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IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE ■ JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

**A RESEARCH-CREATION EPISTEME? PRACTICES,
INTERVENTIONS, DISSENSUS**

Guest Editors: Agata Mergler, Joshua Synenko

Issue 15-3, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

AGATA MERGLER

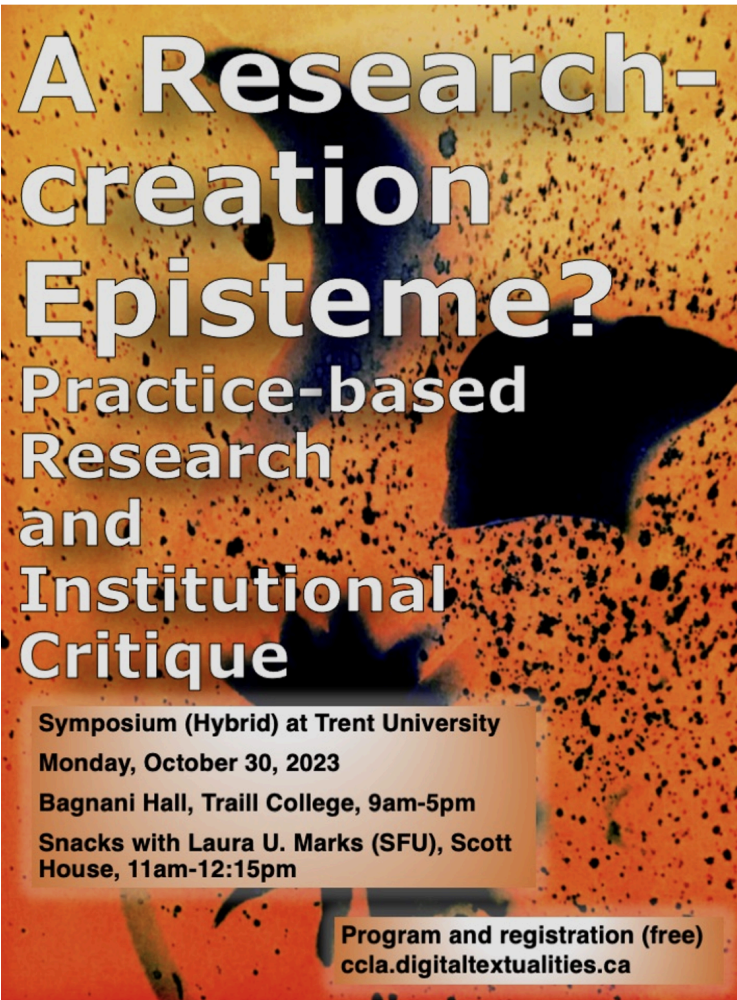
JOSHUA SYNENKO

In the autumn of 2023, on October 30th, we organized a conference entitled “A Research-creation Episteme? Practice-based Research and Institutional Critique,” at Trent University, Peterborough. Our idea for the conference came about during Congress 2023 at the annual meeting of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association/Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée (CCLA/ACLCL) at York University, Toronto, in partnership with their research group, Comparative Materialities: Media, Literature, Theory. The outcome of the conference became the motivation to complete this special issue of *Imaginations*.

The conference planning was inspired by the recent wave of interest in practice-based research and artistic research. We wanted to ask some fundamental questions about how these approaches were shaping discussions in the humanities. We wanted to explore how creative work relates to knowledge and research, and whether (and how) to draw a line between research and creation—assuming there ought to be one. We wanted to examine how universities have altered the way knowledge is organized and shared, how they have permitted visual arts in particular to be included in scholarly work, and at what cost to arts or scholarship, and whether all these changes have affected how research is evaluated and awarded.

Some of the specific questions that we asked include the following:

- What is the boundary dividing creative from non-creative practices?



A Research-creation Episteme?

Practice-based Research and Institutional Critique

Symposium (Hybrid) at Trent University
Monday, October 30, 2023
Bagnani Hall, Traill College, 9am-5pm
Snacks with Laura U. Marks (SFU), Scott House, 11am-12:15pm

Program and registration (free)
ccla.digitaltextualities.ca







Figure 1: Conference poster.

- What are approaches that artists have adopted to transfer their practice into a knowledge-producing milieu?
- What are the fora for presenting research-creative projects, and who are the audiences?
- How does academic research-creation respond to the demand for community involvement and accountability? What are the institutional guarantees?
- How has artistic value been redirected to meet the university's market demands (distinct from those of the culture industries)?
- How do creative works develop pathways through the established benchmarks of securing research funding? How have funding agencies responded to these shifts, and are they viable?
- What are the implications of developing work under different linguistic, national, regional, or global conceptual umbrellas (e.g. "practice-based" vs. "practice-led")?
- What does research-creation entail for undergraduate teaching, graduate supervision, and mentorship?
- How does a research-creative knowledge form comply with the evaluation rubrics for hire, reappointment, tenure, and promotion?
- How do creative outputs advance causes of equity and access?
- To what extent does research-creation, modelled as an intervention, participate in the ongoing labour to decolonize universities?
- What does research-creation reveal for reputedly "traditional" researchers about their own practices?
- What are such researchers afraid of when they encounter research-creative projects?
- What does the diversification of knowledges and methods add to historical debates on the subject, and whom do these serve?

In organizing the conference, we were aware that many of these questions had been asked before in different contexts, to larger audiences, and led to bigger outcomes. Putting our stamp on them was part of recognizing that these issues, significant as they were for many, were still consequential for our own practices, scholarship, and academic community. It became important to examine these questions on our terms. Further to this, we entered the debates surrounding research-creation knowing that consensus about its impact would never be achieved. On the contrary, we felt then, as we do now, that a community of artistic and practice-based researchers ought to welcome dissension into their ranks. The conference and this special issue was never meant to be the last word on the subject.

For the meeting in October 2023, we invited scholars, including faculty and graduate students, artists, practitioners, creatives, and collaborators to deliver short, 5-minute “manifestos” that explore at least one aspect of the emerging episteme. Thanks to the short presentation format, focused on the main claims forming the manifestos devoid of the sometimes pesky detail of presentations, as well as thanks to the hybrid format of the conference, we were able to host over 30 speakers on that day. We organized the contributor manifestos into themes such as design, autotheory, decolonization, care, the artmaking process, collaboration (with humans, plants, and machines), dissemination and circulation, pedagogy, theory, gesture, and critique. Several panels were led by Professor Laura U. Marks (Simon Fraser University), who was at Trent that week as a Visiting Trill College Fellow.

Following the meeting, we got to work on an editorial project inspired by contributions at the symposium for the journal. Part of the effort to achieve this goal involved rethinking academic peer review. Our aim was to develop a more collegial format where authors could be encouraged both to participate in the review process and to get involved in community building with others. We settled on a review in two stages: first, a conventional double-blind review of each article by an expert in the field, consistent with the journal’s guidelines; second, a collegial review of *actual* peers. For the latter, we paired authors together and asked them to comment on each other’s work.



Figure 2: A Research-creation Episteme? Practice-based Research and Institutional Critique. Trent University, October 30, 2023.

We then held a Zoom meeting with each author group, facilitated by at least one of us, but often both. After the meetings, we wrote decision letters that were informed by the anonymous review, the author's comments, results from the meetings, and our own assessment of the process. For a detailed evaluation of our peer review and how it could/should be considered a form of research-creation, see Synenko, this issue.

In the end, we were able to publish eleven articles, one work of poetry, and two "afterwords," for a total of fourteen works. We have divided these into five thematic sections. In the first section, *co-creation*, Monique Tschofen offers a critically theoretical insight into her own journey from a position of more theoretically engaged writing on research-creation to one informed by creative and collaborative practice within an artistic research collective. Anna Foran and Ami Xherro let readers look into their collaborative creative research process by staging a written dialogue between both artist-researchers as they talk about their work on *Circumfluence* events, which combined learning and intimacy/solidarity with collaborative

creation. In the second section, *practicing art - practicing knowledge*, Mehvish Rather explores Kashmiri “guerilla pedagogy” as a means to probe the decolonizing force of research-creation, examining how collectivizing approaches to knowledge dissemination prove to be crucial to surviving under difficult regimes. María Angélica Madero and James Carney, from the contrasting position of an experimental pedagogy institution, discuss “abduction” as a method of dealing with the common Western institutional conditions of creative research. These conditions are detrimental to the art process and artistic research because they reduce the pluralist work in art to a much narrower concept of labour as a form of linearity (where labour is equal to a source of remuneration). Approaching the linearity of research and writing, Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield proposes a form of writing with each of its sections starting as separate and new, and thus he creates a monadic assembly of beginnings in which art, and the episteme of artistic research (and knowledge production in general), are questioned through theory and examples of artistic practice. In the third section, *exploring methods*, Karen Sung’s text goes beyond focusing on creation as a research process to present an application of artistic research methods, specifically using participatory arts-based research method to generate insight into the cultural and personal identity of participants. Jasper van Vught and Stefan S. Werning also present an application of research-creation methods that aim at social impact in the area of teaching, with a goal of a more inclusive approach that is aligned with discursive game design. In the fourth section, *beyond the human*, Steve 4. Tu leads us through a research-creation project on communication with other-than-human species like trees. He adopts a method of “duoethnography” to question the institutional conditions for exploring such methods, especially for decolonial or other critical goals. Oriana Confente follows similarly posthuman research interests in non-human species in exploring possible interspecies collaborations in artistic practice and their meanings for art, knowledge production, and ethics. In the fifth section, *writing and de-writing*, exploring simultaneously the worn-out academic form of an essay and that of the soundtrack as an illustration of a narrative, Martin Arnold refutes our expectations in

order to question the representative character of these forms. Margot Mellet offers a novel approach to writing that she calls de-writing, which in this initiating research she develops theoretically with support from the media-archeological thought of Kittler, Derridean deconstruction, and other theoretical concepts focused on *écriture*, machinic writing, and digital writing. Meanwhile Concetta Principe, reaching out to some similar theoretical sources, Derrida and Lacan, develops a poetical “ultimate showdown” with the research themes and concepts she encountered in her scholarly work.

In our afterwords, we have chosen to develop reflections on different aspects of this intensive project: Agata Mergler focuses on the theoretical depth of research creation or artistic research, of knowledge production with arts in academia, and of its revolutionary abilities to question current knowledge production systems. She speculates, comparing artistic knowledge production with the philosophical task of thinking, whether artistic research has not been part of art practice for a while and whether it is capable of bringing a pluralism of methods and knowledges to save both knowledge and art practices against the commodification of both disguised as innovation. Joshua Synenko reflects on our collegial peer review as a research-creation experiment. Mindful of the epistemic and institutional contexts that inspire debates about research-creation, and given the repeated patterns of university management, Synenko advocates abolishing the term altogether.

Often, the goal of academic writing and publishing is to convince the reader of a set of arguments, propositions, or statements. In this project, which began in earnest in the spring of 2023, ending here with the special issue a year and a half later, the goal has been diligent and determined but not lofty. It is simply to convince the reader that these offerings contribute to the ongoing discussion about research-creation, with a focus on its institutional contexts and questions about its legitimacy, and to provide an indicator of where the debate might be headed.

IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Conference poster.

Figure 2: A Research-creation Episteme? Practice-based Research and Institutional Critique. Trent University, October 30, 2023.

IN (A) CRITICAL CONDITION: RECONSIDERATIONS OF KRISIS,
CRITIQUE, AND THEORIA THROUGH RESEARCH
CO-CREATION

MONIQUE TSCHOFEN

This paper explores the transformative potential of feminist research-creation through the lens of krisis and collaborative world-building, positioning research-creation as both a method and an ethic of care. Revisiting the ancient Greek concept of krisis—a moment of judgment and discernment—as a framework for inquiry, the author contrasts her prior scholarly work embedded in traditional frameworks of critique, often rooted in metaphors of violence, with the reparative methodologies developed through her work with the Decameron Collective. Over four years of iterative collaboration, the Collective produced award-winning multimodal digital projects Decameron 2.0 and Memory Eternal, which use storytelling,

Cet article explore le potentiel transformateur de la recherche-cr ation f eministe   travers le prisme de la krisis et de la construction collaborative de mondes, en positionnant la recherche-cr ation comme   la fois une m thode et une  thique du care. En revisitant le concept grec antique de krisis—un moment de jugement et de discernement—comme cadre d'investigation, l'auteur met en contraste ses travaux acad miques ant rieurs, ancres dans des cadres traditionnels de critique souvent associ s   des m taphores de violence, avec les m thodologies r paratrices d velopp es dans le cadre de son travail avec le Decameron Collective. Au cours de quatre ann es de collaboration it rative, le collectif a produit les projets num riques multimodaux prim s Decameron 2.0 et Memory Eternal, qui utilisent la narration, la co-cr ation et la cu-

co-creation, and curation to respond creatively to crises from the pandemic to climate change. This paper argues that research co-creation can redefine crisis as a site of generative potential, where making and theorizing intertwine to produce new forms of knowledge and connection. By centering relationality, materiality, and feminist ethics, the Collective's work moves beyond solitary modes of inquiry to establish a collaborative, care-driven practice. Situating research-creation within philosophical traditions of *theoria* and contemporary feminist thought, the paper highlights a number of ways such collaborative creation and curation can sustain communities, foster epistemological innovation, and offer reparative responses to crises. The paper ultimately positions research co-creation and co-authorship integrating storytelling, digital design, and collective reflection in slow scholarship as a vital methodology for navigating complex global challenges and reimagining the role of scholarship in a world facing ongoing crises.

ration pour répondre de manière créative à des crises allant de la pandémie au changement climatique. Cet article soutient que la co-création en recherche peut redéfinir la crise comme un espace de potentiel génératif, où fabrication et théorisation s'entrelacent pour produire de nouvelles formes de savoir et de connexion. En centrant la relationalité, la matérialité et les éthiques féministes, le travail du collectif dépasse les modes d'enquête solitaires pour établir une pratique collaborative et orientée vers le care. En situant la recherche-création dans les traditions philosophiques de la *theoria* et la pensée féministe contemporaine, l'article met en lumière plusieurs manières dont cette création et curation collaborative peuvent soutenir les communautés, encourager l'innovation épistémologique et proposer des réponses réparatrices aux crises. L'article positionne finalement la co-création et la co-écriture en recherche, intégrant narration, design numérique et réflexion collective dans une érudition lente, comme une méthodologie essentielle pour naviguer à travers les défis globaux complexes et réimaginer le rôle de la recherche dans un monde confronté à des crises continues.

"But sometimes we need to forget and unlearn what we think matters. We need to rearrange our sensorium and sensemaking practices and disrupt disciplinary thought styles and ways of seeing so that other worlds within this world can come into view. Art making helps me break the frame so that new phe-

nomena come to matter” (Natasha Meyers in Truman, “Intimacies” 232-233)

This paper explores research-creation from two positions in time. I re-consider my own earlier theoretical writing about research-creation methods in light of my more recent experience working in research-co-creation modes with the Decameron Collective, a group of nine scholar-creators who have engaged in digital worldbuilding since the start of the SARS 2 pandemic (Jolene Armstrong, Kelly Egan, Lai-Tze Fan, Caitlin Fisher, Angela Joesse, Kari Maaren, Siobhan O’Flynn, and Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof). From an institutional research standpoint, the work has been highly productive. Over a four-year period, we have produced two digital storyworlds (*Decameron 2.0*, 2022, WebGL, and *Memory Eternal*, 2023, Oculus Quest 2) and an exhibition (*Deformances as Unlinking*, 2024, Web) selected for juried exhibition in Italy, Portugal, Japan, Canada, and the United Kingdom; three refereed articles; fifteen presentations and workshops given to international audiences; and have been awarded a SSHRC IDG grant, including shortlists, and honourable mentions and awards for electronic literature and digital humanities prizes. What I ask here are more modest questions about the value of this work, designed to uncover the dissensus in my own corpus: What did my early scholarly work sifting through the history of thinking about doing and making miss? What was I blind to because my knowledge was purely theoretical? What has been surprising in the work we are now doing? Four years of weekly dialogue and co-writing with my collaborators have left indelible marks on my thinking. This paper reflects theirs.

ACT I: THE BEFORE TIMES

My career falls into the before times and the after times. In the before times, I was a theorist of theory and a critic of critique, and theorized critical making in solo and co-authored publications. I came of intellectual age in the discipline of Comparative Literature in the 1990s, after the “theory wars,” at a time when ideological critique was understood as the very necessary goal

of scholarship. However, despite finding in the language of pure theory (Theoria) a form of complete happiness (Aristotle would call it “teleian eudaimonia” (Ward 242)), I developed a deep suspicion of what Rita Felski described as the “combative idiom” (21) in the language of theory, that is, its casual masculinism and militarism, particularly in relation to its conception of epistemological change.² It wasn’t only the casual praise of Sadism by postmodern theorists that perturbed.³ Rather, it was the uncritical deployment of metaphors of violence in relation to ideals of truth. Rodolphe Gasché, in *The Honor of Thinking*, noted that truth must be “violently shaken” by the theorist, and “torn from one’s everyday setting” (267). Slavoj Žižek, in a 2014 essay called “The Poetic Torture-House of Language: How Poetry Relates to Ethnic Cleansing,” wrote:

“...in order to get the truth to speak, it is not enough to suspend the subject’s active intervention and let language itself speak—as Elfriede Jelinek put it with extraordinary clarity: ‘Language should be tortured to tell the truth.’ It should be twisted, denaturalized, extended, condensed, cut, and reunited, made to work against itself. Language as the ‘big Other’ is not an agent of wisdom to whose message we should attune ourselves, but a place of cruel indifference and stupidity. The most elementary form of torturing one’s language is called poetry.” (566)

This language of force goes unremarked because of the origins of the term critique (*krinein*—taking apart, separating, severing, and judging) in crisis (*krisis*). As Wendy Brown explains, in ancient Athens, *krisis* was originally a “jurisprudential term identified with the art of making distinctions, an art considered essential to judging and rectifying an alleged disorder in or of the democracy” (Brown 5). This process of sifting and judging was linked to a conception of critical inquiry and truth that scholars such as Idelbar Avelar, Edward Peters, and Page DuBois note has its origins in practices of torture of slaves. The Greek ideal of truth (*aletheia*) conceived of as a “dragging, and bringing into light something hidden” (Avelar 29) at the basis of our sense of critical inquiry as a practice of interrogation, leads, accord-

ing to DuBois, “almost inevitably to conceiving of the body of the other as the site from which truth can be produced, and to using violence if necessary to extract that truth” (DuBois 6).⁴

How, in times of crisis, I wondered, might a practice of theoretical critique avoid this violence and “affirm life, affirm value, and above all affirm possibilities in the present and future” (Brown 15)? In my scholarly writing, I turned to centre the artwork’s modes of knowing. My driving research question became how an artwork could be understood as an *act* of theory.⁵ I sought to reconceptualize the relationship between theorist and theory in material, epistemological, and relational terms by returning to the pre-Socratic idea of *theoria*, which yoked two practices—wandering and wondering—to understand the relationship between the thinker and the objects of contemplation as a kind of kinship.⁶ The touchstones of my analyses were a series of questions, all measured against the backdrop of a range of critiques of modernity: How can art’s shaping of concepts un-think and reform the epistemological frameworks around which instrumental modes of knowing and thinking are constructed? How can art reflect and prompt reflection on the circumstances that limit action and transformation, or, alternately, establish the foundations for a mode of action in the real world? How can art develop a concrete language, anchored in the everyday, that restores “dwelling” in an age of displacements, bringing embodied and affective experience back to what we call thinking? How can art find what is redemptive in philosophy’s conceptual homelessness through the articulation of new vernaculars? By studying art’s ways of thinking, I thought, one could find one’s way to an understanding of what it means to ponder, perceive, and act in a world in which we live together.

Seeking to critique the practice of critique, I had read and taught Rita Felski’s *The Limits of Critique*, Bruno Latour’s “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam,” as well as Patai and Corral’s *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*, and Terry Eagleton’s *After Theory*. Inspired, I organized a panel at a conference with Nataleah Hunter-Young, Daniel Browne, and Lai-Tze Fan, scholars with robust critical art practices, to talk about the issues raised by their works. We then

co-wrote an article where I posited that critical *making* such as theirs had a capacity to reform critique:

“We consider critical making as a way of reforming the scholarly tradition of critique that runs from Kant through Marx, the Frankfurt School, the poststructuralists, feminists, post-colonialists, queer theorists, and so on. Critical makers’ work retains critique’s emancipatory aims, while challenging what Adorno identifies as traditional scholarly critique’s arrogant ‘claim to a more profound knowledge of the object’ achieved through distance (Butler). Judith Butler writes about how critique needs to refuse to be separated from ‘the social world at hand’ because not doing so would be “a move which deratifies the results of its own operation’ (Butler). By forging intimate forms of exchange with their interlocutors (readers/viewers/audiences), based on closeness rather than (purportedly objective) critical distance, critical makers leave their readers/audience free to have responses that are powerfully ambiguous.” (Tschofen et al., “Reforming Critique” 135)

My three co-authors described the relationship between their own art practice and crisis. Hunter-Young discussed her work *OverSight*, which responded to the crisis of Black death, responding to the phenomenon she calls “e-Lynching”—the “digital recording, circulation, and consumption of police brutality videos on social media” (142). Browne discussed his film *Memento Mori* in the context of the climate crisis. And Fan discussed many works including a collaborative locative media project set in Montreal’s Champ des Possibles that addresses “the city’s issues of sustainability, including toxicity, settler culture, and the death of indigenous plants and animals because of climate change” (152).

What I tried to argue was that works like these centred the relationships between theoretical thinking, the thinker, and what Hannah Arendt calls, in *The Human Condition*, the “world-in-common” (139) through a practice rooted in *care*. Like critique, critical making, as I then understood it, emerged from and evidenced concern with justice, but unlike “pure theory,” its address was intimate and actions

material and concrete. My proposal in this paper on critical making was a corrective to Latour's and Felski's respective critiques of critiques, which involved

"reconsidering the terms of the dyadic relationship [of theorist and theory] and replacing it with a tetrad: a) the theorist-maker; b) their made (rather than merely contemplated) object; c) their reader/audience/ spectator, who meets them in an encounter over an object with its own facticity and materiality; and d) the world-in-common, that is, the social and material space in which these theorists, viewers, and made objects are embedded. Under this alternative model, the theorist seeking to generate new modes of critique is the artist. Their artwork in turn is at once the theory itself, the object of theory's scrutiny, and its salvo from obfuscation and irrelevance. The reader/spectator—the person to whom the theory is addressed and whom the theorist intends to care with and care for—produces from the made-theoretically-rich object 'arenas in which to gather.'" (139)

Looking at this now, I see myself reaching for what new materialism would call "mattering" (Cheah; Jones; Palmer) as a way to connect the materiality of form to relationality. However, inasmuch as I was not writing this as a theorist-maker but rather as an outsider, I had not appreciated the transformative power when the theorist-maker is not a monad but rather a feminist Collective and the world-in-which-to-gather is a prolonged and critical crisis.

ACT II: THE AFTER TIMES

Since March of 2020, I have met with some or all of nine other scholar-creators almost every week in a practice of slow scholarship anchored in storytelling and thought experimentation. What I have found as a scholar who is a middle-aged human whose time and attention is shaped by caregiving relationships with elders and a child through this co-creative work is what Nicholas Bourriaud calls "a way of living and mode of action in the existing real" that both expands and undermines my prior ways of thinking (13). My

new guiding research question is: In “complex environments” (Chapman and Sawchuk) can our work (of art and theory) be an act of caring and giving? This in turn builds into a series of other questions: How can the collaborative co-production of artworks generate a way of knowing (an epistemology), a way of building communities and connectedness (an ethics), a way of reorganizing work (a praxis), and yield a rich “living archive” (Sabiescu 2020)? What follows is an attempt to distill some wisdom from this work.

1. Co-creation and Curation

According to The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), for a work to be considered research-creation, the creation process must be situated in the research activity, but this is not how many practitioners understand the far more fluid and mutually inter-informing relationship between thinking and making. The work of the Decameron Collective began at a moment of global crisis: the first pandemic lockdown in March of 2020 when the world felt extracted from time. It continued through Black Lives Matter protests, the start of the war against Ukraine, and through fire seasons so severe the smoke from Alberta muddied European skies. Initially, the group’s intention was to reread Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* (1349-51) and recreate it in the present day. In Boccaccio’s work, seven women and three men removed themselves from a Florentine cityscape full of the horrors of the Black Plague, where bodies are rotting in the street, to a *locus amoenus*—a beautiful walled garden—where they told each other stories to while away the time. This space could hold feasts and laughter. It was a space to breathe and create.

From our own backyards and dining room tables over Zoom calls every Friday, we emulated Boccaccio’s narrators and began to use storytelling as a means of survival (see fig. 2).⁷ Simply making time for a Zoom call each week felt like a commitment to keeping life moving forward. We chattered about our worries, and then took some quiet time to create something. We wrote poems, drew pictures, pressed flowers, cultured sourdough, and showed what we made to each other, each sharing an opening of worlds. These activ-



Figure 1: Manuscript pages from the Decameron in the Decameron 2.0 (2022) by the Decameron Collective.

ities existed outside of the demands of our work and family spaces, and so while the work we did was inflected by our scholarly and teaching as well as our personal lives, we experienced this time as a radical reprieve from being pulled under by them.⁸

The idea of disseminating the fruits of our Friday creative time came as an afterthought. We had amassed a large body of works and sensed that there was something important to share. When we first began thinking about the value of the work we had done together, it was from within literary and artistic rather than research frameworks.⁹ We contemplated producing an anthology, collections of chapbooks, and one-of-a-kind fluxus boxes featuring tiny music boxes and perfumes. It now seems clear that this impulse to frame the work as creative rather than scholarly reflects less on our conception of the intellectual value of the work we produced than on the difference between the affective registers of storytelling, which is intimate and reciprocal, and research, which is generally neither.

