thing”), and synesthesia (how registering sensorial stimulation creates more stimulation of a different kind) before culminating in extended discussions of atmospheric ontology and a phenomenology of atmospheres. Both are as nebulous as the concept itself and continue for pages, but might (and only might) be best summarized as follows: atmosphere, in its expansiveness, presents us with a sphere of entities connected through diffuse yet pervasive feeling, where feeling is both the grounds for creating relationships and community and in no way inherently or reliably perceivable, logical, or articulated. (A note to the time-pressed reader: we find in the book’s conclusion its most succinct outlining of what makes atmosphere an important site of study, summarizing more extended discussions of perception and posing final questions.)

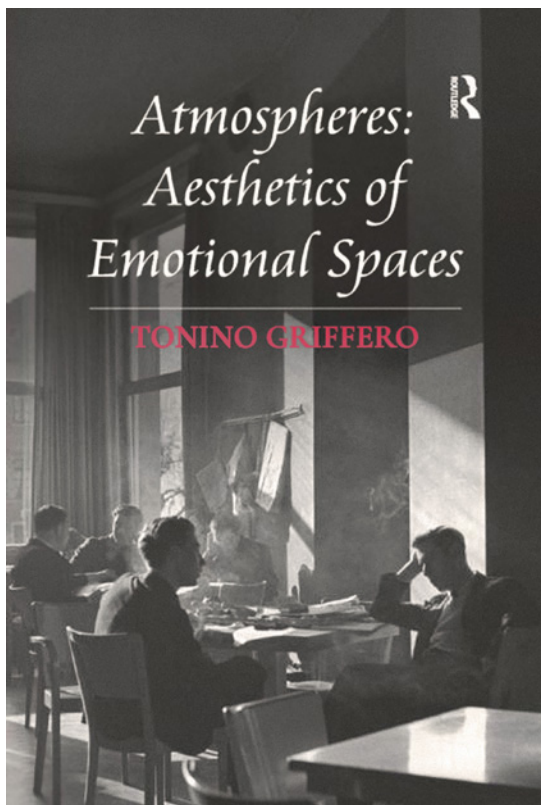
We begin to see intriguing implications of reading for and through atmosphere. The text itself acknowledges how one can make sense of atmosphere alongside literary production and its subsequent processes of analysis, interpretation, and truth making. Sketching the scale of atmospheric perception (which is wider than most), Griffero argues against “segmentation,” or fragmentation, as he positions the novel as both source and example of engaging atmospheric totality. He writes:

[W]hat every good novel exemplifies extensively is that our lived experience—especially if untied from generally reifying senses like sight and touch—is not segmented first of all into discrete objects, but in feelings poured out in the surrounding space, felt by the felt-body before any analytical distinction. (10)

In short, atmospheres outline a hermeneutic that demands engagement with the vast constellation of interconnected entities that the very language of criticism tends to segment non-atmospherically. Through atmosphere, we come to reckon with a conception of subjects, objects, places, spaces, and feelings that is sustained through relationality, codependence, interconnectivity, and affect. Somehow the likes of Deleuze and Bruno Latour (and their respective notions of assemblage and actor-network theory) are notably absent from Griffero’s bibliography.

Writing as a literary critic, I suggest that reading through atmosphere is a model of interpretation that seeks to approximate positions, impressions, and relations as opposed to subscribing to imperatives to name, pinpoint, and fix. Beyond adjusting our analytical motives and destinations in this way, reading atmospherically could also bring about a temporal shift since such a model is inherently slow. Because the substance of atmosphere is made known only sporadically as (un)representative parts of a larger totality, a reading that lingers is in order. Borrowing this terminology from literary scholars Christina León and Joshua Guzmán, “lingering pushes back against the urgent imperative to read and hail [...] into an immediate frame of knowing” (270).¹ Enjoying the process of co-constructing meaning from numerous sources, spaces, and registers, atmospheres stretch the spatial-temporal borders of existence beyond the very terms of person, place, or thing to an affective alternative hinging upon the careful arrangement and interaction of objects and landscapes, times and textures, actions and locations. The locus of ontology, then, shifts from the concrete and singular to the dispersed and multiple—to the atmospheric—without losing the materiality of the fragments that, in unison, populate atmospheres.

A reader as moody as I am will have noticed by now the many points of convergence between atmosphere and mood. Griffero establishes this connection, referencing Heidegger's *Stimmung* on occasion both explicitly and implicitly (as with the above "being-in-the-world" phrase). Because no clear distinction be-



tween the two concepts arises, however, we are left alone to ponder how they differ and if such differences matter. Given that I am more familiar with writings on mood, it seems to me as though the only detectable difference between Griffero's presentation of atmospheres and mood is the former's inclination towards a larger scope of study (although mood, of course, is hardly limited to the interpersonal or local). With any luck, other scholars will further develop this brief comparison to afford us more nuanced potentialities of atmosphere.

In closing, I find the concept of atmosphere to be important for reading and thinking along modes of interconnectivity and dependence—the ones we experience in our lived

world. Although the text will disappoint a reader looking for concrete definitions and immediately practical applications of the concept, it promises to be generative for a thinker invested in expanding the ways we understand our own positions and participation in broad, affective formations like atmospheres. After all, as Griffero observes at the close of his book, "the emotional-atmospheric dimension always knows more than we do" (149).

Endnotes

1. Guzmán, J. J. and León, C. A. (2015). Cuts and Impressions: The Aesthetic Work of Lingering In Latinidad. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 25(3), pp. 261–276.



Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

REVIEW: SHIMMERING IMAGES



bonnie lenore kyburz

INDEPENDENT

Steinbock, Eliza. (2019) *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 248 pp., \$25.95 (paperback).

Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change transforms the vibratory wonder of the “shimmer” beyond ambiguously emergent affect and into a conceptual tool for materializing cinematic pleasure—all of it—as a kind of trans cinema. From this shiny space of endless potential, Steinbock conjures a sense of trans cinema that is ever accessible and available as a disruptive cinematic presence. This strategic, vital perspective on the nature of trans cinema illuminates trans forms of making and being as perpetually powerful forces for shaping desire. The desires fluctuating luminously within trans cinema function somewhat tragically to sustain certain borders even as they more creatively, generatively, and hopefully offer a simultaneous critique and refashioning of normative, gendered [cinematic] being. The resonant implications of such re-makings are profound, and they are not new. Steinbock’s novel take, however, is quite refreshingly up to the task of rethinking being, conflict, gender, and cinematic pleasure.

Steinbock’s work is infused with a spirit of hope and wonder, and this is not surprising because they claim to have been inspired by an “approach to trans as multiplicity,” as they craft “a promiscuous notion of shimmering” (9). *Shimmering Images*

exists at a gleefully crowded intersection where cinema theory, cultural studies, film & film studies, gender studies, and trans scholarship emerge and come together within Steinbock's capacious yet carefully curated pages. Other theorists have done this kind of work, exploring change dynamics in cinematic representation, but Steinbock forcefully moves beyond convention in a clear and appropriate effort to take Deleuze at his word via capaciousness (and well beyond Mulvey). Steinbock does this mostly by not placing trans cinema in a special category but by insisting that all cinema is a kind of trans cinema. Steinbock lays out a plane of immanence that features an early glow up on the vast potential of shimmering as cinematic phenomenon and strategy:

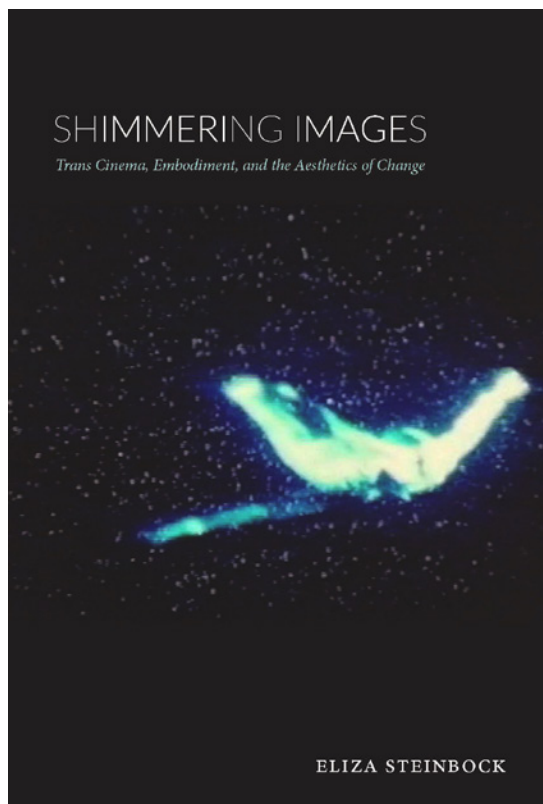
Iterations of the shimmer in the writings of philosophers and of trans and film scholars, including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Susan Stryker, and Steven Shaviro, employ *shimmer* as a noun akin to sparkle or flash, the verb *to shimmer* sometimes translated as scintillate or glimmer, or shimmering as a modifier to describe change in its alluring, twinkling, flickering form. (9)

Steinbock insists that the shimmer obtains its glistening, dynamic qualities across the spectrum of scholarship even as it “confound[s] distinctions ... between subject/object, thinking/feeling, and sight/touch” (9). Despite the multiplicity of conceptual frames, Steinbock's work coheres due to their wholly and deservedly confident conviction: “Shimmering is my concept for change in its emergent, flickering form” (8).

Situating shimmers within an “Inventory of Shimmers,” Steinbock takes inspiration from Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth's readings of Barthes on “how to outplay the paradigm of binary thinking” (9). Steinbock thus composes a notion of shimmering that exceeds previous versions as they also render a specificity suited to the task of contemplating various trans associations and embodiments in cinema as an “aesthetics of change.”

Beginning with a claim that puts Mulvey in the corner, Steinbock waltzes past feminist film theory's core conceptual “sex/gender binary structuration” to reimagine “film's potential for thinking/feeling in a nonbinary way in shimmers” (3). This swooning disruption “recasts the assumptions of a strict male or female grammar for subjects onscreen and off” (3-4). Thinking through film's physical dynamic instantiations, Steinbock's theory of shimmering images evolves from “transgender and cinematic aesthetics,” which may seem heady and ethereal, but it is all to the good. However, Steinbock's most revealing and well-sustained

conceptual move insists that shimmering images are the unwitting beneficiaries of the physical facts of routine filmmaking: “Within practices of filmmaking delinking and relinking across the cuts, gaps, fissures take place in the normal course of cinematography” (6). To imagine a shimmer as a sensational experience



emerging from strategic forgercraft moves us beyond quaintly fluttering associations that affect theory—or the implications of “shimmering”—might manifest. The shimmer, seen as “relinking across the cuts, gaps, fissures” moves us into orbit with an understanding of what is at stake in [cinematic] being, including heroically painful hopes and aspirations for transcendence.

Shimmering Images surfaces many of the conceptual and functional tensions within all of cinema to highlight trans ways of making and being. The capaciously perceptive vision of all cinema as trans cinema is a remarkable takeaway, but Steinbock limits their corpus to cinematic examples that are distinctly trans, despite an early reference to *West*

Side Story. In their introduction, Steinbock references this powerful mainstream film to invite us to recall the character of Anybodys as a cinematic trans presence who plainly suggests the existence, power, and value of trans characters. These characters trouble easy gender identifications, and therefore also serve to question and worry how these identifications are routinely taken up and circulated as ostensibly accurate reflections of purportedly conventional cultural norms. As trans characters like Anybodys make their seemingly quiet trouble, the disruptions they generate simultaneously do the work of shoring up normative gendered character performances in mainstream cinematic works. Creative and receptive readings will likely inspire future readings of “mainstream” or normative cinematic works to further complicate gendered being in film and the mutually reinforcing nature of identity conceptualization within culture and film.



Tel Aviv (detail), Mitch Altman, 2018
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THE ACCULTURATIVE COSTS OF RHYTHMIC BELONGING



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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I examine the workings of rhythm, intensities, and affect through narrative memoryscapes of acclimating to life in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Specifically, I distinguish underlying rhythmic characteristics of each city, analyze how repeated exposure to Israeli rhythms and intensities progressively alter my relations to others, and look at how experiences of rhythmic dissonance affect my acquiescence to dominant rhythms. I begin by offering a brief theoretical framing of rhythmanalysis in its conceptualization of everyday rhythms as a means of analyzing culture and of marking identification in its reliance on social processes. I then examine affect and rhythm's use in analyzing emergent experiences, before they are assigned static representations. In particular, I draw attention to affect's ability to focus on potential agencies that arise in moments of relational intensities as walking and cycling bodies enter new assemblages in public spaces.

KEYWORDS

rhythmanalysis, narrative, acculturation, belonging, walking, cycling

The air contains a charge and an energy of people and vehicles all moving briskly. It comes at my back barely discernibly, propelling me forward into spaces momentarily absent of bodies or objects that otherwise rapidly close up before me, not unlike the vanishing stretch of land that Moses is said to have released from his temporary hold on the Red Sea. Each breath fills my nostrils with the moist Tel Avivian air. Its fragrance carries the promise and reminder that I walk streets nestled on the cusp of the Mediterranean, though no visible or auditory trace of the sea inserts itself amid the bustle and din of traffic. However, the crisp freshness of each inhalation unmistakably whispers “ocean,” even as the pale-yellow desert sand dusts the edges of every corner.

Famously, Deleuze (1994) speaks of an encounter as an involuntary confrontation with “something in the world” (139) in the form of a “*relation* that is sensed, rather than understood” (669) that “*forces us to think*” (139). My aim in this paper is to work with a modified version of that proposition, one which takes the following form: an encounter with the strange familiarity of a city forces us to think in terms of the sensed relations of which worlds are composed. The sensed encounter with a city in its many forms generates opportunities to take up and be taken up by the relations of specific forms of urban life. And it does so in ways that foreground rhythmic intensities that almost demand to be written while also evading our efforts. This is the experiment that I undertake in what follows.

My arrival in Israel happened after a seven-year sojourn in Taiwan. This sojourn colored every Israeli encounter with an embodied Taiwanese cultural sensibility. Resonant encounters with Taiwanese individuals in the United States had prompted me to move to the Mandarin speaking island with a one-way ticket, site previously unseen. I went in search of a sense of home promised by the relationality of these encounters. During my first few years, while doing my best to become conversant in Mandarin Chinese, nonverbal exchanges taught me most viscerally about Taiwanese culture. My previous experiences of big city life had little relevance in Taipei, despite it being Taiwan’s capital. I learned the rhythms of patience, where cyclists slowed to a nearly stationary halt on sidewalks behind pedestrians strolling at leisurely paces. Pedestrians alike silently acquiesced to fellow walkers who inexplicably stopped in the middle of a walkway to think or pull out their smartphones. As a friend of mine describes it, navigating in Taipei is like fording a river whose continuous movement enables a sort of harmony.

I learned in Taiwan that the navigation of shared spaces quickly becomes dimensional as well as directional, equally expressive as it is functional (McCormack, 2013), with territorializing repetitions, or refrains, taking-place through the ex-

pression of impulses. I felt the reverberations of a culture's priorities shaped the ways people made room for one another on narrow sidewalks and in overcrowded buses. These unofficial interactions created ripples with far lengthier repercussions than decorum directed, "official" transactions, such as those between paid employees and customers.

Seven years into finding such a home, I packed my bags again. This time for Israel, for the promise of my Israeli partner whom I had met in Taiwan. This departure and arrival were also lined with the promise of a possible new home, or at the very least, the promise of unlocking insights about the culture that had nurtured my partner into adulthood.

Departures and arrivals have the effect of throwing you into the middle of things and times. One question that I frequently found myself asking when navigating new spaces in Israel was, "How do we make room for others' rhythms and even incorporate them into our own?" This question in turn gave rise to a second question, "What happens when we don't want to be affected by others' rhythms and yet find ourselves inescapably subject to their influence despite our wishes to the contrary?" These questions led to an examination of a cultural politics of prioritization through the rhythmic *haeccities* of individual bodies momentarily navigating within shared spaces, as well as their affective influences. Scholars such as Jacques Ranciere (2010) have considered the role of sensations and sensibilities in shaping corporeal capacities that give rise to a body politic. In this light, rhythm functions as a means to manage subjectivities by enfolding them within collectivities (Henriques et al., 2014), however transitory.

We find similar questions posed elsewhere. No stranger to global travels or cultural geography, Doreen Massey (1994) recognizes that we construct the identity of place at least in part from our "positive interrelations with elsewhere" (169). The process of finding home through the felt experiences of rhythmic belonging or non-belonging can be sensed in the gestures, intensities, and movements of a new milieu long before it can be expressed in a new language. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we can think of rhythm as the passage from one milieu to another, involving coordination and variances between space-times. Something similar underlies Lefebvre's suggested approach to rhythmanalysis as a form of "listening out" (2004, 94) for the temporalities, moods, and atmospheres of places. He likens rhythmanalysis to an aspect of becoming, where the practice of thinking with and through the body is deployed to measure rhythmic relations and their influence on everyday life. Each body attunes to various aspects of experience directly

connected to perceived gender, habits of moving, size, perceived attractiveness, and a host of other factors. In the context of this paper, rhythmanalysis offers a useful tool to look at the process of acculturation as one that involves becoming attuned to multiple rhythms and intensities. I offer a rhythmanalytic reading of a series of encounters with unfamiliar cities in order to explore how differences show up and are felt in these encounters.

The shape of these encounters, and my narration of them in what follows, are influenced by my training as a contemporary and contact improvisational dancer. Drawing from months of cycling and walking through Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, I consider some of the rhythmic characteristics of each city as well as how repeated exposure to the rhythms and intensities of these cities progressively alter my relations to others. I also inquire into how experiences of rhythmic dissonance, or arrhythmia, affect my qualified and sometimes partial acquiescence to dominant rhythms.

Elements of the various rhythms of these Israeli cities provide the context for the paper. Tel Aviv boasts a reputation for being Israel's most cosmopolitan city. English signage adorns places of public use, from product labels in grocery stores and pharmacies to bus signage and more. Many of those in the service industry, such as bank tellers or postal workers, are proficient in English. Tel Aviv houses the center of the Start-up Nation (Senor and Singer, 2009) and offers the main attraction for international investors who flood convention centers looking for new projects in which to sink their money. The city is not governed by the same adherence to Jewish law as Jerusalem. While Jerusalem holds revered sites for three of the world's major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the laws of Judaism staunchly govern the city's rhythms. Jerusalem's dedication to tradition generates a distinct atmospheric intensity that distinguishes it from other Israeli locales. The Sabbath siren signals a halt to all official or machinic activity throughout the streets each Friday afternoon, and the few businesses that remain open throughout the weekend are staffed with non-Jewish employees. It is also an intensely contested site, which warrants more attention than I am able to devote in this paper. The political struggles for autonomy between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as those for sovereignty between secular and religious Israeli Jews fill every corner of its cities with material remnants. At times, protesting bodies obstruct major streets, or wafts of tear gas linger along university campuses. On a regular basis, unrepaired cracks in light rail car windows stare back at passengers. They are fresh scars from rocks thrown out of retaliated frustration against the Israeli government, taken out on transport gliding between Jerusalem's Arab and Jewish neighborhoods. As

a non-Jewish sojourner, my experience touches on the year and a half that I spent encountering a vastly different rhythmic atmosphere formed by a confluence of all of these political factors. I do not presume to speak for anyone else.

In Israel, I am unmistakably marked as a foreigner by my East Asian appearance. However, similarly to how Yi Chen embraces rhythmanalysis as a tool to approach the dynamism of social processes, thoughts, and feelings that govern identity formation (2017), I choose not to begin by framing my encounters with the painfully set parameters that governed my legal existence, which included institutionalized disadvantages and neglect that I struggled with as a non-Jewish immigrant throughout my time in Israel. I choose to engage with rhythmanalysis for its potential to guide us toward a plurality of forms of experiences that may evidence or problematize the construction of wider cultural formations as they arise through everyday experience.

The paper is organized as follows. I begin by offering a theoretical framing of rhythmanalysis for its inroad to analyzing culture and marking identification through everyday rhythms. I then think with affect and rhythm to analyze emergent experiences. I draw particular attention to the affordances that arise from foregrounding affect to focus on emergent agencies and affective capacities. These affordances are highlighted in moments of relational intensities as walking and cycling bodies negotiate pathways in public spaces. I conclude by attuning to the costs incurred from the prevalence of certain contextually based relational intensities.

Theorizing Rhythm and Affect through Rhythmanalysis¹

“In everyday life, what is relative to social relations appear to every ‘subject’ as necessary and absolute, as essential and genuine...the acquired rhythms are both inherent and social.”

—Lefebvre, Régulier, and Zayani “The Rhythmanalytical Project” 1999

In a series of works, Henri Lefebvre (1974, 1996, 1999) focuses on urban spaces as productions of social practices, at the center of which is a concern with the rhythmic movements and gestures of bodies (2004). This is made even more explicit in his writing about rhythmanalysis with Catherine Regulier and Mohamed

Zayini (1999). They ask that the rhythm analyst sensitizes herself to the ongoing, dynamic nature of moods and atmospheres to take in the contextual temporalities encompassing human activity in settings such as a square or a market (1999). Others have extended Lefebvre's analysis of rhythms and their effects, drawing on various fields to demonstrate "the pervasive nature of rhythms as organizing principles that underlie all spheres of experiences" (Chen 2017, 1). Harfouche, for instance, recognizes the role of thought and actions evolving expression across a person's past and living memories as a rhythmic manifestation, or "unconscious symbiosis" (2006, 9) which govern her interactions with others. This temporal symbiosis makes room for memories, the "real," and the imagined to fill perceived, conceived, and lived spaces (Lefebvre, 1974) in tandem.

Rhythm analysis draws on sensory experience in order to foreground the pre-cognitive ability to perceive the nuances of interaction between social agents. The rhythm analyst thinks with and through the body as a tool to measure rhythmic relations and their spatiotemporal interruptions in everyday life, registered as varying intensities of feeling by the body (McCormack, 2013). In this respect it echoes Lauren Berlant's (2016) argument for the need for corporeal training, or a re-forming of attention when attempting to gain access to different kinds of worlds. As someone who has spent over twenty-five years of her life dancing, living and perceiving has always been for me a multisensory, embodied experience more saliently colored by intensity than any other parameter. These sensitivities led to attunements that shaped subsequent habit formation through these embodied encounters, unfolding as a direct result of my reactions to these encounters.

Habit participates in the maintenance of worlds. Moving to a new place means a loss of habit and an encounter with the strangeness of the habits that maintain that world. Connerton (1989) emphasizes the importance of bodily practices in the formation of habits in his book, *How Societies Remember*, defining habit as knowledge and remembering in the body that ultimately cultivates bodily understanding. Wise (2000) echoes the centrality of habitual motion and thought for nomads who actively work to re-create a sense of home. He clarifies the external origins of habit formation that seep in before they take root as conscious repetitions of conditioned reactions:

Our habits are not necessarily our own. Most are created through continuous interaction with the external world. . . We are the result of our own reactions to the world, and are as such an enfolding of the external (303).

Massumi understands affect as embodied experience described in collectively recognized ways (2002). He urges a shift in focus toward an active exploration of how the social gets made through a “felt reality of relation” (39), bolstering the processual elements that underlie experience. Grossberg emphasizes affect’s purpose in animating values through bodily effects that define investments in specific realities (2010). He sees affect as a means through which people are anchored into their lives, which lend context to intuited senses of belonging across time. These belongings create resonant spaces that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) called “milieu” (313), through periodic repetition. If we consider affects to be culturally formative in this way, it is worth contemplating how varying agendas and speeds in public spaces can give rise to cultural rhythms that dictate feelings of belonging.

Felt relations include feelings of curtailment in addition to those of belonging. Seigworth and Gregg speak to power and marginalization’s confining capacities to act in certain relations, whose sustained relational states give rise to habit formation against one’s will (2010). They credit this process of unwillful identity formation to the pressures of conforming to a larger social rhythmic coherence, demarcated by affective markers of belonging and non-belonging directing individuals to interact in ways that allow uninterrupted relatedness. My interest lies within the repeated practices of physicalized power that create marginalized bodies which seek to realize a world beyond current norms. The recognition of these practices of power and the inclusion of marginalized voices call the seemingly self-derived agency of individualized actants within an environment into question. Protevi (2009) cites affects’ contagiousness as the key to their “inherently political character” (50) through their bodily effects. In her work on political protest, Gould (2010) situates affect as an organism’s response to whatever “impinges on it” (26). The political contagion of affect extends well beyond orchestrated protest. Its political nature begins with the seemingly benign, soon to become habitual daily rhythmic practices of how we learn to board buses, cross intersections, or squeeze through narrow sidewalk spaces on foot with cyclists. Repetition after repetition, they gradually shape habituated ways of being in particular places.

Feeling My Way into Methodology

While rhythmanalysis allows us to understand how embodied habits play out through social and spatial practices, Highmore (2004) reminds us that the rhythms of the everyday remain elusive. This elusiveness may be the reason few studies

that claim to use rhythmanalysis as a method read or deploy it in quite the same way. Multiple scholars who have undertaken journeys with a rhythmalytic orientation (Edensor, 2011; Hall, Lashua and Coffrey, 2008; Highmore, 2002; McCormack, 2013) seem to conclude that rhythmanalysis is more a suggestion or invitation than a rigorous methodology. Nevertheless, rhythmanalysis has been pursued through a range of qualitative methods, from interviews and ethnographic/participant observations, to multi-media approaches such as visual recordings, sound diaries, and visual/textual performance ethnography. Several scholars have made use of time-lapse photography to map out the functionalities of public life in small city spaces and street performances (Harrison-Pepper, 1990; Lyon and Back 2012; Simpson, 2012; Whyte, 1980).

My approach here is to draw on the situated rhythms of immersive participant observation, based on eighteen months of residence in Israel. I did so while reflecting on the partiality of an individualized, situated perspective alongside comparisons of other global rhythms beyond my immediate surroundings. Embodied, nondiscursive realities have guided the past two decades of my life. Ann Cooper Albright, a veteran dance scholar who considers dance a means to bridge divides between an academic self and physicality, writes how certain forms of dance enable one to create a 'responsive' body that attunes to the experience of one's internal sensations and the outward flow of movement between bodies (2010). Nigel Thrift (2008) also advocates for the utility of dance in cultural sensitization, for its ability to "reconstitute" us through attuning to cultural specificities nuanced by "touch, force, tension, weight, shape, tempo, phrasing...even coalescence" (140). Erin Manning (2009) views affectivity or relations as virtual movement, taking place prior to observable changes. Both she and Brian Massumi emphasize rhythm's inhabitation between the virtual and the actual. Manning (2009) views rhythm as pre-acceleration, feeding on the momentum that allows the passage of the virtual into the actual. Massumi (2009) considers rhythm at the level of microperception, where relational "multiplicities of tendency, reactivated capacity, [and] affective beginnings" (5) are foregrounded. I often find that affects abound in the nuanced sensations of repetitious actions that undergird relational beginnings, such as whether one accepts a door's weight in a catch and rebound, or by the weighted momentum or force that someone uses to send a door swinging in the opposite direction. While recognizing that my bodily experiences may be different from others', this rhythmically and affectively attuned approach speaks to the cultural persuasiveness of rhythmic belonging within the process of acculturation, as it involves contours formed by material elements.

This corporeal training complements the kind of attunements suggested by rhythmanalysis. Chen (2017) urges researchers to begin their design by exploring sites of rhythmic production that include rhythmic assemblages or entanglements. Lefebvre, Regulier, and Zayini (1999) have pointed out that our attention is naturally drawn to rhythms when we suffer from an irregularity or disorderliness, such as momentary disruptions in the course of everyday life. Bennett (2015) has examined disruptions caused by the unanticipated snowfalls, and Thorpe (2015) has considered how residents have to re-establish familiar rhythms and connections in the aftermath of earthquakes. I take the framing of ‘irregularity’ that occurs from changing the underlying material of one’s everyday life in the context of acculturation.

Lefebvre (2004) coined two terms to describe harmonious and dysfunctional interrelations of varying rhythms: eurhythmia and arrhythmia. The former describes when rhythms unite in normal everydayness, and the latter describes rhythmic discordance that is both the cause and effect of suffering. Although eurhythmia and arrhythmia do not solely exist in opposition to one another, I describe how over time, a predominance of asynchronization becomes untenable as an embodied, lived condition. Lefebvre (2004) coined an additional term to describe the physical retraining one must undergo to acclimate to new surroundings. He outlines the term “dressage” to describe the physical bending, or entrainment that ensues from reforming physical comportment to fit dominant rhythms.

The physicality involved in acculturating across dynamic movement assemblages involves multiple layers of accommodation. In urban metropolises, one cannot assume that a daily commute will simply involve weaving a path through places that eventually become familiar (Edensor, 2010). In densely packed cities, it is nearly impossible to travel in one’s own bubble. In her methodological compilation of rhythmanalytic methods, Lyon (2018) invokes dressage to account for ways that pedestrians accommodate both machinic and human moving objects. The dressage in Israel often involves negotiations with fellow travellers concerning who will advance first. These continuous “collective choreographies of congregation, interaction [and] rest” (Edensor 2010, 70) give rise to permeating rhythms that Seamon and Nordin (1980) calls “place ballets.” These choreographies occupy a state of being that encompasses both learned patterns and improvisation. When first exposed to situated place ballets, it is essential to invoke a peripheral awareness of others’ movements and intensities. Mutual in situ negotiations can be brokered through a receptivity toward eye contact. In addition to these types of awareness,

I focus on the proximity and speed that power people's movements around me. In this context, arrhythmia can occur with a misalignment of rhythmic movement patterns. These can later cause internal arrhythmias wrought by dressage entrainment.

In what follows I focus on the ingrained affective traces from the repetition of hundreds of similar encounters. These "individual acts of remembrance" from transnational contexts (Basu 2013, 130) linger in my body each time I unconsciously step as close as possible to the edge of a curb to be the first in a throng of people to cross a busy urban road. I had once hoped that my body would revert to contextual rhythms and conditioned ways of being when I returned to more collectively minded environs such as Taiwan for extended stays. However, I could not shake the new patterned ways of being from my body. Kasmani refers to this sort of inward returning as "thin attachments" for their returning change "unfolding in other forms, arresting us ever so tenuously" (2019). It felt as though affectivities remained within my body that ran counter to my instincts of disinvesting in those affects, physically and habitually drawing me toward one dimension while I simultaneously desired withdrawal.

Some Insights into Israeli Culture

"Culture is a negotiated and contested space through which one embodies a possible self."

—Sekimoto, "A Multimodal approach to Identity," 2012.

The capacities to act and to be affected alongside passages of forces or intensities construct frameworks that deal with power and cultural identity. The cultural identity in this case emerges from observations of how people choose to navigate scenarios, where they prioritize their own agendas or adapt to the needs of their immediate environment. For Harfouche, rhythm is inscribed through practices, and interactions, understanding, and performances can encompass a range of meanings from national aspirations to daily encounters (2006). Borch echoes this confidence by stating that rhythm analysis can shed light on society's ways of "promoting subject positions" (2005, 95). In this sense, attuning to rhythms can

help make manifest the internalized performances of particular cultural contexts. This has particular resonance in the context of this paper insofar as it reminds us that, in the process of becoming attuned to the rhythms of particular cultural situations, we always risk failing. We might think of this in terms of the risk of being a *freier*.

In Israel, there is a pervasive drive not to be a *freier*, which loosely translates to 'sucker' in English. This mentality treats life as a zero-sum game. Based on an analysis of five hundred Israeli news articles that mention the term, Bloch clarifies that *freier* avoidance involves "refraining from voluntarily undertaking any activity that would entail an effort not resulting in the actor's own immediate interests or not taking advantage of a situation that presented itself [even if taking advantage includes foregoing]...common courtesy" (2003, 131-132). She points out five overarching characteristics: "concern for face, disregard for rules, individualism, competition, and machismo" (p. 138). Bloch suggests that the *freier* can also represent death in a country that raises its young to value and adopt war tactics of survival, where conditions under fire equate being a *freier* with death.

Bloch (2003) surmises that a distaste for *freier* related behavior is connected to a desire to disassociate from an identity marker of the Jew in exile. When one is never considered to be native, or to belong, one must do everything in one's power to survive. Ironically, new immigrants to Israel, often referred to as 'new ascendants' (*olim hadashim*), can find difficulty when assimilating to the culture of *freier* avoidance. Bloch notes that new immigrants carry a contrary pride when they are perceived by Israelis as *freiars* for their commitment to following rules and consideration for others. They wear the *freier* badge as an educational tool to embody an alternate moral compass, where "there's no need to push, that there's no need to honk, that there's no need to cheat on your taxes" (2003).

In 1997, The L.A. Times reported that the aversion toward being a sucker pervades every element of Israeli life, from conducting the most routine task to brokering peace between countries (Ilan, 2007). When he was prime minister in 1998, Benjamin Netanyahu was publicly recorded to have told students, "We are not *freiars*. We don't give without receiving." The de-emphasis on exercising sensitivity and giving without the promise of receiving in routine tasks are cultural elements embedded in the rhythms of local life. Whereas standing in line or paying are somewhat regulated transactions, the negotiations of passage through public spaces further signal ways that these principles are integrated into the culture of impromptu encounters with strangers.

Rhythmic Strains on Foot and by Bike

“The rhythm analyst sees the walking figure as not being delineated by an environment, that he or she is the environment.”

—Chen, *Practicing Rhythm Analysis*, 2017

I. Bus Rituals in Jerusalem

The Sabbath siren echoes throughout the entire city every Friday afternoon, signaling each weekend’s arrival. Without fail, the streets empty of cars and the stores close shop for the weekend. This strictly mandated respite perhaps contributes to the urgent bustle throughout the remainder of the week, when grocery shopping, hair appointments, and other errands must be completed. Jerusalem’s population is 63% Jewish, 32% of which are religiously observant and 34% of which are Orthodox believers, or Haredi (Cidor, 2018).

