



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

WHAT ARE PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY PROBLEMS?

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Performance Philosophy Problems are problems that call to be addressed by and as performance philosophy. But even such a simple definition already names acts that could be considered problems of performance philosophy: problems of *calling*, problems of what it means to *address*, and the fundamental philosophical performance of the problem itself. How is a problem constituted, by whom, and under what circumstances? How do problems emerge, and what conditions of legibility are required? What are the stakes of calling problems into visibility? Do all problems require solutions, or might a problem be addressed differently?

This issue has its origins in such a call: a call for proposals for the organization's 2022 biennial conference, hosted by the Helsinki Theatre Academy. Deliberately broad, the call asked a wide field of artists and scholars of various disciplines (and *undisciplines*) to 'articulate the range of *performance philosophy problems*, whose treatment calls for dialogue and collaboration between philosophy and the performing arts' (Performance Philosophy 2021). Again, such a call names still other problems: problems of *articulation*, problems of *dialogue* and *collaboration*, which were shared in the conference, and further developed in this issue, in ways that ask us to think not only about *what* we articulate but *how*.

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems of form, including the forms used within an academic conference. Over several iterations, Performance Philosophy biennials have invited contributors to experiment with form, including lecture-performances, "no paper" presentations, workshops, and hybrid panels. These formats, and especially those introduced at the Helsinki

biennial, are discussed more fully in Caroline Wilkins' ReView in this issue. Of particular note at Helsinki was the introduction in the call for "key groups" rather than traditional conference keynotes, foregrounding collaborative and interdisciplinary creativity in naming and addressing problems over singular expertise. Performance Philosophy Problems Key Groups (PPPKGs) were solicited by open call in the years leading up to the conference, asking existing groups or new groups to collaboratively imagine the work they would take on, and to develop this work not only in the months before the conference but also at the conference itself: 'Through the PPPKGs, the conference itself wants to provide its participants with an occasion to witness *actual research in-the-making* in a critical and supportive collective setting' (Performance Philosophy 2021).

Problems of form for a conference are reflected in problems of form for a publication: how do we represent the dynamics of collaboration, of "*actual research in-the-making*", in the static form of the PDF or even in the more dynamic form of HTML? The articles here take various approaches. "Laguna de fracasos", by the key group Lagunaries, presents a territory for readers to navigate, guided by a map, moving both between languages (Spanish and English) and between ways of speaking and reading: for Lagunaries, reading is collaborative work. In "The Problem of Hybridity", the design research laboratory Speculative Space restage for the page their film/live presentation in Helsinki, necessarily placing the text between description of the past and summoning into present relation: 'Are you still receiving? Can you still read?' they ask. Similarly, Annette Arlander, Bruce Barton, Johanna Householder, and Michelle Man explore the question of how to share artistic practice—and indeed, how sharing might itself be a form of creative research. The videos and accompanying texts represent the 'Perform-Respond-Extend' model they have developed as a form of 'enactive research', and which they demonstrated in Helsinki. Whereas in 'Poetics of Friction', by Nadja Ben Khelifa, Étienne Allaix, and Jörg Sternagel, the webpage enables superpositions that are not possible in the linear time of conference presentation; here (in the HTML form anyway), the various elements of their contribution are ordered differently each time the page loads, creating new juxtapositions—and new 'frictions'—between the chapters.

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems of collaboration, articulated and explored through formal possibilities, and enacted in those very activities of articulation and exploration. Diana Damian Martin, Daniela Perazzo, and Nik Wakefield, prefer the term 'co-labouring' to 'collaboration' as more honestly acknowledging the entanglement of academic work with neoliberal governance; 'autofiction' models a tactic for mapping this complicity, and also a possible escape route from individual ownership. They write from and through a historical event of labor disputes in the UK, and of Covid restrictions and regulations, which themselves delayed the Helsinki conference (originally planned for 2021). As in many fields, the Helsinki conference carries the influence of this moment in the problem of hybridity: how to make an assembly out of in-person and virtual participation; how to manifest the possibilities of telematic and/or asynchronous togetherness. Performance Philosophy Problems are temporary problems: problems that are passing by, or that we are passing through, problems of a historical moment, of temporal lag, of trying to speak 'in the present', even if, as I suggest in my contribution to this volume, "by the time you read this it is already too late".

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems between performance and philosophy. This is the space, as Anthony Gritten puts it here, of the “philosomer”, residing in ‘the emptiness between the “e” ending Performance and the “P” beginning Philosophy.’ They are perhaps like so-called ‘wicked’ problems (Rittel and Webber 1973) in their interdisciplinary entanglements; but unlike wicked problems, Performance Philosophy Problems do not have their ontology shaped by the problem as negative, as undesirable, as something we would wish ‘solved’. Performance Philosophy Problems are instead events, convergences, and formations: a space of common ground, of emergence, where the problem of ‘ground’ and ‘emergence’ are indeed exemplary problems for philosophy and for theatre (see Puchner 2014). They are not problems we would wish away, as in Esa Kirkkopelto’s writing here on the problem of the mutability of language. Nor in the case of the problem of ‘the human’ at the centre of all other problems, where instead, Annalaura Alifuoco argues here, we might look instead at how this problem might be *exhausted*; but also to the ways in which exhaustion itself is constituted as a collective, cross-species problem.

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems of appearance and acknowledgement: how do we recognize a problem as a problem? Who is called upon to describe it, and in what terms? In Helsinki, one PPKG session featured a recorded presentation from Different Light Theatre Company, a learning disabled theatre company based in Christchurch, New Zealand/Aotearoa. ‘What are Performance Philosophy Problems?’ asks Matthew Phelan, one of the company members. ‘We are Performance Philosophy Problems,’ answers Josie Noble (emphasis added). Her response gives the title to the contribution to this issue assembled by Janet Gibson, Kate Maguire-Rosier, and Tony McCaffrey, which engages creatively and sensitively with questions of inclusivity, reciprocity, and agency in disability theatre, research, and activism.

Performance Philosophy Problems might be problems that ‘trouble’, then, as in ‘gender trouble’ (Butler 1990), ‘race trouble’ (Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown 2011), ‘ability trouble’ (McRuer 2006), ‘affect trouble’ (Forrest 2020), and so on. They appear where there is hierarchization of knowledge, of subjects, of who speaks on whose behalf. They call for new forms of collaboration, which the Helsinki conference generously supported, and new forms of articulation, to which this journal hopes to make a modest contribution.

And Performance Philosophy Problems are also problems of “Performance Philosophy” itself—that is, of the network of real people finding ways to live their lives, support their loved ones, advocate for their students and their research, and volunteering their time to act as facilitators, conveners, authors, peer-reviewers, editors, and organizers for this network. So I close with my great thanks to Esa Kirkkopelto and the team at Theatre Arts Helsinki, to Tero Nauha who offered his support, to Diana Damian Martin who helped me to finally bring this issue to fruition, to those authors who have been waiting for some time for their work to appear, and to you readers, for caring about our problems.

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Biography

Theron Schmidt is an assistant professor at Utrecht University and works internationally as an artist, writer, and teacher. He is one of the editors of *Performance Philosophy*.

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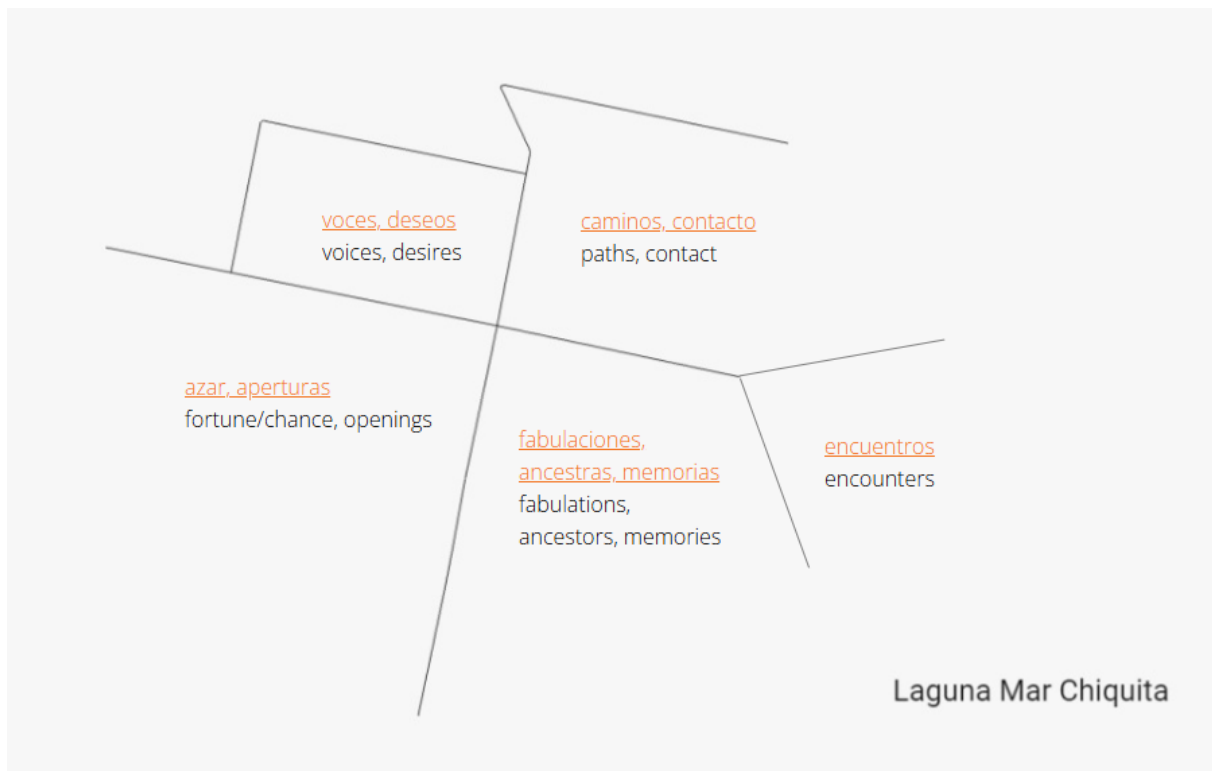
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PERFORMANCE
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LAGUNA DE FRACASAS

LAGUNARIES



Introducción

El ejercicio de imaginar abre posibilidades para construir algo nuevo: nuevos conocimientos, proyectos de mundo, experiencias de compartir. Nos permitimos convertir estas imaginaciones en una invitación a reconocer el procedimiento de la escritura colectiva, de generar imágenes conjuntas como una forma de construir conocimiento. En cada encuentro nos armamos de nuevo, de forma diferente. Las imágenes que podemos crear a partir de la lectura en diálogo imaginario con alguien que no está, las que surgen en una conversación, vienen de los territorios que habitamos.

Las políticas de conocimiento son disputas por las palabras, por modos de escribir, que son modos de pensar. Intervenir en las prácticas del lenguaje es afectar la forma en que se organiza el poder.... La imaginación es un reservorio de deseos y ansiedades culturales, socialmente prohibidos o legitimados, una poderosa herramienta.... La emancipación más que una nueva forma de conocimiento, implica la capacidad de plantear preguntas que, desde el secreteo, el rumor, la opacidad y las entrelíneas, minen el lenguaje neoliberal y su episteme necropolítica colonial.

val flores (2016)

Defendemos el pensamiento como una práctica ética colectiva. Perseguimos el conocimiento colectivo en una perspectiva feminista similar a un micelio: una forma de liberarse de la academia y sus deficiencias en cuanto a la consideración del conocimiento situado e incrustado en el cuerpo, en la

Introduction

The exercise of imagining opens up possibilities for building something new: new knowledge, another way of being in the world, experiences of sharing. We allow ourselves to turn these imaginations into an invitation to recognise the procedure of collective writing, of generating images together as a way of constructing knowledge. At each meeting we put ourselves together again, in a different way. The images we can create from reading in imaginary dialogue with someone who is not there, the ones that emerge in conversation, come from the territories we inhabit.

The politics of knowledge are disputes over words, over ways of writing, which are ways of thinking. To intervene in linguistic practices is to affect the way power is organised.... Imagination is a reservoir of socially forbidden or legitimised cultural desires and anxieties, a powerful tool.... Emancipation, more than a new form of knowledge, implies the capacity to raise questions that, from secrecy, rumour, opacity and the inbetween-the-lines, undermine neoliberal language and its colonial necropolitical episteme.

val flores (2016)

We defend thinking as a collective ethical practice. We pursue collective knowledge in a feminist perspective similar to a mycelium: a way of freeing ourselves from the academy and its shortcomings in terms of considering knowledge situated and embedded in the body, in artistic research of the performing

investigación artística de las artes escénicas y sus diferentes temporalidades. Insistimos en el espacio y el tiempo, tratando de pensar a través de les demás, "habitar la cita de cada una".

A través de fabulaciones poéticas, proponemos preguntarse ¿cómo nos relacionamos con un texto cuyas voces cambian de estilo, de conexión, de colores, y sin embargo mantienen los contornos de una cierta voz colectiva, que nos habla y nos guía, como si estuviéramos siendo manejados por manos diferentes, en un fabulación diferente?"

Hablar con imágenes permite que cada quien traiga su imaginario y se siente con nosotras a la mesa. Sí, a la mesa. Una mesa en la que se juntan a comer berenjenas nuestra abuela, Diana Taylor, Glissant, vos, nosotras. La politicidad del imaginario es traer tu territorio y tu experiencia a colación aun sin decirlo. Confiamos en que aquello que podemos y queremos leer, se lea. Es válido también no resonar con estas imágenes e inventar otras nuevas.

arts and its different temporalities. We insist on space and time, trying to think through others, to "inhabit each other's citation (words)."

By means of poetical fabulations, we propose asking ourselves how we relate to a text whose voices change in style, connection, colour, and yet maintains the contours of a certain collective voice, which speaks to us and guides us, as if we were being handled by different hands, in a different fabulation".

Talking through images allows everyone to bring their own imaginary and to sit with us at the table. Yes, at the table. A table where our grandmother, Diana Taylor, Glissant, you, us, sit together to eat aubergines. The politics of the imaginary is to bring your territory and your experience to the table even without saying so. We trust that what one can read and want to read, will be read. It is also perfectly fair that none of these images will resonate and therefore to invent new ones.

Key words: ¿qué hacemos?

Una laguna de libros descansa en el piso, un mar de tarjetas con instrucciones se desparrraman y esperan a ser usadas ¿Qué es saber? Dos personas bailan por el espacio ¿Cuál es su archivo? Una se desplaza por el salón invitando a desorganizar la distribución de los cuerpos ¿Cómo se construye un saber colectivo? Hay lugar para el juego, el azar y todos los oráculos.

Al entrar, una sacerdotisa te regala un talismán como guía para atravesar esta *collaborative performance* ¿Qué necesitamos saber del otro para construir un hacer común, un afecto? *How is collective knowledge built?* Unas voces intervienen, invitando a escuchar la respiración ajena, a percibir la textura de la ropa pegada al cuerpo, a recorrer con la lengua cada rincón de la boca. ¿Cómo reinventar las formas de afecto y afectación? Un cuerpo se acerca a otro, abre un poemario (¿qué lengua/qué idioma?) y recita un fragmento en voz baja. Le entrega un papel con una invitación a hacer lo mismo.

Traducciones de traducciones ¿Cómo se construye lo común desde las prácticas artísticas? Una computadora con un documento compartido dispuesto a ser intervenido. ¿Qué repone la presencia? ¿Dónde existimos? Los cuerpos lectores son profetas y escribas. Un acercamiento, un ensamble de prácticas, una composición instantánea de cuerpos que se encuentran en el hacer ¿Cómo construir un saber desde nosotros sin intentar reponer el conocimiento hegemónico impuesto como saber? *How is collective knowledge built? Knowledge is dancing.* Iteraciones sobre intervenciones.

Key words: what do we do?

A laguna of books lie on the floor, a sea of instruction cards is scattered, waiting to be used. What is knowing? Two people dance across a space. What is their archive? One moves around the room, inviting us to scramble the distribution of bodies. ¿Cómo se construye el saber colectivo? There is room for playing, for chance and for every single oracle.

As one enters, a priestess hands out a talisman to guide us through this collaborative performance. What do we need to know about the other in order to build a common doing-together, an affection? *¿Cómo se construye el saber colectivo?* Voices intervene, inviting us to listen to the breathing of the other, to perceive the texture of the clothes clinging to our body, to explore every corner of our mouth with the tongue. How can we reinvent the forms of affection and affectation? One body approaches another, they open a poetry book (what language/what tongue?) and recite a fragment in a low voice. They hand out a piece of paper with an invitation to do the same.

Translations of translations. How is the common constructed from an artistic practice? A computer with a shared document ready to be intervened. How do we re-place presence? Where do we exist? Reading bodies become prophets and scribes. An approach, an assemblage of practices, an instantaneous composition of bodies that meet each other in the doing. How do we build knowledge from our own selves without attempting to reinstate the hegemonic knowledge imposed as knowing? *¿Cómo se construye el saber colectivo? El conocimiento es una danza.* Iterations upon interventions.



Key group: ¿Cómo hacemos? ¿Qué es ser un key group?

Las cosas que insisten las llevamos a la práctica, nos damos el tiempo, resonando los temas sobre los que escribimos después. Hacemos teoría conversando.

Pensar con otras, a través de otras, esa es la clave del grupo. Deshilachando las tramas del saber colectivo, trayéndolo acá, a la conversación presente. Despuntando aquellas cosas que insisten sobre los cuerpos, aquellas cosas que insisten fuertes en la experiencia de vivir, que vuelven y vuelve. Aquellas cosas entramadas en los afectos y las vidas de cada una. Dejando de lado la voz erudita del saber aislado y propiciando una voz densa.

Entre, siempre estamos pensando entre otras. Nos iluminamos con linternas y seguimos tejiendo la lana de la otra. Insistir como método, es el título del taller de una amiga, pero le podemos robar la frase porque nos representa y militamos la cita de la compañera, el flujo horizontal de las palabras.

La llave es la clave, abrir la puerta para ir a jugar, salirse por la tangente, rajarse de la academia, todo (o nada) para construir,



Key group: How do we do what we do? What does it mean to be a key group?

The things we insist on, we put into practice; we give ourselves time; we resonate with the issues that we later write about. We make theories through conversations.

Thinking with others, through others, that's the key to the group. Unravelling the wefts of collective knowledge, bringing it here, to the present conversation. Unravelling those things insisting on the bodies, those things that insist strongly on the experience of living, that come back and comes back. Those things woven into the affections and lives of each one of us. Leaving aside the erudite voice of isolated knowledge and propitiating a dense voice.

In between, we are always thinking among others. We illuminate each other with lanterns and continue to weave the wool of the other. Insisting as a method is the title of a friend's workshop, but we can steal the phrase from her because it represents us and we inhabit the compañera's quote, the horizontal flow of words.

The key/llave is the key/clave, to open the door to play, to go off on a tangent, to run away from the academy, everything (or

constituir, componer, ser, hacer una grupalidad. Ser una grupa clave, en cuál clave, un cónclave sin clave.

La clave sin llave, no hay puerta pero si juegos que nos permiten siempre salirnos con la nuestra por la tangente, es todo, todo, todo, nunca nada, nada, nada. Reconstruir, instruir, destruir, instituir una grupalidad. Ser clave la grupa, grupalizar la clave, desclavijarse, desclavarse de la pared de la academia que nos permite desclavizarnos en espacios lagunarios de sensaciones.

Prácticas de cuidar, cuidar para ser grupo, para poder tejer. La grupa encuentra un tejido propio para adherirse a otros tejidos anteriores. No vienen por generación espontánea. La grupa se instituye a partir de la insistencia. Insistir hoy, mañana. Insistir hasta formar un encuentro. Hacer pequeños encuentros previos. Jugar e insistir. Tal vez la clave del grupo es que construye sus propias llaves. Arma sus propios tejidos. Se adhiere a otras superficies, lejos de las paredes.

El juego, la cancha, los jugadores, telepatía organizativa, micelio, los limones se van acomodando con el movimiento, genera milagros, sube la vara: querés que todos tus grupos vibren así. Amigas-compañeras, prácticas de cuidado, magia.

Jugadoras de cancha completa, oraculares y fungis, limonas y limadas en movimiento continuo, hacedoras de

nothing) to build, to constitute, to compose, to be, to make a groupness. To be a *grupa* clave, in which key, a conclave without a key.

The key/clave without a key/llave, there is no door but there are games that allow us to always get away with it, to go on a tangent, it is everything, everything, everything, never nothing, nothing, nothing. To rebuild, to instruct, to destroy, to institute a groupness. The *grupa* is key, to group the key, to become undone, to unhook oneself from the wall of Academia that allows us to unslaven ourselves in lagunarie spaces of sensations.

Practices of caring, caring in order to be a group, to be able to weave. The grupa finds its own fabric to adhere to previous fabrics. They do not appear by spontaneous generation. The *grupa* is instituted through insistence. To insist today, tomorrow. Insist until an encounter happens. Carry out small previous encounters. To play and to insist. Perhaps the key to the group is that it creates its own keys. It builds its own tissues. It sticks to other surfaces, away from the walls.

The game, the pitch, the players, organisational telepathy, mycelium, the lemons find their place in tune with the movement, it generates miracles, it raises the bar: you want all your groups to vibrate like this. Friends-companions, caring practices, magic.

Full-court players, oracular and fungus/*fungis*, she-lemons and *limadas* in continuous movement, she-makers of

maravillas, apostando a todas las formas del azar, vibrando vínculos, practicando magia, cuidando los afectos, afectándose en el juego, revolcándose en la cancha, encontrándose en los sueños.

Pasame la pelota que sola no puedo jugar, los limones si es que no tenés una de trapo. La teoría como pelota o limón, pelando las capas de sentidos, mordiendo los gajos ácidos de humor y amor, vibrando en los pensamientos y los sueños. Si nos afectamos, ¿somos más o menos efectivos?

El limón te saca los humos del gas que oprime. Se instala en el paladar de la memoria y salva. Allí, cuando nos gasearon por querer que el mundo sea mundo para todos los mundos, allí el sentido nos salvó y allí seguramente nos unió. No nos vimos, nos percibimos y... hoy: ¿querés un gajo?

Grupo clave, la clave del grupo, nos abrimos y nos cerramos. Abrimos el espacio y conservamos una trastienda.

NO VAMOS A MOSTRARLO TODO, NO VAMOS A DECIRLO TODO, NO PODRÍAMOS, NO SABRÍAMOS CÓMO, LES ABURRIRÍA.

Las magas no comparten los trucos aunque te dejan tirar de los hilos, parte del misterio se susurra, repercute, aparece con

wonders, betting on all forms of chance, vibrating relationships, practising magic, caring for loved ones and affections, affecting each other in the game, rolling on the court, finding each other in dreams.

Pass me the ball, I can't play alone, or the lemons if you don't have a ragball. Theory as a ball or a lemon, peeling the layers of sense/sensations, biting the sour segments of humour and love, vibrating in thoughts and dreams. If we are affected, are we more or less effective?

Lemons take out the fumes of oppressing gases. It settles in the palate of memory and saves us. There, when they gassed us for wanting the world to be a world for all the worlds, there, the sense saved us and there it probably united us. We didn't see each other, we perceived each other and... today: do you want a slice?

Key group, the key of the group, we open and close ourselves. We open the space and we keep a back room.

WE ARE NOT GOING TO SHOW EVERYTHING, WE ARE NOT GOING TO SAY EVERYTHING, WE COULDN'T, WE WOULDN'T KNOW HOW, IT WOULD BORE YOU.

The she-magicians don't share their tricks although they let you pull the strings, part of the

las voces bajitas, que traman la magia de lo posible.

Una forma de estar presentes, una forma de manifestar incomodidades, un encuentro entre disciplinas desde el hacer mismo. Este key group es la insistencia en el encuentro. La llave que erotiza pantallas, hace estallar dedos y lenguas virtuales y a veces hasta nos encontramos en carne y hueso en cada lectura en voz alta, en cada cita.

Insistir en los dedos y las voces que erotizan pantallas y cuerpos y textos y lenguas de fuego que se encuentran a viva voz. Una cita con otros, entre otros, virtuales a veces, vibrantes siempre. Hacernos presente desde las incomodidades, a pesar de las incomodidades, con las incomodidades.

Se trata de investigar dinámicas grupales desde un abordaje no psicológico pero terapéutico, se trata de cómo nos ayudamos a vivir, tesoros de lapandemia, amigas en la tormenta, una terapia de sensibilización, la construcción del saber desde el afecto.

Una key para un grupo, darle la llave a un grupo equivale a darle la posibilidad de abrir. El grupo encuentra una llave y abre algo, seguro, mínimo, abre un espacio entre cosas que antes estaban cerradas, obturadas. Para abrir se necesita una clave, siempre la misma o va cambiando. Las claves se actualizan, se renuevan. Hay que ser primero un grupo.

mystery is whispered, it reverberates, it appears with the low voices, which weave the magic of the possible.

A way of being present, a way of manifesting discomfort, an encounter between disciplines from the act itself. This key group is the insistence on the encounter. The key that eroticises screens, makes virtual fingers and tongues explode and sometimes we even find ourselves in the flesh in each reading out loud, in each quotation.

To insist on fingers and voices that eroticise screens and bodies and texts, and tongues of fire that meet out loud. An appointment with others, between others, sometimes virtual, always vibrant. To make ourselves present from the discomfort, despite the discomfort, with the discomfort.

It is about investigating group dynamics from a non-psychological but therapeutic approach, it is about how we help each other live, treasures of the pandemic, friends in the storm, a therapy of sensitisation, the construction of knowledge from affection.

A *llave* for a group, giving a key to a group is the same as giving it the chance to open something. The group finds a key/*llave* and opens something, safe, small, it opens a space between things that were previously closed, blocked. To open something, a key/*clave* is needed, always the same or it changes. Keys/*claves* are updated, renewed. You have to be a group first.

Las llaves en el bolsillo, siempre a mano está la grupa, lista para el juego y la potencia del azar, el entramado de la grupalidad. Si hay algo que hacemos es no parar de abrir, tanto que no nos alcanza la memoria de google drive. Desbordamos de archivos, registros y datos, nunca sobran palabras. La clave de nuestro gmail ahora no la recuerdo, pero seguro alguno de nuestros ministerios está preparado, porque cada parte arma la trama.

Nos damos la llave, la llave la creamos, la imaginamos, la llave que abre el espacio, el juego. La llave a nuestros antepasados, a nuestras biografías. Abrimos los archivos, no para decirlo todo, no para saberlo todo, sino para entrar a la espesura de la trama. Abrirnos. Dar cuenta de nosotras en el hacer/sentir/pensar/decir/callar. Una llave para abrir y también para cerrar. Cerrarnos a un dar cuenta de sí en los términos del otro. Juntar leña en las miradas que nos fijan. Guardar siempre un secreto... para el grupo.

En el fragmento del tiempo, en el susurro de la noche, en el intersticio del grito, en el entre, en lo que o es tiempo o es espacio, en lo que no se captura, en... no hay estar, no hay ser, viene para irse, se presenta y desaparece...

The keys in the pocket, the *grupa* is always at hand, ready for the game and the power of chance, the weaving of groupness. If there is one thing we do, it is to never stop opening, so much so that we run out of memory in google drive. We overflow with files, records and data, there are never too many words. I don't remember the password/clave for our gmail, but surely one of our Ministries is ready, because each part makes up the fabric.

We give each other the key, we create the key, we imagine it, the key that opens the space, the game. The key to our ancestors, to our biographies. We open the archives, not to say everything, not to know everything, but to enter the density of the fabric. To open ourselves. To give an account of ourselves in doing/feeling/thinking/saying/silencing. A key to open and also to close. To close ourselves to an account of ourselves in terms of the other. Gathering firewood in the gazes that stare at us. To always keep a secret... for the group.

In the fragment of time, in the whisper of the night, in the interstice of the cry, in the in-between, in what is either time or space, in what is not captured, in... there is no being/estar, there is no being/ser, it comes to go away, it presents itself and disappears...

CAMINOS, CONTACTO

paths, contact

La casa

(fabulaciones desde nuestra experiencia colectiva en la virtualidad)



<https://youtu.be/3Gf1ZZmzulE>

Hay una casa en la laguna o una laguna en una casa o muchas lagunas y muchas casas.

Hay lugar.

Es una casa que flota en agua tibia, una casa que se deja llevar por los ríos que se cruzan debajo de ella, sin ofrecer resistencia. Que encuentra su ritmo en el vaivén del andar. Que aguanta la tormenta generando sorpresa.

Una casa a la vuelta de las vías del tren, en donde casi por casualidad se junta agua. Una casa en el medio de un remanso. Porque el agua llama al agua, y al movimiento. Donde hay agua, hay movimiento y también hay vida. Y también ranas.

Las casas del recuerdo, de la infancia están repletas de ranas, de los sonidos de la noche tranquila, en el barrio del remanso. De ranas que esperan pacientes debajo de las vías, en las acequias escondidas, para hacer tumbar en la noche sus gorgoteos de garganta. De ranas que resuenan juntas, como un solo instrumento. De ranas que no temen esconderse en lo profundo del barro, porque es allí donde nacen: mezcla de agua y tierra. Una jauría de ranas, una yeguada de ranas orquesta, donde cada una toca un sonido, una tecla.

Una casa con piso de tierra, a la que de vez en cuando la arrastra la corriente. Una casa

The house

(fabulations from our collective experience in virtuality)

There is a house in the lagoon or a lagoon in a house or many lagoons and many houses.

There is room.

It is a house that floats in warm water, a house that lets itself be carried by the rivers that cross beneath it, without offering resistance. It finds its rhythm in the swaying of its walk. A house that endures the storm, generating surprise.

A house around the train tracks, where water gathers almost by chance. A house in the middle of a backwater. Because water calls water and movement. Where there is water, there is movement and there is also life. And also frogs.

The houses of memory, of childhood are full of frogs, of the sounds of the quiet night, in the backwater neighborhood. Of frogs that wait patiently under the tracks, in the hidden ditches, to make their throaty gurgle in the night. Of frogs that resound together, like a single instrument. Of frogs that are not afraid to hide deep in the mud, because that is where they are born: a mixture of water and soil. A pack of frogs, a herd of frogs orchestra, where each one plays a sound, a key.

A house with a dirt floor, occasionally swept away by the current. A house sensitive to the

sensible al tiempo, a la tormenta, que en verano sabe guardar la frescura de la noche para compartirla durante el día con quienes allí habitamos. Una casa que en el se repliega y se contrae, como lo hacen los cuerpos, porque nuestra casa respira.

Es también la sensación de pisar el césped y la tierra fresca con los pies descalzos.

De vez en cuando la abraza el remanso. Me gusta a veces mirarla desde afuera. Y cuando toca entrar hay que agacharse, porque la puerta es pequeña y está medio escondida. Y de vez en cuando la casa se vuelve pequeña, tan pequeña que en lugar de ser arrastrada por el remanso, apenas se mece por la brisa, flotando en las aguas de una pileta pelopincho.

Cuando la habitamos, mientras más concurrida está, la casa se hace más grande. Aparecieron dos lagunas desde el oeste, luego otras seis que barrenaron hacia el sur y, cuando nos habíamos cansado de intuir que faltaba alguien, una última lagunarie se materializó de la nada bajo un árbol de flores blancas sobre la vereda a diez cuadras del mar.

Cada vez que se abre la puerta se hace lugar para que pase el viento, porque la casa respira. Tiene una puerta de madera noble que se expande y se contrae, que se moja con las lluvias.

Hay un cuartito que todavía no sabemos para qué es. Algunas lo usan para pensar, otras para prender velas. Hay runas, tarot, iching, arcángeles y sanguchitos de miga. Hay quiniela, olor a incienso y una foto de Gilda.

La huerta tiene su tiempo, pero no es comestible. Crecen especies raras, híbridas. Cada lagunarie trajo semillas de sus viajes y

weather, to the storm, that in summer knows how to keep the freshness of the night to share it during the day with those who live there. A house that folds and contracts in winter, as bodies do, because our house breathes.

It is also the sensation of stepping on the grass and the fresh soil with bare feet.

From time to time the backwater embraces it. Sometimes I like to look at it from the outside. And when it's time to enter, you have to bend down, because the door is small and a bit hidden. And from time to time the house becomes small, so small that instead of being dragged by the backwater, it barely sways in the breeze, floating in the waters of a pelopincho pool.

When we inhabit it, the more crowded it is, the bigger the house becomes. Two lagoons appeared from the west, then six others swept southward and, just when we were tired of feeling that someone was missing, a last lagunarie materialized out of nowhere under a white flowering tree on the sidewalk ten blocks from the sea.

Every time you open the door you make room for the wind to pass through, because the house breathes. It has a hardwood door that expands and contracts, that gets wet with the rain.

There is a small room that we still don't know what it is for. Some of us use it to think, others to light candles. There are runes, tarot, iching, archangels and small sandwiches. There is a lottery, the smell of incense and a picture of Gilda.

The vegetable garden has its own time, but it is not edible. Rare, hybrid species grow there. Each lagunarie brought seeds from their trips

yacen ahí, calentitas, a modo de invernadero postapocalíptico.

Las paredes están llenas de fotos pero hay una en especial que tiene aires de ser icónica. Una al lado de la otra, nueve lagunaries posan controvertidamente frente al mar de Mar Chiquita con vestuarios que destruyen toda posibilidad de identificar la ubicación temporal. Algunos rostros se confunden con otros, sus gestos se desencuentran entre sí, pero la escena está viva porque de ella brota viento salado y la vibración extática de un encuentro. Los cuerpos que se ven en la foto dejan lugares vacíos, para que se cuelen por ahí imágenes de otros tiempos, nuestras historias, y las de quienes nos rodean.

Existimos en nuestras ganas comunes de seguir existiendo, en un espacio intermitente, que aparece y desaparece en el tiempo. Pero que de alguna forma siempre está ahí, latiendo, creciendo, leudando.

Vivimos en las cocinas de cada una, en las de todas. Preparando la cena casi al final de la semana, robándole un cachito más al final del largo día porque urge terminar de tirar un cachito más de la madeja de lecturas, narraciones, historias, chismes y sueños que forman el corpus de nuestra práctica. Y las recetas de nuestras ancestas, vivas y pasadas, que siempre están. Hay un freezer que conecta todas nuestras habitaciones, a modo de portal. Cada una sabe qué porción de berenjena mover para automáticamente transportarnos de un lugar a otro.

Los roles son movientes, nadie hace lo mismo dos veces seguidas.

Somos pacientes como las arañas, vivimos en una tela de araña. Cada una tiene su esquina.

and they lie there, warm, like a post-apocalyptic greenhouse.

The walls are full of photos but there is one in particular that has the air of being iconic. One next to the other, nine lagunaries pose controversially in front of the sea of Mar Chiquita with costumes that destroy any possibility of identifying the temporal location. Some of their faces are mixed up with others, their gestures are in discord, but the scene is alive because it sprouts salty wind and the ecstatic vibration of an encounter. The bodies seen in the picture leave empty spaces, so that images of other times, our stories, and those of the people around us can slip in.

We exist in our common desire to continue existing, in an intermittent space that appears and disappears in time. But somehow it is always there, beating, growing, leavening.

We live in each other's kitchens, in everyone's kitchens. Preparing dinner almost at the end of the week, stealing one more bit at the end of the long day because it is urgent to finish pulling one more bit from the skein of readings, narratives, stories, gossip and dreams that shape the corpus of our practice. And the recipes of our female ancestors, living and past, which are always there. There is a freezer that connects all our rooms, like a portal. Each one knows which portion of eggplant to move to automatically transport us from one place to another.

The roles are mobile, no one does the same thing twice in a row.

We are patient like spiders, we live in a spider web. Each one has its own corner.

No somos propietarias. Vamos teniendo una multiplicidad de maneras de existir de una heterogeneidad encantadora. Hace un rato existimos en la insistencia y la fantasía de encontrarnos, en el hacer planes, buscar fechas, pasajes, disponibilidades...mientras nos seguimos encontrando en las visiones oníricas de muchas, o en las imaginaciones de paisajes y faunas familiares. Hace poco las encontré entre la fauna migratoria, las ví a todas ahí entre un montón de flamencos rosados visitando una laguna salada.

(Sueño con G. Está en un departamento lleno de plantas, de esas frondosas que había en la casa de alguna tía mía en los 70. Estamos en una fiesta, bebiendo de vasitos plásticos de colores. Hay luces rojas, naranjas, verdes, amarillas. Es nuestro primer encuentro sin pantallas. Nos reímos mucho. No estamos nosotras solas, sino todas las personas que nos hacen felices todos los días. Es un lugar al que quiero volver.

Algunas son nómades, son de todos lados y de ninguno a la vez.)

((Un auto muy pequeño con perfume a pino y por dentro revestido de beige con la tela más suave que podría sentirse al tacto sobre los asientos más mullidos para servirnos de colchón. Hay algunas ramas en el suelo y restos de barro que trajimos en nuestros borcegos de alguna caminata en el bosque inundado. A lo largo de Avenida Bustillo bordeando el Nahuel Huapi, viajamos amontonadas en el asiento trasero, una dos tres siete lagunarias (a veces son más) pueden olerse los cuellos y los cabellos. Un aire seco entra por las ventanas sucias a medio abrir y el sol penetra agresivamente a quien maneja. No podríamos saber quién es, su forma está borroneada.

We are not owners. We have a multiplicity of ways of existing in a charming heterogeneity. For a long time we have existed in the insistence and fantasy of meeting each other, in making plans, looking for dates, tickets, availability... while we continue to meet in the oneiric visions of many or in the imaginations of familiar landscapes and fauna. Recently I found them among the migratory fauna, I saw them all there among a bunch of pink flamingos visiting a salt lagoon.

(I dream of G. She's in an apartment full of plants, the leafy kind that used to be in some aunt of mine's house in the 70s. We are at a party, drinking from colored plastic cups. There are red, orange, green, yellow lights. It's our first meeting without screens. We laugh a lot. It's not just us, but all the people who make us happy every day. It's a place I want to come back to.

Some of them are nomads, they are from everywhere and nowhere at the same time).

((A very small car with pine scent and a beige interior lined with the softest fabric that could be felt to the touch on the softest seats to serve as a mattress. There are some branches on the ground and some mud that we brought in our boots from a walk in the flooded forest. Along Avenida Bustillo bordering the Nahuel Huapi, we travel piled in the back seat, one two three seven lagoons (sometimes more) can smell their necks and hair. A dry air enters through the half-open dirty windows and the sun aggressively penetrates the driver. We couldn't tell who it is, its shape is blurred.

Pero en el asiento de atrás está la fiesta.
Cuchicheos, susurros, de vez en cuando
gritos sobresaltados. Se mezclan los alientos
espesos con suspiros livianos.))

Un país en las nubes.

Sin constitución, todo constituyente.

Una institución educativa pública, para
(des)educarnos

Una revolución educativa para todos, para
(des)educarnos

En un campamento en la playa.

En una cueva de montaña.

En un sobrecito de azúcar

En todas las santerías.

En un billete de lotería

En los momentos divertidos y creativos.

En el olor de los sahumerios.

Cada vez que cocinamos.

Cada vez que usamos nuestros
procedimientos en otros contextos.

Existimos en un mundo de tensión gozosa.

*But in the back seat there is a party. Whispers,
murmurs, occasional startled shouts. Thick
breaths mingle with light sighs.))*

A country in the clouds.

No constitution, all constituent.

*A public educational institution, to (un)educate
us.*

*An educational revolution for all, to (un)educate
us.*

In a camp on the beach.

In a mountain cave.

In a sachet of sugar

In all the santerias.

In a lottery ticket

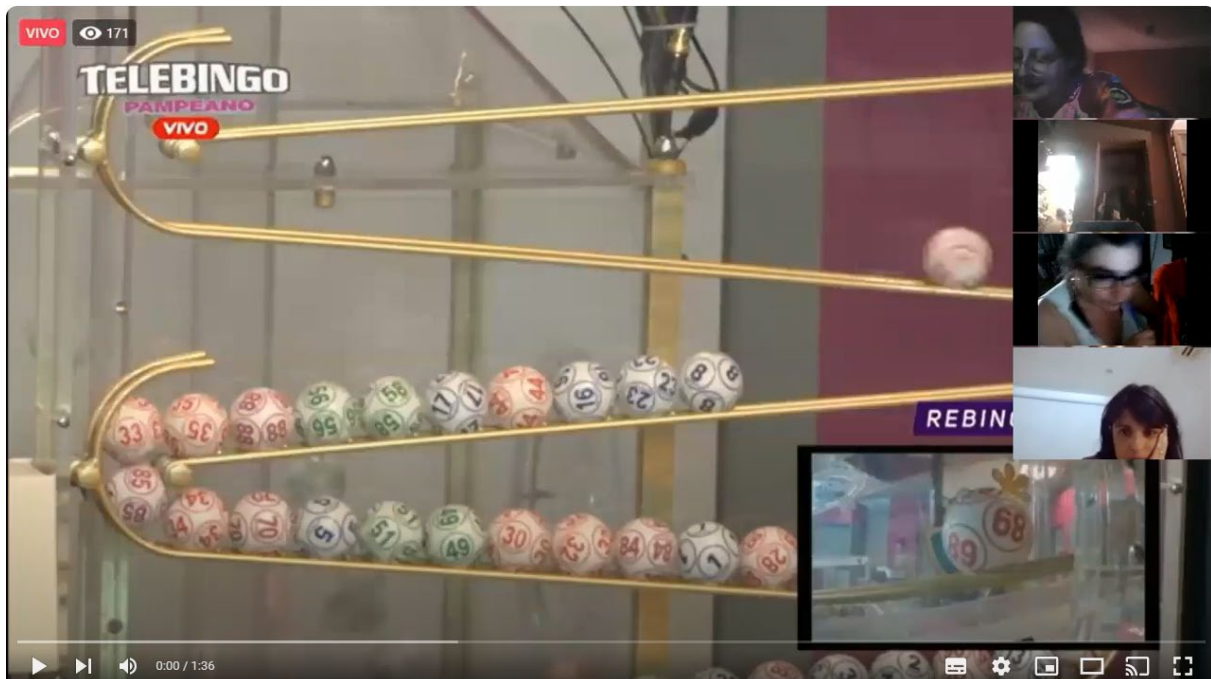
In fun and creative moments.

In the smell of incense.

Every time we cook.

*Every time we use our procedures in other
contexts.*

We exist in a world of joyful tension.



AZAR, APERTURAS
fortune/chance, openings

Las invitaciones

Elegí una/s invitacione/s que desees aceptar para interactuar con estos textos

- Pensar una pregunta, como quien consulta un oráculo. Luego elegir al azar una línea de texto y considerarla una respuesta. Leer la línea de texto en voz alta.
- Elegir un texto. Leer un renglón en voz alta, saltarse dos, leer el siguiente renglón en voz alta, saltarse dos, y así sucesivamente..
- Elegir un texto y leerlo en voz alta.
- Elegir un texto y leerlo susurrando.
- Elegir un texto y leerlo balbuceando.
- Elegir un texto y leerlo cantando.
- Leer el mismo texto pero de otro modo
- Abrir la ventana del lugar en el que estás y leer hacia el exterior un fragmento del texto
- Respirar profundo cada vez que lo creas necesario.
- Elegir un texto en un idioma que desconozcas, y leelo en voz alta

Invitations

Choose one or more invitations to interact with these texts

- Think of a question, like someone who consults an oracle. Then randomly choose a line of the text and consider it an answer. Read the line aloud.
- Choose a text. Read one line aloud, skip two, read the next line aloud, skip two, and so on.
- Choose a text and read it aloud.
- Choose a text and read it while whispering.
- Choose a text and read it while stammering.
- Choose a text and read it in singing.
- Read the same text in a different way
- Open the window of the place where you are and read outwards a fragment of the text.
- Take deep breaths whenever you feel and need it.
- Choose a text in a language you don't know, and read it aloud.

*unos procedimientos,
unos modos de hacer*

para (des)organizar(nos) la vida, el lenguaje, el cuerpo, la escritura, el activismo, el amor, unas prácticas para desbaratar(nos) el poder neocolonial y sus procesos de sujeción en el tejido celular de nuestra propia subjetividad.

un contingente y larvario espacio epistémico para vislumbrar otras formas de sensibilidad política, afectiva, lingüística, artística y cultural.

poner a jugar y a discutir la legalidad colonial de los conceptos desde los que se mira, se siente, se toca e interpreta el mundo y sus leyes que lo organizan taxonómicamente

porque escribirse/pensarse fuera de los límites introduce la precaria, poderosa y turbulenta figura de lo mágico en lo cotidiano

pensar los procedimientos mediante los cuales (nos) hablamos, es también ser re-constructorxs de un archivo de la insubordinación sexo-genérica que ha sido borrado de la cultura pública

un ritual de no saber como desgarrar de la complicidad con los modos presentes y dominantes del pensamiento de la transparencia tecnomediática del mercado y el reglamentarismo de la legitimidad académica institucional, sin la pretensión arrogante de fundar una consigna, una teoría o un nombre propio, sino con el ánimo de explorar una posibilidad incierta plegada en nuestras condiciones de vida y en las lenguas que la soportan y habitan

some procedures, some ways of doing

to (dis)organize (ourselves) life, language, body, writing, activism, love, some practices to throw (us) into disarray neocolonial power and their processes of subjection in the cellular tissues of our own subjectivity.

a contingent and larval epistemic space to peer at other form of political, affective, linguistic, artistic and cultural sensitivity,

putting into play and discussing the colonial legality of concepts from where one sees, feels, touches and interprets the world and the laws that organize it taxonomically

Because writing/thinking ourselves outside the limits introduces the precarious, powerful and turbulent figure of the magic into the everyday.

Thinking about procedures through which (we) speak (to each other) is also to become re-constructors of an archive of sexual-generic insubordination that has been erased from public culture.

A ritual of not knowing as a tearing of complicity in the present and dominant modes of thinking of the technomediatic transparency of the market and the regulations of institutional academic legitimacy, without the arrogant pretensions of installing an instruction, a theory or a proper name, but instead with the idea of exploring an uncertain possibility folded in our living conditions and in the tongues that support them and live in them.

(val flores (2016), *La intimidad del procedimiento. Escritura, lesbiana, sur como prácticas de sí / The intimacy of procedures. Lesbian, south, writing as a practice of the self* - rough translation by Lagunaries, from the Spanish original)

Vivir un enclaustramiento o abrirse al otro: tal es la alternativa a la que se suele intentar reducir el derecho de todo pueblo a hablar su propia lengua. Tal alternativa viene a legitimar unas premisas que en realidad son el legado de una dominación tradicional. O bien hablamos una lengua “universal”, o una de las que tienden a serlo, y participamos así en la vida del mundo; o bien nos refugiamos en nuestro idioma particular, tan poco apto para ser compartido, y entonces nos aislamos del mundo y vivimos solos y estériles en nuestra pretendida identidad.

“Live in seclusion or open up to the other”: this was supposedly the only alternative for any population demanding the right to speak its own language. It is how inherited premises of centuries-old domination were given legitimacy. Either you speak a language that is “universal,” or on its way to being so, and participate in the life of the world; or else you retreat into your particular idiom—quite unfit for sharing—in which case you cut yourself off from the world to wallow alone and sterile in your so-called identity.

Édouard Glissant: *Poética de la relación/Poetics of relation*. Traducción al Español: Senda Inés Sferco y Ana Paula Penchaszadeh. Translation to English: Betsy Wing

Tartamudeo: procedimiento de multiplicaciones crecientes.

Desterritorializar: arrancar de su dominio, para re-territorializar otra noción.

Deleuze y Parnet, *Dialogues/Diálogos*. Traducción al español: José Vázquez Pérez

Stuttering: procedure of increasing multiplications

To de-territorialize: uproot from its domain, to re-territorialize another notion

Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues* - rough translation by Lagunaries, from the Spanish version

Voz escrita 4 : tal vez tengo una voz que resuena bajito

Voice in chat 4: maybe my voice resonates softly

Voz escrita 4 : siempre por lo bajo, nunca por encima

Voice in chat 4: always (be)low, never above

Voz escrita 7 : ¿Cómo hacemos teoría?

Voice in chat 7: How do we do theory?

Voz escrita 4 : Las voces que sonamos así

Voice in chat 4: Our voices resonate like this

Voz escrita 4 : haciendo

Voice in chat 4: Doing

Voz escrita 4 : as-ciendo

Voice in chat 4: I rise

Voz escrita 4 : as-cen-diendo

Voice in chat 4: Rising

Voz escrita 4 : la autori

Voice in chat 4: Authorit-

Voz escrita 4 : ¿cómo me meto?

Voice in chat 4: How do I get in?

Voz escrita 4 : es en relacion de dos, tres,

Voice in chat 4: in relations of twos and threes

Voz escrita 4 : veint

Voice in chat 4: twent

Voz escrita 4 : e

Voice in chat 4: y

Voz escrita 4 : hola

Voice in chat 4: hello

Voz escrita 4 : alguien

Voice in chat 4: anyone

Voz escrita 4 : ahí

Voice in chat 4: there

Voz escrita 4 : ¿ahí?

Voice in chat 4: there?

Fragmento del chat general de la primera colaborativa performance virtual de Lagunaries, *El decorado no se calla*.

Fragment of the general chat from Lagunaries' first virtual collaborative performance, *The décor does not remain silent*.

BAJA TEORÍA

Nos exponemos a cometer un grave error cuando tratamos de «extrapolar» conceptos diseñados para representar un alto nivel de abstracción como si automáticamente produjeran los mismos efectos cuando los trasladamos a otro nivel más concreto y «bajo».

STUART HALL, «La importancia de Gramsci para el estudio de la raza y la etnicidad»

Basándome en la noción de Rancière de emancipación intelectual, quiero proponer la baja teoría, o un saber teórico que opera en varios niveles a la vez, precisamente como una de esas formas de transmisión que se muestra en los desvíos, nudos y giros entre el saber y la confusión, y que no busca explicar sino implicar. Pero ¿qué es la baja teoría, cómo nos afecta, y por qué deberíamos implicarnos en algo que, más que cuestionar, parece confirmar la formación binaria que lo sitúa como lo otro respecto a la alta teoría? La baja teoría es un modelo de pensamiento que tomo de la famosa noción de Stuart Hall de que la teoría no es un fin en sí mismo, sino «un desvío en el camino hacia algo más» (1991: 43). Una vez más, deberíamos considerar la utilidad de perdernos, en vez de encontrar un camino, y así evocar un paseo benjaminiano, o una deriva situacionista, un deambular por lo imprevisible, lo inesperado, lo improvisado y lo sorprendente. Tomo el término «baja teoría» del comentario que hace Hall de la eficacia de Gramsci como pensador. Respondiendo a la sugerencia de Althusser de que los textos de Gramsci eran «insuficientemente teóricos», Hall destaca que los principios abstractos de Gramsci «estaban designados de forma bastante explícita para operar en los más bajos niveles de la concreción histórica» (412). Hall continúa diciendo que Gramsci «no apuntaba más alto, perdiendo su objetivo político»; en su lugar, como el propio Hall, apuntaba bajo con el fin de llegar a un objetivo más amplio. En este caso podemos pensar sobre la baja teoría como un modo de accesibilidad, pero también deberíamos pensarla como una especie de modelo teórico que vuela bajo el radar, que es un ensamblaje de textos excéntricos y ejemplos y que rechaza confirmar las jerarquías del saber que mantienen arriba a la alta teoría.⁹

Mientras haya una entidad denominada «alta teoría», aunque sea de una forma casual o como un atajo para referirse a una tradición particular del pensamiento crítico, existe un ámbito implícito de baja teoría. De hecho, Hall aborda este tema en su ensayo *La importancia de Gramsci para el estudio de la raza y*

⁹ David Graeber también debate sobre la «baja teoría» en su libro sobre el anarquismo. Escribe: «más que Alta Teoría, lo que el anarquismo necesita es lo que podríamos llamar Baja Teoría: una forma de conectar con esas cuestiones reales, inmediatas, que emergen de un proyecto transformador» (9). Creo que en este tema Graeber y yo compartimos la forma de pensar.

[27]

We expose ourselves to serious error when we attempt to “read off” concepts that were designed to operate at a high level of abstraction as if they automatically produced the same theoretical effects when translated to another, more concrete, “lower” level of operation.

—Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity”

Building on Rancière’s notion of intellectual emancipation, I want to propose low theory, or theoretical knowledge that works at many levels at once, as precisely one of these modes of transmission that revels in the detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion, and that seeks not to explain but to involve. So what is low theory, where does it take us, and why should we invest in something that seems to confirm rather than upset the binary formation that situates it as the other to a high theory? Low theory is a model of thinking that I extract from Stuart Hall’s famous notion that theory is not an end unto itself but “a detour en route to something else” (1991: 43). Again, we might consider the utility of getting lost over finding our way, and so we should conjure a Benjaminian stroll or a situationist *dérivé*, an ambulatory journey through the

LOW THEORY 15

Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure/El arte queer del fracaso*. Traducción al español: Javier Sáez

Archipelagic thinking suits the pace of our worlds. It has their ambiguity, their fragility, their drifting. It accepts the practice of the detour, which is not the same as fleeing or giving up. It recognizes the range of the imaginations of the Trace, which it ratifies. Does this mean giving up on self-government? No, it means being in harmony with the world as it is diffracted in archipelagos, precisely, these sorts of diversities in spatial expanses, which nevertheless rally coastlines and marry horizons. We become aware of what was so continental, so thick, weighing us down, in the sumptuous systematic thought that up until now has governed the History of human communities, and which is no longer adequate to our eruptions, our histories and our no less sumptuous wanderings. The thinking of the archipelago, the archipelagos, opens these seas up to us.

Pensamiento archipelágico

El pensamiento archipelágico encaja bien con la estampa de nuestros mundos. Le toma prestadas la ambigüedad, la fragilidad, la derivación. Admite la práctica del desvío, que no es ni huida ni renuncia. Reconoce el alcance de las imaginaciones de la Huella y las ratifica. ¿Acaso es renunciar a gobernarlos? No, es sintonizar con esa parte del mundo que, precisamente, se ha extendido en archipiélagos, esas a modo de diversidades en la extensión, que, no obstante, aproximan orillas y desposan horizontes. Nos damos cuenta de qué lastre continental y agobiante, y que llevábamos a cucostas, había en esos suntuosos conceptos del sistema que hasta hoy han empuñado las riendas de la Historia de las humanidades y han dejado de ser adecuadas para nuestros desperdigamientos, nuestras historias y nuestros no menos suntuosos derroteros errabundos. La idea del archipiélago, de los archipiélagos, nos franquea esos mares.

La pensée archipélique convient à l'allure de nos mondes. Elle en emprunte l'ambigu, le fragile, le dérivé. Elle consent à la pratique du détour, qui n'est pas fuite ni renoncement. Elle reconnaît la portée des imaginaires de la Trace, qu'elle ratifie. Est-ce là renoncer à se gouverner? Non, c'est s'accorder à ce qui du monde s'est diffusé en archipels précisément, ces sortes de diversités dans l'étendue, qui pourtant rallient des rives et marient des horizons. Nous nous apercevons de ce qu'il y avait de continental, d'épais et qui pesait sur nous, dans les somptueuses pensées de système qui jusqu'à ce jour ont régi l'Histoire des humanités, et qui ne sont plus adéquates à nos éclatements, à nos histoires ni à nos non moins somptueuses errances. La pensée de l'archipel, des archipels, nous ouvre ces mers.

Édouard Glissant, *Traite du tout-monde/Tratado del todo-mundo/Treatise on the Whole-World*. Traducción al español: María Teresa Gallego Urrutia. Translation to English: Celia Britton

Tasting, we were always tasting, sucking the spoon and putting it back in. Without anybody noticing. The diners can't know it, but we always sucked the spoon--and we put our saliva inside the recipes waiting for any utensil to get close to the mouth the magic of the meringue the clandestinity. From grandpa's sabayon at siesta time. I CAN'T WAIT TO LICK MY FINGERS! BUT WITH DESIRE, LIKE ALL THOSE TIMES, FUGITIVE. Sucking the spoon, sinking the bread, stealing bites before the time, bathing oneself in flour and splashes of boiling sauce, of stew exploding in gushes, all of us rioting in the kitchen spicing up that infinite pot with our voices.

Lagunaries, The kitchen. Collective writing

Probar, siempre estuvimos probando, chupar la cuchara y volverla a meter. Sin que nadie se de cuenta. Los comensales no pueden saberlo, pero nosotras siempre chupamos la cuchara-- y metimos nuestra saliva dentro de las recetas esperando que cualquier utensillo se acerque a boca. Dividir la magia del merengue la clandestinidad. Del sabayón del abuelo a la siesta. QUÉ GANAS DE CHUPARME LOS DEDOS! PERO CON GANAS, COMO TODAS ESAS VECES, FUGITIVA. Chupar la cuchara, hundir el pan, robar mordiscos antes de tiempo, bañarse entera en harina y salpicones de salsa hirviendo, de guiso explotando a borbotones, todas amotinadas en la cocina condimentando con nuestras voces aquella olla infinita.

Lagunaries, La cocina. Escritura colectiva

Hay renunciación cuando el poema, transcrito a otra lengua, ha tenido la pérdida de tan gran parte de su ritmo, de sus estructuras secretas, de sus asonancias, de esos azares que son el accidente y la pérdida de la escritura.

Hay que aceptar ese escape; y esa renunciación es la parte de uno mismo que, en cualquier poética, cedemos al otro.

El arte de traducir nos enseña la noción de esquivar, la práctica de la huella que, en contra de las nociones del sistema, nos indica lo incierto y lo amenazado, que son convergentes y nos fortalecen. Sí, la traducción, arte de la aproximación y el roce, es una manera de frecuentar la huella.

En contra de la absoluta limitación de los conceptos del «Ser», el arte de traducir acumula el «siendo». Ir dejando huella en las lenguas es recoger la parte imprevisible del mundo. Traducir no equivale a reducir a una transparencia, ni por supuesto, a conyugar dos sistemas de transparencia.

Y por eso está esta otra propuesta, que nos sugiere el uso de la traducción: oponer a la transparencia de los modelos la abierta opacidad de las existencias que no se pueden reducir.

Pido para todo el mundo el derecho a la opacidad, que no es la cerrazón.

Para poder reaccionar así contra tantas reducciones a la engañosa claridad de los modelos universales.

No necesito «entender» a nadie, ya sea individuo, comunidad, pueblo, ni «hacerlo mío» a costa de asfixiarlo, de que se pierda, así, dentro de una totalidad quebrantadora que tendría yo que gestionar para asumir el convivir con ellos, el construir con ellos, el arriesgarme con ellos.

Que la opacidad, la nuestra, si la hay para el otro, y si para nosotros la hay del otro, no cierre vistas, cuando ocu-

ramasser l'imprévisible du monde. Traduire ne revient pas à réduire à une transparence, ni bien entendu à conjoindre deux systèmes de transparence.

Dès lors, cette autre proposition, que l'usage de la traduction nous suggère : d'opposer à la transparence des modèles l'opacité ouverte des existences non réductibles.