We decided to create a digital world to hold the works we had been creating because digital spaces could best accommodate multimodal



Figure 2: The Decameron Collective (from left to right: Caitlin Fisher, Monique Tsofen, Kari Maaren; Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, Jolene Armstrong, Angela Joosse; Lai-Tze Fan, Siobhan O'Flynn, Kelly Egan).

forms, and it was with this next step that our practice evolved into something richer and more connected to research-creation. Practically, we needed to adapt oral and written works for digital presentation, and we needed to design a space to hold them. We divided our body of work into thematically-linked collections, and then asked for volunteers to serve as curators to oversee their adaptation into digital spaces. Four Decameron Collective members (Jolene Armstrong, Caitlin Fisher, Angela Joosse, and myself) collaborated with our designer/developers Angela Joosse and Hendrick de Haan to design the aesthetic feel and layout for individual galleries radiating from a central courtyard that we had envisioned in dialogue with the illuminated manuscript tradition of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. To accelerate the timeline, as curators, we took upon ourselves to adapt some of the group's works on our own, and then collaborated with Collective members in the adaptation of other works.

Without exactly intending to, the collective had made the economy of the gift into a cornerstone of a methodology that drew together and enriched the emotional and intellectual work we were doing.

Our practice, which hung on listening and being-with, meant that we made things with but also for each other. Jolene Armstrong and I, with support from the entire Collective, later summarized this method thus:

“The methodology is strongly feminist and can be summarized as a series of steps create - collaborate - curate - convey to communities. Creation begins with a method that Lauren Fournier (2021) calls ‘autotheory’, which ‘integrate[s] the personal and the conceptual, the theoretical and the autobiographical, the creative and the critical, in ways attuned to interdisciplinary, feminist histories’ (7). Works then pass through a collaborative process modeled on quilting bees or Renaissance workshops that reactivates a spirit present in medieval cultures prior to the notions of authorship and fixed creations conserved in a physical medium or archives that restrain us today. Following collaboration, the curation stage begins, as works are brought into the digital storyworld through a process that involves dialogue about how to activate themes, forms, contexts, and meaningfully construct users’ experience. Finally, we convey the results of our inquiry to communities of researchers and arts practitioners, articulating the research creation illuminates.” (Armstrong and Tschofen, “DIDS”)¹⁰

I had previously discussed Anne Carson’s theory of the gift from her book *Economy of the Unlost* in relation to her poem about Betty Goodwin in my 2013 essay “Drawing out a New Image of Thought” (223), and rediscovered this discussion when I was attempting to theorize our work with the Collective. Writing about ancient poetry, Carson draws from the work of Marcel Mauss to compare two modes of exchange: commodification and gift giving (12). Commodity form, Carson says, “fragments and dehumanizes human being” (19). A gift, in contrast, is an act of communication that offers “an extension of the interior of the giver, both in space and in time, into the interior of the receiver” (18). A gift, she expands, “has both economic and spiritual content, is personal and reciprocal, and depends on a relationship that endures over time” (12). I had seen Carson activating an understanding of language as an intimate force, but also issuing a chal-

lence to patterns of thinking that dehumanize the other. In performing and then adapting works with and for each other, the Decameron Collective was doing the same.

2. Crisis and Critique: Care is Repair

“The iris opens and it is a Zoom call, and all of you are there. Each week this happens, and all of you are arranged on the screen’s grid. Sometimes your order changes. Sometimes some of you are missing. The weeks proceed. The poetry, stories, photographs and films, the accumulated wisdom of these meetings are hard to capture in a 20 second scene, so there needs to be music perhaps, or scented oil. It is clear that there is so much to save that we try to put it into a box. When you open the lid, the light shines out.” (Monique Tschofen, “Bright Spots,” *Decameron 2.0*)

If a problem of critique is that it embeds a language of violence, Wendy Brown notes that in its ancient and medieval contexts, there is a connection between *krisis*, critique, and repair. She recalls the

“sustained linking of the objective and subjective dimensions of critique, the ways in which a worldly event or phenomenon, whether a collapsed empire or a diseased body, connects a specific condition with an immediate need to comprehend by sifting, sorting, or separating its elements, to judge, and to respond to it.” (7)

Brown explains: “critique as political *krisis* promises to restore continuity by repairing or renewing the justice that gives an order the prospect of continuity, that indeed makes it continuous” (7).

The Decameron Collective’s generation of a digital storyworld engaged with *krisis* through *kritik* in this spirit of restoring continuity at a moment of truncated time. Exploratory and aleatory, our work became emergent, auto-reflective, speculative, and always prospective.¹¹ We sifted, sorted, and judged our experiences, and responded aesthetically and interpersonally in dialogue with each other, and in dialogue with other pandemic texts. Justice is often considered to be

public while care is considered private (Van Stichel). And so, with Manuela Puig de la Bellacasa, I turned to Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher's definition of care as including

"everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." (Tronto 1993, 103, emphasis added, in Puig de la Bellacasa, 4)

Our creations, collaborations, and curation, rooted in the economy of the gift and engaged through a spirit of care, consistently turned to this ancient idea that storying was life-sustaining.

Angela Joosse's Gallery of Spells offered phenomenological thought-experiments that conjured the possibilities of the poetic "as if" (Skibsrud). Caitlin Fisher's Gallery of Portals envisioned rich epistemologies of hope in the form of passageways connecting what was known to what was not-yet-known. And Jolene Armstrong's Gallery of Curiosities envisioned a home for things and feelings and experiences that didn't fit anywhere else, legitimizing the unexpected and inexplicable. Like Natasha Meyers, my collaborators worked "to call other worlds into being, to conjure other worlds within this world" offering "art, experiment and radical disruption to learn other ways to see, feel and know" (Meyers, "How to Grow").

The theme of the gallery I curated for the Decameron 2.0 was women's friendships, motherhood, and sisterhood. I took an epigraph from the opening of Boccaccio's *Decameron*:

"The pleasant conversation and invaluable consolation certain friends provided me gave me such relief that I am absolutely convinced they are the reason I did not die." (Boccaccio, *The Decameron*)

Boccaccio underlined in his preface that the storytellers' stories will "teach them how to recognize what they should avoid, and likewise what they should pursue."

What did our stories teach me?

A practice of love.

Vulnerability.

Reciprocity.

Joyfulness.

3. In “complex environments,” only ever start with love

“The question is no longer of submitting, or not, art to philosophy but of understanding that in order to reach another philosophy, a philosophy appropriate to humanity as formed by beings-in-relation, we must begin by transforming our energy through a continuous artistic process. [...] Art is more critical than morality for entering into a culture of human as a being-in-relation.” (Irigaray, “Ecstasy” 55).

Natalie Loveless and Carrie Smith have written about how “feminist collaboration can work to resculpt academic political spaces” and “argue for the value of insurgent, modest, local modes of collaborative resistance that operate in the cracks of the neoliberal university,” “responsive in its capacity to nurture generosity, care, and creativity” (272). Together they invite readers to be attentive to the conditions necessary for any true critical collaboration, listening for and attuning to what Sarah Sharma has called “brokenness” (Loveless and Smith 272).

The importance of love and its cognates to a well-lived life is well known to artists, and love continually appears in the writing about co-creation and research creation. Creating together is vivifying; it resurrects love of ideas, of materials, of feelings and sensations, love of experiments, of being vulnerable and sharing, of learning and growing, and it cultivates love for others. I considered many kinds of love: *philosophia* (love of wisdom); “polydisciplinamory” (Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art*); “attunement” (Natalie Loveless and Carrie Smith, “Attunement in the Cracks” 272); “a politics of relation rather than negation” (Rita Felski, *Limits of Critique* 147); and “care ethics” (Manuela Puig de la Belacasa, *Matters of Care*). Hannah

Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, centred the *homo faber* who creates a lasting human world with durable objects. Engaged in *making* with the Collective, I brought Arendt's *homo faber* into dialogue with relational anthropology's idea of *homo amans* (see Van Ness et al.).

However, I observed that there isn't really an academic language to describe the condition of simultaneously being strangers and sisters, having incommensurable experiences, frameworks, and perspectives, but being nevertheless, at least along some axes, of one mind, building out one place from many spaces. Siobhan O'Flynn and Jolene Armstrong turned to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality. My previous discussion of Martin Buber became pertinent to my own understanding of the Collective's "method" (create – collaborate – curate – convey to communities):

"Buber describes in I and Thou the transformation from a relationship of 'I—It' which reduces the other to an object and subjects it to the blind will of the 'I,' towards mutual, reciprocal relationships Buber terms 'I—You' (Ich—Du) that are grounded in dialogue and based on the recognition of the other. As Buber posits: 'I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You.'" (Tschofen, "Drawing Out" 238)

For me, the experience of curating and co-creating *felt* different from the initial experience of creating. It was expansive, not discrete, led by heart not mind. Curating, from the Latin "cura": "to be an object of care or attention; to have a care for, take care of, attend to, to be anxious about, bestow pains upon," involves making space/s for others (Lewis). In designing digital gallery spaces to hold the mutuality of "I—Thou" relationships, I realized that my past scholarly inquiries into epistemology and co-organizing work of the Media and Materialities Working Group of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association were really about ways of *making room* for new ways of *thinking, together* (what we described as "le penser ensemble"). The difference between the mutuality, reciprocity, and expansiveness of our ensemble practices and the "forcework" (Ziarek) embedded in the tradition of critique could not have been more stark, or, I felt, important. Erin Manning writes "If 'art' is understood as a 'way' it is not

yet about an object, a form, or content” (Manning 53). We found our art’s “ways” to hang in the prepositional. Our work became a feeling *about*, *for*, or *with*; a reaching *to*, a drawing *in*; making space and holding time *for*.

I treated my task of curating and co-creating like a sacred trust, thinking about the ways I could safely hold and expand the experiences my collaborators had shared with me. Every aesthetic and practical decision I made was designed to honour the intricate webs of relationships and experience that our weekly conversations had brought about. As I designed my galleries, poring over the medieval tradition of illuminated manuscripts for inspiration, I continually found myself dwelling upon works that centered reverence, ritual, and gathering. I sought to understand the sacred in the architecture of cathedrals so I could work its principles into the space that held my collaborator’s works as well as my digital adaptation of the works themselves.

In adapting Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof’s intimate story about emergency hospital visits during the pandemic in the form of an electronic book, I reached for visual metaphors for connectivity, and she gifted them to me in EEGs and photographs of the branches and roots of trees. I wondered, what happens if we situate her story in an arched room with a stained-glass window made to feel like a medieval church? What if we bring the rose window motif onto the page so the insides reflect the outsides? What happens if the coloured glass of the windows was made of histological stains showing the neurodegeneration of epilepsy? Would such a design open new ways of considering the overlays between the sacred and scientific—two models for thinking about healing? Could it support new ways of thinking about mind?

From my own *krisis*, I yearned for the kind of clarity achieved not by erasure but rather by depth and connectiveness. While *kritik* means sift and separate, I found that digital tools were inviting me to work palimpsestically in a logic of inclusion, of both/and rather than either/or. My short films and photographs layered still photos, video, and sound from multiple group members over top of manuscript



Figure 3: Left three images, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, Covid Stories, Maternal Worries. Book design Monique Tschofen. Right, the Rose Window alcove where the book was installed. Decameron 2.0 Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).



Figure 4: Left, Monique Tschofen, Being is Said in Many Ways. Middle and right, compositions with Kari Maaren's wildlife photographs layered onto medieval manuscripts. Decameron Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).

pages so that they bled into one another, each layer retaining some distinctiveness but becoming a compound part of a whole that inscribed its genealogy.

This aesthetic of the palimpsest, drawn from my reading of the medieval tradition, I later reflected,

“is part of an ethical praxis that mirrors our vision of feminist ethics and communities of care. Each layer, a moment of a pandemic world seen through our eyes and articulated through language, is a gift from one of us to another, and as they are stacked over each other, no one obstructing another, they materialize the kinds of intimacies that traditional, sedi-

mented epistemology has been unable to imagine or engage. Articulations of experience and thoughts in times of crisis can never be fully scraped away, nor should they. Instead, as the *Decameron 2.0* shows, they can conjoin such that new modes of knowing can shine through.” (Tschofen et al., “Speculative Archives and World Building”)

4. *Philosophia: For the Love of Wisdom*

“The wisdom of love is perhaps the first meaning of the word ‘philosophy.’” (Irigaray, *The Way of Love* 1)

One of the most important and generative insights from the field of research creation is that exploratory and creative work can precede and lead theorization and reflection. As Erin Manning explains, constricting the terms of a research-creation experimentation in advance “results in stultifying its potential and relegating it to that which already fits within pre-existing schemata of knowledge” (Manning, “Against Method” 54). This notwithstanding, at the same time that I wanted to be responsive and attuned to my collaborators in my curation and co-creations, I wanted to be deeply and intentionally philosophical. I turned from my own *krisis* to Aristotle, whom Boccaccio also read and to whom he responded, for his theory of crisis (Κρίσις) as judgement, his delineation of *theoria* as happiness, and his centering of friendship and care.¹²

In my own poetic works that treated themes of motherhood, sisterhood, and friendship, I engaged with Aristotle’s metaphors of building, generation, and change, as well as his theories of the body and love from *Rhetoric*, *Physics*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I not only cited him, but integrated his ancient manuscripts into my digital palimpsests. In *A Form, a Privation, and an Underlying Thing (Eidos, Sterēsis, Hupokeimenon)*, an essay-film I created integrating photographs and video footage from Kari Maaren, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, and Angela Joose, as well as lines from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, I drew the many generative things that Aristotle studies—the lives of plants and animals and the generation of beings as well as building (Aristotle links the building of ideas to the building of



Figure 5: Monique Tschofen, *A Form, a Privation, and an Underlying Thing* (Eidos, Sterēsis, Hupokeimenon), with photography and video by Angela Joose, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, and Kari Maaren. The Decameron Collective, *Decameron 2.0* (2022).

homes)—together with one of the things that Aristotle omits: motherhood.

I wrote an Aristotle poem for Izabella that drew from Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Physics* that treated love as a form of cyclical and circular movement, *Upon a Particular Relation*, and she made a film for it that manifested these movements in a camera language of tilts and pans. And I followed this with another Aristotle poem and film, *Being is Said in Many Ways*, that mashed up thoughts about movement from Aristotle’s *Physics* with a story about sisterhood as the world threatened to break in two and sweep under. I organized the works in my gallery according to the four Aristotelian elements: water, earth, fire, and air. With this intertextual palimpsestic poetico-philosophical practice, I aimed to join other women philosophers whose forms, as Catherine Villanueva Gardner argues in her study on women philosophers subtitled *Genre and the Boundaries of Philosophy*, “specifically show other possibilities for the philosophical

genre, as well as the way that these possibilities can form a critique of the dominant model” of philosophy (Gardner 10). Through the materials, processes of making, form, and content of the Aristotle Suite of film-poems and through the Aristotelian themes of my gallery, I experimented with ways of critiquing the foundations of the Western epistemological tradition while issuing correctives—something my academic writing could not do.

5. Matter Matters: The World-in-Common

“MEYERS: Concepts like Donna Haraway’s material semiosis and situated knowledge motivate me, grounding me in research methodologies that propel me to the arts to expand and disrupt all-too-disciplined modes of inquiry. Material semiosis helps me see the creative and ethical work involved in making matter come to matter, and also helps me see that there is no necessary divide between art and science, or between scholarly research and artistic practice. Making matter come to matter differently through art practices helps me activate new research questions.” (Natasha Meyers in Truman, “Intimacies” 227)

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt suggests that community requires a meaningful engagement with the “common world of things” that gathers us together, as a table gathers those who sit around it, because the very public sphere is constituted by “the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together” (52). She describes artworks as the most “intensely worldly of all material things” (167). Co-created artworks are even more so.

Our practice of co-creation not only expanded relationality, turning *homo faber* into *homo amor*, but also its capacities for ideological critique because materials and techniques carry and thus betray their own histories. In my adaptation of Lai-Tze Fan’s short story “The Dressmakers’ Daughter,” set in British colonial Shanghai, I combined an audio recording of her reading her story, historical advertisements of Pears Soaps featuring Chinoiserie that she had shared with me, together with cell phone footage by Jolene Armstrong, Angela



Figure 6: Lai-Tze Fan, *The Dressmaker's Daughter*. Film by Monique Tschofen, with footage by Jolene Armstrong, Angela Joesse, Lai-Tze Fan, and Monique Tschofen. Decameron Collective, *Decameron 2.0* (2022).

Joesse, and myself of silk scarves and Cheongsam dresses. I digitally processed the footage to render it as an animation.

Textuality, digitality, and research creation/critical making have long been understood through metaphors of textiles. Tim Ingold, for example, describes “making [as] a practice of weaving, in which practitioners bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of material flows comprising the lifeworld” (91), while Stephanie Springgay describes research-creation through the metaphor of “feltness” as a practice of intimacy:

“feltness is m/othering—a violent, sticky, erotic, swollen temporality that is always a tiny ripple at the edge of the sand and simultaneously an enormous wave (Springgay & Freedman, 2010, 2012); Hand felting, affect, and m/othering swirl with intensities, transcorporeal touching encounters, and practices of intimacies committed to reciprocity, relationality, stewardship, and an ethics of care.” (“Feltness” 212)

This is because, as Ganaele Langlois argues in her brilliant book *How Textile Communicates*, textiles can be

“one of the most profound types of communication: one that makes both collective and individual existence possible by tying us, binding us, wrapping us to others and to the world, both physically and imaginatively; one that gives us pasts to bring to our presents and presents to project into futures.” (3)

The shared footage of cheongsam silk dresses not only bound us to each other. Integrating this gifted footage extended the reach of Lai-Tze’s potent critique of colonialism and commentary on women’s lives in garment manufacturing by bringing before the eyes material evidence that the complex historical processes that Lai-Tze was writing about have not ended.

What, indeed, are the overlapping and historical *crises* behind the global flows that have moved silks from China into the houses of Chinese and White women living in Canada? (A complex weave of colonialism, capitalism, globalization; work, travel, migration, and blending of families.) The gifted footage of the silks makes visible a chain of custody of women’s (art)work/s, with all their historical and ongoing planetary inequities. Who manufactures and sews, who

purchases, who wears, who preserves and documents, who critiques silks from China? What is needed to remember the women whose hands made these things or understood what they endured? Our methods of research-co-creation offered a way to orient to, and “Ori-entate” around (Sarah Ahmed in Behar 12), Orientalism, to keep these matters in memory, showing *and* telling about privilege and inequality, beauty and labour extraction, and East-West relations.

6. Hives Hold the Sweet Wisdoms

“So if that is what is at stake in art, that raising of forms that give a possibility of world, where the world in an ordinary, everyday way, is either limited to ready-made and indefinitely repeated significations, like elementary significations (living, surviving, earning a living, also slowly losing your life by leading life towards death, making or producing this or that, making objects, making exchanges, making children, learning something, forgetting, etc.), or else, on the contrary, to an absence of significations, in which case, onto what does it open, the world? Onto other possibilities of worlds. I would say that art is there every time to open the world, to open the world to itself, to its possibility of world, to its possibility thus to open meaning, while the meaning that has already been given is closed.” (Nancy, “Art Today” 93)

Chronologically, at least, theory followed practice. We did not leave the artworks we co-created as self-evident. In keeping with professional expectations of research-creation, we critically reflected upon our co-created work, co-authoring grants, and co-presenting and co-authoring papers about it. One advantage of theorizing in large teams is that nine brains are better than one brain. We made observations of each other’s work that we ourselves could not see, and continually pointed each other to new critical literatures that greatly expanded our vocabularies, approaches, and insights. Co-authoring in digital spaces let us build our thoughts in and around each other’s, so they became more deep, layered, and nuanced.¹³

Co-authored works in the academy typically are achieved through a division of labour; each author tackles a section based on their exper-

tise. Our practice co-writing in Google docs was communal¹⁴; guided by the unspoken principle “come as you are and for as long as you have time,” during long co-writing sessions, members joined and left the Google doc in the middle of sentences and paragraphs, writing and rewriting with few traces of who did what. It remains immensely frustrating that all humanities and social sciences citation styles flatten these contributions to first author et al.

My previous tetradic schema situating the maker-theorist in the world had not accounted for how hard it is to think and theorize when one’s capacity for attention is under constant interruption. We had palliated a broken world in crisis by tending to and becoming custodians of each others’ experiences and ideas. We were all caretakers—middle-aged women whose responsibilities included students passing through a challenging time in their career, as well as caretaking for elders, siblings, and children. We found that another advantage of the feminist Collective is that if someone had an emergency, or dropped out, another seamlessly pulled to the front and the theorizing work kept going. We had built-in redundancies to become resistant against the recurring crises that punctuated our daily experience: critical exhaustion, health emergencies, deaths. Hive mind is revelatory as a radical way of doing academic work.

Hive mind has wider ramifications though. It completely undermines the philosophical conception of the theorist as someone special, solitary, objective, and disengaged, and restores the ancient Greek understanding of *theoria* as “a cultural practice that brought Greeks from different cities and ideologies into contact with one another in shared religious sanctuaries” (Nightingale, “On Wondering” 30) and the *theoros* as one who beholds not with suspicion but with “wonder” (*thauma*) (24). Hive mind, like ancient *theoria*, is co-invested and unboundaried; its knowledge is based on “kinship” with, not distance from, its object (Nightingale *Spectacles* 10). As Hans-Georg Gadamer described ancient *theoria*, hive mind generates “a true participation, not something active but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees” (in Nightingale, *Spectacles* 13): “In this activity (which was itself driven by a ‘de-



Figure 7: Monique Tschofen, *A Form, a Privation, and an Underlying Thing (Eidos, Sterēsis, Hupokeimenon)*, with photography and video by Angela Jooose, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, and Kari Maaren. Decameron Collective, *Decameron 2.0* (2022).

sire to know’) the theorist experienced a powerful *pathos*: a transformation of self and soul.” (Gadamer in Nightingale, *Spectacles 10*)

As I write this, Jasper, Alberta is on fire, and the world has (again) recorded its hottest day. Crisis demands nothing less than manners of thinking that put aside ego and are moved to join together to prioritize collective care and repair.

ACT III: DISSENSUS AS GIFT

This article contrasts the “before times” and the “after times” that have characterized my career and work, outlining the contours of my troubled relationship with critique and theory and early efforts to (albeit theoretically) gesture towards critical making/research creation for solutions, in relation to the transformations brought about by working with the Decameron Collective. I was not wrong, but underestimated the power of what I call feminist collective research-co-creation’s re-formwork, in opposition to theo-

ry's "forcework" (Ziarek). In each of my advocations, I have tried to uncover cornerstones to my work within the Collective, showing how centring making, co-creating, and curating greatly expands the possibilities embedded in theoretical critique. It turns out it is not necessary to interrogate or torture to attain truths. Responding to the world creatively through storying; becoming custodians of and caring for the matters of the world and others in it; "penser ensemble": these are ways of responding to our collective critical condition that are self- and world-repairing, generative, and non-violent. Rosi Braidotti wrote about sustainable subjectivity, arguing for experiencing "bond[s] of empathy or affinity with [our] fellow 'others'" (16). Entering into relations, experiencing joyful encounters, she wrote, "express one's *potentia* and increase[s] the subject's capacity to enter into further relations, to grow and expand" (17). "This," Braidotti stressed, "makes possible future perspectives [...] it writes the pre-history of a future. Entering into relations, or virtual nomadic becomings engenders the world by making possible a web of sustainable inter-connections" (17).

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Manuscript pages from the Decameron in the Decameron 2.0 (2022) by the Decameron Collective.

Figure 2: The Decameron Collective (from left to right: Caitlin Fisher, Monique Tschofen, Kari Maaren; Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, Jolene Armstrong, Angela Joosse; Lai-Tze Fan, Siobhan O'Flynn, Kelly Egan).

Figure 3: Left three images, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, Covid Stories, Maternal Worries. Book design Monique Tschofen. Right, the Rose Window alcove where the book was installed. Decameron 2.0 Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).

Figure 4: Left, Monique Tschofen, Being is Said in Many Ways. Middle and right, compositions with Kari Maaren's wildlife photographs layered onto medieval manuscripts. Decameron Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).

Figure 5: Monique Tschofen, A Form, a Privation, and an Underlying Thing (Eidos, Sterēsis, Hupokeimenon), with photography and video by Angela Joosse, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, and Kari Maaren. The Decameron Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).

Figure 6: Lai-Tze Fan, The Dressmaker's Daughter. Film by Monique Tschofen, with footage by Jolene Armstrong, Angela Joosse, Lai-Tze Fan, and Monique Tschofen. Decameron Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).

Figure 7: Monique Tschofen, A Form, a Privation, and an Underlying Thing (Eidos, Sterēsis, Hupokeimenon), with photography and video by Angela Joosse, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, and Kari Maaren. Decameron Collective, Decameron 2.0 (2022).