I fumblingly cross the chilled cobble-stoned street to the nearest bus stop, which at 7:30am, is already thronged with waiting passengers. I stand at what I determine to be the end of the line of backpack adorned students, army members of about the same age clad in olive green, and ‘religious’ Jews with their black hats, overcoats, and head scarves for the women. At the back of the line, I awkwardly try to avoid the unrelenting direction of their gazes, focused past me down the street, awaiting glimpses of the bus, whose arrival time is highlighted in an electric sign at the base of the stop’s awning.

A bus, not mine, slowly rolls up, crammed full with standing and seated bodies. Unblinking eyes from within fixate on my face as the machine pauses to let new passengers board. As the seconds tick by, the pairs of eyes keep hold of me, without the crinkle of a smile or visible lightening of a new breath.

At this point, I cannot help but attribute this intensity to my ethnic appearance, as it seems to be more concentrated on my person than on the Caucasian or Middle Eastern faces around me. In the face of the gaze I am suspended, powerless to escape its focus. I suppose that one could classify the nature of this interaction as a form of ‘relatedness,’ but it is one entirely unsought, and I long for the bus

to hurry its departure - anything to interrupt this encounter. The identification that I see in those passengers' eyes is one devoid of warmth - it labels me as a strange sort of fruit that merits the unblinking duration of an unrequested gaze.

Habits and rhythms of seating on a bus reveal a lot. Coming from an East-Asian culture where no one dares to occupy the clearly labeled priority seating set aside for the handicapped, the elderly, and the pregnant in every unit of public transportation, or claim a non-priority seat without first looking around to see if someone else might be in greater need, my rhythmic default is quite different. It is as if most of the people around me cannot hear the preparatory overtures before the official downbeat start of the music, so they do not begin listening until the signal of that first downbeat.

The first bus leaves, followed by the one that I've been waiting for. As it comes to rest, people from all corners of the stop—behind me, to my right, and to my left—begin swarming toward the calculated arrival of the narrow boarding entryway, leaving me adrift in my spot as if no line had ever existed. When I fail to press forward as well, the doors close after about eight to ten bodies have crammed inside, having already swelled the container with its contents.

Months of mornings pass in a similar fashion. I have difficulty with the idea of pushing past elderly people too slow to approach the bus doorway or climb the raised step to board. I eventually learn that it doesn't matter if I can't swipe my bus pass immediately upon embarking, which leaves me room to squeeze in at the very last minute. The primary inconvenience of this last-minute position is the necessity to leap out of way of the metal prong that operates the opening and closing of the door each time the bus comes to a stop, to avoid being physically smashed by the prong or berated by the driver.

Negotiating these situations is a prerequisite for learning to become familiar with the habits that hold worlds together. With its limited public transport routes and crowded streets, Jerusalem exists in a perpetual state of rush hour. The meaning of "being acted upon" begins to take on two separate meanings. The immediate meaning involves receiving the ebbing brunt of others rushing ahead, being left behind in their wake, like a dancer unable to keep time with the rhythm and pacing of the movement phrase. The second, more transformative meaning involves succumbing to the overwhelmingly dominant rhythm as a means of survival rather than as a voluntary choice. I cannot stand motionless in the middle of a choreographed space when everyone else is rushing forward around me,

especially when I know that I can easily pick up the movements. Pragmatically, I cannot repeatedly wait an additional fifteen to twenty minutes for the next bus to roll around. I need to advance to my destination. At this point, smashing myself in between the door at the last minute seems like the only recourse to moving forward while enacting minimal aggression on those who crammed their way in first and on those who are unable to cram their way forward.

II. Tel Aviv – Arrhythmic Sensations of Non-Belonging

Street-Side Conversations:

When the time comes to move to Tel Aviv after six months in Jerusalem, I initially interpret it as a move toward salvation. I anticipate the space to breathe, free from the fermata of arresting stares and the crushing currents of too many bodies in too few spaces. I eagerly await the anonymity promised by global cities. Yet, to my dismay, I do not find Tel Aviv to be quite the cultural haven that I anticipate.

As I emerge from the post office to unlock my bike, a woman approaches me on her own bike transporting a young child. I look up, my peripheral vision having taken stock of the mass rushing toward me, expecting to be queried for directions or propositioned to purchase something. Cornered among the parked bikes by the rapidity of her approach, I hurriedly try to ready my limited stock of Hebrew phrases.

“Sleeha, at sinit or yapanit?” (Excuse me, are you Chinese or Japanese?)

I have been reduced to a mere transaction not even worthy of the precursor, hello. The shock must have registered on my face, because before I can settle into the next beat of an appropriate response, she suddenly speaks again, “*Sheeha*” (*Sorry*) and rides off back to the main street from which she had come. Suddenly, my mind feels as lethargic as my tongue. Why had I not asked her why she thought it was okay to set the example for her child that it was acceptable to treat people as curiosities instead of as humans? It is probably because I still didn’t know how to say the word “curiosity” in Hebrew.

While attempts at verbal communication are an improvement over the wordless stares that I experienced in Jerusalem, interactions like these unsettle or puncture the rhythms of the slow process of becoming acculturated. I have learned not to take offense when a cashier cashes me out without making eye contact or conversation. Yet the fact that my encounter with this woman has no transactional

precursor makes it seem all the more jarring. The irony is not lost on me that Israel is a nation of immigrants from various countries and ethnic backgrounds, with an official history of less than seventy years. And still, varying expectations result in our rhythmic incoherence: am I a resource to be queried for information as one would ask about a purse in a market, or am I eligible for congenial pleasantries before diving into any sort of exchange?

Acclimatizing to Tel Avivian Cycling Norms

Much like the process of boarding buses in Jerusalem, cycling in Tel Aviv can be a matter of survival. Streets or sidewalks fortunate enough to be lined with bike pathways allot space carefully, with lanes just wide enough to accommodate a single bike. Tel Aviv had brilliant city planners who ensured that no corner of the city would be 'dead space' by combining residential housing with commercial enterprises. In many cases, they layered apartment units above shops in low-rise, sand-colored buildings. Consequently, the sidewalks and streets are shared spaces between meandering tourists exploring the city and locals commuting about their daily lives. The shared space between pedestrians and cyclists results in a concentration of vastly differently paced bodies traversing the same few square meters outside restaurants and storefronts. One can turn away from the allure of a window display to nearly have one's foot run over by a determined cyclist.

Despite the arrows indicating desired traffic flow on bike lanes on each side of the road, most cyclists, including myself, ignore them in favor of the side of the street that is shaded from the desert sun, or the side whose upcoming traffic lights allow us to continue our trajectories without pause. This enables most cyclists to ride at an exhilarating pace, which often turns into a game of chicken when two cyclists come head to head from opposite directions on the narrow bike lanes when they are clear of pedestrians emerging from the covered storefronts. This game usually involves little contact, and tends to boil down to speed and focus, like two trains racing toward one another on a lone track at varying speeds. Focus is frequently reduced to the unilaterality of a cyclist's gaze. The individual open to negotiation, which I almost always play, ends up giving way, interrupting momentum to brake or veer off the path. Most of the time, I first search for an inkling of recognition or willingness for connection from the other cyclist, hoping for negotiation before the moment of collision. When it usually fails to materialize, I begin to coast or tap on my brakes and swerve to the side to avoid the oncoming onslaught.

In moments like these, when speed equals power, anything other than a multi-speed bike tipping its rider forward at an aerodynamic angle barreling forward with conviction seems like a display of inequity. As my vehicle is neither of these, and I frequently ride with the weight of multiple layers of clothing to ward off the desert wind, I am typically no match for these exemplars of determination even if I were to contemplate death by biking. If some sort of negotiation were to be made, I would happily yield at an “excuse me” or an apologetic smile before a moment of near collision. I often wait for the pause that comes from a moment of mutual recognition, where two cyclists transform from two anonymous vehicular obstacles to two people trying to make their way in the world. In Asia, people frequently offer a facial expression or gesture that indicates an openness to being acknowledged or greeted (Scollon, Scollon and Jones, 2011). Over time, repeated experiences lead me to believe that this uncompromising speed is the city’s default, and I resign myself to get out of the way. At this point in time, I do not yet understand *freier* avoidance, or of its prevalence in daily encounters.

In the midst of all of this forward-looking momentum it sometimes feels impossible to fathom other modes of being. De Certeau (1984) views walking as an act that “implies relations among differentiated positions” (98). He identifies walking with having its own rhetoric, derived from the fact that a walker constitutes a here and a there and has the task of “introducing an other in relation to [an] ‘I’” (99). De Certeau implies that walking serves as a conduit for social models and cultural mores. These social and cultural rhetorics of walking apply to multiple forms of locomoting, including cycling. The differentiated positions that regulate locomoting in the city viscerally imply to me that there is no “us,” only an “I” and multiple “others,” to whom I likewise continue to be an “other.”

Merging Rhythms

Once I find a solid patch of sidewalk, pedestrians and cyclists, many on motorized, electric versions, become anonymous entities with whom the fleetingness of our contact almost invalidates any affective reaction that may arise from momentary wrongs. Several times, I inadvertently come close to running over elderly pedestrians supported by walkers or canes, who appear unexpectedly around shrubs or walled corners. I try to excuse cringing feelings from having nearly run them over by telling myself that I managed to avoid doing them actual physical harm.

In instances without the excusable blindness wrought by corners and ninety-degree blind spots, I shift the blame of near collisions onto pedestrians of course. After all, they are standing too close to bike lanes, encroaching on my limited territory where speed is sanctioned. Over time, I learn not to blame myself for not having shifted rhythms to accommodate those around me. My two-wheeled vehicle gives me right of way, and right of speed.

I tell myself that my transition to a mode of being that I would have once labeled without hesitation as asshole can be chalked up to the sentiment conveyed by the expression, ‘when in Rome.’ In actuality, I claim the agency to act on those who are unable to match the speed of my bicycle. I act in selfishly privileged ways on those with less agency, who have no recourse but to be acted on due to their reduced pedestrian speed while I perpetuate the city’s more rapid rhythms.

After having been exposed to the repetition of multiple similar encounters, at a certain point, I subconsciously begin imitating these rhythms, to my distaste. Waves of guilt wash over me for treating fellow commuters as obstacles in my path, after having habituated myself to negotiating travel across spaces in tandem *with* others in Taiwan. In doing so, I recall Borch’s (2005) picture of urban life and its rhythms, which he distills as repetition and imitation. In my eagerness to join the prevalent rhythms underlying cyclists in the city, I effectively mute prior considerations of those around me.

Conclusion: Rhythmic Echoes

“There are practical implications for researching cultural politics when the identities of ‘subjects/form’ are radically re-conceived. At the heart of the issue is the question of agency and the nature of how ‘power’ relays in social interactions.”

—Chen, *Practicing Rhythmanalysis* 2017

Lefebvre once said, “to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration” (2004, 27). Both Lefebvre and I underestimated a rhythm’s power to linger once I gave myself over to certain rhythms. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) define territory as “first of all, the critical distance between two beings of the same species” (314). They then elaborate, “critical distance is not a meter, it is a rhythm. But

the rhythm, precisely, is caught up in a becoming that sweeps up the distances between characters, making them rhythmic characters that are themselves more or less distant, more or less combinable (intervals)" (320). When the rhythm of a current or energy becomes sufficiently overwhelming, it sweeps over milder whispers of dissent. This overarching merging of rhythm requires the presence of affect to address issues of power. The failure to actualize ways of relating unaligned with omnipresent rhythms lends a new dimension to well-worn terms such as "marginalized," "subaltern," or "subjugated." In this case, it is a matter of being acted on what creates the disappearance of alter-rhythms, newly made absent.

To return to my initial guiding questions, "How does repeated exposure to Israeli rhythms and their intensities affect or alter an immigrant's relations to others over time?" and correspondingly, "How does rhythmic incoherence or dissonance contribute to one's willingness to join in dominant rhythms?" – both questions can be answered in kind by the same framework. Rhythmic coherence, or eurhythmia, involves cultural synchronicity. In my cultural transition from Taiwanese to Israeli mores, I discovered through embodied experience how unsynchronized rhythms, or arrhythmia, reflect a lack of mutual cultural sensibilities and engender a lack of mutual agency. Transitioning to an environment with relatively stronger planes of intensity and faster speeds resulted in a loss of personal agency to lessen intensities or slow my pacing to arrive at fields of mutual coordinated, relative comfort with fellow pedestrians and cyclists, which had happened effortlessly in Taiwan.

In answer to the question asking how exposure to these rhythms altered the ways I related to others, the deceptively simple decision to adapt to local prioritizations of speed also involved the adoption of certain cultural values, such as prioritizing the maintenance of my personal agenda over surrounding circumstances or other people. This required me to reframe those people as obstacles to my personal goals or ends, instead of viewing them as ends in themselves for personal connection, or as autonomous beings who have an equal right to prioritization in shared public spaces, regardless of their speed. In short, I began identifying with the local culture to avoid being a *freier*.

My daily round trip commutes regularly lasted forty to sixty minutes each day, a more substantial duration than any other interactions that I held with people outside of my predetermined social groups. Consequently, the bulk of my interactions with Israelis consisted of encounters on Jerusalem and Tel Aviv's sidewalks

and bike lanes. The affects surrounding these relations of movement single-handedly reshaped my perception of Israelis and my understanding of the probable ways that I might interact with them. My default mode of relating to Israelis, as I came to embody it, became an extension of *freier* avoidance—one of competition, with each body prizing its own agenda over the well-being of others. In doing so, I lived in a state of perpetual perturbation. While I adapted my behavior to match the dominant rhythms of both cities, this gave rise to a self-loathing and anxiety from acting in accord with cultural values that I inwardly did not want to espouse. The eighteen months that I spent in Israel had de-territorialized the approach to navigating public space that I had absorbed in Taiwan on an ethical and rhythmic level. The disjuncture between these collectively oriented values and each self-serving action further de-territorializes me each time I take action. With each act where I propel myself forward across others' paths, I widen the gulf between my present self and the version of myself that I had so enjoyed actualizing every day in Taiwan while navigating between possible modes in the ongoing processuality of subjectivity.

Harfouche (2006) observes rhythm's inscription through practices and the potential of interactions to reflect national aspirations through daily encounters. Borch (2005) voices similar sentiments about rhythmanalysis' ability to reveal society's prevalent ways of "promoting subject positions" (95). The Israeli culture of *freier* avoidance may be in part the result of a survival instinct chronically "on call" aiming to compensate for past generations of exile and a current positioning among countries who consider its nationalized existence an injustice and a threat. Regardless of its origin, the dressage that I ultimately adopted in this culture proved not only to be a deterritorialization of my preferred values while in Israel. The entrained habits lingered in my body well after I left the culture and society. Now, having returned to the United States, I contend with all of these entrained habits, in their transfer from cycling to driving as my daily commute. The further removal from my co-commuters' humanity through our engine-driven metal boxes makes it even more difficult to resist prioritizing my own needs above the overall safety of the road.

This approach suggests that rhythmanalysis can be useful in helping us attend to the actualization of contextual energies and lingering cultural influences. While this account is written solely through the eyes of an outsider and immigrant, similar accounts could be drawn from other sojourners or immigrants who return to their country after spending significant periods of time abroad. At each seemingly innocuous crossing of multiple nationalities on a crowded

college campus pathway or global city sidewalk, individual prioritizations of self and other generate an atmosphere of locality. Affective moments of yielding or insisting coproduce a space and rhythm that give rise to newly attuned cultural sensibilities and embodied memories while also breaking down prior attunements. It is in these moments that the process of acculturation takes place.

Endnotes

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Dream Daddy

a Dad Dating Simulator



Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator
Game Grumps, 2017–2019

CAPACIOUS

ON DADS



Hil Malatino

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Dad names the structure of a fantasy and the structure of a joke. The fantasy is embarrassing. The joke isn't really that funny.

A and I are in his darkened bedroom, projecting a video game on the wall. He's a little stoned; I sip a beer while we wait for the start sequence to cue up. We've been waiting to play this game together, saved it for a special moment where we could be close in the absurdity and silliness and shame and heat of it. The music that plays as the main menu comes up is ethereal, breathy, cloying; gently fingerpicked acoustic guitar over a wash of synth and a thin, tinny dance beat that slowly ramps up. The vocals are simple—a repeated refrain with the first vowels drawn way, way out: “dreee-eee-eeee-eeaaamm daddy,” with the interrogative “who's it gonna be, who's it gonna be, who's it gonna be” layered in as the track progresses. Reportedly, Will Wiesenfeld—the guy behind Baths, the electro-pop project responsible for the song—had to do a ton of takes to get the vocals down. He kept cracking up.

We're playing *Dream Daddy*, a gay dad dating simulator where you play as a single dad new to a suburban neighborhood full of hot dads. The objective of the game is to find and snag the DILF of your dreams. Some dad background that might be relevant: A's told me just a little about his father—that he's a narcissist and that they're

estranged. A knows a little about my dad, too—that he’s an aging hippie who was never around much. So here we are, textbook psychoanalytic casualties: two lost queer boys in search of a Daddy that loves us, indulging in a fantasy humiliating in its obviousness.

(I used to think that all of the mascs I loved were lost boys, inchoate and a little feral. But then I discovered that Dads were even hotter than lost boys because they tucked the lost boy away, but still sometimes let him out to play. Ersatz grown-ness, recursive intrusion of the adolescent.)

It’s 2004. My best friend and I, both in our early twenties, are camping together somewhere on the western coast of central Florida. Juggling tent rigging in the mid-summer swelter, he gives me some unsolicited advice on how to assemble the frame. Tersely, I snipe back at him: “Okay, Frank.” Frank is his father’s name. He has only recently started to transition. I won’t, at least not hormonally, for another 16 years, at which point he’ll talk me through all the biochemical shifts (like a good Dad, one you can open up to, one you can trust to understand your narration of the micrintimacies of your body).

This is perhaps the cruelest thing I’ve ever said to him, in over three decades of friendship. He does not want to become his father. He does not want me to give a proper paternal name to the anxiety we share about our embodied experiences becoming distant and illegible to one another.

I do not want him to act like a Dad, to Dad at me, to Dad me to death, to suffocate under the weight of his presumed competence. I don’t want masculinity to mean this. My interpretive apparatus is scrambled—any advice he gives me now is a man telling a not-man how to do something. Any explanation he gives me becomes a mansplain.

I thought I might be a poet before I thought differently, and a lesbian feminist one, at that. I was in the midst of a years-long apprenticeship in this subtle art, and kept the work of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, and Dorothy Allison close—in my messenger bag, on the floor next to my air mattress. I had whole sections of *Loving in the War Years* (Moraga, 1983) memorized, whole stanzas of “Twenty-One Love Poems” (Rich, 1976). I had committed myself to a long-term psychological detox in order to divest myself of my unconscious investments in White supremacist cisheteropatriarchy, and I was very sure that the last thing I ever

wanted to eroticize was a Dad; even more certain that a Dad was the last thing I ever wanted to be. No being of the phallus, no having of the phallus, just a wholesale rejection of the only libidinal economy I'd ever known.

Cherríe Moraga: "Daddy, you did not beat me, but every blow I took from the hand of my mother came from a caress you could not give her" (1983).

You see, even when it wasn't his fault, it was his fault.

I was also helping friends pick out strap-ons from the Good Vibrations catalog, because part of my apprenticeship entailed reading lesbian sex guides and grappling with the politics of sex toy production and distribution. The early aughts were a strange time to come of queer age. I was haunting the HQ section of the university library; the copy of *The Lesbian Postmodern* that I checked out was full of poststructuralist hand-wringing on the meaning of penetration. This was before the advent of feminist new materialism, before there was an emergent consensus on porosity as general ontology, which I understand to be a kind of triumph for bottoms everywhere. But back then, in the afterglow of the Sex Wars, a question loomed over my book-learning: should I understand sex as a diffuse surface eroticism, or did I believe in the worlds of roleplay that structured lesbian BDSM? I remember encountering a copy of Califia's *Macho Sluts* in the bathroom of W, a trans guy that was slightly older than me who I looked up to, maybe as a potential Dad, though probably not a Daddy. It made me feel some kind of way, which is to say, it made me feel a way that I didn't understand, which is to say, it had something to do with desire.

Patrick Califia: "This repression was certainly aided by the fact that when I looked at the way most men lived, I was repulsed" (1988).

My favorite song during my senior year of high school was "Refusing to Be a Man," by Propagandhi, stalwart Canadian punks. The song title came from the book by radical feminist and life-partner of Andrea Dworkin, John Stoltenberg. I would teach sections of the book years later, in a women's studies honors seminar. Back then, on the cusp of some kind of outness, I was playing it for my high school boyfriend in order to convince him that his hatred of this thing we now call "toxic masculinity" meant that he was a feminist, and also meant that maybe he wasn't even a man, after all. (Reader, we are still friends, and he is indeed a feminist and also still, nevertheless, a man). This wouldn't be the last time I wished that a boyfriend was more queer than he was, not the last time I secretly hoped they would come out as not cis, not straight. When I was, however tenuously, sleeping with

(not-queer, not-trans) boys as a body interpellated as kind-of, begrudgingly and unconvincingly, girl, I thought they must understand that their desire for me made them not straight. Surely they got what I meant when I said I disidentified with gender, full-stop. (Turns out they didn't.) Surely they were cognizing my body and my desire in a way that was consonant with my non-binary self-understanding and way of being in the world. (Turns out they weren't.)

John Stoltenberg: "When you use sex to have a sex, the sex you have is likely to make you feel crummy about yourself" (1989).

Propagandhi: "I'm scared of my attraction to body types" (1996).

The Dad always exists in a crucial tension with the concept of the patriarch, because the historical *a priori* for the ascendancy of the Dad is the decline of the role and function of the patriarch in the White *oikos* (the Greek term encompassing the family, familial property, and the household). The capitalist and, later, neoliberal structural transformation of the *oikos* has prompted the waning of traditional modes of patriarchal power. Which is why Dads do what they do, on sitcoms and elsewhere: putter, loaf, lament, start inessential projects they tend not to finish. Sometimes they gently "discipline" a child—by grounding, taking away a privilege, and then having a heart to heart, nothing corporal. Mostly they say and do kind of stupid things—they're doofy and doltish, benevolent and simple. When these Dads desire, they're turned on by the most banal forms of femme prosthesis—all it takes is a silk robe, a negligee, and a little bit of innuendo and they're being led to the bedroom by their polyester ties like thirsty little doggies.

(Once, using the computer of a guy I was seeing after staying over at his place, one of his past search terms came up as I went to input a phrase in the engine. The search was for "boobs.")

Tim the Tool-Man Taylor, Mike Brady, Dan Connor, Homer Simpson: ham-fisted satirizations of the last gasps of White imperialist masculine sovereignty.

Then there's the feminist desire for a Good Dad, one who does his fair share of domestic labor, has disinvested from the cult of machismo, is caring and empathetic and a good cuddler and a good cook and always engages in aftercare—after sex, and after the kids get home from school. This Dad is also, usually, hot. Probably a service top.

It was a mild March morning in Savannah, GA, in the parking lot of the Thunderbird Inn motor lodge, when I became a Dad. I was eating a donut and drinking coffee, wearing a floppy straw cowboy hat and jorts. My transmasc partner and I were chaperoning a group of 12 (mostly queer) students to a gender studies conference in South Florida. We were driving a big white van while the students curated a collective playlist and snacked and slept and gossiped and, on the morning of our second day on the road, they decided that they were going to christen us their Gay Dads. Questions prefaced with this new nomenclature floated to us from the backseat: “Gay Dads, can we stop to pee?” “Gay Dads, are we there yet?” They were delighted by this. We were, too. If only we’d been able to be kin like this all along, held and witnessed in our goofiness and our perversity and our wildness, merrily rolling down the highway, screaming along to vintage *NSYNC jams. To have and to be reliable care-takers and care-givers without it being a preordained role, without it subsuming our complex personhood.

Jordy Rosenberg: “The family, and all its contortions, is a certain kind of hell, no doubt and... a ground that we must not surrender. We queers know the contours of this particular hell so well; we know how to inhale its phantasmagoria air, and — if we are committed to a radical politics that does not seek assimilation so much as transformation — we know how to exhale elements of a different composition.”

I can’t outrun it, neither the abject desire for the erotic and existential plenitude bestowed by a Daddy, nor the ongoing effort to try to raise the lost boy of my self up right. To have a Daddy, and to be my own goddamn Dad.

Linguist Stanley Dubinsky, on dad jokes: “Most jokes rely on some semantic ambiguity or grammatical ambiguity...the things people call ‘dad jokes’ are the ones where the ambiguity is crushingly obvious” (Fetters, 2018).

On Father’s Day 2019, I post a photograph of my partner and myself at a tiki bar on the west coast of Florida. I’m wearing a loose white linen shirt and mirrored Wayfarers; they’re in a tropical shirt and a gently ostentatious Panama hat; our arms are draped over each other’s shoulders. I caption it “wishing us a v happy father’s day/we are doing a very good job becoming the kind of dads we never had.” A beloved friend (and Dad) immediately comments: “Happy Father’s Day! Also, this look is straight out of Top Gun.” Dream daddies, indeed.

The hope is that, in our repurposing and resignification of the terms of this cosmic Dad joke, we stumble into a kind of grace, and a kind of solidarity—that we are able to Dad the derided and foreclosed parts of ourselves into existence, and that we’re able to offer to our reciprocally chosen kinfolk the kind of loving support that was denied so many of us.



Father's Day 2019


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Anopheles mosquito (Aedes aegypti), A. J. E. Terzi, 1872-1956
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THE GOOD MOSQUITO AND THE BAD: MIMICRY, BETRAYAL, AND TRANSGENIC STRATEGIES



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ABSTRACT

Technologies of genetic modification are increasingly being used or considered to control populations of disease-bearing mosquitoes. This article draws on ethnographic material and science fiction to explore affective encounters between people and new genetically engineered organisms which draw upon imagery and discourses of betrayal. Describing how the organism comes into being with and as the biblical figure of Judas Iscariot, the making and knowing of bodies is shown as much affective as material, as rooted in darkness, intimacy and violence as in the clean and clinical spaces of laboratory research. The transgenic version of *Aedes aegypti* is presented as one in a network of uncanny doubles, illustrating how the uses of unsettling insect imagery to explore elements of human sexuality also works in reverse, as the human figure of Judas emerges as a way for people to think through insect sexuality and articulate social meanings for the new kind of creature in their midst. Working in the interstices of ethnographic data and science fiction, convergences between the insect and human figure are drawn out to make the case for a nuanced attentiveness to negative affect in the implementation of novel regimes of vector control.

KEYWORDS

insects, biotechnology, Judas Iscariot, transgenic, interspecies, fecundity

Bursting, bleeding, biting and bargaining, Judas emerges from antiquity as a transgenic organism, human and satanic, person and animal.

—Susan Gubar, *Judas: A Biography*

Animals that are the killers and superior fighters of their groups have no enemies... So there are a host of weak things that try to hide among them- to mimic them. And man is the greatest killer, the greatest hunter of them all.

—Donald Wollheim, “Mimic”

In 1940s New York, a young entomology museum assistant is returning home at dawn from a late night of arranging insect displays when a building superintendent accosts him in a panic on the street. Shrill screams, heavy thuds, and dull groans have awoken him, coming from the apartment of a strange neighbor, long known to both men. The super gathers our narrator and a policeman, but when the three men reach the threshold of the strange man’s apartment, they hear only a gentle rustling, like a breeze through paper. They kick down the door.

The apartment’s odd occupant had been a presence in the neighborhood for years. Always cloaked in black, never speaking, and apparently terrified of women, “[h]e was a sight from some weird story out of the old lands,” writes Wollheim (under the pseudonym Martin Pearson). Our narrator remembered jeering at him as a child. As an adult, he had become obsessed by the infinitely variable morphology of insects. Especially fascinating to him was their ability to mimic other organisms. “Nature practices deceptions in every angle. Evolution will create a being for any niche that can be found, no matter how unlikely.” Twig insects, moths disguised as threatening wasps, and all the myriad impostors that troupe along with hordes of army ants: it is the nature of life, he reflects, for the weak to mimic the strong. And man is “the greatest killer, the greatest hunter of them all.”

Inside the apartment, the man lies dead in an unfurnished room strewn with garbage. As our narrator leans down towards the corpse, however, he sees that what seemed to be a nose is not a nose. The face is not a face, and the cloak is shiny wings beneath which are concealed an extra set of arms. The creature is not human, and it is not male: a strange emptiness in her thorax makes clear that she has recently laid her eggs. The rustling continues from within a metal box in the corner.

When the men pry it open, they are overwhelmed by a “stream of flying things,” gauzy-winged beetles, shaped like little men, pour out the window and fly off into the breaking dawn. This revelation is superseded, however, by something our narrator finds even more chilling: rushing to the window as the offspring disperse into the sky, he sees the red brick surface of a nearby chimney begin to vibrate. A pair of eyes appears, and a “great, flat-winged thing” peels itself away from the chimney and flies off in hungry pursuit of the newly hatched young.

The familiar neighborhood is suddenly revealed to be a space of anarchy, war, and betrayal. “We know little or nothing,” “And yet we think we know a lot.” We search for the unknown in far-flung continents, in the “science of atomics,” but it is “that which is in plain view which is often best hidden.” And its revelation is an unassimilable horror (Pearson 1942, 59).

Insects’ capacities for mimicry and morphological change have long inspired fiction, science fiction, and horror literature (Byatt 1993; Ghosh 2011). The unease often connected with insects has taken on new valences in contemporary discussions about genetic engineering of mosquitoes for disease control. In exploring affective engagements with a vector control program, this article shows how sex and reproduction have become central to new modalities of biological control and how those same capacities can become a source of uneasiness about human powers to control entomological flourishing.

This article cites ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Piracicaba, Brazil in 2016 to describe how a contemporary mosquito control program resonates with science and fiction about insects, sex, betrayal, and disguise. *Aedes aegypti* is a small mosquito which prefers to cohabit with people and can carry dengue, chikungunya, and the Zika virus. Transgenic versions of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito are produced by the British company Oxitec. “Sterile males” are released into local populations, diminishing their number by producing non-viable offspring with wild-type female mates. Like many transgenic population control strategies, this new program organizes culling not at the hands of humans, but by getting transgenic insects to cause death in their conspecifics. This logic of betrayal on which the program is predicated was observed by the author to elicit new local discourses about Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus with a kiss. The affective tensions I describe over the rollout of this new modality of disease control raise unsettling questions as to whether humans, too, are vulnerable to their own technologies of bio-mimicry.

Male transgenic *Aedes aegypti* are equipped with a “delayed lethality gene” which is “turned off” by the presence of tetracycline in the rearing process at production facilities. Insects are sorted by sex, and male mosquitoes are released into human environments where they seek out and mate with wild females. Without tetracycline to turn off the delayed lethality mechanism, these offspring die before reaching sexual maturity. The concept depends crucially on getting wild-type females to mate with transgenic males, which in turn depends on producing males that can convincingly mimic wild-type males. Insect mimicry becomes inspiration and technique for this form of technological intervention. Certain capacities of mosquitoes are coopted. The affective resonances described here suggest that such cooptation also raises a number of fears about the limits of human control.

Insects have long been useful figures for thinking through human sexuality. Elizabeth Grosz writes in the chapter “Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death” in her book *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* about how praying mantises and black widows “represent an intimate and persistent link between sex and death, between pleasure and punishment, desire and revenge,” showing how this network of associations emerges both from the bodies of insects themselves and from constellations of concepts already linked in discourses about human sexuality (Grosz 1995, 80). In this paper I explore how a reversal of this dynamic seems to be at play in the reception of a new transgenic version of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito: here, rather than insects serving as figures for the exploration of human sexuality, the human figure of Judas emerges as a way for people to think through insect sexuality and articulate social meanings for this new kind of creature in their midst.

I trace the figure of Judas to describe the affective encounters that emerge with this new technology of vector control. In *Insect Media*, Jussi Parikka describes the power of insects as “capable of weird affect worlds, strange sensations, and uncanny potentials that cannot be immediately pinpointed in terms of a register of known possibilities” (Parikka 2010, xiii). I explore the intensification of such uncanny potentials in encounters with organisms whose risks and capacities are sometimes not fully known nor felt. It is in the affective encounters described here that the insect takes form through intensive connections with existing and emergent discourses and figures, including that of the biblical Judas Iscariot. The fecundity and ferality of the insect body coopted as a means of extermination also doubles as the threat of mutation. Rapid reproductive potential and insect capacity

for quick evolutionary adaptation make new types of population interventions possible, but also raise the risk of unpredictable sex and mutation. Fully a part of nature, yet not fully natural, the sex and reproduction of the transgenic insect is part of an “increasing proliferation of mutant species and sexes that profoundly challenges our assumptions on what the body is and what it can do” (Parisi 2004, 7). Disrupting a genealogical logic of species difference and identity, genetically engineered sex emerges from heterogeneous assemblages of various orders of being. Methods of genetic modification adapt bodily substances and techniques from other organisms, from viruses to corals, and the sexual reproduction of mosquitoes targeted by projects like Oxitec’s is carefully choreographed by human researchers and employees. A newly horizontal sexual network emerges, forging intimate and threatening interspecies relations. Inserting themselves in the sex of the insects, humans are not immune to being penetrated themselves by foreign bodies, or of being betrayed by the many disguises of insects. This dangerous intimacy is often processed through tropes of betrayal and nightmares of mimicry.