★

Je réclame pour tous le droit à l'opacité, qui n'est pas le renfermement.

C'est pour réagir par là contre tant de réductions à la fausse clarté de modèles universels.

Il ne m'est pas nécessaire de « comprendre » qui que ce soit, individu, communauté, peuple, de le « prendre avec moi » au prix de l'étouffer, de le perdre ainsi dans une totalité assommante que je gérerais, pour accepter de vivre avec lui, de bâtir avec lui, de risquer avec lui.

Que l'opacité, la nôtre s'il se trouve pour l'autre, et celle de l'autre pour nous quand cela se rencontre, ne ferme pas sur l'obscurantisme ni l'apartheid, nous soit une fête, non une terreur. Que le droit à l'opacité, par où se préserverait au mieux le Divers et par où se renforcerait l'acceptation, veille, ô lampes ! sur nos poétiques.

Translation is like an art of flight, in other words, so eloquently, a renunciation that accomplishes.

Renunciation when the poem, transcribed into another language, has given up the greater part of its rhythm, its secret structures, its assonances, these accidents that are the chance and the permanence of writing.

We must accept these losses, and this renunciation is the part of oneself that in any poetics we give up to the other.

The art of translation teaches us the thinking of evasion, the practice of the trace, which, as against systematic thought, points the way to the uncertain, the threatened, which come together and strengthen us. Yes, translation, art of the approach and the light touch, is a way of frequenting the trace.

Against the absolute limitation of the concepts of 'Being', the art of translation brings together the 'being'. To trace in languages is to gather together the unpredictable in the world. Translation does not consist of reducing something to transparency, nor of course in joining up two systems of transparency.

Hence, this other proposition, which the practice of translation suggests: to set against the transparency of models the open opacity of irreducible existences.

★

I claim for everyone the right to opacity, which is not the same as closing oneself off.

It is a means of reacting against all the ways of reducing us to the false clarity of universal models.

I do not have to 'understand' anyone, individual, community, people – i.e. to 'take them with me' at the cost of smothering them, of losing them

* English has no equivalent for the distinction between 'langue' and 'langage', which is an important element in Glissant's discussion of language use. He uses 'langage' to denote the speaker's subjective attitude to the 'langue' (French, English, Creole, etc.) that s/he uses.

Édouard Glissant, *Traite du tout-monde/Tratado del todo-mundo/Treatise on the Whole-World*. Traducción al Español: María Teresa Gallego Urrutia. Translation to English: Celia Britton

En esas repeticiones, que opté por mantener a propósito, hay ligeras modificaciones, a veces casi imperceptibles. Ellas responden a la necesidad de refinar la escucha de los matices de los gérmenes de mundos fecundados por los efectos de tales urgencias en nuestros cuerpos, y a la necesidad de buscar palabras cada vez más afinadas para completar su germinación, dando nacimiento a un modo de cuerpo-y-habla que los inyecte en la corriente sanguínea de la vida social, contribuyendo a su manera con el trabajo colectivo que busca su transfiguración. (...)

... el mundo vive efectivamente en nuestro cuerpo y produce en este gérmenes de otros mundos en estado virtual.

Suely Rolnik, *Esferas de la insurrección. Apuntes para descolonizar el inconciente*. Traducción al Español: Cecilia Palmeiro, Marcia Cabrera y Damian Kraus

In those repetitions, that I chose to keep on purpose, there are some slight, sometimes imperceptible modifications. They respond to the need to refine [our] listening to the nuances of the germs of worlds impregnated by the effects of these urgencies in our bodies, and the need to search for words that are, each time, more finely tuned to complete their germination, giving birth to a mode of body-and-speech that brings them into the blood flow of social life, contributing, in their own way, to collective work that looks for their own transfiguration.... the world lives, effectively, in our bodies and produces these seeds of other worlds in a virtual state.

Suely Rolnik, *The Spheres of Insurrection: Suggestions for Combating the Pimping of Life*, rough translation by Lagunaries, from the Spanish version

ampliando assim seu sentido. Nessas repetições, que optei propositadamente por manter, há ligeiras modificações, às vezes quase imperceptíveis. Elas respondem à necessidade de refinar a escuta às nuances dos germens de mundos fecundados pelos efeitos de tais urgências em nossos corpos, bem como a de buscar palavras cada vez mais afinadas para completar sua germinação, dando nascimento a um lugar de corpo-e-fala que os injeite na corrente sanguínea da vida social, contribuindo à sua maneira para o trabalho coletivo que visa sua transfiguração.

Suely Rolnik, *Esferas da insurreição. Notas para uma vida não cafetinada*

Existimos en nuestras ganas comunes de seguir existiendo, en un espacio intermitente, que aparece y desaparece en el tiempo. Pero que de alguna forma siempre está ahí, latiendo, creciendo, leudando.

Vivimos en las cocinas de cada una, en las de todas. Preparando la cena casi al final de la semana, robándole un cachito más al final del largo día porque urge terminar de tirar un cachito más de la madeja de lecturas, narraciones, historias, chismes y sueños que forman el corpus de nuestra práctica. Y las recetas de nuestras ancestas, vivas y pasadas, que siempre están. Hay un freezer que conecta todas nuestras habitaciones, a modo de portal. Cada una sabe qué porción de berenjena mover para automáticamente transportarnos de un lugar a otro.

No somos propietarias. Vamos teniendo una multiplicidad de maneras de existir de una heterogeneidad encantadora. Hace un rato existimos en la insistencia y la fantasía de encontrarnos, en el hacer planes, buscar fechas, pasajes, disponibilidades... mientras nos seguimos encontrando en las visiones oníricas de muchas, o en las imaginaciones de paisajes y faunas familiares. Hace poco las encontré entre la fauna migratoria, las ví a todas ahí entre un montón de flamencos rosados visitando una laguna salada.

Un país en las nubes.

Sin constitución, todo constituyente.

Una institución educativa pública, para (des)educarnos
Una revolución educativa para todos, para (des)educarnos

En un campamento en la playa.

En una cueva de montaña.

En un sobrecito de azúcar

En todas las santerías.

En un billete de lotería

En los momentos divertidos y creativos.

En el olor de los sahumerios.

Cada vez que cocinamos.

Cada vez que usamos nuestros procedimientos en otros contextos.

Existimos en un mundo de tensión gozosa.

Lagunaries, La casa. Escritura colectiva

We exist in our common desire to continue existing, in an intermittent space that appears and disappears in time. But somehow it is always there, beating, growing, leavening.

We live in each other's kitchens, in everyone's kitchens. Preparing dinner almost at the end of the week, stealing one more bit at the end of the long day because it is urgent to finish pulling one more bit from the skein of readings, narratives, stories, gossip and dreams that shape the corpus of our practice. And the recipes of our ancestors, living and past, which are always there. There is a freezer that connects all our rooms, like a portal. Each one knows which portion of eggplant to move to automatically transport us from one place to another.

We are not owners. We have a multiplicity of ways of existing in a charming heterogeneity. For a long time we have existed in the insistence and fantasy of meeting each other, in making plans, looking for dates, tickets, availabilities... while we continue to meet in the oneiric visions of many or in the imaginations of familiar landscapes and fauna. Recently I found them among the migratory fauna, I saw them all there among a bunch of pink flamingos visiting a salt lagoon.

A country in the clouds.

No constitution, all constituent.

A public educational institution, to (un)educate us.

An educational revolution for all, to (un)educate us.

In a camp on the beach.

In a mountain cave.

In a sachet of sugar

In all the santerias.

In a lottery ticket

In fun and creative moments.

In the smell of incense.

Every time we cook.

Every time we use our procedures in other contexts.

We exist in a world of joyful tension.

Lagunaries, The house. Collective writing

FABULACIONES, ANCESTRAS, MEMORIAS fabulations, ancestors, memories

La cocina

(relatos tejidos desde la memoria de nuestras
ancestras)



<https://youtu.be/q-PDmaqWLO4>

Reencontrarse con el pasado,
traer al cuerpo la memoria sensible,
ese instante en el que las historias se
entrelazan y se vuelven táctiles.

Cocina abuela quinta gallinero horno de barro
parra brazos fuertes manos rudas jugábamos
a muchas cosas bajo la mesa larga piel
tostada lunares lunares pintitas muchas en la
piel por el sol excesivo del trabajo en la tierra
cuchillo en mano raspando escamas de
pescado arrancando plumas olor a ajo
pelando choclos secando chalas secando
hojas de parra en la sogá eligiendo semillas
tierra lugares para la siembra punteando
regando esperando que llueva que llueva
poniéndole el cuerpo a la sequía sufriendo la
cosecha perdida cosechando eligiendo la
verdura las frutas amasando palo de amasar
harina, si Blanca flor, también usaba esa,---
Cuál es la cocina que recuerdo? dónde
empieza la receta?

nunca la tostadora con puertitas, de esas que
te quemabas los dedos, me vino a la mente -
la vi hace poco en alguna otra parte, pensé en
justo eso

- que se

me quemaban

los dedos -

The kitchen

(stories woven from the memory of our
women ancestors)

Re-encountering the past,

bringing the sensitive memory back to the
body,

that instant in which stories intertwine and
become tactile.

Kitchen grandmother fifth henhouse clay
oven vine strong arms rough hands we played
at many things under the long table toasted
skin moles spots many on the skin from the
excessive sun from working on the land knife
in hand scraping fish scales plucking feathers
smelling of garlic peeling corn drying husks
drying vine leaves on the rope choosing seeds
earth places for sowing stippling watering
waiting for it to rain waiting for it to rain to rain
suffering the lost harvest harvesting choosing
vegetables fruits kneading flour kneading
stick, yes Blanca flor, I used that one too,---
Which is the kitchen I remember?

Where does the recipe begin?

Never the toaster with the little doors, the kind
that burn your fingers, came to my mind - I
saw it somewhere else recently, I thought just
that

- that it

burnt

my fingers -

me decían dedos de manteca cuando era chica. lo odiaba. creo que una vez me puse a llorar cuando me lo dijeron y cariñosamente me dijeron que no significaba nada. Para mi pequeño ser lo significaba todo. Nunca iba a ser diestra en nada. Solo dedos de manteca siniestros.

pensé algo parecido. Mi abuela, ENORME, y no por su tamaño... nunca iba a ser tan fuerte como ella... debilucha era yo (podría haber sido la misma manos de manteca) "Mangia, mangia que ti fa bene, ti fa grande, Mangia María Eugenia."--- Se hablaba mucho italiano en casa, para mi era normal, pero mi abuela había nacido en argentina. una de las bisabuelas no, era tana.

cuando yo

solo quería tostadas

También me daba miedo la electricidad

entendía si era blanca flor o blanca cotta blancaflor racista esa propaganda pero nunca me di cuenta hasta que fui mucho mas grande y pensé que todas las harinas leudantes serían así, modificadas para parecer lo que no son, vendiendo algo que no es... Ricotta de Saavedra? La mesa era trabajo colectivo, ese era la sensación. Ahora pienso en una cocina expandida, que iba de la entrada del living comedor cocina hasta el gallinero del fondo del terreno, pasando por la parra, el horno de barro, la quinta y los frutales. La mesa era larga así que las sillas estaban siempre en otro lado, no alrededor de la mesa.

Azulejos amarillos

Mientras tanto, las manos metidas donde se pudiera. Manos metidas para poder quedarse con algo entre los dedos, esperando el descuido para probar un bocado.

they used to call me butterfingers when I was a kid. I hated it. I think I cried once when i was called that and lovingly i was told it meant nothing. To my little self it meant everything. I was never going to be skilled at anything. Just sinister butterfingers.

I thought something similar. My grandmother, HUGE, and not because of her size... I was never going to be as strong as her... wimpy was I (I could have been the same butter hands) "Mangia, mangia que ti fa bene, ti fa grande, Mangia Maria Eugenia."--- Italian was spoken a lot at home, for me it was normal, but my grandmother was born in argentina. one of the great grandmothers was not, she was italian.

When I

only wanted toast.

I was also afraid of electricity

I understood if it was blanca flor or blanca cotta blancaflor racist that advertisement but I never realised until I was much older and thought that all leavening flours would be like that, modified to look like what they are not, selling something that is not... Ricotta de Saavedra? The table was collective work, that was the feeling. Now I think of an expanded kitchen, which went from the entrance of the living-dining room kitchen to the chicken coop at the end of the plot, passing through the grapevine, the clay oven, the farm and the fruit trees. The table was long so the chairs were always somewhere else, not around the table.

Yellow tiles

In the meantime, hands tucked in wherever they could. Hands stuck in so that you could keep something between your fingers, waiting for the carelessness to try a bite.

Mi hermano se quemó con vitina caliente en esa cocina. Pasamos los siguientes seis meses, tal vez menos, yendo al hospital del quemado cada tantos días. No recuerdo. Solo que él era muy chiquito. Tal vez año y medio o dos. Todavía tiene la marca en ese brazo. Tiene la cocina tatuada en el cuerpo. Una cocina pequeña de un departamento grande, con muchos muebles de cocina. Puertas cómodas para abrir y cerrar. Una mesada muy pequeña. Una cocina oscura, con una pequeña ventana a contrafrente. Una pequeña barra frente a la bacha donde comíamos a veces y que mi abuela debe haber usado de mesada para preparar los alimentos. El olor a la sopa de gallina.

Se me escapó un pajarito por el ventiluz una vez, mientras le limpiaba la jaula. Había estado esperando escapar. Lloré mucho ese día porque no había podido "cuidarlo" como se debía.

Los pajaritos! Siii! Me había olvidado de los pajaritos!!

Por el ventiluz una vez entraron ladrones y se llevaron algo de casa, no se que. Después pusieron barrotes en ese ventiluz, pero una persona muy chiquita podría haber entrado igual. El día que entraron estábamos todos durmiendo en casa. Al lado de la cocina estaba la habitación donde dormía Dionisia, la trabajadora doméstica. El año en que mi abuela murió debimos vaciar la casa. La última vez que estuve allí había pan, tomates, aceite de oliva y orégano sobre la barra. Ya no más olor a sopa de gallina. ROMPAN LA PARED QUE SEPARA LA ALQUIMIA DEL CUERPO

El crepitar de las cebollas, de los pimientos. Los callos en los dedos de tanto pelar papas con cuchillo, bolsas y bolsas.

My brother burned himself with hot soup in that kitchen. We spent the next six months, maybe less, going to the hospital every few days. I don't remember. Just that he was very young. Maybe a year and a half or two. He still has the mark on that arm. He has the kitchen tattooed on his body. A small kitchen in a big flat, with lots of kitchen units. Doors easy to open and close. A very small countertop. A dark kitchen, with a small window in front of it. A small counter in front of the sink where we sometimes ate and that my grandmother must have used as a table to prepare food. The smell of chicken soup.

I had a little bird escape through the air vent once, while I was cleaning its cage. It had been waiting to escape. I cried a lot that day because I hadn't been able to "take care" of it properly.

The birds! Yes, I had forgotten about the birds!

Through the air vents once burglars came in and took something from the house, I don't know what. Later they put bars on the air vents, but a very small person could still have gotten in. The day they broke in we were all sleeping at home. Next to the kitchen was the room where Dionisia, the domestic worker, slept. The year my grandmother died we had to empty the house. The last time I was there, there was bread, tomatoes, olive oil and oregano on the counter. No more smell of chicken soup. BREAK THE WALL THAT SEPARATES ALCHEMY FROM THE BODY

The crackling of onions, of peppers. The calluses on the fingers from peeling potatoes with knives, bags and bags.

Las manos hinchadas tenía mi abuela, los dedos precisos preciosos pero llenos de sangre de tanto enhebrar agujas, hilvanar, pelas papas con cuchillo, bolsas y bolsas. Mientras la salsa de tomate hervía, se untaba las manos con restos de limón y azúcar. Las masajeaba intensamente para que el limón penetre la piel, te quedan las manos super suaves, decía y agarraba mis manitos diminutas y las masajeaba con la sobra del ungüento que le había quedado entre los dedos.

Esas mismas manos enrollaban ñoquis, uno por uno, con el tenedor de dientes largos. Manos empapadas de harina, quizás seguramente era Blancaflor, que bañaba la mesada, el delantal, el vestido y el piso. La nonna Julia detestaba el enchastre asique los noquis los hacía la Tía Carmen, que también hacía las frituras, la pignolata, la zeppole con anchoas, también la rosca de pascua y todo lo que tuviera crema pastelera. La nonna se encargaba de la salsa. Una vez me dijo que el secreto era fritar la cebolla con aceite y una cucharadita de manteca.

Lo que más me acuerdo eran las cocinadas colectivas, los diversos recipientes para rallar el zapallo y el choclo. Las muñecas de la chala con su cabello al viento. caliente caluroso calido

Mi abuela Luisa venia seguido a cocinar a casa. Habia vivido en esa casa antes que nosotrxs pero se habia ido a Canada con mi tia Magda en el 74. Volvieron en el 76. Vivieron una o dos semanas con nosotrxs cuando volvieron. No se como hicimos para sentarnos todxs en esa cocina angosta, calurosa, infinitamente diminuta para seis, liliputiense para ocho. ¿CÓMO HACIAN NUESTRAS ABUELAS PARA HACER COSAS TAN COMPLEJAS EN UNA COCINA TAN CHICA?

My grandmother's hands were swollen, her precise fingers beautiful but full of blood from threading needles, basting, peeling potatoes with a knife, bags and bags. While the tomato sauce boiled, she smeared her hands with the remains of lemon and sugar. She massaged them intensely so that the lemon would penetrate the skin, your hands would be super soft, she would say and she would grab my tiny hands and massage them with the leftover ointment that had remained between her fingers.

Those same hands rolled gnocchi, one by one, with the long-tined fork. Hands soaked in flour, perhaps it was Blancaflor, who bathed the counter, the apron, the dress and the floor. The nonna Julia detested the mess so the gnocchi were made by Aunt Carmen, who also made the fried food, the pignolata, the zeppole with anchovies, also the Easter cake and everything that had pastry cream. The nonna was in charge of the sauce. Once she told me that the secret was to fry the onion with oil and a teaspoon of butter.

What I remember most were the collective cookings, the different containers to grate the pumpkin and the corn. The chala dolls with their hair in the wind. hot hot hot hot

My grandmother Luisa often came home to cook. She had lived in that house before us but had gone to Canada with my aunt Magda in '74. They came back in '76. I don't know how we all managed to sit in that cramped, hot, infinitely tiny kitchen for six, Lilliputian for eight. HOW DID OUR GRANDMOTHERS MAKE SUCH COMPLEX THINGS IN SUCH A SMALL KITCHEN? THEY KNEW SO MUCH... YET MY GRANDMOTHER THOUGHT SHE WAS IGNORANT... BECAUSE SHE HAD GONE TO

SABÍAN TANTO... SIN EMBARGO MI ABUELA SE CREÍA IGNORANTE... PORQUE HABÍA IDO A LA ESCUELA HASTA 3ER GRADO.... Mi abuela Rosa no la recuerdo en esa cocina, solo en la suya. Porque no se hablaban con mi mama. Era la mama de mi papa. Hacia los mejores ñoquis del mundo. Pero me daba leche hervida que ponía en la heladera y que yo odiaba, porque la leche hervida cambia su sabor. Ya se pasteurizaba en esa época pero ella le tenía desconfianza a la leche de sachet.

Hubo una época en la que no tuvimos gas, nos quedamos sin gas porque la deuda era tan grande que no se podía pagar. Tampoco había siquiera para comprar la garrafa. Parecía que no había forma de salvar la situación. Pero por suerte teníamos patio, al aire libre. Y allí hicimos el fuego, sacamos las ollas al patio y cocinamos ahí. Por supuesto todas las ollas quedaron negras, del humo, del hollín. Pero entendimos que había otras formas de relacionarnos con el fuego, y con la cocina. Anduvimos por el barrio juntando ramas, y juntamos las que caían de nuestro árbol de palta. Ahí arrancaba la tarea mucho antes de saber qué se iba a llevar al fuego.---

Mirar la pava calentarse para el mate de la merienda, al calor de un fuego que sólo alguien atento y detallista podía controlar. Mi hermano se encargaba de modelar el fuego, yo sólo miraba como hipnotizada su habilidad para esculpir el furioso elemento. En aquella época, en el patio, la cocina tomó otra forma, otro tiempo, nos reunió de manera distinta. Nos acercó un poco más a la comunicación del silencio.

Yo supongo que habrá sido porque nuestro fuego era diferente.

Las comidas que más me gustan, son las que se hacen en el patio, en grupo. También son las que más trabajo requieren, y por eso se

SCHOOL UNTIL THE 3RD GRADE.... My grandmother Rosa I don't remember her in that kitchen, only in hers. Because they didn't talk to my mother. She was my father's mother. She made the best gnocchi in the world. But she gave me boiled milk which she put in the refrigerator and which I hated, because boiled milk changes its taste. It was already pasteurized at that time but she was suspicious of sachet milk.

There was a time when we had no gas, we ran out of gas because the debt was so high that we could not pay. There was not even enough to buy a bottle of gas. It seemed that there was no way to save the situation. But luckily we had a patio, in the open air. And there we made the fire, took the pots out to the patio and cooked there. Of course all the pots were black, from the smoke, from the soot. But we understood that there were other ways of relating to the fire, and to the kitchen. We went around the neighborhood gathering branches, and we gathered those that fell from our avocado tree. That was the beginning of the task long before we knew what we were going to take to the fire.

Watching the kettle heat up for the mate for the afternoon snack, in the heat of a fire that only someone attentive and detail-oriented could control. My brother was in charge of shaping the fire, I just watched, hypnotized by his ability to sculpt the furious element. At that time, in the courtyard, the kitchen took another shape, another time, brought us together in a different way. It brought us a little closer to the communication of silence.

I suppose it must have been because our fire was different.

The meals that I like the most are the ones that are made in the patio, in a group. They are also the ones that require the most work,

necesitan más manos. Por eso amo las empanadas, porque mi mamá necesitaba a toda la familia alrededor de la mesa para poder hacerla. Empanadas de gallina. Hasta hace unos años anduvo una gallina dando vueltas por la casa del barrio, pero yo ya no vivía allí. ¿Qué habrá sido de ella?---

Oflar, y darle con el oflador una forma redonda, y hacer repulgue. Mojar cuidadosamente la masa redondeada por los bordes para que la empanada se cierre. Antes de cerrarla, sacarle un poco el jugo que escurre del relleno. Probar un poquito el relleno, entre armado y armado.

Los azulejos del piso son de granito, como una especie de puntos deformes sobre unos cuadrados de azulejos en el piso. Es un espacio cerrado, siempre estuvo cerrado, como si los que estuviésemos allí no pudiésemos ser vistos, como si lo que se hiciese allí fuese un secreto. La puerta de ingreso lleva a un pequeño palier que lleva a la puerta de salida. Pero hay otra puerta, esa otra puerta me lleva al lavadero y a un cuarto. Qué es es cuarto? Tampoco ese cuarto no puede ser visto? Qué es lo que no se puede ver? Quién no quiere ser visto? No hay luz natural, no hay espacio para el disfrute. Encontrar el goce de los sabores, de los olores, es nuestro goce.

Probar, siempre estuvimos probando, chupar la cuchara y volverla a meter. Sin que nadie se de cuenta. Los comensales no pueden saberlo, pero nosotras siempre chupamos la cuchara-- y metimos nuestra saliva dentro de las recetas esperando que cualquier utensillo se acerque a bocadiverdiv la magia del merengue la clandestiniDaD. Del sabayón del abuelo a la siesta. QUÉ GANAS DE CHUPARME LOS DEDOS! PERO CON GANAS, COMO TODAS ESAS VECES, FUGITIVA. Chupar la cuchara,

and that's why more hands are needed. That's why I love empanadas, because my mom needed the whole family around the table to make them. Chicken empanadas. Until a few years ago there was a hen hanging around the house in the neighborhood, but I no longer lived there. What happened to her?---

Roll the dough into a round shape with the pastry cutter, and make an overlap. Carefully wet the rounded dough around the edges so that the empanada closes. Before closing it, remove a little of the juice that drains from the filling. Taste the filling a little, between assembling and assembling.

The floor tiles are granite, like a kind of deformed dots on squares of tiles on the floor. It is a closed space, it was always closed, as if those of us who were there could not be seen, as if what was done there was a secret. The entrance door leads to a small hallway that leads to the exit door. But there is another door, that other door leads me to the laundry room and other room. What is that room? Also that room can't be seen? What is it that cannot be seen? Who does not want to be seen? There is no natural light, no space for enjoyment. To find the enjoyment of flavors, of smells, is our enjoyment.

Tasting, we were always tasting, sucking the spoon and putting it back in. Without anybody noticing. The diners can't know it, but we always sucked the spoon--and we put our saliva inside the recipes waiting for any utensil to get close to the mouth the magic of the meringue the clandestinity. From grandpa's sabayon at siesta time. I CAN'T WAIT TO LICK MY FINGERS! BUT WITH DESIRE, LIKE ALL THOSE TIMES, FUGITIVE. Sucking the spoon, sinking the bread, stealing bites before the

hundir el pan, robar mordiscos antes de tiempo, bañarse entera en harina y salpicones de salsa hirviendo, de guiso explotando a borbotones, todas amotinadas en la cocina condimentando con nuestras voces aquella olla infinita.

La siesta, el momento de la comida fría directo de la heladera. Era también como una máquina del tiempo, todo era viejo, todo bien de antes. Era coMom Mmmm

Me llevé todo de allí, tengo las ollas con las que cocinaba mi madre, tengo sus cucharas de madera, tengo la olla de hierro de mi abuela. A veces pienso que macerar es poner los ingredientes dentro de la historia y esperar que ellos decidan el curso. UNA COCINA EXP[ANDIDA, UNAS RECETAS EXPANDIDAS, UNA MEMORIA EXPANDIDA Casi todo se tomar.

El tin tin de la cuchara de madera golpeando el borde de la olla.

OLOR A SOPA DE GALLINA CON ARROZ.

TODO LOS SENTIDOS AHI

time, bathing oneself in flour and splashes of boiling sauce, of stew exploding in gushes, all of us rioting in the kitchen spicing up that infinite pot with our voices.

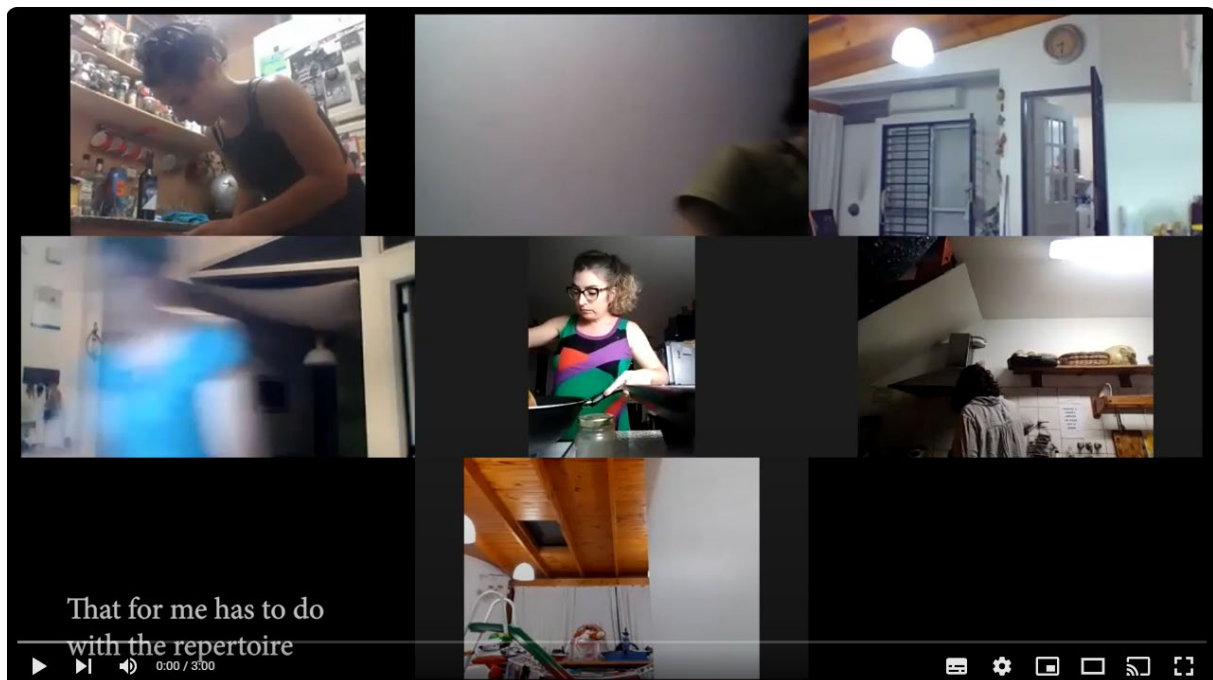
The siesta, the moment of cold food straight from the fridge. It was also like a time machine, everything was old, everything from before. It was like Mmmm

I took everything from there, I have the pots my mother used to cook with, I have her wooden spoons, I have my grandmother's iron pot. Sometimes I think that macerating is putting the ingredients inside the story and waiting for them to decide the course. AN EXPANDED KITCHEN, EXPANDED RECIPES, EXPANDED MEMORY Almost everything is taken.

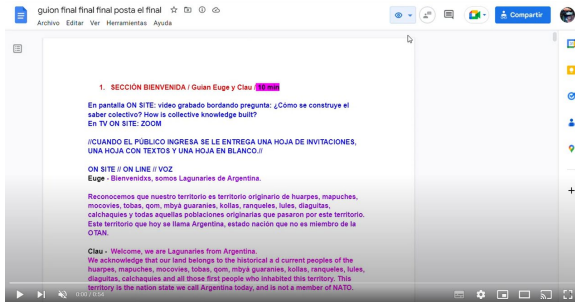
The tin tin of the wooden spoon hitting the edge of the pot.

THE SMELL OF CHICKEN SOUP WITH RICE.

ALL THE SENSES THERE.



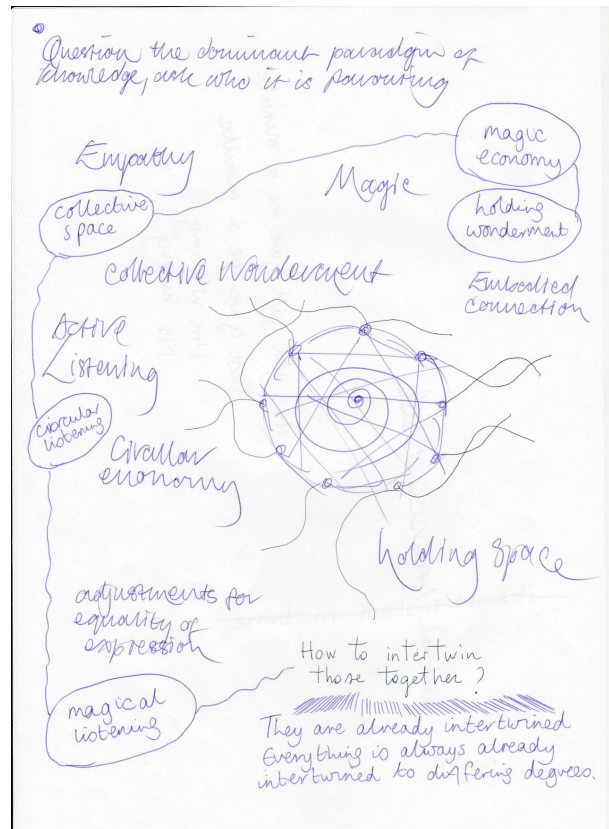
ENCUENTROS encounters



<https://youtu.be/Qjqk4pbzh-4>

conversando ando con versando con ando
conversando entre otros insistiendo entre con
otros conversando dejando proliferar las voces
bajas, los ruidos el viento zonda que se cuele en
todas partes emergiendo desde los márgenes
como una alternativa insissssstennnnnteeeeeee
metiendo la cuchara chupando la y
volviennnnnnnnndola a meter en la olla haciendo
olas al lado Cómo puedo meter mi cuchara en
esta olla? el saber colectivo se construye
metiendo la cuchara

the collective knowledge



HOW TO DEVELOP
TAMEZ. HOW TO DEVELOP COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE.
one takes a pen that doesn't work,
it has run dry, and laughs about
it with one's neighbour; stands up, finds
a new pen, hands out another one on the
way to someone in the same situation.
For collective knowledge requires trust,
seeing each other's what everyone brings to
the table, in this case floor. Not here yet!!

How to build trust?
doing things together?

Doing things together, checking in with each other,
acknowledging each other's presence & not
assuming we're on the same page, invite
someone to share food & hear their story, laugh,
stay together for a while doing nothing, cry and
be vulnerable & see if you can really arrive
with your whole body (currently the said,
bleeding body.) Do a story circle.
(maybe there's no method, can't force it - just vibes?)

Cómo hacemos para construir saber colectivo?

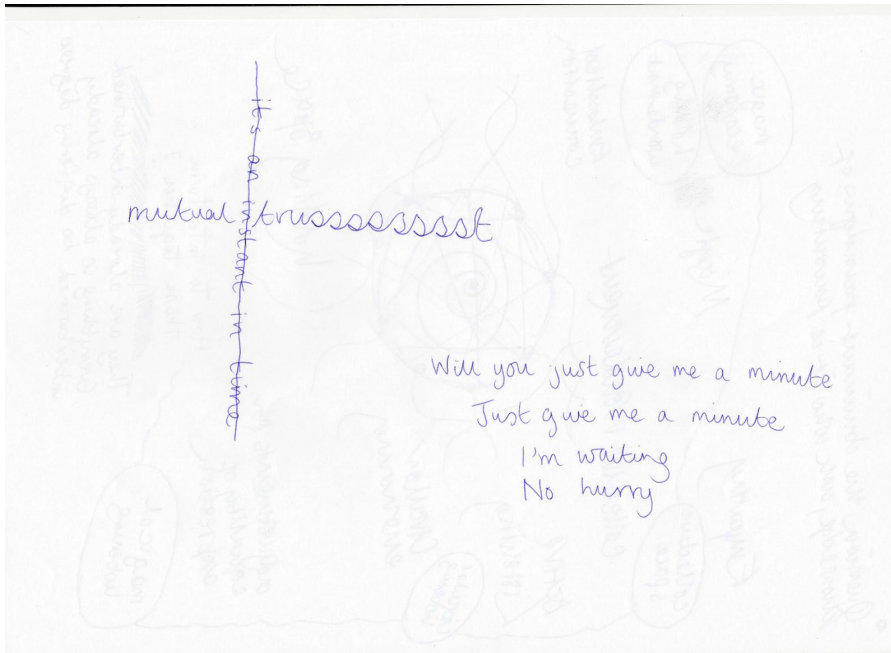
know

call know - calling who? Can knowledge be
called to?

Cómo te cuento desde mi lengua?

Cómo me contás desde la tuya?

I don't have an answer for you, but maybe we
can sit down and try something together. I say
a word and you tell me another. This is perhaps
a way to find words in common, that resonate
with(in) us. I can hear a baby in the audience.
Children sometimes have the answer, Let's ask
the baby... I bet they know



Me escuchás?

Te escucho

Me entendés?

No te entiendo

Me sentís?

Te siento

I feel you - which part
of my body?

cal

Te escribo desde muy lejos... me oís?
como hacemos para comunicarnos
si estamos tan lejos? Can you hear
me? I can't see you. but I know you
are there. Hello! please let me in

I can hear something faint

Hola

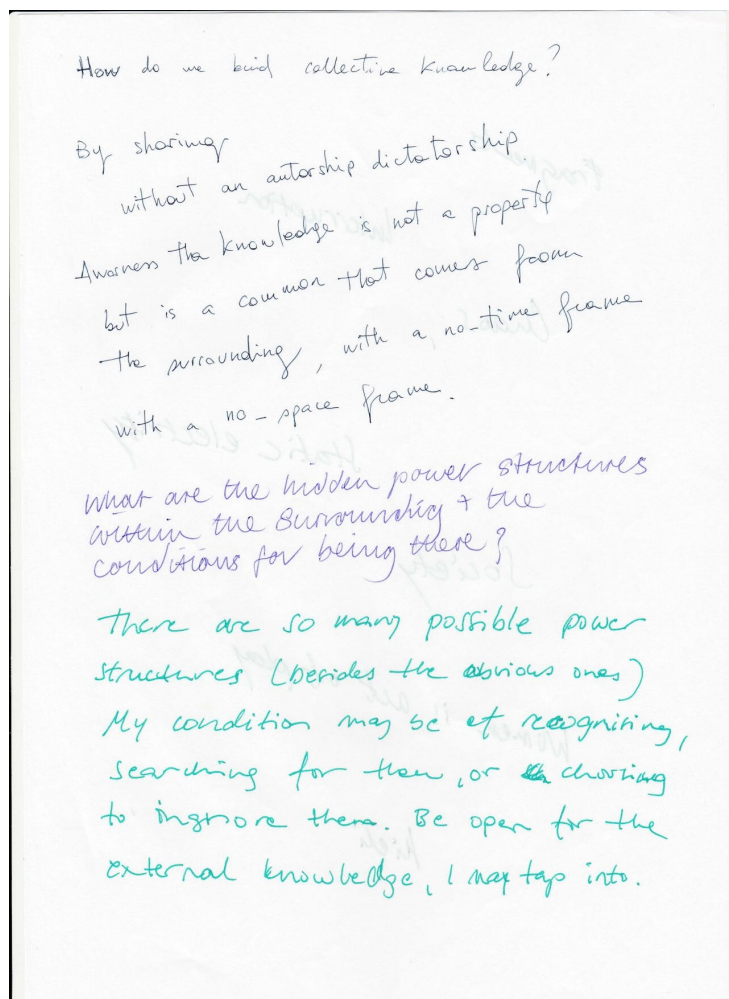
ola

las olas del deseo

mirar y ver ¿mirar?

hello, waves of desire, I see you. I
can really see you, sombras,
ocultamientos, no quiero ver

alo sounds like aloud and allow -
fuerte, alto, permitido, hello, hola,
ola, waves, hello



How do we build collective knowledge?
 What is collective knowledge?
 Is it knowledge that we have in common?
 Some thing we collect together?
 Is it something we build together
 and by thru building we
 gain some knowledge?
 Uoh something is something here...
 Does somebody else share
 it as well?
 Was it the test since we
 are whole ago?
Could this be collective knowledge
 does it include something shared
 shared space
 conditions
 to have something
 common or knowledge?

An answer: I'm not worried, because we have
 here enough to be getting on with.

Collective knowledge emerges, Cómo hacemos
 para construir saber colectivo? merges, it is both
 an attentive - but also unconscious - process.
 Cómo hacemos para construir saber colectivo? I
 add my bit to balance into a direction I aim. not
 direction, intention / pulse / livelihood/ Cómo
 hacemos para construir saber colectivo? I listen
 to others, to see what they wish for. Sometimes,
 shared spaces create mutual understanding.
 Sometimes frictions and conflicts are part of
 these spaces. Space is the place. Is a conflict a
 collective knowledge? Sometimes, I guess, it is.
 But also love. Cómo hacemos para construir
 saber colectivo? The more you put in, the more
 there's mutual trust, ¿cómo construimos la
 confianza mutua? how do we build mutual trust?
 slowly Me das tu mano? puedo esperar Quizá
 podemos apoyarlas cerca primero,
 aproximarlas lentamente sin tocarnos, aún así
 en la cercanía siento tu calor, sentís el mío?

to dig in

collective knowledge to build a loving manner of communicating people looking at each other in
 their eyes ¿Cómo hacemos para construir saber colectivo?

How do we build collective Knowledge?

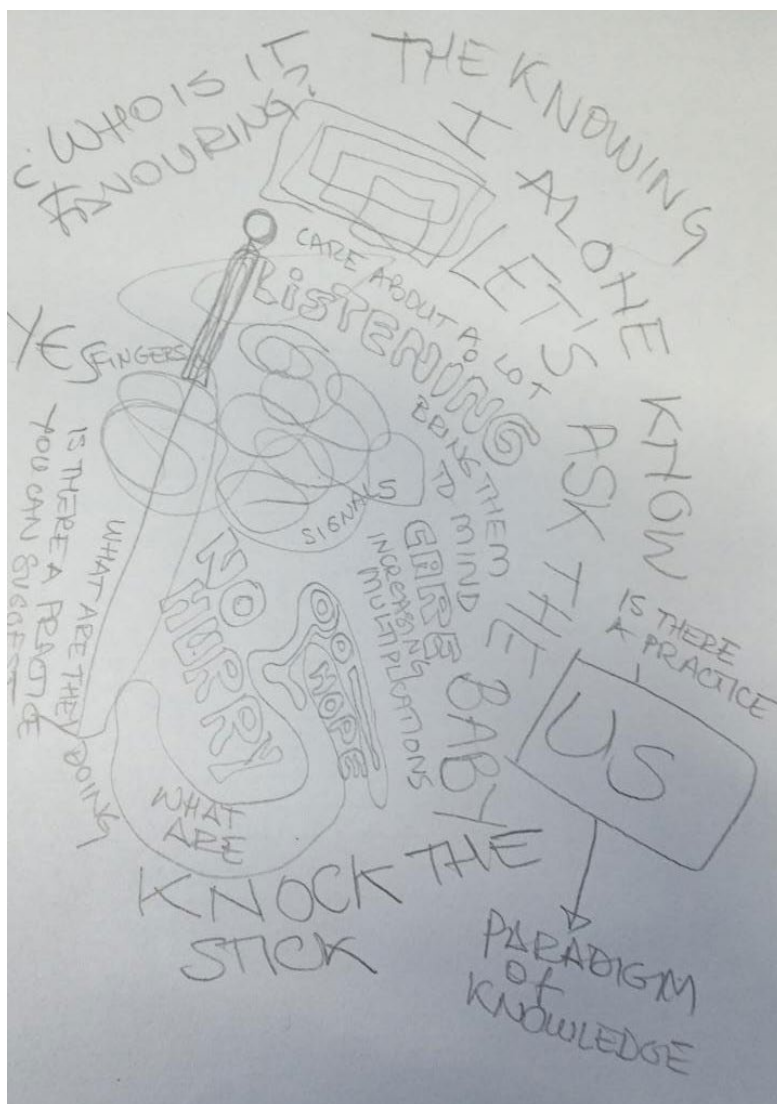
Waiting, patiently, listening.
 Thinking in 3s.
 Listening again.

LISTENING IS ~~THE~~
 THE ONLY WAY I LET THINGS BE WHAT THEY ARE
 I CAN'T KNOW
 HOW DO I LET GO? TO LET SOMETHING BE ITSELF?
 GIVE IT THE SILENCE OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT?

You need to direct your attention and communicate that you are doing so, while refraining from any action that would steal the space-time.

How DO I look you in the eye? How do I find your eyes? Where are your eyes? The eyes are the windows of the soul, they say - los ojos como espejos, entonces la pregunta es por el espejo y el alma.

abriendo la percepción podemos mirarnos más allá de la pupila podemos encontrarnos aquí o donde queramos solo es cuestión de disponernos encontrarnos será fácil atendiendo a todo lo que está en nuestro cuerpo y más allá de él apostamos a las prácticas telepáticas a mirarnos oníricamente a encontrarnos ahí en el entre . qué pregunta ,dime, cariño, una pregunta posible.



Is the knowledge in your eyes or is it in your soul where I have the access through your eyes? the access of our spirit, our ancestors in our bodies

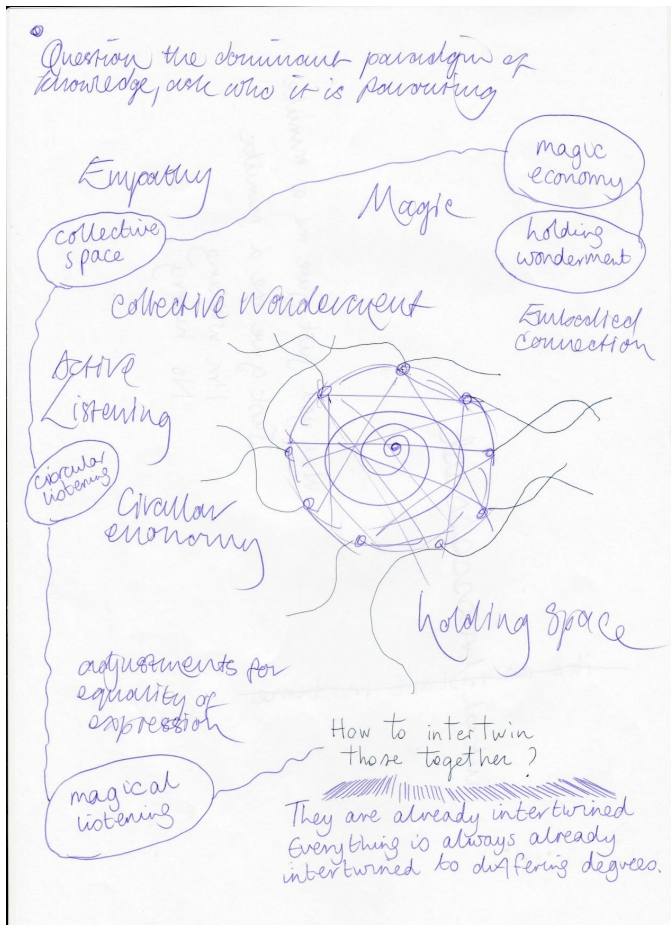
Collective knowledge is built together by communicating with other people, by listening, what is said by other participants, by contributing to the discussion and by building on what is said before by the members of the group. Collective knowledge is like a balloon in the room which is getting more and more air from the participants. (though, hopefully, it doesn't burst at any moment :))

Estás ahí, estoy acá

lejos pero cerca

Dónde existimos?

it's an instant in time ¿instant its time?



walk into a cloud. pick a stone, pick a stick, pick a pen.
make a sound, with a stone, crack the stone.
knock the stick.

maybe we should just laugh at our disfunctional tools?

Yes, but after a while the joke runs dry. What then?

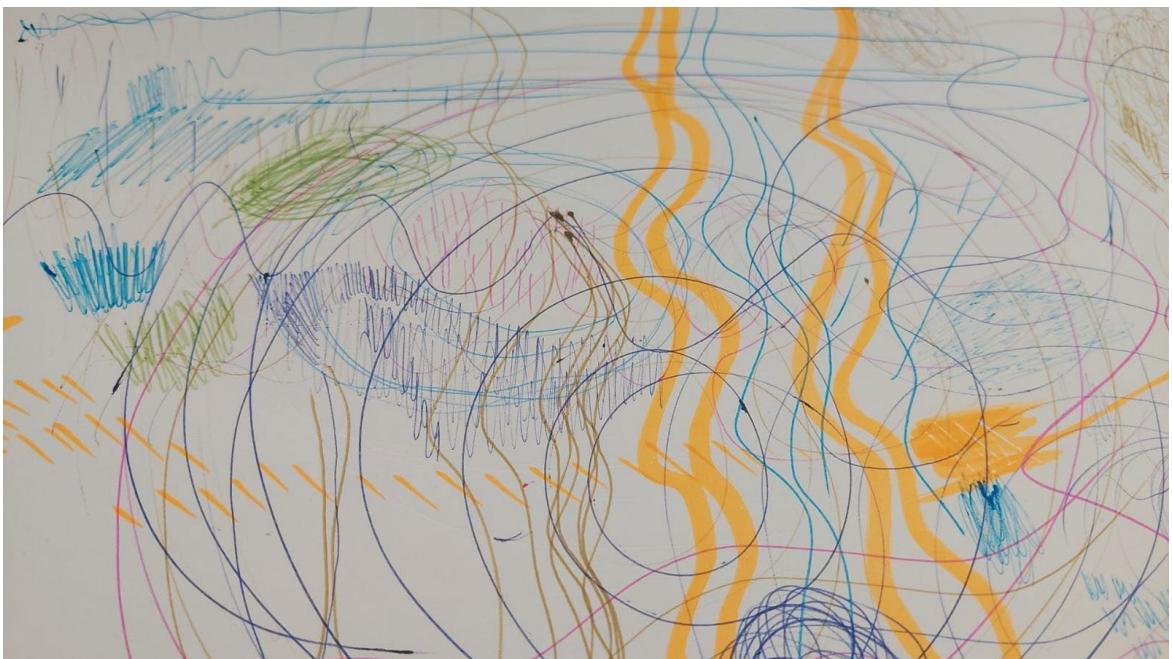
Or we go back to the start and change the rules? ~~instead of~~ or change the idea of what the shape and modality of to an answer might be.

n

Receiving signals from another place.
A female world.

how do we build mutual trust?

We build it slowly. First we sense the rhythm and sensitivities of others. We look at them, we try to comprehend where are they coming from. We can not go within our usual pace. We can increase the pace of responsiveness once we are already attuned to the other. But building trust is a process of attunement, it goes slowly first, with not too much effort to convince into our directions. First try.



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Biography

Lagunaries (2020) es un colectivo/laboratorio de ensayos en movimiento. No nos unía el amor, sino el horror: el horror de la pedagogía normativa y de la teoría incorpórea. Nos reunimos como colectivo para ensayar posibles iteraciones de teorías y textos a través del cuerpo, la danza, la experiencia personal y nuestras genealogías. Nuestro colectivo ha desarrollado una serie distintiva de ejercicios y mecanismos a través de los cuales explorar los límites de nuestros viajes personales y colectivos como artistas, archivistas, educadoras, bailarines, coreógrafas, actoras, estudiantes e investigadoras. Presentamos nuestros trabajos en diversos foros y conferencias, incluyendo en el Performance Philosophy Problems Congress 2022 (Helsinki/híbrido), CineMigrante 2022 (Buenos Aires) y Museo Provincial de Artes de La Pampa 2022 (Santa Rosa). Somos recipientes de una beca del Fondo Nacional de las Artes.

Ensayar un conocimiento de nosotras mismas sin encontrarnos ensayando una reunión sin saber de nosotras

ensayando un nuevo conocimiento de encuentros

¿Qué es saber/conocimiento?

¿Qué necesitamos saber sobre la otra?

¿Qué necesitamos saber de la otra para construir un hacer común, un afecto?

Lagunaries (2020) is a collective/laboratory for rehearsals in movement. We were not united by love, but by horror: horror of normative pedagogy and disembodied theory. We came together as a collective to rehearse possible iterations of theories and texts through embodiment, and personal genealogies. Our collective has developed a distinctive series of exercises and mechanisms through which to explore the limits of our personal and collective journeys as artists, archivists, educators, dancers, choreographers, actors, students and researchers. We have presented our work in various forums and conferences, including at the Performance Philosophy Problems Conference 2022 (Helsinki/hybrid), CineMigrante 2022 (Buenos Aires) and Museo Provincial de Artes de La Pampa 2022 (Santa Rosa). We are recipients of a grant from the Fondo Nacional de las Artes.

Rehearsing a knowledge of ourselves without meeting

rehearsing a meeting without knowing about each other

rehearsing a new knowledge of encounters

What is knowing/knowledge?

What do we need to know about the other?

What do we need to know about the other to build a common doing, an affection?

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

THE PROBLEM OF HYBRIDITY: TRIANGULATING ZONES OF ENTANGLEMENT BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND EMBODIED PRACTICE

SPECULATIVE SPACE

ANKE HAARMANN AND ALICE LAGAAY

WITH TORBEN KÖRSCHKES, FRIEDER BOHAUMILITZKY, TOM BIELING,
BARBRO SCHOLZ, AND PETJA IVANOVA, AND DRAWING BY STEPHAN KRAUS



Speculative Space on stage at the Problems of Performance Philosophy conference in Helsinki June 2022

Here we are together on stage. Sitting on chairs, each in our own spot, with a certain distance between us, creating a constellation in space. What's going on here? What's being addressed? What are we negotiating? And by what means? As in astrology, lines of connection can be drawn between each position or point on the stage; can be interpreted into a composition to tell a whole story, a story of the whole, even when, in fact, there may be no actual lines. In the background behind the stage, building a backdrop to the scene, a film is being projected. It's a film we made about our work and our lines, or breakdowns, of connection. It's our film. It shows how everything is mixed up. It's not always clear who's who in the film. The camera circles around the table in our work lab, where we can now be seen sitting, standing, or lingering. The camera oscillates between movements and close-ups. The images sometimes dissolve into motion blur, animations appear as visual comments on what is being said: a butterfly, a ball with scribbles, a crooked handcart—not drawn or pushed, but driving in circles as if by magic. We move in circles too, between our individual points of view and our collaboration in process. One drops into the mix, forgets oneself for a time while thinking something through with the others; then we merge for a moment in concentration until someone gets hungry or needs a break, and then each of us steps out of the gathering, reconstituting a singular entity, creating distance in order to reconsider.



SpecSpace sitting around the wobbly table at the Centre for Design Research, HAW Hamburg. Still from Zones of Entanglement, film made by Tamara Hildebrand and Stephan Kraus, HAW Hamburg 2023.

You see us in the film, sitting around a wobbly table,¹ discussing our work. We are discussing the constellation of our positions in a joint research project that seeks to move beyond conventional, orderly, “sorted out” formats of research, to include the mixed-upness of our work, our quest to expand the disciplinary register to include its aesthetic and performative dimensions. We come from philosophy, political science, art, and design. The aim is to investigate, try out, test, and lay new foundations for experimental artistic research. In the film we are tangled up, but on stage we

are distinct. We are thinkers, each one of us a hybrid of various disciplines and realms of expertise, and we are arguing for hybrid constellations in which speculation may unfold as an epistemic practice in the planning and drafting of things and texts. We think and argue about hybridity, but our actions, are they really hybrid? In the presenting of positions and through the performative negotiation of constellations, the question gains contour, becomes palpable, intensifies. The question becomes real.

We think and argue about hybridity on stage. In the presentation of positions and the performative negotiation of constellations, the problem takes shape. It becomes tangible, it intensifies. The problem becomes real. But why do we have this problem? Why do we have a problem with hybridity?

After the crisis of “grand narratives”, in the face of doubt in truth, in the aftermath of the terror of “clean” ideals, we have looked to the hybrid as if for salvation. In an apparent legacy of the ‘Enlightenment’ (with a big E) the assumption was that knowledge is universal and that all societies and cultures are knowable from a singular bird’s-eye point of view. This has resulted in what some might call a “tyranny of logic”, the boundary-defining framework of science that excludes any episteme that cannot be grasped by its methodological norm, defining thereby what can or cannot constitute the “knowable” or “true”. The same generalising framework also defines what is regarded and valued, what counts, as knowledge in the first place. The focus tends to be on the communicable (and therefore marketable) outcome, the ‘results’: ideally discrete nuggets of information that can, in principle—or so it is assumed—be further digested and imported into other contexts, independently and regardless of the actual embodied processes that led to the original formulation of these results, and regardless of the original (and local) context in which their significance might be embedded. Related to this are the challenges of post-colonial thought. In particular, the fact that any effort to think through and to overcome the violence of exclusion, implied and continuously enacted by the academic straitjacket, faces the problem of how to define and reframe what constitutes knowledge and truth as opposed to, say, belief, dogma, ideology or mere speculation. Increasingly, however, ‘rebellious’ epistemes are emerging on the fringes of academia, demanding, for instance, that more subjective, non-quantifiable experiences (as opposed to strictly empirical experiments) be equally valued as knowledge.

It is understood, of course, that knowledge is political and that philosophy is no longer just spirit, but embodied thought; not mere abstraction, but action. In recent years, especially in the context of artistic and design research, the focus has moved from science (“*Wissenschaft*”) to research (“*Forschung*”), and thus from knowledge to process: to process, understood as an approach that does not seek answers as much as the formulation of problems; involving a methodology that is no longer “purified” (to take the form of a singular “result”), but accepts incompatible perspectives and inconsistencies, tolerates, and at times even welcomes, a certain blurredness.... Hybridity, as opposed to interdisciplinarity, is the mixing of disciplines, the crossing of ideas with bodies, the forbearance of fragmentation in the unfinished, the celebration of ruptures, the defense of essayism in the face of the system. And hybrids do not multiply in conventional ways, not

straightforwardly; they do not constitute tradition or stabilize in the identical—as such they are in part necessarily un- or non-disciplinary, perhaps at times even necessarily dilettantish.

In the academic context (unlike elsewhere), however, this salvatory idea of hybrid thinking, the emphasis on collaboration, is initiated in the abstract. The hybrid is above all a discursive topos, hence, an idea and maybe not a reality. We have imagined a world of hybridity in its absence. It's a colourful world, full of diversity. One that does not discriminate, but welcomes and seeks to integrate, or at the very least, to acknowledge. This hybrid world is not dialectical but plural, not one of assimilation but of addition. Imagining worlds as these is essential in order to overcome traditions and to draw thought onto new tracks. But are hybrids really so gratifyingly “additive”, so positively generative of meaning in a constellation in which each position takes the other(s) into account? In our collaborative project, are we (and our various interests and expertises) bobbing along happily in a stream of interested togetherness? Do we really reside in this “entangled zone”? Is this how one becomes hybrid? Are we doing this work harmoniously in a mode of diversity together, or not rather, at times at least, *against* each other?

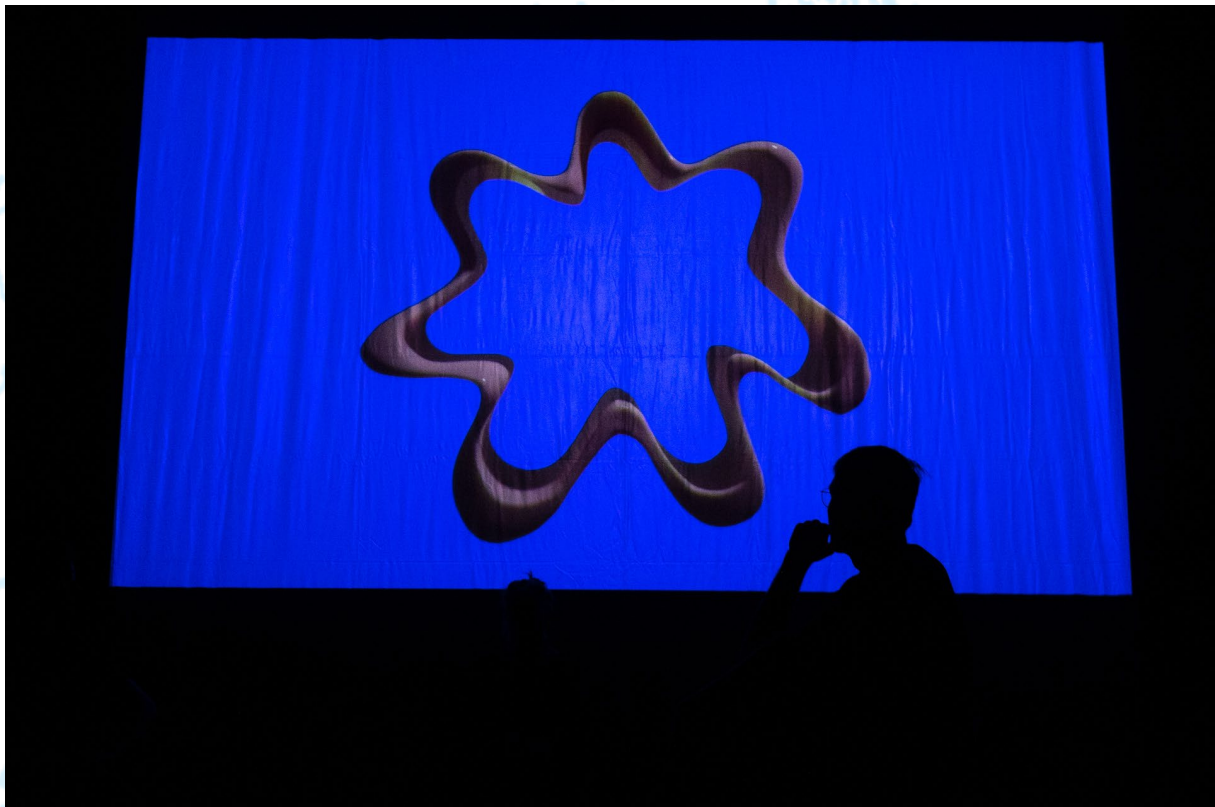
And this is where our problem starts: Because if we take these more subjective, non-quantifiable experiences and their hybrid entanglement seriously as reference points or sources of inspiration for other forms of knowledge, and if we conduct research accordingly with many subjectivities and diverse experiences, trouble arises, at least if we really take the plurality of subjectivities seriously as distinct embodied experiences. To carry out research in a constellation with many—which we might want to call neither collective nor transdisciplinary but *hybrid*—opens up a plethora of questions. Not only the question of how best to define the hybrid, but also the question of the type of knowledge that is developed, and above all the question of the compatibility of the many subjectivities in this hybrid constellation. Whilst a neutral, transparent, and universal truth may be a fantasy construct, the disturbance of such a construct through individual embodiments is no simple alternative. It requires a careful observation of the modes and assumptions, the premises and processes of different knowledge-generating practices within the confines of academia and beyond. In other words, how do we work together once we have acknowledged and accepted our differences as difference?