NOTES

1. This paper has greatly benefited from Griffen Horsley, Jolene Armstrong, James Carney, María Angélica Madero and Agata Mer's critiques and insights and, of course, is completely bound with the think-

- ing of my collaborators Jolene Armstrong, Kelly Egan, Lai-Tze Fan, Caitlin Fisher, Angela Joosse, Kari Maaren, Siobhan O'Flynn, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, and Hendrick de Haan.↵
2. Patai and Corral, in *Theory's Empire*, describe postmodernism's "aggressive vocabulary of subversion, demystification, transgression, violence, fissures, decentered subjects, fragmentation, dismantling master narratives, and so on" (12).↵
 3. Sade was ubiquitous in post-structuralist theory via Adorno and Horkheimer, Barthes, and Lacan. For a contemporary summary see Tyrus Miller.↵
 4. "That truth is unitary, that truth may finally be extracted by torture, is part of our legacy from the Greeks and, therefore, part of our idea of "truth" (DuBois 4). See also my discussion in Tschofen, "Drawing Out" (235).↵
 5. Jacques Aumont asked the question "can a film be an act of theory"? and answered no. I was seeking to argue that it could, in studies of works that ranged from Kristjana Gunnars' lyric essay/novels and poems (*Kristjana Gunnars*); to Anne Carson's ekphrasis of Betty Goodwin's rendering of torture ("Drawing Out"); to Caitlin Fisher's augmented reality storyworld about generations of women's lives ("The Digital Denkbild"); to Gertrude Stein's philosophico-poetic portraits of Matisse, Picasso, and Isadora Duncan.↵
 6. See Andrea Wilson Nightingale. "On Wandering and Wondering: "Theôria" in Greek Philosophy and Culture." *Arion*, Third Series, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall, 2001), pp. 23-58. Andrea Nightingale writes that "[t]his encounter [of the theoros] with the unfamiliar invites the traveler to look at the customs and practices of his own city from a new vantage point. The journey abroad may end up confirming the theorist in his own perspectives and prejudices, but it may also function to unsettle him and even to transform his basic worldview" (33). The work of the *theoros* was thus social and political, directed to the affairs of the world. It was dialogical. And of particular importance, the work of the *theoros* was borne in relation to a way of seeing that was shaped by a practice of actual spectatorship. It was as spectator and then as the storyteller who returned with the account of the spectacle that the *theoros* was able to draw the thinker/citizen into ever wider perspectives.↵

7. I am acutely aware of the immense privilege we had working from the safety of our own homes while other labourers were not being protected from a fatal and disabling airborne virus.↔
8. In this sense, our collaborative practice, which began as a refusal of the demands placed on academic women and ended with modes of productivity acknowledged by the academy, echoed Natalie Loveless' experience of feminist collaboration with Carrie Smith; she observed that their "year of collaboration might be a way to render my daily experience of academic life more robust, communal, and affectively resilient" (Loveless and Smith 273).↔
9. Other pandemic projects had similar ambitions. See Hollington's *The Decameron Project: 29 New Stories from the Pandemic*; Kubovy et al's *Decameron Row* <https://decameronrow.com/>; and *Corona Haikus: Visual Poetry in Times of Isolation* <https://coronahaikus.com>.↔
10. We have since implemented this methodology in workshops with broader publics delivered including the Electronic Literature Organization's Unconference (London) in 2023 and the PhiloSOPHIA conference (Calgary, AB) in 2024.↔
11. See Matina for an account of krisis.↔
12. For an effort to connect Aristotle to feminist care ethics, see Groenhout, "The Virtue of Care."↔
13. Our article in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, "A Research-co-Creation of Care: Feminist Speculation, Collaboration, and Curation in the Decameron 2.0 Virtual Gallery" (2024), demonstrates the documentation of this work that Siobhan O'Flynn describes as digital kintsugi.↔
14. This co-writing practice was feminist, but also informed by workshop practices of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association's Media and Materiality Working Group with myself, Marcello Vitali-Rosati, Margot Mellet, Lai-Tze Fan, and Antoine Fauchié, demoed at the Annual Canadian Comparative Literature Association Conference.↔

HYPHENATED: A COLLABORATIVE MEDITATION ON RESEARCH-CREATION

ANNA FORAN

AMI XHERRO

This article draws on a dialogic form to probe the hyphen at the heart of research-creation, a burgeoning episteme. We, both authors, contend that this hyphen is bound up with solidarity, in the sense of forging communal spirit in the often-depersonalized realm of the academy. We also contend that it's bound up with intimacy, in the sense of forging proximity between different media and disciplines and between the people practicing them, who are both separate and yet not so apart. In the end, we transcribe an impromptu dance party that took place in a seminar room in the winter of 2024, offering this up as a vision for the models of intimacy (you and me) and space-sharing (us) that research-creation might fruitfully imply.

Cet article a recours à une forme dialogique pour explorer le trait d'union placé littéralement au cœur de la recherche-création, un épistème en plein essor. En tant qu'auteurs, nous considérons que ce trait d'union est lié à la solidarité, dans le sens où il permet de forger un esprit communautaire dans le domaine souvent dépersonnalisé de l'académie. Nous soutenons également qu'il est lié à l'intimité, dans le sens d'une proximité entre les différents médias et les différentes disciplines et entre les personnes qui les pratiquent, qui sont à la fois séparées et pourtant pas si distinctes. Pour conclure, nous retraçons le déroulement d'une soirée dansante impromptue ayant eu lieu dans une salle de séminaire au cours de l'hiver 2024, offrant ainsi une vision des modèles d'intimité (vous et moi) et de partage de l'espace (nous) que la recherche-création pourrait impliquer de manière enrichissante.

This is a hyphenated meditation on research-creation. The desire to perform such a meditation sprung from our shared status as research-creation students at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. It also sprung from a year spent collaborating on two research-creation events that we hosted at the Centre in 2023-2024 called *Circumfluence*. We write it across various hyphens: disciplinary, psychical, physical. The exercise is a variation on the game of exquisite corpse, where one person adds to what the other has written (or drawn). We do it to engage in an intimacy via the hyphen, and to try and work out a set of conjectures around the possible relationship between research-creation and intimacy itself.

Anna Foran: I think this all started because you, Ami, identified a funding source and suggested we try to take advantage of it. This source was a possible grant (up to \$2000) through our department's "Ideas Program," designed to allow students to realize an event, a series, a workshop, through creative and collaborative means. You, we, saw this as an opportunity to give form and visibility to the newfound micro-community that we occupied within the Centre for Comparative Literature: research-creation. We talked about a natural way to lend this visibility, which was to invite artists and writers who worked across academic and creative lines to speak on their practices. But we also got to talking about *intimacy*, or our sense of its absence in our academic milieu: intimacy between people, but also expressions of intimacy between people and the work they were doing. What was the relationship between research-creation, or that notion of "working across" fields and media, and this question of intimacy?

Ami Xherro: Our original proposal sought to give room to new modes of making and thinking which ran parallel to academic work. Doing so would be a way to continue to hone the discussion around creative research, not so much in terms of institutional requirements but rather building community, and how students working in this capacity might find solidarity and a sense of community with those working in their disciplines and beyond. "Solidarity" seemed to be the first step of the "intimacy" which we sought. And as our first

event was set to occur a little over a month after the genocide in Gaza began, it was impossible not to address the complicity of large institutions and our positioning within it. How to foster intimacy within the walls of an institution—a university—that elsewhere in Gaza were being annihilated by Israeli forces? At the same time, and increasingly, we saw the power of these big Western universities seriously troubled by the voices of students, faculty, and staff alike who recognized the power of words at a moment like now. As people working inside the University of Toronto, we recognized our own roles in relation to language, and our agency in speaking out to call for a complete ceasefire and an end to apartheid and occupation in Palestine.

The aim of the events, which we called a “low prep/high presence scenario,” were to come together and talk in the hopes of forging an intimacy across disciplines and geographies. This intimacy was rooted in our position within the institution, and our orientation outward, in terms of what support we lacked within it and what was possible without it. It was rooted in a desire to be, in a sense, what philosophers Brian Massumi and Erin Manning would call both an institutional *parasite* (to benefit at the university’s expense by enacting its logic but not its methods) and a *para-site* (to maintain relations with the institution of the university but operate by a different logic): and for our own purposes as students and artists, to refuse the division between research/creation; reader/critic; reader/writer; to refuse the professionalization of affinities born in instinct, and instead to speak about this instinct that draws us near some texts/objects/ideas and away from others (Todoroff 2018).

AF: Yes. And after coming up against institutional barriers to try and secure a large enough space on campus, we settled on using the small seminar room in our own department for the events, which at the time felt like a surrender to bureaucratic forces but actually turned out to be a potent chance to activate a traditional learning environment in alternative ways. The name of the events, *Circumfluence*, emerged from our desire to position people in the round, as in a seminar room, but to reimagine and take apart that circle in various ways: “Circ-” and “influence,” were the categories we decided might

allow for this expression of intimacy between person and work, person and person. In the first iteration, on books of influence, six people (academics, artists, writers) sat in a semicircle, facing a semicircle of respondents. An audience radiated in semicircles behind them. In the dimmed light, each speaker shared about the intimacy between themselves and their chosen text: where they discovered it, and why they returned to it, and the respondents, tasked with listening, then offered a direct reply to what they had heard. We listened, for instance, to someone lovingly dissect a haiku by Matsuo Bashō. Another person read from their scrawled notes on the subject of literary tone as it figured in the collaboratively written 2023 book *Tone* by Kate Zambreno and Sofia Samatar. Someone else read a poem about flow and breath interwoven with a notion from Gilles Deleuze. The hope was for an hour or so of sharing: sharing space, sharing words, and sharing love insofar as the presenters were expressing a kind of love for, or attachment to, the books they were speaking on.

AX: This was also at a time when you, Anna, had just submitted your field paper and were preparing for your oral exam for PhD candidature, so I know we were talking a lot about the stream that we were pursuing, “research-creation”: a new initiative by the Centre for Comparative Literature to invite students with an artistic practice to use a creative methodology to replace one of the three mandatory languages. So a creative arts practice was set to replace or pose as a literary language, which is an interesting equivocation. We were talking a lot about what research-creation *is*, especially the hyphen which binds and separates them, and the kinds of people and thinkers who set the stage for its growing visibility inside the academy, like literary critic Rita Felski.

AF: As soon as we started talking about our desire for the events, which was *to have people bring things they love into the seminar room, and not be afraid to speak plainly on this love* I immediately started thinking of Felski, and her sense that scholars need not hide their love for, or attachment to, their objects of academic interest when performing criticism; rather, they need to boldly *attune* to them. I started to wonder whether Felski’s work (*The Limits of Critique*, 2015; *Hooked*, 2020) operates as a node on the continuum towards

THE CENTRE FOR COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE PRESENTS



CIRCUMFLUENCE: ON WRITING
(an event)

How are we influenced?

WHERE: the Centre
WHEN: Nov.27, 6-8pm
WHAT: Conversation,
camaraderie, food/drink

Figure 1: Our poster for the first Circumfluence event.

research-creation itself; because even if she wasn't writing about artists, she was calling for a visibility of the affective "hyphenation" between subject and object within the academy. This is what positions her inside the theoretical domain of New Materialism, which turns away from humanist dualisms and seeks a more embodied vi-

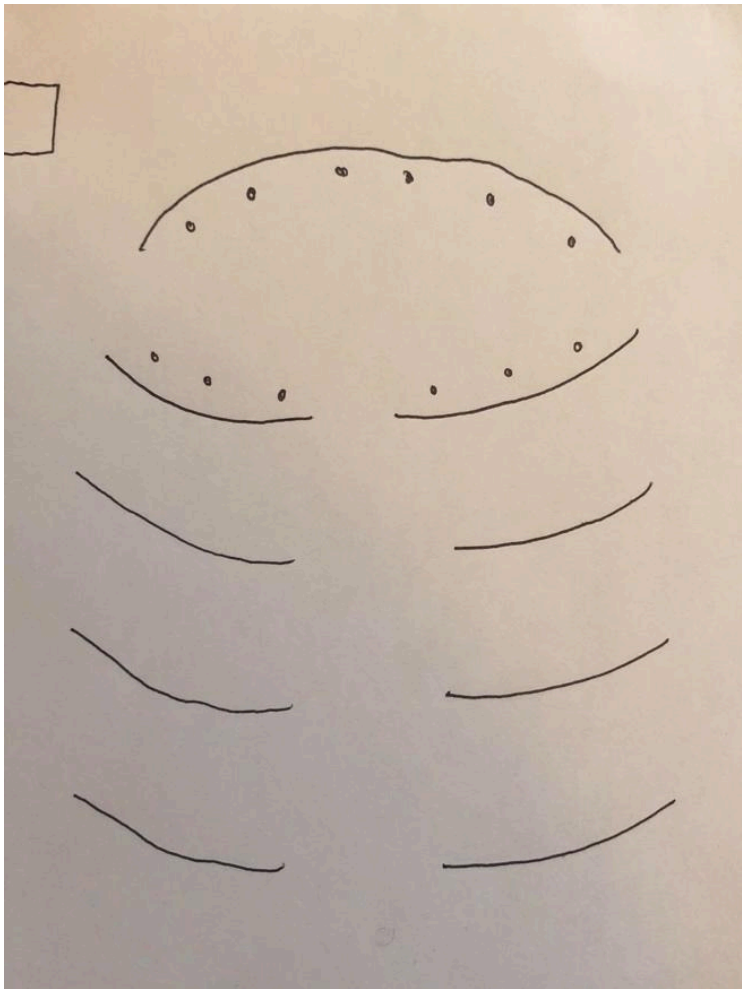


Figure 2: Hand-drawn room set-up for the first event.

sion of human and nonhuman entanglement. And indeed, scholars have called upon Felski and New Materialism to position research-creation as a part of this larger turn towards this entanglement of matter (in its case, of subject, research, creation, etc.) (Truman and Springgay 2015). But I don't think this is exactly what we had in



Figure 3: Cropped image of six presenters from the first event.

mind with the events: instead, we were interested in the physical quality of the hyphen itself, and this idea of connection, rather than the entanglement, that defines New Materialism.

AX: At our event, the hyphen became a bridge which not only connected and attached two realms of praxis but *attuned* the things it connected: more generally, research and creation, and more specific to the events, the books that were being brought in to be discussed and shared. The hyphen forged an intimacy which marked the space as a whole. Attunement, in this case, was less about attuning to the art or literary object in question (à la Felski), as a critic might; it was about attuning to all the material parts that made up the whole of the event itself, the distinct individuals and the objects they were speaking of, as well as the wider group of people in the room. People sat side by side, media and disciplines sat side by side, with the necessary gaps between them. This became, for us, a hopeful model of research-creation itself, a chance for this hyphenated coexistence of people and domains often kept apart. The impulse is to call this intimacy.

AF: And this is akin to the kind of intimacy imagined by literary scholar Julia C. Obert, who, in contrast to, say, critic Laurent Berlant's cultural configuration of the category, understands it in much more immediate terms. In her 2016 article "What we talk about when we talk about intimacy," Obert identifies four facets of intimacy, the final one being its "recognition of irreducibility, that is, a recognition that one cannot ever fully know the Other" (26). She develops this through a reading of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*,

calling on a line from protagonist Lily Briscoe that references language itself as both known and unknown, and which for Obert also summons Jacques Derrida's famous conviction in his text *Monolingualism of the Other* (1996) that, in doing translation, "one shall never inhabit the language of the other" (Obert 26; Derrida 57). In this text and others, Derrida makes an argument for this irreducibility as a core facet of intimacy, for the way we touch one another but never merge, a process that iterates like a trace. So is there a way to think about the hyphen of research-creation as such a trace, as such an opportunity to engage with difference without collapse? Might the processes of research-creation be imagined less as the entangled processes of New Materialism, and more as a chain of interactions between doing research and creating, one person and another? How can this notion of a chain—of continual exchange—resist the status of creative work as an "appendage" to a central research project?

AX: Derrida's configuration of the trace is especially conducive to our line of thinking here: the trace implies no central origin, no thing greater than another, and instead a chain of differences that each contain within them the unknowable other and achieve their meaning through both distance and proximity. In *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), Derrida writes, "I have tried to indicate a way out of the closure imposed by this system by means of the "trace"" (141). While for Derrida this context is the meaning of concepts and words wherein neither are more an effect than a cause, in the context of *Circumfluence*, this extends to mean the re-staging and re-presencing of these differences between academic disciplines on the surface, but on a deeper level, affinities which are not so much academic concepts as they are instincts towards what titillate us in the first place. Difference cannot be thought of without this trace: without the shared instinct towards reading in the shadows our favourite books.

AF: Just as we were interested in the physicality of the hyphen between research-creation, its true material reality, so did Derrida partially derive his own definition of the trace from a very material phenomenon: Sigmund Freud's "mystic writing pad," a 1920s invention which he [Freud] calls upon in his early writings as a metaphor for the human psyche. In his 1967 essay "Freud and the Scene of Writ-

ing,” Derrida turns to this analogy to think about writing as our most primal reality. External stimulus marks (writes) the psyche just as the stylus marks the surface of the mystic writing pad; even when the marks “disappear” by lifting the topmost celluloid sheet from the wax base, traces of these marks are inevitably retained. These traces invisibly inform new marks to come. As you say, it sets up the idea of an eternal chain of interactions between one sign and the next, one entity and the next: it makes it impossible that research should merely accompany creation, or vice versa: rather they are in intimate, but not necessarily entangled interplay, both living inside the other and also always remaining different. And so true with humans.

AX: In this model, research is not necessarily creating, and creating is not necessarily research, though each also always contains the other within itself. This oscillation between the two conjures up its irreducibility, like a breathy whisper where intimacy is forged both through touching the other and also recognizing the gap between you that will always exist. The hyphen becomes a material necessity, like the line that sits between two people on a bus or in an audience, forging a bond but also referencing a gap. In one sense, and historically, it was used to summon or to reference the origins of the grammatical sign, as a means to avoid ambiguity (Liddell and Scott), a sign written below letters—like a $_$ b—meant to bring two language systems together. But this ambiguity returns again and again as a physical necessity; and in research-creation, it enacts an intimacy between two entities. Yet both research and creation are ever-expanding universes. The hyphen is the state as well as the site of this intimacy replete with ambiguity and ambivalence, like a lovers’ hideaway or the corner in which they steal a kiss: something which springs from a body, confused but undistracted.

AF: This link between the hyphen and intimacy, the hyphen and love, actually showed up somewhat fortuitously in the material brought by one of the presenters in our first event, Ben de Boer, a writer, artist, and archivist. Ben shared on Friederike Mayrocker’s *The Communicating Vessels* (2003), a book of 140 entries Mayrocker wrote in the aftermath of the 1954 death of her partner and collaborator of almost 30 years, Ernst Jandl. Alongside text, the book al-

so features small drawings, some of which render two people sitting shoulder to shoulder, spectating at the cinema, or listening to a jazz concert (figs. 4-5). In many of these drawings, Mayrocker actually inserts a curving hyphen between the two people, the two heads, as if to signify a shared perception, or a shared feeling, or simply the fact of companionship. The figures are drawn in such a way that they almost appear to be moving, or making a form of brief contact. Below one of these drawings, Mayrocker writes: “how lovely it was, this mutual brushing of shoulders, it gave me such a great feeling of intimate connection” (2). The shoulders brush, but they do not merge; through this brushing a singular feeling of *intimate connection* is formed. And so it was, or hoped for, at the event, where people sat side by side, on different nodes along the continuum of research and creation, but still engaged in a shared perception, a shared feeling, one born of listening to people speak on what they are moved by.

AX: Reading Mayrocker’s poetry you get a sense of how these personal annotations make up a living archive. You get the sense of how

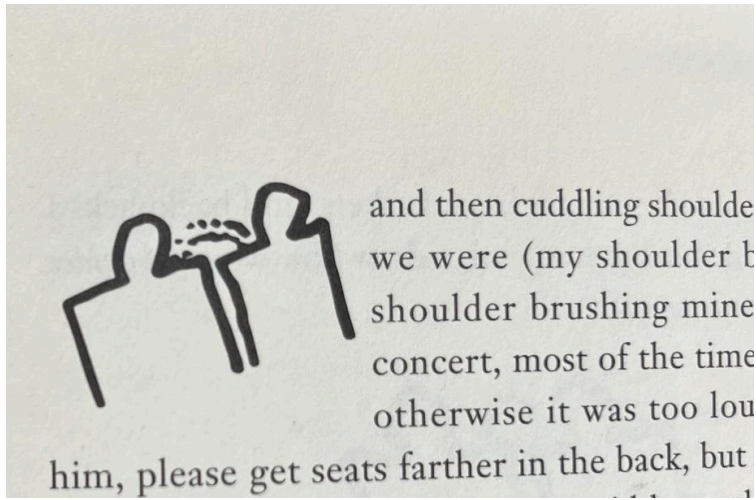


Figure 4: Illustration from Friederike Mayrocker's "The Communicating Vessels" (2003).

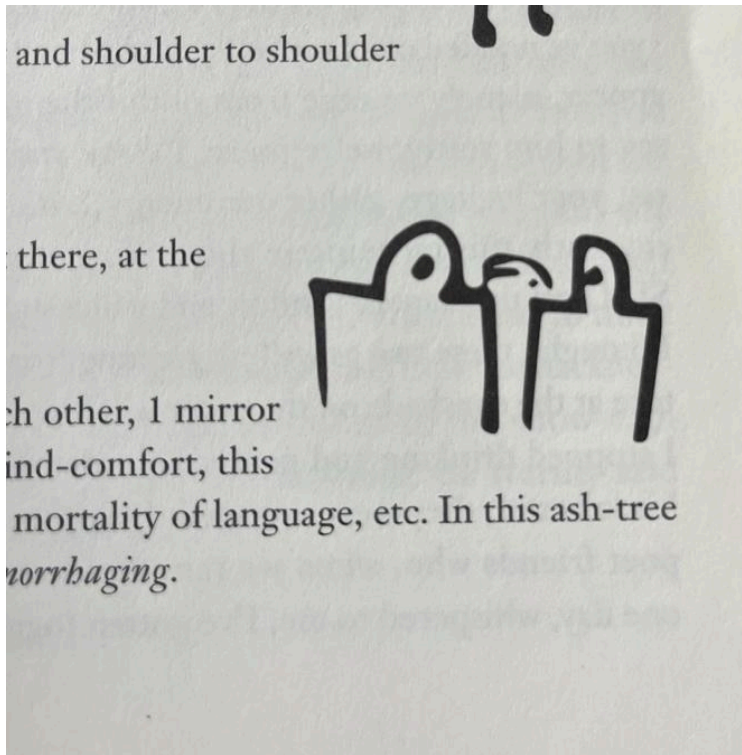


Figure 5: Illustration from Friederike Mayrocker's "The Communicating Vessels" (2003).

she lived among her material, how the contact she made with the world was archived and recorded in her private space. The frenzy of loose papers evokes an eternal labour of inscription, an obsession with the minutia in service of life, the creation of another life altogether. And indeed, if you think of the way she worked—keeping records and making them anew—you can get a taste of the inseparability of “research” and “creation,” and the very stakes of that hyphen.

What if, in or through creation, the differences of research and creation become obsolete? What collective outcomes are possible? And how to instigate them? The second iteration of the *Circumfluence*



Figure 6: Friederike Mayrocker in her studio in 2001 (Barbara Klemm).

events sought after these questions. For, as we learned from the first event, while research-creation at first appeared to simply designate a way of *doing* work, it also seemed an exciting possibility to think about *how* this new variety of work finds analogy or equivalency in models of being together, and models of being in the institutional space of the classroom.

With the second iteration, the event saw the more usual construction of an audience shift: rather than the semi-circled presenters and opposing spectators, the chairs were pushed to the edges of the room to form a full circle around the perimeter. Now everyone, presenter and audience, sat shoulder to shoulder, quite possibly brushing, focused on a shared experience: in this case, listening to the pieces of music or sonic compositions brought in by each presenter as particular sites of influence for their academic and creative life's work.

AF: As you were the one facilitating this event, Ami, it was an exciting chance for you to activate the space in a different way. Atmosphere was important to us all along, as a way to invite shared attunement amid the differences between people, disciplines, etc., but this time around we emphasized that atmospheric form of connection even more. This time, you turned off the lights and laid out 40 flameless candles, generating an ambience not often encountered in the artificially lit spaces of academia. You arranged four pillows on

THE CENTRE FOR COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE PRESENTS

CIRCUMFLUENCE: ON MUSIC
(an event)



How are we influenced?

WHERE: the Centre
WHEN: Feb.27, 5-7pm
WHAT: Conversation,
camaraderie, food/drink

Figure 7: Our poster for the second Circumfluence event.

the floor, orange and neon pink, and laid out food on meat-wrapping paper. A playlist had been made called “Space is the Place,” a reference to the Sun Ra song and to a larger focus on space and place. Perhaps summoning echoes of the Fluxus events of the 1960s art-world, or, more aptly, the sit-in as a historic tool of institutional un-

settling, the event became a variety of performance that turned to elements such as layout and atmosphere to question some of the usual modes governing learning spaces. With the chairs freed from their usual rectangular formation, the aim was for a form of connection not necessarily enforced by shared scholarly or artistic material, as everyone was arriving with a different foundation, but one generated by a collective experience of *space*. Intimacy, in this configuration, was the intimacy of attuning to the space, no matter how unknown one person was from another. The hope was for something akin to Mayrocker’s “1 great feeling,” apart and also together.