Wollheim’s story enters the genre of horror when the men discover the terrible female-ness of the insect-man. Rosi Braidotti (1997) writes in “Meta(l)morphoses: The Gendered Nature of Becoming” about the history of science fiction parallels between the woman’s body and that of the alien, insect, or animal. The horror of birth, the broken abdomen, and the dread with which the men turn to look for what it is she has given birth to underline the nightmarish potential of overflowing insect life and of the female body. In the story of the transgenic insect, as well, species masquerade blends with sexual betrayal.

While the Oxitec males are not technically sterile, the widespread use of this term in company literature on the insects is intended to establish a connection with the considerably older Sterile Insect Technique (SIT). Pioneered in mid-century America, SIT uses radiation to sterilize male (mostly agricultural) pest insects in a process of autocidal control, aimed at breaking a population’s reproductive cycle. In the case of the Oxitec mosquito, sterilization is not achieved by irradiating otherwise normal males. Instead, the insects produced in Oxitec laboratories are transgenic, meaning sequences of DNA from other organisms are inserted to produce a unique life form: the tetracycline dependent male mosquito, fecund and capable of deceiving its mates.

The mosquito’s becoming happens not only in the laboratory, but also in the in-between spaces of affective encounters taking place in open-air releases throughout the city. The mosquito, not yet stabilized in its social or ecological milieus, emerges with and through these encounters. This “becoming-with”

between species often appears mutual and destructive, high-tech and uncanny, utopian and dreadful in equal measures. Through recounting experiences with ethnographic fieldwork in areas where the mosquito has been or may be released, I describe the insect as becoming-with and as the figure of the betrayer. The figure of Judas is also becoming-with these dynamic affective interfaces, rearticulated through the concretization of a newly acquired insect body. Like Judas and Jesus, there is an uncanny mirroring between what are often described as the “good” mosquito and the “bad.” Mimicry, so common in a variety of insect species, is technologized as an elegant intervention in mosquito reproductive biology. I explore themes of mimicry, doubling, and betrayal as an entry point into the atmosphere of unease I experienced during fieldwork. This work was conducted during the height of the Zika crisis, in which concerns over birth abnormalities associated with maternal infection had elevated the virus to a pressing global security threat. Pregnant women especially reported constant fear. Because the virus is known to spread both between humans and mosquitoes, and between humans and other humans in the act of sexual intercourse, danger appeared both omnipresent and terrifyingly opaque.

The Good One and the Bad: Unsettling Doubles and Problems of Distinction

My ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in 2016 in Piracicaba, Brazil where this new mosquito is in increasingly widespread use. Produced by the British company Oxitec, the mosquito known as OX513A or *Aedes do bem* translates roughly to ‘the good Aedes.’ Compared to “traditional” methods which involves locating and neutralizing mosquito breeding sites, this program can use transgenic males not only to locate fertile, and potentially disease-bearing females (only females bite humans, to nourish their eggs with blood), but also eliminate their offspring by passing on delayed lethality. This technique has some similarities with other kinds of “Judas animals” mobilized to target their conspecifics.

In the Galapagos, for example, invasive feral goats are located and then shot by helicopter after affixing one goat with a tracking device. A similar technique has been used to cull raccoon dogs in Sweden, and the term ‘Judas’ comes originally from goats trained to lead sheep or other cattle to the slaughter. It is the cooperation of animal sociality that links these various techniques for killing. In the

case of *Aedes do bem*, the Judas logic is intensified—the program works because wild-type females are unable to distinguish transgenic males from ‘natural’ ones. Judases do not need to make their conspecifics visible for human eradication—the labor of killing can be outsourced to their genetic modification.

Rather than disentangling humans and mosquitoes by reducing points of contact, this new approach involves temporarily increasing contact and interaction because thousands of males are introduced into “treated” areas. Transgenic vector control strategies depend on more than technological innovation. Human behavior needs to change as well, and for community engagement specialists this means teaching people to see and think differently about the insects they live with. Reducing mosquitoes in the future requires new ways of interacting. For example, both Oxitec employees and community members reported protecting or caring for *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes in treated areas because they, like the fertile females, were unable to tell the difference between the “good” and the “bad” ones. People reported a hesitation to kill mosquitoes based on an understanding that any individual mosquito may be a transgenic male whose survival would, in the long term, reduce the total population. Laboratory and release workers also had to learn the insect’s preferences and needs, accreting a somatic know-how which allowed them to best foster their undercover agents.

In delegating the task of killing mosquitoes to their own reproductive processes, humans insert themselves into the genome of the insect. This intervention is manifested in changed reproductive outcomes. It is thus of great importance for workers in rearing facilities to raise the most sexually competitive males. Death and reproduction here appear as indistinct in a program dependent on reproductive processes for population suppression. Fecundity is crucial to the mosquitoes’ lethality. Intergenerational courses of action which are reproductive in “natural” circumstances are repurposed as the transmission of heritable premature mortality.

In Brazil, Oxitec has produced a video to explain their method using two cartoon mosquitoes. The female, larger, berates and belittles her wimpy male mate. In a rasping, lascivious voice, she insists that she would not mate with a transgenic male because she would be able to distinguish him—they can’t catch her! She finishes this pronouncement by flying off in a rage, not followed by her mate, “Ade,” who makes a sly wink at the camera. Little does she know (*Dengue Fever* 2012).



Dengue fever and *Aedes aegypti* mosquito
Oxitec Ltd., 2012

(Saint) Judas as Savior and Betrayer

On an unusually cold and rainy Wednesday morning, my translator João and I set off to join two Oxitec employees, José and Valdeir, in releasing transgenic males through the neighborhood of Sao Judas in Piracicaba. Using a specialized GPS on the dashboard, Valdeir watches a blue dot representing us and, when it overlaps with a red dot, he quickly removes the lid of one of the clear plastic tubs stacked in the back of the van and coaxes its inhabitants into the gentle current of a propeller-free Dyson fan fitted into a side window with duct tape. A few taps between the side of the tub and the fan gets most of the stragglers out, but some of the insects are still reluctant, huddling in a clump in the bottom of the plastic cylinder and refusing to venture into the rain. Valdeir explains that they are lethargic in the cold. When it's hot, he adds, "we have to turn on the air conditioning. They get too excited." Today it's the opposite, and Valdeir leans in to the chute to blow the recalcitrant clumps out. Like many people educated about the project, Jose and Valdier explain to me how they instruct people to protect the *Aedes aegypti*. "We tell other people not to kill the mosquito because who knows? He might be one of the good ones."

The rain intensifies and we pull over to wait it out. How much rain is too much rain, I ask? Valdier says you get a feel for it. He knows they can't fly when it's coming down like this, but he doesn't think that anybody knows how well a mosquito flies in a drizzle, or the chances of a transgenic male surviving long enough to get very far. Valdier elaborates on other things we don't know: is 50 meters the right distance? How well do the mosquitoes fare in commercial areas compared with residential neighborhoods? Passing a bar on the main street, Valdeir says "maybe he gets a little drunk and doesn't fly so well. Who knows?"

At the end of the release, six tubs of mosquitoes are reserved for a 'control' test to be turned into data back at Oxitec's research center. Each man takes three tubs



Author releasing mosquitoes, 2016

and walks in opposite directions. João and I follow Valdier, who has slipped the stacked tubs inside the front of his jacket. He swaddles them, pulling the tub close to his body heat, which he knows will energize them. The protocol of the control is that each man opens a container and stands with it for ten seconds before replacing the lid (no banging or blowing). Back at the lab, workers will count the number of insects who died or did not fly out of the tub to monitor the health and fitness of the day's release. Valdier knows that today isn't a good day for *Aedes do bem*: it's too cold and too wet. But heating them up in this way, he explains, will help them do better. The inhabitants of the first tub fly out with more alacrity than we had seen so far that day, but by the third, which had been waiting on the cold ground as Valdeir conducted the first two controls, a significant number remained. Dead or just sluggish, they would be sent back. Back in the van, Valdier stacks the empty tubs into the crates, removes the fan from the window, and plugs in an electric swatter. The van smells like burning hair as he casually kills the stragglers.

Later, as João and I drive for coffee, I mention it's funny name, Sao Judas. There isn't a Saint Judas, is there? "I guess it's the good one" he answers me. We continue the discussion in his office on the University of Sao Paulo campus. I wanted to

know what he meant: the good Judas? This turned out to be a language issue. Early translators of the New Testament seeking to distinguish Judas Thaddaeus from Judas Iscariot re-named the former Jude. This name change holds in English and in French, but in Portuguese, as in many other languages, he remains Judas, just the “good” one. He is the patron saint of lost causes and desperate cases.

Judas (the bad one) betrayed Jesus with a kiss, marking him for death with a gesture of intimacy and friendship. In *Judas: A Biography*, Susan Gubar narrates the evolution of Judas as a religious and cultural figure throughout history, focusing on the “diabolical transgressions” his name has come to represent: Christian/Jew; living/dead; human/animal; male/female; fraternal/aggressive; filial/sexual. Judas here is the “bogeyman of the border police,” guarding and renewing vital distinctions. “Good and evil, loyalty and treachery, belonging and exclusion get worked out through the figure of Judas” (Gubar 2009, 38). Judas works at the dividing line of self and other, kin and outsiders. His figurative capacity to modulate these binaries can be read as a potential for redistributing life and death. Central to this threat is the spectre of miscegenation. Blurring the boundaries between person and animal, human and satanic, the living and the dead, Judas represents a quite particular fear of indistinguishability and betrayal.

Historically, Judas has had many incarnations. In early Christian texts he appears as a gruesome figure, shamefully revealing a body which is unclean, in pain, and grotesquely sexual (sometimes transsexual). The author of the medieval ‘Golden Legend’ imagines his early life, which includes killing his father and marrying his mother. An early legend written in Arabic describes an infant Judas obsessively biting himself. His racialized portrayals often carry representations of sexual deviancy, disease, incest, self-harm, anti-Semitism, and rabidity.

St. Augustine attended to the vital role of Judas in delivering up Jesus to the death that was necessary to save humanity, damning himself not just to death, but to hell for this act of redemption. “Delivering up was done by the Father, delivering up was done by the Son, delivering up was done by Judas; one thing was done” (Augustine). Jorge Luis Borges wrote a short story in 1944 titled “Three versions of Judas” about a fictional theologian, Nils Runeberg, who writes three versions of a fiery treatise on Judas Iscariot, claiming that Judas in fact made the greatest sacrifice, potentially greater than Christ himself: he mortified not only the flesh, but the soul, sacrificing his own chance at redemption with the betrayal that re-

deemed humanity's sins. Throughout, parallels between the figures of Judas and Jesus are emphasized: "As below, so above; the forms of earth correspond to the forms of heaven; the blotches of the skin are a map of the incorruptible constellations; Judas is somehow a reflection of Jesus" (Borges 1998, 88).

Captivating Mimicry in Insect Morphology

In his essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," Roger Callois (1935) describes insects which mimic elements of their environments for reasons not immediately discernible to people. This mimicry he describes as a dangerous luxury, evidence of a wasteful and excessive nature overflowing with feral fecundity and senseless death. It indicates, he suggests, a powerful creative force devoid of sovereign ego or intentional design. The insect which takes the form of a leaf, a predator, or a pair of eyes is displaced in its spatial perception, possessed by its environment, trapped in its own incantation. This "attraction by space" blurs the lines between organism and milieu and reflects a wanton superabundance and superfluity of life overflowing species boundaries. The insect, captured and captivated, is displaced by the perspective of another—it is neither fully itself nor truly the object of its mimicry. The organism is depersonalized by its assimilation into space, a loss likened to the experience of darkness, which "touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him" (Callois 1935, 100). Parikka likewise describes insect mimicry as:

a passage or a vector that shows that all nature is connected, that there is a layer of Intensity that characterizes all of the expressions of nature. Insects are expressive not only of their specific genealogical record and evolution but of a much broader field of nature....It is as if insects were a microcosmical doubling of other animals, a kind of intensification of potentials of life (Parikka 2010, 4).

As the microcosmical doubling of the good and the bad, *Aedes* is fractally reflected in the mirrored morphology of Jesus and Judas. The frightening element is that this mimicry of form is not coupled with identification. Rather, simulation conceals dissimulation. The becoming-other of the doubled bodily form signals a deeply ambivalent intimacy, a simultaneous indistinguishability and conflict. The penetration and expansion elicited by the obscurity of darkness is recalled in the loss of discernment between organism and milieu produced by associations of correspondence and resemblance. The mutating plasticity of insect forms, coopting the images of their environments, engender fears of a senseless, anarchical force of life, survival, reproduction, and sex. The intensive sexual connections

produced by the penetration of human design into insect sex and reproduction raise similar fears as Callois' permeating darkness. In this penetrative intensity and proliferation of corresponding forms, how does one identify an enemy?

Locating the Enemy

It is customary in many parts of Brazil to burn, hang, or otherwise collectively destroy an effigy of Judas around Eastertime ¹. Amused by my sudden preoccupation with Judas Iscariot, João mentioned to me that this year he had heard of some towns making their effigies with the face or body of *Aedes aegypti* (Globo 2016). This was at the height of the Zika crisis. No one knew how many people carried the virus. Because it can spread by *Aedes aegypti* or by sexual contact between humans, it was additionally unclear how to identify and avoid threats of infection. Zika's unique pattern of transmission extends this element of doubt across potential human and non-human carriers. You can be infected with Zika by an *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, but you can also be infected by an intimate sexual partner. Because 80% of the people who are infected with the virus never show symptoms, human carriers are not much more distinguishable than insect vectors. Within the private sphere in Piracicaba, both lovers and insects can penetrate and infect. The Minister of Health admitted to me in an interview that the extent of the spread was entirely unclear, with extremely limited access to testing and wildly ranging



Judas effigy with the face of the mosquito, nd.

estimates—some speculated as much as 80% of the population may have been carrying the virus (P. Mello 2016, personal communication, September 5). This was terrifying for many pregnant women who feared the attendant birth defects associated with infection. Hence, living in areas treated with *Aedes do bem* was believed to be especially important for these women.

Much work has focused on the ways that comparisons to insects have been used to devalue human life, or to demarcate racialized bodies as diseased, dangerous, or killable. Something related but different was happening in these towns. Rather than humans being cast as insects, *Aedes aegypti* was likened to Judas. The Judas/*Aedes aegypti* effigies were “killed” as a collective enemy. Creating a more size-matched experience of violence allowed the “enemy” to be identified and destroyed. Making visible an indistinguishable enemy strengthened commitments to appropriate modes of interspecies sociality by reinforcing affects of loathing. Learning to recognize and hate the enemy also provided a ritualized experience of cathartic expulsion. Because *Aedes aegypti* is so sneaky and stealthy, reproducing in tiny bodies of water (discarded bottle caps, toys left out in the rain, the tray that catches water beneath a potted plant), traditional population suppression strategies require strict vigilance on the part of the average citizen: she needs to know where the insect breeds and how to eliminate opportunities for reproduction in and around her home.

The contention of Oxitec in Piracicaba was that this strategy is too laborious. The mosquito is too intimate with us, too deep inside our homes. We cannot distinguish its spaces of reproduction reliably enough to separate and protect ourselves. We need the transgenic males to do that for us.

The Judas Breed Survives

In 1997, Guillermo del Toro released a film adaptation of Wollheim’s short story titled *Mimic*. In 1990s New York, a deadly epidemic of “Strickler’s disease,” spread by cockroaches living in the dark recesses of the subway system, is killing the city’s children at an alarming rate. Susan, a sexy young female entomologist, is called upon by the Mayor to stop the scourge. She designs a transgenic version of the cockroach called the “Judas breed” to suppress the population and stop it from spreading the disease between humans. Inverse of *Aedes do bem*, only females are released. They bear a genetic alteration which speeds the creatures’ metabolisms, causing them to starve themselves and thus, theoretically, to persist for only one generation after passing on this lethality to their offspring. Her work appears

successful: the epidemic stops and thousands of children are saved. Three years pass, and we see Susan newly married to her colleague Peter. The young couple fight over sex, however, and Susan is identified as sexually cold. Accusations are made that bugs “peel her banana.” Peter offers Susan hormones to make her more interested in sex, but Susan uses them on her crickets instead and we watch her as she, transfixed, observes its effects on them.

Suddenly, a Reverend is dragged underground into the subway system by mysterious assailants. Shortly thereafter, some children tell Susan about a “weird bug” they found, which she realizes is an offspring of the Judas breed—an offspring which should not have survived. In a terrifying inversion of lab and field, her workspace is invaded by a fully-grown Judas, the size and shape of a human being, who comes to steal back her young. Susan turns, horrified, to her old entomology professor: “but it worked in the lab!” “This isn’t the lab!” he responds. “You let these things out into the world!” Rather than die, the Judas breed appears to have reproduced faster and larger than normal cockroaches as a result of their mutation. They have also evolved quasi-human forms, allowing them to pass undercover amongst people. This inversion of the logic of the Judas animal, driven by an unstoppable “natural” drive to survive, sees transgenic insects masquerading as humans to target *our* young.

A series of abductions and botched rescues ensue. Peter and Susan find themselves deep in the subway system, accessed through an eerie abandoned Catholic church. They must avoid being killed by the Judas breed (which resemble large humans dressed in black cloaks), while finding and killing the one fertile male with whom they are breeding. Because the breed senses with smell, Peter and Susan smear themselves with the secretions of a dead Judas to pass undetected among them. Lubricated with these slimy secretions, they kiss in a moment of sexual intimacy. Like Susan’s Judas breed, *Aedes do bem*, and other Judas animals, this is an interspecies sexual experience, where the reproduction of one species is penetrated by the bodies and interventions of another. Subsequently, they succeed in killing the fertile male, risking both of their lives to save the baby they have learned that Susan is carrying.

While themes of gender and species masquerade are carried through from Wollheim’s original short story, del Toro’s adaptation pushes further on the eroticism of emergent horizontal sexual networks. Both humans’ and insects’ sex and arousal

are conditioned by each other's, and both fight to protect the reproduction of their own species, even as this reproduction becomes more deeply imbued with a disturbing eroticism. The film, moreover, begins with the premise of a purposefully engineered Judas breed, asking audiences to consider not only the possibility of astounding insect plasticity, but the potential for human technologization of insect sex to backfire. The mimicry of the insect world is coopted, but not quite controlled.

Del Toro's film, like Wollheim's story, is deeply uncanny. It works on the fear of misrecognition—what poses as human may not be. Humans may be betrayed by their own undercover agents. Humans and insects penetrate each other's bodies, transferring fluids and risks and transgressing species-boundaries in ways that are sensual, disgusting, exciting, and perverse. As with other Judas animals which betray their mates, the Judas breed was intended to work from within, exploiting a modified ferality to cull its own numbers. In this horror story, modulations of an inherently feral sexuality, the power of life to evolve and persist, spin out of human control to create a reversal of this dynamic. It is the insects which learn to operate disguised within humanity. The human capacity to enter insect bodies, to condition their arousal and to make bodies' capacities for reproduction work against them is here suggested to work both ways. *Aedes do bem* and the Judas breed (as Judas creatures) destroy their own young with an unwitting genetic inheritance. Strickler's disease strikes human young, bringing death to the realm of reproduction, where modulations of killing and birth appear fluid across species networks opened by sexual mutuality. As with Borges' reading of Judas Iscariot, there are two faces to the betrayer: The 'good one' and the bad appear as versions of the other.

One could trace a pattern of doubling here: *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes do bem*, Judas and Jesus, insect and human. *Aedes do bem* is a doppelganger of *Aedes aegypti*. Indistinguishable by sight, its effectiveness in population suppression depends on a female mosquito being unable to tell the difference between her mate and his death-bearing twin. The Judas mosquito works to betray its fellows by being, at once, one of them and an outsider. It poses dangers to *Aedes aegypti* the same way the wild-type mosquito poses dangers to people: by being within the house or family, by being domesticated, intimate, companionable, and hidden. Vector control programs which introduce insects into human spaces rather than remove them depend not on avoiding, but on repurposing closeness, touch, and sexual penetration in both human and mosquito populations.

The Nightmare of Fecundity

Aedes aegypti are entirely dependent on people for their habitats and, because they feed on human blood to nourish eggs, their reproduction. They are drawn to the warmth and smell of human flesh, and to darkness. These facts about the insect are not only known in laboratories and control tests, but in warm skin, swaddled jackets, goosebumped flesh, and shudders. The work of understanding this new transgenic organism can happen in the scientific spaces of research facilities, where workers learn by painstaking trial-and-error what kinds of goat blood or fish meal grow the largest male larvae. It also happens in private homes newly shared with “good” mosquitoes along with “bad.” In transitioning to a transgenic system of vector control, people drew upon language and images to process this new logic of interspecies interaction. Posing the mosquito as Judas Iscariot helped to make sense of the transgenic mosquito, but also amplified fears of interspecies betrayal. Fictional accounts like *Mimic* draw on existing cultural imagery to process fears of things that lurk *inside the house*. Things which are inextricably intimate and yet, in many ways, deeply inaccessible. One might think of Hugh Raffles’ section in *Insectopedia* on the nightmarish aspects of insects:

There is the nightmare of fecundity and the nightmare of the multitude. There is the nightmare of uncontrolled bodies and the nightmare of inside our bodies and all over our bodies. There is the nightmare of unguarded orifices and the nightmare of vulnerable places. There is the nightmare of foreign bodies in our bloodstream and the nightmare of foreign bodies in our ears and our eyes and under the surface of our skin (2016, 655).

Added to these deep insect fears is that of interspecies masquerade. Articulating the mosquito as a kind of Judas helps us to think with this strategy, but also raises fears of betrayal mutating out of human control. Through the stories linked together here by Judas, we have re-workings of the problem posed by distinguishing that which we cannot viably differentiate: the difference between humans and cockroaches, wild and genetically engineered insects, and protectors and infectors. This new story of vector control is one in which threat and security take indistinguishable forms. Dark, warm, and cryptic spaces, with all their associations of uncleanness, disorder, and perversion are at once sites of dangerous and unwanted flourishing and of the protection against them (this same reproduction, repurposed). The meanings of these dark spaces become highly ambivalent—both the creepy abandoned subway lines of *Mimic* and the warm swaddling inside Valdeir’s jacket. Fears concerning out-of-control sex and reproduction are not

limited to science fiction. A recent paper has published data suggesting that the Oxitec mosquitoes in Brazil have, counter to expectations, apparently mated with wild-type mosquitoes to produce viable hybrid offspring. Why these offspring have not died remains unclear (Evans 2019).

This permeating darkness and the plasticity of sex, intimacy, and disease between species taps into anxieties of blurred or indistinct boundaries between human and insect. Because the technology works directly upon insect reproduction and has been deployed in the context of widespread panic over the Zika virus which travels through and between human and insect sexual and blood contact, the perverse eroticism of the Judas breed has a particularly apt resonance. The sex lives of the human leads are intimately entangled with those of the mutant mimic cockroaches, and their erotic connection is affirmed as they smear each other in the sloppy secretions of the insects they aim to kill. This voluptuous carnality emerges in the violent interstices between very different kinds of bodies which appear in certain encounters uncannily indistinguishable, alternately mimicking and preying upon each other. It is the mutuality of such eroticism, penetration, and deception which grounds many fears of new genetic strategies of vector control.

Exploring how the new transgenic insect emerges with and as the figure of Judas, this paper aims to shed light on the significance of affective encounters in the coming-into-being of a new technology. The fecundity coopted in transgenic vector control strategies were observed to raise unsettling concerns about uncontrolled mutation. This uncanny double potentiality is captured in the image of Judas, doubled himself, who can be cast as both savior and betrayer. This biblical figure brings to the fore uncomfortable questions of distinction—he is said to betray Jesus with a kiss, but his image is also coopted in Brazilian ceremonies to make the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito more visible as an enemy to public health. Themes of distinction, mimicry, and betrayal are important elements in the roll-out of new vector control programs and in the evolution of new interspecies socialities that emerge around them.

Endnotes

1. This refers to 2016, the Easter which had passed a few months before this conversation in August

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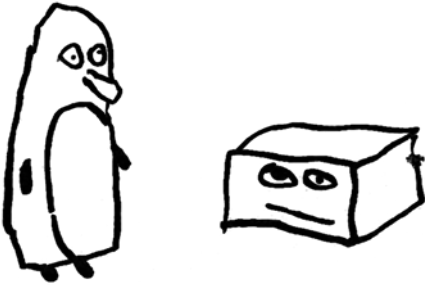
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BAD FUTURE

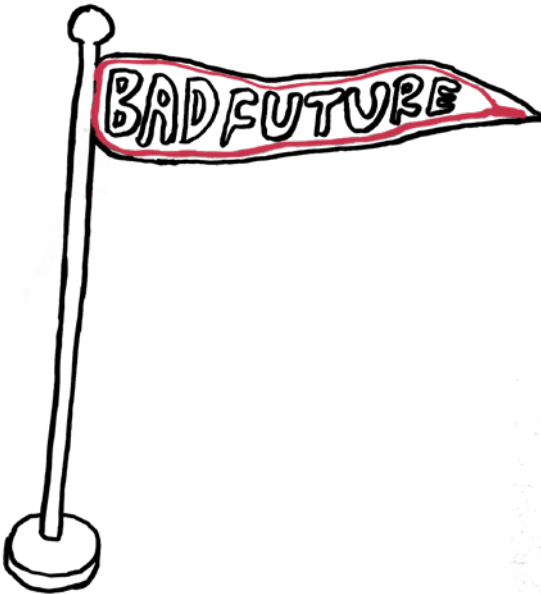


Jill Henderson

SUPERBORING.ORG



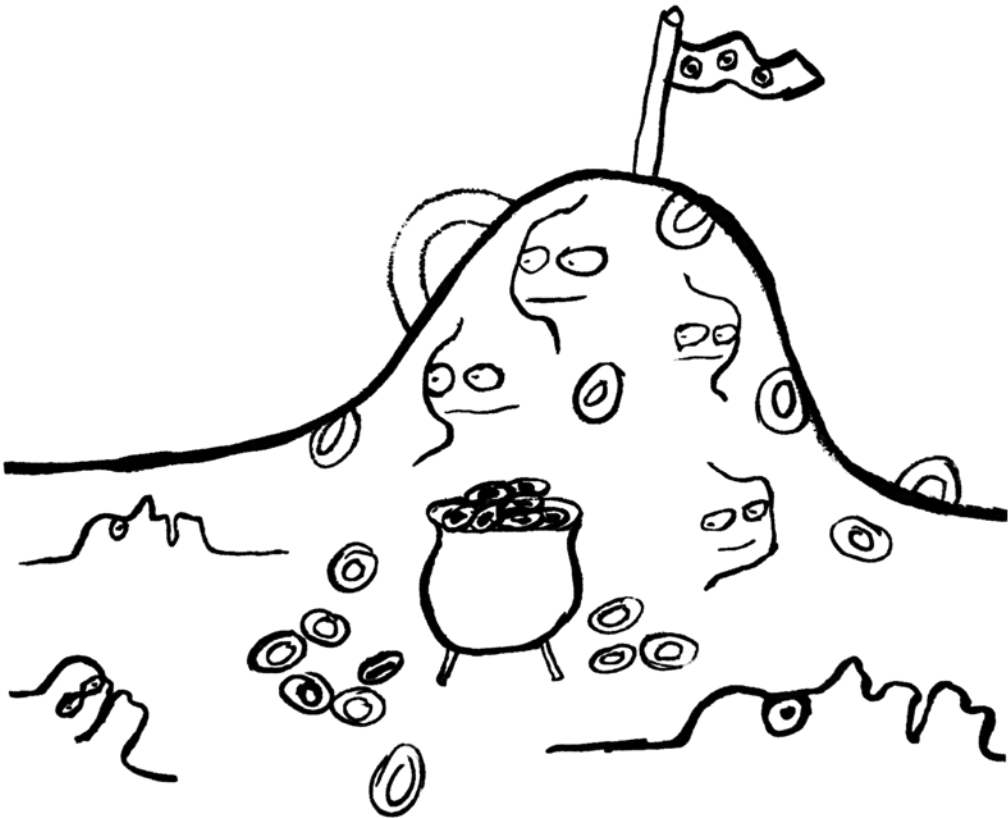
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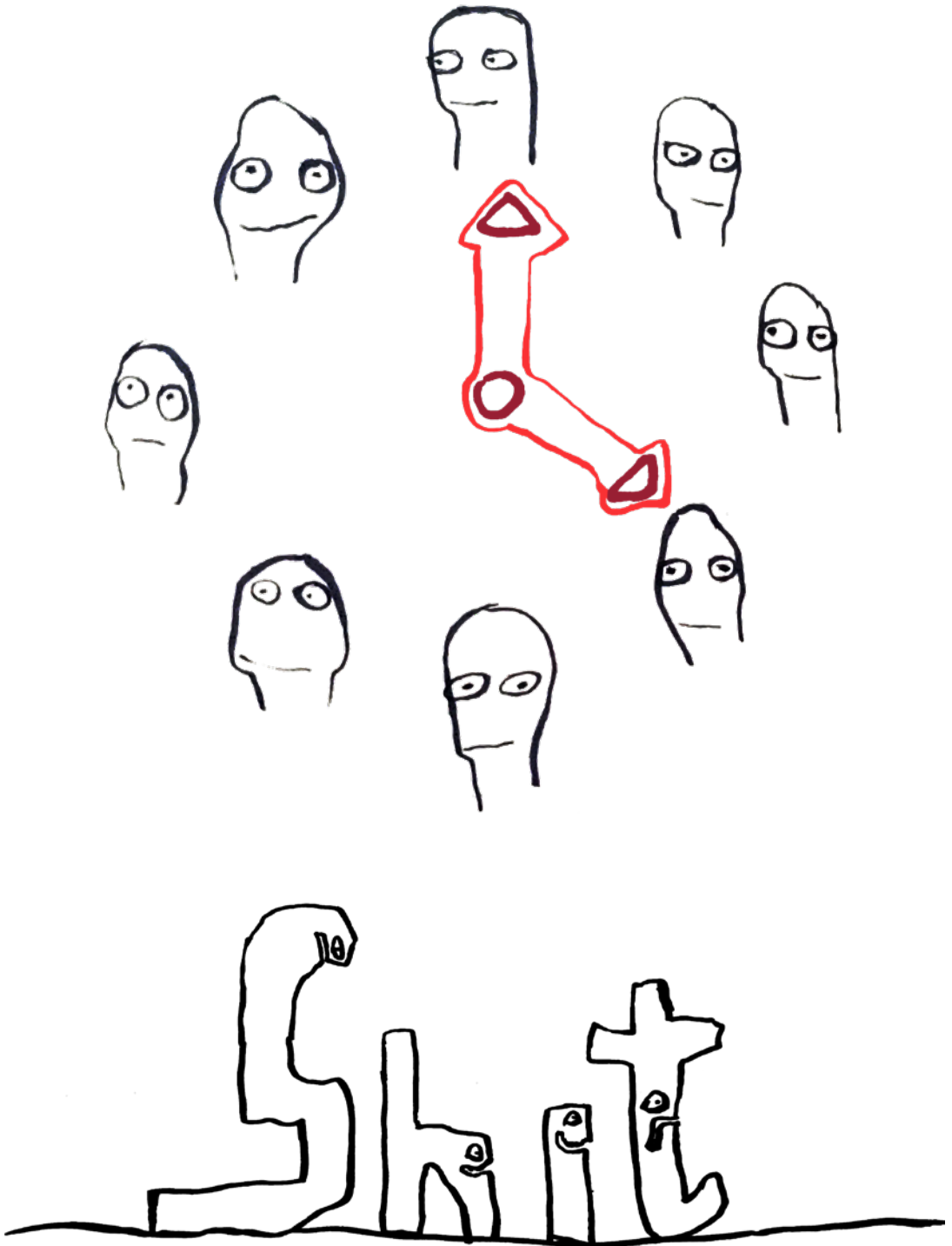


SCULPTURE - 4' high -

CAPACIOUS

DEBT
IS EVERYWHERE
AND INSTANTLY
NOWHERE

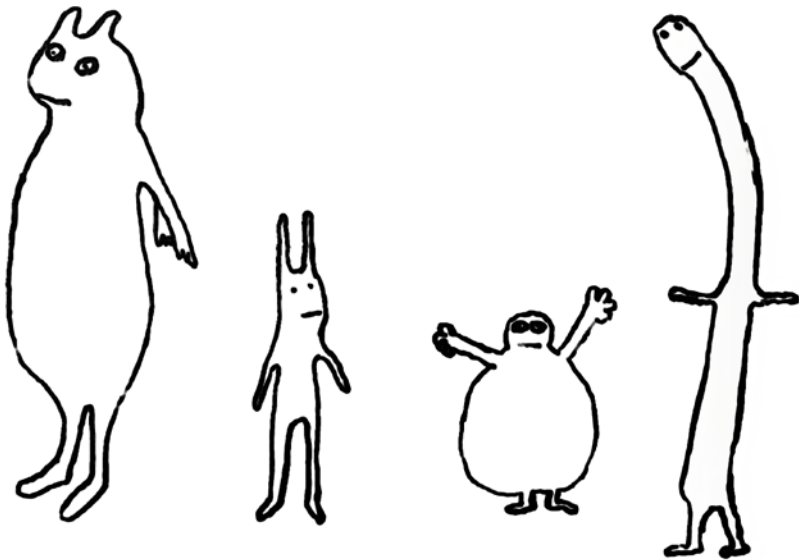




ABOVE

AVERAGE

SENSIBILITIES

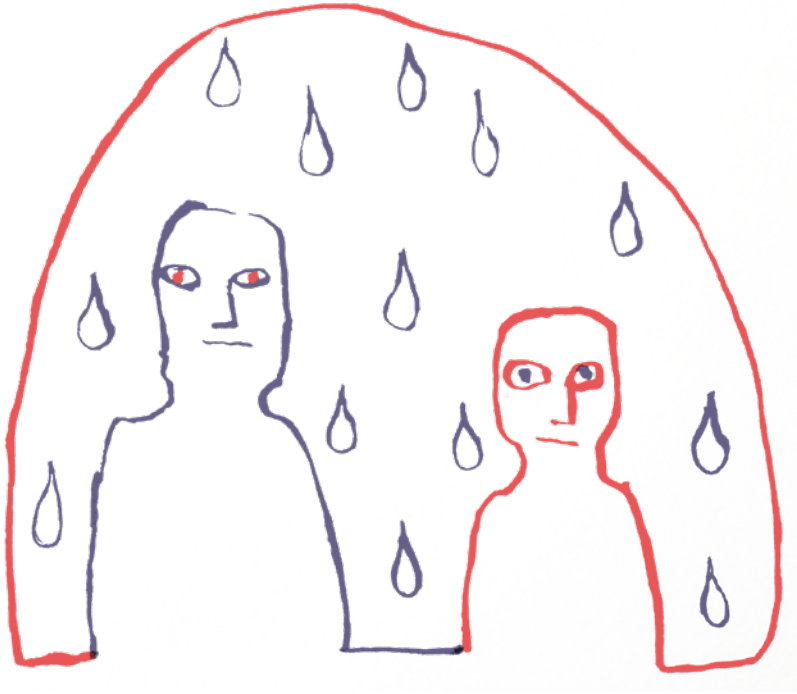




TALK TO ME



EMOTIONAL
RESCUE



this is one version available



FLATATION DEVICES



Neural style transfer: Picabia's *Udnie* × stock photo of medicinal herbs
Mathew Arthur, 2020

CAPACIOUS

BY THE SKIN OF OUR MACHINES: PSYCHOANALYSIS BEYOND THE HUMAN

A Dialogue Between Patricia Clough and Jacob Johanssen



Patricia Clough and Jacob Johanssen

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AND ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Editor's Introduction

Sigmund Freud held a certain delight for machines. His first model of the system Conscious/Unconscious (Cs/UnCs), in *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), ran on the energies of affect. Freud, in fact, called it a 'machine.' But the problem was it kept breaking down, so he switched gears by the time of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Two and a half decades later, Freud offered up one of his most well-known machines through the example of the "mystic writing pad" (1925). The writing pad's three layers operated through the cycling of traces: the traces of sense-impressions on the receptive surfaces of Perception-Consciousness (Pcpt.-Cs.) as a relatively flimsy middle layer; the UnCs as the dark resin of the bottom layer that retained impressions (as memory traces) while also "extending feelers" out toward the external world; the top protective sheet that, when lifted along with the middle layer, removed old traces so that new ones could then be deposited. It's just a simple kids' toy [you might know it as 'the magic slate'] but it offered a wonderful heuristic machine for grasping the fundamentals of the psychoanalytic apparatus.