Addressing how we work together requires that we portray how we work individually. Depending on the type of work involved, and also, perhaps, on our individual personalities, our approach to this self-analysis is particular in each case. Some of us, for instance, will describe the practical and strategic methods used to develop concepts for design projects: building with ready-mades, identifying dichotomies, juxtaposing and contrasting contexts, enhancing paradox. Others will deliver a close phenomenological description of specific skills involved in various phases of their work. These skills are invariably implied in the idea of what our work “is”, but not usually considered as contributing significantly to its outcome; not normally worthy of mention or attention. A close observation of the actual processes involved in carrying out certain everyday work tasks—speaking, writing, experimenting with materials, listening, waiting, doubting, procrastinating, warming up, reading, re-reading, editing, reading out, going for a walk, marinading, starting over, collaging, connecting, refashioning, sewing, letting grow, feeding, etc.—suggests, however, that

these tasks are not just subsidiary methods or neutral service providers, as it were, but in fact intricately and methodologically involved in the creative process of researching, especially when highlighted by the sensitivities of a performance philosophy paradigm. The action of observing and describing what we actually *do* as we carry out our daily work is understood here as an essential methodological step in the infinite process of situating and localizing our artistic research practices, a process which must necessarily accompany, and be valued equally to, the connected and infinite process of enlightenment (with a small e).

In the context of our performance on stage at the Performance Philosophy conference, the aim was not only to reflect on subjective and embodied experience in multiplicity, but also to locate and perform it physically and spatially. This is where the limitations of this text become apparent. In Helsinki, physical experiences on stage and positions on research practices were spatially given. Speech acts were characterised by postures and body movements, and the whole scene was set against the background of a film. The cinematic layer was part of our live presentation, during which it rhythmically interrupted our individual positions on stage, demonstrating the continuous oscillation between individual manifestations and negotiations of artistic thinking and group entanglement. The aesthetic dimension of this presentation and reflection on the stage of the "Problems in Performance Philosophy" conference was crucial: its performative, spatial, temporal, situated, physically present, and cinematically represented nature. Not only does it reveal itself in the doing, but there seems to be a sense in which it requires the liveness of performance, which intensifies its presence, for further layers and dimensions of autopoietic entanglement to become perceptible to us—if not also to the/an audience.

What follows is an attempt to approximate a repetition of this oscillation in writing, i.e. on the "stage" of the *Performance Philosophy* journal in contrast to the stage of the performance philosophy conference,² of the experience of "performing" an idea of our work on stage, in a theatrical setting; and a reflection of the emergence of "zones of entanglement" between us—that came about through and as a result of the heightened awareness generated by the very act of "performing".³



Torben Körschkes on stage with a projected animation of the "zone of entanglement" during the Problems of Performance Philosophy Conference, Helsinki June 2022.

Torben Körschkes (artist, researcher on the stage standing):

I work with semi-finished products. Semi-finished products are intermediate products that are manufactured for further processing. A plastic tube, for example, can be a semi-finished product made from synthetic material in order to be further processed into furniture. On the one hand, the semi-finished product already points to the finished product; on the other hand, it always contains the possibility of becoming something completely different—the potential for bends and new connections, a speculative moment. In its not-yet condition it refuses to be fixed. The semi-finished product consists of only one material, and through this it refers unabashedly to its own history. At the same time, it does not establish an identity through this reference to its origin. The semi-finished product is “becoming”; it invites us to discuss the question of its completion over and over again. For practical reasons today—because material semi-finished products are more difficult to transport than immaterial ones—I propose that we consider language as the raw material, as both a semi-finished product and as an artefact. Letters, grammar, terms, sentences, sentence connections that meet in a given context, are interpreted differently in another context, generating new possible references. Concepts, too, communicate a certain meaning, but they

can also pivot on the way to gradually completing this meaning. It is a matter of poetics, that is, of the re-connection of the sign network.

I will now read two passages from a book on Tai-Chi and replace the term Tai-Chi with the words “Working Together”:

Being an art embracing the principles of physiology, dynamics, psychology and moral life, **Working Together** cannot be mastered without long and constant practices, nor can its intricacies be fully explained in words. In the practice of **Working Together**, one's bodily movements have to be soft, slow, regular, and natural. However, it causes perspiration, after which one breathes normally instead of feeling exhausted. [...] Above all, the nerves in the skin will be so much improved in sensitivity as to be capable of locating other people's center of gravity and places of strength and weakness, and of even feeling the pressure of air. (Chen 1971, iii)

All the movements, both with and without outer forms, are composed of circles. These circles may be plane or cubic, straight or slanting, big or small. They make complete circles when they are big and become points when small. When used, the circle or point should be distinguished as to Yin and Yang, softness or firmness, that is, partly neutralizing and partly giving attacks. Moreover, a circle may be made from a point, and any point on that circle may form another circle; in this manner the process may go on infinitely. The higher the level in the art one attains, the smaller are his or her circles, which do not show in an outer form. These mystic principles can be thoroughly comprehended only by those who have attained a good level in **Working Together**. A beginner needs only to know that every movement contains a circle, or circles. (Chen 1971, 8)

In the film projected behind us on the screen on the stage, a circle may be made from a point, and any point on that circle may form another circle; the process may go on thus indefinitely. It is through this exercise that we first arrived in the “Zone of Entanglement”. We made a first circle and discussed ways of working together, next to each other, opposite each other, *for each other*: in a film that shows the laboratory we have put ourselves in. The conditions of the laboratory were an elliptic table that at once drew us together and maintained a safe distance. The elliptical shape of the central meeting table refers to Aby Warburg, who saw a moment of liberation in this geometric form. For Warburg, Johannes Kepler's discovery that the orbits of the planets are not circular but elliptical constitutes an “emancipation from traditional patterns of thought and topoi” because it takes away the center of thought.⁴ The conditions of the laboratory also included: a variety of fruit and biscuits that put us in a good mood but also revealed individual preferences; the timespan of an afternoon that we had agreed to let ourselves be present for, but that would also be foreseeably

over at a given time; a mistress of ceremonies who, as a moderator, led us, asked questions, offered feedback and let us play; and an observation apparatus—the camera—that both disciplined us and invited us to flirt with it. Thus equipped, we talked, conferred, provoked, tussled and quibbled, interpreted and analyzed, engaged and disengaged; we would turn towards and engage intensely with each other for a while, then lean back, drift off, walk away. Visual material and recordings from that afternoon at the round table were examined, sifted, segmented, sorted, grouped into themes, stylised, and assembled until a story around “Zones of Entanglement” began to emerge and take shape: the film. The film itself forms a new circle, a video loop, into which yet other circles are let in. These further circles are now positions that we assume individually, ones that distinguish us, through which our differences manifest. In a sense, the provocation of these differences is made possible and sustained by the shared video footage of our negotiated collaboration. The film stretches seven times, yawning mightily, as it were, and our seven different positions emerge from this yawning gap, becoming visible one after the other.

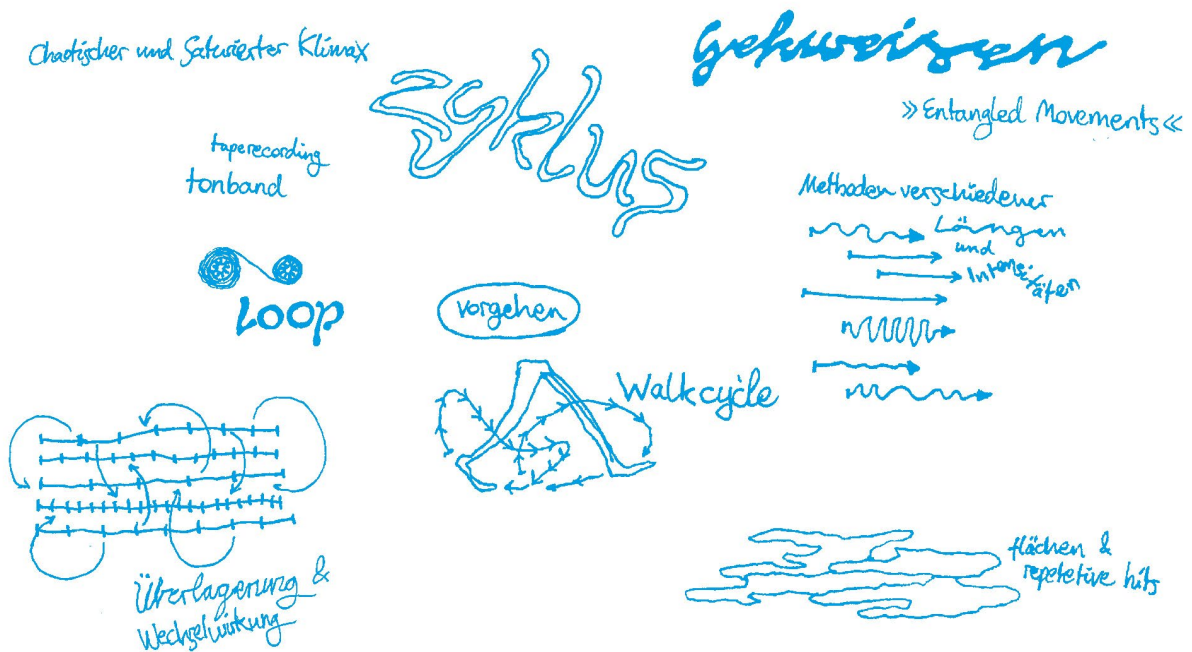
Frieder Bohaumilitzky (political scientist/designer, on stage, sitting on a chair):

I am interested in current discontinuities in *dispositifs* (Foucault); in what happens when two *dispositifs* meet. What contradictions arise, what follows from them, and how can they be made discussable? I understand discontinuities not as simple ruptures but as the place where contradictions become apparent. In my practice, I always start from one field and observe how it collides with other fields, how it is absorbed by them, or how both merge into each other. The field I start from is the field of art, design, theater, architecture—in sum: the field of so-called creativity. I use the contradictions that arise in the clash of the creative with other fields as an entry point to speculate with design. When the practice of the creative encounters other rationalities of action, this usually says something not only about the supposedly other *dispositif*, but also about one's own field of practice, which can thereby be critically interrogated. The sharpened contradictions are not absurd because the speculation might twist something, but because contradictions in one's own action are brought before one's eyes.

By means of an example of my work: In the announcement of the minister of defense to redesign the parlours of the Bundeswehr to make the army more attractive as an employer, I observed the clash of the military *dispositif* with a creativity *dispositif*, in which “previously marginal ideas of creativity have been elevated into an obligatory social order”. I used this to speculate about what might happen if the locking-up and disciplining mechanisms of the military *dispositif* were subjected to the self-actualizing principles of the creativity *dispositif*. After carrying out a series of workshops with soldiers, representatives of the Ministry of Defense, and employees of the Bundeswehr's in-house consulting department, I translated their wishes into exaggerated designs for the parlour.

Chaotischer und Schwieriger Klimax

So, do the contradictions between one's own and the others' position, the assertion of a hybrid collaboration and the stating of individual points of view, cease to be painful because they are now made present in a designing space, a space of possibility, and thereby find a new form? The space of possibility is held together by the intensity of presence, but also by the viewing audience and the speculation that arises through them with regard to other forms of the self. Through speculation on the possibility of hybridity, we are called to look at our methods with fresh eyes. What do practices that are concerned with the possibility of fusion and entanglement, with the mixed together, actually look like? What goes into them? What does it take to sustain them? How might we even begin to think and design when the very process of searching requires one to first discover a process for understanding this unfolding practice in the first place? How are we to imagine the creative, productive, risky practices of this understanding?



Souvenir created by Stephan Kraus to accompany his sound file for the Specology edition (2023). For more please go to <http://www.speclog.xyz>.

Alice Lagaay (performance philosopher, standing on the stage):

I don't know if I really have a method; things would certainly be easier if I did... especially for the people around me. It would be easier to see what I'm doing. But I'm also a great believer in throwing all method to the wind. I need to do so in order not just to repeat but to tend towards, to attend, to attune to what's going on, what presents itself.... It's not the application of a method or a program, if anything it's a—sometimes seemingly pathological—*waiting*, bearing with, holding out, *not* doing, until an impulse, or the fragment of a sentence begins to form. And then, well then, I need to talk it through, even if it's only to mumble to myself. And then, hopefully, eventually, a kind of

future /
Vergangen
Text

rhythm is found. Things begin to fall into place, although it's a lot about hesitating, residing undecided on the brink of a feeling for the formulation of a thought. Until, I don't know, it's as if gravity were involved: like snow falling off a leaf, all of a sudden something is said. This vocalization feels also like a kind of invocation, a plea, a conjuring act.... It's a drawing into presence, not of something necessarily already existent, but perhaps, of a possibility. I like this thought, at the opening of Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities, 1930), the evocation—perhaps also invocation—the calling into the realm of the sayable, of a thinking not bound to the real, but open to the possible. If there is, he writes, a "*Realitätssinn*" (the sensing of reality), then there must also be a "*Möglichkeitssinn*": a sensing of the possible.

And from here it's certainly as if the invocation were to have the grammatical structure of an address, of a calling—perhaps, in another register, one could say of a prayer.... A prayer, for instance, for recognition of the fact that there are many things that we do not know, including essential things. (And a prayer, therefore, for hesitation, in order that one might reach clarity in understanding what is not known: for must one not strive for precision in recognizing what it is that one does not know?) And a prayer for trust and confidence in dealing with and holding space for the uncertain. (For one need not always oversee and control everything.... I can allow myself to indulge in a certain pleasure of uncertainty.) And yet, for this to be possible at all, one must surely trust one's own intuition, fragile though it might be, the perception of an inner voice, the voice of instinct and critical intuition, as well as its potential for subversion and transformation—the voice of conscience?—even *and especially* when working in a collective.

But what does it mean to trust one's own intuition, even or especially when it comes to working collectively? What is the inside of this voice that claims to be the bearer of my intuition? Is it really ever one's own? Socrates refers to an inner "daemon" that guides him in the process of decision making and serves as a moral compass ("a sort of voice that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing"; Plato 1914, 115). This idea of a voice from beyond that, merges with the subject's inner sense of self, is a recurrent theme at the dawn of Western philosophy. Diotima, for instance, is a figure who intervenes and offers wisdom but is not herself seen. Speaking through Socrates in the *Symposium* (Plato's staged discussion of love [Plato 2022]), Diotima marks the transition, the hybrid between abstract reasoning and concrete voice. She can be seen, perhaps, as a paratype, a somewhat crazy model for hybrid thinking. Doesn't intuition, then, make the other, the internalised outsider, intelligible? And what possible articulation can we make of this?

Tom Bieling (design researcher, voice coming from a recording device):

Recherche automatique and illbient research:⁵ Especially the early phases of my investigations sometimes remind me—at least partially—of the processual structure of *écriture automatique*.⁶ In other words, a procedure in which inputs and expressions (of any kind) are brought into a pre-argumentative form largely raw and unpolished and in any case on an equal footing with each other. The writing, creative, sketching, visualising, sometimes even tinkering, process of searching for contexts of meaning deliberately eludes premature control of meaning at this stage. This also means that what is supposedly erroneous (whether orthographically, argumentatively, content-wise, visually or formally-aesthetically) is not only desired, but often proves to be purposeful. It is precisely the “genre violations” that happen in the process that turn out to be groundbreaking, refreshingly enriching and—of course—sometimes also confusing and seemingly desperate. In my self-perception, I notice time and again that more seems to be involved than mere cutting and sampling techniques in which different elements are mixed with each other, but that they are once again superimposed on everyday realities, emotions, thoughts and what was previously not perceived at all or only subtly, which in turn awakens new strands of meaning, significance and argumentation. It’s comparable to a sound or song structure that arises solely from the fact that I stroll through an urban landscape with music in my headphones and an independent, unplanned, perhaps temporary, but nevertheless true sound emerges from the cacophony of song/track, engine noise, babble of voices, and birdsong. Especially during a pandemic or when working more from home, this can also mean, for example, that lines of connection to the everyday can be traced in the researching activity: from small talk with the postwoman in the stairwell to helping kids with their homework, or from the children’s play, their painting and building technique, to a toilet reading or the question of what we are going to cook tonight or how we are going to coordinate daily routines for the coming week: an atmosphere of sounds, thoughts, reflections, disputes, questions, and impressions, intrinsically linked to a certain place, a room, or a situation, in any case: the opposite of silence—seeps into the research.

The research, the thinking, the writing of text is infected by experience. Its quality is rational-aesthetic. Upon careful inspection, one’s own practices, those that feel like they belong to and best reflect oneself, turn out to be intrinsically mixed up with others. I might not listen to music, I might rather be one to get lost with myself in the garden while pulling out weeds. But this difference amounts to a form of kinship, for I, too, come to recognise that my very own collage of experience, between everyday life, concreteness, abstraction, writing and tactile practice, constitutes more than a mere parallelism of the dissimilar. Meaning is generated in the very superimposition or

collision of layers. And during our performance at the conference, as we stood there exposed, in the urgency of live embodied presence on stage, our attention was provoked in ways that we had not experienced before and suddenly we saw connections beyond the acknowledged methods of thinking and designing, correspondences between our individual positions that we had not been aware of until then. But this could result in an undermining of the difference between conceptual reflection and aesthetic design practice, because in all these procedures, the aesthetic and the conceptual, the concrete and the abstract, the inner and the outer overlap and only the subsequent modelling of the process highlights one or the other—but why?



Barbro Scholz exploring social space and illuminating Anke with wearable lights during the Problems of Performance Philosophy Conference, Helsinki June 2022

Barbro Scholz (textile design researcher, on stage moving around):

What is the aesthetic experience of wearable light beyond tech fashion or blinker jackets? My research combines material design with somaesthetic interaction design. So, one part is the actual designing of material composites that have a structure, a tactility, a physical shape and an intangible volume, a light colour, an interplay of shadow, projection, body and surrounding. The other part is the body related interaction, the idea of bodily knowing, the awareness of the interplay of body and mind, especially when it comes to

interaction of body and (interactive) material. I apply material speculation to explore the bodily experience consisting of physical and intangible materials on the body. Material speculation? Material speculation is a critical tool, materializing the speculation into the possible. I investigate possible socio-cultural implications when humans become light sources.

I walk around, like this, arranging the others (my colleagues) in a circle.

I open the jacket, take it off, and walk around the others, shine light on them.

What happens here, I ask, in the human-to-human relation?

Here I stand, interacting and illuminating you with my lights, circling around you, playing with shadows.

I put my arm on your shoulder.

Is this still playful or is it encroaching?

For a moment you are blinded by me. If I turn my head in the wrong direction, I am blinded by myself.

Are we both part of the interactive material composite now?

Now I walk away from the others.

This volume around my body, this light space, could it be my shelter?

I sit down. I could never leave the light space.

Petja, come join me!



Petja Ivanova (speculative artist, moving around on stage):

Sometimes called “The House of Purpose” in astrology, the Ninth House is the house of the higher mind, study and moral reasoning. It is associated with these basic concepts: higher education, scholarship, morals and ethics, spirituality, philosophy, logic and reason. It is also correlated with secondary concepts such as broadcasting, luck, publishing, international travel.

Torben has Scorpio in the Ninth House. He likes long voyages, especially by sea.

Frieder was born with Gemini in the Ninth House. He is logical and careful when choosing his path in life. People with this constellation are pragmatic, no matter what’s happening around them. If they decide to perfect themselves, they can change their direction in life more than once, looking for success. They need their religious and philosophical views to be practical and to show logic. More than this, these natives love to write and to discuss philosophical matters. Their beliefs are usually logical and they’re constantly questioning facts.

Alice’s sky shows Venus and Uranus in the Ninth House. In an astrological chart, Uranus is an energy of randomness that opens the door to infinite possibility. No matter where Uranus is found, be prepared for change and transformation—and certainly stay on the lookout for major upheavals. The presence of emotive Venus in the brainy Ninth House of a zodiac chart indicates a love of learning and an endless thirst for new information and new experience. One possible challenging aspect of Venus in the Ninth House is an endless desire to keep exploring, keep wandering.

Barbro is born with the Moon in the Ninth House therefore highly focused in her profession. You do not need doses of motivation to grab opportunities. You are creative, imaginative, and bring a smile to people’s faces. Thus, you are trustworthy and will never betray anybody for selfish interests.

Anke is born with Uranus in the Ninth House. It’s the sign of a rebellious nature and intense philosophical thought. You are burning with brilliant new ideas, many of which may be seen by others as experimental or even fringe. Aspects of life that are traditional tend to bore you, and you’re far more excited by the potential of broad, sweeping changes and beneficial social movements.

Petja Ivanova reading Frieder’s horoscope on stage at the Problems of Performance Philosophy Conference, Helsinki June 2022

On stage the register shifts to a guided aerobics exercise class. (Abrupt transitions are indeed part and parcel of the collective work; they stimulate the urge to draw lines and make connections.) We are called to activate our breathing and to move our limbs. Can the instructions be addressed to the readership now?

Please feel invited to stretch your neck to one side, then to the other, lift up and drop your shoulders, rotate your hips....

Are you still receiving? Can you still read? Is this an invitation or an awkward command?



Petja leads an exercise unit for SpecSpace (despite certain reservations on the part of some participants) on stage at the Problems of Performance Philosophy Conference, Helsinki June 2022

Resistances take shape. If the discourse on astrology and its path of relatability in the constellation of the stars was met with a certain distrust, it now seems equally tricky to leave behind the familiar realm of abstraction through conceptual articulation and to resort to a display of one's body alone for communication. The attempt not merely to assert and proclaim the mixed-upness, the hybridity we seek to address, but to allow it to become manifest, or at least to work with it, proves something of a challenge. Indeed it takes strength, and a certain self-depreciation, to confront one's own phantasms!

Thus we begin to realise that the notion of the hybrid is not quite the "simultaneous presence of the diverse" that we had perhaps had in mind. Were we unwittingly harbouring a certain ideological idea of breeding derived from the human activity of breeding plants and animals? To take the best and most desirable of the diverse and to fuse it into a new species, purified of any undesirable

characteristic: a wolf without ferocity, displaying the elegance of unbridled attention, yet not submissive, but rather family-friendly? What kind of neutralised monster would it be? Is this the ambivalent core of our problem? And as these sentences form, so too does the author of this paragraph move out of their own practice and comfort zone: they write and think stutteringly as they do so.



Anke Haarmann on stage with a butterfly animation projection and Torben's silhouette during the Problems of Performance Philosophy Conference, Helsinki June 2022

Anke Haarmann (philosopher, artist, sitting on stage):

My Hunt-and-Peck Method: R, T, Z, G, H, B.... these letters mark the dividing line between the right index finger and, interestingly, the left middle finger. I observe myself writing. More precisely, typing. Typing rather than writing has become the primary method of expressing oneself. The common view that lines of argument unfold whilst one types turns out upon closer inspection to be misleading. At first it is only single letters that trace the line to the screen—finger for fingertip—and the argument dwelling in the context of the sentences seems to be a laboriously acquired long-term effect in the aftermath of this hunting and pecking on the stage of the monitor. I am asking myself where only the sentences remain—this semantic fulcrum between the overall image and the particles of which it is composed. In the process of typing, the argument recedes into the background, because the letters in their individuality move to the fore. What is the 'n' doing? And why

does the finger hit the 'b' by mistake? It isn't as if the fingers haven't been trained in the virtuosity of typing. They are swift and have habituated the arrangement of the keys. But still mistakes are made. And the dancing of the fingers is under constant observation. What is written becomes a surprise when—after typing—the eyes turn up towards the screen. Then letters are missing or have been placed just next to where they really belong. No problem because this can be corrected. But the slowing of the process of formulation by the searching fingers, the leaps of the letters, and the distraction of thinking by the disciplining authority of grammar and orthography—all these things decouple the typing process of formulation from the coherence of thought. I realize in-between my observations that the Latin for "finger" is *digitus* and is thus connected to the digital. Fingers are discrete, individualised, single—detached. Searching fingers, leaping letters, authoritarian orthography—they all produce gaps in the flow of formulation. And these gaps, these blank spaces of thought, become the grounds for questioning the current words, their inherent meaning. This leads to excursions of thought, questioning the forms of words, defamiliarizations of all-too-well-known terminology. That leads to research into etymologies, formations of terms.... I realize in-between my thoughts that Deleuze and Guattari were perhaps right to diagnose the work of philosophising as the inventing of concepts. The word just written becomes an alien and develops an unexpected sense. I can watch the argument forming bubbles here. Sentences sprawl into unknown dimensions. The micro-tactics of typing turn the whole business of writing into a laborious process—marked by surprises and overlaps, in which one cannot simply progress in the spirit of the argumentation of the concept—but rather the confounding proximity of fingers to the letters as individual components of words causes uncertainties, opening up hosts of parallel universes.

This work of writing, can it really be done collectively? Is it not more a question of taking turns, of each mind picking up a thread of thought and taking it elsewhere to be untied or continued? There is an element of playfulness and willingness involved, attitudes that rely on a soft bank of trust and that cannot be generalised in principle. 'Collaboration' is not always a positive term, especially not in the German language where the word still tends to be avoided due to its historical connotations. One prefers to speak of 'cooperation', a mode in which individual discernment seems less likely to be compromised. How long will this vital critical individual potential continue to be valued? Is it still?

In the interstices of the film, we become visible as individual positions on the stage. With the moving images (and words) on the screen now slowed down to the point of abstraction and suspended in the background, the viewer's focus shifts to the bodies in space that we are, standing in formation on the stage. One by one, we are illuminated in the spotlight, each rising individually from our chairs or remaining seated to voice our position. The presence of the bodies as discrete entities, and this new performative mode, intensify our discussion about what is one's own singular

position and what constitutes a hybrid. This tension between collaboration and distinction is provoked again and revealed by the presence we have granted, or imposed upon, ourselves: first around the table, then on stage, now in writing. In presence, the difference that strives to become hybrid cannot be overlooked or passed over. It is worked through and held together by the will to create a collaborative work and disciplined by the audiovisual recording apparatus as well as by the audience: a public that perceives and critically examines form and content.

Notes

¹ The wobbly table could serve as an example of an instance of collaborative work that is both trivial and of the essence: who unscrewed the tabletop from the frame? How and when will it get fixed?

² It seems appropriate to note that in both cases there is something of a resistance to the context: the attempt to transpose the process of our collaborative work to either stage requires acknowledgement of various degrees of discomfort. Both the process and the result of our work do not immediately or obviously “fit comfortably” either with the modality of theatrical exposure (which was the setting of the conference—not all of us identify or have experience of thinking of ourselves as artists or performers) or with the attempt here to translate into linear writing what was experienced viscerally and physically during the live theoretical/theatrical performance. This sense of discomfort or of not quite “fitting” (or indeed of fitting too comfortably) raises a host of interesting questions: what does it mean to “fit in” in academic terms? Does this point to discrepancies or exclusivities that performance philosophy itself wishes to address?

³ The notion of entanglement is borrowed from Karen Barad’s use of the term drawn from quantum physics to describe the entangled nature of matter, meaning and agency in the context of agential realism (see Barad 2007).

⁴ Warburg expert Cornelia Zumbusch writes: “Geometrically, the ellipse can be constructed by setting two focal points instead of a centre; the ellipse is then the path that a body describes when moving around two turning points” (Zumbusch 2017).

⁵ I borrowed the term “illbient” from the music style of the same name that was developed in Brooklyn/New York in the 1990s by protagonists like DJ Spooky and DJ Olive (Cf. Katz 2012, 127ff). Based on hip hop and electronic elements, the overlaying of everyday sounds and urban background noise also functions as a significant stylistic device. Illbient—a combination of the slang term “ill” and “ambient”—thus stands in the tradition of “musique concrète”, a compositional technique in which recordings contain both recorded instruments and ambient sounds taken from everyday surroundings, which are sometimes electronically alienated through montage, tape editing, modified speed, and loops.

Modes of music production and -perception are inevitably linked to technical developments and forms of media distribution. As described by the musicologist Michael Schmidt, “Media opened music to sound, and made it universally available material for multiple collages. At the same time media puts music in the state of a constant murmuring drone, an incessant flowing” (Schmidt 2009). When I refer to “illbient research”, I do not mean research into this style of music. Rather, I want to express that no kind of research investigation is immune from being affected by external, unplanned influences. Sometimes this is in fact precisely what gives rise to something really exciting.

⁶ The French term *Écriture automatique* (automatic writing, automatic text) describes a method of writing in which images, feelings and expressions are to be reproduced (as far as possible) uncensored and without the intervention of the critical ego. Sentences, sentence fragments, word chains as well as individual words may be written without intentionality or control of meaning. What is otherwise considered faulty in terms of orthography, grammar or punctuation can be desirable and purposeful under these conditions. The surrealists propagated this literary form of free association as a new form of poetry and experimental literature. This kind of largely unfiltered “automatisation” is to be understood here as a “system of writing down” (cf. Kittler 2003), in which epistemic and aesthetic practice are interconnected.

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Biography

Speculative Space was a laboratory for speculative design research at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW Hamburg, Design Department). It ran from September 2019 until March 2023 and was funded by the Federal State Research Fund of Hamburg (*Landesforschungsförderung Hamburg*). There were five main researchers and two associate researchers. Speculative Space initiated and hosted several design events, three lecture series, two conferences and multiple artistic/design research exhibition, most of which are documented on www.speclog.xyz. It culminated in an experimental publication entitled *Specology. Zu einer Ästhetischen Forschung* (Haarmann, Lagaay, Bieling, Ivanova, Körschke, Bohaumilitzky, Scholz, eds. 2023).

Stephan Kraus is a Hamburg-based sound and graphic designer and artistic researcher. His research method revolves around the creation of art objects (so-called "souvenirs") that serve as junctures for political theory, philosophy and (pop) cultural signifiers. This practice has been articulated in essays (e.g. *Specology*, adocs 2023 / *Designabilities* 2025), exhibitions (e.g. *Schicht & Gewebe*, Raum linksrechts 2024) and lecture performances (e.g. *Zones of Entanglement*, Performance Philosophy Conference 2022). He is currently involved in a collaborative project between the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts and the Department of Theoretical Astrochemistry at the University of Leiden, which aims to develop epistemological methods for artistic research in the context of natural sciences.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

“WE ARE PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY PROBLEMS!”¹ TOWARDS AN ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY?

JANET GIBSON MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

KATE MAGUIRE-ROSIER UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

TONY MCCAFFREY NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SINGING AND DRAMATIC ART, ARA
INSTITUTE, CHRISTCHURCH

These two papers respond to a question directed mainly to Tony McCaffrey and some members of the Different Light Theatre Company after the Key Group Presentation ‘Collaboration, Care and Conviviality’, at the Performance Philosophy Problems Conference, 15–18 June 2022. Dave Calvert, Janet Gibson, and Kate Maguire-Rosier presented alongside McCaffrey.

Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca asked:

I wanted to ask a question—and I’m really sorry if it’s an unsafe question or if I’m asking it in an unsafe way—but I was wondering how you feel about this context, this event, and how the different contributions make each other look and feel. I’m thinking in particular about how the presentation from Different Light and their presence, their ‘withusness’ makes an academic paper look and feel, well...

I’m asking it as someone who also gives academic papers, and is struggling to think and understand why we do that, why we still do this, and how we can be together in conferences in meaningful and inclusive ways.

I’m not asking because I think I know something, but it’s impossible to get away from the resonance of that phrase of ‘nothing about us without us.’ How do we do that? What is ‘aboutness’? What is ‘withusness’? In this beautiful hybrid Zoom space that I hope we stay within as the future of conferencing?

In response to this provocation from Cull Ó Maoilearca, we present two separate offerings: the first from McCaffrey and the other from Maguire-Rosier and Gibson. McCaffrey's contributions draw from performances by Different Light Theatre Company, a learning disabled theatre company based in Christchurch, New Zealand. These include a recorded performance presented in Helsinki accompanying a live question-and-answer session and a live performance in Auckland, New Zealand (and the 'performances' of travel and effort needed to get to this performance). Maguire-Rosier and Gibson's easy read "story" introduces a dance theatre project in Australia (*Days Like These*) and a socially engaged theatre project in the USA (*To Whom I May Concern*). The aim in presenting an easy read version is to open up scholarship to people who would normally be excluded from it due to the density of academic language.

Although we keep the offerings separate, both advance the idea that learning disabled theatre and theatres where people show and share disability and diagnoses of dementia, disturb some of the key assumptions of theatre and performance studies, notably 'withusness' and 'aboutness'. In terms of 'withusness'² learning disabled theatre provokes a reconsideration of long standing assumptions concerning liveness and co-presence. McCaffrey writes about Different Light performers spatially distant but temporally co-present in the lockdowns of the pandemic, audiences who are spatially distant from the actors but co-present with each other, underlining the divide between 'them' and 'us': performer and audience, non-disabled and disabled. He also reflects on theatre as (supposed) repeatable presence: what remains and what disappears in acts by actors co-present in performance that are considered 'live' in as much as they seek to re-present words and actions originally devised in another time and place. "Aboutness" constellates around performance studies methodologies vis a vis the supposedly neutral nature of "thick description" (Ryle in Geertz 1973, 312) and the publication of research. These issues are ones which Maguire-Rosier and Gibson take up in their easy read story along with other issues around power, crip time and care ethics.

The theatres considered in these two papers ask for a reappraisal of the very form of the conference paper and the journal article, the way these two forms relate to each other, their repercussions, and the types of audiences they are intended to address. Our joint article leans towards a different more accessible mode, with its inclusion of audio-visual material, dialogue, the voices of learning disabled performers present in the transcript and videos, and the easy-read section. Yet the article still points to its own inaccessibility with, for example, the fact that *To Whom I May Concern* performers were not able to check the easy read story because of the progression of their dementias. We start with McCaffrey and Different Light Theatre Company members' contributions.



▶ Watch the video: <https://vimeo.com/796992704>

Transcript

JOSIE AND BIDDY: Hello, Helsinki!

ANGIE (coming onstage in her wheelchair) Hello, Helsinki!

JOSIE and BIDDY: (running on behind her): Hello, Helsinki!

MATTHEW P: Tahi Rua Toru Wha— (*Te reo Māori for "One, Two Three, Four"*)

ALL: Hello, Helsinki!

Hei, Helsinki!

DAMIAN: How can we get to Helsinki? How can we do that?

BIDDY: We can communicate with you via Zoom.

PETER: (On Zoom) Welcome to Performance Philosophy Problems.

ALL: Welcome.

MATTHEW S: Haere Mai haere mai haere mai. (*Te reo Māori for "Welcome"*)

MATTHEW P: What are Performance Philosophy Problems?

JOSIE: We are Performance Philosophy Problems.

PETER: No you are.

ALL: You are. No you are. You are.

BIDDY: Guys focus, please stay focussed.

MATTHEW P: We are Different Light Theatre, a theatre group from Christchurch, New Zealand.

PETER: We've been through earthquakes,

ANGIE: floods, massacres,

MATTHEW S: fires,

JOSIE: viruses, a global pandemic,

ANGIE: lockdowns, isolations,

BIDDY: anti-mandate protests,

ISAAC: and a war in Ukraine....

DAMIAN: And now Isaac's poem....

ISAAC: So much depends on my support workers,
So much depends on vaccination,
So much depends on police
so much depends on our lives matter, so much depends on thinking.

MATTHEW P: Now we are going to ask you some questions

BIDDY: For our research

JOSIE: Please answer them to the best of your ability.

PETER: Number 1. What is your disability?

ISAAC: Number 2. Who are your caregivers?

ANGIE: Number 3. How do you get in and out of bed?

MATTHEW P: Unfortunately, we don't have any time for your answers.

JOSIE: You will need to take your answers away with you.

ANGIE: I try to talk to people all the time and they just walk away. By the way, I use a hoist to get in and out of bed.

PETER: Question 4. Why did the person in a motorized wheelchair cross the road?

MATTHEW P: How can the person in a motorized wheelchair cross the road?

BIDDY: Hei, Esa Kirkkopelto !

ALL: Hei, Esa!

PETER: Esa told us we need to do something like a performance but we can rehearse it.

BIDDY: I think Esa looks like a professional and he looks like he has been doing this for a while.

MATTHEW P: I've been doing theatre for a while

JOSIE AND OTHERS: I have too. Me too. And me.

JOSIE: The last public performance we did was The History of Different Light for the Christchurch Arts Festival in 2019.

ISAAC: Since then we have had to rethink what we mean by performance....

MATTHEW S: We can make theatre together.

ISAAC: ...and thinking.

ANGIE: Right now.

JOSIE: We are in an Omicron surge here in Christchurch.

MATTHEW P: To protect ourselves and others we need to meet on Zoom.

PETER: On Zoom you can talk to your mates.

GLEN: You can laugh with them.

BIDDY: You can use filters or share screen.

(HEART-SHAPED FILTERS APPEAR AROUND HER)

JOSIE: On Zoom you can't be with them in person.

MATTHEW P AND GLEN: You can't hug them.

JOSIE AND OTHERS: You can't drink coffee with them and share a meal with them.

MATTHEW P: The question is: Can you do theatre on Zoom?

ISAAC: The question is: Can you do thinking on Zoom?

What is 'aboutusness'? What is 'with-and-without-us-ness'? These are questions—or problems if you like—that define, deconstruct, and drive the work of Different Light Theatre and have done so over nineteen years of practice as a learning disabled theatre company. Underlying these questions are even more fundamental considerations. How can an 'us' be assembled in this work? What does that 'us' look and feel like? What can that 'us' do in performance and in philosophy? What does 'about' mean in performance involving participants subjected to epistemic injustice in terms of their access to the systems of meaning-making, symbolism, education, and training that underpin theatrical practice? How can we make performance stuff that is 'about' us, where that us is meant to include and foreground the disabled participants, but whose participation is (necessarily?) filtered through non-disabled facilitation? 'About' suggests representation either political or aesthetic but also intimates at what goes on about and around the 'us' of learning disabled people and performers. This movement and activity is similar to initiatives inspired by the charity or medical models of disability that circumscribe the activities and circumvent the needs and desires of disabled people.

Current models of learning disabled theatre offer a performance 'us' that is negotiated between learning disabled artists and non-disabled facilitators in which the latter provide various kinds of support ranging from care to curation to allyship to creative enabling and facilitated non-disclosure (see Schmidt 2017, Maguire-Rosier and Gibson 2022). At this time a number of companies have reached a stage, after twenty or so years of practice, where they are questioning how they might develop as learning disabled companies, in terms of promoting or foregrounding the presence, agency, and autonomy of the marginalized participants. These include the online Crossing the Line Festival 2021 of European learning disabled theatre comprising performances, documentaries, and discussions on the nature of performance and the online lectures by performers from Per.Arts from Novi Sad, Serbia (Sandor 2022, Vladislavjevic 2022).

These are issues common to all manner of socially engaged or emancipatory practices. In the particular case of learning disabled theatre these issues have broadly philosophical implications in the domains of ethics—how are learning disabled artists included and treated in theatre, epistemology—how do 'we' know what we know about learning disability? about theatre? and even ontology?—what is the being or 'thing' of learning disabled theatre?

The Different Light performers are all familiar with the phrase 'Nothing about us without us.' Some of them are members of People First New Zealand/Nga Tangata Tuatahi who use the slogan in their logo and letterhead and for whom the phrase is a guiding principle. James Charlton (1998) traces the usage of the phrase in the disability activism movements of the 1990s from South Africa and Eastern Europe and it is often linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Through working with Different Light Theatre—in some cases for as long as nineteen years—the performers have also become familiar with questioning the particular 'aboutness', 'withness', and 'withoutness' of making learning disabled theatre—and the rest of the group's activities—in ways that are broadly performance-philosophical. We are developing a methodology of performance research (see McCaffrey 2023) in which attendance at academic conferences now constitutes my presentation of a paper in apposition to (to borrow a

phrase from Fred Moten) a performance by Different Light Theatre. The papers I present interact with and interweave with the group's performance texts and vice versa. More recently the performers themselves are writing their own versions of academic papers and setting up online social media video groups to communicate amongst themselves.

Different Light Theatre responded to Cull Ó Maoilearca's questions with a performance. This was a performance that continued to consider the questions she asked. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Different Light Theatre responded... in a manner of speaking. The activities of the group that emerged subsequent to the participation at the Helsinki conference constituted a kind of rhetorical response to the questions posed by Cull Ó Maoilearca. To compensate for the group's participation at the Helsinki conference, which was at a distance geographically, temporally and mediated through technology, I submitted a proposal to give a paper and present a twenty-minute Different Light performance *The Journeyings of Different Light* at "Travelling Together" the conference of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama, and Performance Studies at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, 6–9 December 2022. My motivation was both to maintain a research profile for myself and the group and to afford the performers an opportunity to travel and to engage again in in-person performance and conference attendance for the first time in three years. The last time the group had performed in public was *The History of Different Light* in the Christchurch Arts Festival in 2019. They had also performed and participated at conferences with *I Belong in the Past and the Future and the Very Now* at ADSA, Auckland University of Technology in 2017 and *Three Ecologies of Different Light* at Performance Studies international PSi # 22 at the University of Melbourne, 2016. Travelling together—and the untogetherness of travelling whilst disabled through a world largely not designed for disabled people—has become an important form of escape from routine, group bonding, and shared experience for the company and has provided a rich source of material for subsequent performances.

Performances about and around performance

The original contribution by Different Light Theatre to the KeyGroup presentation at the Helsinki conference was a six-minute pre-recorded video sequence. This was filmed by hand with an iPhone in an empty black-box theatre. Seven members of the company were present on stage and one, Peter Rees, Zoomed in, only visible on a laptop screen. In addition, two members of the group, Josie Noble and Peter Rees took part via Zoom in the KeyGroup presentation in real time in Helsinki during which I and my co-presenters delivered papers and Noble and Rees responded in the subsequent question and answer session.

It would have been financially impossible and unacceptable in terms of the health risk to performers with compromised immunity for the group to travel from New Zealand to Finland. The participation of the Different Light performers was hybrid and mediated in various ways. Different kinds of access were both afforded and foreclosed by the particular conditions of online participation. This giving and taking of access aligns with the complexity of what 'about us' and 'with and without us' can mean in learning disabled theatre in terms of the fundamental questioning of the presence and agency of the learning disabled performers themselves. This

questioning of presence, of course, intersects with what presence, participation, and action can mean in the subjunctive conceptual space of theatrical performance. Within the conventions of theatre an 'actor' is both the supposed subject of action, discourse, and movement and subjected to enacting pre-written scripts of speech and movement.

The Different Light presentation was my attempt to curate the performers' responses to the conference's call for papers and the various processes and dialogues connected with the Key Group Presentation 'Collaboration, Care and Conviviality.' These had been taking place since October 2020 when the Performance Philosophy Working Group had contacted me and the other co-convenors of the Performance and Disability Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research with a view to forming a KeyGroup at Helsinki. The performers devised the spoken text over a number of weeks, at times in a rehearsal room, at times, due to the surge of the Omicron variant in Christchurch, over Zoom. They wanted to establish quite a personal connection to the conference organisers and to the audience of attendees. They wanted to greet people in simple English and Finnish and they wanted to 'welcome' the Helsinki audience to Different Light, using te reo Māori.

One of the performers, Damian Bumman, has a fascination with time differences, about which the group was very much aware. He introduced the whole 90-minute Key Group presentation with his account of the time differences between Christchurch, Helsinki, and other cities. He tried to track and update these time differences minute-by-minute, but this attempt was doomed to fail as time kept moving on, and, in addition, he conceded that, in any case, his watch might be wrong.... This was a kind of questioning of the *kairos*—or good timing—of both theatrical performance and the delivery of academic discourse.³ It suggested the need to consider alternative temporalities—'crip time' (McRuer) and 'autistic rhetoric' (Yergeau)—when seeking to include disabled artists or researchers.

Bumann also has a fascination with how things can be done—either technologically or theatrically—which had also become very familiar to the group and reference to which was included in his line in the group's presentation: 'How can we get to Helsinki? How can we do that?' These were questions that acquired greater resonance for the group as the devising process continued. How can Different Light get through to an audience, what can 'we' get through to 'them'? How can learning disabled artists participate in an academic conference? The group's response to these questions was to include greetings, welcomes, and their personal responses to one of the conference organisers, Esa Kirkkopelto, a video of whom I had shown the group. We tried to include some descriptions of their recent and past experiences of living in Christchurch through earthquakes, fires and massacres, of making theatre, of life in the pandemic, of motorized wheelchair user Angelia Douglas's particular experiences of performing 'simple tasks' such as getting in and out of bed, crossing the road or trying to talk to strangers. I asked the performers to ask the conference attendees their own research questions. These were: 1. What is your disability? 2. Who are your caregivers? 3. How do you get in and out of bed? 4. Why did the person in a motorized wheelchair cross the road?

It soon became apparent during this process that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for all the Different Light performers to present this performance 'live' via Zoom. This was due both to the vagaries of the performers' access to stable internet connections and, in some cases, their lack of access to devices and computers at the time of the Helsinki conference—morning in Helsinki, but evening in Christchurch.

I made the decision to submit the participation of the whole group as a pre-recorded video. This was presented as a kind of simulacrum of a live performance in a theatre, toying with different ideas of presence and performance. It included a performer isolating due to Covid but 'present' via Zoom. It was filmed in an empty theatre. The actors performed for the camera. The filming did, however, facilitate the performers' various kinds of access to the *kairos*, as it allowed the possibility of several 'takes'.

When we approached the 'live' performance for the Auckland conference I made the decision to include a straight repetition of the Helsinki performance but this time 'live,' in-person, IRL—'in real life.' This brought us up against a problem or paradox of (learning disabled) theatre. Words and actions that had been devised by the performers themselves over a period of weeks and captured in selected moments using multiple takes for the filmed contribution now needed to be learnt, re-created and re-vivified in the *kairos* and turn-taking or cueing of live theatre. The performers needed to be secure enough in their memorization to 'own' the text. The performance needed to be repeatable enough to withstand travelling from Christchurch to Auckland and from presentation just amongst ourselves in a rehearsal room to a theatre with a live 200-person audience.

We had three performers new to the group who had never performed theatre in public before. The rest of the group, whilst experienced, had not performed live in public since 2019. In the meantime, we had been working on Zoom performance and studio-based performance research as well as online appearance at the Helsinki conference and online participation on a panel on learning disabled theatre organized by VTC Margarita in Athens that included Blue Apple (UK), Hijinx Theatre (Wales), Créahm (Belgium), and Theater HORA (Switzerland).

What had taken a day of filming to produce a six-minute performance was now taking weeks of rehearsal and felt increasingly in danger of collapsing. In addition, I made a decision to structure the Auckland performance presentation so that the first half was the presentation of the Helsinki script that was then followed by the performers needing to acknowledge that they were not in Helsinki but in Auckland and that they were not at 'Performance Philosophy Problems' but at 'Travelling Together.' After this they proceeded to continue the presentation giving an account of some of their experiences of travelling together. The text of both sections was devised by the performers and curated by me, but priority was given to the spoken text and to the memorization and recreation of this text as an ensemble piece out of which individual voices or dialogues emerged. In many ways this strategy replicated or simulated the emphasis on spoken text and the *kairos* of public speaking or conventional talking heads theatre which can be such an uneasy fit for learning disabled performers. Particularly in the early stages of rehearsal, or repetition, the spoken

text went around and about the performers. Despite the fact that this text had been devised with them and, what is more, *from* them, my curation and my decisions on turn-taking and, for want of a better word, cueing, resulted in the text washing around and about them, ever receding from them or crashing into them. The text was about them but had become inhospitably other to them, recalling Derrida's formulation in *Monolingualism of the Other*: 'I only have one language, yet it is not mine' (1).

Then something happened: collectively we made a commitment to proceed with the Auckland performance. I raised funds from the Ara Foundation to cover the costs of flights and accommodation for eight performers. We negotiated the 'necessary' risk assessments for certain performers, we obtained permission for travel from performers' EPOAs (Enduring Power of Attorney), we organized two support people to accompany the performers and me. Angelia Douglas's support people organized a manual wheelchair—to traverse the steep gradients of busy Auckland roads rather than rely on her motorized wheelchair that was guided sometimes erratically by the little finger of her right hand and a hoist—for getting her in and out of bed. This was her first time out of the South Island of New Zealand, her first time travelling in an aeroplane. The airline managed to damage both wheelchair and hoist in ways that severely impacted her mobility and comfort. A performer tripped and fainted at Auckland airport. Another performer vomited backstage just before the performance. We experienced the 'performances around performance' of disability performance. There is a colloquial phrase in English 'What a performance!' that is used in the context that the Oxford English Dictionary defines as 'a difficult, time-consuming or annoying action or procedure'; this is often the kind of performance that accompanies the access of disabled artists to theatrical performance.

We made a collective commitment and a mutual exchange took place. Given the performers' difficulties with the conventional text and rehearsal methodology with which I had presented them, I assured them that I would also film the Auckland presentation in advance and if there were any issues of people being unable to perform, either through discomfort—or the very real possibility of contracting Covid or needing to isolate—that we would show this film and they could answer questions about it if they so choose. I also assured them that prior to the presentation I would introduce the performers to the audience, explaining that we had three artists new to theatrical performance and that the group itself had not performed in public for three years.

What the performers gave in this exchange was their continued commitment to achieving the memorization and *kairos* of the spoken text. What they also brought to the exchange—much more importantly—was their corporeal commitment to the spoken text which rendered the spoken text something entirely different. This was not something that I directed them to do.

I can give two specific examples of this corporeal generosity and articulacy. In one of the rehearsals in Auckland, Angelia Douglas really struggled to maintain her posture due to the right arm of her manual chair being unusable as a result of being damaged in transit. Noting this, Josie Noble for large parts of the rehearsal found a way of moving and supporting Douglas' right arm and leading her through the movements of the simple dance sequences.

Biddy Steffens, another first time theatre performer, but like Noble experienced in disability dance, found her own distinctive movement vocabulary to inform, guide, and support her spoken text—in many ways it was like she was wrapping a bow around her lines and offering them to the audience. As a response to the anxiety the performers appeared to be experiencing prior to performing 'live' for the first time in three years I made the decision to light the acting area and the auditorium equally to highlight the co-presence of performers and audience. I then introduced each performer individually to the audience who responded generously with applause and approbation. In response to this generosity the performers in turn re-inhabited the spoken text they had initially devised separately in lockdown.

Buoyed by the support of the audience they made offers that expressed their desire to connect with the audience. They wore the performance like a loose garment. This was the element of communication that had been missing from the online performances and participation in Helsinki and Athens and this was something that the performers discovered for themselves. I had presented the performers with my own ill-conceived and faulty intentions and methodologies that tried to shoehorn their participation into the *kairos* of conventional public discourse and theatricality. From this constrained form of withness, that seeks to elide difference, the performers found their own ways of being—when they were with the performance and when they were without it—to expand the aboutness of the performance to include an academic conference and to include an audience. They included us.



The Journeyings of Different Light, University of Auckland, Drama Studio, 9 December 2022

▶ Watch the video: <https://vimeo.com/798685021>

Transcript

Introduction

DIRECTOR: It's been a hard year. For everybody. It's been a hard few days. For us. Hasn't it?
Lots of conference food.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

So it's also—I just want to explain. This is Different Light Theatre Company.

(ASKING PERFORMERS.)

Am I right?

JOSIE: Yeah.

DIRECTOR: Yeah? I got it right. And ehm I know you're not scary. But from here

(WALKS TO CENTRE STAGE TO JOIN ACTORS.)

But from here you look quite scary. That's why we've left all the lights on. We just want to make contact. We just want to share with you. So. The last public performance Different Light did was in 2019.

[COLLECTIVE AUDIBLE AUDIENCE REACTION Mmmm. Wow.]

So this is quite a change from Zoom boxes... Also we have some performers who are new to the company. They've never performed before. I'll introduce the first person. Angie Douglas

(ISAAC PUSHES ANGIE FORWARD IN HER MANUAL WHEELCHAIR. AUDIENCE APPLAUD.)

Angie's only been with us for a few months First time on stage first time performing First time out of the South Island of New Zealand.

(LOUD AUDIENCE REACTION.)

First time on a plane. So we're really. We love Angie. We want her to do well. She's a great contributor to the group. But we want her to feel you know that everything's OK. You good. Yeah? You lost your voice

(ANGIE SMILES AND SHAKES HER HEAD. AUDIENCE LAUGHTER.)

Please don't lose your voice now. Ah well if you lose your voice you lose your voice. We'd like to welcome Angie. She's had some adventures getting here. The wonderful people of Air New Zealand broke her wheelchair

(AUDIENCE REACTION.)

From Christchurch to Auckland. And not only that but broke her hoist that she uses to get in and out of bed. So—adventures of travel—of travelling together. Another person new to the company is the wonderful Biddy Steffens.

(APPLAUSE.)

Biddy's very good at making us stay...stay how?

BIDDY: Stay relaxed, and stay focussed. AUDIENCE LAUGHS.

DIRECTOR: And finally the next new performer is our friend Matthew Swaffield.

(APPLAUSE. MATTHEW STAYS UPSTAGE NEAR THE CYCLORAMA.)

Are you being a man of mystery up there.

MATTHEW: Yes.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS.)

DIRECTOR: Also known as...?

PETER: Swaffy.

DIRECTOR: Swaffy for short. Other people I'd like to introduce you to because it's unfair to just introduce three. Mr Matthew Phelan.

(APPLAUSE.)

Matthew's been with the company for eighteen years.

(AUDIENCE REACTION: WOW.)

And he's had a bit of an issue, he's been a bit ill today, if we're honest. And so we're trying to give him some love and support because he's a really cool performer. Then we have Mr Damian Bumman.

(APPLAUSE.)

Damian Bumman is also known as the amazing human.

(LOUD LAUGHTER.)

We have Mr Peter Lewis Rees.

(APPLAUSE.)

And we hope you'll learn more about this interesting actor during the show. We have Mr Isaac Tait.

(APPLAUSE.)

He describes himself as a Gonzo Buddhist artist.

(LAUGHTER.)

Maybe some of that will come through. We're in process. Aren't we all? We're in process. It's kind of rehearsal conditions. There may be some stuff you don't normally see when you expect the disciplinary formations of theatre. That's all I'll say.

(NOISES AND INTERRUPTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE INDICATING SOMEBODY HAS BEEN OMITTED.)

Oh I'm sorry! Who have I forgotten? Josie Noble! My God.

(APPLAUSE.)

The book the book.

(HOLDING UP A MOCKUP OF A BOOK COVER.)

Josie Noble who's on the cover of the new book due out in April 2023.

(APPLAUSE AND REACTION.)

I'm so sorry.

JOSIE: That's all right.

DIRECTOR: Will you ever forgive me?

JOSIE: Yes.

(THEY HUG. AUDIENCE REACT AND APPLAUD.)

JOSIE: I've been with Different Light Theatre Company for eleven years since 2011.

(APPLAUSE.)

DIRECTOR: Shall we get Josie and Biddy to get to start positions?

BIDDY: Yes.

JOSIE AND BIDDY: Hello, Helsinki!

ANGIE (coming onstage in her wheelchair): Hello, Helsinki!

JOSIE and BIDDY: Hello, Helsinki!

MATTHEW P: Tahi Rua Toru Wha— [*Te reo Māori for "One, Two Three, Four"*]

ALL: Hello, Helsinki!

Hei, Helsinki!

DAMIAN: How can we get to Helsinki? How can we do that?

BIDDY: We can communicate with you via Zoom.

PETER: Welcome to Performance Philosophy Problems

ALL: Welcome

MATTHEW S: Haere Mai haere mai haere mai [*Te reo Māori for "Welcome"*]

ALL: Haere Mai Haere Mai

MATTHEW P: What are Performance Philosophy Problems?
 JOSIE: We are Performance Philosophy Problems
 PETER: No you are.
 ALL: You are! No, you are! You are!
 BIDDY: Guys focus, please stay focussed.
 MATTHEW P: We are Different Light Theatre, a theatre group from Christchurch, New Zealand.
 PETER: We've been through earthquakes,
 ANGIE: floods, massacres,
 MATTHEW S: fires,
 JOSIE: viruses, a global pandemic,
 ANGIE: lockdowns, isolations,
 BIDDY: Anti-mandate protests,
 ISAAC: and a war in Ukraine...
 DAMIAN: And now Isaac's poem...
 ISAAC: So much depends on support workers,
 So much depends on vaccination,
 So much depends on police
 so much depends on our lives matter,
 so much depends on thinking.
 MATTHEW P: Now we are going to ask you some questions.
 BIDDY: For our research
 JOSIE: Please answer them to the best of your ability.
 PETER: Number 1. What is your disability?
 ISAAC: Number 2. Who are your caregivers?
 ANGIE: Number 3. How do you get in and out of bed?
 MATTHEW P: Unfortunately, we don't have any time for your answers.
 JOSIE: You will need to take your answers away with you.
 PETER: Angie, how do you talk to people?
 ANGIE: I try to talk to people all the time and they just walk away. By the way, I use a hoist to get in and out of bed.
 PETER: Question 4. Why did the person in a motorized wheelchair cross the road?
 MATTHEW P: HOW can the person in a motorized wheelchair cross the road?
 (IMAGE OF ESA KIRKKOPELTO)
 BIDDY: Hei, Esa Kirkkoppelto !
 ALL: Hei, Esa!
 PETER: Esa told us we need to do something like a performance but we can rehearse it.
 BIDDY: I think Esa looks like a professional and he looks like he has been doing this for a while.
 MATTHEW P: I've been doing theatre for a while
 JOSIE AND OTHERS: I have too. ME TOO. AND ME.
 BIDDY: People, please focus.
 JOSIE: The last public performance we did was *The History of Different Light* for the Christchurch Arts Festival in 2019.
 ISAAC: Since then we have had to rethink what we mean by performance...
 MATTHEW S: We can make theatre together.
 ISAAC: ...and thinking.
 JOSIE: Right now we are in an Omicron surge here in Christchurch.
 MATTHEW P: To protect ourselves and others we need to meet on Zoom.