AX: As we sat in the dark seminar room listening to the sounds vibrating from a Bluetooth speaker placed on a central table (see fig. 8), at first we were silent. It was like being in a cinema, except our eyes were closed. That evening, the last participant to share played a DJ mix of electronic music that they had danced to a few weekends prior. Slowly, fluidly, group listening of the mix transitioned into group dancing in the seminar room. We moved together through the space, bringing this notion of hyphenation into a final and distilled focus: while the group who was dancing was not necessarily carved from a

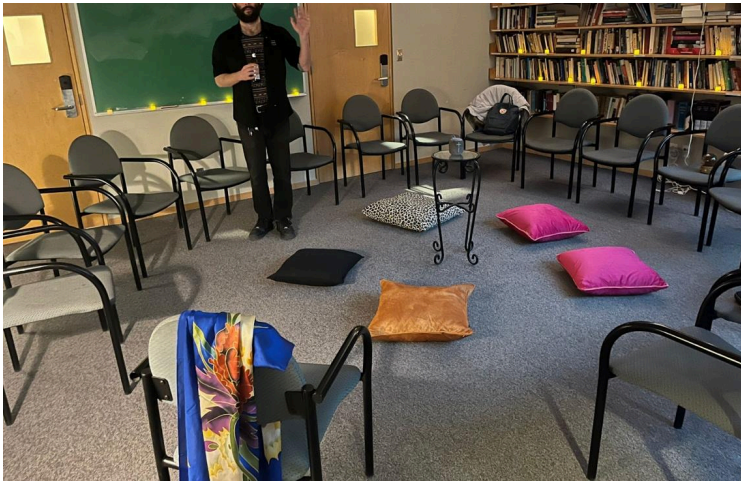


Figure 8: The room set-up for the second event.

specific segment of academia, they did represent a community, however fleetingly assembled, of people brought together by mutuality, by sociality, and shared engagement with a room as a living entity itself.

The act of dancing is a collective undertaking, but people also move separately, and this begins to render that model of a primal inter-connection. In the end, the implication was that such a gathering could transpire into infinity. Whether or not this will be the case, this sense of infinity, or an ongoing chain of responses to each other and to the world, seems to lie at the heart of research-creation and its possibilities.

PLAYLIST: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmkQQYjUpdzlNFU-jzavjcGTh1coKpwxhP&si=A8oeVL68ifo8tOaf>

AF: What seems crucial about what unfolded in the seminar room is the way it represented an immediate response, a response implying presence and perception more than premeditation. When the seminar room broke out in dance this was an act of spontaneity, a *response* to being in the space together and to listening to what had just played from the speaker. Movement became literal movement, but also the movement inherent in responding to the world and to each other, like the dancing was an extension of the earlier act of moving between speakers in the circle.

And if we return to New Materialist lines of thought, we see that movement as a category has been understood as “a primary ‘proposition’ of research-creation itself” (Truman and Springgay). In their 2015 article, the authors differentiate between *relative movement*, which they see as tied to a humanist framework whereby we move but space doesn’t, and *absolute movement*, which calls on New Materialisms to imagine all actors, human and otherwise, as created by and existing in movement (151). But while they imagine this latter variety of movement as “intensive” and “flowing,” and the hyphen of research-creation as gesturing towards various *unrealized potentialities*, it seems vital to also consider a more intimate kind of movement between one thing and the next: my shoulder to your shoulder, my work to your work. What might be gained from this less *inten-*

sive, more tangible (versus *unrealized*), orientation to the hyphen of research-creation? How might the quiet interplay identified by Julia C. Obert between proximity and distance as a hallmark of intimacy inform the act of working across media, across disciplines, across institutional people and spaces?

AX: Not exactly a heterotopia and not fully immersive, the seminar room and the university at large attach themselves to the logos of permanence. The abundance of the world is felt here, but only through its immediate absence: the locales and vicissitudes it augments and those it condenses. A few months after the last *Circumfluence* event took place, the People's Circle for Palestine was erected at King's College Circle. While the university had fenced this area off and put up a sign restricting assembly in anticipation of an encampment, we saw how collective singularities emerged to protest apartheid and genocide. Every day, students and non-students ate, read, and talked together without an expectation of permanence—indeed just the opposite.

I heard recently at a conference titled “The Anti-Zionist Idea” that things that reach for permanence are often destructive: that the condition of permanence itself is a practice of conquest. This is especially true in systems of knowledge-production that attempt to close the gap between the indeterminate and the definite. This breach, however, is where they cohere. Looking beyond the walls of the seminar room, the *Circumfluence* events offered a present in which one did not have to imagine the university being *different* or *elsewhere* or *otherwise*. It offered not an imagining but a tracing of practices to which we attribute less value, and it brought these to the pedagogical locale in which we were gathering.

AF: This question of tracing is where the hope lies: the idea of that endless iterating across disciplines, media, and spaces, not towards a place of permanence but rather of consistent movement and exchange. The task becomes not the temporary erection of a heterotopic or alternative space within the academy, with their risks of the elsewhere or the otherwise; instead, the task seems more to seize institutional space to model that variety of connection whereby the

permeability of the hyphen is that which connects: not solid and immovable walls. As I write this, in the wake of a widespread union movement, the University has announced plans to raise and equalize funding for more of their graduate students, this being a move towards that kind of will to connect more than separate, to generate hyphens, rather than division. Research-creation becomes a direct desire to *do* academic and disciplinary work differently, and it also becomes a broader gesture to a new way of existing in and among the academy: together and apart, but only apart by choice rather than institutional constraint. It's a gesture toward intimacy, in the sense of sharing something (sharing work, sharing space), and toward solidarity, in the sense of a *we* formed by exploring individual pathways into shared wisdom.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Our poster for the first *Circumfluence* event.

Figure 2: Hand-drawn room set-up for first event.

Figure 3: Cropped image of six presenters from first event.

Figure 4: Illustration from Friederike Mayrocker's *The Communicating Vessels* (2003).

Figure 5: Illustration from Friederike Mayrocker's *The Communicating Vessels* (2003).

Figure 6: Friederike Mayrocker in her studio in 2001 (Barbara Klemm).

Figure 7: Our poster for the second *Circumfluence* event.

Figure 8: The room set-up for the second event.

GUERRILLA PEDAGOGY: REVALUATING KNOWLEDGE
MOBILIZATION IN RESEARCH-CREATION AND SUSTAINING
ART IN CONFLICT ZONES

MEHVISH RATHER

This article focusses on the exploration of avenues of dissemination within research-creation methodology – and whether the pedagogical boundaries that research-creation attempts at dismantling within research and practice (especially with respect to film and media) are sustained when the project reaches the dissemination stage. Much like guerilla warfare, where smaller bands of rebels and fighters attack and take on an enemy seemingly much bigger in power than themselves, I view guerilla pedagogy as a methodology of teaching, creating, and disseminating knowledge and art that challenges the confines of corporatized neoliberal universities and hypocritical geopolitical processes which restrict the flow of knowledge in spaces

Cet article explore les avenues de diffusion au sein de la méthodologie de recherche-création et interroge si les frontières pédagogiques que cette approche cherche à démanteler dans la recherche et la pratique (notamment en lien avec le cinéma et les médias) sont maintenues lors de l'étape de diffusion du projet. À l'image de la guérilla, où de petits groupes de combattants affrontent un ennemi apparemment bien plus puissant, je considère la pédagogie de guérilla comme une méthodologie d'enseignement, de création et de diffusion des savoirs et de l'art qui remet en question les limites des universités néolibérales corporatisées ainsi que les processus géopolitiques hypocrites restreignant la circulation des savoirs dans les zones de conflit. Cette approche subvertit fondamentalement les idées préconçues sur les

of conflict zones, and fundamentally subverts pre-conceived ideas of the roles of the pedagogue and the student. Through understanding the critical nature of research-creation in decolonizing the production of knowledge, this article explores the necessity of decolonizing prevailing methods of knowledge mobilization. To that end, we try to understand what decolonized knowledge mobilization could look like *within* research-creation and *as* research-creation itself. This evaluation happens through studying guerilla pedagogy both as a way of knowledge production in research as well as a method of knowledge mobilization within research-creation. This is done through the extensive academic work conducted on guerilla techniques in different aspects of academia, pedagogy, and activism, as well as through an experiential account of my fieldwork in Kashmir. Research-creation has the potential to facilitate the processes of guerilla pedagogy, creatively evolving it for different political and epistemological circumstances – catering it to the audience and students who require it the most in the way they need it the most. As Weems mentions, “our task is to engage the world’s subaltern in places where they speak, unheard.”

rôles du pédagogue et de l’étudiant. En reconnaissant le rôle critique de la recherche-création dans la décolonisation de la production des savoirs, cet article met en lumière la nécessité de décoloniser les modes dominants de mobilisation des connaissances. À cette fin, nous tentons de comprendre à quoi pourrait ressembler une mobilisation des connaissances décolonisée à travers et en tant que recherche-création. Cette analyse s’appuie sur l’étude de la pédagogie de guérilla, à la fois comme mode de production des savoirs dans la recherche et comme méthode de mobilisation des connaissances au sein de la recherche-création. Elle repose sur une exploration approfondie des travaux universitaires consacrés aux techniques de guérilla dans divers domaines de l’université, de la pédagogie et de l’activisme, ainsi que sur un compte rendu expérimental de mon travail de terrain au Cachemire. La recherche-création possède le potentiel d’alimenter les processus de la pédagogie de guérilla en les faisant évoluer de manière créative selon les contextes politiques et épistémologiques – en les adaptant aux publics et aux étudiants qui en ont le plus besoin, de la manière dont ils en ont le plus besoin. Comme le souligne Weems, « notre tâche est d’engager les subalternes du monde dans les espaces où ils parlent, sans être entendus. »

"In the present circumstances, I'd say that the only thing worth globalizing is dissent."

– Arundhati Roy

INTRODUCTION

Much like guerilla warfare, where smaller bands of rebels and fighters attack and take on an enemy seemingly much bigger in power than themselves, I view guerilla pedagogy as a methodology of teaching, creating, and disseminating knowledge and art that challenges the confines of corporatized neoliberal universities and hypocritical geopolitical processes which restrict the flow of knowledge in spaces of conflict zones, and fundamentally subverts pre-conceived ideas of the roles of the pedagogue and the student. Through understanding the critical nature of research-creation in decolonizing the production of knowledge, this article will explore the necessity of decolonizing prevailing methods of knowledge mobilization. To that end, we will try to understand what decolonized knowledge mobilization could look like *within* research-creation and *as* research-creation itself. This evaluation will happen through studying guerilla pedagogy both as a way of knowledge production in research as well as a method of knowledge mobilization within research-creation. This will be done through the extensive academic work conducted on guerilla techniques in different aspects of academia, pedagogy, and activism, as well as through an experiential account of my fieldwork in Kashmir.

This article focusses not on how knowledge is created within research-creation but how it is mobilized *after* its creation. Firstly, I will explore the importance of knowledge mobilization within research-creation—for the outcomes generated through this practice. The dissolution of boundaries of what constitutes knowledge within the academic framework through research-creation has led to a wider acceptance of knowledge created through artistic and community-based practices already prevalent and functional in different communities of Indigenous peoples and in the Global South. However, this practice of decolonizing the understanding of knowledge needs to

further proliferate into its methods of dissemination as well. These methods have to be developed in deep cognizance of the landscape within which such knowledge demands to be mobilized. For this article, I will be focussing on how knowledge can be mobilized within a neo-colonial occupied territory such as Kashmir. In the continued aftermath of a (neo)colonial occupation, educational institutions remain thinly veiled instrument of colonization itself. Such institutions, by virtue of being financially and politically dependent on the colonial masters, cannot and will not support knowledge creation or its dissemination which goes against the occupation itself. An art-based research practice within an institutional framework in such a space fundamentally cannot be decolonized. Therefore, it requires creativity in understanding how said knowledge, education, and skills can be mobilized outside of the institutional framework. To that end, I propose guerilla pedagogy as a form of research-creation itself and a way of mobilizing knowledge created through research-creation.

Owen Chapman views research-creation as a generative practice as well as a category—one that invites a coalition of different disciplines and practices of learning in order to create knowledge in unbound potentialities. Finding the strength in its elusive nature (elusive both in terms of its boundaries and categorization), Chapman sees research-creation not as an opposition to “traditional” scholarship or just a method, but rather as

“an un-assimilate-able challenge to the boxing-in of critical thinking represented by linear metrics of research achievements – metrics through which power flows, as it always does, unequally. It continues to unravel basic assumptions around knowledge, how to create it, how to share it, and how to put resources at the disposal of those who would devote time and energy to research-creating.”²

This understanding of research-creation acknowledges and alludes to the inherent power dynamics present within the creation and dissemination of knowledge through institutionalized frameworks. Building upon this concept I want to focus on two specific aspects of

research-creation—first, “how to share it,” and second, how to unravel the histories and complexities of power relations that come with knowledge sharing—both of which are deeply intertwined.

UNDERSTANDING DECOLONIZATION AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Decolonization is a complex term that has been a historically defining feature of the 20th century global politics. Yet, a single comprehensive definition of this term is difficult to narrow down. Jan Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel provide a comprehensive outlook to understand decolonization as a historical moment for different former colonies as well as a process of realization within the previously colonized people regarding their political independence.³ The crux of the argument revolves around the matter of political control on a territorial and international level—when and how this control was relinquished by the colonial powers and how it was perceived by the ones who were colonized. It focusses on the relationship of the people with the state and the colonial powers, and how the international order was restructured. They encourage us to also look at decolonization as a process, especially with an approach they term “decolonization from below,” in order to understand it as a continuing process. With respect to education and pedagogy Jansen and Osterhammel pose the question,

“To what extent did the colonial power intervene in local society through cultural and educational policy (directed by both the state and missionaries)? What difference did colonial intervention make at the primary education (as indicated, for example, by the degree of literacy) and secondary education levels? Did it contribute to the emergence of Western-trained and Western-educated groups among the colonized population?”⁴

These questions form an important basis for understanding the pervasive nature of colonialism and its continued effect on education and future generations. It urges us to evaluate the methods presently

available to the previously and currently colonized people through which education is imparted and received. Further study is required to see how many of those methods are designed and handed down through the colonial infrastructure and how many are the traditional forms of pedagogy that predate colonization of the territory and the people. These questions are important for understanding how knowledge has been mobilized within these communities, and what purpose it serves.

Several Indigenous scholars view decolonization beyond governance, transfer of power, and international world order—with a reflection on how it can be seen as a method of cultural, social, and pedagogical reclamation of their identity that is not built on erasing the past but moving towards the future. Kathleen Absolon sees decolonization, especially within pedagogy, as a process of “detoxing and clearing out the colonizing knowledge and practices that we have ingested and adopted.”⁵ Absolon focusses on the role of educators within this process of decolonization, which can act as a catalyst for the decolonization of the minds of future generations. Leyla Tavernaro-Haidarian urges an approach to decolonization as a process that does not dismiss or oppose in entirety the colonial past and the neo-colonial present of the people, instead to build upon and evolve from those realities.⁶ To see decolonization as simply a reaction to colonization and therefore denounce the effects and consequences of it in favor of trying to return to the precolonial glory of social, cultural, and political processes of the erstwhile colonized territories creates a disconnect with the lived realities of the people. This understanding of decolonization, therefore, becomes particularly useful when we are trying gauge a method of knowledge and artistic mobilization for a territory and people who continue their existence within a neo-/colonial reality in the present-day, such as Kashmir.

DECOLONIZING ESSENCE OF RESEARCH-CREATION

Research-creation fosters creativity in the way knowledge is created and perceived—through different collaborative and participatory methods. The struggles of having this creativity

acknowledged as research and knowledge itself have been extensive within academic frameworks. Legitimizing different forms of creativity and creations as knowledge and knowledge systems has been the at the forefront of the battle between research-creation scholars and practitioners and university administrations. Far from being over, the fight needs to be expanded into revolutionizing and revitalizing the methods of knowledge dissemination themselves and incorporating creative forms of knowledge mobilization as research-creation. Glen Lowry acknowledges the potential of creative practice in research to pave the path towards decolonizing education that encompasses understanding of knowledge systems and cultural products as already established within Indigenous communities.⁷ Paul Agu Igwe et al. summarize what decolonization could mean within research practices,

“Decolonizing emphasizes inclusivity, consulting, shared responsibility and making knowledge creation more diverse and representative of different cultures, languages, identities and histories.”⁸

This requires acknowledging and understanding the networks of coloniality present within the neoliberal university model and how it engages and supports the historical colonial legacy of knowledge creation and its dissemination. This legacy has facilitated the corporatized outlook towards knowledge creation and structurally is designed to support neo-colonial occupations (of land and education systems). Erin Manning explores the ways in which art is conceptualized for the purposes of research-creation; it requires reorientation in what we consider art to be in the first place. The emphasis needs to be on the thought and the process—which will illuminate the path through which we understand art.

“Research-creation is not about objects. It is a mode of activity that is at its most interesting when it is constitutive of new processes [...] New processes will likely create new forms of knowledge that may have no means of evaluation within current disciplinary models.”⁹

This displaces the emphasis from outcome-based research and art-creation towards the journey of its production.

There is a fundamental aspect of creativity that guerilla technique (in any field) beckons. As Glenda Amayo Caldwell et al. describe it,

“Guerilla activism uses unexpected, unconventional approaches in tandem with interactivity to produce unique and thought-provoking outcomes, usually with a political agenda in mind. These techniques of guerilla activism have been adapted to many different domains including marketing, communication, gardening, craftivism, theatre, poetry, and art.”¹⁰

Guerilla techniques or tactics urge the mind to utilize the resources present around oneself and transform the lack and shortcomings into strength towards a common goal. An example of a guerilla intellectual and social activist movement is the Guerilla Girls Movement—a rebellion by women in New York City since 1985 against the lack of representation of women and artists of colour within art exhibitions, museums, and galleries.¹¹ This movement had to devise its own framework for rebellion. By subverting the language used by their oppressors (through statistics and bold graphics) they created their own language for communicating the discrimination, educating the public of the process through which the discrimination was taking place and who it was benefitting, and creatively engaging and recruiting more people within their fold. The methods used here were designed to shock and evoke the community it was targeted towards—within which lies the recipe for its success.

Guerilla technique rests upon the idea of a group of people—depending upon the community of people inspired by a common cause—to work towards its fulfilment and upliftment. This, therefore, views knowledge mobilization as a community affair rather than an individual responsibility—a practice prevalent in many cultures of the Global South and Indigenous communities. There cannot be an institutionalized framework for such mobilization as it runs the risk of bulldozing pre-existing ways of community-based knowledge mobilization. Instead, it needs to adapt and learn based on the context

within which it is required and emerging. We need to embrace pedagogy and processes of knowledge mobilization as a living entity that can transform, adapt, and grow based on how it is nurtured and in what circumstances it is built to thrive. Rigidity with respect to defining and confining the parameters of such knowledge mobilization does disservice to what research-creation creates. Especially in neo-colonized territories with political violence, having any kind of set framework for such mobilization and pedagogical practices runs the risk similar to making guerilla warfare tactics into a framework—both depend on novelty and creativity for sustenance against a formalized and institutionalized framework of the intellectual (and physical) violence of the occupying state. Therefore, it is imperative that we focus on creativity in the process of knowledge dissemination and mobilization along with the creation of knowledge within research-creation.

UNDERSTANDING NEO-/COLONIALISM IN KASHMIR

During the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent, Kashmir was never under the direct rule of either the East India Company or later the British Crown. Instead, the British had formed several alliances with local smaller kingdoms, one of whom—the Dogras—ruled Kashmir on their behalf. The annexation of Kashmir by the Dogras was preceded by the first Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846), a coup, and finally a transaction between Gulab Singh and the British known as the Amritsar Treaty of 1846.¹² In this treaty, the erstwhile governor of the Sikh Empire paid 75,000 nanakshahi rupees for the territory now known as Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, and Baltistan.¹³ In order to pay for the cost of the territory that East India company made the Dogra ruler pay; the people of Kashmir were taxed heavily, to the point that many scholars¹⁴ at the time¹⁵ and now¹⁶ consider Kashmiris as having been sold by the British into slavery to the Dogra ruler. What followed was a systematic exclusion of Kashmiri Muslims from the services and employment within the state, with most being tied down to heavily taxed agricultural practices. It proliferated the system of bonded and un-

paid forced labour known in Kashmir as *Begari*.¹⁷ Under *Begari*, Kashmiris were forced into manual labour which was either bonded or unpaid,¹⁸ and the agricultural produce in some places was to be handed over in its entirety to the Crown (under the threat of treason).¹⁹ This created a systemic economic disparity between the landowning class and the rest of the Kashmiri people, the majority of whom were forced into abject poverty.^{20, 21}

With Dogras in power, the British could indirectly control Kashmir for resources, fetishized leisure in its scenic beauty,²² and critical access to Afghanistan for the Great Game²³ (coined by Rudyard Kipling, the term was used for the imperialist struggles between the British and the Russian empires over Central Asia, specifically focused on Afghanistan). This indirect form of control exercised in Kashmir would become emblematic of how present-day global powers extend their neo-colonial control over the territory. While the British continued their colonial control over India, their missionary activities travelled to Kashmir. The narrativization of typecasting indigenous people as primitive and savage was followed in Kashmir as well, as is evident through the British ethnographic, anthropological, and photographic work conducted in Kashmir.^{24, 25} The “corrective” measure was introduced in the form of missionary educational institutions that refused to acknowledge ancient and long-held traditions of education amongst the Kashmiris and forbade the use of Kashmiri language in classrooms. These educational institutions (that still stand in Kashmir today continuing the restriction on students to speak in Kashmiri) form the initiation of erasure of traditional Kashmiri pedagogy and language.

Despite the independence of the Indian subcontinent from the British rule in 1947, the colonial occupation of Kashmir never ended. It was handed from the British-Dogra alliance to the Indian state. As the subcontinent was partitioned between India and Pakistan in 1947, Kashmir was a politically volatile and complicated issue with both countries claiming the territory for themselves. It resulted in the first Indo-Pak War of 1947.²⁶ It was because of this war that the territory of Kashmir was divided between the two countries, now known

as Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Indian-occupied Kashmir. Upon the United Nations intervention in 1948, both countries signed a peace accord, in which it was agreed that the question of Kashmir's political future would be decided through a referendum/plebiscite which would ask the Kashmiri population to choose between three options: integration with India or with Pakistan or staying independent.²⁷ This is the cornerstone of Kashmir's struggle for freedom because India never conducted the plebiscite in the region and has been illegally occupying the territory since then. Indian state has continued to chip away at the autonomy of Kashmir, with the recent assault on the political autonomy of Kashmir occurring through the unilateral revocation of Article 370 in 2019 that had safeguarded the semi-autonomous status of Kashmir within the Indian constitution.

The occupation of Kashmir is rooted in neocolonialism and neoliberalism. Just as indirectly controlling Kashmir was pivotal for the British Empire to keep a check on the expansion of the Soviet empire in Central Asia in the 19th century, so is the current occupation of Kashmir by India crucial for the Western powers in order to keep a check on the expansion of Chinese influence in the region.^{28,29} The occupation of Kashmir is accompanied by efforts to rewrite the history and destroy the archives of Kashmiri people. One of the ways the integration of Kashmir is coerced and forced is through the narratives of *development*—reminiscent of the colonial adage of “civilizing the primitive people.” It is achieved through extensive control over educational institutions and manipulation of media industries to fit the narrative of the occupying state.

Controlling forms and content of education in Kashmir is an extension of Indian colonial occupation of Kashmiris. In recent years, under the Narendra Modi government, the push for annexation of Kashmir has been masked under the narrative of *development*. It is important to understand the nuances of the term *development* when used with respect to colonized territories. Social, economic, and pedagogical changes and *development* are often used for advancing neoliberal capitalist goals entrenched in neocolonial control of occupied territories.³⁰ Within such a complex structure of control, *devel-*

opment serves not the people but the neoliberal and neocolonial interests of the occupiers. The propaganda of *development* is peddled through an elaborate control on media representation of the colonized people as is seen being exercised by the Indian state in Kashmir.^{31, 32} Therefore, my focus on media pedagogy within Kashmir is to understand how it can become a tool for decolonization within a territory that continues to be colonized. This will help redefine the idea of *development* to mean advancement of the movement for freedom and community upliftment. While decolonization as a moment of governance and political transfer of power is yet to be achieved for Kashmir, my research focusses on decolonization as a social and pedagogical process that can sustain resistance—intellectually, artistically, and politically. The suggested method of decolonization of media pedagogy and practices is proposed to go alongside the state inflicted and continued colonization of media industries and educational institutions in Kashmir.

TOWARDS GUERRILLA PEDAGOGY

“The master’s tools will never dismantle master’s house.”
(Audre Lorde)³³

Lisa Weems identifies two important tasks when approaching guerilla pedagogy. First is the apparent unconditionality on specific spaces being designated for education, which views these spaces as the *only* spaces for educational purposes.³⁴ Her call for displacing the fixity of physical geography with respect to education comes from Gayatri Spivak’s³⁵ idea of the “need to re-territorialize the academy,” whereby there is intensive requirement to reckon what constitutes as knowledge production itself and where this knowledge is produced. The second task in understanding guerilla pedagogy is acknowledging the “histories of hurt” that educational spaces have supported. Weems encourages us to make explicit the political and ethical complexities present within pedagogy that often stay implicit. The networked and continued coloniality within education is one such complexity that demands to be faced directly.