Patricia Clough and Jacob Johanssen are likewise fascinated with and highly attentive to the ways that various technological operations in our digital age must necessarily transform the contemporary workings of psychoanalysis. Patricia's career-long commitment to "originary technicity"—the notion that techné and being occupy the same ontological plane, that there is no rift between the technological and the epistemological, no gap between matter and the psyche, no splitting of extension from thought—indicates how the intertwining of the machinic and the psychoanalytic has always been the case. Now ninety-five years on from Freud's mystic writing pad, computational data-capturings, other-than-human micro-sensibilities, and out-of-body/mind sites for memory storage have certainly stretched—if not often unfastened—any and all skin-topographies of psyche and soma traces and layerings.

In this intellectually generous and lively dialogue, Patricia and Jacob present freshly formed methodological challenges to the more typical interpretive practices of psychoanalysis. They also articulate the crucial role of affect in how we come to grips with the continually shifting relationships of bodies, interiorities/exteriorities, digital media/tions and all of those other present day machines that are, as Patricia reminds, "changing the function of the skin."

—Greg Seigworth, co-editor-in-chief

Dialogue

JACOB: To begin with, I would like to say that we seem to have similar interests in relation to digital media, affect, psychoanalysis, critical theory, and how one can think about the embodied, entangled—and at times messy—relationships we have with various media and how those, in turn, are shaped by and give rise to social processes and injustices. I am very inspired by your ideas and I first encountered your work when I read *Autoaffection* (2000); I was drawn to your treatment of television. I found it particularly insightful how you drew on a range of thinkers while advancing, I think, an argument that was still loyal to psychoanalysis, and Freud in particular, in order to think about the (un)conscious qualities of television as a technology. Perhaps we could begin this conversation by talking about your interest in psychoanalysis (and its critiques and developments by thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, and others) and television as a technology. How did you develop those interests and why did you specifically turn to television in your book?

PATRICIA: Actually, I first wrote about television much earlier than the publication of *Autoaffection* (2000); I wrote at a time when much cultural criticism was deeply influenced by film theory. Feminist film theory especially had elaborated a critical blend of Marxism and psychoanalysis in an Althusserian Lacanianism that offered a critical perspective that held sway up and through Judith Butler's early work in queer theory. But it was in the same year that Butler published *Gender Trouble* (1992) that I published *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism* (1992). It daringly proposed that narrative, then thought to be the basis of all knowledge, was nonetheless transformed with each development of a 'new' media technology. This transformation, as I saw it, was the result of an effort to contain the excesses of each new technology on behalf of governance and economy, thus limiting the potential of each technology by shaping the subject of that technology through narrative adjustment/containment of those excesses. I then suggested that empirical sociology depended on the narrative realism of ethnography that, seemingly without its awareness, had changed with each new media technology, affecting the unconscious of sociological representation. Moving from the realism of the novel to cinematic realism, the emotional realism of television, and the commercial realism of the digital, as these were represented by well-known sociological ethnographers, I elaborated a critique of realist representation in sociology and in culture generally. And although at the time I was interested in psychoanalysis, Derrida's read of it, as well as Foucault's, Gayatri Spivak's, Hortense Spillers', Judith Butler's and Donna Haraway's would pull me away from using psychoanalysis as an empirical method for audience study. Rather, it seemed to me that psychoanalysis offered support for constructing a certain criticism of empiricism, drawing out empiricism's relationship to positivism, narrativity, and realist representation.

So by *Autoaffection*, my stakes in television were a matter of addressing the question of subjectivity. In terms of the teletechnological and the changed conditions of realist representation it offered, transforming too the relationship of economy, governance, the private and public spheres, and pleasure and pain (beyond desire of the cinematic regime). I have always thought of my work with media more as a matter of speculation—of epistemology and ontology—for a critical study of methods of representation, and more specifically, of the qualitative aspects of quantitative measure.

While television's emotional realism pointed me to affect, the affect it sent me to was at first more Derridean than it was Deleuzian. In the later 1990's, after publishing *Ends* and when writing about what was then a new genre—autoethnography, I took up the two legendary readings of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the

one by Jacques Lacan in “The Mirror Stage” and the other by Jacques Derrida in *Post Card*. If Lacan's rereading would deliver terms such as projection, screening, paranoia, narcissism, voyeurism, and the imaginary for their further development in a cultural criticism of film, Derrida's rereading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1987) would submit psychoanalysis to an autobiographic criticism--initiating a cultural criticism of autotelecommunication. Reminding readers that the boy, whom Freud describes, is Freud's grandson and that the boy's mother is Sophie, Freud's daughter, who died suddenly while Freud was writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Derrida suggests that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is autobiographical. But of course the autobiographical structure of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is barely acknowledged in the text; Sophie's death is only announced in a footnote. As Derrida sees it, Freud's writing is informed by a repressed unconscious concern with loss and therefore with his ‘legacy’—not only a familial legacy but also the legacy of the psychoanalytic movement. After all, Freud began writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* not only as a counter to Carl Jung's attack on Freud's thinking but also to eliminate the internal tension in his own thought that arose with his own treatment of narcissism (Derrida 1987, 366–368). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Derrida would conclude, not only is an autobiographic writing, it also is an “autobiography of writing” that shows how often writing is a disavowed narcissistic defense against the author's loss of self, that is, the defense against the rupture in a fully known self that is disavowed through narrative suture. All writing is “autotelecommunication”—that is, a communication seemingly from a distance, as the prefix *tele* suggests, but where the distance is only the disavowed distance of the subject from itself (303, 326–337). While psychoanalysis is itself a deconstruction of any authorial dream of recording and transmitting all about oneself, knowing all about oneself, which is what television dreams it can do, in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, psychoanalysis also is shown to turn on this dream, turning it into a narcissistic defense of the author. It struck me that, even before television, all writing is autotelecommunication; television only more fully elaborates or more clearly surfaces the autotelecommunication that is disavowed in modern representation. Thus the intimate link between television and the early discourse on postmodernism.

I concluded that, while the unconscious of modern representation is the unconscious of the oedipal narrative, the *Ur* narrative in film and literary criticism of that time, there is an unconscious more general than the oedipal narrative, an unconscious of television which is buried in the dream of telling-all, showing-all, giving-all to the other--the dream of full and endless self-knowing and self-ex-

posure. In television, the disavowal of the unconscious is in the refusal to feel the distance of the subject from itself by erasing the distance with emotions or feelings endlessly offered to the other. It is the refusal to recognize that all emotions are first and foremost "autoaffections." And this is how *Autoaffection* would come to be a book about "unconscious thought in the age of teletechnology" but where autoaffection, itself, was seen as the unconscious' spacing and timing of the technological unconscious, or what I would elaborate in that book as the unconscious of "an originary technicity."

In retrospect I see that in each chapter of *Autoaffection*, there is a move from Derridean deconstruction to a Deleuzian ontology of virtuality as presented especially in his *Cinema II*, which was more about electronic media as Richard Dienst so brilliantly had argued. Along with that move from Derrida to Deleuze, *Autoaffection* was again a reconsideration of realism and representation drawing then on the growing field of science studies and studies of the body that would lead me further into affect and digital media and computational technology. In other words, I was done with looking at television because teletechnology now meant what I had described already in *Autoaffection* as:

the realization of technoscience, technoculture and technonature, that is, the full interface of computer technology and television, promising globalized networks of information and communication, when layers of electronic images, texts and sounds flow in real time, so that the speeds of the territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization of social spaces, as well as the adjustment to the vulnerabilities of exposure to media event-ness, are beyond any user's mere decision to turn 'it' on or off. Teletechnology is both a register and an actualization of postpersonal thought and nonhuman agencies (2000, 3).

A bit of awkward writing but it was the late 90's.

I might add what you might find interesting, Jacob; that is, I stopped looking at television even before this, when television was first broadcasting what would be called reality TV shows. The first appearance of reality TV turned me away from broadcast television or its content. These shows seemed to me, at least at the time, the near realization of the dream of television: a staged disclosing of the really real time of the self, an effort to absorb any distance in representing, such that the emotion endlessly stirred in emotional realism became nothing so much as an ongoing circulation of affect. Strangely enough, I had already read Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect," which was first published in 1995; I didn't quite know what to do with it then, but it would have a long-term influence.

JACOB: In *Autoaffection*, you suggested via Derrida that teletechnology was already anticipated by the conception of the Freudian unconscious, or in other words, that teletechnology bears traces of the unconscious and vice versa. You elaborated on this through the discussion of the mystic writing pad and Freud's understanding of memory. Freud, we could say, thought of the psyche as a medium and as being technological. Technology also has similar psychological qualities. He illustrated this with the example of the mystic writing pad. As I understand it, the writing pad is covered by a thin cellophane layer that protects the surface it covers. By pressing upon the surface with a pen, one can write on it. It is the pen that leaves traces on the layer that can then be felt on the surface of the pad. The psyche has the same capacity to store and retrieve data which is stored in different ways in the unconscious and consciousness. It is the system of consciousness that receives but does not store data or perceptions while the unconscious stores excitations that are retained as memory traces. The system of consciousness excites what Freud called the "memory system" (Freud 1981c) and the memory trace is discharged and becomes conscious to the subject. The memory trace that has crossed the protective shield is produced from unconscious perception and is thus rendered conscious or remembered. I think this conceptualisation is very interesting and lends itself to media, as you emphasise in your book. I also touch on this in my book in relation to Freud's ideas on affect. How would you relate your treatment of the Freudian unconscious in *Autoaffection* to contemporary technologies and particularly our ways of consuming television or television content?

PATRICIA: What I found most interesting about Derrida's take on the mystic writing pad, Freud's last metaphor for the capacity of the unconscious to receive everything perception registers but does not retain, was his noting Freud's dismay that a hand was needed to lift the top layer in order to erase what is written, A hand was needed to make the apparatus/metaphor work. I took Derrida to be pointing to Freud's privileging of nature or being over technicity. Derrida would propose an originary technicity to counteract an originary being while placing a Derridean X through both. Neither was to be originary; or better, origin was to be indeterminate. The hand that dismayed Freud indicated that there always is a framing, a technical frame, even a technical frame that enables the privileging of nature over technicity.

In *Autoaffection*, the indeterminacy of origins would become for me the potentiality or virtuality of a Deleuzian ontology—not a matter of disavowed knowledge but rather the ontology beyond the framing of the opposition of nature and technicity, human and other-than-human, matter and life and more. It was the matter of a new materialism, a new empiricism (before the recent new materialisms and the new empiricism), a Deleuzian new materialism and empiricism in such works as those of Manuel DeLanda, Elizabeth Grosz, and Rosi Bradotti, that led to the *Affective Turn* in which the social was taken up in its ontological transformation in relationship to digital media and computational technologies, human life and the affective capacity of matter, biopolitics and global financial capitalism.

Affect has been taken up since then in studies of digital media, computational technologies, and social media either as a human matter—connectivity of human and machine that is taken often to be disembodied. Or it is taken up in terms of other-than-human agencies with an expectancy of changing the way we have understood the body as an informationally closed organism. Or it is part of a recognition of the degrees of potentiality for self-ordering in the technosphere beyond human agency, suggesting a human and other than human embodiment. For me there is much to think about around the body—our understanding of it, its relationship to those body/organism-based inequalities or violences. However, without being settled on the ontology of the body, human and other-than-human, and with affect no longer only situated in the organism but also in matter or the environment at large, the question about memory is provocative and difficult. For Freud, memory is a function of the body-as-organism, the psyche-soma, the traces laid down in the nervous system. It is an artifact of the temporality stipulated in the move from oedipal to pre-oedipal, always a recovering of the past that is retained in bodily affect and is yet to be symbolized.

But digital media and computational technologies are spawning a different thought of memory, linked to datafication and the search—the ‘forensic’ search of the cloud or the ‘personable’ search of the internet and social media. To discuss these searches there is a need to rethink conceptions of private and public, the state and economy that are assumed in Freud’s notions of memory and the body, the body and energy. But, more important, the temporality of memory in terms of big data is not that of a movement from the present back to the past, forward to the future. It is something more like the present to the future again and again, a realization of the temporal multiplicity of the present rather than the loss of the past—a change as well in the function of narrative, representation and realism, reintroducing an ontological realism of other than human agencies.

In the name of what I have called “the user unconscious,” I have been trying to figure out an unconscious that is both of human and other-than-human agencies involving not only objects that are lost as in psychoanalysis but also objects that are alluring, alluring us to the search. The search has unsettled the notion of internal objects about which contemporary psychoanalysis has become the primary theory; it has unsettled the inside and the outside of the body-as-organism and therefore for the human body, it is changing the function of the skin.

Before I say more, let me turn to you, Jacob, and ask two questions. I was very impressed with your book, *Psychoanalysis and Digital Culture*. Your work engages a rich set of psychoanalytic thinkers, among them Didier Anzieu whose insights I have also found to be useful in working through the user unconscious in terms of a world skin. His usefulness to you is best shown, I believe, in a move in your research from reality television to Twitter and Instagram regarding affect and the body-as-organism. In this light, can you say more about your use of skin ego in relationship to affect and to what you describe, following Freud, as inhibition in the move from television to the digital?

JACOB: Thank you, Patricia. Before turning to Anzieu, I need to say a few words about Freud, because to me, and how I draw on their ideas in the book, Freud and Anzieu are very much connected. I have always had an interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and Freud’s work on affect was particularly fascinating to me. The French psychoanalyst André Green wrote a fantastic book on Freud and affect (Green 1999) and there is also book on psychoanalytic theories of affect by the psychoanalyst Ruth Stein (1999). Both helped me to make sense of and work with Freud’s ideas around affect which are, as is the case with some of Freud’s concepts, often loosely defined and were revised throughout his life. While affect studies are of course a wide and diverse field, it seems to me that they partly came about in a critical move away from psychoanalysis and the focus on an individual subject with a body as a contained entity (amongst other things such as a critique of a focus on language and discourse that came with poststructuralist thinkers).

However, and I am sure we will return to this in our conversation, to begin with, I want to hold on to a psychoanalytic theory of the human subject as an individual who is situated in particular relationalities and psychosocial dynamics. I believe that psychoanalysis is the best and most complex theory of human subjectivity we have. In that sense, my use of affect theory goes perhaps slightly against

some thinkers within affect studies who have emphasized the transindividual dimensions of affect, but I would nonetheless argue that there is some common ground between the two. Generally speaking, affect refers to processes that involve the body, or bodies (human and non-human), and where there is a certain excessiveness involved that is perhaps situated at the intersection of consciousness and non-cognition. Even the 'classic' starting point for many affect theorists, of affecting and being affected (Spinoza) or Massumi's work (1995) which you also mentioned is useful here. All of those ideas, we can also find in Freud.

For Freud, affect is a subjective, bodily experience that is at first felt rather than consciously known or understood. It is a kind of momentary bodily dispossession. The experience is, but does not necessarily have to be, subsequently reflected on and rendered discursive by the subject. This is also very relevant for the consulting room when it comes to phenomena such as acting out or particular symptoms. I find Freud's early work on affect particularly interesting (Freud 1981a, b, c); we could also refer to this as the 'discharge model'. An affective experience can occur in relation to a particular stimulus (e.g. a sequence on television) and it can also be unconsciously activated by a memory that somehow relates to that particular sequence for example. For Freud, an affective experience is either pleasurable or unpleasurable in how it is felt by the subject. Those experiences are fleeting, momentarily. They are discharged, as Freud called it, and leave the body. This conceptualisation of affect is in my view very apt for media use, such as watching television or using social media, because of the fast-paced affectivity that is, as you have also argued in your earlier response, so inherent in media content. It allows us to think about how we are being affected by media on a bodily level. However, Freud's idea of affect is still rooted in the individual subject. I want to think of affect as more relational than Freud did, and his sometimes cryptic discussions also lack a sensual, or phenomenological, element of affective experiences.

It was Nicola Diamond's (2013) book on psychoanalytic understandings of the relational body that introduced me to Didier Anzieu. Anzieu, draws on a number of psychoanalysts (Bion, Winnicott, and Bick) but, I think, he is deeply influenced by Freud. His notion of the skin ego is partly based on Freud's idea of the protective shield which Freud developed in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (Freud 1981a) and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1987). Taken together with Freud's theorisation of the ego as a surface entity, the protective shield is an envelope that enwraps the psyche and, as Anzieu stresses, is also the skin on someone's body. It is virtual and material. The skin ego comes into being as the baby is in deep, affective contact with individuals around her (and those are of course often the

mother and father or other primary caregivers). The baby's skin ego is an envelope that is made up of sensual experiences (touching) and also a secure boundary that protects. The baby arrives at a sense of self through and with others. The baby is touched, held, rocked, etc. and thereby the skin ego is formed and the baby of course responds to those affective messages of being touched, talked to, etc. by touching and gesturing herself. Those affective experiences allow for an ego to emerge. The baby not only feels held and protected, but also has the fantasy of sharing a common skin with the mother (which is eventually separated into two egos). Anzieu writes in this context: "to be an Ego is to feel one has the capacity to send out signals that are received by others" (1989, 62). This beautiful quote struck me, because of how similar it sounds to how digital media operate. Signals, or code, are sent out and received by others and this often occurs in a cocoon-like manner. We are deeply intertwined with media, devices and so on.

I discuss this in more detail in my book, but we can also think of the skin ego as being characterized by different experiences that are discharged by the baby and are often of course highly pleasurable and also unpleasurable. The skin ego, I think, allows us to re-introduce the social and the sensual-affective into Freud's affect model. The first ways of communicating and relating to others, what you call an "originary technicity," are thus affective and they do not involve vision, as Lacan would argue, but touch and the body as a whole. I also find the virtual and sensual-material qualities of the skin ego very valuable for thinking about affect and the body in relation to digital media. Perhaps media have such an important status in our lives because they relate to a primitive affective state of relational processes around the sending and receiving of signals. I'll answer your question on inhibition as part of my response to your next question below.

PATRICIA: In your work, you make use of psychoanalysis in interviewing viewers and users. Can you say more about how this approach works; what kinds of realism and empiricism do you think you are employing?

JACOB: In response to my first question, Patricia, you said about psychoanalysis and empiricism: "[r]ather it seemed to me that psychoanalysis offered support for constructing a certain criticism of empiricism drawing out empiricism's relationship to positivism, narrativity, and realist representation." I completely agree with this and I think psychoanalysis is a useful project for critiquing a focus on rationality, positivism, and empiricism within other disciplines. My own discipline of media and communication studies can be particularly enriched by psychoanal-

ysis, because the human subject is either taken for granted and undertheorised, or regarded as a completely rational and reflexive individual. I think the legacy of feminist film theory and other work on media, which are more exploratory and philosophical we could say, is really fundamental for psychoanalytic research into contemporary technology. I was trained in empirical research and I wish to combine the two. Empirical media research, often unconsciously (I like what you write about sociology's unconscious in *The User Unconscious* in that respect), very often operates with an assumption that human beings are able to fully know the reasons for watching a certain show on television for example, and that they are able to speak about this in interviews for instance.

Methodologically, I draw on how the technique of free association has been adapted by the psychosocial scholars Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2012) for social research. I conducted interviews with viewers and users and encouraged them to freely associate without too many interventions on my part. In this way, narratives are potentially less governed by consciousness and there may be aspects that are made conscious in interviews. In the different projects that I discuss in *Psychoanalysis and Digital Culture*, I wanted to understand how individuals were biographically invested in the media that they use, or in other words what the relationship was between their biographies and digital media. There were moments in many interviews when individuals would suddenly remember an experience, something from the past, or when they would speak more freely about their self-representation on social media for example. Such moments were aided by free association.

I think what you say about the nature of television, Patricia, is really insightful. How interesting that you turned away from television when reality TV became popular. It was reality television that got me interested in affect studies. As some scholars have argued, reality television is so much about a kind of excessive display of affectivity and bodies. I wanted to understand in a more complex manner how audiences responded to such content and how it affected them. Freud and Anzieu are particularly useful for thinking about such questions I feel, because affect is situated at the intersection of, or is in tension with, the discursive and non-discursive. For Freud, once an affect is discharged, the individual might be able to reflect on it or articulate what that experience was like.

This was also evident in my interviews, particularly with those viewers of the reality show *Embarrassing Bodies*. They tried to articulate an affective experience they had had when watching the programme, e.g. in relation to a very graphic surgery sequence, but they could not fully do so. They explained that they had

to look away from the television screen sometimes, or that they did not know why they had such affective experiences. Those were attempts to turn particular affective experiences into language. At the same time, many interviewees spoke of the programme in very pleasurable terms and that they liked the doctors in particular because they were always able to help. The interviewees had also spoken to me about their bodies and particular bodily experiences (related to trauma and illness for example). I concluded that they used the show to work through some of their own affective-bodily states and that the show functioned similarly to a skin ego for them. They were enwrapped in a containing environment which is periodically broken through affective experiences which relate to their biographies. This working through, however, happened unconsciously. None of the interviewees spoke of it in such terms and they did not make a connection between their own past experiences and the show. So it was this non-connection which they spoke about that led me to conclude that there was an unconscious connection which was facilitated by the television programme.

Regarding your previous question, Patricia, I use Freud's notion of inhibition to analyze some of those individuals' narratives about using social media. I can now comment a little more on it. Social media facilitate very important and healthy forms of communication in today's world, but at the same time there is an obsession with the idea of sharing. Sharing everything about ourselves. This is closely connected to affect and the need for us to show how we are affected by others and are in turn affecting them. We are told to be relational on social media and other digital platforms. We may draw a connection to Anzieu's skin ego here, because the subject is formed and develops an ego through sharing. The baby has the illusion that she shares a common skin with the m/other. Anzieu notes in this context that the baby has the illusion, "that the person on the other side of that wrapping will respond immediately, and in exact complementarity, to its signals; this is the reassuring illusion of an omniscient narcissistic double always at its beck and call" (Anzieu 2016, 48). There is a striking similarity here to how our modes of communication operate today. An accelerated relationality where we are expected to share and immediately respond. However, there are aspects of ourselves which we are unable to share online. The *Embarrassing Bodies* viewers also spoke about their use of social media and they did not share anything about the show online (or offline in many cases for that matter). I argue that they were inhibited because of how strongly they were affected by the show. So in a way, there were conscious as well as affective and unconscious constraints which shaped the way they used social media.

Coming back to the question of empiricism once again, I think it is important to emphasize that I am not psychoanalyzing research participants. I have to be very careful regarding the interpretations that I make about their affective and (un)conscious investments in digital media. This was one of the criticisms of early cultural studies scholars against screen theory / feminist film theory: that they had invented a subject who would do things for them as it were (unconsciously identify with the protagonists, etc.). I think those criticisms were perhaps too generalizing and dismissive, but they nonetheless open up a problem for empirical work that draws on psychoanalysis. In that sense, for interview-based research, all analyses are based on the data and particular discursive moments which may point to contradictions, complexities and so on which, in turn, relate to specific psychoanalytic concepts.

For my next question, I will turn to your recent collection of essays *The User Unconscious* (Clough 2018). I really like the term “the user unconscious,” and I share your idea that digital technologies are altering and shaping the unconscious itself and have themselves unconscious qualities. I quote from your recent commentary on Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* on the *Public Seminar* website:

The user unconscious, I therefore have suggested, is a matter of affect, in psychoanalytic terms, the force of seeking lost (infantile) objects, operating, however, in a networked environment of objects that along side those lost are those that are not lost but rather are lively and not containable brought by datafication out of reach of human consciousness and bodily-based perception, that is, an environment of the endless availability of the search that in itself supersedes finding an object. This endless searchability supported by datafication is another way of posing the liveliness of objects or their other-than-human liveliness that suggests an embodiment of the I and the unconscious that is human and other than human, yet to be fully engaged as a matter of subjectivity and sociality.

Related to your notion of the user unconscious, I am interested in discussing what you and colleagues (Clough et al 2007) have called “affect-itself.” You seem to be specifying and defining something with that term which, at the same time, is difficult to define. Generally, affect studies operates with many conceptualisations of affect that, to some extent, all resist definition of what we actually mean by ‘affect’ in a way. In the article, you want to situate affect at all scales of matter. Affect-itself, then, is the process of how diverse modalities and phenomena are being subjected to measure. You give examples, such as:

pre-individual capacities ranging from preconscious human bodily capacities, to human genetic materials functioning outside the human body, to the capacities of computer programs to elaborate scales of complexity beyond the specifications of the program, to the capacities of bacteria to cross species now leading to a reconceptualization of evolution, as well as becoming a model of bioterrorism. (Clough et al, in Clough 2018, 3)

You then relate this to affective labor in order to rethink the body of the worker as something that is not a closed being to whom affect belongs. If I understand you correctly, you argue that there is an abstracting of the human body in certain forms of work that disregards the individual body as one who affects and is affected. You are conceptualising affect-itself as something that is about the “dissolution of the distinction between organic and nonorganic life” (ibid, 11). You then relate your discussion to fascinating insights from quantum physics, information theory, and new materialism. Finally, you also discuss the relationship between value, measure, and affect. Affect has become a means of measuring value, or re-valuing activities and processes that go far beyond issues around work and exploitation but concern populations’ (and individuals’) “capacities for living” (ibid, 20).

Taking all of the above into account, I was wondering if you could say a little about what led you to define affect in that way? And perhaps following on from that, I also have an interest in affective labor which articulates itself quite differently. In so far as I take issue with Hardt and Negri’s lack of definition of what they mean by affect, and I argue in my book that a subject-centred model of affect is helpful when it comes to thinking about the individual who, after all, is the one carrying out affective labor. A similar point has been made by Kylie Jarrett in her monograph *The Digital Housewife* (2016), specifically when it comes to digital labor and our ways of using commercial online platforms for example. I want to think of affective labor as subjective, bodily potentials that are of course interwoven with the social, but are nonetheless about individual bodies. What are your thoughts on all of this?

PATRICIA: It was in an attempt to theorize the changing image of the body that my students and I developed the concept of “affect-itself,” drawing on current mathematics and physics (as Marx had in his time and Freud too) to redefine the body. Taking up the ongoing discussion about what then was described as immaterial labor, we proposed that laborers’ bodies were no longer central to the production of surplus value but that bodily capacities or affective capacities were. These capacities were part of the accumulation of wealth displacing the human laborer’s embodiment of labor-power with the laboring of affective capacity at every scale of matter, an informing of energy at every scale of matter. Sometime after theorizing affect-itself, I would come to notice media studies scholars who were shifting their attention from the nonconscious affective relationship between human user and technology to the technology’s nonhuman cognition, itself. Hayles (2017) would explain that,

“part of the contemporary turn toward the nonhuman is the realization that an object need not be alive or conscious in order to function as a cognitive agent” (216). Of course humans still labor and you, Jacob, have made an argument for users of digital media to be laboring—free laboring as Tiziana Terranova (2000) noted long ago; that they emotionally or affectively labor in consuming digital media. I agree, and there still are laborers laboring all over the world. But the production of wealth that defines finance/data capital today is the larger arena in which all labor comes to value. Here taking up the derivative logic of the market is important (but I won’t be able to go into it now, except to say that Randy Martin proposes that the state is separating from the nation as the capitalist economy is global and nothing coheres, but this incoherence has found itself to be productive economically in capitalism). That the subjects’ use of digital media continues to contribute to datafication is relevant here, as it makes anything you have identified as affective labor to the finance/data market more central to the production of wealth.

Again, something more than the human body or the rational mind is involved here, or the human body and the mind have been opened to the other strata of matter-energy from which they arise and remain in touch (opened by datafication to a worldly sensibility as Mark B.N. Hansen (2015) would put it). That is why I recently have described the user unconscious in terms of a YOU, that composite of an I and its data traces as well as the data fed forward to it from others, including other-than-human others, and whose embodiment is human and other-than-human beyond the organism and the skin, with a cognition that is human and other-than-human. I want to suggest that there is a new diagram, as Foucault would put it. But I also want to be careful to note that it is actually a new more complicated mix of diagrams—for example, disciplinary, control, and beyond control (see below).

This is important to a critical take on datafication. With the recent turn to datafication, a certain violence is unleashed with the speculation on the capacities for life and death, or futurity, beyond the containment of the body and the mind—the economy of affect-itself. Certain populations, those already long violated in their very definition as less-than-human, abandoned, or at-risk, now not only continue to be subjected to these definitions, but in addition are subjected to the speculation of their capacities. While we all are dividuated and subjected to speculation of our capacities, some are more violently or at least differently exposed to and by the social technology of control operating across the whole field of experience in what no longer even can be imagined to be the liberal arrangement separating economy, state, civil society, the private and public spheres, as this arrangement is displaced by the circulation of a global network of financialized capitalism.

As such, populations differently marked by race, class, gender, sexuality, debility, and geopolitics play their part differently in what has now become the privileged capacity to disavow our always already being networked in the socially mediated use of data, which allows the use of digital media to feel personal and private or, at least, ascribable to the legality of private property. Following that, the calls for protections of privacy and ownership of data in the rights of individuals further displaces the violence unleashed in the undoing of the liberal arrangement, as privacy becomes more a matter of the personal and the networked in the state of global financialized capital. That is to say, the unleashed violence is being absorbed as every difference becomes the grist of the algorithms operating in digital media and datafication, albeit differently for different populations but where the body-as-organism is no longer the predominant site of difference and where thinking no longer is distinguished in terms of rationality or reason opposed to instrumentalism. But it is here too that the drive for being in touch with a larger milieu of others, among them other-than-human others, a sensibility of worldly entities or objects, still carries the recognition of a sociality yet to come, a capturing of the indeterminacy of the algorithm unto life. Here I have turned to Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of inoperative community, following Wendy Chun (2016) who rephrases it as "inoperative we," the larger context of the YOU. The 'we' is inoperative because it is impossibly operative in its arising and falling away, back into noise again and again only leaving traces. Yes, Jacob, you are right to be worried that instead of the potentiality of a sociality yet to come, we might find that there is an insistence on individualism, that each of us is an individual and seeks the comfort of a skin ego enwrapped by a highly functional platforms that we depend on for living. I think here is the tension between psychoanalysis and technology urging a rethinking of the subject, the body and the mind.

JACOB: Thanks, Patricia. I would like to talk about what the developments that are often subsumed under the term 'big data' mean for the status of the human subject. In your chapter "The Datalogical Turn" (Clough et al 2015), you write the following:

With the datalogical turn, therefore, not only is there a decentering of the human subject, but the definition of the bodily also broadens beyond the human body or the body as autopoietic organism, and as such, bodily practices themselves instantiate as data, which in turn produces a surplus of bodily practices.

So too, the difference of the inside and the outside the system is undone and a question is raised as to what environment is (Clough et al 2018, 105).