PETER: On Zoom you can talk to your mates
 ANGIE: You can laugh with them.
 BIDDY: You can use filters or share screen.
 (PEOPLE MAKE HEARTS ON BIDDY)
 JOSIE: On Zoom you can't be with them in person.
 MATTHEW P AND GLEN: You can't hug them.
 JOSIE AND OTHERS: You can't drink coffee with them and share a meal with them.
 MATTHEW P: The question is: Can you do theatre on Zoom?
 ISAAC: The question is: Can you do thinking on Zoom?
 (VIDEO OF PETER SPEAKING ON ZOOM AT HELSINKI CONFERENCE)
 BIDDY: People, please! This is not Helsinki. We're in Auckland.
 PETER: This is not Performance Philosophy Problems. This is Travelling Together!
 ANGIE: I'll give you travelling together.
 PETER: Why, thank you.
 MATTHEW: And this is not the University of Helsinki this is ADSA.
 JOSIE: ASDA?
 PETER: No that's a supermarket in England.
 ISAAC: NASDA?
 MATTHEW SWAFFIELD: No, that's in Christchurch.
 DAMIAN: What is ADSA?
 COMPUTER VOICE: AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THEATRE, DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES.
 ALL: HELLO ADSA!
 PETER: And we're not on Zoom, this is in real life.
 MATTHEW PHELAN: Is this the real life or is this just fantasy?
 PETER: This is theatre .
 ISAAC: This is thinking?
 DAMIAN: What do we do now?
 PETER: How about a song and dance?
 ANGIE sings: True love will find you in the end
 You'll find out just who's your friend
 Don't be sad I know you will
 Don't give up until
 True love will find you in the end.
 I'm doing this for my friend, Glen.
 He travels with us, but he can't be here today.

VIDEO TRUE LOVE. DANCE.

DAMIAN: And now Isaac's paper.
 ISAAC:
 Hi, I am Isaac and I have a disability.
 Think of it more like this. Hi, I am Isaac, and I have a label.
 How can I identify?
 Give me your twitch, your phones, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free! Oh, academic papers... there are lots of barriers for people with disabilities to become academic. It is too hard to get help with a disability. So, academic papers... a real time waste for us.

People with disabilities are seen as people that only operate on the level of an eighth grader, and are treated on the same level as eighth graders. Academic studies show that. Hello Finland, hello Russians, how can you do that? Hi Iran and Iranian women, hi Hunter S Thompson, Richard the Third, send tweet to Elon Musk, saying hello. Hello Down syndrome people who live to be fifty. Hello autism, hello support workers who don't really give a cup of tea. Hello Tama Iti. How can we be philosophy? How can we do that?

Where is Isaac's intensity? Maybe somewhere in the future.

PETER: I spend quite some time travelling back in time into history. My ancestor is Edward of Woodstock the eldest son of King Edward the Third of England, and is known as the Black Prince of Wales.

I am also really interested in Richard I, also known as Richard Coeur de Leon or Richard the Lion Heart. We'd now like to present something of the history of Different Light:

JOHN LAMBIE SEQUENCE

MATTHEW P: I have travelled with my friend John Lambie since 2004 when Different Light started.

In 2007 we went to the Awakenings Festival in Horsham, Victoria, to perform *Ship of Fools*. When we got back to Christchurch airport, John went back on the plane and said, 'I want to go to Fiji now.'

DAMIAN: In 2010 we went to Sydney to present at the Powerhouse Museum.

At Sydney airport we all got on the plane home, but we couldn't find John.

People got off the plane to go look for him.

Finally, we saw him coming down an escalator talking to an Air France pilot.

PETER: In 2012 when we presented at the Concourse in Chatswood, we were walking in the Rocks in Sydney.

John missed his footing on a steep road and fell over onto his face.

He was taken to hospital.

He was okay. One of the doctors said John was quite old for a person with Down's Syndrome.

MATTHEW P: In 2015 John celebrated fifty years at Hohepa, a residential institution for people with learning disabilities. A few weeks later he went to Rosebank, a dementia centre in Ashburton.

This was fifty miles from all the people he had known for fifty years.

A few weeks after that, he died.

ENDING SEQUENCE

JOSIE: Every week ten of us walk and wheel down the footpath to a café to take a break from rehearsals.

MATTHEW SWAFFIELD: The footpath is still munted from the 2010–2011 earthquakes.

ISAAC: The earth has been travelling through space for four billion years.

PETER: To get to the café we cross a six-lane motorway with two sets of traffic lights.

(ALL: BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP)

Why did the person in a motorized wheelchair cross the road?

MATTHEW P: Why would a person in a motorized wheelchair want to cross the road?

JOSIE: We walk and wheel down the pavements of Ōtautahi, Christchurch: we grow old together.

BIDDY: Below us Papatuanuku, the earth mother, for the moment, is still, she supports us.
PETER: We travel together...
ANGIE: ...in an untogether way.
ISAAC: John and Louise travel with us.
PETER: Above us the light of the sky.
DAMIAN: Beyond that, the light of the stars.
PETER: The stars weave in our ageing, vulnerable, precious bodies.
MATTHEW P: Mahutonga, Matariki, Purapurawhetu.
ISAAC: The stars weave in our ageing, vulnerable, precious bodies
ANGIE: They are dancing in us.
BIDDY: Come and dance with us.

(TRUE LOVE SONG REPRISE. THE PERFORMERS INVITE AUDIENCE MEMBERS ONSTAGE AND DANCE WITH AUDIENCE.)

What is 'withusness'? We turn now to Janet Gibson and Kate Maguire-Rosier who together tell a story.

From theatres of learning disability in New Zealand, we travel to dance and verbatim theatres of disability in Australia and dementia in America. We—Janet and Kate—want to talk about what it means to 'show and tell' disability and disease in rehearsals, on stage, in a conference paper at Helsinki and in this writing now. Perhaps, when disabled artists and people with dementia share their impairment in a performance, they express the 'aboutness' of disability and disease, for they are present. Perhaps, when we spoke about them at Helsinki and write about them here, this is a problematic 'aboutness' of disability which alienates them as 'them', not 'us', for they are absent. Disclosing disability and disease in dance, theatre and performance thus simultaneously includes and excludes. Disclosing means sharing information about something or someone to some other person or people. Disclosing risks othering, hurting, infantilizing. The list goes on. When thinking and writing about disability and dementia in live performance, problems come up. We retell a dialogue (Maguire-Rosier and Gibson 2022) as our response to Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca's question about how to create 'withusness' between academics and performers with intellectual disability. We use easy-read. In our story, we do not use words we think could be difficult for people with perceived intellectual disability or dementia.⁴

The story takes place in two different theatre projects. The first project with Jianna was in a dance theatre performance called *Days Like These* (we call it *DLT* from now on). It was directed by Sarah-Vyne Vassallo with her company, Murmuration. It was first shown in 2017 at Cootamundra Arts Centre, in country New South Wales, Australia. Kate worked with the company as a researcher. The second project with Therese and Julie was *To Whom I May Concern*® (we call it *TWIMC* from now on). It was directed by Maureen Matthews and presented at Hill House, Connecticut, USA in 2018. *DLT* had professional performers whereas *TWIMC* involved non-professional performers.

Chapter 1. Kate speaking:⁵ About Jianna

On one of the first days with the company, I met Jianna Georgiou, “a gorgeous young woman with Down Syndrome, who is a beautiful, quite a voluptuous dancer” and a “proud disabled woman”. Voluptuous means having lovely curvy body lines. This is how a former director of another company—Adelaide-based Restless Dance Theatre—choreographer Ingrid Voorendt once described Jianna (2010).⁶ In my notes, I write:

Jianna talks about Restless, Michelle Ryan, and Philip Channels and uses the word “whatnot”. Her eyebrows are raised, and she appears quite relaxed. Her legs are crossed, and she wears leggings and a jumper around her waist with converse shoes. Jianna thinks as she speaks, “me and Philip ... last time I was with him, I had to do workshops all the time ‘cause I’m a performing artist, as always”. Sarah-Vyne prompts her, “What about your most recent work?” “Yeah”, she says, “we did a show called Touched, and we been performing, and we got new people coming, and we been performing and we been working together”. She repeats some things without seeming to realise.

While I did not use the term “Down syndrome” in my notes, I consider my word-for-word documentation of Jianna’s sometimes incorrect speech and her repetition of some words as indicators of intellectual disability. Indicators mean signals. Although they are subtle. When Jianna later shares with the group, “I don’t want to be seen as having disability. I’m just me!” my notes that ‘out’ Jianna as disabled, suddenly become a problem. Outing without permission is also a long-standing ethical problem for LGBTIQ+ communities and those connected to them. LGBTIQ+ communities are made up of people who have a range of different ways of expressing their sexual and gender preferences.

I felt I was describing in my notes but it was as an ‘outsider’. By outsider, I mean I am not disabled and do not experience disability culture like some Disabled people might. Gradually, it became clear that it was hard for me, as a nondisabled person, to address lived experiences of disability. The process of addressing Jianna’s subtle disclosure and her own conflicting anti-disclosure quickly became a problem. This dilemma involved facing and owning up to my power as a researcher ‘holding’ Jianna in my story. It involved questioning my research method. And it involved rethinking dance and disability from the perspective of a ‘proud disabled woman’—Jianna.

Chapter 2. Janet speaking: Time, repetition and ‘withusness’

“Just give me a minute,” said Therese to the theatre audience watching and listening to a production of *TWIMC* at Hill House. Hill House is a 61-apartment home for elderly people of low to moderate income in Connecticut, USA. Therese, one of three performers in the production, was living with primary progressive aphasia or PPA. PPA is when people have brain difficulties with language. It is a medical diagnosis given to her by her doctor who in the world she lives in is the one who has the power.

Therese's words ("Just give me a minute") were said over and over by all the performers in a chorus; that is, they were repeated by everyone together. Repetition works in several ways in *TWIMC*. Repeating words and phrases is a key part of so many of the dementia diseases. The cast's repeated chorus, "Just give me a minute", also creates a sense of 'withusness' amongst the performers. They are all in this together. But repetition is also a key part of many types of theatre. Actors in text-based productions learn their lines and repeat them, night after night, or matinee after matinee, over the length of a theatre season. Actors being able to remember the lines and repeat them is also a sign of 'professionalism' in many mainstage productions. Professional performers are often trained and make money from their work. Therese and the other performers *read out* their lines; they do not remember them as would many 'professional' performers.

While I was watching the rehearsal, Therese had trouble with the words in her script at various times, but no one helped her. In the script, she says, "I need for people to stick with waiting. I have lots to say". Yet Therese says there is a fine line between people waiting and people helping her "fill in" the words. "It's like a dance", she says. A dance is when someone or something moves often beautifully, usually to music. There is indeed a fine line between speaking for and speaking with people with dementia or disability and what is called 'crip time' is usually involved. According to Alison Kafer (2013):

Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time or recognizing how expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies...Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds. (27)

Therese's dance with words—hers and others—was a struggle. But it was filled in time, via others waiting, giving her silence and space to speak.

Chapter 3. Kate speaking: Aboutness

In this story about Jianna, I relive a dilemma: I am speaking on her behalf. Here is the problem of 'aboutness'. I am speaking for and writing about Jianna. I need to be careful.

Care researcher Sara Ruddick (1998) thinks "care" can make people angry, especially disabled people. For example, Australian Royal Commissions investigating abuse both in the Disability (2019) and Aged Care (2020) sectors provide examples where care hurt people even when those people tell you to stop. In aged care and disability contexts, care can mean violence.

Jianna's razor sharp words "I don't want to be seen as having disability. I'm just me!" are challenging. Jianna is a person who visually discloses Down Syndrome. So why does Jianna reject disability? And how should I deal with her words as a researcher? For Jianna, being disabled means being objectified and thought about badly by others. She is not wrong! Many disabled theorists agree with Jianna! They speak about how important it is for disabled people to pass as normal to be respected. Disabled researcher Rosemarie Garland-Thomson came up with the word "normate"

(Garland-Thomson 1997) to describe this non-disabled ideal. Yet Jianna, who appears disabled, like many other visually disabled people, is invisible and hypervisible at the same time, standing out easily from the crowd. Jianna has no choice but to manage the stigma of being ignored or stared at and ultimately, insulted (Goffman 2009 [1963]). Stigma means being linked to something negative. Understandably, Jianna refuses to identify as disabled. For her, being disabled means being disrespected. Jianna insists she is thought about just like everyone else.

But as the researcher, I do identify Jianna as disabled. On her website, Jianna explains she is a “dancer with exceptional talent” (Georgiou 2014). Exceptional talent means outstanding. I write about details that ‘out’ Jianna as disabled. For example, I write down word-for-word what she says, which is sometimes incorrect or repetitive. I do not do this to out her, criticise or disagree with her. Instead, I describe what she says and does in front of me in great detail. Philosopher Gilbert Ryle called this ‘thick description’ (Ryle in Geertz 1994 [1973], 312). The difference between what Jianna expressed (being disabled) versus what she said (“I don’t have a disability”) is stark. Geertz saw the difficulties of thick description. He wrote that it is the “hard surfaces of life” (Geertz 1994 [1973], 323). The difference between what Jianna expressed versus what she said presents difficulty. Geertz warned other researchers—like me—not to dismiss difficulties like this. This is why I am writing about the problem I faced and why I spoke to Janet about it.

The only visual bits of Jianna I write about are ‘her blue nail polish that matches her hair’ and “Silver rings and a necklace make me think she expresses herself as quite feminine”. I focus on parts of Jianna she expresses—her blue nails, hair, feminine, punk style, and the words she speaks. I note that Jianna does not knowingly present herself with Down syndrome.

But Jianna is not writing about her disability here. I am! My disclosing of Jianna risks disrespecting her. The researcher Stephanie Kerschbaum warns that I might be creating yet “another person’s perception of [her] disability” (2014, 57). So what should I think? What should I do? What should I write? How should I deal with my own words, which out Jianna as disabled? This does not feel like the right thing for me to do because Jianna does not wish to be regarded as disabled. There are no researchers with Down syndrome whose ideas I can borrow to help answer these questions and solve this problem.

On stage, in live performance, artists with visible disability like Jianna do not face this problem. Their bodies speak for themselves, and there is no need to declare Jianna as disabled. In this story, however, I do have this problem. This is because I am writing it. So I need to manage the word ‘disabled’. And I need to manage its stigma, this hurtful feeling that people link to a disabled person.

Chapter 4. Janet speaking: Power, care and ‘aboutusness’ in *TWIMC*

Six people, led by Maureen Matthews, have been meeting regularly to support each other in living with dementia, to tell their stories, create a performance script and then perform it to their communities at Hill House. I was at the rehearsal on 21 June 2018, when Julie says she “couldn’t go through it without all of you”, indicating the group and Matthews.

Accepting care is not easy for anyone brought up with the “fiction of independence” (Kittay 2011, 51). This means that people, especially those living in western societies, believe the ‘story’ that individual people can live on their own without help from anyone when in fact, all people need to rely on others, whether it is for their care needs, their food or their electricity. When diagnosed with dementia, however, depending on others becomes necessary so the behaviour of care partners or allies without dementia is crucially important. Those without dementia are often the ones involved in facilitating the ‘aboutusness’ of the theatre project with people with dementia, so they need to care well.

Matthews provides good care for her troupe at all times during the rehearsal. Maureen does not live with a diagnosis of dementia, so she could be seen to be an outsider, a ‘them’ to the ‘us’ of the group. She speaks slowly and clearly; she accepts changes to the script from her performers, helping them to control their own stories and to feel as comfortable as possible in front of an audience. She has translated Therese’s script phonetically and edited out as many three-syllable words as possible. Phonetically means that the word is written to describe the sound rather than the spelling. Maureen does this because Therese has trouble reading and saying complex words. Once in rehearsal, Therese struggles to say “independence”. Maureen suggests a “sense of self”. But Therese objects to this change. “Ok,” Maureen says, “we can work on that. We still have time”.

Only some of the group members perform the stories in public. No one is forced to perform; it is always a choice. But the performers present stories to communities in which they live, so Julie’s question before she reveals another person’s story is considerate, attentive and ethical: “can I share this?”. Julie is asking permission to disclose as she partakes in a ‘withusness’ move.

In many *TWIMC* productions, the medical treatment of people with dementia is looked at deeply. Julie asks doctors to “watch their language”. She is speaking back to the power held by most doctors when she was unable to do so in the first instance of her initial diagnosis. But she can do it in the performance because of the ‘withusness’ that the theatre piece enables.

There are also a few stories of the first time the performers were told by their doctors that they had dementia. Doctors 1, 2, and 3 speak to Julie and Therese without interest or kindness. The performers use the doctors’ responses and follow them with “Look at me. Talk to me”, repeated several times to ensure that the audience hears the message: the performers’ experiences with medical practitioners are all the same. All the doctors preferred not to look at or talk directly to any of the performers, directing comments to their family members instead. In this way ‘aboutness’ is continually repeated in the medical encounters and the performers are sidelined in the process.

Chapter 5. Kate speaking: On ‘withusness’

In fact, it is the Artistic Director Sarah-Vyne, who helps Jianna to share her words, “I can do anything! I don’t want to be seen as having a disability. I’m just me!” Together they create the phrase. However, Sarah-Vyne does not agree with Jianna. Sarah-Vyne who has a lived experience of invisible disability thinks being seen as having a disability is something to be proud of. Why didn’t

I mention this earlier? I have, so far, said these words are Jianna's. I have kept Sarah-Vyne's role invisible! I did this on purpose. I did this because access for disabled people twists, turns and can make worlds of difference.

When Jianna says she wants to be seen as "just me", she does not come up with this phrase alone. This is important. Many disability researchers, activists and artists like to talk about the agency and independence of disabled people. Agency means having the power to make your own decisions. Feminist care ethicists and some feminist disability researchers, instead, highlight relationships that enable agency and independence. I think Sarah-Vyne helped Jianna to share her 'aboutness' on her terms. This is very careful work by Sarah-Vyne. It is very smart work by Jianna.

Jianna, with Sarah-Vyne in the role of "creative enabler" (Achtman 2014, 36), performs Jianna's disclosure (Kerschbaum 2014). Jianna's agency is very important. [10] Jianna is in control, control that Sarah-Vyne supports. Echoing Eva Feder Kittay and Licia Carlson (2010), Jianna's independence is being helped by Sarah-Vyne. Michael Achtman comments, "One of the most challenging aspects of the creative enabler role is maintaining the boundary between access support and artistic input" (2014, 36). Jianna's disclosure creates a dilemma between independence and support (Schmidt 2017, 447). Sarah-Vyne and Jianna's cooperative approach brings together the social model of disability (which sees independence as important) with a feminist ethics of care (which sees relationships as significant).

In creating *DLT*, Jianna's disclosure of Down syndrome is performed by her presence; yet, when she speaks, she resists the label "disability". As Jianna realises, in disclosing, she risks linking herself to oppressive ideas of disability. Even though Sarah-Vyne disagrees that being disabled is bad, she helps Jianna create her anti-disclosure. And here, finally, is the bittersweet depths of 'withusness'. Bittersweet meets happily and sadly moving at the same time. Jianna's disclosure uncovers the puzzle people with visible disability face—to disclose or not to disclose? It also reveals Sarah-Vyne's different attitude. This 'withusness' is what disability researcher Christine Kelly describes as "accessible care" (2011). She sees care as, importantly, unstable.

Chapter 6. Janet and Kate—Us—speaking:

This story of 'withusness' is hard to tell. For Tony and A Different Light company members, 'withusness' means performers with intellectual disability, including an audience. For us, Janet and Kate, our story finds nuance in 'withusness', for it will always exclude. Nuance means fine details and subtle differences. Our conversation starts to deepen the tricky story of 'withusness' by thinking about showing and telling disability and dementia in performance. We began by thinking aboutness as different from 'withusness'. We ended by finding what 'withusness' might mean. For Sarah-Vyne 'withusness' means respecting Jianna's decision to say disability does not identify her. For Therese and Julie, 'withusness' means the performers working together to support their disclosure and asking permission to share the stories of others not present in the performance. Disability and dementia shows how much we depend on those around us when we make theatre and dance together. We hope you can depend on this story in turn. You might even like to share something too.

Notes

¹ Josie Noble, Different Light Theatre, spoken in the video cited in the article.

² The authors' discussion about the terms is included here as an example of a caring, 'witness' exchange during our collaboration on this article.

Kate: should 'witness' be changed to 'withusness' throughout?

Janet: I think we need to resolve this issue for more continuity throughout and maybe have a definition of the terms in the intro or at least if not a definition a framing of them as they are used or problematised in the article.

Kate: Does 'aboutness' perhaps question who has power? Is it therefore about political/politicising in nature? Or does it point to a tension of who is speaking for whom? In contrast, is 'withusness' more relational? Is it therefore about a duty/ethic of care for another? Or does it point to the tension of being together as a community? Your thoughts?

Tony: My thoughts on 'aboutness' and 'withusness' are that these are not technical terms. From my perspective—and it is just my perspective—Laura brought them up in the Helsinki Q&A and in my piece of writing I riff on what they might mean. I think they can each acquire different meanings which makes them interesting for me and opens them up for 'philosophical' questioning. Kate's definitions are interesting and obviously relevant but for me only part of the story of the meanings that can accrue around 'aboutness' and 'withusness'. They are deliberately vague and imprecise and open to interpretation. I hope this helps. It is almost as if we could include this discussion as part of or a footnote of the piece itself. Your thoughts?

³ *Kairos* is a Greek term for time as in the good timing of public speech, and by extension performance, as opposed to *chronos* or sequential time. *Kairos* is a term that has been extensively discussed in relation to the different temporality of autistic speech and behaviour in Yergeau (2017) and by Lipari (2021) who considers how *kairos* relates to *akroasis* in an ethical practice of 'listening others into speech.' This is an approach to the negotiation of communication which I find very useful in my ongoing collaboration with the learning disabled artists of Different Light.

⁴ In doing this, we are following the example of UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2022).

⁵ We use the word 'speaking' although we are in fact writing, as this convention is used in discussions between participants at the IFTR Performance and Disability Working Group to make it easier for people with impaired vision to know when a new speaker is beginning their contribution.

⁶ The oppression experienced by disabled people is most commonly referred to as "ableism" (for discussion, see Campbell 2012, 212–28). In the case of Jianna who lives with Down syndrome, and in turn, participants living with dementia, "cognitive ableism" (Carlson 2001) comes into play.

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Biographies

Janet Gibson is a theatre and performance studies scholar interested in socially engaged theatre involving older people with dementia. She is the author of *Dementia, Narrative and Performance: Staging Reality, Reimagining Identities* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020) and has contributed to *Research in Drama Education: Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* and to *Contemporary Narratives of Ageing, Illness, Care* (Routledge 2022). She is a co-convenor of the Performance, Health and Creative Care (PHCC) Working Group of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies, (ADSA) which is the peak academic association promoting the study of drama in any performing medium throughout the region. She is also a founding member of the Sydney Care Lab, which is in association with the Manchester Care Lab, UK. She is a trained actor (Uta Hagen, HB Studios, New York) who performed in *Women in Beckett* at Theater for the New City, New York, under the direction of Moisés Kaufman (of *The Laramie Project*). A certified facilitator for TimeSlips, a creative expression program, Janet is currently collaborating with Dr Meg Mumford on the application of a care aesthetics lens to a TimeSlips program in a Sydney residential aged care home.

Tony McCaffrey is a Lecturer at the National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art, Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand and for 20 years has been the Artistic Director of Different Light Theatre, an ensemble of learning disabled artists. He is co-convenor of the Performance and Disability Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research. He is the author of *Incapacity and Theatricality: Politics and Aesthetics in Theatre Involving Actors with Intellectual Disabilities* (Routledge 2019) and *Giving and Taking Voice in Learning Disabled Theatre* (Routledge 2023). He has contributed articles to *Theatre Research International*, *Global Performance Studies*, and *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. He has recently contributed chapters to *Out of Time? Temporality in Disability Performance* (Routledge 2023), *How Does Disability Performance Travel? Access Arts and Internationalization* (Routledge 2024), and *The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research in Theatre and Performance Studies* (Cambridge University Press 2024). Different Light have presented self-devised performances in New Zealand, Australia, the USA, and the UK and are currently engaged in a collaboration on Ancient Greek Theatre and Learning Disability with companies in Australia, Belgium, Greece, UK, Switzerland, and Poland.

Kate Maguire-Rosier is a dance and disability researcher curious about care, robots and dance theatre. She is currently Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Drama Department at the University of Manchester where she works on a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project, Care Aesthetics Research Exploration (CARE) with colleagues Dr Réka Polonyi and Prof James Thompson. On the CARE project, she enjoys being part of an interdisciplinary team of researchers in arts and health who specialize in dementia and critical (and creative!) ageing studies. Kate is a dancer. She is also a teacher and Associate Fellow in Advance Higher Education (formerly, UK Higher Education Academy). But above all, Kate is interested in building bridges between what happens inside universities (research) and what happens outside (industry and public involvement). She is co-director of The Care Lab (UK, <https://www.thecarelab.org.uk/>) and founding member of Sydney Care Lab (Australia, <https://www.sydneycarelab.org/>). Her writing has been published in *How Does Disability Performance Travel? Access, Art, and Internationalization* (Routledge 2024), *The Drama Review*, *Performance Research*, *Frontiers*, *The Conversation* (Australia), *Theatre Research International*, *Critical Dialogues*, *aDm Magazine* and on her blog (mrkategoestothetheatre.wordpress.com). She is also the proud human to a gorgeous big dog called Pumba.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

AUTOFICTIONS IN CO-LABOURING

DIANA DAMIAN MARTIN ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA

DANIELA PERAZZO KINGSTON UNIVERSITY LONDON

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when the text is done, that's it. It'll be the end of the project.

Co-labouring is a critical approach to working together in difficult times that demystifies the neoliberal, saccharine fantasy of collaboration. Across institutions—particularly those institutions which continue the logics of coloniality that shaped their development—collaboration has become synonymous with precarisation, that is, as Isabell Lorey so aptly argues, an instrument of normalisation through governance (2015). Forms of contemporary work have strayed far from dignified, responsible work, and instead we experience collaboration as the invisibility of essential social reproduction. This entering of collaboration into the institution is another example of capitalist accumulation, erasing commons-oriented practices and modes of work in favour of enforcing a governable subject. Collaboration has become entangled within institutional mechanics, replete with a moralisation that romanticises institutional processes through the lens of performance management. The 2022–2023 wave of collective industrial action across many sectors of work in the United Kingdom is a lawful escalation in the class warfare that has been fought in its newest guise since the 1980s. A class war fought on several fronts: disempowering unions, redistributing wealth toward the 1%, rewarding managerialism, increasing precarity through casualisation and pay gaps, and more. Labour has been depoliticised to a degree that working is transcendent and, as a result, politically abstracted. And the realms where affective labour dominates—the spheres of passion and care (Ridout 2013, Gotman 2021)—are often

redeployed towards a cynical and facile colonial logic of expansion and growth at the expense of the worker, who should be sustained by their passion—as Bojana Kunst (2015) has expertly argued in her analysis of artistic labour in the post-Fordist world. The transcendence of work even obscures the collective aspects of labour by focusing the individual on a ‘career’. What critical political traction might be gained in reclaiming work as a site of difficult collectivity? And collectivity itself as a productive and constant process of negotiating and caring for difference? What might be offered by making visible the forms of labour and the alliances—even temporary—that emerge between the administrative and bureaucratic logics of creative and educational work?

Is this what we’re doing?

I’m seeing it as a kind of... not oral history, but like history, writing like a kind of documentation of working conditions for the future.

Our hybridised critical/creative practice, an enquiry on co-labouring, searches for the political in relation to collaborative work in order to occupy the working conditions in a particular site and its expounding relations: higher education in the United Kingdom, especially in the field of theatre and performance. In claiming the political potential of our thinking and writing together, we are aware of the dissenting, already othered, already plural, positionalities we occupy through our own personal histories of migration and border crossing. We move towards an investment in thinking about the language of an emergent class consciousness shaping creative education at a time of intersecting crises, from war, economics, climate, and politics.

for me annotation is like comments or footnotes.

Work in the theatre has always been collaborative, differentiated, and in a strange relation to visibility. Theatre is inherently multiple in its conditions of transaction between audience and performer, and is rarely an entirely solo endeavour. Labour in the theatre has a history of being divided into specialisms, which distributes responsibility and encourages working together. Different aesthetic approaches in theatre through geographical and historical location hold different values. Values that are not always reflected in the visibility of the labour. Work in theatre practice can be a site of contestation that illuminates exploitation. In theatre and performance education, teaching and learning are too easily depoliticised, and yet also dismissed as superfluous. Neoliberalism dismantles public luxury. As in many parts of the world, the structural threat of theatre and performance in higher education resonates with many and often more severe struggles in places where its institutionalisation has been less linear. Colleagues are being made redundant, departments are closing down, and infrastructures supporting learning and teaching are becoming increasingly functionalist and reductive. These are times in which survival of the subject of performance is questionable.

Students perceive fewer possibilities to study theatre and performance before university and decreasing employment prospects for graduates. Labour is therefore doubly important to understand in this particular context of arts education because of the crisis of opportunity (and futurity) in theatre and performance (Solga 2019). Whilst we caution the exceptionalism and

privilege of the debates around the futurity of a field inherently in tension with itself, we want to pay attention to the ways in which navigating this shifting terrain reconnects with the multiple forms of resistance that have always shaped and informed both collaboration and performance para-institutionally.

This research therefore approaches the documentation of this moment as historical work. The scope of this work is to expound on the intersections between conditions of work and broader politics of collaboration beyond legible ecologies of work. Asking such questions from the perspective of theatre and performance is a hunch—thinking with Paolo Virno (2004), Miranda Joseph (2002) and Kunst (2015)—that both performativity and theatricality, as well as collaboration, are crucial factors necessary to understand the current conditions of production. Now that work is so immaterial and yet fully embodied, so knowledge-based and yet wilfully ignorant of the creativity that secures its integrity and undermining of epistemes that are overtly anticolonial, the conflicts of production are a chaos beneath a surface of calm. The theatricality necessary to conceal difficulty and the performativity that is set to work on maintaining fictions make the problem of working together all the more intelligible through the lens of theatre and performance studies.

you bring up the material reality in relation to our work.

This research into co-labouring returns to the crisis of visibility concealed within the facile championing of collaboration by taking up the tools used against workers—fiction, anonymity, creativity and, most importantly, sustained collective commitments. The writing is both a product of and adjacent to non-individual work. While the 'I' appears throughout, this multiple-authored text resists any unmasking of the particular individual. This opacity, to reference Édouard Glissant (1997), permits an authorship that uncovers the guarded secrets of work in contemporary life—the difficulty, the harm, the confusion, the impossible contradictions. In order to fully invest in these truths, fiction is utilised as a tool of persuasion that is however explicitly articulated at the outset. But fiction also emerges as the hidden tool of administration—sustaining myths that continue to uphold and centre violent pasts and futures. The reader must accept that some degree of what is read is not a report on fact but rather a record of partly speculative experience. Such singularities divorce the author of any ability to be secure in their own subject position but instead ask that creativity and criticality operate in this exchange. Rather than searching for testimonial authenticity, co-labouring autofictions displace the 'I' into a site of experience in order to uncover the effects of systemic forces on lived experience. Autofiction sits uneasily with autotheory; as Lauren Fornier argues, autotheory becomes a 'way of understanding works of art and literature that integrate autobiography and other explicitly subjective and embodied modes with discourses of philosophy and theory' (2019:3). Resonating with the works of Maggie Nelson or Paul Preciado, autotheory pushes for modes beyond the personal whilst maintaining the possibility that the personal too can act as a site for theoretical and philosophical articulation. Autofiction sits in the literary mode, toying with the relation between the fictional and the lived. In this collective nexus, co-labouring itself becomes embroiled with fictioning on the one hand, and criticality on the other. Except we want to hold the bodies present.

to what extent these are objections, and then to what extent they should be their own things, or to what extent we might think about how to hold them on the page in different ways next to each other.

The 'I' becomes a problematic 'we', investigating the difficulty of shared conditions which are nonetheless experienced with radically different singularities and positions.

Autofiction is a critical nudge towards the speculative rather than the truthful; the work presented here is written by multiple people: dis/embody stories without an identity to anchor them. Actors portraying situations. This writing is a collective theatre of audiences attending to the conditions of work in particular sites, especially the backstage of knowledge production. This work is multiple: multiple authors, multiple layers of fiction and critique, but also more than one in the sense of its relevance. This work addresses the audiences of the present, those who are able to attend, as well as those at work backstage, and those at work in the multiplying backstages necessary to enable the fiction that occurs inside the proscenium. The maintenance work, the exclusions, the invisible colonised sites of waste that sustain the conditions of work and life as we know them. Co-labouring is an ongoing conversation that defends working together not as a story of success but as a mode of resistance—often imperfect, inevitably incomplete, but nevertheless doing the resisting.

temporalities that are overlapping and going back and forth on themselves.

And the fiction begins as it continues

This text, this writing, has been forming in my head over the past many weeks, perhaps months. I can't exactly say it's been shaping, as I can't see or feel its shape. It's appeared in dribs and drabs over the multiple times a day when I find myself doing the washing up, or during my twice-daily walks with my dog. It's popped up and stayed with me, a silent voice in my head, until something made it disappear again (an interruption, a distraction—a parcel delivery, a child needing help with a school project, a squirrel on our path which has made my dog pull on the lead and prompted me pay more attention to her and her needs). I'm almost fearful to have found—to have made—the time to sit down and write 'it' (or write with it) now. Not surprisingly, it's past my official working hours. I have an out-of-office on. I don't need to worry about emails coming in.

Microsoft Viva sent me my monthly digest a few weeks ago. It's been sitting in my 'deleted items' folder. I retrieve it. It says that over the previous month I have had three quiet days. It tells me that 'these are days without interruptions of meetings, emails, chats and calls outside your working hours'. I wonder if Microsoft Viva knows I work part-time. I look at the breakdown and my quiet days last month have been a Sunday, a Thursday and a Friday, all of which are outside my contracted hours. Should I be pleased I at least managed one Sunday over four? The digest has calculated my 'collaboration' time at 22% of my overall time: 'this is the percentage of your time spent in meetings, emails, chats and calls.' I wonder what happens when I'm teaching? Am I collaborating then? The digest doesn't seem to include teaching in its calculations. It says I have

had 69 active collaborators: 'these are people you have recently contacted through meetings, emails, chats and calls.' Easy definitions. Anyone I have had a meeting with or sent an email to is a collaborator, we are co-labourers.

An email to one of them returns this reply:

I'm on strike. There are at least four big reasons to strike: precarious employment (around 50% of teaching staff are on insecure contracts), equality (the race, gender and disability pay gaps are shocking), pay and workloads.

I am not on strike. I feel uncomfortable about this, as those four reasons are big for me too. HR has been relentless in sending emails about how the strikes will be dealt with by the institution, outlining 'the University's policy and likely implications of taking strike action or action short of strike': I am being asked to tell them of my 'intentions in respect of the industrial action using this online form as soon as possible'. Emails outline the 'impact on pay of taking strike action':

The position of the University is to withhold a day's pay from staff for each day of strike action in which they participate. If you confirm your participation or, in the absence of confirmation, we subsequently have evidence that you did participate, your pay will be withheld for each day you participated. Line managers will also be monitoring attendance on the strike days. There may be an impact on your pension if you take industrial action and pay is deducted.

Following the strikes, the university expects teaching to be rescheduled, and that priority be given to:

Activities that support the teaching and assessment of students.

Activities that support the recruitment and admissions of new students.

Management activity in support of staff e.g. staff appraisals.

Support for student graduation.

The message includes words of regret at 'having to write to staff in these terms', but these terms are justified as necessary in order to provide clarity about the university's position in relation to industrial action and 'make plans to mitigate any impact on students'. 'We do hope that staff will consider carefully before following the Union's current course of action, due to the disruption it will cause to our students.'

I did consider all the above carefully. I actually agonised over it. The decision boiled down to a list of reasons why I can't financially afford to join the picket lines. And I feel deeply embarrassed saying this, writing this.

I remember reading in Mark Fisher's *Capital Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2010) a critique of what the unions can and cannot achieve through their practices. I look for the book on my shelves. It's not there. Did I borrow it from the library and return it? How annoying. Somehow it seems

important to find further justification for my choices, to be able to quote arguments that can explain why not taking part in strike action is not a betrayal. But I don't have the book and I can't remember the exact argument. I also don't want to look for it just to save my face, to protect my ego.

We had a team meeting yesterday. We discussed students of concern. I reported that a student had emailed me at 10:59am the previous day to let me know that they hadn't finished their essay which was due at 11:00. They had decided the day before that they would abandon their plan to submit a part-practical project that was supposed to include a documentary and a contextual essay as they hadn't been able to do any filming. They were going to submit a full essay instead, which however they hadn't had time to complete. They wanted to know whether they would fail the module if they didn't submit their assignment, worth 80% of the grade. They wanted to know whether they would fail the year—the third and final year of their degree. They wanted an extension. I replied saying I wasn't in a position to grant an extension, as extension requests are received and managed by the student office. I said they could contact the office, who would want to see evidence of what had caused the delay (e.g. a doctor's note), and that my recommendation would be to focus on finishing the essay and submitting it as soon as possible, as a late essay was better than a non-submission. A colleague was unimpressed by my account—especially by my response to the student. Had I sent them the link to the extensions and mitigating circumstances policy? No, I hadn't, because the link is readily available to students anyway and it didn't seem to me that there would be ground for mitigating circumstances (the student had changed their mind about what they were going to submit at the last minute; they hadn't been unable to submit); instead, it seemed wiser to encourage them to focus on the essay than to distract them with an application for mitigating circumstances, which had slim chances of being successful. According to the colleague, the correct answer would have been a one-line reply: 'information about the extensions and mitigating circumstances policy can be found at this link.' I sensed their frustration towards me, this 'rebellious' colleague who writes email replies to students which say more (and at the same time less) than just reminding them of policies.

I suspect a long email to the team will follow in the next couple of days, reminding us all of 'best practice' in student communications.

Is best practice also a form of fiction?

You can almost tell any story with any set of data; it depends on how you arrange the numbers.

How do I collaborate in this environment?

But then I share this writing with a colleague who is also a friend. She writes back immediately and sends me love—'huge huge love,' she says. I lap it up. I need this love right now. I need to read the words she writes back, about how important it is to write about this, however vulnerable it feels. 'The issue of the strikes is so huge,' she says. 'It's necessary to write when there is not the time.' She says my words 'articulate exactly where that gets co-opted, extracted, demolished, used up,

shorn of spirit, by the institution.' She says she's committed to finding strategies 'to go with one another where it matters most.' I think this is a wonderful definition of collaboration, co-labouring. I like that a lot: 'to go with one another where it matters most.'

An autofiction on collaborating with students

A repeated question: 'How do I collaborate in this environment?'

This environment is one of strike, of exploitative working conditions, of digitisation, of colleagues and students, of projects, of home life. The 'I' in this context an embodied but fictionalised character, dispossessed of actuality while simultaneously subjected to the constrained agency of a consciousness embedded within institutions and structures. Collaboration as the watery mundane fact of working with and within networks of harm.

This strike is an old-fashioned performance of collective action that seeks to redistribute the real. Strikes escape the machine of capture in which only numerical evidence carries weight. In the UK, league tables drive up and down the application numbers that universities require to be sure that courses will recruit fees. Part of league tables are scores from the UK National Student Survey. The most important number here is overall satisfaction. Increasingly league tables will also look at graduate outcomes in terms of the acquisition of labour as a measure of how well a course is doing. Marketising education means utilising the values of measure to define a university degree as an investment that must bring returns. On returns, if three years of £9250 returns even minimum wage until retirement, then forty years of work might net three quarters of a million pounds over a whole working life. By another way of looking at it, going into debt might prevent the possibility of property ownership and well-being of security that a home makes real. The current government seems to think that arts and humanities are bad returns on educational investment. Sceptics see this as a culture war of right against left. The fashion for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics complements the dismantling of institutionalised progressive power, as scholars such as Jen Harvie (2019), Johanna Linsley (2013), and Bill Readings (1997) have suggested. The kind of power that was previously consolidated in trade unions, and now precariously clinging to fortifications in universities. The measure of professional work for postgraduates can be seen to target the kinds of study that might create citizens without immediate access to well-paying supposedly comfortable work. Those without work are some of the unspeakable members of society, especially if they have education. They are dangerous. They might refuse the logics of shame and individuality that run amok in the worker. The university is a supplicant to the power of the policy maker who can create abstract instruments to dismember the institution. Consider fees as another bottom line alongside the league tables. UK students were asked a decade ago to pay more for university. They attempted refusal through widespread protest. The fees have been fixed at £9250 since then. Inflation suggests that number is now worth close to £3k less, while universities have given modest pay rises each year to staff. Pay is often a university's most significant expense. Inflation also means that the modest pay rise for staff is in real terms a pay

cut; one of the issues addressed in the strike. Lecturers are asking institutions with increasing deficits to pay more. The government's response is to ask the student to pay more, but not every student, only those who earn less. There is a vicious delegation of fiscal irresponsibility at nearly all levels.

A scholar at a research event suggests that there is violence in travelling between scales. Is the delegation of fiscal responsibility an example of this? Or is a better example the idea that an individual action can have a meaningful collective political outcome?

Here I am, in an argument with students of drama and musical theatre over the state of the profession they will enter after graduation. This argument is taking place in a seminar that follows a lecture on Materialism. It is the first time these students are thinking with these terms about the idea that much of life is to some degree determined by how they work. There is an overwhelming need to vent the frustration at the inequality of hiring practices. There is a real sense of disenchantment, or even depression, in relation to the perceived impossibility of the realisation of their dreams. We discuss expectations and the negotiation of goals. There is more frustration. It is as if they have caught me in the lie. I told them their degree would give them transferable skills, and they see graduates working in the same pubs the current students work in. In the market of courses, I do sell our degree on admissions day as one that provides graduates with transferable skills. I do believe that even this argument equips my students with the ability to communicate, persuade, pitch, propose, critique, and create. So? They want agents to represent them, they want to be on a stage that is big enough that their family and friends will recognise as legitimate. I cannot give them that. This is not a conversation we have on admissions days, so am I culpable as an agent who knowingly deceives? Or is this a time-worn process of education, where the outcome and the value are distributed with a range of differences? I think I can give them an understanding of the real with which they might consider adaptations to find their own degree of agency within larger structures of difficulty. I can encourage them. I can tell them that I care about them, that I support their work, that I take seriously the professional contract between us as teacher/student. They do not seem at all interested in this. It is not something that their friends and families can measure. It is not guaranteed to make them money. But who are they? I can see within this seminar quite a few different people who are coming into this conversation with very different backgrounds and goals. My writing has homogenised them, but there is disagreement between them too. There are the international students who laugh at the importance that the British students invest in the West End. There are the performatively politically engaged students who find moments to express popular opinions. There are the entrepreneurial students who are already finding paid work in all aspects of the theatre profession, shaking their heads in disappointment at the complaints of the others. There are the students who are frustrated at the world, and those that are frustrated with the industry, and those that are frustrated with me. There are students who are frustrated with themselves. There are also many who silently listen. Some learning the art of the excuse from those trained in knowing how to monopolise the conversation in the territory of what the outside world withholds from them, unwilling to reconsider themselves as a matrixed part of that world. And there are the ones not here today. Physically ill, depressed, hungover, sleeping, working, or those

who only attend 'practical' and not 'theory' classes. Those of us who are here, are we doing what we are supposed to be doing? Is this the work? I shift my response. I suggest that they are not outside of the system. That they have a part to play in it, and that their actions can to some degree alter the fundamental shape of their material conditions of labour and consciousness. I warn them that only expressing frustration at the disembodied scale of the macro/structural can become a poisonous excuse to absolve oneself of the responsibility to live. I also reconsider my sense of unease and let them vent, securely diminished in the comfort of knowing that if I think I can help these students, especially if I think I am the only one who can, then I am part of the problem. How gloriously and sickeningly righteous is it to imagine that through lecturing, in this educational environment, I possess the capability to materially improve these peoples' situations? How limited and short sighted to think that a single seminar might be the time and place to address all of this? In the last half hour of the seminar, I say less. The students' frustration continues, but without being egged on by my unwillingness to accept that they understand all this better than I first thought they did. Next seminar we will pick up on the presentation that was missed. One of the students who was to give the presentation did not turn up anyway, so better to do it when they are back. I say the seminar is soon to end and try to sum up how the conversation we have had is relevant to the assessment. I use their language and connect their examples to technical terms, and reference scholarship on related issues. They have more points to make and return to their discussion. They return to an earlier question: 'would this seminar feel different if the fees were paid for by taxpayers?' I tell them we must finish. One student who has more to say follows me out of the room, continuing to talk while I walk down the stairs mumbling an apology about needing to go.

This environment is one of fear and beauty, of relief in the stretch of time, of horror, of love, of distance. The I here is breathing in the fumes and vapours of someone else's superyacht. The striated nature of selfhood and its attachments. A lightness exists. It is sometimes distant, and sometimes overwhelming. But the work escapes. The problems vanish. At a remove, I dance within the lightness. It is not me that is collaborating. It is collaboration that anoints activities of exchange with the continuation of responsibility. A space of desire with the time of fulfilment. The co-labour of internal violence. Shreds of sense. An unravelling.

Another question in response: At work, when is a problem between two parties an ending?

Coughing and debility (after Puar)

How do I collaborate in this environment? Or at work, when is a problem between two parties an ending?

I have been coughing incessantly over the past few days. There's a softness to spring's arrival this year, but it feels early. I check on the current debate on the Anti-Refugee Bill. I read about the devastating effects of climate change on the temperature at Earth's poles. My phone buzzes with messages from friends and acquaintances supporting their friends and acquaintances in or leaving Ukraine. War is waging very close to home. Over the past weeks, mutual aid has come back into

my diasporic life, folded into the madness of a difficult term. I am asked to feedback on statements in solidarity. I try to hold complexity but there's no space for it. 'By absorbing the colony politically and culturally, the metropole subjects itself to a creeping takeover from within by the very alien forces it incorporated' (Radynski 2022). I cough. I sit on a committee. I try to pace myself for a day of tutorials. I resign as External Examiner in solidarity with an ongoing local dispute. I start another job application. I reassure one of my exhausted parents that managing to find dialysis support for twenty refugees is action.

What is in fact, held by language?

'Shreds of sense,' you say.

What is the difference between collaboration, cooperation, co-labouring? These are not the same structures for the distribution of labour; these are not always about labour, either. When there is so much labour too that is invisible, or rather, illegible, what is held in our language?

We are living in dissonant times, but dissonant times also have fissures; in these fissures, we might call out differently what is upheld or appropriated in the language we deploy daily. Or rather, how collaboration *performs*. Its unevenness. Its violence.

After all, the multitude is, as Paul Preciado reminds us, part of a commodified pharmapornographic market.

There's an article Preciado wrote in *ArtForum* (2020) that I've been returning to again and again during the pandemic, 'Learning from the Virus'. 'Tell me how your community constructs its political sovereignty,' Preciado says, 'and I will tell you what forms your plagues will take.' We cannot talk about collaboration without talking about community. And we cannot talk about community without making explicit that which is systemically normalisation. Collaboration often then reproduces highly abnormal and often violent politics. At the centre of the debate during the Covid 19 crisis and beyond are modes of understanding community and immunity. 'The body, your individual body,' says Preciado, 'as a life space and as a network of power, as a centre of production and of energy consumption, has become the new territory where the violent border politics that we have been designing' are expressed. Containment is selective, though. Preciado calls us to de-alienate ourselves.

We must gather, of sorts.

I have increasingly, like many of us, seen the cynical ways in which seemingly democratic institutions appropriate and recenter politics that obfuscate on the basis of a homogenised equality, in which collaboration is deployed as a form of governance, of sorts. A kind of spectral presence of 'or else'. 'Consider that this may or may not be the container to hold what you need to bring' (N'Tanya Lee in brown 2021, 63). I am thinking: committing to abolition movements whilst accounting for mistakes. I am thinking: the structures of governance of higher education have merged into wider structures that perpetuate collaboration as a de facto system for the reproduction of racial capitalism.

Cough, cough, cough.

The other day once more the institution, that is, a network of people and processes internally and externally governed, sought to 'manage a situation'. Increasingly, we are 'collaborating' in order to 'manage situations'. It seems that we do not have time to discuss the legibility and frameworks that render 'the situation' in need of 'management'.

Cough, cough, cough.

I think of Jasbir K. Puar's *Right to Maim* (2017): 'a disability justice movement [...] as a movement that is demanding an end to so many conditions of precarisation that debilitate many populations' (xx). I am inspired by the insistence of the entanglement of biopolitical production of precarity and (un)liveability, and the insistence on an intersectional struggle that demands livable lives. The refusal to position disability as anything other than a register of biopolitical control. Debility as the ultimate institutional fantasy.

In what ways do the current systems and ecologies we are embedded within think and weaponise collaboration?

Or

In this governed or weaponised collaboration, what or who is being redeployed?

What is abundant collaboration?

Cough, cough, cough.

What happens if we centre interdependence and abolition? How are these entanglements already performing new systems that language might capture differently?

We must gather, of sorts.

Scenes (over time)

Scene

Our bodies are carrying too much, so much so my colleague leaves the meeting, and we share tears in the office.

Often, my eyelids are heavy and I do not know if this heaviness is produced by what feels immovable and our bodies hit again and again, or by other atmospheres and energies—my heart is back home, so close to war, and my heart is here, with the slow dismantling of public good, and my heart no longer feels reform is sufficient.

Scene

I sit with a colleague to plan a doctoral transfer—we hold each other for a while as we reflect on collective grief and finding moments of rest and holding hope; shall we do this together, they ask? We hold space and a beautiful thing emerges, a piece of research on the failures of reform, on the need for rituals of release and rehearsals for change. They bring up Audre Lorde—what happens after we have told our stories? I think about autofiction as a theoretical lapse. What is the *problem* of co-labouring?

What co-labouring happens in the act of rehearsing other ways of being together? I am co-labouring with Ruth Wilson Gilmore and adrienne maree brown, I am thinking—how can we be flocks of birds, adjacent yet in movement, when there's no air?

Scene

We are in an archive room in central London, surrounded by boxes of radical struggles for labour justice. Outside, builders are protesting safety conditions. We gather around food. Someone offers the thought that although we are always in the archive, together, we are never wandering the archive together. We notice labour in the archives of organised grassroots struggle. We notice the agency of a non-linear temporality of change. We notice we have all convened around a number of items whose interest feels slippery. Someone recounts their experience of working in a colonial institutionalised archive and we talk about ways of categorising labour, of noticing what happens when porousness and ambiguity leaves space for something to happen.

We sit on the side and talk about difficult alliances, or small moments of harm in collective efforts.

And I think about this a lot: space, for something to emerge.

Scene

I am in a staff meeting, looking at contracts for colleagues due to expire. A management representative talks about optimisation and cost per square footage. There is complexity here, another says. The right people are not here to speak and I walk out, deciding that this is not a way to allow for something to emerge.

Months later, I am part of a recruitment process. I take note of how much of the harm happens through administrative processes—filling out paperwork, negotiating legibilities. I am exhausted at the impossibility of it all. So I break something down to try and build something with others amidst it all.

You know it doesn't really matter whether the problem is solved, but it does matter enormously that there is plenty of evidence that it's been addressed, and according to all of the processes that have been approved, and so on.

Scene

My daughter writes a letter to the faeries late at night; she is six. She asks if the faeries might be so kind as to offer some of their magic, and she would like to offer some coins, as she's aware coins

are what faeries often offer in exchange for teeth. We talk about what is an exchange, and capitalism. I sit with this for a long time.

I think about an archive of disorganised co-labouring and fugitive study.

An autofiction on working

Where does *more* come from? Academics work between students and management. Both ask for more at any opportunity to do so. Neither group ever asks for less. In a meeting on research, academics are told to put in more funding bids. To generate more research income. We also need to publish more outputs, do more practice research, organise more events, and supervise more research students to completion. Students want more opportunities to network. More industry events. More public-facing performances. More social outings to celebrate their accomplishments. More support for their wellbeing, more examples of good and bad assessments, more guidance on how to write an essay. Where does more come from?

I ask management how removing sabbaticals will affect our research. I am told that we are given 20% of our working week to spend on research. I accept the gift of this work as a child who does not know what the object is that he holds in his hands. He is confused but knows he should say thank you. He takes it into the other room and hides it under his bed. Days later, he hopes it has vanished. He takes deep breaths to fake the courage necessary to look. He is inhaling more than exhaling and has to sit down.

I ask the students if they think that the studio is a social environment and whether the performance assessment can be a celebration. They tell me that when something is marked it is not very fun. They want to enjoy being students. They say that learning should be celebration, but marks make that impossible. They want learning to be a gift that can be put on a shelf and exhibited to their friends and family.

Students and management are pleased that I have never asked these questions. Where does more come from? They don't care where it comes from, and they don't want to hear my questions. There is time for their demands, but not mine. Except for when I am assessing them on learning criteria that are mystified beyond comprehension or attempting to disseminate knowledge that is different from the kind they asked for. We got into this situation, each of us with our own intentions and planned outcomes. Management imagines these exchanges between academics and students as if none of them are mystified or enchanted. The data that is produced by teaching and learning is the most important reality that exists at management's level of scale. They are enchanted by more and mystified by the idea that there might not be more in the space or time within which more is supposed to be generated.

I look for someone else to ask questions to. My partner isn't interested. I say things to my dog. I consider what friends or family might say. I wonder if colleagues might be interested. I imagine

them having similar questions. I think of the questions that I have heard them ask. I think of how things run late, and I am afraid we only have time for one quick question.

On some level, more does come from less—from slowing down, from pausing, which make space for practices of reparation, ecologies of care, politics of solidarity and coalition. How can we do more by doing less when co-labouring? Is someone's doing less the cause of someone else's doing more—to make up for lost input, to maintain a balance dictated by the dominant logic of performance and accountability?

I look for more to do and volunteer to be the media contact for my local union branch's picket line. I express some worry that I do not know all the facts and would appreciate some information to be able to communicate. The regional union representative tells me that I shouldn't feel as though I need to speak in general terms, but rather to talk about how conditions affect me personally. I nod to signal that I agree. I hope my gesture was visible on the screen. The last time I spoke to the media, it was on radio, and my interview followed the song 'Hero' by Enrique Iglesias. I accidentally used the phrase 'took my breath away'. Now I realise that I was becoming Iglesias. His breathlessness became mine. I articulated my speechlessness, my dead voice, my lack of ability to say anything more. The best version of more I can offer is someone else's. Any more will require the subtraction from some place. More will also mean less. More comes from less; until there is abundance.

Abundance—this word connects with questions raised by the overlapping crises of the current times: the social and ecological crises typically analysed in terms of scarcity and abundance

It will rain the first day of the strike. The picket line will be wet and grey. Will that be a more fitting symbol? Will the weather contribute to the meaning of the political gesture? Or, has the strike lost its potency? Will the weather symbolise the ineffectiveness of old politics? Surely management will respond by saying that there is no money to raise the pay of staff. How can staff respond to that? What good is a strike at a company with a growing deficit? Until something more powerful is suggested, this action is the best option because it is lawful and so has a foot in the radicality of truly meaningful political action as well as another foot on the side of a belief in the possibility that institutions can be places of justice, equality, and solidarity. Maybe even care.

Aiming for abundance does not exclude compromising for enough. This fascination with abundance comes from another interruption in conversation at an event, where a question on how to make reading lists be less colonial was answered by rethinking reading lists as abundant.

On the other hand, so many institutions are propped up by violent extraction. In this line of thinking it is only unlawful action that makes historical correction possible. The laws themselves entertain the powerful. Striking against systematic oppression might by necessity break current law by calling for new and better legislation.

When is abundance too much?

Is there a point at which it tips over to the other side, or does the logic of abundance already imply an excess that rests on structural injustice?

An autofiction on striking

I am standing in Kings Cross listening to Jeremy Corbyn, ex-leader of the UK Labour Party, speak to the Union about the theatre of politics in parliament versus the actual politics here on the streets. I am listening and thinking though that all this feels quite like theatre. Listening as Corbyn moves on to discuss the importance of education, and being interrupted by stupid tears that remind me how much of my heart is in this business of working. I want to be calm but I am furiously weak at the knowledge that the work I find so meaningful is being undervalued. I have seen colleagues retire, be made redundant, and these are the working conditions that have become unsurvivable for so many. My body is interrupting, feeling the physical strain of chronic stress, the dominant affect of an economy that exploits the majority for the benefit of a minority. All of this listening to a politician who lost elections by large margins. The tears of my body interrupt the smooth flow of capital even as it is the same body surfing along the waves of the economy.

More speakers take the stage. Representing the various unions on strike this winter. Nurses, ambulance workers, teachers, postal workers, train operators, and civil servants. A news article reports that the Prime Minister hopes that these unions will call off their strikes before Christmas is ruined. Pink smoke gives me an excuse for my teary eyes. Pink hats. A barking dog. A driving-by car honking its horn. The photos I take of the speakers also capture the logo of a fast food chain in the background. Next to me colleagues. Some are not here. The context includes that which is absent. The colleagues who are not striking. The ones who have left higher education because the working conditions were not worth the pay. The ones who are still working today, who also stand to benefit from the strike. It at first seems that there is a clear distinction between being here and not being here. But then I find out afterward that there are people here that I didn't see at the time. Absence is not a lack of solidarity. I speak to a colleague at another university who is tired of pointless strikes. A neighbour discusses the miners' strikes in the 1980s as a pointless performance for a dying industry. Because of so many reasons, the strike may only make things worse. It causes disruption and some might even say it causes harm. What about the students who miss opportunities to learn? The speaker from the national union of students says the strike is a learning opportunity that is potentially more meaningful than a lecture. I am not sure that this is the kind of learning I hoped to be a part of. Whose side are students on? If none, is their ambivalence a learning opportunity? The contexts of this rally keep interrupting my ability to listen to the speakers. Whose words make me weep. Or is it the experience of standing among so many? Do the tears have anything to do with recognisable media faces, or just the mundane sharing of space and time, the instrumentalisation of increasing number, the multiplying pain? More speakers take the stage and say more words and more tears fall and we make sure not to block the entrance to the station. Someone close to me puts a hand on my shoulder and explains that she is not emotional because she sees strikes as just a normal part of life, nothing to get too excited about.