Therefore, there is a sense of psychological and physical geography associated with pedagogy which the guerilla technique attempts to dismantle. This is particularly crucial in spaces of political conflict and neocolonized territories where the educational spaces would be harbouring and exacerbating the histories of hurt, and culture of restrictions. Neocolonial occupation in Kashmir comes with the erasure of native languages, cultures, and histories of the occupied people. The network of oppression has continued from the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent who built and ran several missionary schools in the territory, the control of which was handed down to the Indian dioceses after India's independence from the British monarchy in 1947. The colonizing powers switched hands, but the methods of suppression and erasure have continued. Therefore, educational institutions have a long history of being embroiled with the colonial powers, creating a hierarchy of knowledge whereby the knowledge and language of the colonizer are seen as more valuable within the curriculum, and the other forms of learning as lesser. This, however, is not a regressive call for dissolution of classroom learning and educational institutions but a constructive appeal to build upon existing structures so they may serve the people they are designed for, in ways they need it. And if the existing structures cannot be built upon, then a different foundation should be envisioned.

Pedagogy is performance. Therefore, the anti-establishment tendencies of guerilla pedagogy demand that there be a re-evaluation of the performance of power that pedagogues seem to exhibit over the idea of knowledge creation and its dissemination. It also beckons to reevaluate the pre-conceived requirements of subservience of the receivers of the knowledge. My focus here is on the educational spaces in South Asia where the cultural emphasis on the hierarchy of power between the teacher and the student is almost unsurmountable. Culturally, the role of the teacher is seen as sacred and is embedded with religious and social significance, transforming the position of the pedagogue in acute hierarchy with respect to the student. Therefore, breaking down the performance of pedagogy is a crucial primary step towards breaking down of power structures facilitated by

such educational apparatus. It is important to acknowledge the aspects of our own social and cultural fabric that do not serve us, but instead function in ways that promote social and economic exclusions, based on class, caste, religion, etcetera. As Weems suggests, guerilla pedagogy does not want the performativity of pedagogy to be eliminated, but transformed in ways that supports the people it is designed for. Here the performance of pedagogy is constantly evolving, it changes from one day to the next, and is fundamentally fluid in composition, taking upon itself several affective and seemingly familial roles to mobilize knowledge. Building upon this analysis, I suggest that this fluidity of performance is required on both sides—from the pedagogues and the students—further allowing us to create an extensive network of agile educational practices.

By centring the bodies and identities of the people in these educational networks, we can remap what resistance can look like through transformed pedagogical practices. Resistance is not simply of the powers placed outside of the colonized bodies and communities, but resistance is also of our inner practices that create further fissures within the community and unequal distribution of power and resources amongst ourselves. One of the ways we can transform resistance and pedagogical practices is through exploring the idea of intimacy within the community and colonized people. The power of intimacy with respect to the colonized bodies was primarily theorized by Lisa Lowe,³⁶ whereby the colonization of the four continents was achieved through the manipulation of intimacies of the colonized people. She undertakes this analysis through three tangents: the forced intimacies of the bodies of the slave labourers forced into migration from Asia and Africa, the forced sexual and domestic labour of the colonized bodies as well as the regulation of their own intimacy with each other, and finally through the analysis of the distinctions created amongst the colonized people in order to prevent intimacy amongst them beyond racial and ethnic boundaries. This idea of intimacy has been complicated in the neo-colonial occupation of Kashmir by the Indian state as well. Through the counter-insurgency tactic of breaking down the freedom movement in Kashmir, India has created what Mohammad Junaid³⁷ has theorized as the

complicating of the discourse of loyalty amongst the Kashmiri people. The recruitment of Kashmiris into the folds of *Ikhwanis* (counterinsurgent militia) and *mukbirs* (informants) by the Indian state, has led to complicating the intimacy within the community. It has problematized the building of a foundation of solidarity and resistance. It is the direct context within which I propose the utility of guerilla pedagogy as a form of creating and mobilizing knowledge in Kashmir. Through the combination of the creativity that research-creation supports and the flexibility that guerilla pedagogy provides, I see a framework through which the knowledge and histories produced in a neocolonized territory can be preserved, as well as new skills and information can be disseminated amongst the people. This is why I see building a fluid framework for guerilla pedagogy in neocolonized territories as research-creation itself, as well as a method of knowledge mobilization for research-creation projects that can stand to benefit the people of neocolonized spaces.

Evaluating knowledge mobilization *as* research-creation itself has the ability to prioritize the affective dimension of pedagogy—both in teaching and in learning, which has been described as a “pedagogy of discomfort” by Megan Boler.³⁸ It allows for broadening the imagination of what constitutes pedagogical work, and particularly incorporates the decolonial ways of teaching, learning, and understanding. The emotional response is intertwined with the ethical process within the pedagogy of discomfort that gives primacy to the humanity and sentimentality within the teachers and the students. When coupled with the unpredictability and the perpetual danger of existing and living within a conflict zone, the research-creation pedagogy cannot be restricted to a formula, system, or even a plan. It must transform and evolve with the changing situation. Whether it is an affective change or the unpredictability of a volatile political process, guerilla pedagogy repels a systematic approach to knowledge and art itself. It supports and responds to a deeply creative process of knowledge dissemination which can be provided by research-creation into pedagogy itself.

Guerilla pedagogy views knowledge within a culturally specific context as a living, breathing entity that transforms and evolves as the circumstances around it undergo a change. It resists fixity and codification, and turns into a form that grows based on the needs of the people it has to serve. It complements the changes that can occur at political or social levels, transforming the content and composition to better suit its learners in the context they are embodying at that moment. It requires knowing the subjects of your knowledge mobilization, and not simply to regurgitate an institutional form of that knowledge as a one-size-fits-all. It is a call for allowing flexibility within your pedagogy to complement the ever-changing nature of politics in a neocolonized and conflict-based territory.

The resistance to fixity is also encouraged in how we perform our roles as pedagogues and learners, for there might be an immediate need for the learners to transform into pedagogues for a different group. It begs to reevaluate the fixity in the role of the pedagogue, where we have to open up to the possibility of the receivers of this knowledge becoming as immediate pedagogues of the skills and knowledge thereafter—resulting in a domino effect of knowledge creation and dissemination through the masses. Therefore, guerilla pedagogy can function in smaller groups of students or artists with a teacher—learning and evaluating artistic and knowledge skills that are further transferred amongst the people—outside of institutional boundaries and restrictions. At its essence, this emphasizes a non-hierarchical pedagogical practice.

GUERRILLA PEDAGOGY AS RESEARCH-CREATION IN KASHMIR

A fixed safe space is a luxury that is extremely rare in a neocolonized territory, especially with the onslaught of an expanded surveillance infrastructure (digital and offline). Therefore, a culturally embedded and politically resistive knowledge, when in need of mobilization, cannot be fixed into a space where the people meet physically or virtually. This is also a way of acknowledging the diversity in the ways people exist and thrive in a culture—and acknowledging the transferring of knowledge in spaces of

being as a community as a valid form of learning. For example, people congregating at the threshold of the bread shop (*kandurwan*) in Kashmir in the morning after the *fajr* prayers is a space where day-to-day news and information are exchanged. This also becomes the space in the slow hours of the afternoon to discuss politics and social issues at length with the community members. With the ubiquitous presence of these shops throughout every part of the landscape of Kashmir, they are the breathing and thriving cultural, political, and social centres of their community and locality. Having flexibility in the perception of space for pedagogical practices allow for acknowledgment and utilization of existing spaces of congregation and exchange of learning for the purpose of knowledge mobilization. This pedagogy has to imbue flexibility in the space where it is practiced—to fit the needs of the people with whom it is practiced. Therefore, resistance to fixity is required towards its composition, in the roles of the pedagogue and the receiver, and space within and through which it is mobilized. Through such resistance in pedagogy, what is fundamentally resisted is the inherent sense of coercion that is emblematic of Western pedagogical practices.³⁹ Instead the focus is on the affective, cultural, and spiritual well-being of the people involved in such a practice.

Another example of agile and culturally embedded pedagogical practice is the centuries-old religious pedagogy in Kashmir in the form of Sufi shrines, mosques, and *madrastas*. Although the hierarchical role within educators' and students' relationships is reinforced in such scenarios, the affective form of education is best understood in how these spaces used to operate to impart spiritual and religious education in the territory. In my conversation with a local in Baramulla, while explaining how their tutor taught them the significance of different prayers, he recounted an incident where the tutor brought homecooked *halwa* (a dessert) to the mosque for his students and taught them to memorize the prayer recited before and after finishing the meal. The same tutor had to teach his students recitations for climbing a hill and coming down from it, and took the students on a hike to a nearby hill whilst repeating the prayers alongside them. Within the colonial reality, these educational spaces existed as a form

of after-school activity for children in Kashmir, but previously used to be the only form of institutionalized educational for people. The education, therefore, was experienced as an embedded and affective process for both the educator and the students, in the language and framework familiar to the people. However, as suggested by Tavernaro-Haidarian, decolonization of education should not mean having to renounce the present reality altered by the impact of colonization but finding a way to build upon it. Therefore, we need to find effective strategies to combine culturally embedded forms of education with the avenues available to the people. This is not a call for dismantling or discrediting the institutionalized education in Kashmir, but for finding ways in which the resources and infrastructure can be utilized to sustain the people and support a community-centered idea of development.

By being conscious of the culture within which the knowledge is mobilized, it allows for the practice to evolve in forms which respect the already socially established ways of functioning. This then moves away from the colonial tendency within pedagogy of “educating the primitive,” a model introduced through the institutionalized framework of early missionaries (as has already been done in Kashmir), and instead building upon the already established forms of knowledge mobilization that have been part of the society for centuries and generations. This also acknowledges the value of the knowledge that has already been imparted and exchanged through such methods, such as the intergenerational knowledge of childbirth and caring for post-partum mothers, effective forms of resolving familial disputes, and horticultural practices. The need for decolonization is not simply for the methods but for the content as well—which practices and repositories are considered to be valid forms of knowledge and learning, and where that knowledge is exchanged. This idea has been effectively theorized in the works concerned with “culturally sustaining pedagogy” (CSP), which views state-sanctioned and institutionalized pedagogy as functioning on an “assimilationist project” simultaneously destroying the “languages, literacies, cultures, and histories” of the people it is aimed towards.⁴⁰ CSP therefore is focussed on

sustaining and preserving communities and cultures rather than assimilating and disintegrating them.

Pedagogical decolonization in Kashmir has to be approached in the same way as guerilla warfare. Guerilla pedagogy in Kashmir then is a form of political resistance against neocolonial occupation by the Indian state. It is a form of creative dissemination of skills and knowledge within a landscape of intensive surveillance which requires decentralized control for the safety of the participants involved, and it requires iterative forms of mobilization in smaller groups to create a domino effect of distribution (of both artworks and knowledge). It fundamentally requires breaking down our understanding of industry-based artwork or institutionalized education in order to dissipate boundaries that are set in both fields. These boundaries and practices function to exclude several marginalized groups and populations from having fair access to either and to propagate the colonial occupation. Guerilla pedagogy as research-creation itself was a forced experimentation through my confrontation with the transformed political and social landscape in Kashmir. I embarked upon my fieldwork in Summer 2023—visiting Kashmir after the revocation of Article 370 from the Indian constitution in 2019.⁴¹ Post-2019, the political landscape had seen a rapid shift because of the expanded nature of surveillance (digital and interpersonal/informants) deployed by the Indian state against the Kashmiri people. The revocation of Article 370⁴² meant that Kashmiri people are no longer stewards of their land.⁴³ Therefore, the state surveillance directed at identifying any dissent amongst the Kashmiri people could translate to loss of life, livelihood, and land. Under this context, institutionalized education (which was already biased and skewed towards forwarding the agenda of the occupying Indian state) became further inaccessible in preserving Kashmiri history, culture, and resistance. This is the context that I was unaware of when I visited to conduct the fieldwork in the summer of 2023. The plan was to teach the upcoming filmmakers and film students methods of creating low-resolution films and artwork⁴⁴ that could be disseminated over the low internet bandwidth of 2G (in the eventuality that the Indian state shuts down or restricts

internet in the region as a form of communication/dissent suppression⁴⁵) and also would require less technical cost.

However, under expanded surveillance infrastructure, it became increasingly difficult to teach methods of art-creation to people that could sustain and support their resistance. The time was instead focussed on designing ways to communicate and gather the people interested in these skills without jeopardizing their (or my) safety, and then equipping them with skills and software that could be communicated and taught by them to other groups of people they find within their network. It had to develop and proliferate in a guerilla activist fashion, as this is the only way epistemological and artistic resistance can be sustained in a neocolonized territory. At the end of the fieldwork, after analyzing the data and fieldnotes, I was able to ascertain that the primary intention of the project—which was teaching several students and upcoming artists technicalities of alternative documentary filmmaking and low-resolution filmmaking—was achieved, although not in the numbers I was hoping. The transformations that kept changing the project, and the security and surveillance hurdles that kept minimizing my capability for interacting with the people in Kashmir, were compensated with developing a teaching methodology which would work in the form of a domino effect, whereby the information and skills I had managed to pass to small groups of students and artists in Kashmir, I would hope would be transferred further by them to their own smaller groups of artists that they know. Since the project was not designed to deal with these hurdles and was not conceived to focus on transforming the curriculum or method of dissemination, there wasn't a concrete system of reciprocal channels of communication established with the students in order to gauge the reach of the skills imparted to them in the initial stage. Therefore, this research is a re-evaluation of the fieldwork within a context that was not its initial purpose, but which became its reality on the ground. Building upon Manning's understanding of research-creation which views the process in itself as valuable, I view guerilla pedagogy in Kashmir, therefore, both as an object (of art) as well as a method of artistic and pedagogical dissemination.

CONCLUSION

Research-creation needs to break loose from the circular trajectory of creating knowledge within academia and art galleries and disseminating said knowledge within the same restrictive confines. This essay views research-creation as a fertile avenue for conducting guerilla pedagogy within contexts such as that of Kashmir, and revolutionizing not just what we consider research (which it has been doing since its inception) but also how we mobilize it. We can then possibly see (as an example) the development curriculum of guerilla pedagogy as research-creation and its execution as its dissemination/knowledge mobilization. In this way, the process of dissemination is built into the framework of research-creation itself. The act of creation is not seen as the formal conclusion of the research-creation project—not the end but a means to an end. Research-creation can therefore facilitate the processes of guerilla pedagogy, creatively evolving it for different political and epistemological circumstances—catering it to the audience and students who require it the most in the way they need it the most. It can respond to the call, articulated by Weems, that “our task is to engage the world’s subaltern in places where they speak, unheard.”⁴⁶

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SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS: WORK, NON-LINEARITY, AND ABDUCTION IN CREATIVE RESEARCH

MARÍA ANGÉLICA MADERO

JAMES CARNEY

We argue that the institutional administration of academic and creative research as *labour* does violence to the true character of this research as *work*. Where work is a pluralist concept that admits multiple forms of transformation, labor is based on a linear proportionality of inputs to outputs. We explore various forms of non-linearity in creative work and pedagogical work, ranging across disproportion, the associative, the counterfactual, and the interdisciplinary. We arrive at C.S. Peirce's notion of semiotic *abduction* as a useful cognitive model for research practice and creation. Here, the linear mapping of inputs to outputs is complemented by a recognition of the role played by the speculative or interpretive leap in arriving at novel concepts and practices.

Notre étude démontre que l'administration institutionnelle de la recherche académique et créative en tant que labeur fait violence à la véritable nature de cette recherche en tant que travail. Alors que le travail est un concept pluraliste qui admet de multiples formes de transformation, le labeur est basé sur une proportionnalité linéaire entre les entrées et les sorties. Notre recherche explore diverses formes de non-linéarité dans le travail créatif et pédagogique, en passant par la disproportion, l'associatif, le contrefactuel et l'interdisciplinaire. Nous arrivons à la notion d'*abduction* sémiotique de C.S. Peirce comme modèle cognitif utile pour la pratique de la recherche et création. Ici, la mise en correspondance linéaire des entrées et des sorties est complétée par la reconnaissance du rôle joué par le saut spéculatif ou interprétatif dans l'élaboration de nouveaux concepts et de nouvelles pratiques.

Academic and creative research troubles the distinction between labour and work. Labour, in its most common interpretation, is transactional: an individual's time and effort are—adequately or inadequately—remunerated with value in a linear fashion. Work, by contrast, is more expansive; it comprises processes of transformation that can operate in the cognitive or aesthetic domains (for example) no less than the economic, and need not be linear in character. In other words, all labour is work, but not all work is labour. The problem this distinction poses for thinking about academic and creative research should be evident: While both practices are clearly forms of work, they are “officially” administered as forms of labour.

That this is so is self-evident: research grants pay wages, they generate returns on investment, they are routinized by way of contracts and deliverables—all tokens of bureaucratic administration. That is, research is implicitly conceptualized as a linear process, where the application of labour to a problem *now* yields a predictable increase in knowledge in the future. It is not new to suggest knowledge has never operated in this way (Kuhn 2012); nevertheless, institutional actors still universally converge on the idea that labour articulates the essential activity of research. Why this should be so is less easy to answer, but there can be no doubt that the success of physical labour in transforming the world provides a hard-to-ignore precedent for thinking about how cognitive and creative labour might also do the same.

But when the anthropological reality of research is considered, it quickly becomes clear that the labour model is inadequate. To be sure most qualitative and quantitative disciplines admit *some* forms of routine work, with this being especially so in experimental disciplines. But even the most positivist discipline can only be routinized in the narrowest logistical sense: to identify research outputs in advance is to invalidate the purpose of research. That is to say, they are *disproportionate* in how they relate outputs to inputs. In creative disciplines, this is especially the case, given there is not even an in-principle linear proportionality between labour expended and results

produced; their openness is a de facto refusal of labour in its most fundamental interpretation (Sullivan 2009).¹

We take this unpredictability at work in artistic research-creation as our starting point. We argue that to truly engage with the reality of how research operates in creative disciplines we must expose ourselves to the most capacious interpretation of work—one that takes in excess, absence, the non-linear, the associative, and the counterfactual. In this essay, we take these concepts and explore how they exemplify themselves through artworks and art practices. This leads us to the semiotic concept of *abduction* as a wider framework for thinking about research in creative disciplines. We argue that abduction provides us with cognitive models that are more precise than those offered by the concept of work, but still general enough to retain its pluralist character.

EXCESS, POVERTY, AND LABOUR

One illustration of the incongruence between labour and creative work can be found in the way that specific artworks distort labour into poverty or excess. That is, they explicitly thematize (and thereby problematize) labour by exemplifying its extreme forms.

On the side of excess, take the work *One Year Performance 1980-1981*, also known as “Time Clock Piece,” by Tehching Hsieh. In this work, the artist committed to punching a time clock every hour, on the hour, for an entire year, from April 11, 1980, to April 11, 1981. He wore a worker’s uniform and shaved his head to visually mark the passage of time. Each punch of the clock was documented with a photograph, resulting in a time-lapse film showing Hsieh’s face aging over the year. The artist’s dedication and the physical and mental challenges of adhering to such a rigid, relentless schedule here is an obvious challenge to any notion of artistic practice as a form of routinized labour. No doubt, there is labour in the process, but the labour is not integrated into any linear return on the effort involved—instead, there is an act of self-consumption that the artist offers as a

prompt for an undefined (and probably undefinable) set of audience reactions.

Coming from the other direction, there is the idea of a *poverty* of labour. Where Tehching Hsieh accelerates labour to the point of the physically and mentally unendurable, Robert Rauschenberg took up the notion of erasure and created an aesthetic that centred on making labour invisible. This started with erasing his own drawings, but in 1953 he approached Willem de Kooning and asked for an original work that he progressively erased and, with Jasper Johns, [presented as a work in its own right](#). Here, the refusal of labour is visible in the controlled destruction of a celebrated artist's work as a public spectacle.

One could elaborate on these examples, but the general point should be clear. Labour-based models of productivity in academic disciplines, with their emphasis on linearly predictable outputs from measurable inputs, fall short of creative research and practice. In other words, there is a disproportionality in the work of art that refuses the research-as-work model and invites new ways of thinking about the relation between artistic practice, academic research, and the nature of work. This inordinate proportion of production against product discloses contemporary creation as having at its core the thought process of the refusal of the object (product, oeuvre, piece) as the concluding outcome (Muntadas 2013).²

ASSOCIATION

While the simplest refusal of the linear nature of labour comes in the form of disproportion, it is certainly not exhausted by it. There are many logics that connect outputs with inputs in non-linear ways, and all these are visible in the act of creative research. Aesthetic style, in its most basic form, oscillates between the frustration and the satisfaction of perceptual intuitions, to the extent that it floods the environment with evidence of a particular conception of the world whilst innovating on the superannated styles that have preceded it (Carney 2020). When the innovation is relatively small, style takes the form of decoration; when it

is larger, the stylistic innovation announces an entirely new aesthetic. We see the former in the operation of fashion, where seasonal shifts in taste combine with contingent cultural preoccupations to generate changes in sartorial style. The latter is announced by the *manifesto*: a polemically framed articulation of a new aesthetic that self-consciously refuses prevailing patterns of creation and thinking in favor of a radical break with what went before.

One important case where this creation of new perceptual and cognitive forms reaches its apogee is the logic of free association. At once both a style and a historical movement, the impulse towards free association became manifest in both the creative practices and psychoanalytic theories of the early 20th century. In the *Surrealist Manifesto*, for instance, André Breton wondered when we would have philosophers and logicians of sleep, so he could go to bed and surrender himself to the dreamers (Breton 1924).³ To operationalize this idea is to inject the oneiric and the associative into the logic of space and contiguity—in other words, to make the irrational predictable and the predictable irrational. Take for instance René Magritte’s “Elective Affinities” (1932), a depiction of an enormous egg inside a cage. What makes this image absurd is not that there’s an egg inside a cage, but that we have birds inside of cages all the time and find it unremarkable—all we have here is a younger bird. It is the fact that reality surpasses the real. Therefore, the logic that this image presents is not merely a random concatenation of images, but one that starts from an unremarkable social practice and projects it into a space that is adjacent to—and radically deviant from—that practice. Clearly, we are at a substantial remove from any linear mapping here. But how might we better approach this unpredictable-yet-not-random logic?

In psychoanalysis, free association is a method used to bypass internal and external judgments. It aims to modify internal intimidation related to what we feel, think, and desire. It is through the act of saying them that we truly discover their significance. While our internal judgment, or superego, dictates what is permissible to think and feel, free association allows for exploration without censorship, enabling the unsayable and inadmissible to surface without

fear (Philips 1994). This means that if one bypasses internal censorship, new things emerge in the process. Psychoanalysis teaches us that there is always a break, a gap, a lack, a blind spot that indicates our inclusion in reality (Žižek 2011, in Bryant 2015). It doesn't matter if something is true or not, what matters are the webs of associations that are created. Memories, desires, and dreams are in potential and becoming.

Art's modulation is in the play between the sensible and the intellectual,⁴ generating associative constellations that operate through nuanced and unpredicted concepts, ideas, experiments, materials, shapes, emotions, narratives, and more. One way to think of associative logic is through the lens of *contingency*: if all events could have happened otherwise, then violating linear causality and proportion allows us to map contingent orders of events that could have been part of our world but aren't. Take the work *Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech)* (2007) by Allora & Calzadilla. Their aim is "to make a relationship between geology and politics, two things that have nothing to do with each other. [...] Unexpected juxtaposition is something we love. This had opera singers lying down inside a gigantic sculpture that looked like a ruin, singing fragments of political speeches."⁵ These giant sculptures of rock-like landslides and tunnels of possible future disasters worked in tension with the fragility of human bodies and lyrical voices activating the space through satirical political rhetoric.

Juxtaposing different media, materials or objects is also reflected in techniques like collage, bricolage, automatic writing, or art of instructions. These methods are radical in the way in which meaning emerges, which is by association—fragmenting and sticking together seemingly unrelated things (a collage's potential is that it can hold infinite contradictions). Laura Emsley—an artist interested in paleolithic consciousness and caves—uses the old surrealist techniques of *decalcomania*⁶ and collage as dialectical analogues of submerging (inside the cave) and merging image's contradictions in complex assemblages that break binary categories: inside and outside, mind and body, matter and consciousness, touch and virtuality, present and



Figure 1: Laura Emsley, *The Manias_Ramp* 2024. Courtesy of the artist.

past, accidental and intentional, singular encounters and existing narratives.