I think this is a very powerful and apt characterization of what is at stake when everything about us and around us is being turned into data or in some way being linked with digital data. I would agree with this characterization, but I would also argue that such a decentering of the human subject falls back on the human subject, that is the human subject who thinks of herself as being centered and rational, in positive as well as threatening ways. The two of us are probably more interested in the latter, given our investment in psychoanalysis, so I would argue, as I do in Chapter 6 of my book, that those practices around big data and data accumulation can result in fragmented, polarized senses of who we are and how we appear online, on digital devices, in relation to technology etc. We have so little control over and knowledge of what happens with our data, which are tracked and appropriated, that this can result in anxious, even paranoid, subjects. Where it feels like we as subjects with some level of agency are being immobilized and made powerless in relation to our data. Those data can come back to haunt us or affect us in very profound ways. So this fragmentation of our subjectivities and how the inside and outside of the system are undone, as you say, is something I absolutely agree with, but the question then is: what does that do to us, our unconscious and affective ways of experiencing reality? What does it do to our experiencing and understanding of our bodies?

I am wondering what the implications are of the obsessive ability of datafication to bring together disparate data in order to produce new relations. If we have become metrics or are merely regarded as data points that can be manipulated, what sort of politics follows on from that? How can such practices be resisted, or if that is not possible: perhaps from a Deleuzian–Guattarian perspective, turned into forms of enjoyment that we might tolerate? I think Mark B. N. Hansen’s work is very interesting here, and you cite him in the conclusion of your text, as he argues that the subject “comes to learn that it lags behind its own efficacy” (2013, 14). The subject, then, is constantly “tracking tendencies, maintaining liquidity of capacity” (Clough et al 2018, 114). I discuss this similarly in my chapter where I think about the subject and big data as being oriented towards the future and as always in flux. Alison Hearn’s work (2017) is useful here. She has argued that mass datafication, targeting, and predictive analytics give rise to, what she calls, a “speculative subject” (2017, 73). A subject, whose data are not only constantly anticipated and in flux, but who becomes anticipatory and malleable herself. We come to regard ourselves as bearers of value that is possible of being optimized towards a future state. To a large degree, how that future is going to look is in the hands of automated data mining processes. Related to your earlier question about who the subject of big data is for me, I actually hadn’t realized before you

pointed it out that my chapter on big data is the only one in the book for which I did not interview users. I wanted to make that chapter more exploratory both in writing and conceptual terms. It seems less linear than my other chapters, just like datafication and related technologies are.

I think it is very important to point out, as you do in various texts, how the data-logical turn enables a new form of population racism and surveillance. On a more fundamental level, I think there is an underlying process of dis/individualization at work. We are being individualized through technology because datafication enables a bespoke, custom-made user experience for us whereby the platforms, devices, and services we use address us as *individuals*. This can be highly pleasurable. We are being told by Facebook for example, how valued and important we are. At the same time, our data are mined and used for various purposes. This is disindividualizing. Who we are as complex human beings does not matter in reality, as long as parts of us and our expressions online can be merged with other data to come to various conclusions about who we are. I relate this to the psychoanalytic notion of perversion in my book. Going back to Anzieu, we could also characterize such processes as being about the creation of a skin ego where we are assured and enwrapped by highly functional platforms which we have come to depend on. However, beneath the surface that very skin ego, or perhaps one layer of the skin envelope, is broken down and parts of us are extracted. This creates a strange experience where we own something and have control over it and do not own it and cannot control it at the same time. What is your view on this?

PATRICIA: Well Jacob, I find everything you say about your own work very compelling and very interesting; all of it is on behalf of the subjects you interview and who stand in for subjectivity in the age of digital media and datafication. However, noticing that there are no research subjects in your chapter on big data suggested to me that there needs be a fuller rethinking of subjectivity and datafication, a difficult but necessary task ahead of us. For me, this implies the larger issue of a change of *diagram* as I mention above and remembering how Deleuze (2005) reworked Foucault's treatment of it in terms of micro-relationships of power and affective forces, informing various aspects across the whole field of experience and which engages an already existing mechanism making it central to a new diagram, as it "crosses the technical threshold," becoming a social technology (Clough 2019).

For me, the rethinking of subjectivity in terms of datafication as it becomes, if not already has become, the social technology of control beyond control suggests a diagrammatic change from the liberal arrangement of separating state, economy, civil society, and the private and the public spheres, a change in the figures of the body and the mind as they have been conceived in disciplinary society. This liberal arrangement, as Marx pointed out in his *The German Ideology*, coincides with industrial capitalism arising in Europe and the bourgeoisie's ownership of the means of production of consciousness as well as material life, or the matter of consciousness arising out of material life. Although what is described here is the 'free market economy' as separate from state control, and the relative autonomy of civil society institutions, such as the family, the military, the school, etc., Marx and the critical, theoretical perspectives he has inspired recognize that this is more an ideological understanding, one promoted in fact by civil society institutions, which interpellate the subject to this ideological understanding that includes the fiction of the autonomous or sovereign individual subject of the Nation-State as well as the market. To speak of the diagram as informing this liberal arrangement is not to reduce the diagram to it but rather to mark the dynamism of the arrangement, opening it to change. What I have been arguing is that datafication is part of another diagram rather than a disciplinary one and calls forth a subjectivity that is not specific to the individual. Moreover, the individual subject cannot be the figure in our contemporary theoretical/critical discourses. Or as you put it: it is the subject of a strange experience where we own something (of ourselves) and have control over it and do not own it and cannot control it at the same time. A control beyond control is here involved.

This has involved me in a rethinking of the body and its capacities beyond its figuration as an organism. It also has led me to the work of Luciana Parisi who, along with others, is taking up the thinking done by algorithms, the machine learning supported by the indeterminacy of the incalculable immanent to the algorithm—what Parisi (2017) calls speculative thinking. A new image of thought is given that is “nonbiologically bound to any organism;” further it works by abduction rather than induction or deduction (177). It is speculative thinking that Parisi argues refuses the opposition between reason and sheer instrumentalism and prefers a pragmatism where massive amounts of data again and again offer another problem rather than a solution—a socially mediated use of data that works speculatively as the algorithm does. If you still are with me, I am suggesting that with datafication, we not only have a new image of thought, we have a new figure of the body, both requiring we rethink the subject and the unconscious.

Thank you Jacob. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have had our conversation and I am so sorry it's near its end. I leave you to have the last words.

JACOB: Thank you Patricia, I have immensely enjoyed having this conversation. It has been an honor. I think it is particularly valuable to see where our ideas converge and diverge while we are both committed to thinking about similar questions that concern the status of the human subject and technology today, and agree that those are of great importance. I think what you have said about the changing ontology of thought, the unconscious, the body, and the human subject—and I would also add things like meaning and interpretation—is very powerful. It is very enriching to such debates that you hold on to psychoanalytic ideas and productively combine them with other paradigms that can be very critical of psychoanalysis (like new materialism), and your discussion of the thing self in *The User Unconscious*, for example, is very interesting in this context. Regarding the conceptual and actual challenges to notions of (liberal) subjectivity which you have outlined so beautifully in your response, I would say that the subject, and Chun makes a similar point in her work (while focusing less on the body), is both individual, an organism, material, and relational, unbounded, leaky, beyond the body as organism, virtual. This presents us with some conceptual problems of how to hold on to such a view which may seem contradictory to some. Anzieu and how we have been discussing his ideas is useful here I think, because he shows how the subject is becoming individual through relationalities, or is moving towards individuation via the relational. I would add to this that an unconscious desire to return to this relational sphere of the skin ego persists throughout our lives.

You have raised important questions that are now very fresh in my mind, and will be for some time, about the changing nature of the unconscious, of bodies, and subjects due to computational technologies and the datalogical turn. Your concept of the user unconscious is very powerful here. I think this tension that you mention which is revealed because of technology should also be something of a wakeup call for psychoanalysis. Perhaps clinical psychoanalysis itself needs to take account of such technological shifts because they have such fundamental effects on the very understanding and being of the subject. So there is a need for a new psychoanalytic theory. If we accept the fact that technical systems, datafication, algorithms, artificial intelligence and so on will become increasingly more autonomous and 'intelligent', even capable of cognitive processes as Hayles

argues, we are pushed even further into expanding our understanding of the kind of questions we have discussed in this conversation. Hayles argues that we are already at a point where technology is capable of cognition. I think this is taking things a step too far and we are not at this point yet, but it certainly opens up a vision of the future where machines, algorithms, and other technologies will be able to think with us, for us, and against us –more quickly, more rationally, and more effectively than we ever could. This has implications for the unconscious and many other aspects, not least for how populations are subjected to forms of violence and surveillance. Returning to affect, the affective capacities and capabilities of media and devices in relation to subjects and how subjects in turn will affect them will surely increase even more in the future. Those themes will continue to occupy us.

Thank you again Patricia for this wonderful opportunity to engage with me in this dialogue.

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RESPO

ASCAT



Leslie Gates

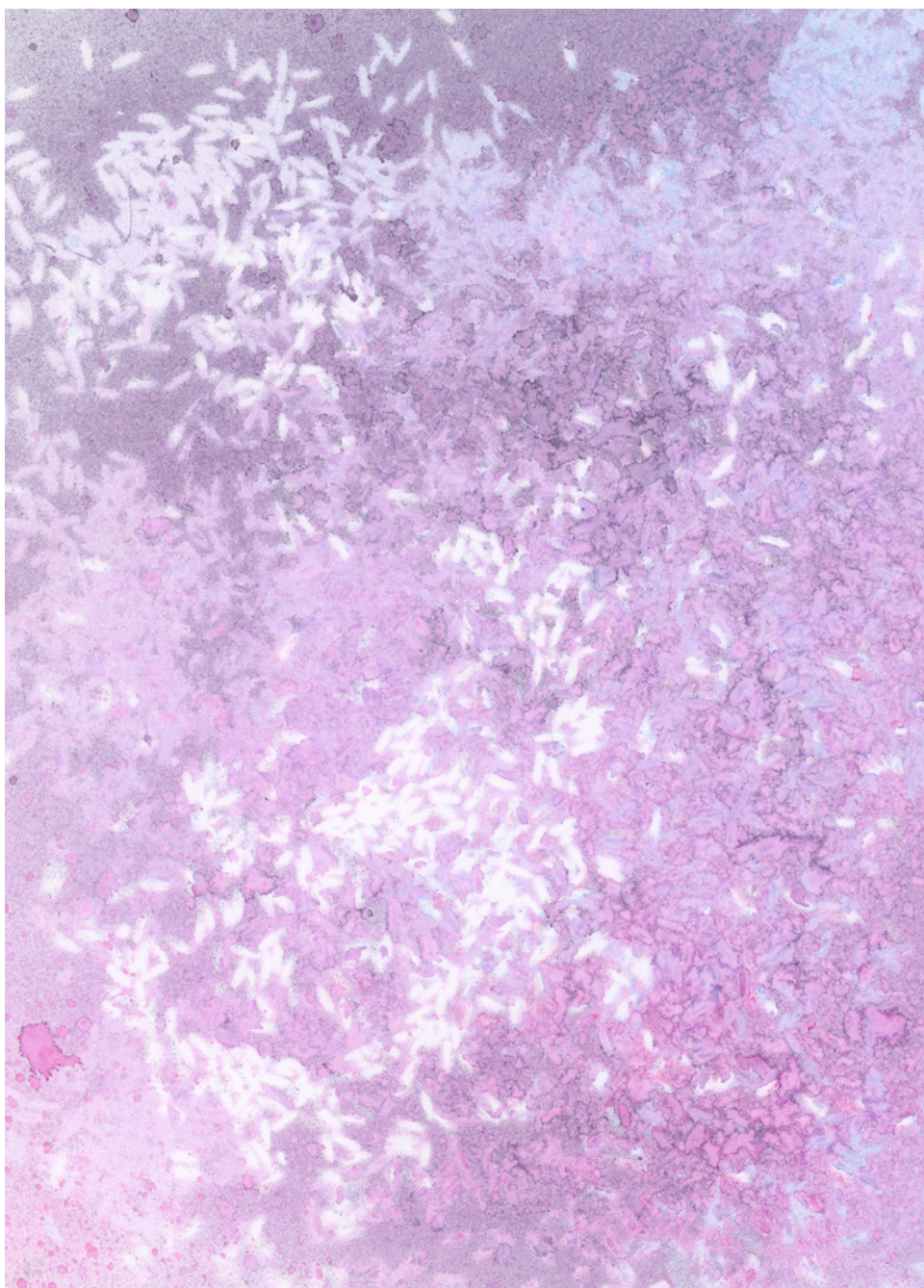
MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY

Daniel Clarke

HEMPFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT



Response as Catalyst is a collaboration between artists Daniel Clarke and Leslie Gates. During 2016, Clark and Gates each produced and exchanged a drawing every week. The drawings—exchanged weekly—served as a catalyst for the artists to respond with a new drawing the following week. The intention of this exploration and exchange was to provoke new directions in each artists’s own body of work. The project includes 106 works (though only a selection of drawings are reproduced here): two bodies of 53 pieces, each arranged chronologically. One set began with a drawing by Gates, and the other with a drawing by Clarke. Produced with a wide variety of media on archival paper, the works are 8.5 x 11” (216 x 280mm).



I thought using food to mask out areas of the paper was pretty interesting. Basically, I just want to play around with the idea too. I used a small spray bottle of different inks (watered down) and brown rice. I added more rice with every layer. That's it.

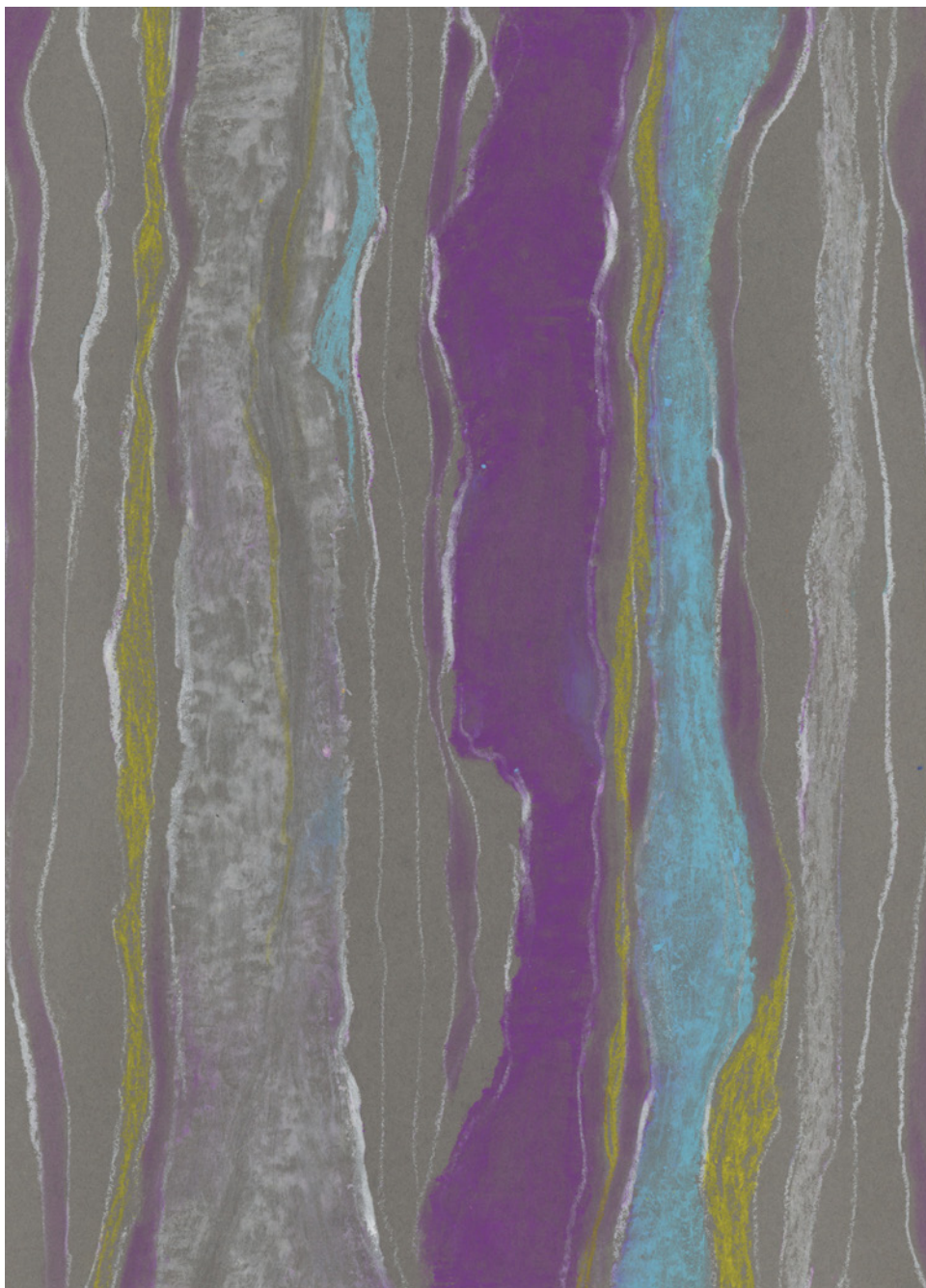
—Dan



Dan,

I put some blood orange loose leaf tea under pressure after using it for its intended purpose. Then I worked into it to get something to take shape.

—Leslie



Dan,

This is a horribly forced drawing with oil pastels and oil based on your torn drawing. I started by making the first three wide shapes using torn edges of paper as a stencil and went from there.

—Leslie

CAPACIOUS



Hi Leslie,

I thought it was interesting that you felt the oil pastel drawing was forced—which is bound to happen. So, I decided to use two different forces with oil pastel: heat and pressure. I took an oven pan, put foil over it, cooked it on the stove oil pastel on the stove—once the pastel started to melt, I put the whole thing on the floor, put paper over it, then stomped it as hard as I could. It made a horrible smell that, hopefully, wasn't poisonous.

—Dan



Dan,

We have drawn a lot of film-related stuff, so I went in a different direction and created a black and white still life from our kitchen table occupants.

—Leslie

CAPACIOUS



Hi Leslie,

Back into the kitchen. I tried to recreate your image, but I used some different materials. I used soy-based ink as a monotype. I used a butter knife, cheese cloth, and a wine cork to remove ink. I also made the whole print transfer from a table. I was going to use the dining room table, but thought Katie would get angry if I couldn't wipe the ink off. I used a work table in the studio—both are dark oak—hard to see what I'm doing.

—Dan



Hi Leslie,

I stayed with the subject of the bicycle, but turned the focus toward the motion of the object. I cut a small "x" on the paper and mounted it to the my turntable. I had to fold the corners (sorry) because it kept getting caught as it turned. Once it was going, I just dragged the ink on with a brush and pen. Here's the result.

—Dan

CAPACIOUS

CVS/pharmacy #1668
630 CENTERVILLE ROAD, LANCASTER, PA 17601
LESLIE GATES
707 LESHER AVENUE , WAYNESBORO, PA 17268
**MECLIZINE 25 MG
TABLET**
Common Brand(s): Antivert, Vertin
TAKE 1 TABLET 4 TIMES
DAILY AS NEEDED FOR
DIZZINESS.
Qty: 60 | Refills require authorization
Store Phone: (717)898-0308
Rx# 731388
Prescriber: TIMOTHY VINCENT WEAVER

Dan,

I don't do well with turning.

—Leslie



Paris smoke bomb, Damien Checoury, 2017
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0)

SOVEREIGN CHAOS AND RIOTOUS AFFECTS, OR, HOW TO FIND JOY BEHIND THE BARRICADES



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ABSTRACT

A commonly deployed signifier to render the political event of a riot intelligible, ‘chaos’ describes an affective condition of disorder and disarray. For some theorists of affect, such a condition of chaotic unpredictability suggests emancipatory potential. Recounting the 2018 May Day/May 1st protests in Paris, that both politicians and media declared to be a riot, this paper argues that to consider the riot as chaotic is to think and feel like a state. Critically interrogating the analytical purchase of ‘chaos’ to describe a riotous assembly of bodies, this paper contends that ‘chaos’ is not only a theoretically impoverished concept to understand such political events, but also that sovereignty mobilizes ‘chaos’ as an affective infrastructure of governance to shore up attachment to the security state. Repudiating the sovereign logic of chaos, this paper presents a first-person encounter with a protest-declared-riot in order to explore the various affects that materialize around such events. Through ethnographic reflection, this paper outlines a series of affects that accompanied the day’s events, such as speculative optimism, fragility, suspicion, fear, boldness, and joy. In so doing, the paper develops an affective approach to theorize relations of political antagonism in the street, arguing that whereas the state weaponizes terror as a form of governance, the rioters weaponize joy as an affective means of resistance.

KEYWORDS

chaos, riot, joy, political affects, sovereignty

Marching through the streets, banners held high, feeling the thunderous voice of the crowd explain what democracy looks like. Political protest is a loud and often civil affair, and frequently an enjoyable way to spend an afternoon. Other times, however, things get broken: skin, windows, promises, clean records. To make sense of the violence of broken things, the media commonly employs the word ‘chaos’. A *Los Angeles Times* (1968) headline about the May ’68 uprising in France reads: “De Gaulle Returns to France and Worst Chaos in 10 Years.” Fifty years later, whether in ‘respectable’ news outlets or tabloid journals, the narrative stays the same: “The annual May Day rally held by labor unions for better workers’ rights,” *Al Jazeera* (2018) reports, “led to chaos in the streets of Paris.” Similarly, *The Sun* headline reads: “Paris May Day riots see far-left anarchists . . . bring chaos to the French capital” (Christodoulou 2018). Like a loyal but rabid dog, the riot never arrives without chaos as its companion.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2018) provides one meaning of chaos as, “the formless void believed to have existed before the creation of the universe; primordial matter.” In its theological signification, chaos describes a confused, formless, order-less, state prior to the emergence of God. Given the historical imbrication of religion with politics in the medieval world, Carl Schmitt (2005) suggests that in modernity all (western) political concepts are secularized theological concepts. As such, it should not surprise us to see chaos mobilized as a trope to describe what life would look like without the state, or as Thomas Hobbes calls it—the mortal God. Take away law, Hobbes writes, and you “reduce all Order, Government, and Society, to the first Chaos of violence, and Civill warre” (1996, 469). Yet, the protest does not remove the law. Rather, it serves as a political warning or perhaps even a promise: from protest to riot on the path to revolution. The protest’s possibility to become a riot poses a threat of upending the state, of returning civil society to a prior space of chaos—undone, unformed, and ungoverned.

To see the event of the riot accordingly is to see like a state. Or rather, it is to feel like a state. Chaos is not simply an ideational position but also an affective condition—a social sensation where life feels out of place, displaced. Given the celebration of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers’s work on chaos theory and its influence—via Brian Massumi—on ideas of chaos as a condition of potentiality (Clough 2007), one could describe chaos as an affective condition *par excellence*. “Affect or intensity,” Massumi writes, “is akin to what is called a critical point . . . in chaos theory and the theory of dissipative structures. This is the turning point

at which a physical system paradoxically embodies multiple and normally mutually exclusive potentials” (2002, 32). A “state of transformability” and thus of “unpredictable futurity” (Massumi 2002, 100), chaos suggests a condition of emancipatory potential and so often carries positive resonance in the work of affect theorists.

Yet, in mobilizing this signifier, I suggest that we remain caught within sovereignty’s symbolic order. From the sovereign’s perspective, chaos signifies the opposite of Law and Order. Law is Order, and so to exit the law is to exit order. Left in the dizzying terror of chaos, the state hurries to mobilize the police apparatus to recreate a sense of the ordinary that has been thrown out of joint. The ‘rioters,’ then, aren’t simply breaking the law by breaking property. They are breaking the technologies of the state that order our sensations of time and space. If chaos, terror, and fear are the feelings the state projects in order to make the riot intelligible and govern its effects, then we can ask, what is the emotional texture of the riot from the position of those momentarily ungoverned and how does this affective condition challenge the state’s description of the riot as chaotic?

The following account attempts to analytically distinguish between affective states that in practice both defy any simple parsing and refuse any stable proportional relations. Despite the murkiness of this affective situation, I argue that we can distinguish between those feelings tactically provoked by the state as a part of its strategies of riot control and those forces of feeling engendered by the riot’s successive unfolding. I begin with the affective sensibilities that accompany the riot even before the riot, narrowly understood, begins. The sensations of speculative optimism and comradely care engendered by the expectation of coming events shape the protestors’ entry onto the streets just as the feelings of fear and suspicion may linger long after they exit from the scene. As such, the event’s affective horizons stretch the riot beyond the delimited period of broken things.

Turning then to the riot proper, I argue that in contrast to the statist discourse of chaos, the political sensibility of the riot is better understood through the positive affects of public happiness and collective joy that circulate around the bold actions of the rioters. The igniting of happiness, joy, and boldness, however, do not exhaust the other affects at play, even if they are, as I argue, the riot’s primary sensations. In other words, even if such positive affects are not always experientially predominant, I suggest that the riot’s political trajectory tends toward their prominence, thus calling for a greater attunement to the riotous conditions that spark joy.¹ Insofar as chaos and its associated negative affects appear, they emerge not as organic to the riot’s form but rather as an effect of the state weaponizing

fear to disorganize riotous bodies. Herein, the state precipitates the very chaos believed to be constitutive of the riot in order to justify the riot's management and suppression. Ultimately, then, optimism, care, suspicion, paranoia, fear, boldness, happiness, and joy mingle and vibrate together throughout the riotous assembly, becoming louder or softer as the conflict between the state's fearsome governance and the riot's joyful resistance unfolds.

Speculative Optimism; Comradely Care

April 30, 2018—the evening before the annual celebration of labor struggle known as May Day. We sit around a map of Paris drinking wine and strategizing at the house of a couple I do not know, but who refer to us as friends, part of an international struggle. Though we are strangers, there is an impersonal intimacy to our conversation. Paris has been a fertile site of conflict in the months leading up to May: from student occupations to the attempted eviction of the autonomous territory known as La ZAD.² I hear from contacts dotted around Europe that others are planning to travel to Paris. The mythology of May '68, and its 50-year anniversary, is too alluring not to note. There is a warm atmosphere of optimism, as our Parisian hosts tell us that they feel certain that we will be many. And in that force, they say, we're going to be all right.

Our hosts conjure up our imagined future as a risky albeit hopeful endeavor. Their speculative optimism draws on conspiratorial circuits that span continents. An anonymous network of political radicals can make otherwise dangerous actions feel safe. They cannot know for certain, but international rumors have a way of electrifying the skin. It is unclear what it means to win. None of the activists want to get arrested, but that's a low bar for victory. Inarticulable, the event's promise is nonetheless palpable.

Reviewing police strategies of containment, surveying the city map for possible chokepoints and emergency exits, and concocting solutions of Maalox and water to counter the effects of teargas, these preparations are at odds with the image of the riot as a spontaneous event that catches all by surprise. Unforeseen and unorganized, the riot's supposed spontaneity finds affinity with its assumed chaotic form. As Joshua Clover observes, the Russian word *stikhiinost*, which Lenin famously used to condemn mass revolt, “signifies both spontaneity and the chaos of nature: that which has the least degree of organization” (2016, 92). As

an expected event for which such a high level of organization is undertaken, the 2018 May Day riot does not harmoniously fit within Clover's proposed scheme of contemporary riots, increasingly "incited by the police murder of a young person with dark skin, or following on the failure of the legal apparatus to hold the police adequately responsible for their violence" (2016, 10).³

This is not to suggest that the riot that "transpires within a logic of racialization" is the site of genuine spontaneity (Clover 2016, 11, 100). Like its twin 'chaos,' the trope of spontaneity rests within a sovereign framework that fails to make sense of the riot's internal workings. Neither chaotic nor spontaneous, the riots Clover analyses are nonetheless responses to particular episodes of *unpredictable*, even if unsurprising, police violence. In contrast, the 2018 May Day riot aligns with an alternate lineage of rioting, spanning other Labor Days, summits and conferences (1999 WTO in Seattle; 2017 G20 in Hamburg), Olympic games (Vancouver 2010), and presidential inaugurations (#DisruptJ20). What unites these events is the foreseeable specificity of their time and place. Indeed, they are so predictable that individuals can schedule time off work for travel in anticipation of the events they hope to precipitate and in which they expect to participate. In this regard, these assemblies are similar to the riots of European football fans in their preparation and expectation. Echoing Bill Buford in his study of English hooligans, we too can suggest that May Day 2018, like many before it, was "a riot by appointment" (1993, 201). Yet, given the risks, what insights can centering affect provide us in explaining why so many keep their appointments? How does thinking with and through affect illuminate the attraction of the event's anticipatory promise?

Speculation: "the conjectural anticipation of something"; "a conclusion . . . reached by abstract or hypothetical reasoning" (OED 2019). The activists collect the evidentiary materials of their optimism—discussion of strategy, assessment of equipment, analysis of terrain—but, directed towards an open future, their feelings lack assurance. As such, despite the optimism of their preparations and plans, not everyone is confident. The meeting and the night close as the activists go around the table with their final thoughts and feelings: excitement and hesitation. Some aren't sure they want to participate in the *cortège de tête*—the head of the demonstration where the most intense conflict usually unfolds.⁴ The event's promise a bit too speculative to keep the nagging fears at bay.

Speculation: engagement in any "enterprise or transaction of a venturesome or risky nature, but offering the chance of great or unusual gain" (OED 2019). Militant politics requires a certain kind of political faith—in oneself, in one's comrades,

in a future where, though stacked up against you, the odds turn out to be in your favor. The risks run large, but so too do the promised gains—but what *exactly* do they hope to gain? After the go-around, the uncertainty of some envelops us all. The group affirms the vulnerability it takes to speak of one's own vulnerability and after a few shared cigarettes, they decide to reassess in the morning.

The Suspense of Suspicion

Urban inhabitants usually greet the faces of strangers in public with indifference, but on May Day, careful glances and double-takes fill the street. In Hannah Arendt's reflections on violence and power, she remarks that, "power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group that remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (1970, 44). The problem of surveillance in the city, however, troubles the possibility of collective power: to be *identified* as being together puts a stop to coming together. From the perspective of state security, any person roaming the announced starting point poses a threat in need for searching—and if you are caught with gas masks, that signals intent to protect oneself in a situation of conflict, an arrestable offence. As such, in the time before *it* begins, the protestor must navigate the streets suspended in suspicion: is that person an undercover agent, a potential accomplice, a tourist, or simply an unaffiliated citizen?

Despite intentions to glide smoothly through the city streets, the group's hurried walks, darting looks, and jittery conversations nonetheless draw attention. Militancy is its own political theater, and 'playing it cool' is a difficult art to master. Sitting at a café, chatting about nothing in particular, the activists pass time. The impasse drags on until the crowd before them begins to swell. Impatience overwhelms a few as potential rioters start crouching between friends and under banners, hiding from the surveillance gaze and preparing: black bandanas, sunglasses, gas masks, and leather gloves. It's time to begin.

But when does the riot begin? In France, the Penal Code (article 433–6) speaks of rebellion—"violent resistance" to any person of "public authority" attempting to carry out the "mandates of justice." United States federal law (18 U.S.C. § 2102) defines a riot as a "public disturbance" that "constitute[s] a clear and present danger" to property or person by someone in a group of three or more people.

Similarly, in the UK, the Public Order Act 1986 (c. 64) defines violent disorder as “3 or more persons who . . . threaten unlawful violence,” causing someone to “fear for their personal safety.” Despite their differences, the UK Public Order Act, US Federal Law, and also the French Penal Code figure rioting not simply as a manifestation of violence, but its *threat*.

Yet, the political impact of any protest depends on its ability to threaten. Hundreds of thousands spill out onto the street to voice their demands. Their presence in public is a sign of dissatisfaction, anger, and desire for a different order of things. If you do not listen, you will have to reckon with all of us who have come today with our bodies to show you who you are up against. Is the riot not simply the manifestation of this threat, the expression of those who speak but, as Martin Luther King (1968) said, whose language is unheard? Every protestor is a potential rioter, as every rioter a protestor.

Performatively speaking, then, the riot is a declared event. In 1714, the British parliament passed the Riot Act, one of the first juridical configurations of the riot in the West. Aimed to prevent “tumults and riotous assemblies,” the Riot Act mandated an officer publicly name the gathering a riot by reading the Riot Act aloud to the crowd, exclaiming that: “Our Sovereign Lord the King chargeth and commandeth all persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse” (Stevenson 2013, 27-9). Sovereign declarations therefore performatively reconstitute the assembly into a riot. However, not every protest becomes a riot. In other words, not every protest sufficiently threatens sovereign power. As the police are fond of saying on the reality TV show *COPS*, “the situation is under control.” But if the situation is not under control, where is it?

The Joy of Possibility

“Siamo tutti antifascisti!” The sound of hands clapping in unison reverberates throughout the crowd. Over 1,200 people dressed in black forming a bloc at the head of the march are a collective force. It’s unclear what will happen shortly, but the feeling of joy in the shared power of an anonymous many increases as one’s line of sight beyond the black mass recedes.

Of course, we are not all anonymous. There is a special art of reading the bridge of a comrade’s nose, learning the particular eye structure and wrinkle formation of a friend’s face. Small clusters of affinity groups pervade the bloc. These bundles of friends and comrades draw themselves together via shared hand signals,

calls, and signs. I laugh as I hear a deep voice next to me baaing like a lost sheep only to be greeted somewhere farther down the crowd by a larger herd of sheep. That's a good joke, I think.

An undercurrent of suspicion still lingers. Undercover agents could be lurking anywhere throughout the crowd. Yet, once a certain threshold is passed and a collective force has unfurled, this suspicion will loosen, and the militants will move more freely. The crowd begins marching and soon thereafter the sound of hammers clanging cobblestones pierces the air. Without any division of command or dictated instructions, those few with hammers get to work for all. Shrouded bodies move in and out of the scene with their pockets heavier. Against the tear gas, riot shields, concussion grenades, and the power of state violence, the protesters turn to the city. Opening up the city beyond market exchange, the potential rioters make use of the city in new ways: the road's uniformity broken as paving stones become projectiles, chairs and fences rearranged as they lose their commercial use to become barricades in conflict. The militants feel the city with a different touch, disrupting the flows of market exchange and transforming urban space: *sous les pavés, la plage*; beneath the cobblestones, the beach.