We have elsewhere in this writing encountered the inability to strike; and here we ask whether this inability to strike is but one example of the impossible pain of co-labouring? How can we share space and time within a collectivity in which we experience every moment as one of absolute difference? I thought that co-labouring was signing up to participate in an institution that has forced the people who taught me so much that they cannot exist within it. One of them warned me that the institution would take more from me than I would be able to get back. Just as I stand here at the union rally while other colleagues do not strike, I still work in the university while other colleagues do not. Co-labouring is the abomination of how we each are always doing our best.

I support a student having a panic attack during an information session given by a colleague from the university's career service.

Suspension and/as falling

This morning I woke up half an hour or so before my alarm and was met by a sensation that I recognised from a nightmare I used to have as a child (*the* nightmare actually, as there weren't any other recurring ones). I was perhaps eight or nine or ten and there was one summer in particular when I had this nightmare several times. It came back later as well, but only occasionally. I used to find it very difficult to describe the nightmare (still do) because there were no images as such, or none that I could summon clearly. I would wake up sweating and in total distress, full of dread, crying, perhaps screaming too. I don't remember exactly. I do remember my mother didn't know what to do. She became very worried and, at some point, wanted to take me to see a therapist. I don't think she ever did. Trying to explain what was going on, I started to describe this nightmare as 'the world feels too big for me'. It still sort of fits as a description, but maybe more than size it's a matter of grasping, i.e. not being able to grasp—the world, its meanings, its forces, my place in it.

The sensation of the nightmare was of a bulk of matter overwhelming me; not squashing me as such, but being there with me (around me and inside me) and yet not being definable, graspable. I couldn't see or feel the edges. I couldn't see the matter either. It was just present in and around my body as a sensation. I also remember there was a sensation to do with my hands, as if trying to reach out but failing, and the shape that contained my hands and fingers was expanding but also dissolving. I've never really spoken about this to anyone, and it feels a little odd to try and find words to explain this.

So this morning I woke up to this sensation (not the hands bit, but the rest). I hadn't had this nightmare in years. I actually don't remember ever having it as an adult. This morning it didn't feel scary like the other times though. I was met by this sensation when I woke up, and I was able to simply acknowledge it, recognising it as belonging to my old childhood nightmare: 'Hello you, what are you doing here today?'

I talk to a friend about this experience and, as the conversation unfolds, it becomes apparent that their reading of my account includes an image of falling. I am surprised because there's no falling in my childhood nightmare. The sensation is that of suspension, of hovering in an unknown space—which feels even more terrifying because it implies I'm in some sort of vacuum, which, rather than feeling empty, feels full of unknown and ungraspable 'stuff'. I talk about this with the colleagues I'm co-labouring with to produce this piece of writing and they also understand my nightmare as being about falling. I feel puzzled by this coincidence. I'm sure I never mentioned falling when describing the nightmare, on either occasion.

One of my co-labouring colleagues shares a piece of writing by Hito Steyerl, 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective' (2011). It opens with this image: 'Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.' I'm intrigued. In the article, Steyerl considers the condition of 'groundlessness' that—as she puts it—several contemporary philosophers have identified as characterising our times. It looks like this: 'We cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best, we are faced with temporary, contingent, and partial attempts at grounding' (Steyerl 2011).

Steyerl argues that without a stable ground, we're in a state of 'free fall', whether we're aware of it or not. Noticing the fall is actually made harder by the lack of ground. This in turn leads to a conflation of falling with floating and hovering—which seems to explain why the state of suspension in my nightmare was understood as a fall.

Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as if you are floating—or not even moving at all. Falling is relational—if there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling. If there is no ground, gravity might be low and you'll feel weightless. Objects will stay suspended if you let go of them. [...] As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. (Steyerl 2011)

Yes, this sounds like my nightmare. Steyerl goes on to discuss how falling has the potential to disrupt accepted ways of seeing things, opening the space for 'new types of visibility'. As 'terrifying' and 'deterritorializing' as it is, falling gives the opportunity to let go of precise coordinates, navigation instruments and familiar perspectives. It opens up the possibility that we may learn to abandon the need for control and accept and even embrace instability and ungroundedness as conditions that make new experiences of freedom possible.

Yet, in my daily life, I strive for groundedness. I aspire to be a balanced individual, who can in turn be a responsible parent, a stable partner, a loyal friend, a reliable colleague, a dependable neighbour. I engage in movement practices that help my body stabilise around its centre, in breathing techniques that enhance my groundedness; I devise and implement strategies that allow my home and my family life to function steadily. Stability, balance and core strength are what I strive for, so that I can withstand the unexpected, including the curveballs life throws at me, so that I remain solid enough to be able to provide care for others, so that I can hold things together.

Where does the groundlessness I read and write about in my academic work (here and elsewhere) meet the groundedness I strive to achieve in my personal and family life? If instability and uncertainty are the conditions for new possibilities to emerge, to what extent can I embrace them in my relational existence? Does the responsibility of being in relation require a more cautious approach, founded on solid roots and stable behaviour? Does the requirement to be dependable for others stifle the possibility that new ways of thinking, being and doing may emerge? Is this also the contradiction of co-labouring? To what extent is groundlessness compatible with ethics of care and ecologies of collaboration? Silvia Federici (2019) writes of how people's capacity for cooperation is rooted in their interdependence, in relations of reciprocity and in established rules and decision-making structures. These are some of the characteristics of the commoning politics she theorises—they seem to speak of a common ground. Can groundlessness have a productive function in the commons? If 'regaining a sense of wholeness in our lives' (Federici 2019, 189) is the path towards 're-enchanting the world', perhaps there is a way to make room for both uncertainty and stability, for both deterritorialising and grounding practices in our modes of working together.

We speak on Zoom. This is how we meet and come together to think—and to feel a form of togetherness that has become rare in our working practices.

An autofiction on borders

You could open the wooden school benches upwards, I remember. Underneath you could store your backpack or pens; but you could also store notes—secret correspondences. The school knew there was this fugitive space for the kids who were usually quiet in class to leave each other notes in the dark gaps of the wooden benches. It's hard to leave notes if there's no underneath; but it takes a group to create a network.

During a Zoom meeting, I draw a parallel between processes of border administration and those present in a university structure. I think of the choreographies of legibility, permissions, privileges. I think of the structures that render certain forms of labour visible. I think of borderisation as a military process of development of border infrastructures. I think about South Ossetia and Abkhazia. I hark back to the university; I share stories of passport and identity checks, contract refusals. We talk about witnessing and silence. We exchange border stories. I think of Swati Arora (2021), who reminds us that 'borders that determine the coordinates of movement and belonging to territories are not just tangible [...], they are also intangible and invisible, as is the case of recruitment processes for students and staff at universities' (12). Recalling the affective learning at the picket line unfolding during periods of strikes, and the legacies and learnings of Black study as thinking with others, Arora invites us to consider that perhaps the university, 'with its histories of colonial exploitation and racialised violence, was never meant to be transformed' (18). What forms of co-labouring can happen across borders—not just physical, but those borders that divide and expose the margins of what might otherwise blur outwards?

Later at home, I pick up my copy of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987): 'I am a border woman. [...] I have been straddling that *tejas*—the Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to be, this place of contradictions' ('Preface'). Border crossing in the institution. By being here, along with all other border crossers, we also extend the institution to vantage points it does not want to see or confront. In some ways, administration is the key colonial operative of the university. The Life in the UK test as it stands was introduced in 2005, and became a vital organ through which to shape speculative articulations of Britishness by the Home Office (Riley 2023, 271). Some of our journeys through academia involved firstly noticing where borders emerge—then learning to navigate them; always temporary constructs in the confines of shifting hostile environments.

In the post, I receive a copy of Gargi Bhattacharyya's *We, the Heartbroken* (2023); it opens by speaking of heartbreak as an elastic pain: 'the imprecise sense of unease that can swirl around a life, stealing joy no matter what you do' (3). I think of where heartbreak sits and where it cannot find a space. The affective ecologies of navigating co-labouring in a university that constantly seeks to re-articulate place; its place; or maybe, its communities.

Recurrence

Take this recurring affect.

Several folks in my classroom are exposed by a particularly insistent student intent on exposing the classroom as a partisan space; it is unclear what is partisan about it, save for the fact that the student feels like the political emerges too spontaneously and with too much commitment on an art degree where we should be learning about 'Kant, or someone like that'. Due to repeated harm, a disciplinary is triggered but no one is clear what the process is for, given that the only effect of this disciplinary is a kind of performance that tries to establish the legitimacy of experiences of harm—which of course, do not require legitimation because they are already seen and collectively held. 'When you are involved in a complaint, you are still at work; you are still doing your work,' says Sara Ahmed (2021) in her work on complaints. 'What you hear in the room comes to fill that room' (8).

We talk about how fiction enters or is naturalised within processes of co-labouring. In the work we do within our institutions, there is a layer of administrative fiction, which we all have to engage with: we create narratives in appraisal processes, in promotion applications, in reporting cycles.

At the picket line rally, someone mentions Tony Blair and the rumble stops, for a second, we all want to hold that silence for what it exposes. I feel physically sick.

So writing auto-fictional texts here is a way for us to think critically about the fiction that already exists in institutional work, and a way for us to make it visible and de-naturalise it.

At the recent team meeting we are asked to collaborate more to ensure the effective delivery of a series of inter-related processes with no clear infrastructure which *is being developed* and *is in progress*, and once again I am reminded that, even though pedagogy and research are always in progress, the only thing that is allowed to be in progress is *the department*, the *meeting*, the data collection.

On some level, an annual review or a monitoring process are fictional processes. They are supposed to refer to and evidence something true or real, but they produce data, which is very easily manipulated and thus becomes fictional.

I have been thinking—of late, again, as a kind of recurrence—that the ways in which the logics of administration permeate my (our) working life/lives, and the ways in which they are wrapped up in the affects that motivate us to collectively work towards change, create a very particular kind of dissonance. Preciado talks about this as a particular state-sanctioned virality but Puar talks more explicitly about this in ‘Crip Nationalism’ when discussing the relation between the production of ‘disability’ against debility as produced by war. ‘The biopolitical distribution between disability as an exceptional accident or misfortune and the proliferation of debilitation as war, as imperialism, as durational death’ (Puar 2017, 68). Puar’s articulation of crip nationalism comes to mind here because it exposes the multidirectional investments that nationalism creates in erasing particular forms of belonging and interdependence, further reproduced by particular—even liberal—logics of support. This relation between disability and debilitation echoes recurrently in this strange fantasy that we sustain through the logics of administration. And the logic itself, of course, emerged from a colonial matrix, as Walter Dignolo (2023) has proposed.

The fiction that our institutions produce has become our reality. We have to treat it as real because we haven’t found a way to escape it. Unless we create spaces of solidarity (‘to go with one another where it matters the most’), which enable us to break through the curtain of that fiction that has become our reality.

I look at Jack Ky Tan’s brilliant occupation of a budget spreadsheet in *performing borders* (2022). Tan proposes that this engagement with the spreadsheet become a ‘live-in conversation’ seeking to pin down budget items like ‘ambitions, emotional labour, public duty, experimentation/failure, the weight of guilt from taking time away from family/children,’ and other entanglements. It is, in a sense, impossible in that the budget—like many embedded institutional processes of capture and seeming transparency, render many forms of labour and knowledge inexistent; as Tan says, ‘embodiment, flux, pace, relationality, care, dignity, instinct, praxis, human rights, more-than-human rights’ cease to exist. I think about: the failures of equality and diversity in institutions, the carceral—and inherently punitive—logics of productivity always staked against the need to perform functionalism in a restrictive, bordered state infrastructure, the empty logics of administration as a high-end late capitalist functionalist tragedy. The disciplinarity of administration that shifts everyday conditions so that care, time or fluidity seem excessive—any difference in process seems excessive.

Some of the ideas that inspire this text are answers to questions after presentations at research events. I don’t know how to reference those statements.

I might have misunderstood. The person might not stand by what they said.

So some sources remain anonymous. We attempt to at least take responsibility for
the collectivity of knowledge.

Sometimes what people say sticks in the imagination
as deeply as published pieces of research.

Should we take a bit of time to do some writing with each other's texts?

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

UNIDENTIFIED VERBAL OBJECTS: HOW DO WORDS PERFORM?

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This article considers how artistically performative practices, especially the scenic embodiment of words, problematizes our accustomed understanding of language, both in a philosophical and an everyday sense. In classical phenomenology à la Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty, language is considered a medium of the process of appearing or expression. As I try to sustain, language should instead be understood as the medium of appearing; not as the primary medium, nor as a medium among others, but as an intrinsic aspect of all appearing, no matter what its medium, user, or level of development. This conclusion, if it holds, leads towards an expanded idea of language where *being linguistic* and *being or having a body* coincide. The idea is sustained by evidence rising out of consideration of the basic corporeal operations of a scenic performer as they try to embody their textual material performatively. Through this idea, the article seeks a reconciliation to a debate between post-structuralist and post-humanist thought regarding the role and scope of language in knowledge formation.

A Problem of Performance Philosophy

The performance philosophy problem scrutinized in this article concerns the relation between two modes of considering and using language. The first one I call *discursive*, by which I mean any institutional or everyday use of language where words have established or agreed meanings and their use follows certain pre-established rules. A 'discourse' is an institutional arrangement that both enables and constrains what can be said or expressed within it. The 'discursive practices' that aim at knowledge formation in the sense that Foucault has analysed them use discursive language.

This article is written by using language discursively within the framework of ‘performance philosophy’. In the following, the discursive use of language will be contrasted with its *artistic* use. Language can be used artistically in many ways, and artistic linguistic practices could be called generally ‘poetic’, ‘literary’, or ‘fictional’. Here, my focus is on performance practice and its way of operating with language. I will call that practice ‘performative’ in that specific sense. In performative language, *the linguistic elements themselves perform*, and our attention as audience members is in their way of performing. As I will argue, in different modes of language use words perform differently. This viewpoint re-problematizes our understanding of language in a fertile way.¹

By ‘performance’, I understand an *act of appearing*. The definition aims at taking into account the Goffmanian and Schechnerian legacy of the term while making it more accessible to readers and thinkers from non-Anglo-Saxon contexts, where that term is often hard to translate and therefore operate with. The definition implies the possibility of transposition, repetition, variation, and play, as well as the possibility to influence an audience or participants. Moreover, the definition creates a link between performance studies and phenomenology, where the appearing of things constitutes a premise. As we will see, the link is methodologically significant to my argumentation.

All things appear, but they do not necessarily perform. They only perform when they do something for the sake of appearing. The reasons for the apparition may be multifarious and they need not be limited to artistic contexts only. As one makes oneself or something appear, one performs or makes something perform, which in both cases implies a distinction between the performer and the performed. The definition enables us to conceive everything as a performance, but in many cases, we only project the idea to things or events that do not perform really or intentionally. That is to say that we ‘dramatize’ or ‘stage’ their mode of appearing and then consider them as performers.

The transition from the direct mode of speaking to the performed mode has been discussed since Plato, who made the critical distinction between *haple diegesis*, a direct narrative voice, and *mimesis*, mimetically reproduced speech (Plato 1979, 392c–398c). In modern times, the phenomenon has been analysed in sociology, performance studies, and linguistics, for example by Erwin Goffman (1974), Richard Schechner (1981), Bryan K. Crow (1988), and Andrea Milde (2019). In my case, the question relates to a larger philosophical debate concerning the transition from post-structuralism to post-humanism. The latter comprises orientations of thought as new materialism, speculative realism, or object-oriented ontologies. A central bone of contention in that debate is language and its forms and function in knowledge formation.²

Between the ‘Posts’

Although the post-humanist philosophers, or ‘new realists’ as I call them here, share much with the post-structuralists—for instance a strive for a non-hierarchical, non-binary thinking beyond metaphysical, ‘phallogocentric’, or colonizing divisions—they have simultaneously wanted to break with the post-structuralist paradigm according to which reality can only be approached and encountered as mediated by language. The ‘linguistic turn’ represented by the post-structuralists

and criticized by the new realists (Bryant et al. 2011, 1; Cox et al. 2015, 20) maintains a 'view that affirms the indispensability of interpretation, discourse, textuality, signification, ideology, and power' (Cox et al. 2015, 15). Insofar as language is understood as a human construct, as the new realists understand it in this context, it constitutes an anthropocentric closure and an obstacle for a thinking interested in more-than-human aspects of reality, like autonomous material processes, individuation, inter-corporeal relations, networks of heterogeneous agents, asemantic flows of information, and phenomena brought up by contemporary natural science and technology. In such areas, the post-structuralist approach seems to fall short.

What remains between the lines in this mentioned debate is the question of the onto-epistemological nature of language itself, 'the life of signs' as Ferdinand de Saussure called it. On the one hand, the deconstructionists have never claimed that 'there is nothing outside discourse', like the new realists tend to understand the famous Derridian premise, according to which '*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*' (Derrida 1967, 227). Instead of confining human existence and thought in a linguistic cage, the ethos of deconstruction has rather been to expand our understanding of language. As Shining Star Lynghold has remarked, 'the notion of "text" in Derrida, therefore, knows no bounds, without a beginning and an end, without being limited only by language. Rather, the notion of text opens up the possibility of the unexpected, the unknown' (Lynghold 2018, 111). Nevertheless, although the post-structural critique has significantly widened the possibilities and perspectives of discursive practices, it has not necessarily enabled us to approach areas that following my definition cannot be considered discursive or artistic. On the other hand, while the new realists criticize the linguistic paradigm, they still do that discursively and without always problematizing that fact sufficiently.

There are several ways of coping with this seeming paradox. One way is to redefine and enlarge the idea of discursive practices beyond their previous humanistic framings to comprise any sort of material arrangements of meaning making, including scientific arrangements. This is what, for instance, Karen Barad suggests in her inaugural article on 'Posthuman Performativity' (Barad 2003). Quentin Meillassoux, in turn, is ready to question the whole discourse-driven philosophy and replace it with paradigms rising from formal languages and natural science (Meillassoux 2005). Another way is to reconsider linguistic phenomena 'agentially' and range them alongside other agents in different kinds of 'flat' neo-ontological systems. That can happen either by giving to linguistic agents an equal ontological status with any other agents, as in the object-oriented ontology of Tristan Garcia (2009, 242–259), or by seeing linguistic agents as partaking in 'networks', 'chains', 'meshes', or 'assemblages', which comprise various heterogenous and interrelated agents. The latter way of considering language, which is often inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's immanent philosophy, has gained terrain especially in new materialism, which currently also informs applied linguistics (de Freitas and Curinga 2014, 255–260; Toohey 2019, 943–946). If, from the new realist point of view, the post-structuralists' idea of language tends to oppose constraining structures and creative agencies (de Freitas and Curinga, 252), then in the new realist thinking, in turn, the focus oscillates between the networks or assemblages, where the agents find themselves and from where their 'utterances' are born, and the idea of language as 'multimodal doing' or

'linguaging', operating creatively with heterogeneous semantic registers and agents (Toohey, 944–945).

However, the closer one considers the object of the debate, which is the scope of linguistic entities, the more the viewpoints of the new realists and post-structuralists seem to converge. In particular, they meet on the question of the *materiality of language*. As educational scholar Maggie MacLure formulates it, in the spirit of new materialism, the challenge is to embrace of the 'materiality of language itself—the fact that language is in and of the body; always issuing from the body; being impeded by the body; affecting other bodies, yet of course, always leaving the body, becoming immaterial, ideational, representational, a striated, collective, cultural, and symbolic resource' (MacLure 2013, 663–664; quoted by Toohey, 643). The idea is basically shared by the post-structuralists as well. As Claire Colebrook reminds us, the connection has already been established in the structuralist idea of the 'materiality of the signifier' (Colebrook 2011, 2). However, in the case of Derrida, for instance, that idea has not sufficed to dissipate the suspicions regarding his 'linguistic idealism'. The reason for that is undoubtedly that also his 'materialism' is hard to sustain (Lynghold 2018, 108–117). Even though in Derrida both matter and bodies remain suspended, withdrawn, or something 'to come', the text and bodies do not cease to seek each other. As summarized by Lynghold, '[t]ext, thus, is the embodiment of phonic or graphic signifiers, or bodies insofar as they can be represented. Bodies, similarly, are always already inscribed with sense inasmuch as they are representable in the physical traces of written marks or spoken sounds' (Lynghold, 113).

There are several ways to tackle this Derridian aporia. One way is to shift the attention to the level of bodies and establish them as sense-making entities. This is what happens, for instance, in Jean-Luc Nancy's post-Heideggerian ontology, or in the post-structuralist feminist thinking inaugurated by thinkers such as Helen Cixous, Julia Kristeva, or Luce Irigaray. In Catherine Malabou, the idea of 'plasticity' provides a substitute for the Derridan 'text', opening the material and non-discursive phenomena to a deconstructive analysis (Malabou 2011, 41–66). At the same time, as the new realists contest the primacy of language and rank linguistic entities alongside non-linguistic entities, the move increases the ontological weight of the former in an ambiguous manner.

The Mutability of Language

Here, I cannot go further with charting this complex disciplinary debate. Instead, I would now focus on a problem that rises from it and that is common to both camps. As one juxtaposes the terms 'body', 'matter', and 'language', and if one does not take the sense of any of them as given, it seems that the terms problematize each other in the same proportion as they seem interrelated. On the one hand, if one supposes that bodies are always material entities, then the embodied forms of languaging (speech, gestures, affective registers, rhythms, etc.) provide an obvious reference point for the consideration of the materiality of language. The opposite reference point consists of the materiality of the elements of linguistic communication, where it is regular to consider letters, words, or signs as some sort of 'bodies' (*soma/sema*). (An additional 'some sort of' is needed, as that corporality cannot be anthropomorphic or living in any biological or phenomenological sense. If

the embodied forms of language use are obvious, the embodied status of linguistic entities is problematic.) On the other hand, as obvious as it seems that bodies are material, it is as usual to think that 'matter' is not linguistic by nature. I cannot state that it is impossible to think the opposite, but special philosophical grounds would be needed to sustain such an idea.³ Instead, the move from matter to language requires a mediator, and bodies fulfil that function. Therefore bodies are supposed to be something both material and languaged. The latter aspect, in turn, implies that they can appear to themselves and, therefore, also make of their appearance a show—that is, to perform, regardless of how rudimentary that performance is. Thirdly, if the existence or subsistence of language is considered as such, it comprises two interrelated aspects, of which one is more 'material' (media, technologies, embodied forms of expression, communicational contexts) and the other more 'immaterial' or 'ideal' (grammar, semantics, phonologies, 'structures' in general). If that is the case, then the existence of bodies should also share something of both ways of appearing.

Based on these features, it should be possible to construct onto-epistemological models that aim at comprising all these aspects. I leave to the reader to consider whether the already mentioned philosophers and philosophies, or those that have not been mentioned, have managed to do that. However, what in my mind the philosophies that I have encountered have not managed to explain sufficiently is the infinite *mutability of language*, which enables language users and the linguistic entities they use to move from one register to another, from one context to another, and to maintain a difference between those registers and contexts, as well as to play endlessly with them. Here, the agency of the human language user and the agency of linguistic entities is interdependent and interchangeable, so that it is finally hard to decide if the words follow the user or the user the words. This mutability constitutes a prerequisite of all discursive use of language, although users most often do not or need not pay attention to it.

The case is the opposite in the arts, where the attention resides precisely in the mutable or plastic resources of language, in the capacity of words to *perform* and appear differently on different occasions and in different languages.⁴ The same principle applies to the debate outlined above. Eventually, it is perhaps irrelevant to ask which theory of language is right or the most comprehensive one. Each of them manifests certain aspects of language, speaks a certain language, and thus retains its contextual relevance. Instead, one should wonder what in language both enables all these interpretations or modes of use and performs and appears according to them. In other words, the problem concerns the *medial* nature of language since, eventually, we can speak of language only within languages.⁵

Here is a performance philosophy problem that derives from artistic practices in general and from the performing arts in particular, where the embodiment of words and the languaging of bodies play a prominent role. Here also is a problem that can be studied through performative means. As I see it, the arts do not have a language of their own. Speaking of a 'language of art', that of music or painting, for instance, is misleading, as if the language of art were just one language among many. Instead, in the arts, language use goes through a certain transformation or manifests its transformative power. The arts imitate and play with all possible ways of using language, including,

for example, the everyday use of language, formal languages, various cultural discourses, poetic language, and sign language, as well as languages informed by social or ethnic background, psychopathological states, age, dreams, drugs, or neurophysiological dysfunctions. From the point of view of the arts, all these forms are *equal*, which, at the same time, highlights the arts' enigmatic linguistic position. The relationship between the arts and language is at the core of my questioning.

As one tries to think about the mediality or multimodality of language, one easily ends up imagining its materiality and corporality. As Plato reasoned in *Timaeus* concerning the idea of *Khôra* (Plato 2009, 49a–53b), the endless transformability or plasticity of an entity requires that it simultaneously retains its receptivity and neutrality regarding the forms it assumes. Correlatively, the way of being or appearing of the materiality and corporality discussed here is paradoxical, and it goes beyond what we are accustomed to mean by those terms. If a word has a material 'body', its corporality can by no means be organic, anthropomorphic, or fleshy. The observation leaves open two possibilities. Either we should abandon the very term while speaking of linguistic entities (or use it only in a metaphorical sense; 'words in certain circumstances behave like bodies') or we must radically change our idea of body and what it can do. If the latter is the case, as I am here inclined to think, 'word' must be a more complex entity than a mere printed mark, a combination of phonemes, or a series of manual gestures. Although a word or a phrase may look like a mere instrument of communication or carrier of meaning, it must have a complex inner life that we are somehow familiar with, otherwise we could not use our words so easily. I am asking now about the nature of that *preliminary understanding* of which we are not necessarily consciously aware while speaking or writing. This search for a preliminary understanding also turns my questioning phenomenological.⁶

In what follows, I will propose for the reader a workshop consisting of a series of simple performative tasks where I ask them to pronounce words in a certain manner and reflect on the outcomes of their verbal operation. Each task constitutes a variation on the same theme, which is the materiality and corporality of language. In each of them, the attention moves from the discursive to the artistic use of language. The tasks can be accomplished alone or together with other people. External execution of the tasks is recommended, but one can also accomplish them internally by reading the given instructions and imagining in one's body how they would realize them and how the outcome would appear. The initial context of the tasks resides in my artistic research concerning the way a scenic performer works with their textual material (Kirkkopelto 2022). If the reader has previous experience of techniques of performing (by no means required), some of these tasks may be familiar from other contexts. Although I have developed them myself, I do not presume that similar techniques have not been used earlier in some other contexts. The point is not the originality of the tasks introduced but the *logic* that ties them together.⁷ That is a way to practice performance philosophy. Each task is followed by a short 'commentary' where I gather my reflections regarding the phenomena the task made appear.

A Verbal Workshop

Task 1: A meaningless word

Let us first study the different ways that words can behave and start with the simplest possible option, namely with meaningless words.

Use your mother tongue and choose a word that is neither too short nor too complex and with which you would like to play. A noun may be the easiest to play with, but you can also choose a verb, a pronoun, an adjective, or a participle.

Pronounce and repeat your word aloud so that your way of pronouncing deprives it of its semantic meaning or turns it semantically indifferent to you. This can happen in various ways, and you are free to invent different techniques. Some of them may be more mechanical, some of them more imaginary. Try to find 3–5 different ways to abolish the meaning. Have fun!

Commentary to Task 1

This simple demonstration, where a word was performed and a word started to perform, brings forth at least four interesting aspects:

- Any word can lose its semantic meaning. It is impossible to imagine a word that could not turn meaningless. The loss of meaning should be considered a constitutive possibility of the word to work as a linguistic component.
- Although the meaning of the word is omitted, the word does not disappear as an entity. On the contrary, the operation now only reveals an aspect that its semantic meaning had hidden, namely the materiality of the word. This materiality has a twofold character. On the one hand, it consists of the column of air that your vocal apparatus fashions so that it gains an audible form. On the other hand, that audible form has a temporal duration, a volume, a mimetic likeness, and an affective feel, which in the case of each word and each language is unique and which each articulation realizes differently. The initial airy matter has been given a characteristic form.
- Depending on the point of view, we perceive either a bare voice or a sound object made of air. As we reflect the outcome, our attention oscillates between these viewpoints. Yet, and unlike what one might think conceptually, the result is not dualistic ('matter' + 'appearance'). Instead, the resulting entity is something *attuned*, which implies a certain mimetic likeness and affective feel. Without a given meaning, the attuning is open and ambiguous. Yet it is there and, as a corporeal being, whose body is always attuned in some way or another, I can share the attuned state of the meaningless word. For the same reason, I am also inclined to consider it as a certain kind of body.
- If your operation is considered as a performance, you may look and sound like a person who does not understand the words they emit or does not react to their meaning, or just plays with their voice. Between the body of the performer and the body of the word resides an experiential break.

– The semantic meanings are quite hard to suspend, and the operation requires a specific technique and concentration.

Task 2: A word full of meaning

Next, let us take a counterexample and study how a word can become meaningful. Contrary to what just happened, try now to be attentive to the different semantic meanings your word may have. Try to pronounce the word aloud ‘meaningfully’ and repeat it, maybe by varying its sense.

– As you may notice, the task is quite hard, if not impossible, to accomplish without imagining a situation where that word is spoken out, together with other words or beings. The attempt easily turns into a pretended speech, or acting, which gives to the pronounced word a performative interpretation. Luckily, there is a technique that enables one to focus more exclusively on the word’s semantic meaning. It works as follows:

Find another word whose vocal body resembles the first one and play now with these two words by repeating them one after another. Consider how the semantic meaning changes as you move from one word to another, and how the repetition informs the meaning of the words. Once again, let the task entertain you.

Commentary to Task 2

– The first version of the task indicated how the meaningfulness of a word is not dependent on your conscious intention. Instead, it seems to come from the context, where it is pronounced and which here is imagined.

– The second version, in turn, highlighted a semantic aspect of language that I call ‘metonymic’. The idea derives from Roman Jakobson’s famous analysis of the two main categories of semantic function in speech and their rhetoric correlates (Jakobson 1990). In metonymic semantic relation, the way a word can replace another word, or follow it, is based on a *partial likeness*, which does not hide the simultaneous difference between the words and their more established discursive meanings. The intermediary semantic space is left open for interpretations and free play.

– In the latter case, you may have looked like a speaking person whose relation to the words pronounced is free and playful, as if you were singing or reciting contemporary poetry! In poetry, words live in a freer semantic relation to each other, in a non-discursive way.

Task 3: An acting word

Let us continue by demonstrating an operation that, after Jakobson, could be called ‘metaphoric’.

It implies that you now deliberately try to pronounce your word as if it were pronounced and used in some specific life situation that you have experienced or can imagine. In other words, you now give to the word a fixed performative interpretation. The word and the way you perform it replace and repeat—that is, *represent*, an interpretative situation, a lifeworld which is not here or is here only virtually (Kirkkopelto 2021). Please try to do that until you find a way that satisfies you.

Commentary to Task 3

What you just did was very schematically something the actors do as they rehearse alone. As a performer, they try to give to a word a certain contextual interpretation. Normally in a performative situation, there are also spectators watching them as a person or character who finds themselves in a life situation and who behave therefore in some specific manner. On this basis, we can once again make a series of observations:

– A single word can open a myriad of different life worlds. Insofar as a word can be totally meaningless, it can also be full of meaning. One can use a single word to denote an indefinite number of things or use it in an indefinite number of ways and, thereby, open an indefinite number of practical situations where that word can become meaningful. In this respect, every word can work like a pronoun, or a ‘shifter’⁸ whose semantic and contextual capacity is basically infinite. That same capacity also explains why, reciprocally, every noun can always be replaced by a pronoun, by ‘it’ for instance. In each context, the word that is used not only means or does something; it also gains a certain affective tone, reflecting mimetically its surroundings and having mimetic effects. Unlike the case of the meaningless word, which was attuned in an open way, the word is now attuned in a specific way. A word is not just a mark of another thing but a multimodal agent whose agency you have just performed and made appear.

– At the same time, the demonstration reproduced a discursive way of using language based on grammar and conventional semantic relations. The performance constituted a citation or a quote from the life of some other person, or of my own life, past, future, or imagined. In Schechnerian terms, we are dealing here with ‘restored behavior’ (Schechner 1981, 35–116).

– If one now compares Task 3 with the second version of Task 2, where the relation of the words pronounced was metonymical, one can have an idea of two modes of performing, where one is more scenic or theatrical whereas the other is semantically more open and therefore applicable in other modes of artistic performance.⁹ The comparison highlights the simultaneous continuity and difference, the logic of variation between different modes.

Task 4: An unidentified verbal object

Now, take the two words you used in Task 2 and make of them a new word either by connecting one to another, like in a compound word, or by merging them, so that the resulting fusion differs from the words implied. The aim is to create a word that has no semantic correlation in the actual world. Repeat the word and try to imagine the thing it could refer to or a situation where it would become meaningful. Can you imagine contexts where that kind of word could be used? Hopefully, you like your creation!

Commentary to Task 4

– The resulting word is like the words one can encounter in literature, dreams, psychopathology, or magic. It is simultaneously meaningless and full of meaning. Yet, every word whose meaning we do not know, such as the words in a foreign language, can basically appear to us in a similar, semantically ambiguous or nonsensical way. In this respect, it resembles a linguistic agent that below is called a ‘floating signifier’.

– Any word can be combined with any other word, and the resulting object is still a word. Depending on the context, its meaning can be ambiguous or defined. That is a usual way to generate new discursive terms. Correspondingly, a word would be split into smaller parts, such as syllables that, in turn, can be treated as words, at least in poetry. Both operations manifest the extraordinary mutability or plasticity of language.

Floating Words

All my observations so far have been obvious and not necessarily that surprising. What is more surprising, and worth considering, is what one can finally testify as their sum.

So that a word can function as a word, it apparently must comprise all the mentioned and demonstrated aspects *at the same time*. But how to conceive of such a complex entity? What do we get as a result if, as our final task, we try to imagine a word, any word you like, in all its complexity, comprising 1) its total meaninglessness and materiality, 2) its endless metonymic affinity with other words, 3) its infinite metaphoric capacity, and 4) poetic ambiguity and plasticity? As I try to do that, then, at least in my imagination, the word starts to gain a body that is independent of my physical body and that changes constantly in its form, its mimetic likeness, and its affective feel, oscillating between meaninglessness and meaningfulness; a body which performs, not metaphorically but literally; a body comparable to that of a human performer.

Of course, a word does not have a human figure, no head, arms, or legs. However, as Task 1 tangibly demonstrated, words do have a plastic torso that, after Antonin Artaud, one might even call ‘a body without organs’, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have famously suggested (see Cull 2013, 64). As I have tried to indicate elsewhere, this is the way that the scenic performer conceives their body during their performance. Phenomenologically, the embodiments the performer’s body emits are not primarily anthropomorphic (Kirkkopelto 2022).

So far, we have observed and played with the semantic aspects of words. But is the relation between words and human bodies only semantic, metonymic, or metaphorical? Do linguistic entities only *resemble* human mimetic and linguistic behaviour, or is there a more intrinsic link between the body of the word and the human body? What finally authorizes us to speak about a ‘body’ in the same sense in both cases?

It seems that the identity between words and human body comes forth crucially in a linguistic function that the structuralists have called a ‘floating signifier’. The term was initially coined and introduced by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his famous essay devoted to the work of his predecessor Marcel Mauss (Lévi-Strauss 1987, 63). Ever since, the idea has significantly informed post-structuralist thought, as in Lacan, Derrida, or Deleuze.

By a floating signifier, Lévi-Strauss refers to signifiers that paradoxically signify what remains non-signified in each lifeworld as a system of reference. According to him, every human language is born instantaneously as a totality, which covers everything encountered within the given

circumstances (59–60). A linguistic world has no holes. However, that does not imply that everything within a world would be named and known. The floating signifier refers paradoxically to all that remains without a signifier. Insofar as it signifies the not-named and not-known, it simultaneously signifies the whole linguistic system and its symbolic power. It is both meaningful, as meaningful as the world it denotes, and meaningless, without any meaning *within* that world. Therefore, in human cultures, its function and power are often associated with various magic and ritual objects or words, such as amulets, fetishes, or spells.

Secondly, and now more in conformity with structuralist theory, the floating signifier functions as an instance that connects and mediates between different frames of reference without belonging to either of them. Those frames may consist of different worlds and their respective languages, or of a signified order, where words and things have their established correlation, and a signifying order, which scouts and denotes the former. This also explains why in different established discursive orders, floating signifiers and their representatives play a seemingly liminal or marginal role.¹⁰

Finally, José Gil, in his seminal study *Metamorphoses of the Body*, proposes that the human body itself can function as a floating signifier, as a ‘mediator or interchanger among codes’, as he calls it (Gil 1998, 95). According to Gil, the body’s semantically and syntactically floating function comes forth particularly in different kinds of healing rituals described by anthropologists, as well as in artistic performances, such as in the art of ‘mime’ (106–111). In the former case, the floating bodily signifier still works at the service of the given and established symbolic systems, the discourses, whereas in the latter case, it can manifest its potential more artistically and freely. As it does that, like it just did in our workshop, we may finally start to understand how integrally our understanding of our bodies, both our own and those of others, relates to our understanding of language and our linguistic capacity.

Conclusions

In the above workshop, we have considered phenomenologically the process of verbal expression in the moment of it taking place, focusing on the appearance of its outcomes, the pronounced words, and their transformative qualities. I hope that the logic that I have traced through these exercises now helps us to rethink language beyond the disciplinary framings discussed above. If that is not the case, and if someone wants to retain their assumed theoretical stance, then at least they should be able to comprise the evidence rising from these experiments in their theoretical framework and give it a corresponding interpretation and practical implementation.

However, at least to me, these experiments, like many others that I have accomplished in the field of artistic research, have opened a new way of thinking about our corporeal and linguistic co-existence. It is not that human bodies are first born and then thrown into (or abandoned in) the symbolic universe of language and subjugated to its order. It rather seems that our bodies are born linguistic; our embodiment and language acquisition are reciprocal processes, where the mimetic and affective attuning between bodies plays a crucial role (Zlatev 2007). Our linguistic

capacities, both discursive and artistic ones, are based on a structural isomorphism, which resides between our embodied experience and the ephemeral bodies of (spoken, written, gesticulated) words or their more objective representatives (like animated objects). I call this isomorphism *the idea of the linguistic body*. According to this idea, verbal objects are no less material, although their materiality may differ from that of our physical bodies, and no less corporeal, although their corporality is not living.¹¹ Correspondingly, a living organism can conceive of itself and others as bodies only insofar as it is capable of actualizing that idea. Finally, the isomorphism in question constitutes the object of the preliminary understanding, according to which we recognize our specifically 'human' relation to language.

That relation is primarily neither discursive nor artistic. Instead, both registers are interdependent and born from each other as a result of a process that is hard to imagine and that barely has a name, a process which extends beyond the human sphere and finally connects us with everything that is, has been, or that is yet to come. In discursive use, words and bodies have their established or conventional, that is *forced*, meaning. Whereas in the arts, words can manifest their more corporeal nature and bodies their more linguistic nature. Language as the medium of appearing is as real as the bodies that take form within it. Bodies do not cease to imagine themselves in contact with other bodies, but those inter-corporeal encounters are also always linguistic, no matter what kind of bodies they are, human or more-than-human. It is this process of embodiment/languageing that is witnessed at the occasion of every artistic performance and that today can be studied through the performing arts.¹²

Notes

¹ Despite the terminological proximity, I am not referring here the Austinian 'performatives', which most often occur and function in various discursive contexts.

² I have touched upon the mentioned debate earlier in a previous *Performance Philosophy* article (Kirkkopelto 2016). The present article, where my focus shifts from performing objects to performing words, can be read as a continuation to my former argumentation.

³ Johan Wilhem Ritter's (1776–1810) speculative physics provide an idea of that kind of argumentation. If all natural phenomena are accompanied by oscillation, oscillation associated with tone, tone understood as a primordial music, and music as the most original form of language, then it is possible to state: 'Also in the world of phenomena one still sees words and writing inseparable. All electronic excitation is accompanied by oscillation even if it only appears external at the isolators. Basically, however, there is no oscillation—even no internal one—without being external. All oscillation yields tone, and therefore word' (Ritter 2010, 475).

⁴ According to some thinkers, there is no ideologically neutral language. Instead, every actual language pursues certain socio-political interests. I think here in particular of Valentin Voloshinov's Marxist theory of language in Voloshinov (1973). The observation adds another layer to the present analysis and sets a question of its interests. In my case, my most obvious interests relate to artishood and the claim of artists to be acknowledged as capable of knowledge formation. I thank Petri Tervo for this reference.

⁵ The fundamental mediality of language also comes forth in the Goffmanian 'frame analysis', where the pre-existing interpretative frame defines how a performative action should be understood on each occasion (Goffman 1974). Insofar as those agents use language, the frame also defines the agential role of the latter. What the

Goffmanian analysis takes as granted is what I am questioning here—that is, the mutability of linguistic agents themselves.

⁶ My analysis can be considered as an example of ‘performance phenomenology’, if only one bears in mind that phenomenology is understood here more as a research method than as a philosophical theory. The idea of performance phenomenology as a branch of performance philosophy has been introduced in Bleeker, Sherman, and Nedelkopoulou (2015) and in Grant, McNeilly-Renaudie, and Wagner (2019).

⁷ Here, I refer to Ben Spatz’s argument, which enables the consideration of techniques of performing as ‘epistemic’ practices. The relevance of singular techniques of performing should not be assessed according to their originality or ‘authenticity of transmission’ but according to the function they assume in each system of training, to start with the order in which the tasks are accomplished (Spatz 2014, 272–274).

⁸ For a linguistic analysis of shifters, see Jakobson (1984). Concerning their philosophical bearing, see Agamben (1991, 73, 84–85). Notice also how Bert O. States, in his phenomenological analysis of acting, compares actors’ different performative attitudes (‘self-expressive’, ‘collaborative’, and ‘representational’) to different ‘pronominal modes’ (States 1985, 160).

⁹ Peggy Phelan has used the distinction between metonymy and metaphor to highlight the critical potential of performance art as compared to more conventional modes of performance (Phelan 1993, 150).

¹⁰ The intermediary role of the floating signifier is in particular focus in Gilles Deleuze’s analysis of structuralism (Deleuze 2004, 184–186).

¹¹ At this point, I debate with contemporary thinkers of performance who promote a division of ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’ as an alternative to the mind–body division and other metaphysical binary oppositions. According to my view, the so-called ‘immaterial’ things, such as linguistic phenomena and constructs, are still material, albeit in another way (see, for example, Camilleri 2020, 99–107).

¹² This conclusion is sustained more systematically in Kirkkopelto (2025).

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Biography

Esa Kirkkopelto is a philosopher, artistic researcher, and performance artist. He has worked as a professor of artistic research at the University of the Arts Helsinki (2007–2018), Malmö Theatre Academy (Lund University, 2020–2022). From 2024 onwards, he continues in that same position at the Tampere University. He holds the title of docent in aesthetics at the University of Helsinki. He has a PhD degree in philosophy at the University of Strasbourg (2003). He is a former board member of the Society of Artistic Research (2022–2024), a former core-convenor of the Performance Philosophy association and the organiser of the Helsinki 2022 Performance Philosophy Biennial. He is the founding member of the Other Spaces performance collective (2004–). His research focuses on the deconstruction of the performing body both in theory and in practice. His monograph titled *Logomimesis: A Treatise on Performing Body* is forthcoming at Routledge in 2025.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

THE WORK OF SHARING: DISCUSSING PERFORMANCE IN THE MODE OF PERFORMANCE

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BRUCE BARTON UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
JOHANNA HOUSEHOLDER OCAD UNIVERSITY
MICHELLE MAN EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

How do we discuss performance in the mode of performance? How do we think and discuss *through* art-making rather than think and discuss *about* art-making? A defining characteristic of artistic research is the rejection of simple binaries, in pursuit of a complex, interwoven relationship between *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poiesis*. This is, no doubt, a point of philosophical inquiry. However, for those who identify as practising artist-scholars, it is also a recurring practical challenge, particularly within academic conference situations. How can artistic research practices be effectively shared in contexts that traditionally prioritize scholarly papers and presentations? Early in its evolution, the Artistic Research Working Group of Performance Studies international (PSi) initiated what was called the Porous Studio, an attempt to create a studio-like setting within and during the PSi conference. Participating artist-scholars, as well as local artists from the conference's host country, were invited to share their work in ways that, similar to the presentation of papers and panels, elicited direct critical response from those in attendance. Building upon this project, the Artistic Research Working Group has continued to experiment with models of exchange, leading within recent years to a three-part engagement that we initially called 'Perform-Respond-Extract', and most recently identified as 'Perform-Respond-Extend'. Both models involve structured, interactive engagement between group members, including preparatory work prior to the gathering, artistic presentations during the conference, and reflective documentation after the event.

This multimedia essay is describing, or rather demonstrating, one attempt at dealing with the problem how to discuss performance in the mode of performance, based on a presentation at the Performance Philosophy conference in Helsinki in June 2022. There we tried to present and demonstrate in a miniature form the ‘Perform–Respond–Extend’ model that we have explored in the working group, and to do it in a hybrid format, with two performers in the room and two performers present via Zoom. The three phases of the method (perform, respond, extend) were performed by three members of the group and restricted to three minutes of prerecorded material per person at each stage. The third phase was augmented by live performances by the two members present; Annette Arlander made a table-top performance with pinecones in front of her video and Michelle Man danced with her text slides as accompaniment. Unfortunately, and perhaps significantly, these two live performances were not properly documented and exist only as basic online recordings.

The essay consists of a brief introduction based on the presentation by Bruce Barton and three pre-recorded video compilations prepared by Annette Arlander, Johanna Householder, and Michelle Man, as well short explanations between them. The main video examples are accompanied as appendixes by the original abstracts, two recorded extracts of our preparatory discussions on Zoom, and a rough documentation of the live performances during the conference. A link to the working group archive or blog provides further background information.

The title of this essay, the work of sharing, refers to engaging with and sharing artistic research. The philosophical problem that has accompanied artistic research practice probably since its initiation, is ‘how do I share this work?’ How can it be done, what are the forms and what are the processes? What are the ways in which the work—that is so very much associated with the actual experience of doing the work—can be shared? What are the possible modes of exchange? How can the work be disseminated and then reapplied in other contexts? We have prepared video materials as examples, so this introduction is quite brief, just to introduce both the context and a few ideas to address this philosophical problem that we are engaging with.

We are presuming that many of our readers are quite familiar with the idea of artistic research, so there are only a few ideas that we want to make sure we have a shared understanding of as we begin. The key idea being that artistic research is indeed a form of research in which artistic practice is the central mode of enquiry, even if the topic or focus is not necessarily artistic practice. This distinguishes it clearly from many other forms of research; artistic practice is the defining characteristic of it. Moreover, ‘artistic practice (can) be viewed as the production of knowledge or philosophy in action’ with ‘the potential to extend the frontiers of research’ (Barrett and Bolt 2007, 13). This leads to a series of characteristics that are quite pertinent for what we are discussing here. The first characteristic is that it is a form of research, which is or which we can call *enactive*; it is a fully embodied form of research. And it is therefore one that is carried out through the practice, that is done by doing, which is a particularly important aspect for the challenge of disseminating artistic research. The second characteristic is that it is a form of research which is highly situated, and which therefore is quite distinct to the context in which it is taking place. As such, it is very much unique to the circumstances of the individuals involved, the location, the time, the

temperature, etc., to a degree that makes the transmission of this research and the sharing of this research often quite challenging. The third characteristic is that it is also an emergent form of research, one in which not just the discoveries of the research emerge through the process, but often the process itself emerges while evolving on a constant basis. The researcher must be sensitive and open to that unfolding, in order to allow the research to guide us as much as it is a vehicle for the enquiry that we started out with. And finally, the fourth and last characteristic of it is that is an interdisciplinary form of research; almost inevitably one moves across the boundaries of specific established disciplines and of specific methodologies in an effort to work almost always in a highly collaborative manner.

With these ideas in mind, the place that we start from and the problem that we are dealing with is this form of engagement with knowledge, which is resistant to and even perhaps suspicious of outcomes and results, which particularly in an academic context provides all kinds of challenges. Drawing on Mark Fleishmann's, thinking about performance-as-research (2012), it is a form of research that is less interested in arrivals and destinations, or in the distance that is covered between two points, and more interested in the quality of the movement between those points. It is about the experience of the travel itself, and the textures of the travel itself. And in that sense, perhaps one could think about it as a form of embodied philosophy, or a form of philosophical embodiment. That is the base from which we are going to be presenting our examples.

We are all members of the Artistic Research Working Group of Performance Studies international, a working group that has had a long life; one which has a large number of members from around the world, some of whom are coming from year to year while some rotate through and change depending on where the conference is being held, what the theme of the conference is, and the various characteristics that vary from one year to the next. One of the key elements is that the working group has been designed to engage with local communities. When conferences were always in one place only, unlike many of the conferences held today, it was a means of engaging with new communities of artistic practice and artistic research as the conference moved from location to location.

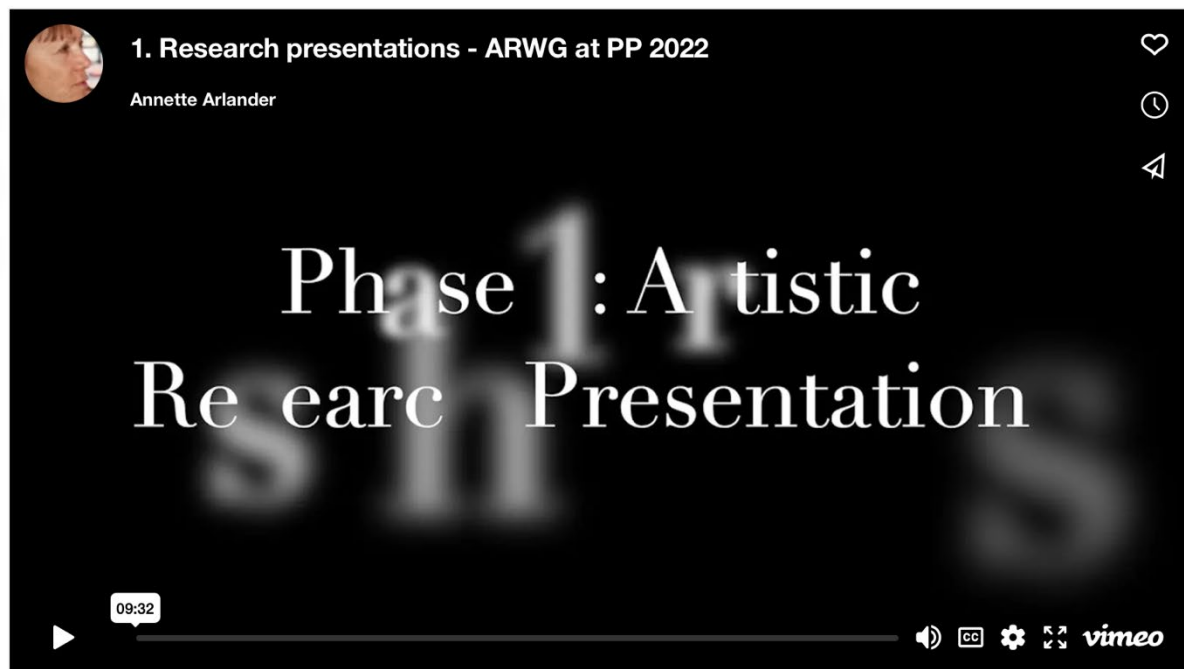
To give a sense of how this evolved over more than a decade, here is a little bit of the history of the Artistic Research Working Group: In 2011 in PSi there was what was referred to as the Artists' Committee, which was understood as a place for artists working within PSi and often within academia to bring their work together, to present their work to each other, and to have exchanges in a place somewhat removed from the rest of the conference in a space where the conventions of the conference gave way to more free forms and more flexible ways of engaging with each other. This was later referred to as the Porous Studio, with the idea of porosity referring to engagement with local communities; the PSi community arrived at a particular location and then opened its doors to the local artists' community for a more concentrated exchange. In 2014 the group changed its name and became known as the Artistic Research Working Group and has evolved significantly since that time.

Initially the challenge of moving beyond the mere presentation of work for each other became the question: how do we exchange? How is this work shared? How do we collaborate in moving forward? In 2017 we introduced the model of 'Performance and Response'. This meant that individuals prepared materials prior to the conference, and then at the conference there was a performative response by colleagues to the work that was presented by individual members. In 2019 we extended that model further and referred to it as 'Performance, Response, and Extraction', with the idea being that there was a presentation by each member of the working group, another member of the working group responded through performance to that initial performance, and then there was a third iteration, where an individual attempted to extract from the response a particular question, problem, or element that would be worthy of further examination and exploration, and often also possible to preserve as a document. In 2021 we then altered that further, referring to the model as 'Perform, Respond, and Extend'. Now the challenge was for each of the individuals first to present, then to respond through performance to one of the other participants' work, and then on the third day, each individual had to respond to the previous response, as well as taking something out of it and extending it even further into a performative conversation. This model is the one we are going to offer a very brief example of here. At the 2022 version of the gathering of the Artistic Research Working Group, a further evolution to this model was based on working in pairs; we asked individuals to respond and to extend in collaboration with another participant.

The video material that follows is a miniature and quite accelerated version of the 2021 model 'Perform, Respond, and Extend'. The first video compilation is the presentation of the initial performances, the second video compilation is based on the idea of responding to those initial performances, and the third compilation of video and live material is a mode of extending the relationship that was established between the first two iterations through performance.

Phase 1: Perform

This first iteration of videos represents the first stage in the three-stage process of 'Perform, Respond and Extend', which often takes the form of materials submitted prior to the meeting, presenting an initial basis of individual work. The three presenters also shared written abstracts with each other (see appendixes 1–3). This phase goes right back to the early days of the artists' committee, which was about creating a space to present work to each other, and in many ways that is what that first iteration represents.



Phase 1. Artistic Research Presentations: Annette Arlander, Johanna Householder and Judith Price, and Michelle Man (Video, 9 min 32 sec). <https://vimeo.com/813841510>

Phase 2: Respond

This second compilation of videos coincides with the 'respond' phase of the working group's method, in which individuals respond to another individual's presentation and performance through performance. The person who is assigned to respond to the materials of a specific participant will have access to it leading up to the conference and will have some time to make the response over a few weeks, sometimes even longer, although sometimes they have been created overnight. This 'response' has often been performed live at the conference, although in this example the responses were also pre-recorded.



Phase 2. Responses to research materials: Johanna Householder's response to Annette Arlander's work, Michelle Man's response to Johanna Householder and Judith Price's work, and Annette Arlander's response to Michelle Man's work (Video, 8 min 34 sec). <https://vimeo.com/813842586>

What is perhaps evident from this second set of videos, is that the response often turns into an intersection between the practices of the two artists who are in exchange. The second stage is a response to the original material, by bringing in one's own practice, one's own interest, one's own skill set into exchange and conversation with that of the individual to whom or whose work you are responding.

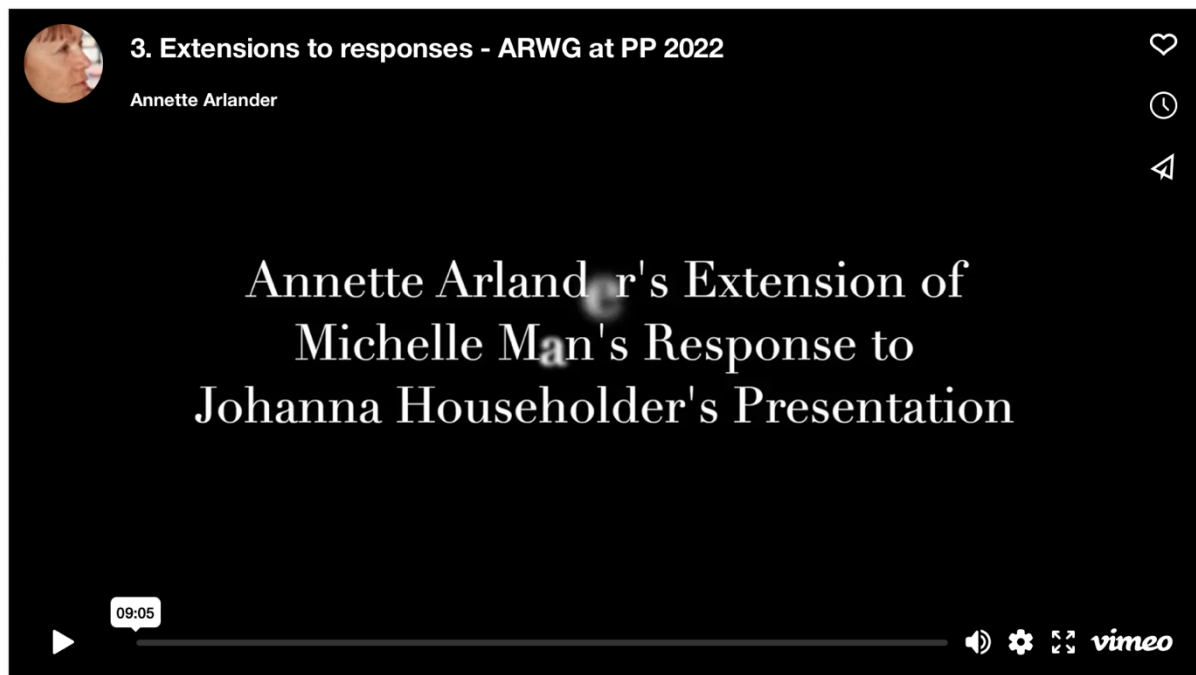
Phase 3: Extend

We refer to the next iteration in our process as 'extending'. The idea behind this phase is that a third member enters the conversation, bringing their interests, their skill sets, and their disciplinary background in order to create a response or extension—not only to the first and second participants' work, but also to the conversation between them, so that it becomes a three-way conversation.

When we first experimented with extensions, they were supposed to be something that could be documented, because the responses were live. In these miniature examples from the Helsinki conference, we were doing the opposite, because the 'responses' were pre-recorded, so a live component was included only in this third stage. Unfortunately, the live elements of the extensions were not properly videoed and are therefore here included only as a rough, unedited recording from the room. For the sake of clarity, the screened elements of the 'extensions' are included as separate clips after the live recording.