Jorge Luis Borges gives a literary exposition of this idea in his story “The Garden of Forking Paths,” in which the narrative describes the eponymous labyrinthine text written by the Chinese diplomat Ts’ui Pên that contains all possible outcomes:

“In all fiction, when a man is faced with alternatives he chooses one at the expense of the others. In the almost unfathomable Ts’ui Pen, he chooses—simultaneously— all of them. He thus creates various futures, various times which start others that will in their turn branch out and bifurcate in other times.” (Borges 2018)

All possible and potential alternatives surface when nonlinear dynamics are at play. Borges’s story has been used to think through things like the hyperlinked nature of the internet. But for all that we’re endlessly exposed to new possibilities, we remain enmeshed in



Figure 2: Laura Emsley, *The Manias_Nana_2022*. Courtesy of the author.

the conjunction⁷ of the present. That conjunction (which is interconnected, rhizomatic, and networked) is the result of a process. As vari-

able as it is, the operations at work manifested in creativity are the result of different tensions, or rather contradictions. And one of the logics that animates these contradictions is the logic of association.

THE COUNTERFACTUAL

If non-linear disproportion leads to contingency and free association, it also leads to the counterfactual. The human preoccupation with what is not the case has always been something of a philosophical mystery (Sartre 1993), and it is in the act of fictional elaboration that this preoccupation reaches its most elaborated form. Unlike even religious beliefs (which believers hold in principle to be true), the immersion in fictional worlds is engaged in the explicit knowledge that these worlds do not (and will never) exist. And yet, despite the cost that this imposes in terms of attention, memory, and opportunity, humans engage and invest deeply in fictions. In 2005, the average Briton spent about 6% of their waking life immersed in counterfactual realities of one form or another (Nettle 2005). Since then, the explosion in digital media and online social platforms means this figure can only have increased. Though authoritative research is hard to come by, one credible estimate suggests that present-day North Americans now spend 25% of their day engaging with fictive or quasi-fictive online content (Talker Research 2024).

While there are many theories as to why counterfactual realities should be so attractive, what is immediately clear is their non-linear relationship to what is actually the case. Even the most prosaic fictional world is not a mirror but a distorting lens: it will foreground some elements of experience while backgrounding others—and in fictional worlds where naturalism is entirely dispensed with, we are exposed to routine violations of the causal order. While we are disposed to think of such worlds as the creation of narrative fiction, the fact is that any creative act that invites audiences to reflect on alternatives to what is currently the case—which is to say nearly all creative acts—amounts to tracing the outline of a counterfactual reality.

Consider [Nomad 13 \(2017\)](#) by [Beatriz Cortez](#) and [rafa esparza](#)—artists interested in science fiction—a work that represents a botanical space

capsule of steel that propels a garden (made out of ancient American plants: corn, black beans, amaranth, sorghum, quinoa, chayote (huitzil), chia, prickly pear, chili pepper, yerba buena, yerba santa, sage, and a ceiba tree) into space and the future. This capsule journeys atop an adobe platform,⁸ Xolotl, the ancient Aztec deity who leads travelers through various dimensions. This work is counterfactual as there's a projection of the past into the future in an imaginary world. By sending this garden into space, the artists expose an impossible design, but also comment on the current efforts of NASA and SpaceX, as seen in the [Seedling Growth-3 mission](#), to populate space with living plants to populate space with living plants.

What we see emerging here is a type of research-creation that is less concerned with tracing causal implications than in positing fictitious causes and tracing them to their conclusions. Such activity works transversally to the linear sequence of cause-and-effect, and cannot be readily accommodated to models of research that rely on this sequence. The act of entertaining counterfactual realities certainly remains of psychological interest and quite properly the target of cognitive science, but the logic of the counterfactual itself falls outside any deterministic logic. No doubt, one could object to this claim and argue that any preoccupation with consequents and their antecedents retains the emphasis on causation. To fully answer this we need to bring in the notion of *simulation*, where there is an attempt to elide the distinction between a cause and the representation of a cause. Whilst we are unable to treat this idea with the thoroughness it merits here, we would note that any analysis of causation that arrives at an agent (a simulator, a novelist, a god) as its termination point cannot realistically be described as analysis of causation in the first place.

BRAIDED METHODS

Another space in which creative research is reflected is in interdisciplinary academic practices, which can sometimes take non-linearity as a productive space in which to ground counter-intuitive research. At [The London Interdisciplinary School](#)

(LIS), a crucial ambition is to create conceptual models that allow the heterogeneity of disciplinary perspectives to be brought together in a way that is neither unprincipled eclecticism nor reductively cohesive. The idea of *braided methods* aims to dismantle traditional disciplinary boundaries and challenge the limitations imposed by disciplinary approaches to research-creation. The practice of braided methods integrates words, images, numbers, and algorithms—four fundamental cognitive revolutions of human culture—into the core of the Master’s Programme in Arts and Sciences (MASc). Image is a cognitive technology that allows us to record and recode our perceptual environment; [its earliest evidence is from 73,000 years ago](#) but it is certainly much older. Words are a cognitive technology that allow us to communicate as a species and engage in collective action, with [the first language \(probably\) being around 100,000 and 200,000 years ago](#). Numbers are a cognitive technology that allows us to abstract away randomness from our environment and [emerged around 43,000-42,000 years ago](#). Algorithms are a cognitive technology that allow us to control the environment by exploiting its predictable regularities; they gained most significance in the industrial revolution.

Braided methods are informed by interdisciplinary research practices that aim to break down silos between different areas of knowledge associated with these revolutions and create counterintuitive results. For example, the integration of language, numbers, and images encourages students to view problems from multiple perspectives simultaneously, creating a more holistic approach to understanding and problem-solving—as well as diversifying the languages in which to communicate (both in terms of information and symbolically). They learn numerical methods (statistics and probability), linguistic methods (natural language processing, close reading, narrative), visual and creative methods (image analysis, archival practices, cultural probes, visual journals) and programming.

Traditional educational models follow a linear progression, where knowledge is acquired step by step. However, braided methods require students to engage with a diversity of data simultaneously. This non-linear learning process demands that the learning experience be reflective of the synthesis of multiple—sometimes contradic-

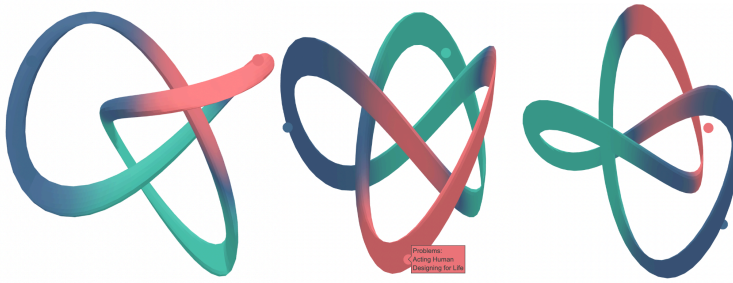


Figure 3: James Carney and María Angélica Madero, 3D curriculum visualization of the MASc in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods at the London Interdisciplinary School, 2024. The dots are equidistant extreme points corresponding to the problems, methods, and research strands of the program. The braiding of these strands is captured by the color leakage across different parts of the knot.

tory—frameworks. This synthesis is not only theoretical, it is embodied and reflected in the shape the curriculum takes—a trefoil knot (see fig. 3). Its interconnected loops represent the intertwined assemblages of words, images, numbers, and algorithms symbolizing the circuit through which the student moves. In this journey, any arbitrary point can be an extreme point, a beginning, or an end of the process.

Each student creates their own unique knot with a specific set of contents. The metaphor of the knot also points to its (mathematical) complexity, as most problems resist simple solutions, and it challenges hierarchical structures. It also means students graduate with a range of diverse outcomes. For instance, one student analysed plant growth using neural networks in order to model complex systems, another worked on neuroaesthetics and the impact that art has on wellbeing, and another worked in art as a tool for speculation.

In this last case, you can see the work of Juliana Echavarría who created “*ing*: speculating in the present continuous,” an open-source web platform (www.i-n-g.space) designed to address the limitations of current ideation processes by leveraging speculation (see fig. 4 and 5). *ing* (intentionally spelled in lower caps, signifying the suffix of

present continuous verbs) is developed through a collaborative curatorial approach that invites different visual artists to conceive a series of exercises, providing a repository of tools for people to engage with speculation and construct meaning through actions, learning by making. The exercises are framed through a methodology of play that allows people to embrace chance—a fundamental vehicle to reach a speculative mindset, one that embraces a plurality of outcomes and unpredictability.

ing explored the relevance of speculation in addressing today's complex problems, the need for embodied solutions, and the role of collaborative approaches. The project was premised on the idea that we are currently facing a crisis of imagination (Mulgan 2022). Juliana employed a braided approach to research methodology, integrating a range of methods, including participatory action research (PAR), cultural probes, archival practices, thematic analysis, natural language processing (NLP), computational image analysis, and data science.

ABDUCTION

If we have succeeded in making our case, the non-linear, non-laboured nature of creative research and elaboration should be visible. Across the cultural record, there is clear evidence that standard models of research are not alone inadequate to the artistic practice—they are in fact antithetical to them. Instead, creative research relies on notions of disproportion, association, and contingency that, while not random, are not straightforwardly predictable, either. How might we frame these ideas through a cognitive paradigm that helps us to synthesize them? We propose to use Charles Sanders Peirce's notion of *abduction* as one way to do this (Pierce 2014).

Peirce offers abduction as a counterpoint to the familiar process of scientific induction. Where induction consists of the abstraction of a general rule from observed statistical patterns, abduction is the act of generating hypotheses that best fit the data available. That is, where induction is guided by the data itself, abduction supplements the data with a cognitive surplus that derives from the theorist's creative ac-



Figure 4: Juliana Echavarría, poster for “ing: speculating in the present continuous.” Capstone project at the MASc in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods at the London Interdisciplinary School, 2024. Courtesy of the curator.

tivity. The most routine forms of abductive inference are found in interpretation: the meaning of a poem cannot be determined by the statistical relations between its linguistic tokens—cognitive and pragmatic knowledge is also required. But one can also find startling examples of abductive processes in natural scientific inquiry. Henri Poincaré recalls how “I entered an omnibus to go to some place or other. At that moment when I put my foot on the step the idea came

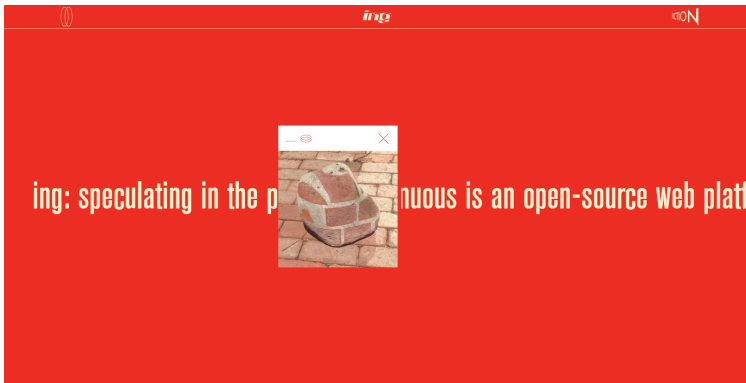


Figure 5: Juliana Echavarría, about page for www.i-n-g.space. “ing: speculating in the present continuous.” Capstone project at the MASc in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods at the London Interdisciplinary School, 2024. Courtesy of the curator.

to me, without anything in my former thoughts seeming to have paved the way for it, that the transformations I had used to define the Fuchsian functions were identical with non-Euclidean geometry” (Hadamard 13). August Kekulé famously claimed to have discovered the structure of the benzene ring by way of a dream in which he saw a snake eat its own tail; Niels Bohr maintained the same of his model of the atomic nucleus; Srinivasa Ramanujan assigned his mathematical insights to visions sent in dreams by a Hindu goddess—the examples could be multiplied. What they all share is the presence of a non-deterministic subjective factor that guides the evolution and selection of hypotheses in a credible way.

That abduction is in fact present in aesthetic fabulation is nowhere better visible than James Joyce’s monumental evocation of the life-world of the dream, *Finnegans Wake* (1939). There are no algorithms here; instead, it is a condensation and compression of meaning that is both a product of and a prompt to the abductive consciousness. Take the title alone: Fin/Vin (French: *to end/wine*), Finn (Irish: *mythological hero asleep under a mountain*), egan (English: *again*), Wake (English: *to rise/a funeral ritual*), Finnegans (*all the habitual wine drinkers—no possessive apostrophe*), Finnegans Wake (*the funeral rit-*

ual of the builder Finnegan). Here we see a polyvocal layering of cycles of death and rebirth, ranging from the comic (getting dead drunk and waking up to do it again) to the quotidian (the death and rise of an individual called Finnegan), to the mythopoeic (the expression of Irish collective destiny through a mythological narrative centred on the figure of the sleeping giant, Finn McCool). While this logic is not scientific in any positivist sense, it is the same cognitive strategy that stands behind hypothesis generation. Hypotheses may exist to be falsified, but the falsifiable hypotheses do not come from nowhere.

A second example can be seen in Santiago Pinyol's work *Simbouvenires* (2024), which stimulates participants into abductive subversion of practices of exchange. In this installation, Pinyol presents plaster chocolate bars in exchange for real ones, subverting the tradi-

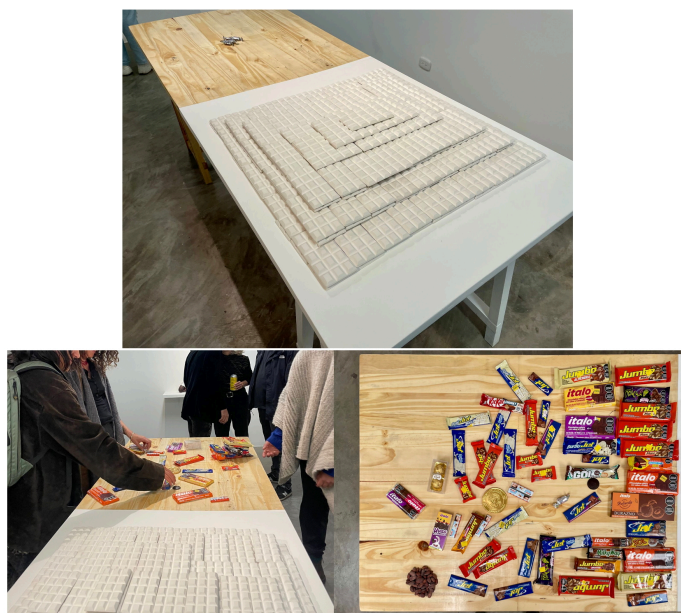


Figure 6: Santiago Pinyol, *Simbouvenires*, 2024, installation, action, tablets cast in dental plaster, SGR Bogota. Courtesy of the artist.

tional exchange of goods and emphasizing a speculative exploration of value. By inviting participants to trade a real chocolate bar for a plaster replica, the work engages with a creative process that is far from deterministic, allowing for new hypotheses about materiality, exchange, and cultural significance to emerge. The exchange does not conform to simple fungible structures but instead creates an associative space where the viewer must generate meaning based on their own experiences. However, these experiences are not merely arbitrary or random: “chocolate bars” trace the troubled colonial history of cacao, which went from an Aztec beverage in pre-Columbian America to a storable and tradeable solid in 16th-century Europe. This commoditization is captured by Pinyol’s elimination of the gustatory association of chocolate in his collapsing of the consumable object into its aluminum wrapping. Abduction, then, is a process that moves beyond linear reasoning, instead making space for creative activity to fill in the gaps of meaning and engage with the contingent nature of cultural value.



Figure 7: Santiago Pinyol, *Solid Desire* (No sugar, no palm oil), chromed copper, 2024, SGR Bogota. Photo credit: Sebastián Cruz. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8: Santiago Pinyol, Concretised Still Life #0,1, cacao pods at various stages of ripeness, aluminum leaf applied using "gilding" technique, 2024, SGR Bogota. Photo credit: Sebastián Cruz. Courtesy of the artist

The great value of abduction for our purposes is that it respects the specific action of creativity without monopolising it as the prerogative of a particular discipline or set of disciplines. Practitioners of the natural and social sciences and the humanities are perfectly correct to say that there is a creativity specific to their forms of thought, and the concept of abduction captures this. But by the same token, the greater freedom of the creative disciplines in the generation and selection of materials and processes can also be made consistent with the abductive consciousness. The question, ultimately, is one of where the act of abduction occurs. In the standard model of the scientific method, the hypothesis is the primary focus of research—and this is downstream of the creative activity of hypothesis generation. Nevertheless, if this abduction—this dream of the atomic nucleus or the periodic table—is not there to begin with, there is no hypothesis.

In the creative disciplines, the hypothesis is of less interest than the dream that leads to it, whatever form that dream may take.

And it is precisely here that we see how we can arrive at an episteme of research-creation that is neither reductive nor hallucinatory. Artistic practice and creative research cannot be collapsed into the linear logic of qualitative and quantitative research without violence being done to their nature. But neither can an ethos of unprincipled randomness deliver any appreciation of the material and symbolic connections that attend creative action. Against both, abduction supplies that extra subjective element that allows for the disjoint to be joined in radically unexpected ways. For this reason, we volunteer it here as a worthwhile paradigm for thinking through the idiosyncratic logic of research creation.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Laura Emsley, Manias Series 2 Ramp 2024. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2: Laura Emsley, Manias, Series 1 _Nana_2022. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 3: James Carney and María Angélica Madero, 3D curriculum visualization of the MASc in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods at the London Interdisciplinary School, 2024. The dots are equidistant extreme points corresponding to the problems, methods, and research strands of the program. The braiding of these strands is captured by the color leakage across different parts of the knot.

Figure 4: Juliana Echavarría, poster for “ing: speculating in the present continuous.” Capstone project at the MASc in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods at the London Interdisciplinary School, 2024. Courtesy of the curator.

Figure 5: Juliana Echavarría, about page for www.i-n-g.space. “ing: speculating in the present continuous.” Capstone project at the MASc in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods at the London Interdisciplinary School, 2024. Courtesy of the curator.

Figure 6: Santiago Pinyol, Simbouvenires, 2024, installation, action, tablets cast in dental plaster, SGR Bogota. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 7: Santiago Pinyol, Solid Desire (No sugar, no palm oil), chromed copper, 2024, SGR Bogota. Photo credit: Sebastián Cruz. Courtesy of the artist.

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NOTES

1. Graeme Sullivan’s model of practice-based artistic research has four areas: in the first, theoretical, the researcher explores problems. In the second, conceptual, the artist creates works that are part of the research process. In the third, dialectic, human processes in the creation of meaning are explored (beyond direct communication). And, finally, in the contextual area, practice results in social transformation.↔

2. Antonin Muntadas’s art project methodology situates this question historically, outlining that after the 1960s and ’70s new considerations emerged in art practices, amongst them, specificity of place, temporality, and duration.↵
3. Surrealism could be read as the impulse to break seemingly logical structures of thinking in order to reach different cadences of semantic chains. The manifesto’s first statement says: “*I would like to sleep, in order to surrender myself to the dreamers, the way I surrender myself to those who read me with eyes wide open; in order to stop imposing, in this realm, the conscious rhythm of my thought*” (Manifesto of Surrealism, Andre Breton, 1924). The impulse of breaking normative speech was also part of Sigmund Freud’s talking-therapy. Later, Jacques Lacan outlined that Freud couldn’t achieve further as he couldn’t access a department of linguistics, as the forms language took in its free manifestations revealed the content of what was said.↵
4. According to Friedrich Schiller, in the *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, nature is split into two contrasting elements: the physical, driven by the sensuous, and the intellectual, guided by reason and morality. Schiller believes that art is in the play between the conflicting forces of sensuality and reason, thought and emotion. While his ideas come from the Enlightenment, they resonate with contemporary artistic research by addressing how art engages with—and mediates—the material and the rational. If it was purely rational it would be philosophy; if it was purely material, it would be craft. It is in that play between both that creative contemporary research engages both the mind and the body.↵
5. Yablonsky, Linda, et al. “Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla.” *Interview Magazine*, 9 July 2011, www.interviewmagazine.com/art/jennifer-allora-and-guillermo-calzadilla.↵
6. Decalcomania is also the rhizomatic process of mapping over tracing (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Maps represent dynamic thought, while tracings imply fixed, hierarchical structures. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, this distinction underpins their philosophy and poststructuralist theory: arborescent thought is linear and hierarchical, while rhizomatic thought is non-hierarchical and interconnected.↵
7. This can be thought with what Irit Rogoff calls “contemporaneity,” not seeing it historically, but as a conjunction of shared urgencies (Rogoff 2006).↵

8. The codex preserves the recipe and adobe-making technique, ensuring future generations can understand this form of land stewardship and labour.↩

THE RELATIONALITY OF RESEARCH-CREATION AT THE END
OF EPISTEME: A SCATTERING OF BEGINNINGS WITH
EXCURSUSES FOR DISSENT

JONATHAN LAHEY DRONSFIELD

The beginnings that follow are not to be read linearly or causally, as if one leads into or is led into by another, nor as if one follows on from the other, not even additively, as if they can be brought together to form a unified whole. Instead they are to be read as beginnings again, each time differently, as if for the first time. Each begins in its own way. This does not mean that there are not repetitions from part to part. Each of these beginnings is itself about beginning. They are beginnings of the same thing, namely of how to begin to think about relation, to think with relation, and to think relationally. The relations of the human being to things, of human beings to art, of human beings to themselves as selves and as others, of art's relation to human beings, and of human beings to the more than human. Relationality has no origin; indeed, origin is something that relationality puts into question: relations proceed from, or begin with, division. Thus it is difficult to speak of relation between things, between parts, in the singular. The relation between the beginnings is as important as what each of them states. I do not say what those relations are or might be. Nor do I offer anything like a definition of research-creation. To my mind, it would be unhelpful to do so, and counter-productive. Instead, I offer some notes towards thinking what the relation between research and creation might be. These notes towards I have termed "beginnings" because before anything else they are attempts to clear the ground from different direc-

tions. Hence I take on certain basic claims made about research-creation which relate it to knowledge and knowledge-formation (in particular the work of Erin Manning), and begin to develop ideas about relationality that assist in doing so. It is the privileging of knowledge in conceptions of research-creation that I seek to put into question. As such, these beginnings can be taken as propaedeutic for re-thinking research-creation at the end of episteme, again and again.

BEGINNING ONE.

Before anything else the human being is a response, responding to being addressed in being-with-others, responding in language to how it is from the start interpellated as a subject by language. Responsivity is something we carry out in language before grasping our own I that speaks. That responding voice is pre-personal. We are in relation to others before we are one. Before having a relation to ourselves in the first person, we are responding to others. Before grasping ourselves as a subject we are being subjected to. Grasping oneself as a subject necessitates being displaced from the manifold ways in which we are being spoken. Modernity has privileged the I, the “first person,” as the beginning, the primary linguistic form. But if we understand the I as a response, then that to which it responds precedes it, namely the appellative, the giving of a subject position, the “you.” Grasping oneself as a subject entails, in an important way, retreating from or saying no to the form of address that is “you.” To begin to use the word “I” is to put oneself together from out of how one has already been spoken.

As subjects we are constantly relating to ourselves. But for the most part this is relating without relation, for we barely stop to question what this relation is. An unmediated relation to ourselves is something we assume in speaking, it is something that all philosophies of the subject assume, and even those philosophies

“Wouldn’t we like to know” responds Eric Cazdyn, when he asks “What is happening there?”, there in the blindspot created by his camera machine installed in a public park, four cameras shooting at 90° intervals rotating to-

which seek to deconstruct subjectivity take it as given in some way. How we relate to ourselves forms our identity, even if our self-relating is decided outside of us, be it by parents, family, peer groups, culture, society, ideology, religion, capitalism, social media, and history, in short by language. (I would also add by mental health, for mental health issues can affect us without our knowing it, as if from the outside.)

Coming to see how we have been subjectivised and determined as subjects historically, culturally, and socially is not a matter of self-knowledge. It is not the Socratic question of “know thyself,” not if it presupposes a self to be known or grasped as something knowable, nor a telos of self-knowledge or wisdom to be attained with any finality. Rather it is an ongoing process of awareness, where the self is the site for this becoming. It is self-creation, self-formation, the production of new relations to self, relations which are not reducible to or usefully describable as knowledge, neither in the sense of “self-knowledge,” nor in a theoretical sense.

The space “between” ourselves and what dictates or projects or assumes our relation to ourselves is foreclosed, covered over, repressed, or denied. Some might want to call this

gether on the same automated head of a single tripod (“The non-coincidence of the future”). He is voicing over his film *The Blindspot of Participation* (2013). I think we ask other things, and are invited to do so by the work, not about what we do not know, but about what we see. The gaps created by the film are, for me, not blind spots. What interests me about this work is not the blindspot, nor what we cannot see, or what the camera machine does not show us, but how what we do see is disjointed as a whole, creating spaces for us to see the park otherwise than how we have seen it before, allowing ordinary things to be seen newly, showing us that the whole contains within it the unseen or the differently seen or the co-seen or the seen at the same time or the same thing seen from different angles at different times or at the same time. If the “perfect sex” and the revolution being plotted take place there is it not in the blindspot but in the relation the four quadrants of the screen have to each other and to us and to the people in the park displaced from themselves and the actors staged by Cazdyn to perform. One of

alienation. I do not, not if alienation presupposes a givenness of self outside of all these things interpellating us as subjects, nor if it assumes an authentic self prior to them which is somehow distorted. There is neither a pre-given pre-formed self nor an authentic one. Others might want to say we are being reified as things rather than subjects. I do not, because reification retains positivity as a possible way of resisting how we are interpellated as a subject, insofar as we can make ourselves things or style ourselves as things—an obstacle, a question, a demand, a performance—to stand in the way of our interpellation, proposing alternatives.