The sound of glass shattering rings out and is followed by cheering. This appears to energize the crowd as the pace accelerates and we move closer. Ahead, a McDonalds stands crumbled over, but not impressively destroyed. Like a playground bully with a black eye, this McDonalds will be collecting lunch money again in a day or two. Farther down the road, a subject of tension: a burning Renault dealership. The cars in flames still sit parked inside the dealership, which is on the bottom level of an apartment building. The danger is obvious. The fire could spread, and people could get hurt. Yet, fingers are not pointed and speeches are not made, but quick decision follows: two people extinguish the flames; others then move the singed cars out and onto the pavement. Again, the fire is set and again the crowd pushes on down the Boulevard de l'Hôpital.

A seemingly non-deliberative assembly, it would be a mistake to think that the crowd did not speak at all. Littered on the ground to explain the foreseeable property destruction was a prepared communiqué entitled: "To Those Who Would Side with Windows" (Anonymous 2018). It reads the broken windows and charred cars as a strike against capital: "we attack symbols, physical manifestations of capitalism, and not individuals, the furniture is not human, it is only money."

For the authors of this communiqué, the broken things of the riot signal an attack against “industrial domestication, conformism and,” for some unexplained reason, “fashion.”⁵

While the riot makes the city newly possible, the riot is not inherently subversive. All riots, even if not all rioters, fight the police, whatever the political position of the participants. Formally speaking, the riot is like a game and to win means gaining control of the streets. “The revolutionaries”, Arendt argues, “are those who know when power is lying in the street and when they can pick it up” (1972, 206). Of course, the police always win; otherwise, there is no longer a riot but the beginnings of a revolution. But the riot can be the winning side for a short while. To push back the police or have the police tactically disengage creates the conditions for momentary autonomy. Political differences enter when the rioters decide what to do with their newly found freedom.

From the perspective of state sovereignty, this situation is terrifying: ‘if those people would commit such violence to that window, that car, that bank, then why not also *you*?’ The space of the law ceases to operate, and the ordinary functioning of monopolized violence—the police, the prison system, capital—is up for debate. While sovereign logic would suggest politics itself is no longer possible in the absence of the law, the opening up for debate of who exercises violence and for what purposes is the very stuff of politics. As Jacques Rancière puts it, political events engender a “dispute over the object of dispute, the dispute over the existence of the dispute and the parties confronting each other in it” (1999, 55). The political difference of the riot depends on how the rioters, having opened up the question of violence, use their freedom to redraw its lines. For white supremacists, the boundary is visibly at race, and so, whether in Charlottesville, USA or Chemnitz, Germany, when neo-nazis gain autonomy they attack non-white people. In both 1968 and 2018, the anti-capitalist riots set the limit at capital: banks, boutiques, luxury car dealerships.

The most alluring spectacle therefore is not the smashed windows or the burning cars but the crowd itself. Sovereignty’s scariest event is not the presence of the rioters but the absence of the police. The state has lost the monopoly on violence. In defining riots, social scientists propose a necessary characteristic to be an event in which “authorities have lost control” (Halle and Rafter 2003, 347). Following Max Weber’s classic definition of the state as a “community that *successfully* claims the *monopoly* of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory,” we could say that in the riot, the state momentarily disappears (1948, 78, emphasis

added). These scenes therefore terrify; this is the nightmare of the state of nature, a world the state imagines would exist in its absence. Behind the militarized police, the prison walls, the tough on crime sloganeering trembles a frightened ruling class. As Chicago rapper Vic Mensa (2017) explains, “If the National Guard was actually hard they wouldn’t be scared.” Like the swagger of insecure men, the state’s thorny exterior compensates for a fragile governmental regime—always in crisis, always on the verge of falling apart.

Yet, the rioters do not feel like a state. This is not to say that they do not feel fear, they do, but terror fails to capture their imagination. The affect of the riot is a shared social force, a potent energy that resonates throughout the mobile bloc. So much that had been forbidden by the law suddenly becomes possible. The riot makes politics newly possible. This possibility may only remain a potentiality, but its promise sticks as a question: What if next time? As a piece of graffiti during the May 68’ riots in Paris reads: “*La barricade ferme la rue mais ouvre la voie*”—barricades close the street, but open the way. If the riot is a political force of natality, then joy is its sensation, regardless of the political position of its participants. “There was an intense energy about it; it was impossible not to feel some of the thrill,” remarks Buford on his experience in ultra-nationalist English hooligan riots; “Somebody near me said that he was happy. He said that he was very, very happy, that he could not remember ever being so happy” (1993, 87–88). “Join the battle of Joy,” writes an activist reflecting on the battles at the blockades of Heiligendamm, where the G-8 summit was held in 2007. “Under every mask was a smile, in every stone thrown against the common enemy there was joy, in every body revolting against oppression there was desire” (Dupuis-Déri 2014, 83).

The joy of the riot, however, is qualitatively different from the pleasures of private life. Acting as a collective force, the protestors experience a form of joy more akin to public happiness. In *On Revolution*, Arendt argues that “public happiness . . . consisted in the citizen’s right of access to the public realm, in his share in public power” (1977, 118). Unlike “the pursuit of private happiness” (1977, 118), public happiness emerges from the experience of collective power, that is, participating in public with others in such a way as to organize the affairs of our common lives. As Arendt puts it, “public freedom consisted in having a share in public business,” and “the activities connected with this business . . . gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else” (1977, 110). Yet, in contrast to Arendt’s revolutionaries in their deliberative assemblies,

when “public business” has become the public *of* business, the rioters turn not to the townhall but to the city street as the site of their collective assembly and source of public happiness.

Public and collective, the riot’s joy nonetheless emerges from an altogether different type of political power than Arendt had in mind. Public happiness for Arendt appears intimately linked to the pleasures of constituent power: the “joys of discourse, of legislation, of transcending business, or persuading and being persuaded” (2018, 206). In contrast to the pleasurable action that comes from constituting a new juridical order, the riot is a force that momentarily deactivates the governmental apparatus. In other words, the joys of the riot are the pleasures of destituent power (cf. Aarons 2019). No less collective and no less public than constituent power, the riot’s pleasures emerge from action-in-concert that simultaneously renders the law inoperative as it opens up a public space of autonomy.

There “exists such intense happiness in acting that the actor, like the gambler, will accept that all the odds are stacked against him” (Arendt 2018, 206). Indeed, this experience of public happiness, argues Arendt, “had been sufficiently profound for them to prefer under almost any circumstances . . . public happiness to private welfare” (2018, 125). So too for the rioters, who risk the private pains of injured bodies, lengthy trials, and lost work for the taste of public joy. So striking is this joy, that sometimes you catch yourself thinking: this is not a riot, so much as a political carnival. The riot is serious play—a game where freedom’s vitality is at stake. Writing in Italy 1977, during the years of lead and against the ascetic militancy of the Red Brigades, Alfredo Bonanno argues that insurrectional “play is characterised by a vital impulse that is always new, always in movement. By acting as though we are playing, we charge our action with this impulse. We free ourselves from death. Play makes us feel alive” (1977, 17). Considered as a strategy in revolutionary struggle, maintaining the affective life of the riot as a joyous event is one of the militant’s weightiest responsibilities. The “pursuit of joy, dreams, utopia in its declared ‘lack of seriousness,’” Bonanno writes, “hides the most serious thing in life: the refusal of death” (1977, 17).

But is the joy of the riot qualitatively different from the joy of the protest? Media tropes commonly depict political events ‘turning,’ like the flicking of a light switch: the protest turned into a riot; the event turned chaotic. If, however, we turn away from declarative utterances and their performative effects, away from words and towards the sensations of the body, then we need a new way of making sense of the protest’s escalation into that collective force we call a riot. Feelings do

not switch, but flow like waves. Sometimes they drift slowly and at other times rush wildly, but it is always a changing of intensity. As Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg write, “affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body” (2010, 1). The riot can be understood through its qualitative shifts of intensity, not of chaos, but of autonomy and its sensations. In militant struggle, joy qualitatively increases as the space of autonomy enlarges. Yet, the question remains: when does one pass the threshold from protest to riot? One feels joy, but one does not feel a riot. And hours later one may even feel bewildered: ‘Was *that* a riot?’

The Paralysis of Fear

Canisters fly above the crowd, separating mid-air and then fall to the ground. A few militants move to pick up the burning black disks, but these gestures prove futile. The atmosphere quickly becomes suffused with a thick white smoke. The sounds of dry heaving soon follow. Even though I am equipped with goggles and a mask, the gas tugs at my eyes and forms a burning goatee around my mouth. Unable to see five steps into the corrosive fog, we move in blind retreat. We are packed together tight—too tight. One feels to be on the precipice of panic. Someone might fall, someone might get trampled. I need air. I want out.

These scenes do not evade the grip of fear, but this feeling is a qualitatively different experience than that projected by the state. Terrified by the possibility of the state’s absence, the state weaponizes terror. Fear strangles the body and renders it chaotic in the sense of placing the body in a state of confusion, disorder, and formlessness. In other words, disorganization is not so much the condition in and of the riot so much as a governmental strategy of its management. Consider tear gas as a crowd control tactic. The police seemed to have wizened up to the rock throwing and keep their distance, but close enough to fire tear gas and concussion grenades. In sufficient quantities, tear gas makes the body impotent and docile by overwhelming it, rendering it temporarily paralyzed. From the Greek, παράλυσις (*parálusis*: “palsy”), meaning to loosen or untie, it’s as if tear gas unwinds the nervous system and the body’s membranes come undone: tears, mucus, vomit all spill out.

From the position of the militants, the organizational form of the riot is not inherently chaos. State interventions, however, can render the body of the protest-protestor chaotic. That is, in weaponizing fear, the state disorganizes the

body on both an individual and collective level. Indeed, students of the riot have often remarked on the ways in which the state produces the very chaos it then tasks itself with quelling, as police projections of protesters as always-already potentially violent mobs tend to produce repressive actions that provoke the expected violence that then justifies police strategies of escalated force (Schweingruber 2000; Perez, Berg, & Myers 2003). In centering the question of affect, however, we become attuned to the imbrication of the singular organic body of the protestor with the public political body of the riot. In tear gassing the crowd, for instance, the state attempts to unwind the political relations that hold the collective body together by unwinding the sensuous relations that hold the organic body together. In disorganizing the riot's communal corps by attacking the rioter's singular body, the state strategically constitutes an affective condition of chaos that it then seeks to re-order.

If affect describes the capacity of the body to affect or be affected, then the affects of fear are weapons of state control—these felt sensations the tactile effects of police technologies that attack the body. Tear gas, sound cannons, rubber bullets, and stun grenades make bodies lose control. As such, these are the weapons of crowd control as sense control. We should consider these administrations of bodily sensations to be a central strategy of state governance. In the prison system, for instance, solitary confinement, a favored method of punishment in the US, deprives the prisoner of human and environmental contact; it isolates the body and strikes at its senses in order to make the prisoner docile. If chaos enters the scene, then, it is not due to the state's absence but rather the very presence of its affective apparatus of violence. Far from being a secondary or poetic perspective on the state, the government of our affective life is central to both the techniques of sovereignty and its resistance.

The Boldness of Initiative

Pushed back into a clearing, the crowd readjusts. The police no longer launch tear gas canisters into the air but directly at the protestors. As the militants compete for the chance to volley the black fuming disks back into the direction of the police, a rhythm emerges. Protestors move forward into the plumes and exit to catch their breath and let the burning subside. Occasionally someone is struck and their body collapses. Shouts of 'Medic!' move through the crowd as strangers drag the injured comrade away. Somewhere down the street, barricades are built, and confrontations seem to be happening at various fronts.

With enough rounds of tear gas and stun grenades, the police break through the barricades and shift into an offensive. The slow movement of the militants becomes a steady run. Turning their backs to the police, the rioters commit to retreat. Yet, even in the flight of exit, boutiques continue to lose their glass coverings. Black clad protesters leave the collective safety of the crowd, isolating themselves in an out-stretched vulnerability, to continue their attacks inside the shop. The boldness of these gestures in the face of such risk is dangerously seductive, as several other protesters stop in their tracks to watch the attacks. Temporarily suspended, these gawking protestors demonstrate that the attack on the commodity spectacle can itself become a spectacle, sweeping others up into the unfolding initiative. Stay too long with gaze affixed, and the spectator-protestor risks capture by police. Yet, their momentary immobility also demonstrates the power that such risky actions evoke. Don't stay at all, and the protestors-in-flight may miss the boldness of others even in retreat.

* * *

Once in flight, the riot is soon dissected, choked, and exhausted. The space of possibility has diminished to a zero point, and one no longer feels joy but seeks the relief of exit and the calm of safety. Small clusters of people split from the running crowd into the arteries of the city's side streets. Those who are unable to escape are arrested. The police seem to have re-established an old ordinary, even though bystanders remain bearing witness, as if waiting for something unexpected to occur. Walking away, the adrenaline begins to subside, and I become tired and cold, as the hard concrete returns like a forgotten memory to my feet.

Chaos—that dominant and clichéd signifier to render the riot intelligible attempts to capture the citizen's affective reaction to the event of broken things. The discourse of chaos poses a threat: a world without the state, a world devoid of order, and thus a world of unceasing violence. As Massumi writes, this threat “has the capacity to fill the present without presenting itself. Its future looming casts a present shadow, and that shadow is *fear*” (2005, 35). Figuring chaos as its outside, the state stimulates the very chaos it retroactively invokes as the reason for public management. The mobilization of ‘chaos’ as a way to render the protest-riot affectively meaningful therefore illustrates one of the many ongoing mechanisms in which the state uses technologies of affect “to manage and contain cultural anxiety and dissent” (Staiger, Cvetkovich, and Reynold 2011, 7). In this way, both state and media narratives of chaos attempt to shore up attachment to the state

security apparatus. Fear is the form of governed life in modernity and ‘chaos’ is one kind of affective infrastructure of governance.

Is ‘chaos’ then a compromised analytic? Caught within the symbolic register of these statist deployments, are affect theorists who normatively equate ‘chaos’ with potentiality destined to think and feel like a state? Or rather, can we not affirm that as a force of “destratification,” the riot will, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, “*sometimes end in chaos, the void and destruction*” and other times gesture towards a more emancipatory order (1987, 53, emphasis added). Indeed, according to Massumi’s humanistic appropriations of the science of chaos theory, this “order-out-of-chaos effect” poses salutatory possibilities for theorizing politics (2002, 224). A Massumian style of analysis of the riot, for instance, may resemble the following:

Like the application of increasing heat to a tranquil liquid, initially causing chaotic perturbations but suddenly and unexpectedly producing a Bénard stability, the riot’s destabilizing force may increase in intensity until “a threshold is reached at which order spontaneously arises out of chaos” (1992, 59). In upending state stratification, the riot throws the governed social world into a “peculiar state of indecision, where what its next state will be turns entirely unpredictable” (2002, 109). Unstable and unpredictable, “this ‘chaotic’ interlude is not the simple absence of order. It is in fact a superordered state: it is conceived as the literal co-presence of all of the possible paths the system may take” (2002, 109). A political appropriation of the science of chaos theory thus reveals that the chaotic force of the riot can break the stranglehold of the governed present, hold it in suspense, and present “an unpredictable futurity” (2002, 110). This new future may be devastating but it also may be beautiful—we cannot know before the riot begins and such are the stakes of political action. Rather than lament riotous chaos, therefore, thinking the political with and through scientific phenomenon such as the Bénard stability provides hope that a new political configuration of “structural stability [can be] achieved under conditions of extreme instability” (1992, 59). In other words, a new and brighter “order from disorder” may emerge (2002, 111).

I do not dispute the allure of such a politico-scientific analysis, nor do I contest Massumi’s laudable attempts to “poach a scientific concept” and see how humanistic thinking “will be changed by the encounter” (2002, 20). However, as Massumi readily admits, such scientific poaching “carries with it scientific affects” (2002, 20), and I worry that such affects may cast a shadow over and thus obfuscate the political affects at play. A *scientific* analysis of chaos risks short-circuiting its *political* analysis as an affectively loaded concept historically mobilized to suppress just the sort of transformative potential that this politico-scientific analysis glorifies. Any productive recovery of ‘chaos’ thus requires reckoning with this political history. Until then, the *political* affects of chaos demand a political and not scientific mode of thinking.

Consequently, it is not the riotous assembly but the police apparatus that engenders a (political) condition of chaos—the disorganization not only of the human body as a biological organism but also the political body as a collective assembling in public. These events indicate not only the analytical poverty of ‘chaos’ for understanding the multiple affects at play in a riot, but also the political poverty of ‘chaos’ as a shared affective condition bubbling with emancipatory potential. Indeed, the affective promise of the riot as a joyful event depends on the degree to which the human and political body is not rendered chaotic. The usage of ‘chaos’ as a positive (scientific) analytic normatively inverts but does not escape the symbolic logic of sovereignty.

Where the proliferation of ‘chaos’ as an affective infrastructure of governance demonstrates an understanding of “affect as capturable life potential” (Massumi 2002, 41), capture is by no means guaranteed. Affect, Sara Ahmed reminds us, “is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects,” without making these connections permanently stuck (2010, 29). The riot is one manner of unsticking affective connection by violently intervening into political assemblages. In so doing, the riot gestures at a different form of life. As political theorist Taiaiake Alfred argues, “how you fight determines who you will become when the battle is over” (2005, 23). To focus on the affective life of struggle is to take seriously the pre-figurative politics of feeling. Though fear is present, it need not dominate the riot’s emotional texture. The joy of possibility, and that possibility taken with bold initiative, is the primary political sensation that the riot promises its militant participants. And so, if fear is weaponized by the state, then joy is weaponized by the riot.

But what of fear’s closely related negative affects—rage, anger, and other ‘ugly feelings’? Indeed, discussions of anger and “black rage” have been pivotal for theorizing racialized experiences of domination, resistance, and black power militancy (Grier & Cobbs 1992; hooks 1995; McCann, 2013). It may be the case that unlike the planned riots under discussion, those that emerge from police killings of black men predominantly express rage—not simply as an immediate response to an event of state murder, but also as a re-activation and upswelling of past traces of punctual and structural events of state violence.⁶ Nonetheless, we should not discount the presence of joy even in these riotous assemblies. As some of the Baltimore teenagers who took to the internet to live-tweet the 2015 riots in response to the police murder of Freddie Gray put it: “They really beating 🇺🇸🇺🇸 police 🇺🇸 downtown, I love everything about 😂”; “Fucking shit up is one of the funnest things to do yall know that lol” (Research and Destroy 2015).⁷

Being an event of particular intensity and thus spotlighting the question of affect in politics, the riot is by no means a privileged site of political affect. Rather, as an exemplar of affective politics, the riot poses the question of how to orient political organizing around happiness, joy, and bodily sensations more generally. The political logic of sentiment and the transformative power of affect has, however, been overlooked by the Left's overemphasis on mental awareness, education, and consciousness-raising. Focusing on consciousness prior to action, on rationally re-thinking ourselves into new ways of being, misses the ways in which sensuous activity engenders new modes of thought. The riot and its accompanied affects suggest prioritizing the body and its sensations as an entry point for political organizing. To inverse the popular song from 1970s band Funkadelic (1970), we could say that emphasis on the politics of emotion teaches us a simple lesson: "Free Your Ass and Your Mind Will Follow." Thinking through the politics of affect and its aesthetic sensibilities promises to open up new possibilities for political intervention on the level of feeling, maybe helping to reconfigure forms of popular attachment away from capital and towards the commune, away from deadening party politics and towards joyful democratic life.⁸

Notes

1. For whom is the riot joyful? For all or even most of the rioters? For most of even some of the time? While I have been encouraged by the positive reception I have received from those who have previously participated in riots and read prior versions of this paper, the claim that riots tend toward joy and under what conditions they do so ultimately requires more ethnographic work to substantiate. My thanks to Chad Shomura for pushing me to clarify this point.

2. La ZAD, or Zone to Defend, describes an autonomous squatted area of wetlands, fields and forests in the French commune of Notre Dame de Landes. In 2008, the French state slated the area for the development of an airport, but in 2009 the land was occupied to oppose the project. After years of struggle, on January 17th 2018, the French prime minister cancelled the airport project, but nonetheless vowed to evict the numerous occupants of the ZAD. In April 2018, the state deployed 2,500 police backed by armoured personnel carriers and helicopters to carry out the eviction, which led to weeks of intense conflict. The eviction is said to be France's largest domestic police operation since May 1968.

3. Likewise, these 'types' of riots seem to confirm Alberto Toscano's caution, in his review of Clover's book, that: "at least in the overdeveloped and deindustrializing world that forms Clover's stage, many of the partisans of riots are not in any way fully excluded from reproduction, nor can they be properly or usefully defined as 'abject'" (Toscano 2016). In fairness to Clover, however, he does note that contemporary riots are not wholly made up of the excluded or 'abject,' but also of indebted students and other "youth discovering that the routes that once promised a minimally secure formal integration into the economy are now foreclosed" (2016, 180). Would the black bloc partisans fall into this latter category?

4. More than simply the head of the demonstration, the "cortège de tête" describes a phenomenon emerging in the 2016 "loi travail" protests, where the first line of the protest march is no longer made up of the traditional trade unions but of masked demonstrators willing to engage in militant confrontation with the police.

5. While targeting the fashion industry's store fronts may enact the more commonly voiced critique of capitalism and conformity, the singling out of "fashion" as a possible stand-in for vanity, superficiality, and aesthetics more generally appears misplaced, especially considering the seduction of the riot's own fashion aesthetics. Indeed, the preparation for these mass blocs is rarely absent the ogling and oo'ing at the military grade gas masks or the sleek leather gloves that one finds on the protest runway.

6. My thanks to Ben Anderson for this formulation.

7. Compiled by the New York city research collective Research and Destroy, *The 2015 Baltimore Uprising: A Teen Epistolary* is a collection of tweets from Baltimore teenagers who either participated in or spectated the riots that unfolded in their city. In addition to various statements of joy and copious use of the laughing-face emoji, one can also read descriptions of acts that are similarly expressive of public happiness, such as the person "dancing to Michael Jackson on top of a truck in the middle of the riot Imfao" (Research and Destroy 2015).

8. My thanks to Gregory Seigworth, Sophia Goodfriend, Vincent Millou, Chad Shomura, Ben Anderson, and the participants of the Double Binds of '68 conference held at the University of Kent, 29th -30th September 2018 for comments and criticisms on earlier drafts. My gratitude to the anonymous militants who enabled me to accompany them on their Parisian adventures.

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Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

CAPACIOUS

FOR BOREDOM: A CONCEPTUAL NETWORK OF CULTURAL OBJECTS



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Boredom is a paradox. It belongs to the object and is at the same time related to the subject. Boredom is both cultural and personal, both structural and immaterial. It can be both stultifying and inspiring. We take boredom to be part of a cultural imaginary that tells both a tale of disenchantment and enchantment. In the former, boredom expresses and produces existential resentment and makes it hard to form ethical attachments to life. In the latter, boredom is a disruption of usual habits of experience, and therefore possibly a conduit of wonder, curiosity, or some drive for *something else* or *something more*. In either case, it signifies a warping of time and a challenge to the relation of self to world. Boredom is part of a cultural mood, neither only personal nor merely trivial.

Other scholars (e.g., Goodstein 2005; Dalle Pezze & Salzani 2009) have already built an historical case about boredom as a modern phenomenon construed by 19th century artists and thinkers in terms of a ‘spiritual crisis.’ What we are doing is arguing that it’s *productive* to understand late modern boredom—what Sharday has

called “overload boredom”—as a spiritual crisis (Mosurinjohn 2016; Mosurinjohn forthcoming¹). It may not seem obvious that the spiritual is related to boredom, so let us make that case. By ‘spiritual,’ we mean essentially, ‘existential,’ as in something bearing on the nature of the world and the significance of human and other beings in it. But because the category of the spiritual is so intimately related to the category of religion, what the word ‘spiritual’ does better than either ‘existential’ or ‘ontological’ is conjure up the whole set of debates and social processes around the demises, rises, and different guises of religion as a guarantor of order, meaning, and ends. In the standard history of boredom as an idea, it has always been a spiritual problem. The concept has religious roots from the early Christian monks who suffered, alone in the desert, from *acedia*. *Acedia* was a sinful feeling personified as “the demon of noonday,” who sapped the monks’ will to meditate, and even to live. There is a whole history of boredom as a dimension of religious and spiritual traditions (Raposa 1999) as well as a psychological function of any surfeit of solitude or sameness.

Today, there are huge demographic shifts away from traditional religions. The movement is toward all manner of spiritual innovations that nurture the subjective life: Spiritual But Not Religious; New Age; and many forms un-labeled. Crucially, ‘spirituality’ turns away at every opportunity to settle its own category because its ethos is precisely nonconformist, subjective, and fed by its ‘freedom-froms.’ This gives firmer historical grounding to the widespread sociological observation that, today, spirituality is usually associated with matters of fundamental selfhood, meaning in life, and connection with others (see Bender & McRoberts 2012; Heelas & Woodhead 2005), and of course with the concept of religion, on which it depends as a “semantically parasitic” category (Fitzgerald 2007, 54).

To be clear, we are not proposing that boredom is the cause of spiritual seeking. Rather, we note boredom as an affective counterpoint to all of these social strains that are sometimes louder, sometimes quieter in the mix at any given moment. But then there is boredom in its uniquely modern mode.

Overload boredom

If we’re being precise, “boredom” per se, as an English word, only came into the language around the time of the Industrial Revolution. The word came about to name a feeling that intensified with the repetitive monotony of factory line labour,

but also with the democratization of leisure made possible by the Industrial Revolution. Along with these, there was the democratization of existential skepticism made possible by the Enlightenment, plus a reservoir of Romantic melancholy to lament it all. Thus was born “the rhetoric of reflection” (Goodstein 2005, 98–99), a forerunner of contemporary therapeutic culture, ready to root in liberal individual subjectivity. At the same time, there was a reordering of temporality around the idea of historical progress promised by industrial material changes, as well as institutions, principles, and policies informed by democracy, liberalism, and nationalism. The affect of modern boredom incorporated the moral burden of ensuring that progress. That is, boredom registered resignation to the futility of the individual trying to arrange all their time in a way equal to the juggernaut task of contemporary life.

Talking of existentially inflected boredom isn’t so much in fashion these days. The word is more likely to evoke the stakes of a kid trapped inside on a rainy day or an office worker suffering through a long meeting. Yet loud echoes of industrial-era problems inflect the rhythm and speed of experience in late modern life. What was then characterized as a “time of endless ‘nows” (Lefebvre qtd. in Gardiner 2012, 44) still comprises both discordant registers of instantaneously fast and draggingly slow.

Boredom in its late modern mode is intensified by the impact of digitization, especially social media and information media. This “overload” boredom is what comes not from too little stimulation, but by too much—information, connectivity, choice. In this overabundance of content, though, there is correspondingly an affective, aesthetic, and ethical paucity. That is, we can think of overload as a cultural condition for what Steven Tipton (2002) has called the “multiplication of moral ideals” that “accounts for the apparently inconsistent and self-contradictory cosmologies modern individuals hold simultaneously” (33). On one hand, this multiplication of worldviews and viewpoints renders any given one less plausible. On the other hand, the speed at which the multiplication happens through always-on communication media means that there is no longer any languid asynchrony to process these inputs, unlike what the early Internet afforded with its bulletin board systems and chat rooms. Instead, there is a constant state of emergency—what Douglas Rushkoff (2013) calls “present shock”—borne of trying to keep up with everything happening in a perennial “now.” Increasing the volume of content does not therefore straightforwardly increase the resources with which lives can find their worldly orientations; instead, sheer abundance and speed can be disorienting.

More than ever before, individuals have to bear the responsibility of meaning-making. They are like independent contractors sourcing the key parts of an orienting story about the nature of human beings in the world. And more than ever before, people *expect life to be interesting* in the sense of being personally meaningful. The tool par excellence for doing so is choice. Instead of tradition and other shared plausibility structures, a raft of productivity hacks is what's on offer to navigate toward something that might add up to a life. Melissa Gregg calls this productivity's vacuous post-secularism. Speaking of productivity and time-management apps, she writes:

The labor of time management is a recursive distraction that has postponed the need to identify a worthwhile basis for work as a source of spiritual fulfilment ... Productivity pivots on the belief that right actions will liberate an extraordinary class of worker from the concerns of this world (96–8).

Productivity is spiritually vacuous insofar as ignores labor politics by personalizing work limits and insofar as it ignores how the power of personal choice is sharply curtailed by the mundane fact that there's only so much time in a day and in a life.

The overabundance of both information and choice makes each disempowering. Too many choices and too little time prevents us from demonstrating to ourselves that we are making enough of the right choices to feel in control of our lives. Too much information fails to inform, rewarding the pursuit of clarity with meaningless noise. The energy required to manage this overload is great. Yet we punch out of this cognitive and affective labour at the peril of our own life prospects. The strain of relating self to world under these conditions is what we name “overload boredom.”

The key feature of overload boredom is that it makes us withdraw from engaging the very problems that cause it, making it even harder to recognize as an already elusive thing. Overload boredom is a problem of meaning in a dual sense. There is boredom as the forestalling of experiential presence in the world, a symptom of spiritual (or existential) malaise. Rather than being tied to any given era, this is boredom as a creative function of the human will. Then, in the historical present, there is the failure to make sense of information—the overload component of contemporary boredom.

Materializing overload boredom

In Fall 2017, we (Sharday Mosurinjohn and Nelly Matorina) started a website called *For Boredom* (<http://forboredom.com>). It features a curated set of excerpts of works, dated from the year 2000, in a variety of media (text, drawing, film, etc.). All of them have something to do with the concept of boredom. The three concepts that *For Boredom* is organized around are, therefore, boredom, spiritual(ity), and information. Since their medium must be transformed somehow to exist in a website format, we have made choices in each instance about how to do this—for example, a set of screen grabs from a video, a detail of a drawing, a page of a long poem. These digital representations become the ‘objects’ that *For Boredom* works with. The way these objects are arranged owes to the functionality of three pieces of software: Wordpress blog, Hypothes.is annotation plug-in, and InfraNodus text network visualizer. These tools enable us to add new objects continuously, and they enable visitors to: visually compare objects, annotate objects, search objects’ textual elements, and visualize all of the website’s text as a network.

For Boredom’s proposition is that we might materialize the ephemera of overload boredom in order to sustain reflection on it. Its method is neither traditional literary criticism, nor discourse analysis, nor genealogy. We might call it a curatorial analytics, a blending of aesthetics (i.e. having to do with art, but also with sensation in the broadest sense) and informatics (the interaction between the information systems and the user, as well as the construction of the interfaces between the two). On the site, works appear in fragments so that they are amenable to annotation. They are allowed to outgrow their taxonomies in order to jostle alongside diverse media and genres. This way, the site can be infinitely and collaboratively expandable, and increasingly dense and synthetic, owing to the functions of searching and hyperlinking.² But it also aims to deal with overload by putting parameters around it.

In some sense, these parameters perform a fairly standard curatorial function. They select a subset of objects from an open set. But our interest lies in the interplay of enabling constraints of the site’s software, of the artworks (e.g. their genre, medium, length, etc.), and the user’s interpretive agency. If the cultural present is “awash in a sea of private languages” (Foster 1985, xiv), then *For Boredom* seeks a lingua franca by creating hyperlink relationships between manifold

excerpts and offering the concept of “overload boredom” as a cipher for apparently disparate elements of contemporary culture. Into the conversation, “overload boredom” invites its correlated social horizons: the information age and the spiritual turn.

Ours is an aesthetic strategy that might resist the logics of overload culture. It aims at, but cannot promise, a new narrative through which we can locate ourselves historically. We are “for boredom” in the sense that we advocate for the critical potential of “overload boredom” as a concept and as an affect that forces reflectiveness about the conditions of contemporary boredom and how it feels.

What do Networks Want? The Real?

When surveying the language arranged by the text visualizer InfraNodus, we found that terms like “spiritual” or “spirituality” are actually rare in our network. Instead, there are allusions through broader concepts like “meaning-making,” “the existential,” “ontological significance,” among others. This automated aversion to using particular key terms yields thesaurus-like chains of proxies. While these connections form, connections between conventionally related terms like “god”

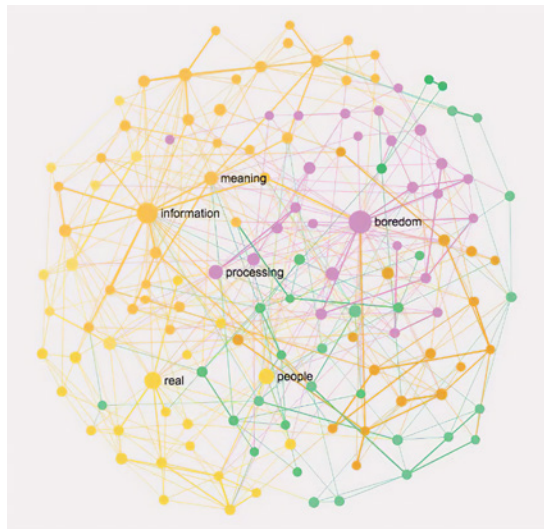


Figure 3. InfraNodus annotation network as a whole. Captured September 3, 2018. Maximum number of nodes set to 150.

and “prayer” and “spiritual” break. Admittedly, while InfraNodus is unbiased by the same catchword associations with which we are culturally imbued, inevitably we have planted some of what we expect to reap. That is, some constantly fluctuating proportion of textual relations belongs to the objects and the other to us.