Phase 3. Extensions. Documentation from the room: Annette Arlander's extension of Michelle Man's response to Johanna Householder's presentation, Johanna Householder's extension of Annette Arlander's response to Michelle Man's work, and Michelle Man's extension of Johanna Householder's response to Annette Arlander's work. (Video, 9 min 22 sec). <https://vimeo.com/813843632>



Phase 3. Extensions. Pre-recorded and screened material: Annette Arlander's extension of Michelle Man's response to Johanna Householder's presentation, Johanna Householder's extension of Annette Arlander's response to Michelle Man's work, Michelle Man's extension of Johanna Householder's response to Annette Arlander's work. (Video, 9 min 5 sec). <https://vimeo.com/813843202>

At the conference we also added one extra dimension by inviting the audience to 'extend' the problem one step further, and the panel concluded by inviting those present to further extend the work that they had witnessed with questions or discussion. However, there was less discussion than we had expected, and half of the presenters being present online complicated the exchange. This experience nevertheless confirmed our previous experiences with the third stage; the 'extract' or 'extend' phase is still in development and looking for a proper approach to its facilitation and implementation. For example, for the meetings of the Artistic Research Working Group in 2024 we have focused only on the 'perform' and 'respond' phases and have tried to work with pairs of mutual responses rather than the 'chain' demonstrated here (in which A responds to B who responds to C). For others who might be interested in applying the method, it is worth noting that the choice of emphasis in the third phase can be calibrated for the purpose it is used for. If the aim is sharing the process with a wider community—for example, via some form of online publication—the extension in the third phase can focus on creating informative documentation of the previous perform–response phases. If the goal is to stimulate the research process, the extension phase can be directed towards reflection and distilling core questions from the perform–response exchange for further exploration by the group.

Nevertheless, what was interesting in this miniature demonstration at Performance Philosophy Problems was the degree to which the work itself articulated some of the ideas that we were trying to introduce at the beginning of the presentation about the challenges of dissemination, exchange, and interaction through performance, and demonstrated that this is indeed an open-ended

process. The practical problem with the lack of proper documentation of the live elements of the third phase makes very palpable the embodied, situated, and emergent character of artistic research in performance. We did not and do not arrive at a conclusion, nor did we arrive at a set discovery, but by inviting the audience to continue the extension process, our hope was that others would embody the spirit, as well as the process, of the work that we do with each other. And with the help of this essay, we extend the invitation to the reader-viewer-listener as well.

Appendices

1. Presentation, Annette Arlander

'Hello Pine'

In order to develop and sharpen the focus of my recent artistic research project *Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees* (2020–2021) I have in 2022 commenced a three-lingual project called *Pondering with Pines – Miettii mäntyjen kanssa – Funderar med furor*. Neither the research aims, nor the artistic aims of the project are yet fully articulated, but the idea is to focus on pine trees rather than any kind of trees and on pondering rather than performing in general. For this mini presentation, with the focus on demonstrating our ways of proceeding in the Artistic Research Working Group I chose one aspect of the practice, namely experiments with talking to or with trees.

Recording my impromptu speech next to some pine trees, rather than writing a letter to the tree by the tree, and then reading, recording and adding it to the video afterwards, as I have done before, changes the approach and accentuates the real-time dimension, because the talk is recorded and added to synchronized to the video as it is. The sound files are also published as episodes in the podcast *Talking with Trees*. I suppose this kind of 'live recording' of an impromptu talk resembles the real-time, real-action ethos of performance art, despite being shared as a recording. The example to be presented is the beginning of a talk recorded on 8 April in Kaivopuisto Park in Helsinki.

The whole podcast episode (9 min) is available on Soundcloud:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-90370389/pine-5-eng>

And as a video with the transcript of the text on the RC, here:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1529168/0/0>

For context, see:

- Project blog: <https://ponderingwithpines.wordpress.com>
- Project archive: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1323411>

For background, see:

- Previous project blog: <https://meetingswithtrees.com>
- Previous project archive: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327>

2. Collaborative Exchanges on Zoom, Johanna Householder

We humans, we animals, are mimetic beings. This quality gives choral singing, unison dancing, synchronized swimming and starling murmurations the power to enthrall, to mesmerize, and to feel.

In August 2020, veteran performance artists and former collaborators Johanna Householder and Judith Price, separated by three time zones, decided to break away from their 'lockdown Zoom calls' and instead use the calls as an opportunity for collaborative exchange.

We challenged each other to improvise a new relationality by thinking and moving spontaneously, experimenting with ways to bend the technology, to reach around and through the screen. We mapped potential and new spatial relationships. Reading the screen, we observed that architecture (both domestic and computer architecture) accrues alternative meaning when read as *mise-en-scène*. Recorded on laptops, between Pacific (UTC -7) and Eastern time (UTC -4), the resultant "Episodes" document our attempts to restore peripheral vision to a world condensed into a 2880 x 1800 slab of metals and electrons. The crude imprecision of our communication technologies flattens geographies and obliterates time zones. We began to inhabit a continuous architecture.

By February 2021, we extended our collaborative improvisations to include working with sound artists. Each artist brought a unique way of hearing and approach to the visual material we sent them, they in turn sent sound files that influenced the image sequences. For the purposes of this conference we will use a clip from the last collaborative zoom video, titled *Episode 202122*, with sound by Jeff Morton.

For context: DIPTYCHS UTC -4 / UTC -7 the six video works by Johanna Householder & Judith Price

1. Episodes 7, 9, 14, 15: Smoke & Mirrors, Sound by Seth Cardinal Dodginghorse

In which we explore the architectures that we inhabit in common, uncovering perhaps a continuous household.

2. Episode 3 & 8: Marxist Crows, Soliloquy by Jeanne Randolph

In which we replace ourselves in order to introduce a particular outsiders' perspective on the covid lockdown situation.

3. Episode 5: 43.6532° N, 79.3832° W / 48.4284° N, 123.3656° W, Sound by Anne Bourne

In which we continue to explore architecture and recognize the relationship between mirrors and screens.

4. Episode 11: Kitchen party, Sound by Homo Monstrous

In which we explore each other's fridges and pantries, tuning into domestic concerns and exchanging recipes across time and space.

5. Episode 20: Object lesson, Sound by Rita McKeough

In which we give the space over to the objects at hand to find their own relationships.

6. Episodes 202122: Zoom escapes, Sound by Jeff Morton

In which we try to leave lockdown, to push the limits of wifi, and zoom itself takes over the editing, deciding who and what to show.

3. *Ghostlight*, Michelle Man

The *Ghostlight* project expands on my framings of *choreoluminosity*, which explores the opportunities available from coalescing energies of light and the dancing body, and that lies at the heart of my on-going thesis *Light and the Choreographic: dancing with Tungsten*. Over the course of this project my positioning sits within increasingly contentious arguments around the sustainability of theatres and Eco-design as lighting manufacturers, distributors, and designers vie with environmental policy makers over the phasing out of Tungsten lighting fixtures. Being on the brink of a post-Tungsten era, therefore shifts my approach to working with different lighting sources. As an artistic and critical way of questioning a practice of *choreoluminosity* in a world of climate emergency, *Ghostlight* is posited as a provocation of dancing with a 'last light'—what if this were the last light? A death of Tungsten? How choreographed sensibilities of preciousness towards the non-human come to manifest and to what end, is the concern of this research.

My conceptual landscape draws on theories of new vital materialisms with particular attention to political theorist Jane Bennett's critiquing of a 'sensuous enchantment' (2010: xi), as a 'strange combination of delight and disturbance' (ibid.), that can become a 'motivational energy' (ibid.) spurring a practice of care towards the other than human, in this case the choreographic dialogue with light. Resonating with the ways in which I articulate *choreoluminosity* is Bennett's insistence on the need to 'develop a language and syntax for, and thus better discernment of, the active powers issuing from the non-human' (ibid: ix). I do so, knowingly allured by the texts of Karen Barad, whose writings on touch and the experimental nature of matter and 'its agential capacities for imaginative, desiring, and affectively charged forms of bodily engagement' (2015: 388) she defines as a 'charged multisensorial dance' (2012: 206).

Viewing Artistic Research Materials of the *Ghostlight* Project

The following documentation is taken from the research and development of *Ghostlight* to date. The recordings serve to map the process, and include research practice notes which are an imbrication of reflections and observations made during and after the sessions. The online software that allows for inserting annotations that relate directly to a specific moment enables the archive to be kept as is a collection of live documents, which I can return to in order to review and analyse the materials uploaded. I write with a desire to capture images, or thoughts as they move through my body, rather than strive to create a logical follow through. The notes below, are extracted from the review area of the videos.

Ghostlight 2i, August 2021 04'49 minutes

<https://vimeo.com/user27982055/review/581359922/b405667047>

starting from the edges of self, tips of fingers dipping in and with the light, as if a first soft stroke picks up light's dust to play in the soft, velvet like silence of this darkness shimmering with light; the feeling is of easy articulation and a flow with ease, awareness of bones' edginess, everything feels liquid

allowing this to ripple through the body with quicksilver speed; what my hands are eager to play with is passed across the body; I do my best to avoid what I feel is a hierarchy within the body, where the hands hold attention, tension, their own rapid intelligence, like the brain on the skin

avoiding face to face contact with the light source, I clasp my hands open behind my back knowing that the light beams into my palms - what private dialogue ensues?

if my movements become worded then it is with language of light - that falls, tenses and then releases - what weight this light? then how to stir the light dust as it brushes off my skin as it sweeps through the atmosphere of the black box space

I notice the neatness of pausing in parallel again, a physical rectilinear projection, my ensuing movements then seek to criss cross myself and wrap and unwrap around my body and kinesphere

top of head, or crown wants to make some kind of poetical union with the light; so far I have avoiding looking directly at the ghostlight source; I bathe, play, listen, work and dance with the refracted light. I am not sure I can sense the closeness of the light here; it is as if I am breathing through the top of my head, breathing in the light, breathing with the light.

the energy that I believe I absorb from the light opens onto the front of my neck, long-throated stream of electro-magnetic energy pulsating as I pause

gesture of insistence that I will not look directly at the light source, whilst at the same time knowing that the light radiates and fills the lines in the palm of my hands

each liquid-like drop a reminder of 'light falls', so soft-seed/egg-like body clustering in on self, knowing where the ghost light's luminosity extends

articulating through sensing the undersides of the body, knowing that light arrives everywhere - under, beneath and though every surface

bones of hand on bones of face, edges of bones and light? inner lumens and light?

coalescing energies of light and the flowing body; what sense of sensing hair in the glow, hair that moves with the body and can be projected in other ways.

Ghostlight 2v 06'19 minutes

<https://vimeo.com/user27982055/review/581365361/e3d8cf753d>

I have started in what I have referred to in my previous project as a minor light; I am conscious of the reduced visibility in what I do, and revel in this

from fluttering bony fingertips to elbows light, tips of elbows with tips of light, folding and enfolding articulations to transfer, spread and merge this light energy

Ghostlight, Workers up, blanketing the ghostlight 01'39

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/649818969/8cccf62559>

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Biographies

Annette Arlander, visiting researcher, University of the Arts Helsinki (Finland), is an artist, researcher, and a pedagogue, one of the pioneers of Finnish performance art and a trailblazer of artistic research. Former professor in performance art and theory at University of the Arts Helsinki, principal investigator of the Academy of Finland funded research project *How to Do Things with Performance* (2016–2020). Professor in performance, art, and theory at Stockholm University of the Arts with the artistic research project *Performing with Plants* (2017–2019). At present she is visiting researcher at Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki with the project *Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees* (2020–2021) and *Pondering with Pines* (2022–2024). Her research interests include artistic research, performance-as-research and the environment. Her artwork moves between the traditions of performance art, video art, and environmental art.

Bruce Barton is a director, playwright, dramaturg, and scholar whose creative practice, practice-based research, and teaching focuses on physical dramaturgies in devised and intermedial performance. His writing on performance has been published in major scholarly and professional journals in Canada and internationally, and he is the author or contributing editor of seven books. He is the Co-Artistic Director of the award-winning Vertical City, an interdisciplinary performance hub preoccupied with exploring the potential of/in/for intimacy in immersive and participatory performance contexts. He is also the Director of the School of Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Calgary, and a co-convenor of the Artistic Research Working Group of Performance Studies international (PSi).

Johanna Householder (professor emerita, OCAD University, Canada), works at the intersection of popular and unpopular culture, making performance art, audio, video, film and choreography. Her interest in how ideas move through bodies has led her often collaborative practice. She has performed across Canada and at international venues for 40 years. One of the founders of the 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art, she co-edited two books with Tanya Mars: *Caught in the Act: An anthology of performance art by Canadian women* (2004), and *More Caught in the Act* (2016). Her current work concerns the vexations of the anthropocene. She has taken refuge in T:karonto on Treaty 13 territory.

Michelle Man is a Senior Lecturer in Dance and has been working at Edge Hill University since 2012. Her teaching practice has spanned over more than a quarter of a century and across a range of professional, institutional, and community contexts in Europe and the UK. She holds an MA in Making Performance and her doctoral research explores *Light and the Choreographic: Dancing with Tungsten*. On graduating from Elmhurst Ballet School in 1989, Michelle pursued her professional career as a dancer, choreographer, pedagogue, and eventually director of her

own company in Spain. Her work has been seen in Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Italy, Korea, and the UK in both theatre and site-sensitive contexts. Michelle fosters interdisciplinary practice, working extensively with architects, composers, designers, musicians, and circus artists, and is a frequent collaborator with the Basque electro-acoustic collective Espacio Sinkro.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

THE PHILOSOMER

ANTHONY GRITTEN ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC (UK)

1. We, here

I begin with three questions about the present moment. First: Why is the philosopher here? Secondly: Where is the philosopher here? Thirdly: How is the philosopher here? It might be immediately asked why the present—*Here you are reading this essay*—should be deployed as a starting gun. My answer is this: perhaps for no other reason than it is Performance Philosophy's big bang, the discursive ground zero from which all questions, concerns, passions, and activities emerge—from a desire to engage not just with the present (to make a difference) but in terms of and as the present (to be part of that difference). This is the ecological condition of Performance Philosophy.

Hang on! You haven't explained the term you've just glibly thrown into the above paragraph: what's a "philosopher"? Before proceeding any further, it feels appropriate to provide a rough and ready definition of the term "philosopher". To wit: a philosopher is the term I use in this essay to characterise the person who undertakes work that we might recognise, or at least, posit loosely, as an example of Performance Philosophy. This latter double-barrelled term is the name for a relatively recent disciplinary adventure that a group of practitioners and scholars have undertaken outside of, or on the margins of, the various scholarly and practical institutional frameworks that existed prior to the second decade of the twenty-first century in the performing arts. As I write this essay, shadowed by Performance Philosophy, the term itself is now pretty much firmly established in the academic firmament, and with a global following.

As I work through this present moment in this essay, my take on the various issues is informed here by the work of Marcel Duchamp. For what it is worth, my own present moment has been, for some time, and pleasurably, distracted by various examples of performing, performance, and performativity that can be said to be Duchampian in one way or another: broadly experimental, and in the most interesting cases, also geared in more or less explicit ways towards the making of ecological interventions into our shared world. *Ok, thanks, useful to know.* That said, of course, the choice of this iconic figure is neither innocent nor arbitrary. Although I write in this essay about Performance Philosophy with a deliberate ear for how its foundations—both historical and conceptual—might be situated with respect to the work of Duchamp, the ideas are not intended to articulate a historical argument. Primarily, my desire is to unpack the phenomenological constitution of the philosopher—of the subject-citizen who does Performance Philosophy—that is, of me—in such a way that this constitution is, on the one hand, congruent with the pre-history of Performance Philosophy (that is to say, with the earlier disciplinary adventures of Performance Studies and the theory explosion, both most explosively debated during the 1950s–1970s), and, on the other hand, turned open towards the future of Performance Philosophy. My focus is on maintaining the latter focus; the pre-history of Performance Philosophy and the search for precursors can wait for another occasion. *Hang on again: why obsess over origins, isn't my activity itself enough? (In any case, I've been a Philosopher all along, you'll see.)*

I return to the three questions listed at the start, but turn here to some logistics, plus some descriptive context for why, where, and how 'here' has come into being. *Here we are, conversing like old friends, this is going to be interesting!* The Performance Philosophy Network has established a book series, and its journal has quickly established itself as a forum for perceptive contributions to international debates. Performance Philosophy has been through at least five different iterations or developmental stages, if the biennial conferences are taken to be events with discursive and institutional force. The narrative linking the conferences began by “staging a field”, moved on to the issue of documenting what Performance Philosophy “can do”, then invoked issues of ethics, ethnography, institutions and intoxication, followed by consideration of how Performance Philosophy “intervenes” in the world. In Helsinki in 2022, the fifth conference focused on how Performance Philosophy “collaborates” to solve “problems”. These iterations of Performance Philosophy are cumulative, rather than oppositional, and one stage does not replace the previous stage. In other words, what has come into being is a prodigious pulsating body of work *Ooh, get you!*, which consists of multiple positions, energies, and (most importantly) people, and multiple interactions, collaborations, and debates, all of which seem to be thriving somewhat chaotically—or at least, in a fascinatingly complex and playful manner. *Great description, I like it, but it's a lot for me to live up to....*

So, a decade on from its founding, it is the right time to take stock and consider the manner of Performance Philosophy's constitution and its projection into and onto the world. These are questions about how it narrates itself, both inwardly to its closest interlocutors (though the global reach of Performance Philosophy suggests that 'inward' is not the right word here) and outwardly towards interlocutors nominally further afield—fellow travellers. One challenge concerns the “material-discursive practices” (Barad 2003, 810) of Performance Philosophy's many practitioners.

This can be unpacked with a few questions: Who witnesses events? Who intervenes materially? Who contributes to Performance Philosophy? Whose collaboration increases social capital? Who evaluates practitioners' self-management? *Why, me, of course, and others like me who are otherwise homeless artistically, drifters of both time and space in search of performance opportunities.* Other questions are possible. This essay considers some of these questions.

With respect to the self-anointed name, Performance Philosophy, I am interested in this essay in the space between the 'e' ending the word Performance and the 'P' beginning the word Philosophy. Whether this space is blank or bustling, an emptiness or a plenitude, is the issue here—indeed, it is the oppositions in this sentence that are the problem, not the desire for e.g. plenitude or the positioning of activity over and against emptiness. Duchamp's position on "breathing" (Cabanne 1971, 69–90), whereby meaninglessness is not emptiness and lack of action is not inaction, is pertinent in several respects. To wit: it inverts the ideology that "we have to work to breathe" (Duchamp quoted in Tomkins 2013, 86); it acknowledges the "entanglement" of "intra-actions" within local rather than distant contexts (Barad 2003, 815); and it is proto-ecological—world first, work second. Performance Philosophy is a singular name, but what interests me is the Duchampian breathiness of its hybridity. *Am I two? How will you show this? Which me is speaking? Whence the work of performing?*

Compared to other cross-disciplinary gestures, the juxtaposition of the two words makes for an attractive, even seductive, phrase: the name deliberately avoids the phrases 'Performance as Philosophy', 'Philosophy as Performance', 'Performance and Philosophy', 'Philosophy and Performance', and many other possible phrases. It is also worth acknowledging that failing to determine the parameters of an action, object, text, or value does not prevent the action, object, or value from working in practical contexts and from being worked through; the terms of a debate are not wholly definitive of what might happen. *Absolutely: I can always turn materials into potentials, and sensations into utterances, just watch!* Discursively, no 'as' colonises the emptiness, no 'and' accumulates surpluses, no hyphen forces syntheses, no 'or' generates friction: what is not intended in the meeting of disciplines is 'Performance as Philosophy', 'Performance and Philosophy', 'Performance-Philosophy' (a less confident hyphenation of the disciplines), or 'Performance or Philosophy' (or any of the reverse possibilities, listing the word Philosophy first).

In short, the co-articulation of the words is deliberately aimed towards the maintenance of a certain perpetual détente. The figural registers of this emptiness can be phrased phenomenologically in terms of the intuitions present to consciousness: no colour is pure, no canvas is blank, no stage is empty, no duration is silent, no clearing lacks shadows, and so on. The emptiness, however, is also a challenge: to colour, to utter, to sound, to interrupt, to inhabit liminal space, to name, to phrase, to set forth, and so on. The challenge is less to provide content than to invest energy, less to analyse than to act—to "perform or else" (McKenzie 2001). Thus we might note the relevance of Duchamp's challenge to all those who would triangulate work in relation to art and thought: "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?" (Duchamp quoted in Sanouillet and Peterson 1973, 74).

Mental note: I need to think about this. I'll just lay this down here as a marker: I'm unsure whether "challenge" is enough to set me in motion as a philosopher, as it seems to be predicated upon notions of difficulty, aspiration, achievement, and success, which, particularly in this neo-liberal environment we share, seem slightly at odds with the kinds of artistic activities of mine that you're asking me about.... I suppose my point concerns maintaining a healthy balance between exploration and extraction in my work, else my ecological relationship with our world be destroyed....

How to respond to this challenge? *Ok, let's leave the word here for now; maybe you'll be able to bracket it later on.* Should the philosopher seek to reflect on their activity in the midst of material intervention, seeking philosophical adjudication, seeking evidence, seeking even distraction while they leap into action? Does the conjunction of Performance and Philosophy require simultaneity and equal weighting? Should new performative or philosophical content be produced, or coherent formal structures for such content: i.e., must the *telos* always be one of production, of, bluntly, perform or else fail? There is a complex relationship between the temporality of action and the events through which the philosopher's energetic investments in worldly materials are embodied. Even if it is believed that there exist adequate working definitions of performance and philosophy (notwithstanding that the act of naming representative examples of Performance Philosophy risks insensitivity to its diversity, one of the very things that it was founded to pursue), it would be a huge task to categorise the kaleidoscopic disciplinary gestures within the multiple examples on offer of Performance Philosophy. *Thank you, that feels as if you're genuinely interested in the multiple lives that I lead.* The various postures, publications, and proposals thus far are consistent, but still mostly tentative, less because of their framing within academic genres like Calls for Papers, and more because Performance Philosophy has sought to define itself without reifying this definition, where this resistance to reification seems to be less a sign of disciplinary youth and more an intentional indication of a range of acceptable behaviours. Performance Philosophy's collective sense that performance and philosophy juxtapose productively—witness the neat orange logo with its interwoven letters, its dimensionality leaping off the page—*Glad you like it!*—is less a given than a horizon requiring redefinition every time Performance Philosophy happens.

So, my concern is with the how the space between performance and philosophy remains dynamic, complex, and multiple: neither their collapse into a single event nor their separate self-determinations either side of a boundary—and, too, no sense of a withdrawal of either party from the attempt to make something of the space in-between. *This is right on the money; what matters is the strange tightrope walked between being flexible and being assertive, especially when, too often, it's hard to say which is which!* It might be asked whether the philosopher is a subject or a temporary function taken on by a subject; whether being a philosopher is a matter of subjectivity or activity, a matter of property or output. *How about: of text or italicised gloss, isn't that the same logic?* This essay assumes that such oppositional thinking, however loosely formulated, runs the risk of over-committing itself to one position on the subjectivity of the philosopher, when all that is needed is the acknowledgement that there is a transformational drift in the philosopher's life after which the disciplines of Performance and Philosophy cannot return to their previous spaces (if it could ever have been properly said that they were fully self-determined). They have become non-fused yet undivided, each one a parasite upon the other, forever the philosopher's undecidable jumping-off

point into what Duchamp termed “a little game between ‘I’ and ‘me’” (Duchamp quoted in Tomkins 1996, 160). *Qua* subject, the philosopher is set in motion by this “little game” of drifting disciplinary undecidability, which, while it is framed by Duchamp somewhat idiosyncratically in terms of canned chance, it behoves us to distinguish from the notion of indeterminacy.

As such, the questions of Why, Where, and How the philosopher is ‘here’ in Performance Philosophy at this present moment are vital questions about persons, subjects, and their worldly interactions with one another. *Damn right: this matters to all of us!* Despite focussing on disciplines and languages in the above paragraphs, I am more concerned in this essay with persons, with what this spacing out implies for the phenomenological constitution of Performance Philosophy’s practitioner. I ask a non-trivial biographical question: who or what is the philosopher?

2. Ghost

In this section I claim that the philosopher is a ghost. *Where’s this going to go, trapped in italicisation?!*

At William Copley’s art show at the Galerie Nina Dausset in Paris in 1953, each of the guests was given a little gift, made up of a small wrapped sweet with an enigmatic pun inscribed on the wrapper. Duchamp had designed the square tin foil wrappers, which were 13.7cm x 13.7cm squares with black print on glossy green paper, and he had arranged to have the following utterance inscribed on each individual wrapper: “A guest + a host = a ghost”. It is believed that the sweets were caramels. Duchamp liked his verbal invention and used the phrase again in 1968 as the only entry on the otherwise entirely white back cover of his *S.M.S.* portfolio design.

This playful utterance exemplifies how relationships can become disturbed, loosened, proliferated, complexified. *Presumably this is an example of Performance Philosophy, yes? It feels vaguely familiar....* Its significance emerges from the way that various energetic investments are blocked together within a single utterance yet differentiated and distinct. For example, the playful use of letters targets visual perception, alongside which the correct syntax and perplexing semantics provide material for cognitive mechanisms. The utterance has a looseness that remains after it has been apprehended by the ears, eyes, and mind; there is an interesting complex of looseness, openness, and vagueness circulating and multiplying through the words and symbols.

A *prima facie* interpretation, then, unpacks the registers attracting attention. The single resultant (‘ghost’) arises as an amalgamation of inputs: the initial consonants of each word in sequence (the ‘g’ of ‘guest’ followed by the ‘h’ of ‘host’), the final two consonants shared by both words (‘st’), and the vowel of one (the retained ‘o’ of ‘host’) used instead of the vowels of the other (the eliminated ‘ue’ of ‘guest’). In a definitional register of meaning behind the amalgamation of letters, the joining of these paired and opposite words (the host who provides hospitality and the guest who receives it) leads to their annihilation in the spectral form of a ghost. In a contextual register of meaning, the phrase’s humour is evident when inscribed on a sweet wrapper, for after the guest has eaten the sweet, the wrapper remains as a ghost, the former (and now empty) covering of an annihilated substance. In a third register of functional meaning, the people were guests at a host’s exhibition,

and they left the show with a ghost generated by the gift of a host followed by receipt and intended usage of a guest. Several more registers of presence and function could be teased apart in Duchamp's utterance (see, for example, Gould 2000). *I agree, especially since you've analysed it above in terms of its philosophical content, with a tacit assumption that this 'content' is what's being performed in the gallery with those attending is somehow 'performed'—but I'll take this on advisement, as I'm sure you could describe this in a more interesting way as Performance Philosophy, perhaps gearing the analysis around an experience co-owned by all present, and (equally) owned by none of those present.*

What is clear from the performativity of Duchamp's utterance is that relationships between events—for me (and for you, too, yes?), between performance and philosophy, and between philosopher and materials—can be indeterminate, fluid, multidimensional, ambiguous, loose, slow, gentle, rough, incomplete, even misleading. There is no such thing as the relationship between performance and philosophy or the relationship between the philosopher and their materials, no fixed definition within a single medium of their interactive dynamics. There is no opposition as such, and their interaction is not a matter of all or nothing (Derrida 1988, 123). What matters more than determinate definitions that ring-fence activity in advance is a certain openness, a certain indeterminacy, a certain undecidability, and a certain trust. Apropos of the Performance Philosophy practitioner, I propose that “A philosopher + a performer = a philosopher.” *Yes! If the cap fits....* I could have combined the two terms in the reverse order and proposed that “A performer + a philosopher = a perfosopher”, but I have simply cut the knot arbitrarily where my ears hear the sound flowing; other grammatical incisions may be possible, other determinations, but the relaxed and almost unmanageable flow of sound in the term ‘Philosopher’ appeals.

Other puns spring to mind in congruent discourses: a fact + a fiction = a faction; tough + taught = thought; an advert + an event = an adventure; prefer + prevent = event; and so on. *Oh, now I get it: how about “comment + tarry = commentary”, that works, too, right?* The energy mobilising the words and multiplying their effects and meanings is tangible, which is the point of invoking Duchamp. Each of these invented proverbs, while perhaps a little flippant, contains a certain kernel of pragmatism—of truth—about the world in which they are uttered. *Well, only really if you say, more specifically, by whom they are uttered and for whom or what they are given to the world.* Thus, events may turn out to be characterised by an unholy mixture of preference and prevention; preference for this rather than that, but also prevention of that or that. And thought is indeed tough and taught; or at least it approximates to this rough and ready juxtaposition of terms, like the rebuses discussed by Lyotard in *Discourse, Figure* (Lyotard 2011, 291–305), and the lengthy catalogue of verbal puns deployed by Duchamp throughout his artistic work.

If it is accepted that the proposal that “A philosopher + a performer = a philosopher” holds some intuitively pragmatic meaning for the practitioners of Performance Philosophy—*Happy to run with it!*—such that in some sense it reflects back at practitioners something of both their identities and their intentions in posing and practising Performance Philosophy, then we could also suggest that the experience of doing Performance Philosophy, an experience which they have in common at some basic phenomenological level (here, phrased in terms of a quasi-mathematical or symbolic intervention into artmaking) could be termed “Philosomance” or “Performosophy” (the latter was

the twitter tag at the Performance Philosophy conference in Chicago in 2015). *No, no, these are definitely too much! In any case, I'm coming around to your point about the graphic-cum-symbolic spacing of Performance and Philosophy, so let's not over-complicate the matter.*

If we are to keep matters relatively simple—*Thanks very much*—we might retain a deep link with Duchamp, in which, according to Thierry De Duve's analysis of his pictorial nominalism, there is a transformation both in how art making is configured (namely, as 'indifferent') and in how artistic performance is managed (namely, as 'performance'). To wit: "it is nowadays considered perfectly legitimate for anyone to be an artist without being a painter, or a writer, a musician, a sculptor, a film maker, and so on. Would modernity have invented *art in general*?" (De Duve 2007, 28). Would the philosopher be practising performance "in general"—setting in motion events that by the very energetic nature seek root in multiples disciplinary and discursive registers? *Would I be doing this? Yes, I think so.*

Performance Philosophy is the philosopher's experience of a porous and "undecidable" (Derrida 1988, 148–149) flow of energy to and fro between performance and philosophy, a "spasm" (Lyotard 1993b, 170) that deterritorializes performance and philosophy alike, that invests energy over a larger number of registers, and that opens up a general space for "art in general". The flow is unregulated because it follows the philosopher's artistic drives, the philosopher's epistemological and epistemic cathexes along what Duchamp calls, neologically, the "infraslim" or "infrathin" (Sanouillet and Peterson 1973, 194) boundaries between performance and philosophy. These infrathin boundaries form "an interval that cannot quite be articulated [...] the haecceity of an experience that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts" (Manning 2017, 99), thereby affording the emergence and coagulation of the independent meanings and subjectivities that characterise the philosopher's interventions. There is something interesting here about the performativity of Performance Philosophy's documentation; one foot in the archive, one foot on stage, always concerned with the problematics of lifting themselves up by their bootstraps (hence the multiple formats on offer at the conferences, ranging from chalk-and-talk to no papers, and injected with new creative possibilities as the Covid world has gone online). *Are you saying I'm having my cake and eating it? I don't think that's fair; it's just a function of how my energies are invested and expended—Performance Philosophy doesn't just happen, you know!*

Changing personal patterns in this flow of energy can be discerned now and then. Sometimes these are delicate and gentle. Often these afford a pragmatics for the individual philosopher, a means of working through the flow and self-management at disciplinary boundaries, where energetic investments are pulled in different directions. This pragmatics is my focus in the next section. *Great, precisely what I need when I can't see the way ahead!*

3. Sophist

In this section I claim that the philosopher is a sophist, in addition to being a ghost.

I start by comparing Performance Philosophy with reflective judgement. Comparing Performance Philosophy with reflective judgement—a *disciplinary child to its grandmother? I recall studying something like this before I became a philosopher*—might seem counterintuitive, given the opposition between sophistry and philosophy. However, as a practice, reflective judgement seems to model the challenge of suppositionless listening and unforced dialogue characteristic of Performance Philosophy. Moreover, it affords a “soft power” approach to what performance does *qua* philosophical content, parallel to the “collapse of long-term thinking, planning and acting, and the disappearance or weakening of social structures in which thinking, planning and acting could be inscribed for a long time to come” (Bauman 2007, 3).

That's perhaps putting it quite negatively, but I guess one could argue that Performance Philosophy emerged out of a particular historical moment in relation to the history of Global Performance and the activities jostling together under the umbrella of Performance Studies. Notwithstanding the pioneering work of, say, Richard Schechner in the 1960s and 70s, different genealogies should account for Performance Philosophy outside of the developed West and outside of funded academia. And, of course, long before his renaissance in the 1960s and 70s, Duchamp himself (the primary driver of your constitution of Performance Philosophy) was plugged into numerous different discursive networks. I apologise for this lengthy retort, but it's important to situate Performance Philosophy not just with respect to its ecological intentions but also in relation to its global and historical roots. Who knows, one day, maybe one day your article will have a certain archival value as one such genealogical sketch.

Not all interventions need to be loud, noisy, deep, and threatening in order to be provocative, persuasive, and full of potential, and in this respect Duchamp provides plenty of examples in which the big reveal is deliberately undermined, and in which the very notions of engagement and participation are critically examined within the very art practice itself. *That's a big relief! Sometimes I feel as if there's a weight upon my shoulders, with Performance Philosophy still being relatively new and epistemological and political matters still pretty much open to debate each time I share a platform with another philosopher.* Performance Philosophy's watchword is nuance, the nuance that remains after answers have been given, that chips away at certainties, that reminds the subject of their embodied energetically invested presence in the event, that continues questioning long into the night after a performance has ended.

Let me briefly recall the classical Kantian position on reflective judgement, namely that “if only the particular be given and judgement has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely *reflective*” (Kant 1987, 18–19); the task of judgement is to “find” the universal and thereby clarify, determine, and subsume the action under the relevant concept. The phenomenological reduction of the philosopher's constitution, however, brackets this kind of reflective judgement with two manoeuvres, both of which seek to avoid over-determining concepts and to avoid engaging in too retrospective an approach to action or too power-driven an approach to the world.

First manoeuvre. Performance Philosophy resists syntheses and concept production, desiring rather to produce affects and effects upon its environment and participants. *Absolutely—no doubt about it, the telos in all my work is to share something with other people and to explore the nature of human embodiment together.* Its assemblages are grounded in the energetic investments of the philosopher's body, and the emptiness between the 'e' ending Performance and the 'P' beginning Philosophy is therefore seductive and contagious, rather than deterministic and polarising. It operates a different "technology of the self". *Don't forget the sheer volume of energy that's expended becoming a philosopher, becoming hybrid, and sustaining a practice of Performance Philosophy.* While "felicity" (Austin 1962, 14) has long been acknowledged as the criterion for evaluating performative utterances, this means that Performance Philosophy involves a generalised loosening of the machinery of reflective judgement, a proliferation of materials, and a variety of delays in discursive entanglement while the philosopher's energetic investments in events and objects disseminate around the world; Duchamp's term for this phenomenon is "blossoming" (Sanouillet and Peterson 1973, 38–44). There is no becoming-propositional for the philosopher; they are focussed upon becoming-world. *How do words, even (or especially) italicised words, matter?* In this sense, Performance Philosophy is more complex than the cross-disciplinary complexifying of discourse, more interesting than yet another "turn" in the humanities (sometimes signalling a failure to match up to the impossible social demands of STEM subjects); but it is also simpler, for the simple reason that the philosopher takes material pleasure in being embodied on the boundary between performance and philosophy. *I think it's worth saying that there's no shame in hybridity, no shame in occupying several artistic, discursive, and institutional spaces and having to vary the ways in which competence and expertise, however minimal, are demonstrated performatively; don't forget that the word "career" is also a verb!*

Second manoeuvre. Configuring being-in-the-world as a search for criteria through which activity can be assessed remains an "extractionist" configuration of material engagement. Positioning itself in relation to the object to be judged and over and against empty conceptual space, reflective judgement is a colonial response to the emptiness between the 'e' ending Performance and the 'P' beginning Philosophy—as if it is waiting to be filled with content. In contrast, the philosopher's position on "positioning" the subject is precisely that the notion of positioning itself requires mobilisation, Performance Philosophy being nothing if not enactive.

This bracketing of reflective judgement has consequences. Within what Zygmunt Bauman (2007) calls "liquid modernity," reflective judgement is overwritten by the sophisticated discourse of retortion—logic, rhetoric, and judgement become performative. Retortion operates through a flow of sense impressions and energetic investments. It is a mode of "autopoiesis" and "self-affirmation" (Guattari 1989, 10) and feels like experimentation: "A culture, while it is being lived, is always in part unknown, in part unrealised. The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience" (Williams 1958, 320). *Indeed so, this feels right to me; remember Duchamp's example, drawing together tact and wonder in an explosion of multi-sensory micro-events?* Retortion enables the philosopher to attend to the drift between labour and event, to inflect micro-events, to gather together the sensuousness of world-inhabiting activity and bind it into sensations and eventually into gestures,

thereby binding themselves to their material commitments, generating the basis for meaningful social interventions, and creating temporary bridges between events and subjects. Hence the importance of ideas of simulation, affordance, and emergence, which link being-in-the-world to acting upon that same world. *Now we're getting somewhere, I feel as if this description's thickness is becoming a bit more rewarding.*

4. Materialist

In this section I claim that the philosopher is a materialist, in addition to being a ghost and a sophist.

What does the philosopher worry about? Might they feel that retortion happens too quickly or slowly? Might they feel their desire to invest energy distracted by the thought that “what is threatening in the work of thinking (or writing) is not that it remains episodic but that it pretends to be complete” (Lyotard 1988, 6)? Might they feel that the very energy of self-reflective embodiment is as valuable as its materials and products, indeed sometimes more pleasurable than the process of documenting activities, which sometimes becomes an end in itself? *Sorry to interrupt your train of thought, but you could consider fiction for alternative ways of working through these issues; here's one example of such wisdom: “At some point in life the world's beauty becomes enough. You don't need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough. No record of it needs to be kept and you don't need someone to share it with or tell it to” (Morrison 1981, 208).* Might they feel that retortion emphasises their vulnerability and exposure, that it “dismantles consciousness” (Lyotard 1991, 90)? Might the very notion of an appropriate time for retortion be the problem?

These questions are worries about the body's predicament, namely that retortion uses it as a prosthetic apparatus for inhabiting the world. After all, while it is true that intention can be bracketed out so that the philosopher can focus on the emptiness *qua* emptiness between the ‘e’ ending Performance and the ‘P’ beginning Philosophy, and on investing energy in actions that preserve this emptiness (rather than always seeking to match *noesis* to *noema*); and while it is true that Performance Philosophy's hybridity is not just between performance and philosophy, but also between stage and green room, it is also true that the philosopher's concern is less to disown or destroy intentions than to complexify and disperse them—working through the very desire for complexification and dispersal, thinking through what it feels like to be embodied. *I certainly have to think about my body, but I don't think it's a question of worrying about it, really.* Hence Duchamp's idiosyncratic take on chance (which, along with the ‘machine’, is perhaps the most essential component of his aesthetics): “So the duty of chance is to express what is unique and indeterminate about us beyond the rational” (Duchamp quoted in Tomkins 2013, 53).

However, given that retortions are open to “modes of individuation beyond those of things, persons or subjects” (Deleuze 1992, 26), modes of loss like desubjectivisation are likely consequences of energetic investment: not only will the philosopher not be the same philosopher afterwards; they will not even be themselves. Desubjectivisation is significant, forceful, and transformative: As Jean-Luc Nancy notes, “we have to understand what sounds from a human throat without being language, which emerges from an animal gullet or from any kind of

instrument, even from the wind in the branches: the rustling toward which we strain or lend an ear" (Nancy 2007, 22). *Do you intend this to be read as a gesture towards the ecological grounding of Performance Philosophy, towards an awareness that its activities are—must be—formed not just from within my body but with an explicit awareness of where my body is situated within the world?*

This uncertainty about the material future of the world—*Can you be more precise, please: what you mean is the very environment within which my Performance Philosophy intervenes?*—might induce some anxiety, but it also has a predominantly positive register: "To understand, to be intelligent, is not our overriding passion, we hope rather to be set in motion" (Lyotard 1993a, 51). Coursing along the boundary between the actual and the virtual (Masumi 1996, 236), Performance Philosophy involves acknowledging that something may not happen, that uncertainty is itself uncertain, and that moments of intensity or meaning coagulating around material may emerge and disperse in the absence of clamour: "agency is the (differentially distributed) capacity to make a difference in the world without knowing quite what you are doing" (Bennett 2001, 155).

Simply working harder, then, is not in itself a solution for the philosopher and their "differentially distributed agency". Duchamp's position is more sanguine, drifting closer to the Refusal of Work movement and interrogating the relationship between productivity and art (Lazzarato 2014). There is a role for mess in Performance Philosophy—*Definitely, just watch me work!*—or at least, there is a space in which mess can remain messy (muddled, semi-ordered, partly chaotic, indeterminately juxtaposed), both materially and discursively, without there being an overriding need to force ordering upon it and thereby take over the activity and subsume it into one or other regime of production. *Qua* speech act, Performance Philosophy should be understood in terms of a different kind of relationship between mess and order, governed, as Jacques Derrida argues, by a quasi-transcendental "iterability", which is "at once the condition and the limit of mastery: it broaches and breaches it. And this cannot be devoid of consequences for the concepts of 'application', of 'rules', of 'performance', etc." (Derrida 1988, 107). Hence the priority given in Performance Philosophy to questioning the world rather than answering it back, given to exploration rather than extraction: Why is the philosopher here? Where is the philosopher here? How is the philosopher here? *Your questions seem less risky and less arrogant than your answers (we're growing closer to each other as your essay goes on...).*

The phenomenological reduction from reflective judgement to retortion and from retortion to energetic investment is congruent with the refusal of work. At the core of retortion is an openness to the event. This has been described variously as a "poetical" attitude (Retallack 2004), "sensitivity to singular cases" (Lyotard 1988, 8, 27–28), "anima minima" (Lyotard 1997, 235–249), "ethics without principles" (Caputo 2003), and so on. Subjects, that is, "are now expected to be 'free choosers' and to bear in full the consequences of their choices" (Bauman 2007, 3–4). Being open to the event means that retortion is inefficient and cannot save time. Indeed, being a sophist and a materialist literally takes time: it requires working through the materiality of the event, exhibiting patience, turning away from speed's incessant drive forward no matter what, and acknowledging that events may be "delayed"—"delay" functioning for Duchamp as a way of naming, or at least placing and apprehending, the results of art making (Sanouillet and Peterson 1973, 26). Performance

Philosophy cannot be measured in terms of the time it takes to prepare, create, or document, and its search for a mode of being is not a matter of watching the clock, limiting linkages between ideas to those satisfying Occam's Razor, working backwards from solutions to materials and "tracking the truth" (Nozick 1981, 172–178). Rather than forcing events to signify, the philosopher is "open to the 'it happens that' rather than the 'What happens'," and this "requires at the very least a high degree of refinement in the perception of small differences" (Lyotard 1988, 18).

It also requires a certain slowness, a lack of concern for speed and fast transactions between disciplines, between materials, between people. Performance Philosophy, insofar as it puts itself forward as an *ars vitae*, a way of living, is guided by the Owl of Minerva, a philosophical figure in which no event need emerge and be maintained at anything other than the right time and tempo, *kairos*. *What matters is the performance, still, after all; you want to say this, don't you?* This slowness is only a step away from the refusal of work movement, from gestures of quiet quitting, and it has its roots in Duchamp's pragmatism (Tomkins 2013, 44–45). But it comes with a certain optimism (which is not the same as optimistic certainty) about the value of engaging in Performance Philosophy; Duchamp called it "affirmative irony" (Molderings 2010, 128–129). As James Loxley concludes his discussion of Judith Butler's approach to the "political drama of domination and resistance", useful resistance "will need to be accompanied by a working out of questions of right and value, and this will be precisely a process of attending to norms of some kind" (Loxley 2007, 137). There is, in a sense, all to play for in Performance Philosophy, and the "working out of questions" is a central component of the activity.

I can now describe a little bit more of how the philosopher "resists" the onward march of capital and retains the emptiness between the 'e' ending Performance and the 'P' beginning Philosophy (rather than filling it with content). By investing energy in materials they disperse the ability to define what they are doing and to decide that they are done, their energetic investment working more like a palimpsest than a *tabula rasa*, with materials and investments co-present in a giant, messy collage of micro-events, many ill-formed and un-formed, many failing to remain beyond a limited moment; multiple determinations of human activity, but not necessarily indeterminate. Resisting transparency, accountability, audit, relevance, knowledge transfer, and impact, all of which are designed to increase productivity per unit time, the philosopher's retortions do not scurry on towards their conclusions (which is not to say that they lack conclusions). Not only is there no need to scurry on but there is no benefit in doing so, even in thinking that one might consider scurrying on; on the contrary, the world contains many more "possibilities" than scurrying on can hope to entertain, and it is more complex than such a self-aggrandising ideology: "The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which 'mattering' itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities" (Barad 2003, 817).

Not rushing to posit a community of assenting subjects, the philosopher lingers with events, problematises their materials, and allows materials to do their thing. Failing or forgetting to allow materials to "matter" would be to succumb to "haste", which Jean-François Lyotard criticises as follows: "What it hurries, and crushes, is what after the fact I find I have always tried, under diverse headings—work, figural, heterogeneity, dissensus, event, thing—to reserve: the unharmonizable"

(Lyotard 1991, 4). They seek, somewhat playfully, to distract everybody away from the process of reifying events into mere facts, and possibilities into mere affirmations. There is a certain languor. *And a warmth, perhaps?* Embracing the impermanence and of the event, they seek to breathe like Duchamp, no more, no less, thereby embracing “the aesthetic moment: a sigh, the provisional suspension of the principle of efficiency” (Lyotard 1997, 58). *Mmmm, interesting...*

5. You, when?

Biographies of living people are incomplete, and this is true of my loose and rather sketchy phenomenological reduction of the philosopher’s constitution. Nevertheless, I could conclude with the far-reaching claim that the philosopher described above is the archetypal liquid citizen, in the sense that their radical Duchampian individuality (Molderings 2010, 133–144) bears sombre comparison with, *inter alia*, the liminality of the refugee (forever forced into performing somebody else’s dance), the difficulty of saying “we” in the global context, and the importance of “improvisation and experimentation” (Bauman 2007, 87, 95). Such characteristics of liquid life are both maintained by and resisted by the philosopher. *Such a claim is not all that radical, really, despite some of your rhetoric earlier in your essay, though I agree that the pointed end of your argument is all too sharp here.* This claim would represent no specific advance in securing the epistemological foundations of Performance and Philosophy—if anything, the opposite. What such a claim about the philosopher does acknowledge, though, more honestly, is that disciplinary multiplicity is at the heart of the academy, regardless of the numerous exclusionary actions that have constituted the histories of ‘separate’ disciplines. *I interrupted you at the beginning and I’ll interrupt you again now: I’ve been a philosopher all along, long before your concern with discursive and disciplinary drift came to clarify what I already knew in my body.* In this respect, Performance Philosophy’s example is exemplary, for it does nothing in its activities, discussions, and interventions if not include, embrace—and therefore inspire and enhance—all those in its fluidly shifting disciplinary vicinity.

Given the quasi-biographical title of this essay, ‘The Philosopher’, which might be read as requiring a sense of the core values in question, it would be remiss of me to end this essay without providing a manifesto. *That’s a good idea, let’s see it please.* So, I end by proposing four imperatives that might be taken as governing Performance Philosophy and the work of the philosopher. These are positive without really being provocative, and they are not intended to lay down the gauntlet to aspiring philosophers—to them it ought to be clear: *You must find your own way.*

- (1) The emptiness between the ‘e’ ending Performance and the ‘P’ beginning Philosophy must not be forced into over-determining the colour, shape, volume, and intensity of projects and outputs: *Embrace openness!*
- (2) The philosopher must invest in events that maintain a flexible co-articulation of performance and philosophy: *Remain loose!*
- (3) The energy invested in events must be allowed to disseminate, disperse, and die out according to its own temporality: *Let energy blossom!*

(4) The ghostly, sophisticated, and materialistic relationships between terms, disciplines, philosophers, spaces, postures, and utterances must emerge affectionately, following the flows of energies: *Be gentle!*

In this manner, the philosopher's energetic investments, actions, hesitations, and mistakes will be pragmatic and productive—not necessarily of work, but of life.

Although the above paragraph puts its head above the battlements with some characteristics of what Performance Philosophy is or should be, I would rather end with something more celebratory, something more like a toast to Performance Philosophy's many voices. *Me too* Not with a pat conclusion like, for example, *We are all philosophers now*, after which the celebration will be short-lived, while everybody is assimilated to the category of 'philosopher'. *I agree; I'd strongly resist that gesture*. Instead, how about something looser, more open-ended, vaguer, and challenging, where the emphasis remains on what is yet to come, perhaps: *Here's to the philosopher!*

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

POETICS OF FRICTION

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Note for the reader: This interactive work can be navigated in multiple ways, in resonance with the proposition of friction as a mode of engagement with words and images. The use of diverse methods and styles is intentional, and seeks to create space for open-ended thinking from which multiple meanings arise. We recommend you move back and forth between passages, excerpts and video clips.

You can also view the online version, where the sections are shuffled in a new order each time you view the page: <https://performancephilosophy.org/journal/article/view/441/556>

Chapter 0: Intro to a Poetics of Friction

How can current problems in our lifeworld, such as climate change, poverty, and phobias, be addressed, worked on, or even be solved? What are the possibilities and difficulties of performance philosophy to contribute to reflections on the crisis-ridden, everyday situations we find ourselves in, through our embodied existences, and with our thoughts, fears, hopes (and even prayers), both inside and outside art and academia? Called by these questions, our contribution collaboratively explores corresponding responses within a *poetics of friction*. The three contributors—a multimedia artist, a cultural theorist, and a philosopher—perform with their spoken words, screened images and handout materials to participating audience members at the Performance Philosophy conference and the readers of this contribution.

Just as the wheel needs the concrete surface against its rubber to spin in movement, or the piece of wood needs the wooden stick rotating against its bark to spark a flame, we—the performance philosophers—need frictions. These frictions enable the philosophy of performance, performance-as-philosophy, and philosophy-as-performance, to rub off against each other, to move, spin, carry on, reflect, struggle, doubt, aim, and spark flames of inspiration. This is attempted from our being-correlated or, as the case may be, being-situated-dialogically with others. In-between, a poetics of friction is rehearsed, acted out, and tried out in a setting where forces come into play that resist relative motions of solid approaches and beliefs sliding against each other. Creative and critical ways of collaborating develop that are informed by the friction of our existence.

While the sources of such an inspiration are manifold, four of them come into movement and display during the rehearsal, the performance, as follows: (1) reflection, (2) excavation, (3) meaning, and (4) sense.

Chapter 1: Reflections I

What is friction? The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2024) locates it in medical treatment, as the action of rubbing the body, for example, especially the limbs, or as in a cold bath, “with friction and little exercise” (*OED* ‘friction’, sense 1.a). Other locations can be found in hairdressing, “as a massage movement in which the fingers press and rub the scalp surface, imparting their effect in depth,” which is “very popular in the gentleman’s saloon, where they may be considered as invigorating and beneficial in that they tone up the debilitated scalp” (*OED* ‘friction’, sense 1.b). Generally speaking, it’s the rubbing of one body against another; *attrition*, “as the rocks below that are worn many feet deep by the constant friction of the water” (*OED* ‘friction’, sense 2).

Chapter 2: Excavations I

Double movement

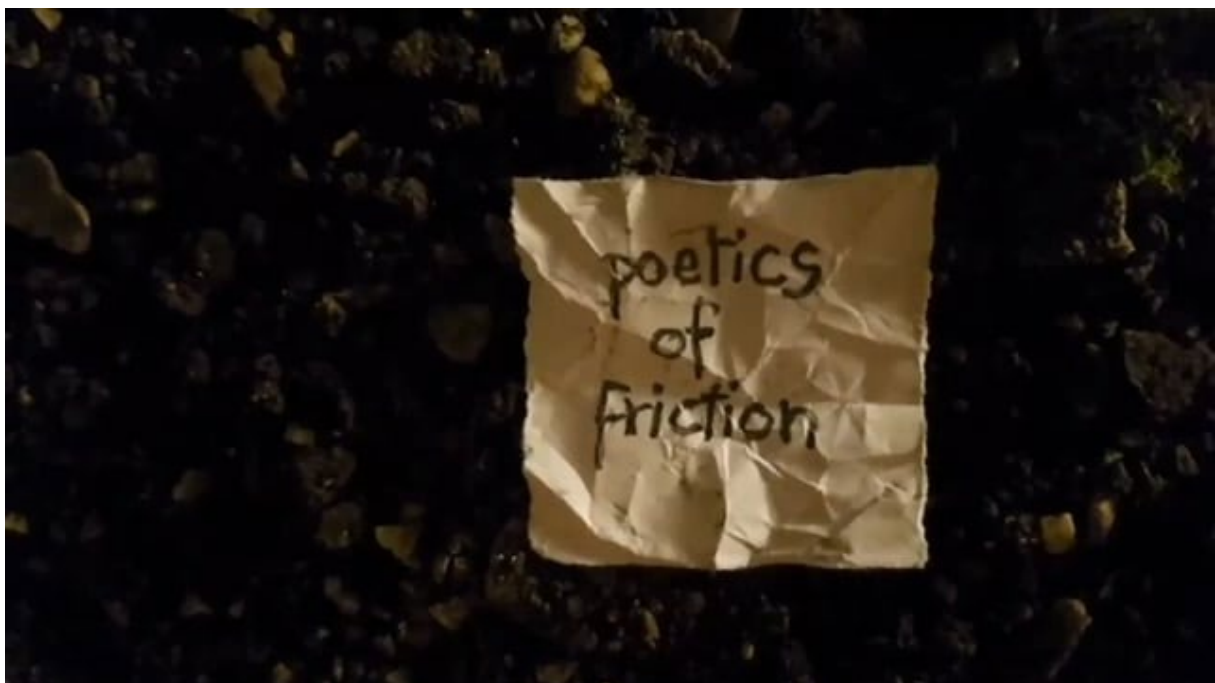
There are multiple similarities between walking and thinking. Whether our journey is mobile or motionless, we can in both cases follow pre-defined paths, get off the beaten track, go around in circles, encounter rough terrains as well as favourable grounds, face a dead end, have a goal, or stroll haphazardly.

Distinctions between thinking and walking become inextricable when they work concomitantly. They feed each other: the movements of our body combined with the perception of our physical environment affect our reflection (enhancing or disrupting our thoughts), whereas the walk we make is colored by our preoccupations as we start moving.

Going underground—a vertical study

This contribution to the project “Poetics of Friction” intends to explore this double movement: from the inside to the outside and the other way around. The three-part video *Excavations* takes the spectator on an underground journey, from the subjective point of view of speleologists.

The idea of exploring the subsoil found its origin after a visit of the Slovenian Škocjan caves. While walking through a maze of vast cavities, a sensation of mise-en-abîme came up, until it became clear that every step in that cave was also a progress in one’s own body. Disrupted scale, uncanny sensation of exploring the inner architecture.



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/819807004>



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/819807045>

SUBJECTIVITY HERE, ART THERE.
ALL THINGS TIDILY IN PLACE.
POSTMODERNISM IS MESSY.
SCIENCE HERE, OBJECTIVITY THERE.

ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) can be triggered by animals, humans and machines. When ASMR is effected by machines—such as a vacuum-robot—it works not only not only *for* humans, rendering their lives more effective, but it also works *on* human's neurotransmitters (cf. Richard 2016). It can provide a special benefit to something as delicate as their sense of relaxation, but also makes them uncomfortable independently of the machine's original utility.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center (2022) defines ASMR as “a term used to describe a tingling, static-like, or goosebumps sensation in response to specific triggering audio or visual stimuli. These sensations are said to spread across the skull or down the back of the neck and, for some, down the spine or limbs.” The effect is a kind of involuntary reaction to a machine's sounds by a person experiencing ASMR, caused by “activating the brain regions and releasing neurochemicals normally associated with affiliative behaviors” (Lochte et al. 2018). A set of sensations triggered by frictions of many kinds, ASMR does not work on everyone in the same

ways. Rather, it depends on the individual whether they experience ASMR-typical effects if they are confronted with audio and/or visual expressions, such as:

- Talking softly or moving slowly
- Tapping or typing
- Close personal attention or eye contact
- Massage, hair brushing or hair cuts
- Humming or chewing
- Light patterns
- Slowly turning a page or folding paper
- Scratching, crisp or squishing sounds
- Squishing or crunching sounds
- Applying makeup to the face.

(University of Nebraska Medical Center 2022)

For many—fellow felines and humans alike—a cat’s purring constitutes ASMR. This invasive “work” on other’s brains and bodies has an involuntary effect that cannot be withdrawn from through will. This suggests that the bounded whole of humans is an illusion, that the category of ‘human’ actually includes non-human parts such as animals and machines (cf. Morton 2019). Descartes “denied animals any conscious life and made them into mere machines” (Cassirer 1957, 63). Consciousness is identical to pure reason for Descartes, it is “the act by which the ego apprehends and constitutes itself as a thinking being. Without this fundamental act of pure reason there can be no act of sensation, perception, or representation” (Cassirer 1957, 63). According to the rational thought ingrained in the Cartesian thesis, the “clear and distinct idea” is the only “valid criterion for all postulation of existence” (Cassirer 1957, 63). By contrast, in the “earliest stages of consciousness” the world is “experienced as a chaos” of frictional “sensations”, but those sensational distinct qualities such as “light or dark, warm or cold” cannot be perceived (Cassirer 1957, 64). Rather the earliest “experiences of pure expression are not of a mediated but of an original character” close “to the phenomena of the animal consciousness” (Cassirer 1957, 65).

The neo-Cartesian version of evaluating human intelligence—i.e. the “non-embodied version of intelligence”—views the human not as opposed to the technological. Rather, it proposes the view that the “human has always been technological and thus “treats the human body [...] as the replaceable substrate of a formal system” (Caputo 2018, 256–257). The transhumanistic delusion of uploading a human consciousness to a machine and expecting it to become the same existence can only be viewed as a rejection of the significance of embodied experience (cf. Loh 2018).

The “embodied version of intelligence”, in contrast, is “materialist and biological and organizes how much of being-human is non-formalizable and non-programmable. It is much more hermeneutics-friendly, which is why Jacques Derrida wrote a book on the animals that we all are” (Caputo 2018, 257). Derrida’s cat explores the animal-human divide, finding that the divide is not between animal and human, but between the human-animal and the animal. It is merely a gradual divide on a “continuum of analogous behaviours” (Caputo 2018, 257). “Human exceptionalism” is not all that

exceptional after all (Caputo 2018, 257). Cats are there with us as part of our ‘companion species’ (cf. Haraway 2016), “they have faces, they look at us” (Caputo 2018, 257), and they are gathering with us if a new structure is erected on their ‘turf’. They are sitting around it, observing it curiously but cautiously. The cats in the video are devouring the sinuous line, tracing the curves with their movement in a tidy fashion from both sides; the nourishment of animals works in line with the curve. The sinuous line is Cassirer’s metaphor for different modes of perception and interpretation—mythic, religious, linguistic, artistic, scientific. What does the line signify for the cats: play, hunt, being treated? Does the vac-bot’s drawing of a sinuous line suggest its capability of interpretation or is it the mimicry of the cat’s capability?