The I is relational to oneself in that it is the process of retrieving or forming a self from its pre-personal relationality. This does not mean negating that pre-personal I. The process of self-formation is an ongoing one. One's self is continually being covered over or lost or habituated into or made comfortable with the everyday, the impersonal. The pre-personal becomes over time the impersonal and over time and in an ongoing way it is from or with the impersonal that one's I must be re-formed. The self is continually being repressed into a given impersonal, by patriarchy, by political ideologies, by theocracy, by authoritarianism. Art is a primary and ongoing way that human beings put these mechanisms in question and deconstruct them.

Grasping oneself as an I out of the ways in which we have been determined by our relations to others in our personal and cultural histories is to grasp how one may become an I.

those relations is the blindspot, but there are many others. It is not that the individual is “swallowed up” by the blindspot, it is that the individual is comprised of the different relations this work creates, and that there is always something to come from the individual, the individual is always becoming, including their appearances and disappearances. And if Cazdyn desires to see one day that film which he says the blindspot is, the film of perfect sex and utopic revolution, it is because he has already seen it, there in the film he has made, as an impossible desired political outcome.

The advent of mobile video technology in the late-1960s enabled

It is something that involves and necessitates our ongoing unquestioning self-relating being interrupted. It is in the space of interruption that another relation to ourselves emerges, offering possibilities of relating otherwise to the relations which are given or imposed. Art is one way, a primary way, in which relations to oneself can be undone and re-formed, tried out, experimented with, and allowed to emerge. Art can suspend or pause the flow of our responsivity, our unquestioning responding, allowing us to question and think the responding being we always already are, can make explicit the implicitness of our responsivity, offering it back to us in order that we de-appropriate ourselves from our positioning and interpellation in language, and re-appropriate possibility by language. Art can disarrange the relations at work in the flow of language by which we are spoken. Art can allow us to see how we are interpellated as subjects, can show us the workings of those things I have just mentioned which position us or project onto us or speak us, and how we as subjects are interpellating others, positioning others and projecting upon them a subjectivity not of their making or choosing. Art is not a way of knowing ourselves. Neither artworks, nor our selves, are first and foremost objects of knowledge; art is a way of changing ourselves, of giving form to ourselves differently. The relations to ourselves to be gained through art works may be describable not in epistemic terms, but

artists, in particular women artists—Joan Jonas, Lynda Benglis, Eleanor Antin, Carolee Schneemann, Hermine Freed, Nancy Holt, Valie Export, Shigeko Kubota, Marina Abramović—to stage relations to the self which interrupted and put into question the way women were interpellated as subjects, as embodied subjects, as subjects with bodies subjected to the male gaze or to patriarchy, to the extent that for at least a decade thereafter the body became the material of art making. Many of these works involve the voice put to work in processual ways. Many utilise the mirror to perform relations to self, to the face, to voice. It is no accident that much early video art was made in the privacy of the artist's studio, for it is where the artist can stage relations to self, to her body, and between her body and the camera impossible elsewhere.

processual ones. Art is one of the primary processes of the production of possibilities of self.

BEGINNING TWO.

We need to accord relation a primacy it lacks in philosophies of the subject. Relation needs to be understood less as that which connects autonomous selves, and more as something which itself has a certain autonomy. Relation as the between, but a between which is not reducible to the subjects and objects it relates. The between is not a relational concept in the sense that the essential part of its theoretical function is accomplished by putting distinct and substantial things into relation with one another. Instead, the between is something which itself has to be understood as something with its own reality. The between is a relation which intervenes and displaces things from their givenness and their identity and even their substantiality.

The relational is to begin with two, not one. On the one hand, “We must set out from the idea that an ‘autonomous’ between exists.” So Peter Sloterdijk (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 151). If there is an autonomous between, then those things which it is between no longer assume priority, either with respect to the relation between them, or to each other. On the other hand, “‘being-a-pair’ precedes all encounters [...] the number two, or the dyad, appears as the absolute figure.” So, again, Sloterdijk (“Against Gravity” 28). Being-a-pair, being-two, is inclusive of the relation between them. It is the relation between them which confers on the two its singularity.

Artists have always been at the forefront of how technology can be used to intervene in the ways in which human beings, and not just human beings, are positioned as subjects. For instance, in Iran, the car has functioned for decades as a form of mobile studio technology for artist-filmmakers to stage, under conditions of extreme censorship, relations of the body and its formation and presentation, relations between persons, relations between ideas, especially as these impact upon women or are performed by women, otherwise unshowable due to censor-

A relational pair is not “one plus one,” for that would be to begin with one. We begin with two, not one. We are first in relation, before we are one. Sloterdijk argues that being a pair “precedes all encounters.” He absolutises the pair, and sets out how the pair precedes all encounters in his theory of spheres. We will not follow him there. To absolutise the pair will take us away from relation, for it implies or presupposes that the pair is in itself unconditioned or without relation. Instead, we focus on the precedence of the pair and the relation, over what, on the face of it, the relation connects: two single units, two autonomies, two substances. We are interested less in establishing the pair as itself a separate thing, and more in how we begin in relation, and how the pair is itself connected. Sloterdijk asserts that making relation primary comes “at the expense of” substance. This implies that relation is hierarchised over substance, or that a de-hierarchisation happens, such that the existence of relation is considered the equal of that which it relates. If what we are after is a fluid ontology, a socialised ontology, an ontology that does justice to how we are socially formed, then the beginning number is two, “an ontology of minimal plurality” (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 151).

ship, for instance in the work of Jafar Panahi, *Taxi* (2015) with the human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, and *3 Faces* (2018) with the actress Behnaz Jafari; Panah Panahi, *Hit the Road* (2021) with the actress Pantea Panahiha; and Abbas Kiarostami, *Ten* (2002) with artists Mania Akbari and Amina Maher. However, it must be noted that Akbari and Maher have raised serious questions about *Ten* regarding authorship and consent. Nonetheless, the film explicitly addresses gender discrimination in Iran, for which it was banned. All these “car films” address the patriarchal and misogynistic policing and control of the female body, and they do so by unloosing the bounds of suppression, by ironising or mocking repressive subjectification of women (and often therefore of men in relation to them), and through performing creative self-formation or self-transformation, and by revealing conditions of change. Totalitarian regimes seek to subjugate the female through blocking the processual movement from an impersonal “I” (a “they”) to a becoming-I in self-formation. It is precisely *self-formation* that is denied

Indeed, it may be better to say that such an ontology begins with at least two. The two has its own interior space, the relational between, and this between is spatial. This between is dense, it is intense. It resonates, there is resonance between, a resonance which denies priority to the one or the other in relation. The task is to think this between, to find the right vocabulary to articulate relation, primarily the autonomy of the relation between two, and to move away from presupposing the primacy of one understood as an autonomous individual embodied as thing-like substance. In short, to think two over one, autonomy of relation over autonomy of individual, relation over substance, accident over essence, and situatedness, connectedness and context over sovereignty, the solitary, and the unconditioned. Art as research-creation

helps us in the task of thinking the two over one; indeed, it would be impossible to think this minimal plural ontology without art.

women and girls in theocracies. Theocratic and politically ideological totalitarianisms deny authorship of self to the female subject; she is prevented from becoming the author of her own self-forming actions. Authoritarianisms of this sort seek to impose both authority over and authorship onto the female body, making it responsible in ways only it deems licit and legitimate. In saying “no” to the censorship, the repression, the misogyny, all of which has been inherited by anyone under the age of 45 in Iran, artists and filmmakers are seeking to negate the pernicious effects of theocratic totalitarianism, and in doing so are constituting themselves as subjects.

BEGINNING THREE.

If we accept that one is in relation before there is such a thing as oneself as a subject, an individual, then should individuality be seen as derivative, because itself a response? This has implications for the concept of responsibility. The responsibility of the pre-personal I must be understood as response, and becoming responsible for oneself becomes taking responsibility for how one has always already responded in becoming a subject. We might say that our always already responding makes us responsible. But this pre-formed

responsibility is not the responsibility of a fully-formed I, as we say, it is the responsibility of an interpellated subject; it may be of the person, yet it is pre-personal. Responsibility is to be retrieved or rescued from the ways we are always already responding. Not that the I is ever fully-formed; I am emphasising that the I is formed after the fact of its having always already been interpellated as an I. Responsibility comes after responsivity, and to be fully responsible involves accepting this. But this always already responding— is it already an affirmation? Is it a “yes” as Jacques Derrida argues, and “responsible without autonomy” (“Eating Well” 100)? I hesitate to answer yes to this. If it is an affirmation then it is one which precedes the distinction between affirmation and negation. Becoming responsible entails accepting that one has always been a responding being, and therefore responsible, even before one has become a responsible “I,” and becoming responsible in this way involves saying no, saying no to how we have been positioned, determined, interpellated, already spoken, and made to respond. Only in saying no do we begin to appropriate ourselves as a being which becomes responsible and which can lay claim to the first person singular I. Only by retrieving ourselves as an I from how we are being spoken by others, by the language of being-with-others, can we become the I that we are. This is constitutive negation. Constitutive negation is at the beginning of the emergence of “I.” Saying no, resisting, leaving, is at the beginning of saying “I,” withdrawal is essential to becoming fully formed. There is a certain violence to it, for it is in an important sense a questioning how we are always already in relation. But at the same time, the saying no, the refusal, the leaving, would not be possible without relation, without being-in-relation with others.

There is one other implication of individuality which must be considered. Individuality implies an atomistic self in a neutral or empty space. But we can think individuality as a relation one makes with others, or as that which is joined with others. If the self is relational then it is divid-

Irani Bag ([کيف ایرانی]) by Maryam Tafakory, winner of this year’s Film London Jarman prize, is a split-screen video essay from 2020 inquiring into relational possibilities for undercutting censorship

ed by its relations, and its unity as a self is not the absence or negation of relations but the way in which relations are gathered or grouped, and how these groups or sets of relations move through the world and interact with other sets of relations one might have with others. Unity of self, then, could be understood to be a direction or a movement, or a repetition of relations or certain sets of them, across different contexts and concrete situations. When, in language, we address others we do so as these different sets of relations, we can deliver or offer or force particular relations or sets of them to or upon other people. This makes of our subjectivity something multiple rather than individual. Responsibility, individual responsibility, if it is one thing, is nonetheless something divided and itself relational. The feeling of responsibility then becomes a question of whether and if so how one keeps these relations together as a meaningful unity.

BEGINNING FOUR.

To begin with Erin Manning's first proposition in "Ten Propositions for Research-Creation," to say that research-creation "proposes new forms of knowledge, many of which are not intelligible within current understandings

of intimacy and the female touch. Working with scenes from Iranian films made under conditions of drastic censorship between 1989 and 2018, the work analyses the way the bag, "a simple prop," functions in them, how it becomes a character in them, something like a silent go-between, a sensuous mediator, a material operator of desire, a dispositif channeling affective intensity and intensifying flows of desire. All of these are relational possibilities revealed through a focus on "historical gaps, unspoken prohibitions and purposefully concealed queer stories" (Tafakory interview 2024). In *Irani Bag* it is the prohibition of touch which forms the motive for Tafakory's breaking open the relation between the visible and the sayable, driven by the conviction that censorship "can never get rid of" the thing it prohibits. It may try to remove it from sight, but the research-creation of Tafakory shows how it can be brought back evermore movingly, evermore affectively, evermore creatively. *Irani Bag* shows the possibilities for art to intervene not just in discourses about censorship but as a performative challenge to it, un-

of what knowledge might look like” appears to be contradictory, for where does the authority to lay claim, in the present moment, here and now, to its being knowledge come from? Better to stay with the more hesitant sentence that comes next: “new forms of knowledge [...] *may* have no means of evaluation within current disciplinary models” (133, my emphasis). Notwithstanding, is Manning saying that there is a

dercutting it, materialising its innocent everyday objects differently such that they become part of the body forbidden from touching and from being touched, to the extent that without such dispositifs scenes of non-touching are revealed as the monstrous acts of repression they are.

reality to the artwork behind its appearance, which will one day become known? Does she want to say that our “current understandings of knowledge” are inadequate to art and the ways art shows us how things really are? Or is she saying that there may come a time when this or that instance of research-creation will be re-describable in the future, more useful or more relatable, according to our needs and purposes at that time? If it is the latter then I do not have a problem with that. The problem lies in the former, the idea that research-creation is granted the status, here and now, as knowledge, without our being able to relate to it, or that there is something intrinsic or essential to it that is (currently) non-relational. If it is “unintelligible” then we cannot come up with anything useful to say about it, we cannot find the words with which to allow it to participate in self-formation or encourage its use in societal transformation. If we can relate to it then we can describe that relation, and that relation may or may not be useful or usable in processes of self-formation or societal transformation—or indeed re-evaluation of disciplinary models.

The archive is an important medium for research-creation. By intervening in archives, producing and staging relations between their elements and between archives, research-creation invites us to read them again, indeed obliges us to do so, for what they may have covered over or made invisible. This is what is proposed by Kvet Nguyen’s *(Un)official History: The Limits of Our Pain*, her winning submission to this year’s Novum competition in Slovakia (for which I

was one of the judges). Nguyen compares institutional archives with community archives, the centralised with the diasporic, the public with the private, the official with the personal, and by confronting one archive with another shows how one can reveal what is hidden or denied by the other. She disjoins elements in one archive by relating that archive to another, creating space for new relations in the cultural memory. The Vietnamese were Czechoslovakia's first official non-European minority. Its presence was intended to be temporary, but when it persisted over time it became characterised as "leftover." Bringing archives of the presence of the Vietnamese into an encounter with one another, Nguyen traces the emergence of the concept of race in communist Czechoslovakia. Nguyen calls her practice fictional documentary; it is to do one discipline through another, again confronting one with another. She repeats archival stories in the form of a fiction, giving space to those voices missing in the state archives, not visible in the subdued surfaces of its photographs, allowing a young Vietnamese girl to emerge from a newspaper photograph, the first such photograph in Czechoslovakia, to become the subject of her own story, drawing out the potential in today's Slovakia for decolonising central European culture. The work is as much educational as it is activist, and to be both requires it to be non-dogmatic. Rather than tell us what to think it must create a space for thinking which otherwise would not exist. Nguyen insists that to achieve this it is not enough to approach the matter epistemically, in terms of facts and knowledge. Instead, she works with emotions to produce an affective document. "Communist memory in reality is a way of not remembering," asserts Jorge Semprún, the great scriptwriter, "it is not a historical memory, a memory that bears witness, but an ideological memory" (*The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez* 182). Nguyen's work speaks to the imperative of what Semprún says is the only way of perpetuating memory in the face of its censoring by communist memory: to fictionalise reality ("The Art of Fiction"), something research-creation is exceptionally good at.

Contemporary research-creators seek to allow themselves as much space as possible in response to questions as to what their practice or their discipline is. Increasingly at the level of research-creation, if

artists do a discipline, then they do it through another, they practice one discipline through another. And with good reason. They do not want to be pushed into a corner. Instead they un-build the corner, and construct different possibilities of answering, by bringing into question what a discipline is. These possibilities will, they hope, and perhaps even argue, be useful to some people.

According to Manning, research-creation “generates forms of knowledge that are extra-linguistic” (“Ten Propositions” 133). I disagree. The knowledge produced by research-creation, by art as research, by art, is neither extra-linguistic nor non-linguistic, and for the most part not usefully describable in terms of knowledge. Rather than think in terms of knowledge and how a work might relate to the order of knowledge, it might make more sense to speak of meaning, for instance, and how this or that artwork creates meaning, and might mean something, or not. Or, if it is a matter of knowledge, then it is knowledge which is not knowable outside of a creative relational approach to it. Knowledge is always partial, and it is becoming. What this means is that artworks which approach a subject matter in terms of knowledge propose their own criteria for thinking about that subject matter. They provide both the way of approach, and the criteria for judging that approach. Research-creation does not propose forms of knowledge which are outside of language or beyond language. It proposes relations between things, often new relations, which is what language does. Art proposes new forms of language with which to relate things. Or does Manning want to say that there is some non-linguistic relation we can have to something which is intrinsic to art? Placing things in different contexts makes them thinkable differently. When something becomes thinkable differently, it becomes describable differently. If all thinking is, as I believe, a re-thinking, then all thinking is re-describing. If all feeling is a relation, to ourselves, to others, to things in the world, to something about the world, to historical events or “facts,” then that feeling is describable. The affective relations that artists and research-creators set up and try out and propose are not outside of language, they are not new feelings for which we do not yet have the words. They are proposi-

tions for new ways of relating to what we feel, new meanings to our feelings.

The vocabulary of “not intelligible” and “extra-linguistic” is unhelpful for discoursing research-creation. It is perhaps consequent of an emphasis on knowledge production and force-fitting the evaluation of art practices according to discipline-specific criteria derived from a time when, for example, there was not such a thing as a PhD in art. The relational forms of art and research-creation are not presented as knowledge, instead they are proposed as useful, or usable, or workable, and these may not necessarily be realisable in the present. Art works as relational forms are relational in a twofold sense: they set their elements into relation, and they are perceived from relational perspectives. There is nothing *intrinsically* knowable about them, it is not as if they await the discovery of their knowledge, it is a question of how we relate to them, and they to us, whether they can be related by us to something else, or whether they show us ways of relating. Art both takes advantage of, and radically expands, the relational contexts into which things can be put; art can produce the purposes to which things can be put; art can show us how things placed in different contexts can respond to our needs, for instance our political needs, and our desires, for instance our desire for freedom, freedom from suffering and repression, freedom for expression and movement and association, freedom for self-formation.

If something is knowable then we can describe it, we can set it into relation with other things. If it is a relation we have to the thing then we can describe that relation. If we cannot find the right words for such descriptions then that is a matter of time and cooperation and beginning again. Relationality is repetition. Descriptions of relation are themselves relational.

EXCURSUS

For her film *Landscapes of Resistance*, Marta Popivoda did the research “on the spot.” “We did the research,” she says, “and talked to people and visited the places... Artistic research on the spot” (2023). What does it mean to do “artistic research on the

spot”? It means to create at the very spot where the research is carried out. The film is an essay on a woman named Sonja, now 97 years of age, “one of the first women who joined the partisan resistance movement in Yugoslavia.” What the director seeks to do with this film is give space to Sonja’s story, the space to feel and think about what Sonja is feeling and what this means for the viewer. This involves producing what Popivoda calls verbal images, described as “scenes of memory,” scenes in which places are re-discovered, and what traces remain within them unearthed, and entails not just representing places and landscapes, but intervening in them, creating an opening in them for a different relation to them. For instance, by superimposing a drawing onto a forest. To intervene into landscape in this way is to de-naturalise it. It is to open another kind of space in that landscape where other aspects of it, memories held by it or meanings concealed by it, can be heard or seen. What makes the images of the film verbal is that the voices of people who once lived there or fought there, or died for that place, or are buried there, can be allowed to be heard and be seen. Verbal images, then, are images which allow words to emerge from such places, or which give space to the production of words within the images, words produced by the characters not shown, by the characters shown, and by those watching the images. I would also say that such work allows words to be found, or assists us in finding them, or inventing them, words which otherwise might be lacking, in any case words which we might not have had until then, to make sense of the events referred to. If Popivoda says her work is “artistic research on the spot,” it is because it works open a space for questioning there where it is made. It does not tell us what to think, but invites us to think, and to come up with words for what it is we think. Part of what is to be thought is our relation to historical time, mediated through testimony and witnessing, in this case the living testimony of a now 97-year old woman of her participation in the resistance when she was a young girl. Yet Popivoda’s film is not just the coming to the surface of a voice until now not heard or listened to, it is a visual relation to the “before” of historical time excavated through the “after” layerings of socio-cultural change in what a woman’s voice is and

how it might be listened to. Verbal images which do this work facilitate the becoming of a voice.

Popivoda's film is a work informed by theories of the image—for instance the image as stratigraphic or archaeological, or what it is to make images speak of resistance, or what would it be for a landscape to speak—and which is seeking to find new kinds of image with which to address issues of contemporary relevance, in material underpinned by, or rather weighed down by, so much foundation, so much historical significance and contestation. It treads a path between providing facts about past events and offering a renewing perspective on them and a different description of the reality of these events, between making claims about reality in terms of the facts about past events and an attempt to find just as valid a way of describing past events, especially if the already existing descriptions of these are considered set in stone or epistemically exhausted or already real enough. The real contribution works such as these make should not to be measured simply or even primarily epistemically in terms of the reality of historical fact, to which they nonetheless do make a contribution, but in the way in which they propose their own criteria for thinking about the past. They provide both the way

The archive is an important medium for research-creation. By intervening in archives, producing and staging relations between their elements and between archives, research-creation invites us to read them again, indeed obliges us to do so, for what they may have covered over or made invisible. This is what is proposed by Kvet Nguyen's *(Un)official History: The Limits of Our Pain*, her winning submission to this year's Novum competition in Slovakia (for which I was one of the judges). Nguyen compares institutional archives with community archives, the centralised with the diasporic, the public with the private, the official with the personal, and by confronting one archive with another shows how one can reveal what is hidden or denied by the other. She disjoins elements in one archive by relating that archive to another, creating space for new relations in the cultural memory. The Vietnamese were Czechoslovakia's first official non-European minority. Its presence was intended to be temporary, but when it persisted over

of approach, and the criteria for judging that approach. *Landscapes of Resistance* tries to create the way in which its relation to the past is to be judged, introducing a degree of diversity into history's accounts, in this case a woman's voice as authority over its representation, not allowing history as it is written to dictate to art how history should be shown and made, and it makes a work such as this a democratic work. This is not simply another opinion appearing on the scene, this is voice tearing through the fabric of words, allowing us to know otherwise.

Through its use of verbal images *Landscapes of Resistance* de-naturalises the landscape; this is to advocate for the argument that nature is itself a construct, something made. It is a kind of artistic research—or research-creation—which accepts that reality is only ever becoming, never fully known and real outside of humankind's creative relational approach to it. In this way, such artworks are always research “on the spot.” Reality can never be known completely, and artworks can both expose that fact, and enrich reality, giving us a more complete picture of it, or a better picture, a more informed one, or a more meaningful one, or more useful, one which might contest certain hegemonies of

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representation, without implying that plenitude or completeness is possible. We can only ever know reality, historical reality, the reality of place, partially. And the form which art gives that approach repeats and is itself the process of the becoming of reality. If art seems to show something other than the reality of that place, or disjoins us from that reality, then this is how the reality of that place *already* is.

BEGINNING FIVE.

What makes art political? Let's start with something that Brian Massumi says in "The Thinking Feeling of What Happens," a conversation begun with someone else, then made into a semblance of itself by Massumi continuing the conversation with his interlocutor as his, Massumi's, fiction— a form to be appreciated in the present context as it makes explicit the relationality of singular subject positions, and presents a possibility of relational discourse and a possibility of discourse on relationality. What makes art political, he says, is that

to produce an affective document. "Communist memory in reality is a way of not remembering," asserts Jorge Semprún, the great scriptwriter, "it is not a historical memory, a memory that bears witness, but an ideological memory" (*The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez* 182). Nguyen's work speaks to the imperative of what Semprún says is the only way of perpetuating memory in the face of its censoring by communist memory: to fictionalise reality ("The Art of Fiction"), something research-creation is exceptionally good at.

"It can push further to the indeterminate but relationally potentialized fringes of existing situations, beyond the limits of current framings or regulatory principles. Aesthetic politics is an exploratory politics of invention, unbound, unsubordinated to external finalities. It is the suspensive aspect of it that gives it this freedom [...] Artistic practices that explicitly attempt to be political often fail at it, because they construe being political as having political content, when what really counts is the dynamic form." ("The Thinking Feeling of What Happens" 14)

Neither overt political content nor reference to external political or social questions makes art political. What makes art political is the way it opens still further the gaps between its elements, the between of its constituent parts. If the form of art is the relation between its parts then how it makes those relations more dynamic will create a space for the political and as the political. Art can take an existing situation, which need not in itself be a political situation, and open it up in such a way that one is displaced from it and back into it in the same moment of experiencing it. In finding oneself there, one can see the situation differently, be given a perspective on it, unlike we might have were we viewing that situation “in real.” Art’s inventive-ness is the way it can unbind everyday relations that things have, or suspend them, or even negate them, to potentialise and dynamise the situation. By pulling things back from everyday usage and disjoining them from conventional situatedness or withholding them from external finality art can make them available or offer them up for new ways of living and new forms of life, dynamised and suspended by the new ways in which the elements are put together: new possibilities of relation, new ways of orientation in the world. This is responsive to and creative of the world’s complexity. Peter Sloterdijk remarks on the paucity of means for situating ourselves with respect to this complexity:

“What is missing is an art of thought that serves as an orientation in a world of complexity. What is missing is a logic with enough power and versatility to accommodate complexity, indeterminacy, and immersion. If we want this logic, we must change the reading list.” (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 350)

But research-creators are changing the reading list all the time. The art of thought of the researcher-creator consists in precisely this. The sense in which Sloterdijk is right in saying that such an art of thought is “missing” is that it is forever needed. The relational forms that art works are are never fixed, never final. Art must again and again re-relate things. Art’s history is strangely cumulative. Unlike science, the developments of art do not build upon the advancements of art before it, the experiments of art do not refute or prove or cor-

roborate the findings of other experimenters. Research-creation is not “a contribution to knowledge” in this sense, the requirement that practice-based PhDs are ostensibly measured against. “Contribution to knowledge” is a symptom of the rules for their submission being an inheritance from the natural sciences. No, art is a making-indeterminate. The more art makes things become indeterminate in themselves, the more those things attain a potential for re-ordering and re-presenting and re-orientating. Rather than new forms of knowledge, art strives for new ways of speaking, a language with which to respond to the world, for new relations between the world’s elements art has loosened and undone. Art opens up the space for new ways of speaking, new relational vocabularies, by making things dissensual, both with respect to each other, and with respect to themselves. Art is dissensus at the end of episteme.