Because InfraNodus has a rule that nodes can be deleted but connections between nodes cannot, connections (or lack thereof) can only be generated by the text itself. Yet InfraNodus does allow users to manually connect terms that didn't appear connected in the eyes of the algorithm. For instance, we connected: “bored” to “boredom”; “spiritual” to “prayer”; “prayer” to “search” (eg. typing into search engines but also “seeking” as in “i feel better after i type to you”). Nonetheless, these breaks help us see how conventionally religious categories can be useful as analytic categories, much as Gordon Lynch (2012) has done with his cultural interpretation of “the sacred” as denoting what is morally good in social life. This is valuable because it challenges us to ask how different cultural forms of the sacred, or of the spiritual, or of the divine, arise and influence social life. It is also valuable because it asks us to take seriously the way a variety of discourses manifest desires for enchantment and supra-empirical frameworks of meaning, even when they are outside of religious traditions. But just as the network breaks conventional discursive frames of reference, it also suggests that we consider new discursive conjunctions.

Among InfraNodus' analytics is a function called ‘Questions to Ask,’ which finds “gaps” in the network where connections are sparse, pushing us to explore how these concepts are related. Our response, in turn, immediately changes the network's shape. Two questions the network asked was: what is the “real,” and what is its relation with the conceptual trio boredom-spirituality-information?

Canvassing the annotations containing the “real,” one pervasive construal of the real is as a state. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the real is the state of nature from which we have been severed by our entrance into language. It erupts, however, whenever we are forced to confront the affective materiality of our existence, as with needs and drives for hunger, sex, and sleep. The psychoanalyst Adam Phillips invokes the real in the context of the death drive: if people are beings tending toward death, not in a masochistic way, but just that they “are simply dying in their own fashion”—“to describe someone as self-destructive is to assume a knowledge of what is good for them, an omniscient knowledge of

the ‘real’ logic of their lives” (2000, 81, cf. 77). Elsewhere, Mark C. Taylor (2013) describes the thought of the real as synonymous with the concept of “god” with respect to the *origin, the absolute* (4-5):

Within religious traditions West and East, God, the gods, and the sacred do not always bring light, certainty, and security; all too often they disrupt ... human life. Their “heirs” are writers and philosophers for whom the real, however it is conceived, is other, wholly other ... [and] must be approached indirectly in works that artfully figure what eludes precise language, clear concepts, and transparent images (5).

This real is a speculative real, synonymous with the provisional, not devotional, ‘god’ of the philosophers. It urges us not to overlook the spiritual preoccupations wrapped up in the making of apparently secular culture.

A second set of meanings of the real emerged in our network around the pairing of ‘real’ with the concepts of ‘pattern’ and ‘noise.’ Taylor goes on to state that our contemporary task is to “sort through the historical and cultural debris of the latter half of the twentieth century in the hope of finding patterns where there seems to be nothing but noise” (196). It seems the real bounces between extremes of the bodily and the ineffable. In its immaterial mode, the real is full of patterns (conducive to meaning) that are disguised as noise (conducive to boredom). When material, it shows up as noise disguised as patterns. An object from our original set, Simon Morris’ *Re-writing Freud*, suggests a way of interpreting the significance in this relation. *Re-writing Freud* runs the text of *Interpretation of Dreams* through a program that selects one word at a time to reconstruct an entirely new “book.” As Morris puts it, “[w]hen one word is placed next to another, meaning is suggested, and even though the syntactical certainty of Freud’s sentences have been ruptured by the aleatory process, flashes of meaning persist, haunting the text” (qtd. in Dworkin & Goldsmith 2011, 448).

This has led us to think of the real as haunting our network, causing elements of images, footnotes, annotations, titles, references, and the like, to variously come forward and recede as ‘real’ or fabricated, primary or secondary, pattern or noise. In his 1986 *Overload and Boredom*, Orrin E. Klapp wrote, “meaning and interest are found mostly in the mid-range between extremes of redundancy and variety—these extremes being called, respectively, banality and noise” (2). Redundancy is repetition of the same, which creates a condition of insufficient difference, while noise is the chaos of non-referentiality, or entropy. In a way, these extremes

collapse into each other, in that both can be viewed “as a loss of potential ... for a certain line of action at least” (Klapp 1986, 3). The line of potential, then, that *For Boredom* sustains amid the stabilizing pressure of its force graph is along the chains of proxies for our central concepts all the way to the ‘real.’

In a way, this “return of the real” (*c.f.*, Foster 1996) describes what the website is trying to do: to turn the focus away from the singular nature of the artwork itself to the context housing it in order to creatively analyze the limitations of “unreal”—digital, symbolic, evanescent—culture. This is about getting in touch with the existential core of the overload problem, the maddening contingency of flash-in-the-pan media spectacles as they circulate and multiply, copy-pasting over the possibility of narrative, crowding out any thought of the future in service of immediacy. At the same time, it is also forces some reflection about the intransigence of media, when, for instance, each visual and time-based object has to be translated into a text-image hybrid in order to annotate. Meanwhile, at the conceptual level the emergence of the real directs our comparative focus beyond the boredom-spirituality-information triad, to a psychoanalytic concept for whatever is accessible to first-person awareness behind phenomenal appearances.

The emergence of the real raises the question: what is the form of presence and reality to ground this moment? What algorithms should we run to detect the “patterns that look like noise”? The network yields no determinate answers, but certain kinds of invitations to make culture. This analytics is one of surprise, being to culture something like tarot cards are to a psyche: a heuristic device for reflection—guided, but not systematic. Or, to switch from a divinatory to a medical metaphor: even if boredom is experience without qualities (anaesthetized experience), it leaves traces just as surgery under anaesthetic leaves psychosomatic traces even though not consciously registered. *For Boredom* pursues these traces in order to visually realize an expanding picture of the informational conditions that seek to conceal themselves in experiential deficit.

How can we put technologies in their right place? Instead of training our attention to expand ever more with the demands of these technologies, we might instead embrace the winnowing powers of attention to tailor what’s too fast and too much to human size. All *For Boredom* can do is model this winnowing. Its form embodies the act of circumscribing (via curatorial algorithm) some area of the mediascape populated by objects already invested with focused attention. Rather than accelerating and disintegrating experiences in the network, our time spent in close reading, and annotation (re)calibrates the affective tonality throughout the network and across its objects.

Endnotes

1. Mosurinjohn, S. (forthcoming) is a book (tentatively titled *Overload Boredom: Religion, Dis/Affect, and Late Modern Meaning*, McGill-Queen's University Press) that the website, *For Boredom*, is a companion project to. The book takes a more traditional scholarly format to advance analytical arguments, often with aesthetic objects as touchstones. The website experiments with an aesthetic-affective mode of engagement with the "overload boredom-as-spiritual-crisis" heuristic by enabling a certain kind of close reading.

2. We based *For Boredom* loosely on the model of UbuWeb, an archive of avant-garde multimedia artworks shared freely online. UbuWeb is like "a library which is ever-expanding in uncanny—and often uncategorizable—directions....The future is eminently scalable" (Goldsmith 2011). However, our own site is not so bold in terms of radical distribution (as we consult with our university copyright office and seek artists' permissions) or gift economics (with university web hosting unavailable, we secure hosting with grant monies).

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Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

ANARCHIVAL SCRIPTS



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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a series of experiments performed at conferences, seminars, and in the classroom, where I as a speaker invited the audience to modulate the course of the talk by editing, commenting, adding to, and deleting the prepared manuscript in real-time. One aspect of these experiments was to play with the affective relation between speaker, audience, and technological support to see what would happen when an audience is empowered to manipulate an exposed body at their own will. Another aspect was to experiment with a reflexive capture of memory traces that might encompass more of a situation's dynamic form than traditional documentation. These experiments work to inform speculations on the potential for real-time interfaces to facilitate ways of collectively inhabiting the affective passage from the privacy of the body to publicly accessible form. The paper takes its point of departure in the prevalence of mobile digital devices that allow for an affective attunement to the diverse speeds, rhythms, and flows of information of the Internet. Rather than simply regarding this distributed presence as disengaging, the paper explores what new possibilities for thinking together and attuning to each other that is enabled through the intensively extended attention span enabled by digitally networked technologies. The notion of the *anarchive* creates a leeway for working experimentally and conceptually with the excess (of memory, affects, belief and desires) that is produced when sharing and remembering through technological means. Beyond the archive's conservative ordering of memory, the paper explores the potential for authoritarian rupture and collective thought enabled by the anarchival slips, spillages and mutations of memory in real-time signal transmissions. It is argued that the real-time modulation of the manuscripts in the experiments becomes immediate transcripts of the situation's dynamic form which might enable an interfacial materialization of a common ground.

KEYWORDS

anarchive, real-time, signaletic material, modulation, collectivity

[Last edit was made on 20 January 2016 by anonymous].¹ As I continue to present the outcomes of previous research endeavours, scrolling-talking through the digital manuscript, a new image appears on the screen. A photograph, unknown to me, is inserted into the manuscript, screaming for attention. Puzzled, I look up and scan the room for signals that might help decipher what seems to be some kind of message (“LOOK AT THIS!”), only to find expressionless faces drawn in by the gloomy light of a calm sea of half-eaten apples. Confusion. I recognise no immediate link between the prepared manuscript and the newly incorporated photograph. And so, I put my faith in the following section of the manuscript to steer the talk back on track. Time extends. Anxiety. The warm feeling of blood shooting through my veins. What was my point? I know there is a connection! I stutter a bit while slowly making a return to the original course of the pre-scripted talk. The unforeseen disruption still echoes with me, signalling a gap in my storyline as I continue the talk.

Above is an anecdote from a series of experimental presentations of research at conferences, seminars, and in the classroom, where the audience were invited to collaboratively edit the supporting manuscript in real-time. For this purpose, a Google Docs document functioned as both memory support tool (manuscript) and presentation media; the document was made publicly accessible, the URL shortened and made visible for the audience via the projected screen. At the beginning of a talk, the audience were invited to participate in an ongoing making of the talk by adding, editing, or deleting content in the manuscript. The anecdote serves as an initial example of an autoethnographic exploration of the precarious position of orally presenting research outcomes assisted by digital memory support tools. Prior to such encounters between a speaker, a technological memory support, and an audience, a careful selection of archived data takes place in order to structure the narrative for the audience, thereby prioritizing certain memories over others and ‘scripting’ the talk in advance.

During the talk, the speaker is enmeshed in a twofold affective relation with the audience and with the technological memory support. Both audience and memory support amplify or diminish the speaker’s capacity to think and act in various ways in the situation by re-conditioning the pre-scripted talk: the almost mandatory hassle with setting-up computers and projectors; an occasional cough from the audience; the vibration of an incoming phone call; too small lettering in the manuscript to read; people coming and going; stuttering or speed-talking under the pressure to perform; low battery; etc. All such social and technical factors re-configure the virtual potential for what can be said and done in the situation.

This paper plays with the notion of ‘script’ as “something written” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary). The notion of script very much relates to the notion of the archive and its authoritative transfer of something or someone into a particular order (e.g. the narrative of a ‘manuscript’ or the military enrolment of a ‘conscript’). Today, the somewhat static meaning of script as a noun has been picked up and repurposed in computational areas to denote the dynamic execution of automated tasks in programmed operations of software and web pages. Working with the idea of *anarchival scripts*, this paper will argue for a break with ‘prescriptive’ ordering of things (social, computational, temporal, etc.) and explore a constructive middle ground between manual and automatic modes of production: between order and disorder.

The Signaletic Materiality of Real-Time

While the following presents insights from a series of experiments, it is not the experiments themselves that are the focal point of this paper. Instead, the experiments have worked to inspire and inform speculations on the potential for real-time technology to record and support collective ways of thinking together. In this regard, the paper explores the potentiality embedded in what Gilles Deleuze terms the “signaletic material” that he uses in relation to cinema, and electronic and digital media to underscore the inclusion of “all kinds of modulation features, sensory (visual and sound), kinetic, intensive, affective, rhythmic, tonal, and even verbal (oral and written)”. Deleuze (1989) further describes the signaletic material as a plastic and dynamic mass, which “is not an enunciation, and these are not utterances. It is an *utterable*” (italics original, 29). Picking up on this proposition to depart from a reading of the electronic and digital image as sign, Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen (2012) argues that the signaletic material “became present on the surface of the video-screen as electronic lines and dots, leading neither to a representation of time nor space but to a *becoming of time itself* in the live signal and further to time as the dominant vector of digital variation, even within the production of images” (italics added, 3). Following this line of thought, this paper re-contextualises Jacques Derrida’s (1995) notion of archival “consignation” (i.e. the act of archiving) as a dynamic process of “*gathering together signs*” (italics in original, 3) in contemporary real-time signal transmissions. The notion of an interface is central in this regard as an operative surface on which signals dynamically gather and modulate the flow of information, thereby substituting the emphasis on signs for signals.

This paper argues that the prevalence of real-time interfaces has amplified the slips, spillages, and mutations of memory occurring in information transmissions. Under the rubric of the *anarchive*, the paper explores the potential for real-time interfaces to

facilitate a “gathering together of signals” that produce and modulate a temporary common ground. The anarchival is understood as those memories, feelings, and affects that are in excess of the authoritative selection and ordering of memory for the archive. The anarchival will provide a conceptual entry point for understanding the new possibilities enabled by real-time networked technologies. I argue that real-time technology holds the potential to both render the flow of information visible in its temporal becoming, and to also facilitate an immediate inscription of the signaletic material into the records. This modulating inscription thereby allows one to consider the excess of affects, memories, and values present in real-time interface events, and to imagine new ways of thinking together and attuning to the forces that condition how communication can occur in network cultures. My approach is thus akin to Lisa Blackman’s (2019a) inquiry into “haunted data” as a way of attending to and re-activating the gaps, absences, and contradictions that return to haunt a statement (in this case a scientific paper) after its publication in the digital sphere. Blackman illustrates how statements survive and are transformed across different digital platforms and in an entanglement of multiple temporalities. She argues that digital platforms tend to support and further a statement’s claim to truth through their hierarchichal structuring of data. As an alternative to such foreclosing of potential truths and speculations, Blackman therefore calls for the development of “collective apparatuses and modes of storytelling, which might allow for new relations of association to take form and attract attention” (ibid 49). Where Blackman’s hauntological approach engages with the resurrection of potential “traces, deferrals, absences, gaps and their movements within a particular corpus of data”, (ibid 49) in their afterlife, the anarchival approach in this paper engages such potential in *real-time*.

Networked Modulation of Memory

The exploration taps into the transformation from analogue print culture to digital network culture, where paper and pencil have, mostly, been replaced by smartphones and laptops with real-time connection to multiple sources of information. In the context of this paper, an interesting problematic has surfaced with the prevalence of individualized devices, where the attention of an audience in class, at conferences, etc. often attunes to the rhythms of the hyperlinked Internet, shifting back and forth between corporeal and incorporeal, analogue and digital, flows of information. Anna Munster (2006) describes how digital technologies

allow for bodies to extend beyond their corporeal boundaries, which comprises, “an intensive capacity for being affected by the diverse speeds, rhythms and flows of information” (19). So, rather than critically regarding such shifting attention as disengaging, this paper explores how the co-presence of multiple extended corporealities distributed across time and space weave together and open up new potential for other sources of knowledge to fold into the situation.

In general, this potential distribution of attention in time and space has made profound changes in how memory is preserved and can be accessed and mobilized, and thus how identities are formed and transformed (as individuals, groups, societies, etc.). Increases in automation and connectivity of omnipresent devices enable us to participate—knowingly and unknowingly—like never before in the production of social memory through an endless performative recording, mapping, tracing, and sharing of our “dividual” (Deleuze 1992) bodies, activities, and relations. The consumer/producer dichotomy is increasingly replaced by “producers” (Bruns 2007), who continuously participate in real-time making and interpretation of the dynamic and abundant flows of information circulating online. The formation and transformation of social memory is thus intrinsically connected to the values embedded in the algorithmic processing of transnational corporations such as Google, Amazon, and Facebook functioning as contemporary “guardians of the archive” (cf. Derrida 1995). Enabled by a “technical option of immediate feedback, turning all present data into archival entries and vice versa” (Ernst 2013, 98), historical representation has been replaced by real-time *modulation*, often associated with control societies (Deleuze 1992; Galloway 2004; Rouvroy 2012; Chun 2016). This real-time modulation of information thus breaks with the narratives of historical linearity and affectively reconfigure how events are shared and remembered. According to Richard Grusin (2010), events are also often “pre-mediated,” which means that future situations are technologically anticipated through probabilistic processing of small and big data to a degree where their actualization are affectively *pre-scripted*. In a sense, the future becomes archival, while memories of the past become the result of real-time processing.

However important these critical stances may be towards the production of social memory in contemporary network culture, social control need not be the only end to the imaginaries derived from the concept of modulation, as argued by Yuk Hui (2015): “[f]or if modulation is identified with control societies today, then the task for those who wish to find ways to supersede existing forms of social control will be to invent new forms of modulation that are not limited to them or by them” (88). Hui (2015) recovers the notion of modulation from being a determin-

ing characteristic of control societies to also encompass “the field of possibilities opened up by contemporary digital culture” (79). Hui does so by resituating the concept within Gilbert Simondon’s (2009) ontogenetic philosophy in order to resist the reductive ontology of hylomorphic thought. According to Simondon, modulation is to be thought in relation to processes of amplification, where a charge may trigger changes in a system (technical, social, societal, etc.). Individuation is seen as a process of relational *becoming* with the immediately inhabited environments, which thereby breaks with the binary separation of being and world, form and matter, interiority and exteriority found in hylomorphic thought.

This paper takes up the challenge posed by Hui of inventing new techniques of modulation that might resist and circumvent social control. I propose to affirm and engage with what has traditionally been treated as ‘noise’ in communication, and I argue that such affirmative engagement might provide an interface through which authoritarian rupture and collective thinking is simultaneously supported and recorded. Hence, the aim is to explore some means of infusing the archive’s reductive capture and representation of memory with the anarchival’s excessive production of counter-memories. In other words, this paper explores the potential for real-time interfaces to facilitate a reciprocal production and tracing of a networked excess of memory, affects, and values that reconfigure how a situation is perceived—in its immediacy and in retrospect. A question emerging from this is: what new possibilities for thinking together and attuning to each other is enabled through the intensively extended attention span facilitated by digital technologies?

From Retrospective Documentation to Immediate Transcripts

The paper is based on insights and experiences from five ‘in the wild’ experiments staged in various academic settings (conferences, seminars, and a classroom) in the context of knowledge dissemination. The experiments took place over the course of 1.5 years, and the number of the audience/participants ranged between approximately 10–100 people. The experiments consisted in an open invitation for the audience to participate in real-time transformation of the (sole) prepared manuscript, thereby potentially interfering in the course of the presentation. The manuscript was projected onto a big screen so that it simultaneously functioned as my memory support and presentation media for the audience. The normally

private manuscript and the public multimedia presentation were thus merged into one and the same thing. The shortened URL needed to access the online manuscript in Google Docs was likewise projected so people in the audience could access the document at any time during the talk.

The semi-publicly accessible manuscripts allowed for comments, questions, provocations, suggestions, and greetings to fold into the immediacy of the talks (semi-public since only people with the correct URL had, and still have, access). This exposed my presentations to a wide array of real-time modulations. The interventions ranged from changes in font type, size and colour, over pasted pictures and quotes, to rearranging and editing (strangely enough never deleting) content. Even a meta-hyperlink redirecting back to the very same manuscript found its way in. Some participants made alterations and suggestions directly in the manuscript, some made use of the suggestion tool to add comments in the margins of the document, while others seemingly refrained from intervening at all. Through real-time modulation, these altered manuscripts thus transformed into *transcripts* of the situation's dynamic form, moving beyond documentary representation to include what might otherwise be treated as the 'noise' of a situation. As such, the manuscripts serve as memory traces, and in conjunction with the affective experience of positioning my own body in the middle of this interfacial encounter, they worked to trigger reminiscent experiential qualities of the situations. The experiments can thereby be regarded as anarchival techniques aimed at troubling documentation's limiting capture of an event's excessive potential and the archive's authoritative ordering of memory.

The five manuscripts—edited by participants in real-time—thereby make up the empirical foundation for inquiring into the intensified relation between speaker, technology, and audience. Since the dataset only consists of five experiments with no standardized method of collecting and analysing the data, I do not argue that any generalizable claims can be made on the basis of this experimental study. The experiments rather act to provoke thoughts and support speculations on the potential for academics and creative practitioners to understand and engage with the signalitic material's dynamic form. In addition to this technical aspect, the experiments also explored what happens to the social order when an audience is allowed to interfere with a scripted and normative situation by indirectly objecting, correcting, and supporting the data and viewpoints expressed from the authoritative yet precarious position of an academic speaker. What, or rather whose, memories are privileged over others' when a group is invited to assist in the real-time modulation of a scripted situation?

“Do you have a copy?”

[Last edit was made on 1 July 2017 by anonymous]. “Yes, I have a copy,” I think when the question appears in the manuscript, “Or do I?” I suddenly find myself in doubt whether or not I will be able to restore the original manuscript, or at least parts of it, if someone decided to press cmd+a and hit the delete button. Of course, I can just hit cmd+z—right? Remembering that I actually never did test out this possible turn of events (that would be cheating), I decide to ignore what might be a precursor to potential catastrophe and resume the talk. Again, the question appears. This time I can hardly ignore it, since it is written in continuation of a quote I am reading out loud. “Yes, I have a copy,” I say out loud, comfortably knowing I am nearing the end of the manuscript anyway. I wonder what will happens when the manuscript is wiped clean. Nothing happens. I round off the talk.

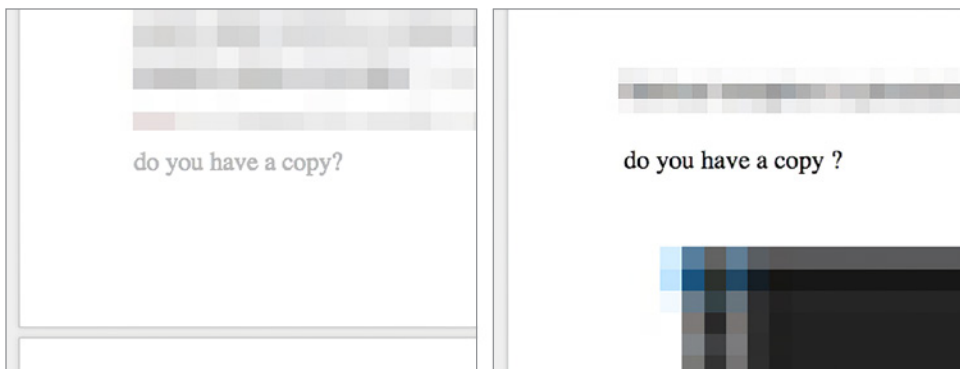


Figure 1. Screenshots of the same question posed twice in the same manuscript. The surrounding content has been blurred for focus.

Had I been able to abstract myself from the pressure of performing, I would likely have been able to remember that Google Docs automatically saves a copy of the document whenever substantial changes are made (you can always rely on Google to safeguard your data), and that any particular version can easily be restored by browsing a detailed version history. In fact, one of the key ingredients in the paradigmatic shift from analogue print culture to digital network culture is that the idea of an ‘original’ document and its archival repository must be rethought. No longer conditioned by the limitations in space and time of analogue materiality, all digital material has the potential to mutate, to multiply, and to partake in synergetic media ecologies. According to Wolfgang Ernst (2013), the

read-only paradigm of static, documentary stills has thus been replaced by a read/write paradigm of algorithmic dynamics, where each move to access information is immediately followed by an execution of code that reassembles the file anew. Thereby, “the emphasis in the digital archive shifts to *regeneration*, (co-)produced by online users *for their own needs*” (Ernst 2013, 95, italics added). The notion of an archive is diluted as it is shot through with change, where signals perpetually modulate how information is composed and received, thus making the digital archival an ‘archive in motion’ (Røssaak 2010). So, the logic implied in the question “do you have a copy?” is really a remnant of the print culture. Do I have a copy? No. But Google most certainly does.

A trait of this unruly nature is exemplified in what has popularly become known as the “Streisand Effect” (also “Hydra Effect”). An aerial photograph of the coastline mansion of American singer and actor Barbra Streisand received massive public awareness and an increase in downloads, when Streisand in 2003 filed a \$50 million lawsuit to remove the photograph from a publicly accessible database of research on coastal erosion. This effect indicates that every act to suppress memory from the ever-expanding archives of the Internet has the paradoxical tendency to amplify the very same thing that it set out to remove (the Hydra’s head multiplies when cut off). Today, an example of the ugliness of this regenerative capacity reveals itself when copies of intimate imagery (e.g. nudes and sexual assaults) enter into circulation on online platforms and devices, and out of the hands (both metaphorically and legally) of the violated individual(s).

Anarchival Amplification

Recent years have shown an increased awareness on a “right to be forgotten,” which emphasize the political implications of archivization in the production of social memory today. The right to be forgotten is a complex and controversial matter: on the one hand, it may prevent recurring individual stigmatization caused by involuntary distribution of personal information. On the other hand, it may restrict the freedom of expression and effectuate a rewriting and negation of history. In the European Union these discussions have materialized through the 2018 implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). According to Derrida (1995) archivization is a co-constitutive process of remembering and forgetting, in which archival preservation of memory is underscored by a “violence of forgetting, *superrepression* (suppression and repression), the anarchival” (79, italics in original). A selection of what to include and what to

exclude must take place in order to avoid informational overload. Some memories are thus preserved for future recollection while others are consigned to oblivion. The anarchival can be understood as that which is in excess in the selective act of archiving or in encounters with archived material, the excess of memory, and of affects, desires, and beliefs. It is the surplus value of the archive, which enables the future to become more than the homogeneous narrative of the archive.

While it might seem like the capture-all logic of the contemporary 'global village' means that nothing is forgotten, the opposite is probably more accurate from a technical perspective: the archives of digital network cultures are always in the process of forgetting, but they do so in a productive manner. Every reading of information comprises a simultaneous writing somewhere else, where information is made readily available, while the activity of accessing this information is logged for future use (e.g. caching search history). One can even say that in the land of permanent updates, activity is made king following the abdication of content; or in other words, data about data (i.e. metadata) produced through signal transmissions in online interactions hold higher value than the signs perceived in the data itself (e.g. interactions surrounding a picture, such as downloads or shares, is more interesting than the picture itself). Every piece of information is composed anew, which accentuates "time as the dominant vector of digital variation" (Thomsen 2012, 3) and modulation as the process through which we make sense in network cultures.

While analogue media are conditioned by a spatiotemporal reality of continuous progression (one roll of film in one place decaying little by little), the regenerative capacity makes digital media discontinuous (multiple copies of film perpetually regenerated and accessible from multiple places). Real-time networked technologies thus multiply the potential number of sources that can modulate what Derrida (1995) articulates as the, "institutional passage from private to public" (2) of the archival machinery. The transformation from the privacy of the body to publicly accessible form is thus effectuated in a passage through an interface of some sort (electronic, digital, architectonic) that guides how the archival entry takes form and place. The possibility in distributed networks for an *n*th number of individuals (human and machinic) to co-inhabit the passage means that communication in digital networks is in no way linear but multilinear and consists of multiple temporalities with their own speeds and rhythms. Through the interface, these temporalities are drawn together in real-time, which introduces a

“liveness” (Auslander 2012) to human–computer interactions. To a large degree, this feeling of liveness makes the passage “from private to public,” a two-way operation in which an archiving body can immediately and continuously (re-)position itself in relation to the archiving apparatus (e.g. using a smartphone’s front camera to take a selfie). According to Anna Munster (2006), this interfacial operation is fundamentally affective, where “affect slips in and inhabits the passage between sensing and rendering. Affect arises relationally and is produced out of the difference between being in the body and representing/mapping the body from the outside” (142). Digital processing has reduced the interval between bodily sensation and computational rendering to what seems like ‘real-time’. This acceleration thereby reduces response time and leaves (virtually) no time for the experiential process of filtering and processing sensory input. In effect, experience is increasingly shaped by the immediacy of real-time processing, which means that habit and affective states tend to dominate how we produce and receive information (e.g. on social media).


In the experiments presented in this paper, the audiences were able to observe how cursors of various colors moved around in the manuscript and made changes in real-time. This infused the manuscript with a certain feeling of (a)liveness, as multiple flashing cursors crawled through the document (see fig. 4). Depending of their relative positioning to my progress in the talk, some of the renderings performed on the manuscript also influenced my composure and my reading of the manuscript, and thereby also the talk. An immediate and intensified triangulation could thereby take place between the speaker (me), the audience, and the manuscript. Here, the manuscript (*im*)mediated a continuous repositioning of both audience and myself in relation to the manuscript and each other. Some members of the audiences reported a feeling of transgressing an interpersonal threshold, since they—as peers or students—could relate to the precarious position I was in as a speaker. This accentuates the transindividual nature of affect as the experiments become more than simple interactions with an interface. Instead, the experiments leave room for what Brian Massumi calls “*immediation, immediately lived relation*” (2011, 73) as an intensive experience of the situation’s dynamic form.

What I initially wanted to explore—the potential for through the experiments as a form of collective thinking that cuts across lines of thought—turned out to be subsidiary to how the experiments amplified a feeling of extending beyond the corporeal boundaries of one’s own body. Many of the thoughts, feelings, and affects that emerged in the situation may not have been expressed and recorded

in the manuscript. In this sense, these unspoken impressions remain virtual traces that linger in the individual member of the audience that may or may not produce new understandings and orientations. Still the question remains: how might this virtual excess be activated? Although the experiments did not provide answers to this question, they did however, reveal how interfaces may underscore a trans-individual feeling with a situation by gathering (a)live signals (i.e. participants) in real-time.

Engaging an Anonymous Badger

[Last edit was made on 4 February 2017 by anonymous]. Should I respond to this? The beating of my heart accelerates. I know it has not been my finest hour when it comes to giving a paper, but did I not make my point clear, or did the author of the question just not get it? Doubt. Is this a critique of my talk, or is it a helping hand? What is my point anyway? I read the question out loud, stalling for a moment. Staying within the safety of the experiment's framing I decide to make a reply. Again, I am able to read the response of my audience, only this time in the occasional gesture of a nod. On my screen I catch a glimpse of a cyan-coloured cursor belonging to an anonymous badger: "Ok!–thanks ;)". Relief.



What's your point?
Ok! – thanks ;)

Figure 2. Screenshot of the textual traces from a 'dialogue' between myself, the speaker, and the audience.

The badger's bite did not leave any visible marks on my body (in Google Docs, each anonymous user is represented as a non-human creature). It did, however, inscribe itself into my archives as a textual reminiscence of the talk, which was the culmination of two days of exhaustive conferencing that had been doubled in intensification due to a need to re-write my paper because of changed circumstances.

[Cut to 1974]. Marina Abramović performs *Rhythm 0* in which the public is invited to choose any of 72 items (including paint, a feather, knives, and a loaded pistol) laid out in an open gallery space to treat Abramović's body however they

wanted to over the course of six hours. In this piece, Abramović's body can be seen as an interface between her own experience and the public's potential renderings by cutting, rearranging, cleaning, painting, tickling, and potentially even killing her body with no restrictions (free rein and free passage) nor juridical or social repercussions (people are within the art museum, and so afforded a certain amount of anonymity). Abramović has later recounted how the public instantly left the space when the performance was over, reluctant to be confronted with what proved to be more than a compliant body (Marina Abramovic Institute 2:30). In referencing to *Rhythm 0*, I want to underscore the potentiality embedded in the 'thinking-feeling' of what happens (Massumi 2008) when an audience is empowered to manipulate an exposed body at their own will. How does anonymity influence the social rules of engagement? What happens to the situational dynamics? How might technology support the sharing and remembrance of such an affective experience?

A major difference between the two experiments is that my body was not the direct object of manipulation, as the manuscript performed as an interfacial buffer between myself and the participating audience. As such, the performative aspect of my experiments was no way near as radical as in *Rhythm 0*; it rather situated the interfacial configurations of the social in a contemporary network culture. In both experiments, a variety of 'tools'—analogue items and digital word processing tools—were made available for the audience to explore the boundaries of what can be done to a body, and what is socially acceptable. In *Rhythm 0*, the 72 items offered a wide range of possibilities for action, which could be further extended by combining or dismantling them (e.g. rose thorns were separated from the stem and stuck into Abramović's skin). In my case, it was the limited affordances of tools in Google Docs' digital word processor (copy, cut, paste, type, undo/redo, insert, link, edit, delete, etc.) that modulated the way I made sense of the manuscript.

Through observation and participants' testimony, I recognized a peculiar pattern that took form across the series of experiments: I became aware that people were putting a great effort into producing and retrieving content that would go into the manuscript—or they were paralyzed by the pressure of procuring content that would fit and make sense in the context. While the experiments were definitely opened for contributions of this sort, the kind that would add content to the manuscript, the initial idea was actually of a more playful character aimed at reorganizing and editing the already existing material. I had imagined that people would make use of the word processing tools to play around with the format of the manuscript, that they would edit more than add content, transform the script rather than complying with it.