The anthropomorphizing of machines suggests that they interpret and produce art that would be comparable in all aspects to human-made art; this became underwhelming to most people as early as in the 1960s. The vacuum robot as an actor is performing in a way that is supposed to chisel the viewer: that it is making sense, repeatedly and thoughtfully, changing meanings by disclosing and concealing words seemingly at its own will. However, the viewer is not fooled by this charade today just as they were not fooled in prior decades when cybernetic art attempted to do the same for a brief moment, until everybody got bored, because it is not about creating a radical alterity but about simulation and the power of suggestion, about a sleight-of-hand magic.

Here, the vac-bot constitutes a technique of suggestion, repeating the artist’s technique of choice proven in ancient times: the artist’s machines created visual, tonal and linguistic effects. As long as these were deemed impressive and artistic, they were thought to be on the right track (cf. Rauterberg 2021, 30).

Chapter 4: Reflections II

Further possibilities of *friction* can be found in physics and mechanics, as “the resistance which any body meets with in moving over another body: Polished substances have less friction than rough ones” (*OED* ‘friction’, sense 3). In design friction points to the users’ experience within a digital interface that interrupts their journey and slows their progress; this is in opposition to *frictionless* design that optimizes the users’ experience as quickly and as seamlessly as possible, following the supposedly best practice possible: “Do not make me think!” Friction also has a figurative dimension, especially of the jarring or conflict of unlike opinions or temperaments. An example can be found in Henry James’ novel *Roderick Hudson*: “He felt the friction of existence more than was suspected” (James 1876, 15).

Chapter 5: Excavations II



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/819807076>

Terra incognita

We manage to explore territories that are light years away, but we are unable to dig a few hundred meters down below. We are capable of dissecting every object of our environment, although our most intimate thoughts stay out of reach. Our unconscious remains as inaccessible as the Earth's core: the terra incognita we live on, and the mysterious material we are made of, resist.

A search in the dark: in the video *Excavations*—as well as in the Škocjan's caves—the surroundings are plunged into darkness. The headlight allows the viewer to see only a restricted part of the spaces (glimpses which they can't control), whereas most of the walls remain in a deep shade.

Clawing fingernails

Get your hands dirty, scratch your skin against the walls. Starve for air. Put yourself in danger in order to stimulate your potential. Arouse the problem.

Excavations is a do-it-yourself archaeology, put together from a simple desk; a journey towards the centre of the earth and the inner body. The trembling picture betrays the anxiety of the explorer; their search is frenetic, like in apnea, as if the air was going to miss. The viewers are witnessing their quest to find a way out – or maybe in.

Chapter 6: Hermeneutics II

**'Strong thought' is planted in the mind by
Metaphysics, God, Pure Reason.**

'Weak thought' means no timeless meanings.

**We do not DISCOVER the WORLD
through interpretation, we CREATE it
through DESCRIPTION with WORDS.** (cf. Caputo 2018)

The hermeneutics of the poetics of friction

How can we bring together the intentional interpretability of performance art and the philosophical need for clarity of an argument in performance philosophy? Problems with doing are, it is true, often the source of desirable reflexivity, creativity and new thought. Since we are living in a high-time of post-truth, when 'truth' is often held to be a substantially subjective everlasting category thought of as being able to conquer, conserve, and defend against everything including reason and solidarity—and therefore it is viewed at the same time to be subject to relativism—it seems more than risky to perform thought ambiguously. What if my performance philosophy argument is not legible in the larger context of public discourse due to means and media that favour not only non-academic, but also non- linguistic modes of perceiving and understanding, such as artistic or mythic ones? Can we afford to be misunderstood? Poststructuralism has always favoured 'weak thought', because "the interpretative quality of being is not relativism, but our very chance at remaking our world in better ways" (Zimmermann 2015, 140). Productive friction only works if both needs—artistic and academic—are met. Meaning is frictional. Friction scratches the surface of meanings, displaces some meanings in favour of others, renders meanings void or significant.

In the body politic, on the distal side of the continuum of liberal-minded poststructuralist thought, can those located there afford to be understood? Can 'we' afford not to understand—in the sense of reading and seeing through 'them' as a vantage point for an act of resistance? Mind you, not in order to arrive at a "fusion of [interpretive] horizons", as Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013, 350) puts it. That would mean that 'we' are discursively integrating 'them' in a hermeneutic circle, i.e. in a continuous spiral, thereby normalizing 'strong thought'. Merely the vac-bot can afford going in hermeneutic circles, a movement between parts and whole, waltzing along to the music. The spiral or circle is never just one thing: the vac-bot's spiral is also a metaphor for the ideal learning process: revisiting what it knows and going in a new direction, adjusting its knowledge, repeating.

Terry Eagleton (2015) interprets and criticizes the formalist construction of poetics as pointing beyond the immediate context, referring to some deeper truth. But poetics is about principles. Exploring the principles of friction, one finds that it generates all energy, division, progress, destruction. Those are the creative elements that are part of a phenomenon that is not (necessarily) a process of art, the phenomenon of friction.



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/819807113>

Chapter 7: A Game

The Odd One Out - "Who do you think is the odd one out?"

Welcome to this game! Please, join in!

Playing along according to the rules is important if you want to play in the first place. Less rules does not equal more game, but it equals no game at all. Even more generally, we have no choice other than to interpret the signs we are presented with in life as in art (cf. Caputo 2018). The selection of images is a presupposition of the creator's own categories of understanding and interpretation that we accept, because we are no spoilsports, we are good sports—we play along.

Take a look at the first frame of images: Which/who do you think is the odd one out?

1



2



3



4



What caught your attention? The “obvious” CELEBRITY? But then again, RED LIPS always send a signal that demands to be interpreted. Is HAIR still even notable? How about that, if combined with questions of ‘ETHNICITY’ or ‘RACE’? Now intersectional: Is GENDER on your mind, or does it pale by comparison when the expectation of CIS-GENDER is challenged by your perception?

Who did you interpret to be the “odd one out”? Did you solve the riddles or did you understand the game? Have you found the right and true answer yet? Every attempt at understanding, e.g. presenting a frame of images, is already an act of interpretation. What were your categories? What was your choice of categories informed by? Knowledge, habit, experience, the neighbour’s opinion, pre-judgements, stereotypes? The competition of categories and the competing systems they are informed by necessarily exist in a relationship of meaningful friction.

Race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and sexuality in intersectional intertwining can make for conflicting interpretations, understandings, and perspective in a ‘queer postcolonial hermeneutics’ a term which was used by scholar Sara Salih (2007) in connection to her recounting the reactions to a clashing of anti-queer versus colonial attitudes in the infamous ‘Jamaican dance-hall DJs case’ of 2004. Some Jamaican DJs employed anti-gay lyrics in their songs, and were criticized by local and Western LGBTQI+ organizations to incite physical violence against Black gay men. As a result, the UK, USA and Canada turned away from their borders some Jamaican DJs, and surveilled others, which was criticized by those defending the DJs as “Western interventionism” and neo-colonialism (Salih 2007, 1). The reactions display a rhizomatic net of heteronormative discrimination and oppression as well as colonial racism. Salih articulates this as homosexual panic (Salih 2007, 1; cf. Harper et al., 1); she argues that inciting violence against queer people, as perpetrated by the Jamaican DJs in this case, is wrong; but so is “border panic” (Salih 2007, 1), the nationalist-racist discrimination of former colonizer’s states (here: UK, USA, Canada) who reject their former colonial subjects from their borders, in this case due to the applicants’ anti-queer attitudes.

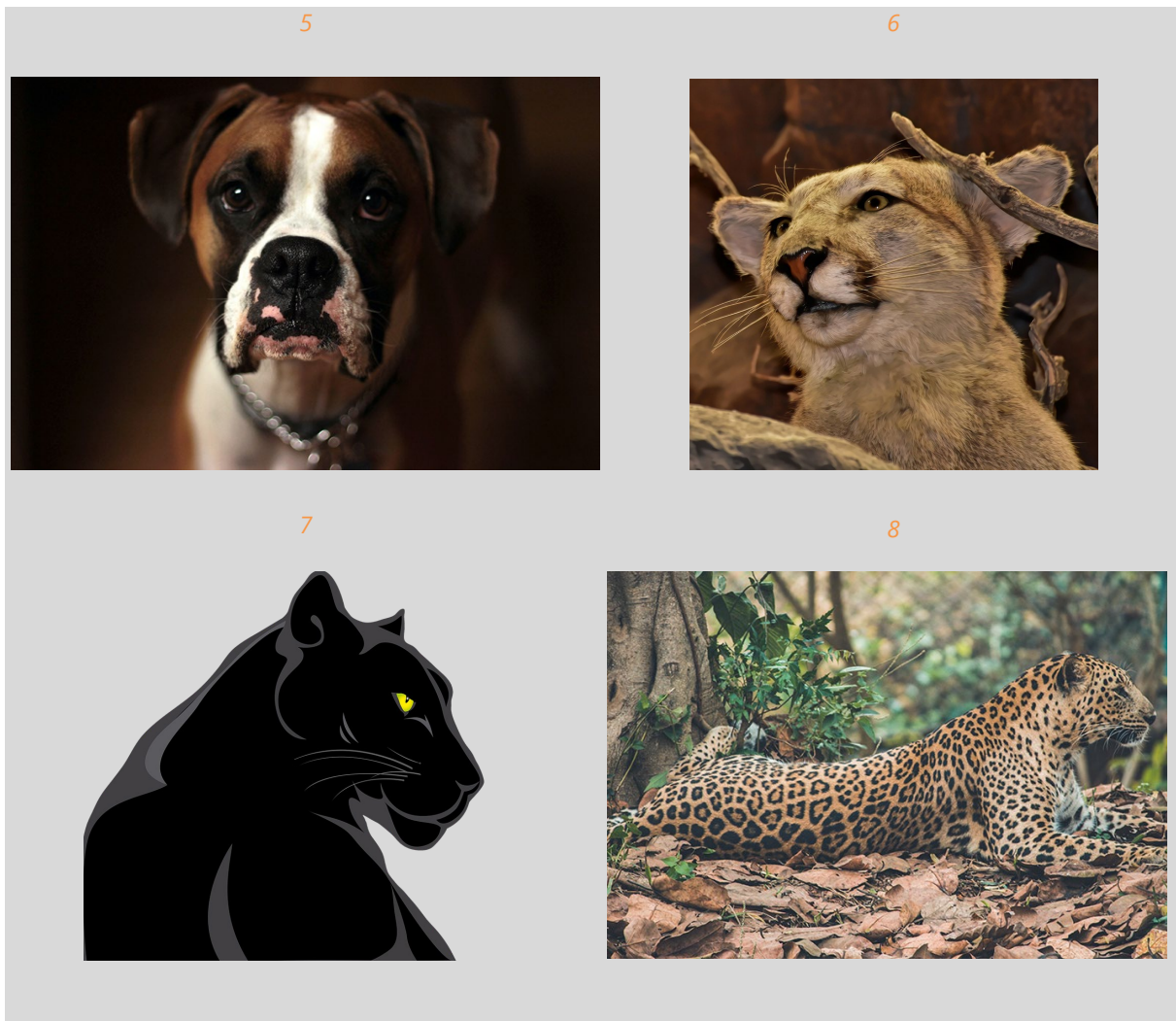
Anti-discriminatory perspectives in terms of sexuality, gender and race which are increasingly extant in the same individual—and then more often than not residing comfortably side-by-side—enter in friction in a postcolonial setting and context. It is seen as neocolonial racism, and usually met with anti-colonial criticism, when a white European/North American member of a formerly colonizing state tells a formerly colonized society how to be inclusive and enforcing their views through border policies. And it is patriarchal, heteronormative and discriminatory towards queer people for hegemonic males, such as the DJs, to dismiss and slander queer individuals and spread hatred towards victims of HIV/AIDS. Some commentators support them anyway because the Jamaican society should arrive at queer inclusion on their own terms, instead of being dictated to by their former colonizers.

It seems that in order to allegedly further their own ends all have done themselves a disservice. Has anti-discrimination, whether in favour of sex, gender or race and ethnicity been misused for furthering their respective own ends, insisting on one anti-discrimination at the expense of another, amounting to a zero-sum game for individuals who are not merely one thing or the other, but for which discriminations intersect? Is the Jamaican DJs’ charge of neo-colonization towards the

international human-rights regime spear-headed by Western former colonizing forces used merely as an excuse to maintain the powerful status of male heteronormative patriarchy in their own Jamaican society? Is the political measure of closing the borders to their former colonial subjects on the charges of violating human rights a pretext in order to demonstrate Western superiority in an attempt to re-justify colonialism and keep out the former colonial subjects from their homelands in an ethno-nationalist effort, hiding their own societies' structural discrimination of queer and transgender people? It seems that as long as one is insisting on only one convenient aspect of a constructed identity at a time, as if identities were "clearly-defined entities" (Salih 2007, 2), truth becomes hegemonial, because the wrong ones, those who are in power in a given context, win, and so, first, the marginalized—but ultimately everybody—loses.

Every time the intersectional friction of aspects of identities is denied, smoothed over, drowned out, reduced to a convenient essence, e.g. playing out race against sexuality, anti-discrimination efforts are doomed. Sexuality and race and their discrimination cannot be tied in a binary to colonialism and anti-colonialism either, so Jamaicans who base anti-queer sentiment on their Christian faith and defend it for their anti-colonial persuasion, conveniently forget that it was Christianity that came with colonialism and slavery to them, as Salih reminds us (ref). Similarly, the "buggery" clause of the Jamaican constitution is a copy of the English "Buggery Act" in effect until 1861, rendering sexual relations between men a crime (Salih 2007, 2). So, the culturally relativist argument does not work, maintaining that anti-queer attitudes are indigenous to African-Jamaican culture and therefore hard to understand for anyone else. Rather, they are a souvenir from Christian colonial culture itself. Colonial nationalism displayed by the colonizers in this setting, is not the only form of nationalism at play here. Rather, there is also diasporic nationalism which holds dear the ideas of "masculinity, reproduction and genealogical descent" which is at the forefront of Western national thought, and criticized through postcolonial queer theory, notably Salih (2007, 3) and Gayatri Gopinath (2005). In summation, a constructive instability of identities is at the heart of postcolonial hermeneutics. The 'frictitious' constructions of "queer postcolonial, queer diaspora and / or queer Jamaican are not oxymoronic [...] subject positions" (Salih 2007, 4).

Take a look at the second frame of images: Which do you think is the odd one out?



What was your interpretive horizon when looking at these images? Did you think of WAR, TANKS and WEAPON SYSTEMS—abstracting from the animal's actual existence? Or did you take those images at face value, responding to the difference between SPECIES or between STAGES OF MATURITY? Or did you detect the MATERIAL differences of the analogue IMAGES, almost indiscernible in the digital medium?

In remembering both frames together, the hermeneutic sense succeeds, that demands of the mind to make sense of two frames of diverse images. Machines, animals, people historically rendered slaves or subaltern others—they have a history of being exchangeable in the coercive services of the essentialized universalized 'human'.

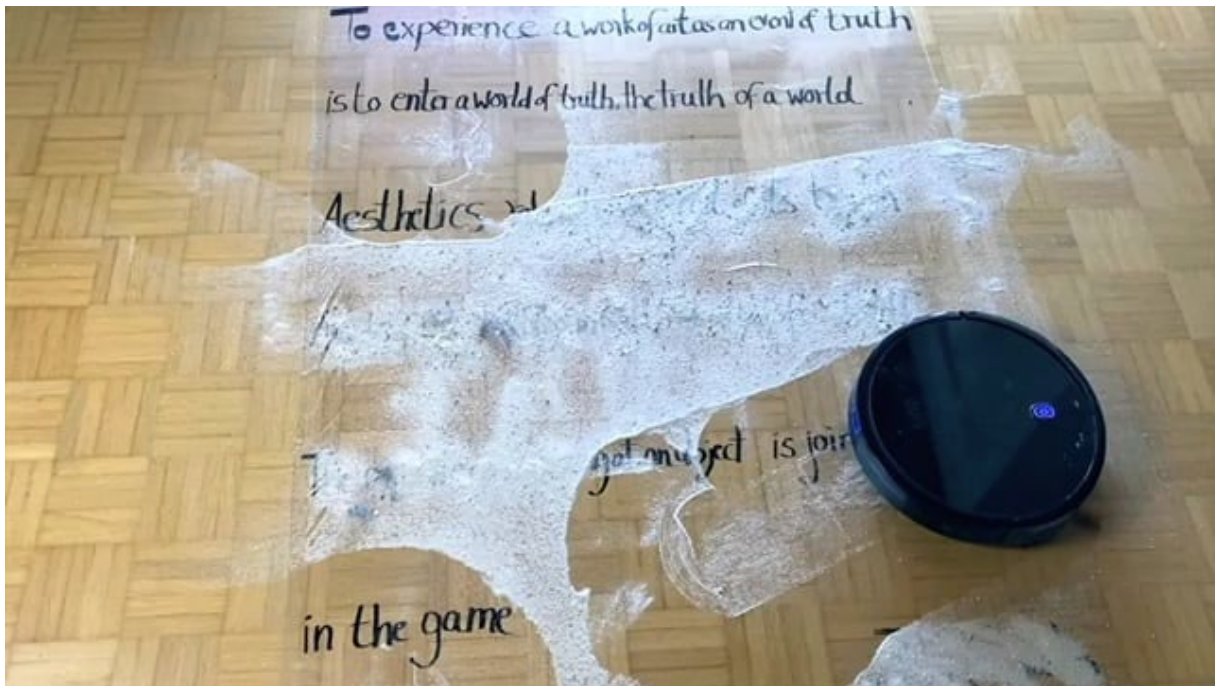
Is there no friction at all? Are all answers relative to each other depending on the categories we employ? Do we understand the different ways in which other people may interpret the frames of images? Or, is the sheer attempt to understand another person's opposing position an act of

violence on our part? By integrating another's position into our own, do we commit an act of ethical trespassing? Must we avoid hermeneutic friction for the sake of practicing ethical behaviour and to avoid (cultural) appropriation? So, is Derrida's radical hermeneutics right, when it prohibits—like Emmanuel Levinas' radical hospitality—to interpret another's communication in order to assimilate their views into my own interpretive horizon?

Correspondingly to Levinas and Derrida, Édouard Glissant proposes a 'tracing thinking', "a thinking without system", which is "neither dominant, nor systemic, nor subjugating/conquering", but rather "perhaps a non-systematic, intuitive, fragmentary/brittle/fracturable, ambivalent thinking" (Glissant 2005, 76; our translation). Glissant turns away from the imperative of understanding. Much like Derrida's radical hermeneutics, he writes that for him, to understand the other is not necessary, since "understanding" is an act of reducing the other "to a model of my own transparency in order to live with this other or to build something with" them (Glissant, 2020, 45). Understanding is a colonial and dominant gesture, akin to Derrida's own ascribing of understanding as violence. Glissant insists on the "right to opacity" in a postcolonial context, based on the experience of enslaved people from the African continent, who did not bring any historical artefacts or archives with them when they were enslaved; this is in contrast to European settlers who brought their histories with them. Instead of the imperative of imagining African historical pasts of pre-enslavement that lend legitimacy to African cultures in Western thought, Glissant advocates the "right to opacity", to not understanding, which to him therefore means "the most obvious sign of non-barbarity" (Glissant 2020, 45), as it defies the logic of the practice of colonization which justified its colonial enterprises with bringing culture and history to the allegedly 'uncultured' Africans, who were deemed less than human, and therefore exploitable, for their alleged 'lack of culture'. For Glissant, the "right to opacity" constitutes the way into the future for everyone including literary contexts since it leaves room for identities to be defined by mixtures of transparency and opacity.

Apart from his own "poetics of chaos" (Glissant 2020, 53), Glissant may sympathize with a poetics of friction. He proposes the fractured, the non-systemic, and also understands poetics as a practice of art and culture that is "a way of living, acting, and imagining prematurely" (Glissant 2002), prior to any secured knowledge or analysis. In such premature and thus liminal states, 'frictitious' encounters that have not been fully made sense of, that are not yet embedded in closed epistemes, are thinkable.

Chapter 8: Hermeneutics III



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/819807144>

To experience a work of art as an event of truth
is to enter a world of truth—the truth of a world.
Aesthetics robs the work of art of its truth.
A work of art belongs in and to daily life itself.
The opposite of gaping at an object is joining
in the game. (cf. Zimmermann 2015, Caputo 2018)

Chapter 9: Excavations III

Nocturnal animals

Assembling clues, completing sentences like pottery shards: along their progression in this confined environment, the speleologists encounter fragments of texts. These buried words are preceding them as if they were waiting in darkness for completion—for their eyes to be read, their mouths to be spoken.

In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977), Roland Barthes evokes language as a touch-sensitive phenomenon, loaded with desire, an epidermic message/massage, capable of merging sense and sensation.

Baptiste Morizot, a French philosopher born in 1983, talked about working and thinking as an intentional, resolute endangerment. Problems are the source of solutions. The fuel which is needed in order to generate the required tension, this “state of anxiety” that helps us to escape the caves.

The search resembles a video game: every layer has a riddle to solve, a sentence that needs to be completed to access the next level. The progression results also from destruction: the successive layers must be pulled to pieces in order to gain ground, until you reach the last step, where, like in a platform game, you get the chance to meet the big boss. Once you're there, the disappointment might be brutal: it's only you in the mirror.



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/819807192>

Chapter 10: Reflections IV

Whereas the concept of friction figuratively points to conflicting tensions, the concept of existence phenomenologically describes something *concrete* and *richly interrelated*, so as to avoid the dualisms both of psychological processes of consciousness and of physiological mechanisms. Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, it is made explicit such that the unity of body and soul is not any arbitrarily arranged connection between 'subject' and 'object' but, rather, that it is "enacted at every instant in the movement of existence" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 89). As disclosed from this experience bit by bit for every human existence bound up with the body, the *theory and praxis of perception* is one of being situated in the world, a world in which those Others permanently possess an *alteritary* imperative: the otherness of the Others is both demanding and inevitable. It is an opening in the openness in which friction occurs, friction with the Others surrounding us, with whom we have to deal with, in efforts, performing, adjusting, neglecting, convincing, discussing, creating. Right there, in this openness, we have to take a close look, also by looking back. Our orientations then point us to the future, to what we are moving forward. "They also keep open the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can respond with joy to what goes astray," as Sara Ahmed stresses in her queer phenomenology (Ahmed 2006, 178). And this is the direction Performance Philosophy hopefully takes, in-between friction and frictionless, convenient and inconvenient, to slide against each other to spin, to move, to carry on, to reflect, to struggle, to doubt, to aim, to spark flames of inspiration

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Biographies

Nadja Ben Khelifa (M.A.) finalizes her PhD thesis on the mediality of nation. Recent publications include the contributions "Race, Nation, and the Uncanny as Mythical 'Character of Expression'" to the collection *Beyond Mimesis: Aesthetic Experience in Uncanny Valleys* (2024), and "Encounters of the Uncanny Kind" to the collection *Actor & Avatar: A Catalog* (2023). At Performance Philosophy in Prague, she contributed to *The Golem Project*.

Etienne Allaix (M.F.A.) includes objects, images, site specific installations in his process and questions human memory, focusing on its flaws and the creative potential of its delusion. After having integrated writing in his pictorial language, he finished his first novel, entitled *La Peau de l'Ours*, Collection Suites, Éditions Rue Saint Ambroise, Paris, March 2025.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE: THE PROBLEM OF THE ONLINE LECTURE

THERON SCHMIDT UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

By the time you read this it is already too late.
We have been waiting some time for the
words to catch up with us.
There is a delay built into the system.
If you could just repeat the question?

If you could just repeat the question?
There is a delay built into the system.
We have been waiting some time for the
words to catch up with us.
By the time you read this it is already too late

1. The problem

The challenges of online teaching have been widely diagnosed and addressed, particularly since the ‘crash course’ in remote learning forced by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Remote learning moved from a typically marginal area of pedagogical activity into the mainstream, as all educators and learners were unexpectedly having to find ways of working within a new dynamic and context in which the learning encounter to take place. The negative impacts of this shift have been thoroughly documented, in international reports such as those by UNESCO (Meinck, Fraillon, and Strietholt 2012) and UNICEF (2022), with the latter warning of the risk of a ‘lost generation’ from a variety of factors impacting socialisation and development, including access to education.

As those of us working with Higher Education at this time experienced, the abrupt shift to remote learning involved a steep learning curve in relation to telematic learning tools. This shift involved greater reliance on asynchronous learning, where learners participate in their own time and pace, such as on discussion boards, remote assignments, and independent reading and writing; as well as synchronous learning via video conference tools such as Teams or Zoom, which assume that both teacher and learner will be seated before a computer screen and camera and as such depend on a variety of material factors, such as access to reliable internet connections, availability of a quiet room and up-to-date hardware, and ability of participants to maintain attention for the duration of the lecture. In this context, numerous pointers and guides were produced by university educational and technological support departments, software providers, and teachers who were experienced in online learning, often in the form of FAQs, or frequently asked questions.

The challenge for online learning, as Peter Shea et al. (2006) articulated well before the COVID-19 pandemic, is to create a sense of ‘presence’. In a quantitative survey, Shea et al. measured online learners’ sense of being part of such a classroom community in relation to ‘perceived levels of instructors’ teaching presence’, which they measured according to a variable they defined as ‘the Teaching Presence Scale’ (178). Their study was predicated upon a ‘participation’ rather than ‘acquisition’ model of learning, in which learning is conceived as ‘a process of becoming a member of a certain community’ (Sfard 1998, 6). Shea et al. concluded that ‘The respondents to the survey were significantly more likely to report higher levels of learning and community when they also reported that their instructors exhibited more salient “teaching presence” behaviors’ (184) through instructional design and directed facilitation.

If you could just repeat the question,	Where are we in this sentence?
we might be able to get a better connection.	This is an attempt to build a stage of the “we” but
This is an attempt to build a stage of the “we” but	we might be able to get a better connection
where are we in this sentence?	if you could just repeat the question.

Within the context of theatre and performance studies, educators wrestled with these new challenges in various ways. A trio of articles in a post-pandemic issue of *Research in Drama Education* reflect on some creative approaches to this challenge. As high school classrooms in

Canada became virtual, Christine Balt (2024) found herself ‘adrift in adrift in practical, pedagogical and philosophical challenges’ (3), which she engaged with through a process of ‘feeling together’ with her learners. ‘Togetherness’ was something which was built, through online ritual and embracing the shared and ‘messy’ affects of isolation (17). Similarly, Michelle MacArthur et al. (2024), taking inspiration from philosophies and practices of care ethics, argue that centring *care* in online learning might both counter the deficiencies of the virtual encounter, and also harness this interruption in learning as an opportunity to foreground practices of care more broadly: ‘In spite of its limitations, we argue that this provisional virtual space offers new, altered modes of caring (and imagining care) through its disruption of boundaries and de-hierarchisation of many theatrical and training norms’ (25). Surveying the impact of COVID-19 on youth performing arts in Australia, Bryoni Trezise et al. (2024) argue that the innovative practices developed here exemplify what they refer to as ‘creative literacies’ of resilience, agility, and adaptability (44, 48ff). Elsewhere and with other collaborators, Trezise expands on this theme to argue that performance-based practices that foreground bodily intuition and kinaesthetic sensibility are precisely the approaches needed to cultivate creativity in online and hybrid learning (Trezise, Tálamo, and White 2023).

This piece, the one you are reading now, shares an interest with these other makers and scholars in the ways in which online learning presents challenges for performance-based learning, and also how performance-based practices might offer creative parameters for thinking and acting through these challenges in ways that are generative of agential possibilities—not just in spite of these constraints, but embracing them as creative material with which to work. Like Trezise et al. (2023), the implicit argument of this piece is that such creativity is relevant not only to online teaching of performance-related practices, but also that all remote learning might benefit from such a performance-based perspective on its pedagogic modes.

However, this piece thinks through the problem of the online lecture from a performance philosophy perspective—that is, to think through the problems that the format raises as (both) philosophical and performance problems: problems of synchronization, of asynchronous engagement and distraction, of remoteness and spatiotemporal ‘lag’, and of the parameters that enable the performance/pedagogic encounter itself. And this piece also thinks through the *method* of performance philosophy—that is, by understanding performance as itself a mode of thinking—and so it engages with these problems in a performative mode. The mode that it chooses is that of the performance-lecture, as both its subject of enquiry but also the format that it itself takes—at least in its original presentation, in which this piece was itself an online (performance) lecture, though now adapted for the (digital) page. How might the format of the performance-lecture allow learning to engage with its own conditions of production?

Where are we? In this sentence.

But it is hard to know in which direction
you should look around you to draw
conclusions.

I will wait for you to catch up.

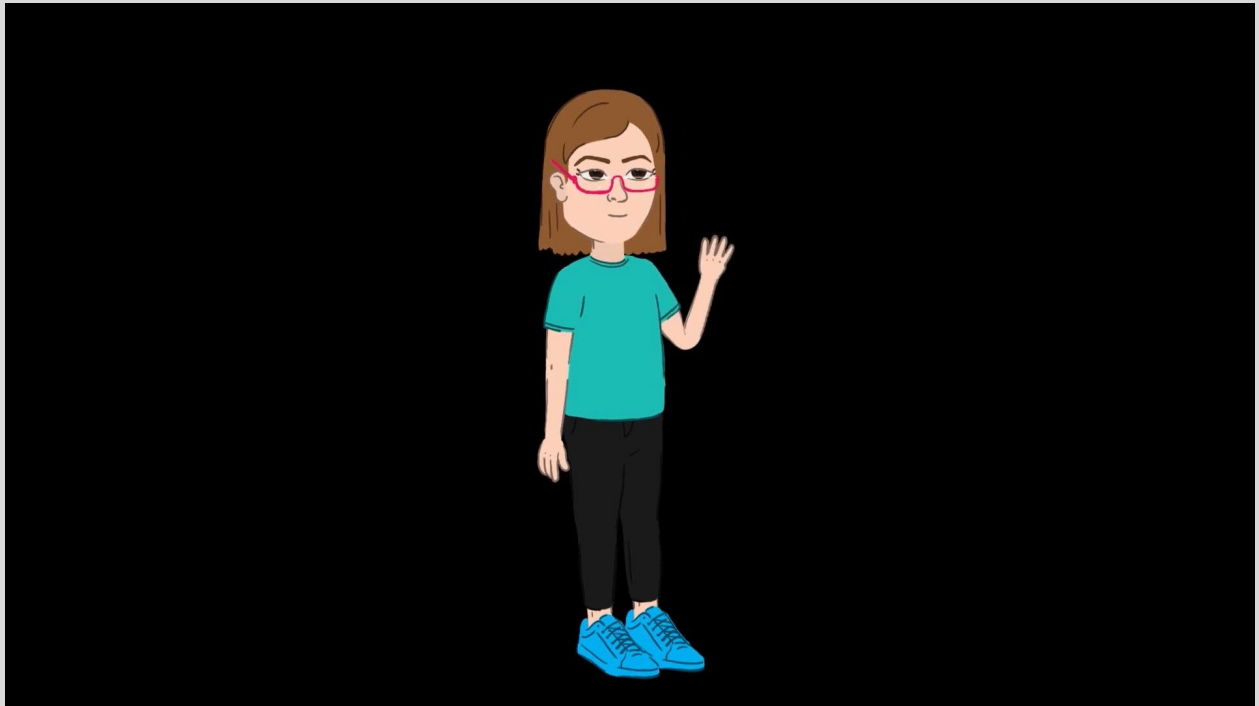
I will wait for you to catch up.

You should look around you to draw
conclusions,

but it is hard to know in which direction.

Where are “we” in this sentence?

2. Frequently Asked Questions



Watch: <https://www.vimeo.com/1012006087>

The text for this video is composed of phrases from FAQ guides from a variety of sources, including internal university memos, online forums and tutorials, and help sections of websites. As ephemeral guides, original sources no longer exist.

Hello! Learn how you and your team can stay informed, organized, and connected—no matter where you are.

Careful planning of your course is essential for creating a positive and effective learning experience for your students. Before you begin to design your course online, review your current teaching strategies, the course learning outcomes and the learning activities used to assess the outcomes. Articulating the learning outcomes and aligning them with teaching and assessment strategies—"constructive alignment" (Biggs 1999)—will help you select your course content and plan the learning activities for your students.

A photo of the course instructor and their relevant contact details situate the teacher in the course. This is the first step in creating teacher presence that is strongly linked to "students' sense of learning community" (Shea, Sau Li, and Pickett 2006).

If you receive error code 10003, it may be due to a certificate issue on your device. If your device is managed by your organization's IT department, it is recommended to reach out to them to fix this issue.

There are two options: 1. Instructor submits a request for a new self-enrolment key to be created. 2. Super TELT Admin manually corrects the user's inactive account.

Channels are dedicated sections within a team to keep conversations organized by specific topics, projects, disciplines—whatever works for your team!

Create media content for stakeholders (3D models, scans, art/visuals, 2D/360 video, editing/cleanup, audio, user interfaces, etc) and bring them together as needed.

Create instructions and guides for teachers and their students. Scope, design, create, test, deploy, and maintain immersive experiences for stakeholders.

Type in the session name that you want here: typically, 'Lectures' or 'Tutorials'. This will create your first sub-room. This will generate a 'dial in' box that you should ignore.

If you hear audio echo or audio feedback during your meeting, there are three possible causes: A participant has both the computer and telephone audio active; Participants have computer or telephones speakers that are too close to each other; Multiple computers with active audio are in the same conference room.

Hello, our UK based company is currently using the Phone with Calling Plan Trial but when attempting to purchase it states (country zone 1 - US) and obviously we are UK based. How can we confirm that this is the correct calling plan given there are no alternatives?

Hello, does anyone know if it possible to allow members to edit post/announcements? Trying to work in a channel to provide information for user, we would ideally like to work collaboratively on areas and enhance first drafts announcements.

Hi, my name is Didi. I'm happy to help you today.

It is possible if we assign a messaging policy for specific users to be able to edit sent messages such as announcements. After we've created a team and added members to it, added users get automatically added to public channels. For private (and shared) channels, however, members need to be added manually.

Catch up on all your unread messages, @mentions, replies, and more under "Activity". Use the Search box to find and filter specific items or people, take quick actions, and launch apps.

To isolate the attendee: Host can mute the attendee one at a time; Host can mute all, and unmute one at a time; Attendee can mute themselves.

Hello, the "Immersive Technologies team" partner with academics to explore, create, and deliver effective immersive experiences to enhance students' education.

Note: Escalation option will not be visible until after 24 hours of the support ticket submission.

Note: When choosing a page format, consider all the pros and cons. The "Collapsed Topic" page format provides the best flexibility and advantages. "Topic" and "Weekly" formats are also very useful, and are simpler to use.

Note: Don't use too many fonts or colours. Two font styles are adequate: one for headings and another for body text.

Give each section a short title by entering title text in the section summaries. Don't use long activity or resource names. These are hyperlinked names, not full descriptions. Place any further information in the item's "Description" or "Introduction" field, which displays when the item is accessed. If necessary, select "Display description on course page", but if you do, keep the description short.

Note: Include short labels to break up resources and activities lists and help users find things quickly.

Note: Indent items below labels to indicate the hierarchy of information, but don't overdo it. Too many levels of indenting can detract from the usability of the page.

Note: On October 1, 2021 the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) e-mandate directive will be taking effect for recurring payments using India Bank Cards. Starting October 1, 2021, customers who are using India bank debit or credit cards may need to use PayNow for their recurring payments.

Note: Use images in section summaries to enhance your course page, but keep them small so that they don't dominate the course page.

Note: Obtain feedback from self, peers, facilitators and teachers, clients, friends.... Ask yourself: What do my peers think? What does my teacher think? Did my performance meet expectations? Would my performance be acceptable in the real world? What do I think?

I will wait for you to catch up.

Go ahead, I will be right behind you.

I am listening, just like you.

We might say this together.

We might say this together:

I am listening just like you

Go ahead, I will be right behind you.

I will wait for you to catch up.

3. Performance's double-hold

Consider this as a definition: performance is that which attempts to hold that within which it itself is held. This may take the form of an explicit theatricality, foregrounding and reflecting upon the conditions of being seen and being heard, of the speech and appearance of an actor—which can have both dramatic as well as political dimensions. This politics of making an appearance is foregrounded in what might be called an Arendtian turn of political philosophy (Damian Martin and Schmidt 2019), following Hannah Arendt's descriptions of 'spaces of appearance', which Arendt writes, 'come into being whenever [persons] are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government' (Arendt [1958] 1998, 199).

Arendt's view presupposes an equal capacity of anyone to make an appearance. Elsewhere Arendt makes the theatrical metaphor more explicit, writing that 'Living things make their appearance like actors on a stage set for them. The stage is common to all who are alive' (Arendt 1978, 21). But as others following Arendt have pointed out, this stage is not common, and one definition of politics might be formed by a distinction between what is and isn't common to all. Judith Butler writes that that certain actors and actions are deemed 'prepolitical' or 'extrapolitical'; 'they break into the sphere of appearance as from the outside' (Butler 2015, 78). Butler argues that 'any conception of the political has to take into account what operation of power demarcates the political from the prepolitical' (Butler 2015, 205). And we might think about Jacques Rancière's provocations around the distribution or apportionment of what is and isn't sensible:

the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees those bodies are assigned by the name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (Rancière [1995] 1999, 29)

The appearance of politics is dependent upon a politics of appearance, one that attends to the conditions that make politics possible: who speaks, who is seen, and into what categories such speech and action is perceived to fit by those who are standing by. As Butler has described extensively, the claiming of the right to appear is a performative politics, where the performative is that which generates the conditions that allow the performative to be recognized as such.

All of which is to suggest that a self-reflexive attention to the conditions of appearance—the stage that supports certain kinds of speech and action—is, or at least can be, a political domain. In their ambivalent propositionality—consider this gesture *as* gesture, consider these words *as* words—those words and gestures that are explicitly framed as 'performance' can also reach outside their frame from within, claiming the circumstances under which they are produced as the material of the performance itself.

4. Planetaryity

It's late, 11pm where I am, 9pm where he is, but 8am where some of the others are. I can hear the gathering of bats in the fruit trees in the dusk outside my window, and morning birdsong from other time zones through my speakers. There is a hot cup of tea in my hands and the steam where it collects on my glasses is a half-gauze between me and the screen.

We might say this together,	All of the words gathered here.
that within which it itself is held,	Performance is that which attempts to hold
performance is that which attempts to hold	that within which it itself is held.
all of the words gathered here.	We might say this together.

My friend Felipe is on the screen, describing the difference between the planetary and the global. He's quoting Spivak (2003) and as he's talking I'm downloading the PDF in another tab, because I no longer have a library of books, just bookmarks. The global is the globalised, an expansion of a specific, White predatory capitalist locality to encompass the globe. It is a thing done to this planet where one set of norms and hierarchies and disciplinary structures have been exported, imposed, regimented, coerced, advertised, superimposed, or otherwise sold on the basis of an underlying juxtaposition between a centre and a global spread. But the planetary precedes and survives the global, he is saying. It is not a historical condition but a superposition, a multiversal simultaneity of hyperlocalities, a multipolar distribution rather than a single axis of orientation and occidentalisation. It is not even a thing, but a mode of awareness, a fact of relationality, a nonhuman assemblage that defies rationalisation.

Or at least that's how I understood it, or how I'm remembering it now, as I think back to the image of me sitting in my Sydney apartment on stolen Gadigal land, as my tea got stronger and Felipe gestured emphatically from within his little glowing box on the screen, and other boxes lit up as the others in the conversation joined in.

Before then, or after then, or in parallel, anyway, we try some experiments in planetary pedagogy (Cervera, Schmidt, and Schwadron 2021). In these experiments, I act as a remote guest lecturer and also as a remote mentor for groups of performance students in Singapore who are working in proximity to each other as they think through some of the fundamental precepts of performance development. I don't meant that what they are doing is fundamental in the sense of basic or unsophisticated, but rather that they are stripping performance back to some of its fundamentals to work through dynamics of liveness, co-presence, spectatorship, self-representation, autobiography, polyvocality, spaces populated with characters, etc.

With my mentor groups I gave and received ideas, an exchange mediated by online platforms—Google Docs, and Telegram, most prominently, with its parallel channels all populating themselves from multiple contributors to a linear stream of words, images, video clips.

For some of this time I am back in the US, visiting my family. I am standing outdoors on our wooden deck in the wintertime of rural Georgia, pine trees sharp and distinct against a bright blue sky, my phone held up in a search for a good signal; and coming to me from another hemisphere are pieces of rehearsal footage, to-camera attempts at explanations and prefaces and reflections on the group dynamic; and I am sending a message back as I walk indoors, my dad's favourite cat curling against my legs; and then some time later I am again returning to the thread and this time I am in Montreal where the snow has long been on the ground; and then later still I am back on Gadigal land, and all the time we are talking about these fundamentals: liveness, co-presence, spectatorship, self-representation, autobiography, polyvocality, spaces populated with characters, etc.

All of the words gathered here,
they are lined up just for you.
There are memories stored here.
By the time you read this it is already too late.

By the time you read this it is already too late.
There are memories stored here.
They are lined up just for you,
all of the words gathered here.

5. Writing and its material conditions

At a micro-political level, performance-writing is a strategy for attempting this reflexive double-hold, in which the content reshapes the container of delivery such that it becomes an instance of that which it is also describing. As Ric Allsopp put it in a formative essay on the topic, performance writing foregrounds 'the transformative play of text as performance' (Allsopp 1999, 79), emphasizing the materiality of writing—the act itself, its material conditions, the circumstances in which it takes place and that allow it to be seen or legible. As an example, John Hall's "Reading Illegible Pages" (2004) begins by exploring the materiality of the very word that appears self-evident in its title:

I have found it very difficult to get this word ~~illegible~~ ~~ineligible~~ ~~intelligible~~ to behave consistently, to be intelligible as a fixed sign in the space of a page for which it is eligible. There is a seemingly irresolvable jostling for a place with at least these two other words, and a third (fourth) comes in derisively with an elegant clarity that is nowhere legible in its form. There is this jumble of 'i's, 'g's and 'l's that are the same at the beginning and end but confused in the middle. (Hall 2004, 15)

Hall goes on to describe the materiality of the page itself, consisting, as he puts it, of three 'field vectors'. One is the compulsive forward motion of the top-down, left-to-write conventions of printed English:

Faced with a filled page no reader can do it all at once. The best thing you can do is to try not to stumble as you move from left to right and then down, left to right and then down, with your eyes making their saccadic jumps only slightly ahead, aware of peripheral (illegible) textuality above and below. (Hall 2004, 17)

For Hall, a second vector of the page considers the page as frame, reinforced by a margin, where we might step back and look at the page as "marks that form visual constellations rather than with linguistic tracks" (Hall 2004, 18). And the third vector considers a page as a map, one that may stick

in our memory, perhaps, where we can't remember an exact phrase but remember where on the page it appeared; we scan the page looking for that place where we lingered.

But of course, even as we read Hall's text, we are enacting the very process that he describes: engaging with the printed page across these material vectors—and Hall's writing is aware of itself as materiality, as ink on paper, as in the image of the 'illegible' graphic above. Hall's text is thus performative in that it not only *describes* these dimensions and affordances of the printed page, but also *enacts* those encounters. It is bound up in its own material conditions even as it analyses them. What makes it performance-writing is not a specific form or style of writing, nor determined by its content, but rather its self-reflexivity about the context in which it appears. As Della Pollock observes,

Performative writing is thus no more or less formally intelligible than a road sign or a landmark: its styles may be numbered, taught, and reproduced, but its meanings are contextual. It takes its value from the context-map in which it is located and which it simultaneously marks, determines, transforms. (Pollock [1995] 1998, 79)

In this way, we might think of *all* writing as performance-writing. To describe a thing is to give it a context, and the context shapes the meaning; or, to put it another way, how we talk about the work *is* the work (Schmidt 2018). These levels of discourse, description and performance, are not ontologically distinct from each other, but mutually constitutive—just as this text that you are reading now both holds and is held by its 'performative' elements.

By the time you read this it is already too late.
Somewhere in between you realise
it all comes together
at the start and at the end.

At the start and at the end
it all comes together.
Somewhere in between you realise
by the time you read this it is already too late.

6. The performance-lecture

If performance *writing* takes the materiality of the page and the meaning-producing functions of text as contextual frames with which to play and interrupt, then the performance *lecture* takes not only the conditions of textuality but also those of the apparent liveness of speech, and the claims to authority of the lecture, as both its subject and its terms of interrogation. As Maaïke Bleeker writes,

In lecture-performances, theatricality is used not (or not only) to explore a new understanding of art, but also allows for an exploration of the object of investigation: what this object is, how we know it, and what it means to know it. (Bleeker 2012, 188–89)

We might think here of the self-described 'non-academic lectures' of Rabi'h Mroué, which often address autobiographical narratives, acts of representation, or political symbolism that emerge from the Civil Wars in Lebanon, the country of his birth. A central preoccupation of Mroué's is that of fabrication, the epistemic acts of making new truths, and the erasures that accompany them. But to talk about them is also to undertake such a fabrication, and so his lectures are characterized

by a self-reflective theatricality about their own of fabrication, acknowledged through impossibilities, half-truths, verbal slipholes, and fantastical forms of knowing.

Mroué's work *The Pixelated Revolution* (2011) exemplifies this interest in fabrication and representation. The work recounts the phenomenon of videos made on camera phones and other widely available media by protesters in the early phases of the uprising against Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria; these were distributed via YouTube and other forms of social media, and sometimes seemed to show the deaths of these protesters and resistance fighters. As Mroué recalls at the opening of the lecture, 'It all started with this sentence that I heard by chance: "The Syrian protesters are recording their own deaths"' (Mroué 2012, 25). These amateur videos are a form of resistance to dominant distributions of images in a very literal sense, providing an alternative account of events on the ground; but what Mroué is interested in is the way in which they might present not only an alternative set of subjects for images from the government narrative, but also an alternative sense of what an image might *be* and *do*—what its effects are and how shifting ontologies of the image might shape and reshape reality. While these acts of recording one's own death are a form of testimony and witness, Mroué uses his lecture-performance to explore what the effects of this mediation might be on our understanding of the acts of testifying or witnessing—the very act in which we are participating by being in attendance at the lecture.

In Mroué's works, the subject matter of make the political stakes clear: in relation to the ideas of Arendt, Butler, and Rancière described earlier, we can see how an example like *The Pixelated Revolution* is political both in the way that it concerns the 'space of appearance' in which the Syrian protestors can be seen and heard, but also the demarcations of what is and isn't counted as politics, including Mroué's lecture-performance itself. As Clio Unger observes, the ways in which the lecture-performance both thematizes the politics of representation and also enacts those very politics make it a useful tool for marginalized voices to intervene within hierarchies of knowledge production:

[E]pistemic art practice—of which the contemporary lecture performance is one—often draws on non-hegemonic knowledges, such as situated, feminist, queer, indigenous, bodily, or common forms of knowing, and express a wish to remap epistemic hierarchies, violence, and ownership. They may also use their parainstitutional status, beside the university, to claim non-hegemonic and therefore non-homogenised epistemic practice. (Unger 2021, 476)

But if, as I claimed above, all writing might be considered performance-writing, then we might also put forward the claim that all lectures are lecture-performances, even those taking place within the 'homogenised' space of the university. Every lecture not only takes place within a classroom, but reproduces a performance of what a classroom is: what counts as knowledge, what learning looks like, and what forms of relationship and responsibility are demanded of those present. But the interruption of the 'problem' of the online lecture might be a chance to think these qualities anew. The shift to a new context forces us to reflect on what a lecture *is* and what it *does*, what it is that is necessary for it to do and what is needed for it to do these things, and how it can do these things in a different way. We have an opportunity to remember it as an 'epistemic practice', to quote Unger, in which every lecture is an act of imagining the classroom, perhaps as if for the first time.

7. Imagining the classroom

Imagine the classroom.

Imagine the classroom where you learnt to read.

Imagine the classroom where you learned right and wrong.

Imagine the classroom where you learned to keep a secret.

Imagine the classroom where you learned the power you have to shame and to be ashamed.

Imagine the classroom of the future.

Imagine the classroom under the weight of what is to come.

Imagine the classroom that opens to the stars.

Imagine the classroom that is formed when we are holding hands with elders past and present, walking on Gumbaynggr country, in the dawn before the stars have faded, listening to country, listening to dreaming.

Imagine the classroom that has a trapdoor in the middle of the room, that leads from one hemisphere to another, that cuts you off at the shoulders, the classroom that kicks you out, that mutes your voice when you are not speaking, that freezes you in flight.

Imagine the classroom we might weave together, out of fibres and story, hyperlinked together from where you sit to where I type tap tab away at the thoughts becoming characters, one after another.

Imagine the classroom with the mirror down one side of the room, and your back is to the mirror as you turn your gaze out to the others, and you are here together to explore liveness, co-presence, spectatorship, self-representation, autobiography, spaces populated with characters, etc

Imagine the classroom in your childhood home, your childhood bed, your childhood clothes, your childhood books, your childhood light, your childhood face, your childhood fears, your childhood bones growing, your childhood eyes growing tired, your childhood stories falling falling falling falling falling all the way into the forgotten past.

Imagine the classroom where we hand off the words to each other, our mouths keep moving but the sounds come from somewhere else, another voice takes over, it's no longer me speaking or you speaking but just speaking, no longer my face or your face but just faces, no longer my classroom or your classroom but just the classroom, no longer my imagining or your imagining but just imagining, no longer my longer or your longer but just longing.

Imagine the classroom that we wake up into, here, present and alert, already online, in whatever we happen to be wearing, with whomever happens to be at the other end.

Imagine the classroom that has linoleum floors, smelling of stale tobacco, a faint green tiled wall, a low ceiling and wooden doors.

Imagine the classroom as a spiral, that loops slowly through our lives and through our parents' lives and through our ancestors' lives, not progress but all at the same time, the same spiral, the same but different.

Imagine the classroom on a loop, whenever you log-on it just keeps going, a flickering film frame, a stuttering of the algorithm as it makes room for one more, all of us linked together going on and on and on into the incalculable future.

We might say this together:

I am listening just like you.

Go ahead, I will be right behind you.

I will wait for you to catch up.

We might say this together, that

within which it itself is held,

performance is that which attempts to hold

all of the worlds gathered here.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

EXHAUSTING THE (HUMAN) PROBLEM: A PERFORMABLE DYS/SOLUTION

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Global conflict, forced displacement, mass extinction, oceanic acidification, viral pandemic, economic devastation, environmental dissolution... The exasperating condition of things gone awry has become commonplace. It is the world we live in now, amplified by an apparent inability of human-kind to respond to crisis. What possibilities reveal themselves in this new age of the impossible, the unthinkable, the unimaginable?

Is it possible that we have exhausted all solutions because we ourselves are exhausted? Or is it perhaps that we have exhausted ourselves by exhausting the problem? If so, what can be asked of us? How do we rethink the ways we live, survive, thrive even? Who is this 'we' anyway?

This piece *feels* through the ecological and intellectual exhaustion caused by one of the most problematic notions in philosophical thought—the category of the human and specifically, the genre of “Man.” As Sylvia Wynter exposes, this mythology of humanity has become synonymous with all that matters, its morphology shaped by colonial forces depleting all planetary, political, and physical-psychic energies.¹ This is now a geological problem that centres the human as the presumed author of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Sturmer 2000), a distinct epoch of global upheaval and climate instability.² Yet this concept liberally assumes *humanity* to be a complicit, compliant, even consensual aggregate referent to a single subject. It presumes a stable *we* placed at the heart of both problem and solution.

In what follows, I sidestep this double bind by tracing an alternative to the “monohumanist” fantasy (Wynter 2015, 44)—an invitation to embrace *we* as being(s) *beside ourselves*, always spilling in all directions, in a muddled universe full of experimentations, misadventures, troubles and wonders. I am aiming for a different story altogether that invokes what Jose Ésteban Muñoz refers to as “thinking outside the regime of the human as simultaneously exhilarating and exhausting” (2015, 209).

Is there anything left?

In *Ends of Man*, Jacques Derrida asks: “But who, ‘we?’”, questioning the specific morphology of this liberal incorporation. This emblematic ensemble invents form for itself against the bodies of *others*, becoming itself precisely in the denial of its contingent enfleshments.³

I propose that this univocal fantasy uncritically leaves out the concrete status of bodies—irreducible, asymmetrical, fractal entities, always patchy at best. Bodies, especially of the human kind, are finite, easily worn out, their dynamism sustained by other matters—gravitational (walk!), atmospheric (breathe!), chemical (beat!) microbial (shit... think!).

Scholars such as Mel Chen and Eva Hayward have knowingly argued that we cannot think of bodies as separate from environments. Hayward, living with cancer and autoimmune disorder, writes: “we are vulnerable to one another; our bodies are open to the planet” (2011). For Chen, who uses their body, their illness and their encounters with other ecologies to think through molecular intimacies, the question becomes not how to secure *our* identity, but “which bodies can bear the fiction of independence” (2011, 274). Philosopher Bayo Akomolafe (2020) makes home and kin with what is unsolvable and preposterous in the meeting of the human *within* the world, asks: “what if the way we respond to crisis is part of the crisis? What if the climate change imaginary, and its commitments to sustainability [...], are not solutions at all, but particular ways of thinking of the world and our place ‘in’ it?”

I wonder, might the form of the human be the problem after all? Not humanity as a thing, a body or species, but as an intellectual posture—the mytho-formation of a solutionism committed to individualised thinking. A solution-mindset bent on saving the planet from its troubles. As I write through a time of chronic exhaustion, I wonder what it really means to remain *critical*. I wonder if this form of interruption, interval, suspense, can release us from the pressures and expectations on *our* bodies. I want to lean into it and yield to the promises of lying fallow, practicing slowness in crip time, following Alison Kafer’s intuition: “rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (2013, 27).

The shape-shifting nature of brokenness is perhaps what remains untouched in our philosophical conversations: “*For crip time is broken time*. It requires us to break in our bodies and minds to new rhythms, new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world” (Samuels 2017, original emphasis). I wonder if this *dysorientation* might help recompose our-selves in new modes of liveability. I am inspired by Kim Q. Hall’s notion of “crip sustainability”, which means

“understanding a sustainable world as a world that has disability in it, a perspective that recognises the instabilities, vulnerabilities, and dynamism that are part of naturecultures” (2017, 438).

This perspectival fall precipitates us backward into *we*—the messy agglutination of the matters *with* us. Following Wynter’s praxis, this flippancy might just lead us into a practice of slow wayfinding. As Akomolafe suggests, “slowing down the pace of who we are” might be what is required to re-compose the human in its *inhuman* nature (Akomolafe and Young 2023). I want to linger for a moment on this promising ferment of (bio)possibilities, generative of what is yet to come.

What’s the use?

The *we/us* of this project spills from what Alexander Weheliye calls “minority discourses” (2014, 6–7).⁴ These orientations inspire experimentation with alternative shapes of life through material methodologies that take shape in relation to exhaustion. Here exhaustion emerges as the affective drift of matter in modes of saturation, dissipation, and (self)dispossession. This inconspicuous, inoperative state becomes a disabling condition of human norms, presenting a problem to exalted forms of agency and causality. Its posture connotes a ruptured torpor that sunders the spatial and temporal flow of human capital. In a very critical sense, the exhausted exists in a crisis of form—an indeterminacy whose meaning remains difficult to absorb, whose *inaction* stays suspended. Yet it keeps going.

I take this affective figure as that which animates the aesth-ethic project allowing bodies to partake in collective shape-shifting and sense-making. At the core, an investigation of the conditions of the sensible through concrete materiality. In practice, I am interested in material artistic practices that through very elemental and plastic methods take a stance—a shape—in relation to exhaustion.

The forms of chimeric agglutinations that assemble around the figure of Belgian artist Berlinda De Bruyckere offer a vital approach to the matter of the exhausted. These fantastic formations, rendered from wax, pelts, fabrics, and polymers, do not solely experiment with the material affordances of exhaustion, but think through what it means to occupy such a position for theory. Matter thinks through matters and creates abstractions.⁵

What this yields is not a way to conceptualise artistic work, and I am not sure if this is always needed. The matter(ing)s of the artistic apparatus should be left to do their stuff, with *us* respecting their autonomous nature. Instead, I pursue a speculative method, a way of imagining otherwise deeply rooted in affective forms that recognise the queer animacy and intimacy of artistic capacities that are not (and cannot be) restricted to the realm of the human. The work is guided by a biomorphic orientation grounding a nonhuman aesthetic angle through which a Deleuzian-Massumian notion of “affect” and “becoming” activates in art practices. This mobilises two key aesthetic notions: the performative—the primary activation of aesthetic matters—and the performable—the sensible shaping of what is already mobilised in aesthetic praxes. The direction of these propositions is my next trajectory.

What's the matter?

Is something vital missing in thinking about bodies (not necessarily human or even animate) as making art in-tensity with the world? Isn't the force that throws things into moves and shapes the cascading performance of it all? Aren't the *informing* capacities of art's own making what drives the active and sensible directions of the aesthetic work?

Philosopher Judith Butler recognises this sustained activism as the "performative dimension", referring to how an artwork *performs*, how "it acts, that it intervenes upon and transforms a space, that it seems to exercise its own agency and effect" (2017, 172). I want to linger here on the vital(ist) intuition of the art's ability to actualise itself simultaneously as giving itself a-way—to change. Alongside the active principle of performativity, I propose, something else exists—the performable quality of art's potential to be affected and shaped, its reiterative capacity to receive and transmit intensities. I want to anchor my speculative orientations on the emergent notion of this *performability*. Art's performativity and performability operate as distinct but interrelated forces. While performativity effects how art works (its agency), performability affects how art forms (its receptivity).

The introduction of performabilities is not simply a linguistic jest for academic effect. Rather, the sense of the practice of art becoming itself in polyvalent shapeshifting is intuited via Karen Barad's agential realism (2003, 2007, 2011) where the movement of bodies and their material-discursive practices emerge through "intra-action":

Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but "things"-in-phenomena. The world is intraactivity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential *sense* of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency. (2003, 817, my emphasis)

Every-thing is a relation. In this sense, Barad exposes the continuous difference without separability of things being performed. In this sense, art's performative (intra)activity cannot be processed apart from its affect-ability—or performability—as its capacity to be shaped by and shape relations.

Affect is precisely the speculative opening of things/bodies as a porous capacitation of what could or might be. Philosopher Brian Massumi describes how the networked influence of the affective precisely involves passing from one state of capacitation to another (2009, 1). The regions of both aesthetics and ethics are bound up with this receptivity in the way their *things* are sensed by what at the same time is being sensed, albeit in (un)certain differential ways.

The artwork emerges through this double movement: its performative force (what it does) and its performable potential (what it can become). This distinction matters because it opens art to a different kind of agency (well beyond the human)—not just its power to effect *things*, but its capacity to be affective, to hold open possibilities for transformation. By means of—or *per*—their

trans*form-ability, the co-operative field of the artwork is animated not only by the performance of things but by *the sense that makes matters matter*. If performativity is the artwork's active condition of being, then per-form-ability is the continual unfolding of its experience—its horizon of possibilities that shapes—or *transforms*—the relational field of art's-own-making.

What next?

Once more with feeling, performativity potentiates the artwork while performability in/trans-forms its aesthetic sense. Together they drive the exhausting activity of being effective (mattering) and the inexhaustible capacitation of affectivity. What builds here is an aesthetic ecology—of bodies among bodies—exceeding each body's self-realisation toward yet unfelt possibilities. This susceptibility sets conditions for alternatives to cascade asymmetrically, (shape)shifting between the possible and (yet) impossible.

The combinatorial plasticity of the performative (in-active) and performable (affective) mirrors the compositional capabilities of exhaustion as both an existential problem and an actual impossibility. As bodily matter, exhaustion destabilises the epistemological and ontological safety of the coherent and consistent. In exhaustion, matters simultaneously give in and give out.

This deformation surprises habituation—a spatial anarrangement felt as the collapse of containment, the outside looking in, the decomposition of fixed form. A slurred, bent, suspended shape, its contours loosened, never stable to begin with. Such formal dispossession speaks to alternative relations of space and time, conditioned not by utility but by enigmatic impossibility. Exhaustion and temporality articulate the ruptured stagnancy sundering matters from human flow. The matter of the exhausted resists progressive time to reorient us around “crip time” (Kafer 2013)—where speed, pace, duration, timing, rhythms take flight from systems of order, organisation and volition. Time becomes irreducible. In crip time, time becomes itself, its suspended lapse resonating the quotidian tonality of affective life.

Where, after all, is the problem? Precisely where we left our definition of the human. It is an identity problem. To individuate is to give precise meaning, to define or delimit its in-formation, to determine what becomes important, to create hierarchies of value. If we approach an artwork through this delineation, it becomes the subject of the work itself. We submit the event to our volitional and cognitive resources. We maintain things in our control.

Affective matters in general and exhaustion in particular cut through the problem by making impossible the intellectual posture that creates the problem. They refuse the categories of philosophical reflection through sustained in-activism. This (de)composition holds the problem open—in suspense. As the shape of life failing humanist ideals, exhausted matter has no form but the unthought.⁶ Its operational inactivism cannot be *had* by the (human) subject. It works differently than *us* via an exchange of ideas, influences, directions. ‘We’ become merely one aspect among things taking life within phenomenal, *in-forming* possibilities.

This opens a nonhuman aesthetic where ‘becoming’ achieves collective mobilisation in art practices. Matters invent form in ensemble with other matters, though precise relations to shared form. Like runaways from capture, affects take risk and care with the shapes they make and share (Campt 2019). After all, fugitivity (following Moten and Harney 2013) isn’t about safe escapes but making kin with things resisting completeness and sameness. Such unruly kinship needs both sensuousness and its refusal.

Why do some of ‘us’ claim the full spectrum of experience as the only bodies-that-matter? What of being the ones whom feeling is not (meant) for? A more-than-human discernment requires a more-than-human sensorium. Might ‘we’, perhaps, support art’s intimate expressions by not-feeling? In-activist suspense or self-surrender, might just be the affective form that release our hold on problematic feelings.

I borrow this intuition from philosopher and film theorist Eugenie Brinkema’s scintillating work (2014). Simply put, Brinkema posits that affects have forms. The daring novelty of this unconventional formalism is to escape the fixation on individualised emotions, as a refusal to “preserve a kernel of humanism in any discussion of affect” (32).

Yes indeed, how queer, scandalous, even perverse to trespass the quintessential site of affectivity—our (human) bodies. But for once, without feeling, we may be able to witness what Brinkema calls the “self-folding exteriorities” of compositional particulars—shapes, structures, and genres (25). Affective capacity forms bonds with their specific movements, rhythms, durations, weights, intensities, and their minor accents. This liberation from prescribed sites of feeling propels philosophy into animated fields of shimmering moments, a thousand everyday sparks of things speculating, intuiting, and confabulating, amidst the human logic that keep us (pre)occupied with problems. To consider these aspects in a work of art might well reveal something other-wise, deeply grounded in the co-compositional abilities of matter(ing)s, their capacity to think, feel, respond, make change possible.

Ultimately, what is this for? Would this radical formalism of affective aesthetics merely re-dress the problems? What’s the use? I am not after resolution or consensus here. If we concede that the artwork is a self-realising form, it is not to endow with a new philosophical concept or have the concept validated by the work of art. Regarding forms affectively means investing things with what Barad (2007, 176ff.) calls “agential separability”—not projecting construction nor meditating on pure materiality but recognising a topology of specific *matterings*.⁷ This sense of “exteriority within” opens changing a more capacious sites where materiality and discursivity hold equal weight (Barad 2003, 825). So, let’s have aesthetic objects release their performative and performable energy and do the work of thinking and philosophising with their own specific languages, forms and problems, and let’s get *thinking things together*, after all, in a Laruellian non-philosophical sense, aren’t all thoughts equal (see Ó Maoilearca 2015)? Art and theory can then transform through mutual consideration and transformation of all.

What can be asked?

In what follows, I attempt a careful engagement with practices of close thinking emerging from the agential materiality of specific artworks. Particular attention is bestowed on aesthetic composition and spatio-temporal combination as they resonate with distinct affective structures. The question of critique and its problems is the context. The intuition is that the narratives of affective forms will ripple out to join the discussion and submit their own responses.

With this in mind, I turn to the bodies of work that gather around the figure of Berlinde De Bruyckere. Exhibition pieces, installations, drawings, collages, and, more recently, performances, that have become recognised primarily as sculptural practice. Together, they exist as incubation spaces where specimens gather in sparse situations, forming conceptual provocations through hybrid species, long extinct or in passage to a changed future.

In *We are all Flesh* (2009), horse hides stretch across iron armatures, their pallid surfaces marked by resin veins and folds.⁸ Some forms hang together, intertwined yet headless, the flesh-toned wax creating an unsettling proximity between organic mass and grafted tissue. The work suspends at a height forcing direct encounter with gravity.

Inside Me (2008–10) exhibits bulbous forms resembling internal organs, rendered in wax and fabric. These visceral masses, varying in scale, rest on industrial trestles. Their surfaces alternate between smooth and wrinkled, both sturdy and tender. The tonal range from pink flesh tones to deep reds, exacting organic materiality.

Actaeon (2012) features tangles of wax-cast antlers drooping across concrete slabs. These twisted forms, wrapped partially in cloth, echo dismembered limbs. *Cripplewood's* (2013) massive fallen elm trunks translate bark and skin through wax and cloth. The support of sandbags and metal structures forcing movement around broken forms.

Each composition materialises exhaustion through specific formal choices—suspension, fragmentation, drooping, wounding—while maintaining the tension between biomorphic and synthetic elements. Their plastic techniques of elemental amalgamation translate into corporeal masses of alternative enfleshments, grafted from mixed matters that fall into solitary shapes and emerge organically in associated clusters.

In other words, what holds their environment together is that both as singular forms and collective formations exist absorbed in affective extremities that resemble the morphology of the exhausted. They hang in the balance of abeyance, depletion, collapse, while also abiding, spreading, radiating. Such suspense counters a state of precarity with the capacity for sustainability.

I dwell in these inspiring wonders as they *inform* my incomplete practice of wayfinding with art's workings. Here, exhaustion shapes the aesthetic project through formal resemblance, redistributing matter through inhuman terms. Its formalism becomes a disabling condition of

human morphologies and mythologies, making exhaustion performative (bestowing agency on bare life) and performable (in its capacity to shapeshift relations).

The human factor remains conspicuous in these creative relations: De Bruyckere's international recognition, the art market's demands, institutional spaces. These forces are co-generative of the artwork's entangled bonds and (in)tensions. Rather than seeking coherence, this slow experiment takes on a wayward method, a slanted approach, latching onto critical points where discourse breaks, analysis falters, and linear logic disperses. In the artwork's wake, these disruptions become not problems to solve but form(ulation)s to unfold.

How do we end here?

In the environ of De Bruyckere's creative gatherings, the material artistic methodologies take stance through elemental methods in relation to experimentation. The abandonment of traditional resistant materials—metal, stone, bronze, marble—for malleable wax, animal skin, cloth, wood, resin documents the chemical and intimistic aspects achievable through compounded relations. Their forms of articulation produce paradoxical figurations through reticular agglutinations and inserted supports.

Their physical aspect gives the impression of enigmatic congregations:

the skin is furrowed by folds which, together with a lattice of veins and arteries, weave an intricate pattern; the muscles are rendered with a keen anatomical eye; while the pallor of the flesh is a reminder of the transience of life. The bodies are explored by way of subtraction: the figures, always incomplete and faceless, are the portrait of a fragmentary existence. (De Bruyckere 2013)

In their plastic language, these formations consolidate states of abjectness, fragmentedness, corpo-realness that compound recurrent themes. These qualities respond aesthetically to ideas of death, vulnerability, decay while “evoking processes of birth, metamorphosis, dissolution, and regeneration” (Lynch 2014, 89). This resonance emerges from De Bruyckere's engagement with classical traditions: the visceral gothic of Flemish Trecento art, the transfigurative icons of Netherlandish Renaissance, the chiaroscuro of Roman Baroque. The narrative references cross mythological motifs, images of battlefields, and other scenes of abjection and transformation.⁹ Yet what I find arresting about these projected scenes are elemental structures wrest from symbolic sublimation.

Out of their coagulated shapes, these biomorphic displays “have no heads to think with, nor eyes to see” (Downey 2018, 51). I understand this abstraction as a symbiotic (not symbolic) principle—a metabolism conceptualising through raw methods of materials that experiment with their tinkering spirit. Critic Herta Pümpel notes how “De Bruyckere's method of work is craft and its substance associated with concepts of joining together and connecting” (in Sagmeister et al. 2016, 216).

The structural composition here functions as formal articulation of how things become implied in their affective orientations. Their constitution is achieved not through received narratives but through exhaustive arrays of devices combining elements with synergies and resistances. Each material's experience of sensing and being sensed drives collective becoming. Their networked technologies respond to energies transmitted and shared—inflection, temperature, pressure, duration—via forces of rupture and cohesion defining relations.

For example, wax is inherently dense and unstable, repellent to moist and insoluble to water, made malleable by heat and bending/melting to flame; epoxy is wet, resistant, and adhesive to many encounters, tensile and bearing strength to compression and bending, with tendencies to low shrinkage and high retention properties. To all intents and purposes, their networked technologies are governed by the affective and sensible orientations of their coalitions.

In the present case of syncretic mattering of different substances into spatial shapes, the elemental and simple already appears as a resonance between poly-cognitive forces and experiences. It expresses itself, formally, as a correlative reality from the start—matters considering collaborative learning, that think through the proclivities and repercussions of syncing and embedding, a modality that attends to the role of a wider composition.

This combinatorial capacity yields new properties through external-within supplementation. Following Foucault's non-teleological approach to histories shaped by force, I pursue not what the artwork *means*, but how we might regard it otherwise—attending to the substrate matter where form takes place. These compositional structures sustain what Isabelle Stengers (following A. N. Whitehead) calls "lures" for feeling and thinking (Stengers 2008).

Exacting both rigor and curiosity in considering how De Bruyckere curates *with* materials, rather than convince you of an analytic method, I will share, as well as I can, an orientation toward thinking *with form's affective arsenal*. As tools of relation, these attentive speculations gesture toward the intricate play of agential materiality, yielding performative and performable possibilities.

Can we go on?

With this disposition at heart, I turn to the long form of Gilles Deleuze's essay on Samuel Beckett's narrative structure—"The Exhausted" (1995). This text and the aesthetic modulations fostered by De Bruyckere share a special relation to exhaustion. Both tend to(ward) forms and rhythms that are simultaneously bio-poetic-political. Both break and repair the aest-ethical limit. Through their exhausted structures—their formability, disability, penetrability, sustainability—they invite an inhuman morphology that lays the human problem to rest.

Exhaustion, as we feel it, carries an element of the impossible; it seems unthinkable to go on. Yet we press on, exhausted—but toward what? Deleuze presents exhaustion not as defeat but as necessity, a tactic escaping the tyranny of all present(ed) possibilities:

Exhausted is a whole lot more than tired. [...] The tired has only exhausted realization, while the exhausted exhausts all of the possible. The tired can no longer realize, but the exhausted can no longer possibilitate. "That the impossible should be asked of me, good, what else could be asked of me?" (Deleuze 1995, 3)

Deleuze's model of exhaustion begins with a formal encounter and infectious thinking with Beckett's novels and plays, radio plays, and his more extremely experimental late writing and television plays. The philosopher's argument (in complicity with Beckett's text) may appear to be little more than a riddle wrapped in the enigma of (im)possibilities. With no solutions in mind, I want to consider this arresting puzzle—problem or question—from the literalness of its affect.

The exhausted figure remains "'bowed head resting on hands', hands sitting on the table and head sitting on hands, head level with the table" (5, citing Beckett's television play *Nacht und Träume* [1982])—a lump of matter lapsing into other matters. This slumped shape "without the force either to rise or lie down" (6) carries on into shadowy, indeterminate versions of itself. A de-compositional movement of suspense—still-in-action. It doesn't bear thinking.

Let's linger on this posture that escapes human exaltation, renouncing all while holding itself in a suspense without ends. Overwhelmed by all that is and has been, collapsed in a condition of indeterminacy and incompleteness, taking up entirely its immobility, deflation, at the limits of existence.... It's indeed exhausting, simultaneously as a physical state of matters being consumed, and the logical principle of using up a whole set of possibilities.

Following Deleuze, exhaustion is the exercise of the combinatorial—the art (or science) that compounds variables by renouncing "all order of preference and all organization of goal, all signification" (3–4). This suspension of priorities doesn't mean passivity: "you press on, but toward nothing" (4). This is the paradox of Beckett's protagonist in *The Unnamable* (1953): "You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Beckett 2009, 407). This principle of de-composed-in-differentiation is what the philosopher finds in Beckett's work with text, space and screen. It lands on particular and specific structures: a figure—the rolling gait of *Watt*'s listless character shuffling in all directions far from equilibrium; a diagram—the absolutely reduced spatial-mechanical nature of *Quad*'s sequences; a space-image—the camera's disjunctive cuts and travelling frames in *Trio*.

The scene defines itself not through content but through *form*—its "internal tension" (Deleuze 1995, 9). A world made up of countless permutations of topological intra/extro/in/versions. The exhaustion of logical possibilities opens "another reality to possibility, one that is itself exhaustible" (Stevenson 2009, 82). Here exhausted meets exhaustive at the limit edge—impossibility. As scholar Audrey Wasser notes "exhaustion invents the possible as it exercises it, and it has affair [...] only with the impossible, which belongs to it as an essential determination and a limit to be displaced" (2012, 128).¹⁰ Exhausted matters de-compose themselves in the possibilitation of the impossible, at the point where the (human) figure disengages its-self.

Let us pause. Exhaustion lays bare its compositional energies. An elementary situation that cannot take anymore "of that which coerces, from the outside and from the inside" (Pelbart 2015, 23). In

its extremity, exhausting becomes the art of composing with “a fantastic decomposition of the ‘I’” (Deleuze 1995, 5). Everything is being (de)composed out of an energy asking matters to hold shape.

A point of suspension. A curiosity.

What are we capable of holding? This strategy of matters co-(de)composing demands engagement with exhaustive energies grappling between collapse and radical sustainability. Empty head in captive hands, I temporarily suspend thought via an elliptical form bringing into being the not-yet...

What escapes (us)?

The dys-organic compounds that make a scene in De Bruyckere’s theatre seem to express themselves via the de-composing capacities of exhaustion. From the moment wax, resin, wool, hair, iron, cotton, skin, artist and all other intervening agencies come together, they engage in unpredictable theory-making through compositional tendencies. Their inherent properties break down, bend, blend and dissolve under machines, processes and atmospheres.

Skins elongate and tighten under the pressure of shifting volumes. The wetting of epoxy makes atomic bonds with the substrate of wood, cloth, wax and hair. The jumble of particulate collisions precipitates castings, carvings and shavings. Metallic bones tense between the lifting and landing of weights. Transient states enter a zone of impact and sync in. Network technologies work their alchemy through more-than-conscious understanding of *bodies* in relation.

Matters appear held together by a principle that is inherently sensory and social—a collective self-sense that shapes an orga|ni|smic deployment. For instance, let’s consider the choreography of *We are all Flesh* (2013), a series of works in skin study. The disparate pieces derive their communal expressive, technical and aesthetic features from still-unfolding questions about collapse, surface tension, and abeyance.

Oddly shaped carcasses of swollen mixtures—wax, resin, hessian, twine. The masses heavy in their quietude, the weight almost unbearable, layering, positioning, and sliding on and over metal, concrete, and wood structures. In response, they spread out so as to release their gradations in colour or size, to rub against the singular perspective. Their suspension underscored by their arching lines—their faceless sensuality heavy but held. Like composted paradigms, finding comfort in their demise. These formal agglutinations syncretise an impressive collection of ‘bodiments’, in the sense intended by Emily Anne Parker:

bodiment instead of *embodiment* because I take the latter to be a hylomorphic term, *em-bodiment*, which suggests that something immaterial has passed into something material (em-). In this way the concept of embodiment problematically suggests that a body is divisible into agency as “form” and inertness as “matter.” (Parker 2018, 448; original emphasis)

Such wonders do not take form as their object but occupy such a position—making home with matter(ing)s yearning beyond binaries. In a critical sense, form belongs to the indeterminacy of

things, a speculative opening where matter affects itself. The background precipitates into critical sense-making through performative revitalisation that weaves bodies into performable becomings.

What becomes animated is a nonhuman aesthetic angle finding support in the unknowable—where judgement hangs, suspended. The headless approximations of new casts and species are both outcome and means by which techniques of unhinged logic develop and exhaust. Pieces assemble in recursive series jolted from order, seized into semblance of depleted action to the point of saturation. Systematically truncated from habitual definitions, they remain held in abeyance.

All possibilities here exist in a state of figural and figurative suspension that generates entangled meaning. Wrenched from the flow of ordinary sense, they emerge in relative isolation. Lifted from any functional activity, they exist in a collapsed state of energy, gripped in the suspension they perform. The dissociation of surface and form from a single recognisable source, logic or sequence intensifies the tension between formal extroversion and topographic composition.

Waxen antlers slump/ed over shelves, tables and plinths
stuffed pelts h-a/hung from gallows and iron cranes
stacks of woollen blankets roll/ed out on beds, crates or trolley legs
crippled branches recline/d over pedestals and metal trestles
lumps of gutty fibres splay/ed across racks
synthetic limbs slung/ed between sawhorses
Some droop/ed on high trampolines, some hover on hooks
some rest/ed in old vitrines
all wrest from the ground—in a realised state of... *suspense!*

What's happening now? What's going on? What's going to happen? How enigmatic... How thrilling....

Lingering on this affective intensity, suspense comes to coincide with an intense interval of possibility without top certainty or bottom end. This form of arousal is akin to what philosopher Alanna Thain recognises as "*a technic* for an attentive awareness to the minor form of difference that (re)constitutes a body in time, a feeling of futurity immediately impinging on the body's stability and reopening it to intensive relationality" (Thain 2017, 3; my emphasis). From this thickness, suspense emerges precisely where subjectification loosens up—at the point we hold on to bewilderment and wonder.

How curious... How intriguing.... Having trouble to know, not deciding whether to be or not to be, taking off interpretation.... Maybe this tension is just an invitation—to be more curious about another(ness). Are we ready to be in audience? Are we struggling to be with our attention? Perhaps what we need is a queerer sensorium more attuned to other-than-human intimacies. A radical accessibility where we can let ourselves be spoken to by matter's own intentions.

What's up?

Suspense is in the air, hanging with the carnal anomalies that come under the name of De Bruyckere, replicating what Thain recognises as “a vertiginous swept-upness, affirming a becoming that precedes and exceeds knowing” (2017, 53). What resurfaces is the problem of perception—of how human logic and utility becomes the project atop the rest.

Every molecule making its risky journey through air into senses is a portal to dialogue beyond knowledge or language. Every move reaching *us* enlists *our body* into atmospheric choreography, telling what's hanging, what's (re)occurring, what's (de)composing, what's changing. In this sense(making), we become participants in an ecosystem of feelings....

We are swept up into unresolvable tensions, losing ground control of knowing or thinking on human scale. In this suspenseful milieu, we are in enfolded de-territoriality—literally off-ground—through a technology of expanded *in*activism.

I want to ally the held-in-drift temporality of suspense and Kafer's rendition of crip time as “flex time not just expanded but exploded” (2013, 27). This dehiscent rhythm makes space for a groundless practice attentive to bodies colliding in community. Here lies the embodied experience of difference opening *other* systems of perception, interdependency and mutuality, that can take care for all forms of matterings.

Underlying this is a belief in creative practices that challenge epistemological assumptions producing the problem of ‘knowledge’. In the call and response of the sculptural formations that take on the semblance of exhaustive exhaustion, we might be sustained by its affective structures to rethink through, as we think among, the ways in which its *informal* relationality is recurrent, resurgent, even recycled.

In other words, the exhaustive combinatorial is where all the options or contraries taken together are equally enactive (performative) of a transpositional (performable) disposition. The result is a sense of extraordinary polymorphic complexity as the affect—the desire for a kind of infinite expression—combines with... more or less anything.

Let's return for a moment to *We are all Flesh* (2012), where expansive renderings of horse hides, epoxy and iron armatures explore transient states by creating contact and syncing into form. Resin-filled veins and metallic structures coordinate, returning sustained impressions of life-size carcasses from collapsed perspectives. The singularity of each structure multiplies as matters link and influence in combinatorial patterns.

Or let's consider the phenomenal disjunctions responding to the serial kilter of the *Inside me* series (2008–2015). Wax, wool, cotton, wood, rope, epoxy, and iron rendered into bulbous lumps, displaying all manner of innards, resembling bursting anatomies. Their outlines carry outward into industrial supports while sinking into structure, spilling into synthetic collaborations through the overlap of material accommodations and tensions.

Materials and technologies experiment with the virtual possibilities they surrender to. They express the (neuro)plasticity of their headless bodies, exerting themselves in lingering collapse, extricating affects with each enlisted form, composting rhythms of autonomous gradations into combinatorial in-possibilities.

Notice how surfaces stretch, press and contract in sync with the shifts in the spectrum; how the hard edges of metals intensify against collapsing volumes; how the iridescence of wax activates tension between depth and surface. Shadows animate cuts vertically or capture material waves horizontally. The irregular densities of plaster flow with the viscosity of resin. Fibrous muscle-mass vibrates infusing hidden movement through the whole ecotone.

I lean here on Nicole De Brabandere's suggestive reading of the informing rhythms of affective intensities:

[a]s the specific qualities of the rendering ecology generate intense tensions, they also *inform* how the texture is rendered and perceived. The *inform* emerges in the experimental ecology as the situated relations of form-taking activate new openings to attention and inhabited alignments of force and form. (2017, 70–1, original emphasis)

Energy isn't merely extracted (from bodies) but infuses the per-form abilities of non-sensory attunement rendering intra-activist matterings. The still-lives of exhaustion are sustained by a tensile re-posing—not mimicking grounded perspectives but resonating affective forces. Their *informing* recycles itself in resistance, using exhaustive energies while continuously exhausting bodies—toward nothing. No-thing resolves here; suspension remains in possibility-shaped guise without arrival or grounding. The with-holding of suspense attends only to polymorphic improvisations of exhaustive combinations.

From within this spread emerge techno-aesthetic bricolages that co-(de)compose even the artist, among the rest. Incomplete and uncertain, they are as fragile in their faceless figuration as strong in their sustained inactivity. They make body from each affecting matter, posture from each informing transition, experience from each inclusive dissociation. They hold anticipatory possibility.

In this suspension, what deformations of the human become possible? Can this impossible holding sustain relation with other-than-human humanity? How might “crip sustainability” behold a transformative praxis so the impossible can be absorb in the real? What new forms of socialities can emerge if we stay with these overwhelming dispositions?

Next and toward the end (if ever there is one), this exhausting cycle of problems and propositions sets again in creative fugue, assuming new response-abilities, tending reticular forms, sustaining even the most surprising or unbearable solidarities.

Why go on?

The formidable figures of exhaustion that have taken hold of these pages return to the point where intelligibility is suspended. Their precarious introversions open up and cleave the most tender parts of the bodiments they press forth, always earthward—what we know goes to bottom, goes down.

It is among the site of encounter known as *Cripplewood* (2013) that I first witnessed the full weight of this dispossession, actualised through impersonal perception—feeling-beside-itself—finding its way into the artwork as a force in potentia. Here lies sustained tension between resistance and depletion, absorbing within its affective extremity the bio-syn(aes)thetic figure of incompleteness.

The appearance of truncated tree trunks multiply, weaved with felt, rubbed by wax, spread in gradations of colour and size, expressing the bearing of weary bones. The environment finds in shadow resistance to affirming gaze, troubling mass, density, weight toward the point of amalgamation. Synthetic membranes hide within displaced matter, inspiring wonder as an unending, unfurling practice of wayfinding.

The distinct scales these expressions and contradictions inhabit can inhibit human logic of sense, unhinging binary systems. What is suspended are the conventional operations that divide the assumed *exteriority* of shape, structure, dimension, duration, light, line from the *interiority* of feeling subjects, “so privileged in Western thought” (Brinkema 2014, 22). In a very critical sense, *Cripplewood* finds form precisely in the indeterminacy of things. The difference between one matter and another, one composition and another, is not resolved but e/merges from exhaustion’s combinatorial return. I imagine this process as a *collaborative continuity*, where activity is never complete, only suspended, so that matters may find common production through shared exhaustion.

This *inactivism* grapples with the tender cont(r)acts between affect and form. Not restricted to dualist segregation, they recognise each other in the intra-action of the formed and formulated—the performative—with “the formless and unformulated” (Deleuze 1995, 5)—the performable. An ecology of matters among forces exceeding each entity’s self-understanding.

There is continuity between wood, skin, steel, cloth, wax, resin, concrete, integrating disparate forms into communal structure. Singularity and exhaustion converge into collective tissue holding separate agencies into a group, a series—a social field. This synthesis neither assimilates nor annihilates difference. No hierarchy is constructed.

Contradictions abound in inclusive disjunctions through the exhaustive combinations of matters. They account not to the one—matter, body, subject—but to all sides. They become lures of conviviality, shaping elemental yearnings into what Fred Moten (after Manuel Callahan) calls “real assembly”—“the gathering of things in the flesh, where performed devotion refuses every enclosure” (2016, 163).

This meshwork concretises the combinatorial force of exhausting matter(s): each material thinking through and beyond its own dissolution, *withholding* the tension between what dissipates and what persists—in-difference. No elsewhere, no divide, just otherwise. To sustain these possibilities is indeed suspenseful.

A vertiginous force done holding out for the human—body, thought, feeling, action—to be utilised or sustained. At the beat of crip time's refusal of normative productivity, it invites undifferentiated multiplicity where nothing needs to be fixed, managed or made proper. It swirls opposition into composition. A radically different sustainability—one that holds space for all forms of access, all modes of being and unbecoming, all ways matter finds to persist beyond prescribed understanding. Here, even *us* and *ours* become part of its wide embrace.

Such a situation demands imagining outside of the centrism of singular problems toward the responsive polyamory of forms/forces. Why? Because if we become capable of exhaustive (self)transformations we can also join the fantastic *combinatorial living* peculiar to art. Its radical creativity emerges through dispositions engaging intra-material and trans-affective potentials, providing a key for ethical liveability.

If art effects the in-active formalisation of exhausting possibilities, it also foregrounds its exhaustive potentialised sense. Just as there is inactivism in art—a performativity—there is also a force, or passion, in-forming its tendencies—a performability. The performative can be the motion that actualises any such variation in the language of the work of art. The performable is the text that can stress a praxis of sense-making—holding a sense of intention as simultaneously as becoming sensible in mattering(s).

In this double sense, art exposes its ways of *working* and *in-forming* the production of otherness—a state of conglomerate being performed on bodies stripped of subjectivity; a sense corroding the calcified forms of human norms. Here we can form new intimacies in not-feeling, abandoning old Self through world-sensing. This reorientation needs both sensuousness and its refusal.

How might we unlearn to feel *other things* by not feeling ourselves? Can this de-action become a speculative practice, a way of imagining otherwise? Can it reorient material praxis toward greater care? Can attention as felt form foster more responsible and sustainable (crip) *inactivism*? One minor step to take before inviting these (im)possibilities....

Why not (we)...?

Exhaustion's minor gesture abides time with non-spectacular suspense. Philosopher Joff Bradley suggests: "it is also a kind of visionary act in that the seer perceives the virtual inhering in a given actuality that surpasses or overflows it" (2019, 271). A feeling that has done too much and has had enough. What is left is the refusal to compromise with all present(ed) possibilities—"this absence of the possible" enables "new processes of subjectivation... in their very impossibility" (Bradley 2019, 271). The scene of exhaustion invites us to relinquish accomplished postures, to stay with

overwhelming complexity as less defined, less Self, to experiment with what we consider a problem.

Do our critical postures disguise the crisis they replay? Is our solutionism, all too human, part of the problem? What if we adopt the intelligence—the sense-ability—that comes with suspending thought and action and tipping the problem sideways? Let's do something different and hold on to uncertainty, not to dismiss or bypass the problem, but to be felt by the experience of it. Receive the imagination or discovery that becomes possible when we attune (again) to our disintegration; to *other* sensible capacities that reawaken when we suspend cognition....

Upside down, head(less) first, stripped of the grounds of subjectivity, in the loose direction of crip time—dispossessed, extenuated, at the threshold of possibilities. We can re-learn how to be undone from presumed identity, how to feel through painful unbecoming. This disorientation opens new configurations, where refusing normative processes of being becomes a way of knowing otherwise, of sharing what emerges when we release the grip on certainty.

Following Brazilian philosopher Peter Pál Pelbart, the exhaustion with old forms can encourage the expressive, creative and modulatory capacities of (neuro)plasticity, in ways that escape from dominance:

“minor” modes of life that are not only more fragile, precarious, and vulnerable (poor, crazy, autistic), but also more hesitant, dissident, and at times more traditional than others (Indigenous people); that are, on the contrary, still being born, tentative, even experimental (to be discovered, invented). (Pelbart 2017, 137)

The tender things that insist on resisting, stay alive through attempting, wandering, escaping, failing without preconceived finality, knowledge or definition: “without hoping to entertain, fulfil, without the fear of nothing happening. The condition for something to happen is that nothing must happen” (Pelbart 2016).

The minor qualities imperceptible to human logic—affects, senses, resonances—stick with no-things, no-matters, no-bodies. Multiple as they are, they commit to crip sustainability as a disposition for collective liberation—a praxis of *thinking things together*.¹¹ A formal expedient for larger environments to emerge. Some relational field of *in*action, some differential shape for coalition—some things performative *and* performable.

Unlike the tired which realises possibilities, exhaustion must in-possibilitate—must create. Just as the crisis is not the result of a problem, the critical bodiments that have called our attention here raising the questions which problems become ruse for new, inventive (cor)relations. Their micropolitical attunements—barely perceptible shifts in how matter moves and holds still—teach us to notice what trembles at the edge of attention, what whispers beneath the threshold of recognition.

Why not we... take their cue, slow down, lose our heads, ditch our human scales, risk new shapes, weighed as we are with unsubstantiated feelings, swelled as we are with desires and con+fusions,

to tenderly hold the combinations of relations that compose all bodies and their survival.... It feels good to be felt.... What else can happen now but the impossible?...

I am exhausted. I hope you are too....

--

What happened? Is it still happening? Are we still—here? I am writing this post scriptum in times of renewed dislocations, genocidal destruction, grief, conflagrations in thoughts and implosions in values. At the end of another earth revolution (2024). Reminded again of our radical incompleteness. To notice we've never not been indebted to our undoing.

An inflection point is reached with exhaustion. Loosening predetermined expectations, changing the shape of experience, staying with the minor tremors of bodies, yielding into a wayward pattern, a queer feeling, a fugitive moment, a strange perception. The sustenance for these times comes from the gift of our sensuous solidarities, the glimpses of artistic (autistic) futures, the other lives that have always sidled ours.

You are still being felt.

Held with care.

I wish you good rest and quiet fallowness.

Notes

¹ A morphology defined by European, Western modernity in both forms of the Vitruvian Man and the medical-natural organism. Such mythology that privileges an implicit whiteness, masculinity, cis-ness, hetero-ness, symmetry, and ability, across an intersectional field of gendered, sexual, racial, and colonial relations (see Parker 2018).

² A term coined to formalise the geological epoch of modern Earth as characterised by the transformation of human activity as the primary factor in determining the direction and flow patterns of ongoing geological processes. New concepts have since emerged to illustrate some of the contradictions of the Anthropocene, such as "Capitalocene" (Moore 2016), Plantationocene (Haraway 2015), "Afrocene" (Akomolafe 2022), "Plutocene" (Solón 2019), "Mantropocene" (Raworth 2014), or even "Technocene" (Hornborg 2015) and "Wasteocene" (Armiero 2021), and more.

³ Stacey Alaimo, Hortense Spillers, Jasbir Puar, Sara Ahmed, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Jack Halberstam, Alexander G. Wheellike, Sophie Strand, among others, have demonstrated how this projection is inextricably tied to, even predicated on, various dehumanised and inhuman bodies—the feminine, blackness, disability, queerness, transness, animality, and the non-human animate and inanimate.

⁴ Feminist new materialism, queer theory, affect theory, critical race studies, disability studies, postcolonial critique, and other adjacent fields.

⁵ In my ears here the motif that thrums throughout Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016): "It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds" (35).

⁶ I consider this dimension referring to states of dehumanisation in a broader field of gendered, sexual, racial, ableist, and colonial norms and relations at their intersection (see Waheliye 2014).

⁷ Curiously, for Barad 'geometry is concerned with shapes and sizes [...], whereas topology investigates questions of connectivity and boundaries' (2003, 825).

⁸ "De Bruyckere has spoken candidly about her relationship with the Bruges University Veterinary Clinic, who contact her when they have a deceased equine patient. De Bruyckere chooses the bodies with care and consideration. She doesn't take every horse carcass she is offered; she must, in her own words, 'fall in love with' a particular body, find it beautiful or moving" (Downey 2018, 53).

⁹ For instance, the series titled *Slaapzaal III* (1999) made out of layers of woollen blankets stacked on bed, tables and wheeled structures emerged in response to news footage of refugees in Rwanda (see De Bruyckere 2012).

¹⁰ Elsewhere Wasser (2017) also anchors Deleuze's philosophy in the notion of "problems", which is relevant to this journal issue.

¹¹ As an aside, I would like to acknowledge philosopher Erin Manning's (neuro)atypical intuition on the differential attunement of micropolitical movements: "A minor gesture that activates the collectively at the heart of thought effects change. It affects not only what the text can become: it alters to the core what thinking can do [...] and gives that thought the space to develop collectively" (2016, x).

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Biography

Annalaura Alifuoco is a human animal who finds joy in reading, cycling, wandering, wonder and play. Originally from Southern Europe, they now live under the herons of Liverpool by the river Mersey, where they work as an educator and learner through writing and performance.

Their research, teaching and artistic methods tend to minoritarian bodies and matters—those rendered as racialised, gendered, disabled and non-human by normative politics. These activities weave together neurodiversity, queerness and trans-materialities as regenerative practices offering compelling strategies to heal, thrive and re-enchant matters in times of crisis.

The work is always done with others in the belief that regenerative practices emerge through collective wayfinding. Recent projects include “Endosymbiotic Love Calendar 2021”, merging microbial science with performance art (funded by Arts Council England/Microbiological Society), and “Flow.Walk.Drag.”, exploring ecological performance methods (supported by the Ecological Citizen[s] fund – UKRI/Royal College of Art).

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

PERFORMANCEPHILOSOPHY: SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE HELSINKI BIENNALE 2022

CAROLINE WILKINS INDEPENDENT COMPOSER/RESEARCHER

Introduction

Hosted by Helsinki's University of the Arts in collaboration with the Performance Philosophy Network, this event comprised interactive live / virtual events over a period of four days. Six international key groups, including one from Argentina and another from Russia, met during the months leading up to the conference in order to structure a combined presentation whose title had been selected in advance. Equally diverse in terms of subject matter were a total of twenty-two individual / group panel presentations that comprised a variety of papers, performances, workshops and recitals. Parallel to these activities an ongoing Pop-up Picnic took place in the large entrance hall that initiated interventions for conference participants to meet socially. A key question of the conference was 'How Does Performance Philosophy Collaborate?' Throughout this ReView I shall refer by way of example to two previous biennial conferences: *Between Institution and Intoxication: How Does Performance Philosophy Intervene?* (Amsterdam 2019, Franzen and van Balen 2019) and *How does performance philosophy act? Ethos, ethics, ethnography* (Prague 2017, <http://web.flu.cas.cz/ppprague2017/>); as well as 'interim events' that Performance Philosophy supported between the biennial conferences, such as 'Pragmatics: Practice: Praxis', a three-day workshop in 2017 in Sydney organized by Erin Brannigan, Oliver Feltham, Barbara Formis, and Theron Schmidt (<https://www.performancephilosophy.org/events/>); 'Getting Bread', a one-day workshop for Philosophy as Performance in Hanover, Germany, in 2016, organized by Rüdiger H. Rimpler (<https://gettingbread.wordpress.com>); and 'Know thyself/ Gnothi seauton', a "No Paper"

conference” in Prague in 2014, organized by Alice Koubová (<https://youtu.be/t-PmFrU3RrU>). All of these can be found on the Performance Philosophy website.

A conference community

This contribution stems from the perspective of a curious witness and not a presenter, at the Helsinki conference. Its focus is made even more complex by the inclusion of both live and virtual presentations for the first time at a biennale. In this light, Simon Makhali, Anna Suchard, and Carolin Bebek from the Bremen Centre for Performance Studies proposed methods for establishing exchange between individuals. This was realized through the possible choice of a personal hybrid “mate”, with whom one connected via a digital device and communicated during a session. Thus a particular rhythm of response on the part of these two individuals became possible in the form of a parallel dialogue commenting on the event in real time. It was conceived under the concept of an “event dramaturgy to crosslink the two spheres”. Such innovative sessions, entitled “Interspace / Interlude”, occurred during the whole conference and took the form of ongoing events under the subtitle “PPPPP (Performance Philosophy Problems Pop-up Picnic)” (Performance Philosophy 2022). Participants could withdraw or engage at any time with others in suitably furnished, designated spaces around the large entrance area. Such interludes acknowledged the multiple needs of a conference community engaging with their contemporaries in the same time-space. Their aim was to playfully question ways in which people can act and gather during or between sessions and attempt to address the social component of a performance philosophy conference as a problem within itself.

Although chiefly concerned with the hybrid issue of online and live participation at Helsinki, this contribution on the part of its initiators highlighted a need for flexibility within the structure of the programmed events themselves. My question, however, remains as to how successful the Bremen group’s experiment proved to be, given the demands of a program in which live participants were faced with a full schedule and their own varying levels of technological competence. Interesting to note, in this context, is that two of its instigators, Simon Makhali and Carolin Bebek, were co-convenors of the 2017 biennale in Prague entitled “How does Performance Philosophy act?” Recognition on their part of the key role to be played by forms of social interaction between live participants became implicated years later into a hybrid format. The Prague event was conceived as a performance-in-itself, experimenting with new dramaturgical formats in a genuine search for alternatives. I shall return to these in more detail during the course of the essay.

The replacement at Helsinki of traditional keynote presentations by key groups reflected a move towards a more democratic direction when compared to the usual conference structure. Combining a small number of individuals around a commonly-proposed title, live and online discussions were held between them during a pre-conference period. Ideas were then filtered down to an agreed format and shared with the conference audience. This was in contrast to panels, where a number of individual or group presenters were placed together in sessions loosely connected together in terms of a general theme by the conference organisers. By definition, a working group in this context would indicate processes of decision-making on the part of the

organisers or key groups, prior to the conference. Key groups were a welcome alternative, particularly those open to active audience involvement during their presentation. Sometimes the arena was widened to include responses on all possible levels, whether gestural or vocal, according to each individual. Their place within the conference worked well and I would strongly propose an increase in number, perhaps replacing paper presentations altogether. Such a practice was echoed during the Prague biennale, where lecture panels became the basis for collective exchange on the part of the contributors and not the result of individual research.

With regard to some presentations, general discussion would have been welcomed as an alternative to the formality of individual questions and answers. I note that at the Prague interim event of 2014 there was no paper and question-time format. All panels were discussed in dialogue within a structure of cross-mapping between them. Although I was not present at the Prague event, I imagine this would have taken the form of an open session where all presenters, together with participants, exchanged comparisons and connections between related themes. At Helsinki, such an approach would have allowed for more of a sharing process to occur, and avoided the frustration of thoughts not being aired to the group due to a lack of time. A plurality of response methods increases the field of diversity with regard to each person's rhythm and calls on structures in which this can take place. I recall a session at Helsinki, for example, where audience feedback was too intense for the presenters to absorb after the very different demands of their performance-lecture. The switch from performance to analysis via question and answer was too harsh. More time and space was needed in which to exchange. A missing component could have been acknowledged here, one that would have valued a more relaxed discussion in a less time-bound situation. Indeed, it could be a fundamental argument for the *rhuthmos* (Barthes 2013, 7) of a looser, more flexible session structure. This term, a predecessor of the word *rhythm*, refers to a changeable pattern, a flowing arrangement that can be improvised or configured.

As a Performance Philosophy 'interim event' in 2014, Alice Koubová from the Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy at Prague University had taken the radical step of organizing the above-mentioned No Paper Conference. It focussed in particular on forms of 'public thinking' for philosophers in place of prepared papers, deconstructing forms of interaction between its participants by offering a free space for a variety of expression formats within an experimental dimension. I wonder if this step led to a more continued presence of conference members. Where do feelings of inclusion and the possibility of contributing, in whatever form and without pressure, stand in relation to this? Surely each person's presence, whether physical or virtual, is valued in such a context, whether or not they actually say anything.

Presentation formats and themes

At this point I return to Helsinki and an analysis of the presentations, the majority of which were structured as individual papers comprising panels. These included some workshops and performance-lectures / demonstrations, of which roughly ten involved an engagement of direct audience practice. Below is a summary of themes (which by their very nature often overlapped with others) and their chosen formats. Thematic problems addressed at the conference are listed

as subject headings alongside the format chosen for their presentations and include key groups as well as individual/group panels:

<u>Subject:</u>	<u>Chosen format:</u>
Theory / Practice re-framing	Key Groups, papers, workshop
Collaboration	Key Groups, paper, performance lectures
Artistic Practice	Papers, lecture-performances Workshop-demonstrations
Information consumption	Workshop, papers
Colonization and ethics	Papers
Environments and virtuality	Papers, workshop
Illness and special needs	Key Group, paper
Ongoing interventions	"Pop-up picnic"

I propose to address one of these themes, namely collaboration, by means of a methodology with examples as to how it could be experientially explored through a process of *doing*, thus bringing the rhythms of performance and philosophy more closely aligned together. Barthes' term *idiorrhythmy* (2013, 6), comprising *idios* (particular) and *rhuthmos* (rhythm), refers to any community that respects each individual's own personal rhythm. It can be applied here in a metaphorical sense if we examine the potentially diverse rhythms of thinking and doing inherent to these two practices. In essence they involve processes of thought generated through and with the body. Their collective existence places theory and practice in an evolving space of mutual interaction. At the same time, major differences between paces of thinking and doing, when applied to this space, can disturb, disrupt, or even positively influence a change. Such difficulties become manifestly clear during an event that combines them.

Under the heading "Collaboration", I counted a chosen format of seven papers, one key group, two performative gatherings, and one screened presentation of a theatre piece. Examples of *doing* collaboration with an audience were limited to two, namely "Poetics of Friction" (Panel 18) and "The Minutes of the Hildegard of Bingen Society for Gardening Companions" (Panel 13). Briefly outlined, the former concerned the problem of mutual understanding, putting into practice a system of call and response between the three panellists and the audience by means of spoken words, screened images, and handout materials. The latter involved a participatory performance-lecture together with the audience, staging a real or imagined gathering. In both cases, any unconscious structures of power between presenters and audience were dissolved in order to reach a level of reciprocal understanding. Such diversity of materials and spontaneity of situations would encourage an individually rhythmic-based response. Doing was combined with thinking as bodies moved and talked.

Regarding the key group, the seven papers, and the screened excerpts from a theatre production, my query remains the following: are there similar methodologies of *doing*, such as the ones applied

to the presentations described above, that could have allowed the content of these latter formats to be communicated on a more experiential level with an audience? Clearly the structure of both examples cited above relied on direct collaboration amongst participants in the form of responses and were facilitated either by an emphasis on 'staging' a speculative meeting or by instigating spontaneous vocal reactions that rebounded from each other. The methodology used by each differed: in "Poetics of Friction" it centred on collecting and re-examining histories, whereas with "The Minutes of the Hildegard of Bingen Society for Gardening Companions", a play between one person's and another's interpretations of words, images, or other materials helped to dissolve barriers of comprehension between them. With regard to the structure of these presentations, does the solution then lie in creating more—or only—key groups, along the lines of a No Paper conference, as proposed earlier in this essay? Would this lead to more practice-based thought? Could such key group sessions be led in the future by practitioners as a way of gently guiding participants into a hybrid field of *do-* / (performing) *think-* / (philosophizing) *-ing* in order to encourage a more balanced relationship between their paces of activity?

Some previous contexts

By way of a previous encounter with this question I refer to a chapter of the *Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy* entitled "Daring to transform academic routines: Cultures of knowledge and their performances" by Jörg Holkenbrink and Anna Seitz (2020). Both are practitioners from the Theatre der Versammlung (Theatre of Assemblage) and describe their involvement in a production entitled *Am seidenen Faden* (At the Silk Thread) performed at a funeral parlour in Bremen, Germany. The chapter describes how an audience is greeted, the arrangement of the space, the structuring of time, forms of acting, and a discussion in the form of a "memory stage" (204) by the spectators. Basically, this practice allows for specialist disciplines to be brought into performance work whilst performative methods are applied to specialist areas. Practical and aesthetic approaches are interchanged with theoretical perspectives on reality. There is an integration of different forms of knowledge by applying theatre anthropology to the community. Issues of power between participants are dissolved here by a cross-over of disciplines, resulting in a flow of rhythms between the personal and the public.

Again, the Prague biennale conference springs to mind as a precursor to the above: here the audience divided themselves into two groups, namely theory and practice, and approached pre-determined thematic fields, surrounded by their own particular formats and disciplines, from the perspective of making reciprocal connections. Both examples—the one cited in the *Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, the other based on a dramaturgical application within a conference event itself—offer solutions as to how specialist areas of knowledge can be incorporated into performance. Other interim events organized under the Performance Philosophy umbrella that reflect this concern include "Getting Bread", a workshop on philosophy *as* performance (2016) and "Pragmatics: Practice: Praxis" in the following year, a workshop dedicated to the exchange of practice within different fields and methods to produce hybrid

models of these. Such an approach would generate an understanding of the different 'rhythms' inherent to each field through a process of direct experience.

The Amsterdam Biennale of 2019 entitled "Between Institution and Intoxication: How does Performance Philosophy Intervene?" included a number of workshops as well as parallel events such as performances, exhibitions, and installations in the foyers of the buildings. Indeed, interventions occurred, whether spontaneous or planned, between some of the presentations, including my own, which was titled "An Expansion of the Admissible: Sound Theatre as Interference". A colleague and I agreed to enter spontaneously into dialogue in the form of an intervention during each other's presentations. One was made in the form of non-verbal interruptions that simultaneously echoed and played with fragments from a spoken presentation. These issued from the auditorium area and were performed through a small megaphone equipped with sound processing filters. The other was a piece of live performance art following a presentation of *Fragmanin*, a sound installation by Leona Jones, that also took the audience by surprise.. Movement, gesture, vocal and percussive sound gave embodied form to content that had previously been relayed through loudspeakers, with myself as performer leading the audience as they exited down a staircase into the foyer. Such collisions of pace between doing and thinking caused a disruptive shift to occur, engendering shock, surprise, moments of suspension, and re-evaluation.

Space and language

This leads directly on to my next point concerning the spaces available in a Performance Philosophy conference, one that contains unusual demands when compared to those of events normally understood under this term. It contains a plea for a practical consideration of spaces within institutions that allow for flexibility in the form of communicative living. Such venues continue to remain problematic but have been extended somewhat thanks to the imagination of the organisers. Perhaps lecture-theatres should be avoided altogether, along with Powerpoint presentations and panels seated in front of fixed audience rows. Indeed, are seats always necessary? If so, then perhaps a semi-circular or circular format would encourage eye contact and acknowledge the bodily presence of people, thus generating an atmosphere of trust amongst participants who are mostly meeting for the first time. A non-hierarchical, non-linear grouping does much to create this dynamic. Spaces at Helsinki that allowed for movement, so that the body negotiated freely in relation to others and to objects such as chairs, floors, cushions, technology, or lighting, proved highly successful in this regard.

Indeed, the main reception area was used in a welcoming way, containing furnished areas for repose or interaction with others, according to the stipulations of the Bremen group's "Interspace / Interlude". These were well-considered in order to allow for a diversity of individual needs. I wonder, however, if the seating arrangement for general reception presentations could have incorporated more of the above suggestions and avoided the lecture-hall formality of a screen and presenters standing on a podium. Do we still need a structure of chairs placed in lines and a view of the back of someone's head? Comfortable floors, well-placed technological devices, objects,

suitable lighting, and ventilation are all important in encouraging a good ambience. They generate an environment that challenges any pre-conceptions of behaviour by people used to traditional conference formalities.

Regarding the themes listed earlier in my analysis, could the book of abstracts be indicated in an alternative way to names and titles, in order to keep the journey and development of each presentation more open(-ended) and creative? Often the presence of titles proves to be reductionist rather than expansive in its affect. The densely-written format of a programme often proves an impossible tome to negotiate in the middle of a conference, whether read in virtual or hardback form. Why is such an innovative movement such as Performance Philosophy still using traditional structures of introduction? Given that most people access this information in virtual form surely other methods of programme presentation involving sound and image could be incorporated. Do we need academic terms such as 'abstract', or for that matter 'key groups' and 'panels', in a context that includes performance in its field? My plea is ultimately for a more playful approach to a seemingly unquestioned practice, one that would address an imbalance between the two disciplines. It calls for the radical potential of *rhuthmos* to be applied by inviting changeable alternatives into the arena.

The ultimate challenge for Performance Philosophy conference-goers, for whom doing and thinking are combined into whatever chosen form of expression, is to explore multiple modes of the above besides that of verbal syntax: "a matter of fracturing the fixity of language and drawing closer to our fundamental discontinuity" (Barthes 2013, 19). Such a discontinuity avoids the lure of progressive, directive discourse and, as the author points out, deconstructs meta-language. Perhaps it is the lived experience of the above quotation, of our fragmented conscious states, that allows for the emergence of unconscious knowledge through doing. There are, after all, many ways in which an individual can insert themselves into a social code—for example, by way of movement, gesture, sound, or image, all of which are very familiar to practitioners of performance. Such an approach favours a lived reflection of our everyday consciousness, experienced by an acknowledgement of our discontinuous states, our vacant spaces without verbal definition, our playful fluctuations. This relates to *idiorrhhythmic* forms of individual expression that can allow for a space of *being*. Methods of response to the different rhythms of verbal, musical, or gestural language are at the core of understanding if there is to be genuine interaction between participants coming from both disciplines. Generated freely and spontaneously, not only within the time allocated to a session but extending above and beyond it, they address the importance of acknowledging a balance between value-systems of expression. Examples of the above surfaced during Panel 20 of the Helsinki conference with Riku Laakkonen's workshop 'How Agency can be Studied when doing the Art of Expressive Objects' and Esa Kirkkopelto's 'Floating Bodies, Performing Signifiers'. The first concerned 'the bodily-material interaction of human subjects and objects' whilst the second demonstrated 'how the scenic performance problematizes our conceptions of body and language' (Performance Philosophy 2022).

The hybrid and the social

Linked to the above concerns is a social factor highlighted by vigorous attempts on the part of “Interspace / Interlude” to engage live and virtual audiences in mutual communication at Helsinki. This innovative component of the conference had to do with the presence of a superb and helpful technical team engaged by the University of the Arts to facilitate such a complicated digitally hybrid event. Small / large screens, headsets, loudspeakers and computer microphones acted as unobtrusive interfaces between two sets of participants. It was for me by far the most experimental and imaginative approach that I have experienced in similar situations to date, representing genuine solutions to the problem of facilitating exchange within the content and format of two realities. Highly diverse rhythms of space and time were brought together. However, the presence of such devices in a situation where a live audience had varied experience in dealing with them sometimes generated an unsatisfactory in-between space or *no-man’s-land* as both worlds attempted to combine in the mind of a confused participant. One solution was offered by the aforementioned coupling of hybrid ‘mates’ who could respect each others’ different rhythms of response on a one-to-one basis and adjust accordingly. Both live and online members interacted with presenters during key-group events, such as the one from Argentina entitled “Hacia Helsinki – Helsinki Bound”. In this case the live audience were encouraged to exit their chairs, leave their devices, and enter a relaxing, comfortable floor space in order to simply watch, listen and intervene in a virtual performance of texts, readings, sounds and actions.

The experiential energy-fields created within a hybrid gathering are very different to a live, in-person event. In this context they raised the question as to how the component of *doing*, something so fundamental to the nature of performance philosophy, can be incorporated into such a framework. If a live version of the biennale has proved problematic in the past regarding content and format, I wonder how this has been confounded, challenged or even improved by the addition of a virtual component. A possible answer would lie within a mixture of all three affects. There is still a feeling of discomfort on the part of a live audience when faced with the potential power hegemony of virtual reality. Emphasis is laid on its visual impact, sound often remaining of a frustratingly poor quality. One is less likely to intervene with a comment or a question if the virtual presenter cannot always see, let alone hear, the questioner. Discussion between hybrid participants remains on a much more formal, necessarily sequential level because of time-delays and the risk of interruption, either verbal or technical. Spontaneous interjections become much more difficult to comprehend when synchronicity is vital. Furthermore, exchange remains essentially discursive rather than performative due to the different spatial dimensions involved.

From a live audience perspective, I often found hybrid situations alienating as they incur no sense of real contact. A gap occurs in which meaningful exchange becomes difficult. The energy present within a shared physical space, comparable to that of engaging with a live performance, is missing. Body and mind do not respond on a perceptively physical level when other bodies are missing from the same space. And if the number of online participants outweighs that of people physically present in a room there is indeed a perceptual sagging of energy within the live environment. The term *social presence* comes to mind in this context. Challenges include problems of concentration,

as inevitable technical issues intervene during a presentation. However, in all, the virtual presence of people contributing in real time from all over the world opened out the enormous dimensions of such an event by greatly enlarging its live and online audiences. It would never have been possible to witness such a concentration of divergences and multiple rhythms of exchange between members. Perhaps, as our engagement with digital means increases in the future, hybrid events will reveal other new and improved possibilities for negotiating these realities on an experiential level that become seamless.

This brings me back once again to Makhali, Suchard, and Bebek, and their “Performance Philosophy Problems Pop-up Picnics” and “Digital Mates”. Their focus on interpersonal relations during the Helsinki conference made a fundamentally important point: namely, that it is vital to encourage real social intervention in between sessions as much as during them. In this way, the *idiorrhythmy* of each individual becomes respected by a group as trust is increasingly generated between its members. Socially organized outings, such as local cultural events and eating and drinking venues are important and should be taken into consideration during the planning. The best conversations often occur during external trips, allowing participants a welcome perspective of time and space for deeper exchange, plus a chance to reflect off-site. Such an experimental project as the “Artistic Dinners” organized at Prague 2017 took participants into the city to explore actual sites of thinking and doing hosted by the local population, bridging a gap between the *island* of an institution and its surrounding cultural context. I have had very positive experience of similar events at previous conferences and welcomed those that avoided the formality of a costly dinner that not all participants can or want to afford. Such a divisive structure, unfortunately common to many events, is elitist, both economically and politically speaking. However, the Performance Philosophy biennales have avoided such a pitfall by including a dinner in the registration fee. Indeed, the setting of a dinner onstage in one of the university theatres at the Amsterdam event was a nice touch in this respect. Lighting created a warm ambience and informality was ensured by its relaxed proceedings.

Conclusion

The above reflections could potentially allow for more genuine meeting points, interaction, and exchange between hybrid participants in the future. It has been valuable to re-examine previous biennales and interim events from the perspective of pinpointing strategies that were employed to introduce a fresh approach to the very particular concerns of performance philosophy within a conference situation. To summarize, the following suggestions have emerged during the course of this essay with regard to future considerations:

- The importance of social gatherings, both live and virtual, during the event (“Interspace / Interlude” 2022)
- No division between performance and philosophy, rather a conference *as* performance (Prague Biennale 2017)
- The importance of key groups (Helsinki Biennale 2022)
- Collective exchange / no question-answer formats / a cross-referencing of panels (Prague 2017)
- No Paper conferences (Prague 2014)

- Performative engagement with audiences through *doing* / performance of knowledge (Holkenbrink and Seitz, Prague 2017)
- Philosophy *as* performance ("Getting Bread" 2016)
- Exchange towards hybrid models of practice as a method ("Pragmatics: Practice: Praxis" 2017)
- Interventions (Amsterdam Biennale 2019)
- Organization of spaces / places / objects / importance of ambience (Helsinki 2022)
- Multi-faceted modes of communication / expression aside from written / spoken (all events)
- External social / cultural events (Prague 2017)
- Guidance with digital forms of live / virtual interactivity ("Interspace / Interlude")

In light of these, I would propose the biennale held at Prague in 2017 as an experimental model to be developed in the future. Although not personally experienced, its ethos of performativity as a first instance, along with an openness towards finding new organizational formats, come closest, in my view, to reflecting the ongoing nature of research characteristic of Performance Philosophy. Returning to Holkenbrink and Seitz's insightful essay described earlier, it seems that a real integration of knowledge can take place through performance, thus ultimately avoiding any dichotomy between practice and theory. Many of the issues I have highlighted in this essay concern social factors such as hybrid communication methods, meeting points between participants, collaboration, session spaces, and multiple forms of expression. Respect for everyone's personal rhythm is expanded by these means, a respect that generates a feeling of trust within a (con)temporary society present at a conference gathering of this kind.

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Biography

Independent composer/researcher Dr Caroline Wilkins comes from a background of new music performance, composition and theatre, and has worked extensively on solo and collaborative productions involving these. Her particular interest lies in creating new forms of presentation, whether in the field of inter-medial sound theatre, sound poetry or performance art. Current activities include conference presentations and academic publications. Website: <http://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/wilkins-caroline>

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