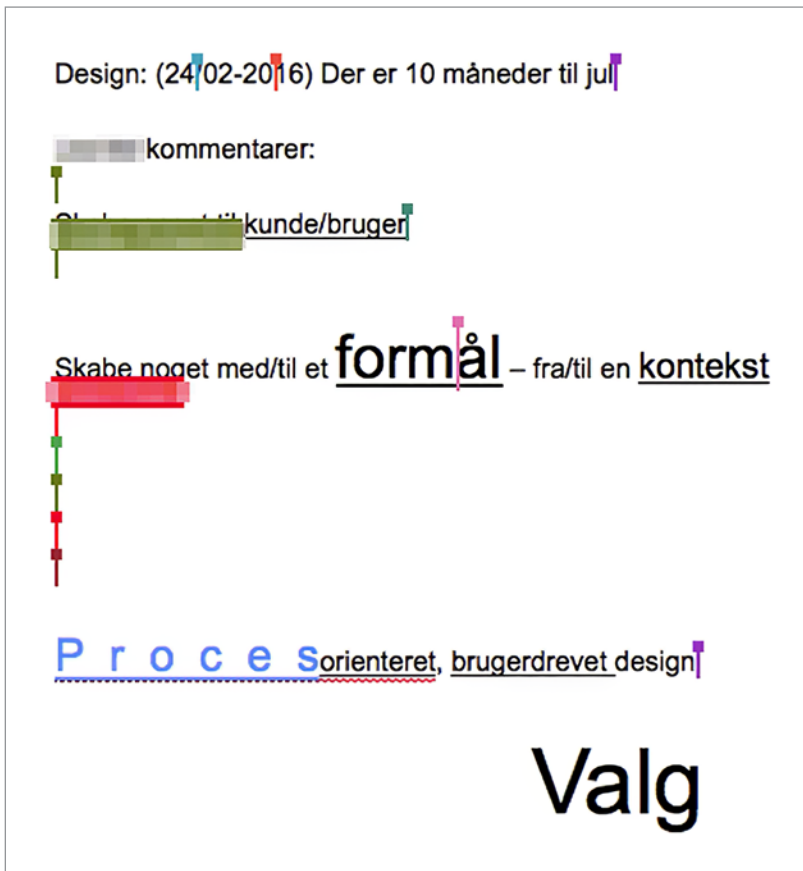


Figure 3. Screenshot of multiple participants simultaneously engaged in real-time modification of a manuscript used during class. Last edited on 25. February 2016. Blurred for anonymity.

Except for one of the experiments, this collective caution and wariness—in following the talk’s chronology and script—was evident, both in situ and going through the altered manuscripts in retrospect. In this exception, participants engaged the manuscript with a playful attitude. For instance, they emphasised or de-emphasised words and concepts by changing the color, font, and size of the text, either as immediate responses to my emphasis on their importance in the talk, or because of the significance attributed to them by the participants themselves (figure 3). The setting for this exception, however, differentiated from the rest of the experiments, since it was the only experiment taking place in a classroom, where the people present were familiar with each other, with the space, and with my way of teaching. In this case, the invitation to participate came from my authoritative position as a lecturer, and the students may have perceived their engagement as more

of a duty in the first place, rather than an opportunity to influence the lecture. However, in all experiments, participants remained anonymous (unless they were automatically logged into their Google account and opted not to log out), and the talk would have continued without their participation—so why even bother?

Becoming Networked: Contagion, Cooperation, Collectivity

In all the experiments, this matter of voluntary cooperation is a question that extends well beyond the experiments and into collective behaviour in network culture in general. The possibility to connect to others and to cooperate on the production of social memory across space and time is greatly amplified by the prevalence of digitally networked technologies. Omnipresent real-time interfaces have enabled people in the same place or in different time zones to immediately and collaboratively produce and publish multimedia content in what feels live. This liberalization of how information is produced and distributed has made way for neoliberal corporations to supersede the nation state as powerful “guardians of the archive” (Derrida 1995), and of (collective) memory as such. In his seminal work on the sociotechnical implications of archivization, Derrida (1995) emphasises, “the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” as key to political power (4). New regimes of power have taken hold today as digital media corporations support and exploit increased participatory cultures. While such corporations capitalize on the expanded social playing field offered by real-time networks, Tiziana Terranova (2017) reminds us that this participatory regime produces a surplus of not only economic value but also of cultural and social value: “Remembering and sharing by technological means produce surplus value for netarchical capitalists but also an excess of affects, desires, and beliefs materializing a ‘common ground’” (288). These developments thus effectuate new modes of experience that are highly individualized (through data-profiling and customized devices) and yet leave room for collective thought and action.

Terranova argues that if we are to understand why people voluntarily engage in cooperative production of social memory across distributed networks (e.g. publishing on social media), there is a need to move beyond neo-liberal theories of individual motivation. Instead, she argues, the matter ought to be understood in terms of infra-individual contagion: “The engine of voluntary and collective social production is, in fact, a willingness to follow, to copy, to imitate (even one’s

own self), to become part of a flow, to join somebody else's design, all the time hoping to realize one's own small or great invention" (301). Rather than adhering to the idea that cooperation is fundamentally based on exchange (monetary, intellectual, etc.), Terranova argues that social memory is produced through a Nietzschean "will to power" where individuals connect to others and cooperate in a drive to "proliferate to the point where it will have become the whole world" (300). In her explanation of this infra-individual contagion, Terranova draws from Leibniz' concept of a "monad", as reworked by Tarde and by Deleuze (1993). In order to further an understanding of the subject matter of this paper, I use the more common term 'individuals' while acknowledging that a monad designates an entity prior to any individualised formation. The contagious connection that draws individuals into the flow of others does not occur reflectively but rather spreads across individuals on an affective level prior to conscious understanding and reasoning. In regards to the experiments, what are the inserted pictures and comments, the change of fonts, and the questions posed, if not traces of the will of others to infect the design of the scripted situation with their own desires and beliefs? But again, one may wonder why there were no attempts to obstruct or short-circuit the scripted flow of the situation by deleting or radically altering the manuscript.

[Cut to 20 January 2016]. A participant at a seminar comes up to me immediately after I have given a paper using the experimental technique in question. This person, who was also giving a paper at the seminar, confesses to having been terribly nervous on my behalf that someone would delete the entire manuscript, and had therefore made a back-up copy of the document—just to be safe. While there turned out to be no need for the copy, this gesture hinted at an unexpected tendency similar to what occurred during Abramović's performance of *Rhythm 0*: a protective group formed in the audience to prevent potentially violent acts from being realized. Since nobody did delete the manuscript, a protective group never had the opportunity to form during my experiments, and it thus remains speculative if there was ever the potential to begin with. What became clear, however, was that many of the participants in the audience engaged in an intensive 'reading' of the situation through which they were able to anticipate and relationally intervene into the flow of my talk.

Perhaps opening up the manuscript—and thus partly the situational 'script'—became a gesture that invoked a sympathetic atmosphere, as explained by Brian Massumi (2014): "What is felt in sympathy is the *dynamic form* of the *situation*."

This is not felt from the point of view of one participant or the other, but from the situational perspective of what, potentially, passes between them” (77, italics in original). According to Massumi (2014), sympathy occurs as “transindividual immediacy” in an “intuitive understanding of what does not affect one without affecting the other” (78). What worked well in the experiments was exactly this possibility to not only feel but to actually see the dynamic form of the situation through the collective authoring of the manuscript in real-time: each minor or major alteration of the manuscript marked potential lines of flight from the pre-scripted narrative and thus reconfigured the virtual potential of the situation, whether I decided to act upon it or not; even the idle presence of a throbbing cursor signalled a precursor to change. Such modulative co-presence of multiple distributed bodies (locally situated and globally connected) transformed the otherwise static manuscript into a dynamic interface through which a common ground could materialize. This transformation was enabled due to a shift in focus from the content of the manuscript to its signaleptic materiality (i.e. the nonsensical mutations, additions, and gaps in the pre-scripted order). In this way, the situation’s dynamic form is inscribed into the document and rendered visible as traces that reflexively crystallize the signaleptic material as a conditioning force of how communication can occur. As remnants of the signaleptic material’s becoming of time, these inscriptions can be treated as traces that underscore and relay an anarchival production of excessive memories, affects, beliefs and desires, which might work as a meta-stable foundation for the information of a common ground.

Postscript or: Towards a Conclusion

[Undated] I marvel at the icons that appear in the document. “Are they human or machine?” I think to myself. Out of nowhere they appeared when I checked the box that made the document publicly accessible: now an anonymous panda, now an anonymous hippo, now an anonymous wombat. “What do they want?” I sit back and observe the screen, thinking to myself that the Internet is indeed teeming with life. For a moment, I anticipate a whirlwind of exotic creatures rummaging through the document in an explosion of chaotic movement. No movement occurs. One by one they leave the scene and I continue my work.

When I work my way through the five altered manuscripts, I make use of a time machine. This time machine is Google’s invention and allows me to search through each version of the five manuscripts—from their initial creation to the point in time of their last modification. Google Docs thereby allows me to go back and forth in time—to explore different times—and also to gather a multiplicity of temporalities in a unifying ‘real-time’.

This paper has explored what new possibilities for thinking together and attuning to each other is enabled through the intensively extended attention span enabled by digitally networked technologies? What possibilities for collective thinking and attunement are enabled by the prevalence of digital interfaces with real-time connection to the diverse speeds, rhythms, and flows of information of the Internet? Reiterating Blackman's (2019a) call for: "collective apparatuses and modes of storytelling, which might allow for new relations of association to take form and attract attention," this paper has explored the potential for real-time interfaces to facilitate collective modes of thought (49). For this purpose, the notion of the anarchival has worked as a conceptual leeway for working with excess (of memory, affects, values, etc.) in network culture. I have argued that the prevalence of real-time networked technologies has led to an anarchival amplification of the potential number of sources (human and machinic) that may co-inhabit the interfacial passage that affectively modulates how social memory is formed and transformed.

Re-contextualizing archivization in network culture's dynamic signal transmissions, the paper builds on an experimental exploration of the signaleptic materiality of real-time networks as a potential focal point for collective knowledge production. This exploration has taken place through a series of five experiments at conferences, seminars, and in the classroom, where I, as speaker, invited the audience to modulate the course of the talk by editing, commenting, adding to, and deleting the prepared manuscript in real-time. These experiments play with the twofold affective relation between speaker and audience, and between speaker and technological support, to see what will happen when an audience is empowered to manipulate an exposed body at their own will. This social experimentation is underscored by a technical exploration of the potential for digital technology to both render the flow of information visible in its temporal becoming, and also to facilitate an immediate inscription of the signaleptic material's dynamics into the archival order. The paper thus works both with interfacial reconfigurations of the social and with the capture of memory traces that might encompass more of a situation's dynamic form than traditional documentation.

In sum, the aim of this paper has been to explore the potential for real-time interfaces to facilitate ways of collectively inhabiting the affective passage from the privacy of the body to publicly accessible form. The hope is that these explorations may point towards a development of an "interfacial commons" that operate along

the axis of the anarchic, where a dynamic multiplicity of memories, affects, desires, and beliefs overflow and leak from the production of social memory. This is an approach that moves beyond highly individualizing systems of exchange towards a repurposing of the commons in which memory is underscored in its excessive becoming.

Notes

1. The indented text in the beginning of each anecdote is copied directly from Google Drive's automatic logging of the manuscript used during the specific talk.

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Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020



Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020

STATE AFFECT BREAKDOWN



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To the extent that the Covid-19 pandemic took shape amidst a global right-wing turn energized by a fascistic media ecology, the emergence of a state discourse of public health denialism that follows the lead of climate change denialism might not be surprising. Trump in the US and Bolsonaro in Brazil have championed this approach, attacking civil servants and positing their own critique of expertise as insurgent. But it is worth noting that Modi in India has followed a different yet no less disastrous path, proclaiming the state's successful imposition of the world's largest lockdown – one that very publicly targeted the purported Muslim roots of the national outbreak in the slums of Mumbai and that forced the expulsion of millions of migrant workers from the cities. The swift resort to communal surveillance and expulsion of poor workers built upon an existing caste Hindu claim to sanitary reform in Modi's prior campaigning (“A toilet for every Indian!”) forms part of the proximate context here. Such a context cannot be understood without considering the attachment of the post-independence state to a certain vision of modernity, one that shapes a vision of emergence from colonialism by yoking health to the vision of the human. So it is worth exploring whether the particular contexts of postcolonial development affect the modalities of emergency rule in both its mediatized and infrastructural dimensions.

To the extent that affect theory might illuminate such contexts and divergences, we might consider how the problem of the hospital surge that accompanies outbreaks reflect certain infrastructural investments of the state, and to what extent such investments capture a sensibility about the compromised futurity of the virally-hy-

bridized nation. Brian Larkin (2013) writes that infrastructure helps to catalyze a relationship between circulation and futurity.¹ By tethering the technological mastery of the earth to feelings of social progress, “infrastructures bring about change, and through change enact progress, and through progress we gain freedom” (Larkin 2013, 332). Hospitals certainly form a key part of this infrastructural modernism, as the site at which capitalism purports to offer care and secure human circulation against biological risk.

But in the United States, using emergency powers for expanding hospital infrastructure was not an idea on the table despite the Chinese state’s successful demonstration of rapid hospital construction. Explicit avoidance of attention to Chinese lessons about the relationship of both death rates and the R0 (rate of new infections from a single case) to hospital capacity, as well as a purposeful postponement of testing to prevent surveillance of the virus, were instead the paths taken by the federal government. Against the backdrop of decades of neoliberal restructuring of health care – which included widespread closures of hospitals in urban and rural areas alike – hospitals in New York, New Orleans, Detroit, and other cities experienced surges in emergency room bed and ventilator demand that overwhelmed health systems and forced people to die at home.

To the extent that Covid-19 has intensified a nationalist circuit of accusations and economic interrelations in which the Chinese and US states coexist in publicly disavowed interdependence, infrastructural breakdown brings with it a transformation of state affects and a highlighting of the fissures in the state apparatus, as officials in both countries argue over conspiracy theories and pit different state and regional governments in competition. While in India and China the pandemic has been accompanied by a continuation of a certain type of national development discourse of the nation’s emergence from histories of outside rule, in the US and Brazil the lockdown of racialized and class-inflected zones of risk have become normalized. The shape of the state itself, and the feeling of attachment to or risk from it, are in turn in flux. The futures of health infrastructure lie in the balance, as the horizon of circulation meets the limits of capacity, and the prospects of American exceptionalism rest on faith in an insurgent sovereign.

Endnotes

1. Brian Larkin (2013). The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, 332, pp. 327-43.



Hand-dyed yarn by Kathleen Royston
Photo: Wendy Truran, 2020



*Yeastograms made by AKI BIOMATTERs students, Agnieszka Anna Wołodźko, 2020
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LIVING WITHIN AFFECT AS CONTAMINATION: BREATHING IN BETWEEN NUMBERS



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It is the 11th of March 2020. At the moment I started writing this, there were 12,1246¹ cases of infected people worldwide and 4628 deaths, and rising. In the Netherlands, where I live, there are now 501 infected people and 5 deaths since the first case on the 27th of February.²

But numbers will not capture the variety and complexity of responses, cultural, social and economic realities that condition them. Especially in Europe, we have already witnessed and experienced: racism against Asians; economic opportunity in the face of massive buying to raise prices of masks and disinfectants; ignorance and carelessness around wearing masks including fear of being exposed to public shaming when you do; reporting on national news that the Christmas decoration will be a month late due to closing of factories in China (Schutijser 2020); massive buying of painkiller drugs, soaps, thermometers, vitamins and toilet paper; disciplinary measures by the government not to panic in fear of losing on stock markets; ageism and ableism that grow from the premonition that only old and sick die; online forms of resistance through group chats and sharing of hacks for

medical care supplies; speed of communication and misinformation about new corona treatments from garlic, vodka, drinking a lot of fluids, to masturbation; new forms and strategies of mapping, archiving, and monitoring how the virus spreads and governmental ideas of herd immunity as the strategy of containment that caused a general loosened approach in the Netherlands; shifting from happy clapping on balconies at 8pm for all the health workers that work hard saving lives, to an *en masse* walk outside despite the phone alarm text reminding all of us about social distancing.

Meanwhile, the virus spreads. The number of infected grows revealing established and new ways of capitalist discipline, control, and surveillance. While all over the world, institutions and schools are closing down, here in the Netherlands, with one of the highest population densities in Europe, I kept receiving emails from the university to work and not to panic, until the 18th of March. After that date all the schools were closed with work moved to online-learning at the speed of light. I am still receiving those emails, to keep on working, learning new online tools, and maintaining the business, deadlines, and program as usual. By the 22nd of March, we have 4204 registered corona patients and 179 deaths in the Netherlands.

Contaminating

Disease is never neutral. Treatment never not ideological. Mortality never without its politics.

—Boyer 2019

I have spent the last six or so years working on the concept of affect as relation of transformation, of what I call affect as contamination—an onto-epistemo-ethical condition of our living bodies (Wołodźko 2018). While looking for a nongeneric understanding of how to practice our bodies in the age of biotechnological manipulation and governance, the idea of contamination grew into the inescapable condition and a desire to rethink how we live. But never did I imagine the radical urgency of its call as it came with the great viral pandemic of the Covid-19. My first reaction was feeling guilty over my own naivety: how could I continue to praise, often in the context of what is called bioart and biodesign, such an invasive

and risky concept as contamination and call for it to be materialised and affirmed? Is contamination not what we have to fight against now? My anxiety gradually grew to pervade my whole body, and I thought that there must be some rational way to respond philosophically to the pandemic that would make things clearer. And then, like a kick into my stomach, I caught myself accepting that which I despise—the philosopher’s trust in reason. As Anne Boyer notices, philosophers tend to neglect pain due to its supposedly uncommunicative character. But pain, Boyer argues, is that which is unequivocal and egalitarian in its recognition beyond even species divisions (Boyer 2019, 213–214). Through the pain of my own anxiety, I thus rescued contamination from its shame. Embracing contamination is staying with the trouble, its anxiety, its uncertainty. To live with it is to pay attention to troubles you find yourself in, not escaping to false assurances, disavowals of responsibility, and comforts of quick explanations. Contamination is living in the stickiness of things and bodies that are never fixed and never given, but mutating, changing, and escaping normalisations. Donna Haraway’s idea of “staying with the trouble” (2016) thus began vibrating anew.

Contamination, as a condition of our living bodies, expresses their relational character. That our bodies have never been pure, that we are porous and leaky bodies, conditioned by the encounters with multiple human and nonhuman bodies—be it other humans, animals, plants, bacteria, viruses, yes viruses, particles, thoughts, experiences and minerals. As Alexis Shotwell argues, “we are in and of the world, contaminated and affected” (Shotwell 2016, 10). In contamination, we find our ways of symbiotic survival and sustenance, our creativity and care—only through relations of transformation we can become, we can grow, we can learn. Contamination, however, is not a neutral state, and it cannot be controlled. As Spinoza was writing, we do not know what a body can do, what its capacities are, until we test it (Spinoza, 2001). Each encounter may change you, transform you, you may flourish when meeting another body, you may mutate or die. Living within contamination is living within the omnipresence and inescapability of uncertainty. It is not a state of choice or control, but care.

In life after Covid-19, the contaminating condition of bodies is at stake. But not only because now we have a common viral enemy that threatens our lives. The challenge that we are all facing also concerns how to live and practice our bodies with care, how we can sustain bodily transformation and contamination, rather than harm it or kill it.

Caring

The word 'care' rarely calls to mind a keyboard. The work, often unwaged or poorly paid, of those who perform care [...] is what many understand to be that which is the least technological, the most affective and intuitive. 'Care' is so often understood as a mode of feeling, neighbouring, as it does, love. Care seems as removed from quantification as the cared-for-person's sensation of weakness or pain seems removed from statistics class [...]. But strange reversals reveal themselves during serious illness. Or rather, what appears to be reversal becomes clarification. Our once solid, unpredictable, sensing, spectacularly messy and animal bodies submit—imperfectly, but also intensively—to the abstracting conditions of medicine. Likewise, care becomes vivid and material.

—Boyer 2019

It is 24th of March. We have 5560 registered corona patients and 276 deaths in the Netherlands. Our bodies are dominated by the virus that is neither alive nor dead, so we become with it in this state of limbo. Most of us are locked in our houses and we struggle to learn what care might involve now, how does it materialise when physical contact becomes illegal. I wear a mask when I am going to the grocery shop. People laugh when they see me, I hear an elderly lady talking to her partner: "Look, like Chinese!" Some of the shoppers wear gloves. These are a facade of protection as they still touch themselves and their surroundings, maybe even more than without any protection. When I am going back home through the parking lot, I see some men waiting in their cars, their women approaching with the full baskets. I am one of them.

Anne Dufourmantelle, in her "In Praise of Risk," notices how risk, that which is a lived intensity, became a commodified value, absorbed by the market made omnipresent and therefore unquestioned (Dufourmantelle 2019). We are trained by the commodification of risk, to release ourselves from dependency on the body, liquids, objects by putting them into the categories of fetishizations of the logic of market economy. We are told to value independence and autonomy of identities because only in the logic of firm identities can hierarchies sustain themselves. To take the risk of dependency is, as Dufourmantelle writes, to take a vaccine, to allow small doses of that which might harm you to grow and build your strength. Writing this and thinking about the metaphors of vaccine - in a time when there is none against a great virus- seems reckless. It reminds me of the call of Dutch

and English prime ministers for the experimentation of herd immunity (Cohen 2020; Yong 2020). The risk Dufourmantele proposes, relies on understanding that immunity comes not from dying, but from interdependence, porosity, and relationality of bodies - what I would call 'contamination by transformative encounters.' Living within the risk of contamination is living within Spinozian affect - as *affectus* that conditions bodies' life. Affect as contamination demands a constant attention and responsibility before each encounter, it demands from bodies a constant attentiveness to transformations that might happen, that might change all bodies in the encounter, and not always into a desirable and safe state. In that sense, Spinozian affect must be understood beyond any given moral rules because it demands, with each new encounter, new ethical decisions - and in that sense, living within contamination is living with the risk of care (Wołodźko 2015, 2017, 2018). Risk, as such, becomes a practice of depending on change, of allowing to be changed and anticipating the implications of changing others, where both bodies, not only the selected few, can flourish. Such an understanding of co-dependency is risky, because it involves a different practice. It involves care and attention to changing reality, not relying upon and trusting in a set of rules and institutional hierarchies. It is your body that depends on other bodies; it is immediate, actual and therefore beyond any rules of habits established *a priori*. What is good or bad, each time, has to be reinvented - that is why caring is risky, because it is ethical.

Dufourmantele calls for risk to be carnal, forcing us to encounter the porosity of our own bodies. In the time of Covid-19, risk makes clear how it involves not only the carnality of our human bodies but of human and non-human, organic and inorganic bodies; in other words, the materiality of things and of bodies that are fuzzy and beyond a clear cut definition of life and death. All bodies are porous, sticky, and we need to not only learn how to live with them, but mostly, *as them*, as those sticky, mutating and contaminating/contaminated bodies. Our understanding of relationality and materiality of bodies so far has tended to operate according to the tools and mechanism of ignorance: toxic and animal based ingredients in our food, in our makeup, in our clothes, in our air we breathe every day - these have been just labels and quantities from a supposedly distant world. We have been living as if our bodies have an invisible border, impenetrable. We have not really lived according to our bodies' capacities and dependencies. And now, we are hit by the consequences of what is at stake when ignoring their demands: the care for the material contamination of our bodies that shape and rule our desires.

Meanwhile, we have all seen the many heads of nations of the western world, after introducing the first biopolitical measures of not touching your faces and not shaking hands (what is now called "social distancing"), either licking their fingers to turn the next page of their speech or greeting each other with a warm hand shake. We all have bodies, but it seems that the most difficult thing is to become a body.

Commoning

If capitalism has been able to reproduce itself it is only because of the web of inequalities that it has built into the body of the world proletariat, and because of its capacity to globalize exploitation. This process is still unfolding under our eyes, as it has for the last 500 years. The difference is that today the resistance to it has also achieved a global dimension.

—Federici 2004

It is 28th of March. The number of cases in the Netherlands has risen to 9762, deaths to 639. My mother, who lives in Poland, is awakened by the police using loudspeakers to make their daily announcements instructing people to stay at home. My father has been told that he will get a special pass next week, allowing him to go to his work in the grocery shop. It is forbidden now to leave your district, and he works on the other side of the city. I asked my mother how she feels: does it remind her of the communist state of war that happened between 1981-1983? She demurred - back then there was army on the streets and problems were different. There are 1638 registered infected patients in Poland and 18 deaths. But we suspect that the low numbers are due to limited access to tests, and the active restriction by the government to provide data so as not to introduce heightened panic. Thus, the presidential election in May may happen as planned (Cienski and Wanat 2020).

Living in the pandemic of Covid-19 has brought a longing for the optimization and normalization of surveillance. Monitoring and digital mapping of the people with the virus, enforced video and drone surveillance within the cities as governmental digital tracking works in collaboration with Facebook and Google (Romm, Dwoskin and Timberg 2020; Singer and Sang-Hun 2020). And a few

new measurements slip in unnoticed. Though individual privacy can be easily undermined by the argument of common good, when it comes to the pharmaceutical corporations, different standards are upheld. The commodification and hegemony of the market economy, that our governments protect, unveils itself shamelessly. We are told that we cannot test for the presence of the Covid-19, because there is a world-wide shortage of tests, while the most likely reason is that we have to protect the ownership rights of the companies that monopolise the equipment running these tests (Ark and Strop 2020). We are assured daily about the world-wide chase for a vaccine against the virus: meanwhile this research is fuelled not by co-operation, but by competition for the first patents, launched among others in the Netherlands, and proudly owned by Johnson and Johnson (Steenhuysen 2020). While we are facing the lack of medical protective and life-saving equipment, pharmaceutical corporations become the one winner in this state of exception, drowning countries in fresh debt. But patterns of resistance have erupted with people sewing masks, making face shields, 3D printing respirators and donating to local hospitals. Biohackers, makers, designers, artists and academics are distributing open source designs, recipes, manuals, and protocols against spreading the virus along with guides on how to cope with various difficult situations caused by the pandemic.³ These are forms of collective sharing that Federici argues must be conditioned by the patterns of commoning that not only precede the market regime but constitute an alternative to capitalism (Federici 2004, 21-22).

As David Bollier and Silk Helfrich write, “The ‘free market’ is not in fact self-regulating and private, but extensively dependent upon public interventions, subsidies, risk-mitigation and legal privileges. The state does not in fact represent the sovereign will of the people, nor does the market enact autonomous preferences of small investors and consumers. Rather, the system is a more or less closed oligopoly of elite insiders” (Bollier and Helfrich 2012, xiii-xiv). Capitalism is based on the premonition of a radical hierarchy between opposing autonomous individuals. The market is thus driven by the ideology of autonomy and deeply depends on the exploitation of that belief. A way to challenge this hegemony is by changing how we understand not only the individual, but how we establish what is valuable. Bollier and Helfrich propose that we see commons not as goods but “politics of belonging” where, rather than a resource or a thing, we view commons as a system of relations and practices that they call “life-forms” (Bollier and Helfrich 2019, 3-4). Commoning thus means a new way of relationality between people as an “identity shift,” where “people evolve into different roles and perspectives [...] by creating value networks of mutual commitment” (Bollier and Helfrich 2019, 5).

Moreover, commons are shared but not sold; they require community as they are established by relations that are cooperative and reciprocal. Commoning, as Federici writes, means a radical “re-enchantment of the world” that does not belong to humans alone, but to multiple human and non-human bodies (Federici 2018). Commoning, in other words, is practicing bodies beyond fixed identities and against their hierarchization—it is practicing a shared responsibility where risk is not a commodified value but a condition of our bodies that gives force for taking the position of care. Commoning, in other words, is about practicing living within contamination, where our bodies are cared for and caring through the catalyzation of joyful transformations despite their uncertainty and volatility. To contaminate and sustain contamination is risky, it demands care and sensitivity to changing conditions and bodies. It demands constant attention to bodies’ precarity.

Apart from threatening our health and lives, Covid-19 revealed the political and economic power relations battling over ownership of our bodies and their data. We should ask: who profits from the tracking of our whereabouts? Who has access to our phones when we are infected? Who profits from the samples you give in order to discover whether you are positive for corona? Will they stop surveilling us when the pandemic ends? What will happen with all the digital data stored now for virus control? We trust it is for common good, to stop the pandemic, to save lives, to help future generations, to know ourselves better. But trust is the worst of enemies. It melts down your sensitivity and strengthens existing inequalities and hierarchies. It justifies negligence, denial, and indifference. In trust we cannot trust. What we need is to distrust, to defamiliarize, to destabilize. I am not arguing for distrust as a catalyst for revenge and conspiracy. What I am arguing for is the distrust that is driven by care, by an affirmation of the ambiguity of things and bodies, by the uncertainty and precarity of encounters and their materialities. By distrust we thus take responsibility for action outside the state control. By affirming this uncertainty, we expose the governments’ disavowal of it that only works to support big pharma and their centralization of access to medical care and equipment. This is what ‘living within contamination’ forces us to encounter: each relation might kill you, might change you, might endanger not only you but your loved ones. But it can also help you, give you a means for survival. We need to learn how to reenchant the world, where we already practice life with viruses, microbes, animals and plants. In other words, we reenchant the multiplicity of bodies that are here, that live with us, as us, that might enrich us,

make us different, mutate us or kill us. Each relation thus matters, each relation, each encounter becomes an existential reconfiguration that demands an affirmation of uncertainty through practices of care. This is what contamination, as condition of our living bodies, forces us to do, and it might be what saves us.

Breathing

It is the 3rd of April and the numbers are rising. We have already known for some time now that the actual numbers are way higher, because they cannot test everyone, mild or severe symptoms are not the case any longer. And then there is the whole matter of privilege and access. On top of that, the available tests are not even entirely reliable, causing people with the virus to be accidentally released from hospitals (Chen 2020).⁴ But the lubricant of counting determines all the prognosis and actions, graphs and lines with mystic curves and quantifications, this is who we are now—a dance macabre of cyphers.

I am writing these words mostly feeling angry and numbed. At night my sleep is interrupted usually by fear of not only falling ill with corona, but also of other sickness. I fear that I will not get access to medical care because priority is given to Covid-19 patients. I worry for my husband's health. He was waiting three months for his hospital appointment and it was cancelled—there was one explanation but without any guidance for how to deal with pain. I worry for my parents. But then I force myself not to go further with these thoughts, and the fear fades away quickly leaving the sense of emptiness.

It seems that overcoming the fear through acceptance of the precarity from which it has arisen is what is at stake now. It is the coming of a new form of fear, one that will not numb us into ignorance and carelessness, that will not revitalise desires for borders and clear answers that have never been. I am constantly learning about the challenges of practicing living within contaminations. There is no recipe I can follow, no clear rule. I thus map and learn each day what the care for contamination implies. I know I am the privileged one. I know there are millions of people on the borders of Europe, refugees unwanted in unsanitary camps. I know that I am in the country that proudly believes in its own capacity to do well, in the exceptionality of its “intelligent lockdown” while calling “stupid” the first measurements of desperately fighting Italians.⁵ I know that the virus became the perfect smokescreen for enforcements of powers: be it old school totalitarian regimes or new iterations of surveillance capitalism.

I continue to teach my students, but teaching has turned into coaching and sharing ways of coping. My classes on biomatters (now outside our biolab) have turned into a rhizomatic biohacking net of how to find materials in your waste bin or in the local forest; on guides for how to be safe and implement our biolab rule, “dirty hand and clean hand,” when collecting materials in the grocery shop. I am mostly proud of how resilient they are, and how eager to learn new things - I hope it is not a mask worn specially for me, I hope they stay healthy. Our course on ecologies within art and design, on how to work with living bodies in creative practice has become now a survival pedagogy—how to grow things, how to work with microbes, how to engage with plants in a creative yet responsible way. And what does it all mean now, when the world is in quarantine? I imagined these skills to be urgent for the precarious future, but the future has always been now.

The mutation would manifest as a crystallization of organic life, as a digitization of work and consumption and as a dematerialization of desire.

—Preciado 2020

Life with the virus is not an easy life. It is a risky life of encounters, of realizing how much we need material engagement and love, how much we need relationality and daily contaminations. Within the pandemic of Covid-19 we have found ourselves in the life of sterilization, surveillance, abuses of power, physical distancing and overwhelming digitalization - I have never been in contact with so many people as I have been during this quarantine. In his letter regarding life after Covid-19, Paul B. Preciado is revealing -- it is the fear of loneliness and the threat of its acceptance that is scarier than the virus itself (Preciado 2020). It thus seems that what we need now is to overcome the numbness that comes after fear: that we accept the calls that say we must normalize life against the virus, that we accept the borders, fixed identities, and an interest in quantification. What we need now is to practice life not *against* but *with* contamination.⁶

Endnotes

1. Number of infected registered patients that tested positive for Covid-19 taken from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

2. Numbers of infected registered patients in the Netherlands that tested positive for Covid-19 taken from *National Institute for Public Health and the Environment Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport*, <https://www.rivm.nl/actuele-informatie-over-coronavirus>

3. See some of the archived links by the “Open Design Lab” at *Waag Society*, Amsterdam, <https://waag.org/nl/event/waag-talks-diy-maker-initiatieven-tijden-van-corona>, accessed 3 April 2020.

4. I thank Špela Petrič for this information.

5. “The response from Italy is very stupid and over the top,” said Ira Helsloot, professor of safety management at Radboud University Nijmegen, in conversation with NU.nl. “They are now shutting down their entire economy and unable to maintain their health care, which will only add to the crisis,” (translated from Dutch) Lennart 't Hart, “What if all Dutch corona measures have not worked so far?”

6. I thank Špela Petrič, Robert Zwijnenberg and Gregory Seigworth for their comments on the first drafts of this text.

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ca·pa·cious

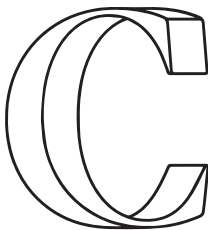
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