BEGINNING SIX.

The call for papers for this volume begins with an epigraph, an excerpt from the “proof” of Thesis 8 of Jacques Rancière’s “Ten Theses on the Political”:

“Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself.” (Corcoran translation 38)

There is an earlier translation of Rancière’s “Ten Theses,” in which the above second sentence reads: “It is the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself” (Bowlby and Panagia translation, unpagged). Taking both translations together, we can read them as saying a difference the sensible has with respect to itself. Thesis 8 is as follows:

“The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one.” (*Dissensus* 37)

Note how in the “proof” of the thesis, Rancière defines the political subject as plural: “the people, the workers, the citizens” (*Dissensus* 37). The task of politics is to create a space for the appearing of such subjects. The creation of such space is a re-figuring. The re- is a beginning again, it is a retrieval of space from its governance and rule by vested interests and powers, or by encultured habit, such as to allow for the appearing of plural subjects, the subjects of politics. The subject of politics is plural: communitarian, participative, relational. In getting them to be seen, the spaces of those who constitute these plural subjects needs to be re-qualified, again the re-, retrieved from how they have been kept unseen and unheard. The re-figuring, re-qualification of space as political consists in making space for the voices of the plural subject yet to be heard, not the “noise” they make under suppression but their articulated political speech. This is not the speech of a pre-constituted subject, but the speech of a becoming-subject; such speech is not heard in a pre-given space of political discourse, it is heard in a space which is constructed, which is made, which is re-made, re-made amidst those who normally do not see it, who cannot see it, who perhaps refuse to see it, or who do not want to see it. It is the construction of a space in a space which normally or usually or even legally is not given recognition. Hence Rancière’s saying that it is the putting together “two separate worlds” (*Dissensus* 39). There is no naturally-occurring space of the political. The space of the political has to be made in a world which forbids it, resists it, ignores it, or has no use for it. It has to be brought into existence. It is brought into existence by, in Rancière’s terms, partitioning the sensible world in which it is to be seen and heard, creating a gap in that world, making a difference in the sensible of that world.

In our terms, the political is the retrieval of something of the world from itself, making it different from itself, setting that world into a new relation it has to itself. The one is made up of two, or at least two. As Rancière puts it in Thesis 8, “two worlds in one,” where the one is internally divided, divided from itself yet remaining one. We can say it thus: for the world to become one, to become a truly political world, it must begin with the two, or begin again with the two, begin again as if for the first time. The process of doing so is called

dissensus. Rancière nowhere discusses either knowledge or episteme in his “Ten Theses” setting out the work of dissensus.

BEGINNING SEVEN.

Art can participate in dissensus. Art can make a thing different from itself, it can show a thing’s difference from itself. In that difference does politics take place. Art can re-mark the space internal to the one, the space of the two that the political is. It can point to it, and it can itself make it. Art can re-distribute the world, the sensible of the world, such that a space of the political can be seen, can be prepared, can be proposed, and can be conceived. This is a co-conceiving. It is not a question of knowledge or knowledge-formation. Or rather, if it is a question of knowledge, if the matter of knowledge is to be relevant here, it would be the making of a gap in knowledge, in the knowledges that re-enforce the space in which the political is unseen or forbidden, it would be to bring about a distance in the knowledges that enforce the suppression of voices, a distance from these knowledges themselves, one might even say from knowledge itself, given the primacy that knowledge has assumed in the suppression of peoples and repression of genders.

For Brian Massumi art is political because it pushes “further to the indeterminate but relationally potentialized fringes of existing situations, beyond the limits of current framings or regulatory principles” (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 14). Art achieves this through the dynamism of its form, as he puts it. For Jacques Rancière, art is political because it allows to emerge the dissensus of “two worlds in one” (*Dissensus* 37). At first glance it might look as though Rancière and Massumi are going in opposite directions, Rancière inward in creating two worlds in one, Massumi outward to the fringes of the one and perhaps even beyond. But there is no opposition here. Creating a gap in the sensible, revealing the “two worlds in one,” can be achieved by exerting force, perhaps even an explosive force, one that brings about a plastic difference rather than an elastic one, changing the borders, internal as well as external. The space of the political, as a space made within a world that would otherwise not

want it or actively seek to repress it, is a precarious space, continually at risk of being covered over again or negated, and always being made more difficult to bring about. Witness the constant action of the law constricting the right to protest. The more plastic the force that challenges this, the more resilient will be the change. With this comes the risk that the law will push back ever more violently.

What art can do, and does do, is constantly remark the precarity of the political, by partitioning the sensible again and again, allowing order to be confronted by dissent. The necessity of repetition is part of the reason why the term “knowledge-formation” is in my view not appropriate. The task of partitioning the sensible is without end, in the sense of never having a point at which it is no longer necessary, and without end in the sense of never being allowed to reduce to a particular political ideology or a desired final political outcome. Nor is it the case that we can *know* how to make art dissensual. Making the world different to itself will entail remaking art again and again, each time differently, in response to the closing down of the space for dissent. Not only is there no final know-how in art, there is no finality to its forms. Know-how is plural and in need constantly of renewing, responsive to the materialities of need and desire consequent of being-with-others as much as to the material worked with. No form is fixed or even stable, because it tends towards making indeterminate the material it works with, in the name of the re-determination of the relations internal to it and the relations it participates in. If form is dissensual, which it must be if it is to be political, then it is constantly in need of responding in turn to how the law seeks to constrain the space of protest.

Art is relational in that the viewer is in a lived relation with art’s form. Form capacitates the body, artworks participate in the dynamic unfolding of life, the event of art is constitutive of affective life. Art interrupts the interpellation of the subject. Art interrupts the unquestioning relations we have to ourselves, art participates in becoming-I, it potentialises the voice. Massumi is right to say that art “brings back out” the fact that form is always dynamic form (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 7). Where I disagree with Massumi is in his emphasis on art’s immediacy, whether that be presen-

tational or affective. The event of art cannot be reduced to the experience of it in the present moment. Part of that dynamism is what Massumi calls art's "self-abstraction," the way in which it withholds something about itself, retains a difference to itself (10). The creative self-abstraction of artworks is another reason to question the value of immediacy. Art's self-abstraction is part of the process by which art can bring about a difference of the sensible with respect to itself.

BEGINNING EIGHT.

If we enjoy or gain meaning from a work of art it is not because we have somehow gained knowledge of it as if of an object, it is because we have been taken out of ourselves as a subject, we have been related to that work and found ourselves in relation to it. This is a relation to our self, but it is not reducible to the self, for it involves a relation to the work. In being drawn out of ourselves by the work, a space is created in which to think. Thinking begins in this space. This is when we become I, when art takes us out of ourselves, the self presumed or interpellated in language or covered over in the everyday, and returns us back to ourselves, a self being realised as an I, one which we can lay claim to as our "own," each time as if for the first time, with each experience of art each time again as a renewed I. This is the case whether the art work be a painting on the wall, or an installation in which we are being asked to participate. With the latter kind of work it is not that there are more relations to be had with it or are performed or staged within it than with or in a painting, it is that there are different relations; but the way the space for thinking is created in participatory works is no different to how it occurs in relation to paintings. What of formless works, or works which have no discernible form? There is no reason why a conceptual work—take Lawrence Weiner's "Statement of Intent": "The piece need not be built"—cannot take us out of ourselves, towards an experiencing of the effects of the work, the work's words, towards how we feel ourselves affected in ourselves in wondering what it would be for there being no "need" for the work to take the form of an object, opening up relations to ourselves in which to think, being made to think by the relations the work produces, even in its not being re-

alised—but the statement “the piece need not be built” is a realisation—being made to feel powerless, or its opposite, finding ourselves with a power to articulate feelings or experiences not had hitherto, in the absence or withholding or negation of the rule of the object.

Art is relational in that form is in relation to concept, including the non-form proposed by the “need not be built.” Art works open the gap between form and concept, easing form away from subsumption by the concept, away from objectivity, away from knowledge. Yet it is not a question of completely disjoining form from concept, nor of maximally distancing one from the other; it is, rather, the creation of a space between them. The separation is reversible; a route back to the concept is retained or suggested, held open in some way, or the rules for re-relating form to concept is held in visibility, which can be achieved by language, that is linguistic form, as much as by visible form. But this route back is not to the same, not to the concept definitionally fixed. The concepts of object and form have been changed by the kinds of statements formulated by Weiner and Sol Lewitt and Joseph Kosuth and *Art & Language*. The concept will change, or will have changed, or may one day change, through form, the concept itself is re-figured through the work of the form of art and our relation to it, including the non-realised form of “need not be built.” This is the historicity of concepts and how they develop over time, in which art plays a leading role.

Distancing is a matter of dissonance, and it is a question of dissent. The more dissonant form is from concept the more it dissents by provoking the understanding. And the more it asks of the understanding, the more we respond by thinking the work that the artwork is doing. The more an artwork makes dissensual the relation between things, or the relation something has to itself, the more one is obliged to come to a decision about it, or go along with the speculation or proposition, or not go along with it, to stay with it awhile, to allow it to unsettle you or to question you, or not.

Distance is achieved by disarranging the sensible of the world, partitioning it (Rancière), making assemblages of it (Manning), re-giving it form and making formations (Massumi), and in creating distance

between parts or elements art sets them in new relation. For Massumi, as new possibilities of world these relations are virtual: “There is really no such thing as fixed form – which is another way of saying that the object of vision is virtual” (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 7). It is a virtuality which is not in opposition to reality, because virtuality is lived. Massumi sometimes adverts to the term “actual-virtual configurations” to point to the ways in which each work bears a different distribution of potentials (18). The hesitation is in part due to the causality that actuality tends to bring with it. Causality would be at the expense of creativity:

“It is only because relation is virtual that there is any freedom or creativity in the world. If formations were in actual causal connection, how they effectively connect would be completely determined. They might interact, but they would not creatively relate. There would be no gap in the chain of connection for anything new to emerge from and pass contagiously across. There’d be no margin of creative indeterminacy.” (23)

But at the same time it’s the sensible world that is intervened in and re-made different to itself, the one sensible world shown to be constituted of two worlds in relation. It is in the “gaps” created by the distancing of the sensible that “reality” is to be found (26). Setting the world into new relations with itself demands new conceptualisations of it and new vocabularies of sharing, putting not just the world’s knowledge of itself into question but knowledge as such, its value and its status, and its relation to the knowing subject. This is the knowing subject on the way to its deconstruction.

If art is relational in its re-conceiving relation, then re-conception is co-conception. Relationality demands a re-thinking of thinking, where thinking is no longer the possession of the sovereign subject, no longer the heroic work of the autonomous individual. “In participation-in-situation, things look completely different” (*Neither Sun Nor Death* 349). Peter Sloterdijk is right. In a world of participative relations rather than appellative ones, the endeavour of coming up with a language for shared situations is itself shared, a grammar of collaboration is a grammar collaboratively arrived at. Autonomy is

of the between. “The main project of the aesthetic politics I’m talking about would be to rethink autonomy in qualitatively relational terms” (“The Thinking Feeling of What Happens” 26). Brian Massumi is right. Autonomy is relational. “What is at stake is the shift in the idea of autonomy, as it is linked to that of heteronomy” (“The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes” 136). Jacques Rancière is right, autonomy is heteronomously constituted, right at its origin. The I becomes a speaking subject by grasping that the first person singular is a function of the two, born of being in relation to another, and of occupying the shared space between, including the space internal to oneself formed by being in relation to others. Language is relational, and our vocabularies of self are always already shared and not the property of one.

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MAKING AS ENQUIRING: PERFORMING MAKING AS A MEANS OF ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

KAREN JIYUN SUNG

Practice-based research and well-researched creative practice are not the same. The former shapes its question through practice, while the latter refines its answer through research. The paper aims to emphasize the position of the practice-based research method as a strong companion to written methods rather than a replacement. This paper exemplifies the distinctiveness of practice-based participatory research when conducted with culturally specific groups, South Korean in this case, where drawing led to a firm illumination of self-identities where traditional research methods fall short. Through this investigation, the paper aims to contribute to discussions surrounding the diversification of what constitutes knowledge and its implications for research at large.

La recherche basée sur la pratique et la pratique créative bien documentée ne sont pas la même chose. La première façonne sa question à travers la pratique, tandis que la seconde affine sa réponse par la recherche. L'objectif de cet article est de souligner la position de la méthode de recherche basée sur la pratique en tant que solide allié des méthodes écrites, plutôt qu'un substitut.

Cet article illustre la spécificité de la recherche participative basée sur la pratique lorsqu'elle est menée avec des groupes culturellement spécifiques, ici des Sud-Coréens, où le dessin a permis une illumination claire des identités personnelles, là où les méthodes de recherche traditionnelles échouent. À travers cette enquête, l'article vise à contribuer aux discussions sur la diversification de ce qui constitue le savoir et ses implications pour la recherche en général.

BACKGROUND

Practice-based research is seen as an alternative method of conducting research, and its legitimacy has been debated by scholars and creatives alike. Linda Candy at the Creativity & Cognition Studios describes practice-based research for creative arts as the making of creative artifacts as the primary basis of the contribution to knowledge, along with a body of writing to accompany or supplement the artifact. This research investigates the manifestation, application, observation and analysis of creative production to inform new understanding instead of overlooking the mysteries of the creative process when creating an artifact for investigation (Blumenfeld-Jones). Understanding the process behind creative production is vital for impact in research as the arts allow “producing something new (unknown) within culture (what is established) [...] an indeterminate condition, a threshold between conscious thought and unconscious feeling, an opening onto a liminal space where rationality (theory) and irrationality (experience or emotion) mix in the individual creative act (practice)” (Dallow 49). In other words, creative practices investigate conventional human understanding and offer alternatives in qualitative subjects such as culture and community.

This is not to say that all creative practices are research. Candy acknowledges that every creative practitioner conducts some level of research to inform the work. The key difference, then, is that “practice-based research aims to generate culturally novel apprehensions that are not just novel to the creator or individual observers of an artifact, and it is this that distinguishes the researcher from the practitioner” (Scrivener). Practice-based research is the pursuit of research through practice: it is an evolution of knowledge rather than a growth of individual understanding. The methodologies of traditional written research—of observation, reflection, and theorization—are “not something that is done either before or after work has been made, but [are] crucial to the process of making” (Blauvelt 74-75). “Doing” is not separated from “thinking.” Therefore, research with creative practice—from creative writing to illustrative drawing—falls

under the same scrutiny as traditional forms of research in observation and analysis of the unknown.

There is no reason to consider one particular method of enquiry as less than another. The entire process of creation for the practice-based researcher is in itself research, where the separation of “research” from “practice” does not exist. Therefore, it is redundant for arts research to be called “practice-based,” as if the methodologies, production, or the result of the arts research yields something extraordinary compared to other fields of written research. Then, the separation of practice-based research from “traditional” forms—that is to say, an entirely written thesis—may have been for the benefit not of the art researcher but of fellow academics who do not see the similarity in pursuit of contribution to knowledge with the creative practice. There is an underlying division between knowledge gained from physical labour—the making of the knowledge—and knowledge gained from intellectual labour—the comprehension of knowledge. As Desmond Bell highlights, the hierarchy of the types of knowledge is also prevalent within creative arts research, where the intellectual manifestation of an artifact is of more value than those gained from iterative and persistent making. Julien Posture hints at this distinction when he investigates the reason behind the romanticization of the artist as being free from societal turbulence and economic needs by erasing the work that is required to make art. The distinction, therefore, is another rendition of the hierarchy between the thinkers and the workers, the white collars and the blue collars, rather than the value of the research itself. Creative arts’ process, methodology, analysis, and impact are no different from those of exclusively written output. There is no need for the creative researcher to convince traditional researchers of their worth and significance; the creative arts researcher must be assured that their pursuit is valid without exclusive titling. Practice-based researchers are simply researchers.

This project is particularly interested in the Participatory Arts-Based Research (PABR) method (Nunn; Stickley). It is not research into the practice of creative making itself but its application. Through PABR, new knowledge is produced by the collective efforts of those involved. The method seeks to “empower participants to tailor an in-

tervention to suit their own contexts” (Goodyear-Smith et al. 2). It aims to break down the hierarchy that sits within the research with the researcher, and their hypothesis reigns over the participants who serve the research question. The most significant advantage of PABR in gathering data is its accessibility to specific demographics of participants who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of data collection such as interviews and questionnaires. Through this method, I sought to pursue research that flattens the hierarchy of the researcher and the researched, the verbal and the visual, and promotes a co-creative environment where the participants are empowered to pave the way in answering research enquiries.

CHALLENGE

The pilot workshop recruited six participants who identified themselves as South Koreans. The study aimed to collect qualitative data about how South Koreans think about personal identity within their culture. South Korea’s culture has been observed as being socio-centric, which Jungeun Yang calls “we-ness,” where the good of the community and the nation is prioritized over individualism. The study was not to separate individual identity from social identity, as no person’s identity can be articulated away from the social, geographical, and cultural environment that the person embodies (Tajfel). Instead, the participants were recruited to see how people in group-based cultures balance the “me” and the “we,” and how the articulation and potential rebalancing of the two would affect their view of the societal role they embody.

Incorporating drawing was not the first option to implement at the start of this project. However, it quickly became apparent that traditional interviews or verbal-only methods would not be sufficient. Three aspects became apparent with the so-called “traditional” qualitative research methods. First, the recruited participants, who all identified as ethnically and nationally South Korean, refused to call each other by name. Instead, they called each other “sun-seung-nim [선생님],” which translates to “the elder one” or “the wise one.” This is a polite way to address someone without calling attention to their

ages, societal roles, or names. Linguistically, South Korea's grammar is structured differently according to who the speaker is referring to, mainly to distinguish who is socially higher than the speaker. Therefore, referring to each other as "the elder one" is an attempt to flatten the grammatical structure to be polite to anyone. Simultaneously, however, the flattened grammar unintentionally lowers the speaker's position to be "lesser than" the listener. Since calling someone by their first name is seen to be impolite and even intrusive, the participants chose to lower themselves to avoid equality. It was deemed ineffective and even counterproductive to encourage the participants to express their experiences with a grammar structure that lowers the person's social position. Even when talking about their personal experiences, they were abiding by the "normality" of their group—what Benedict Anderson refers to as "imagined communities."

Secondly, partially because of the lack of individualism in South Korea, the participants found it hard to talk about themselves in general. The South Korean language is structured so there is no need to use the pronouns or possessives within their sentences. Thus, using "I" or "my" was unnatural to say. It was the listener's job to "read between the lines" to know whether the speaker was talking about themselves, an object, the listener or a hypothetical scenario. The participants voiced their concern that they sounded self-centred when asked to use "I" in their sentences. The inarticulation of what is spoken of and the merging of tactile to hypothetical could be a byproduct of the indistinction between ethnicity and culture and the "me" from "we" (Watson). In short, the verbal exchange did not foster the appropriate environment for this research about gathering authentic responses from people.

Lastly, the participants were acutely aware of their social positions within the meetings, especially of me as the researcher. Even though I was the youngest one in many of these meetings, the participants sought to know what I was thinking and what I would want to hear. I was seen as the authority figure regardless of my age, lowering their social stance to raise me as someone who was in a socially higher position than them. This was only accentuated by verbal exchanges,

since the language did not allow a neutral social position with these South Koreans. It was apparent that traditional qualitative methods, such as dialogic and verbal data collection, were inappropriate for this study. In these instances, not only do the researcher and participant need to be fluent in their common language, but they also need to come from a cultural background where the language supports such expression of thought.

Other scholars have faced similar challenges when working with communities where verbal communication was not the most appropriate means of gathering data. Mitch Miller co-created a psychogeographic hand-drawn map of a street in Glasgow from the locals and inhabitants of the street. Luise Vormittag collected drawings of communities around Elephant and Castle to archive their stories amidst the area's changing landscape. Yeni Kim co-created drawings of the everyday lives of the women of Jeju Island to preserve its dying heritage. The commonalities among these studies are twofold: first, the studies involved participants whose stories and experiences embody a niche and specific area of culture that is undertreated and in danger of getting lost in history; second, the demographics of the studies were also marginalized within their communities and were underrepresented as people. Minoritization is deeper and more nuanced than the conventional notions of ethnicity, culture, religion, and gender. The participatory direction of these studies allowed the participants to be free of the labels of conventional marginalization and reveal more complex notions of inclusivity and exclusivity among communities. In all these cases, drawing came as an excellent alternative to continuing the dialogue while relying less on verbal exchange (Literat).

When discussing drawing, I do not mean the outcome of it as an art form but as the action of making marks. Hickman notes that “although it has close associations with art activity, drawing in itself is not necessarily art” (316). What most people considers drawing—the thing that only ingenious or trained persons can accomplish—is perceptual drawing, whereby the drawer has aptly replicated the observed world on paper. Credit for observational drawing is due when the artist removes himself as much as possible for the best repli-

cation. Eileen Adams (2002) suggests two more arenas of drawing: drawing for communication and drawing for manipulation. Communicative drawings are images that follow a specific formula that has been agreed upon among a group of people, and are made to be shared with others. Adams lists charts and diagrams as examples of such practice. Manipulative drawings allow the practitioner to shape and understand abstract concepts and utilize the understanding to express new and innovative solutions to others. These acts of drawing for communication and the pursuit of understanding abstract thoughts, such as self-identity, and their recorded processes hold the same qualities of legitimate and valuable research data as do transcripts from an interview.

I also do not think that visual expression or communication is in any way superior to verbal exchanges. As poems and metaphorical adage suggest, verbal language does not always mean clarity. Instead, this study aims to accentuate the lack of access to drawing and how the lack of visual literacy has obscured its many benefits, so much so that non-specialists deem it too out of their skill sets. For those not adept in visual literacy, drawing could manifest as a form of learning a new language—a translation from words to images. Here, Berger notes that translation is not a bilateral form from one language to another but a triangular trichotomy between two languages and the intention that links the two in between. Learning to draw as a new form of language, therefore, can elicit a revisiting of the intention of the drawer.

METHOD

Despite the benefits of drawing for communication, it was not a natural pursuit for the participants, who all identified as “not artistic.” They expressed concern that their artistic skills were not up to par with my standards, which they assumed to be high since I was a creative arts researcher. Some were worried that their drawings would hinder the study’s outcome. Evidently, they were imagining the observational drawings and the possibility of “wrong” drawings. Rather than verbally explaining why drawing is a

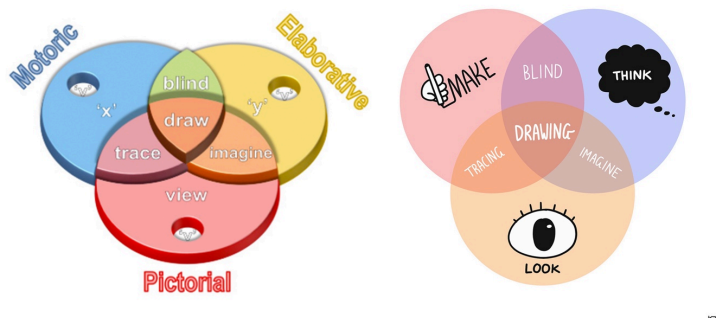


Figure 1: Motoric, Elaborative and Pictorial Formulas in Drawing. Left: diagram derived from Fernandes et al. Right: illustrated diagram inspired by the left. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

good option, the best method to convince them of the power of drawing was to encourage them to make drawings for themselves.

Three drawing activities were prepared. The inspiration behind these exercises came from the integrated-components model by Fernandes et al. (305), where he distinguishes three components of drawing and what combinations they yield. I re-drew the chart to share with the participants and help them understand what was expected of them (see fig. 1).

The first exercise is called the Alphabet Game. It was devised by the graphic facilitation company Scriberia. In it, the participants were asked to write an alphabet from their language and develop it into a pictorial symbol. For example, B would develop into a butterfly (see fig. 2). The exercise promoted looking and making/drawing to illuminate the relationship between language and drawing. If the participants could write, they could draw.

Then, the participants were asked to consider a series of prompts. The prompts do not enquire about their identities directly. They were chosen to evoke vivid visual memories (elaborative) of objects or lo-

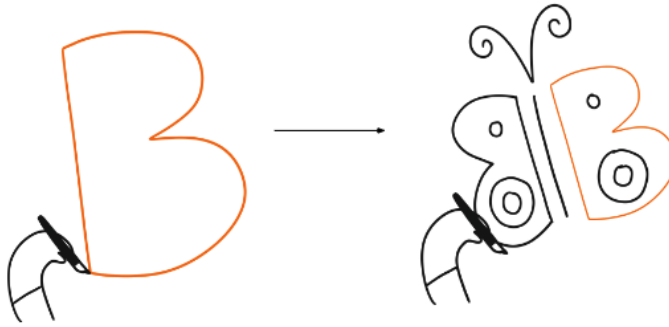


Figure 2: Example drawing of the Alphabet Game. The letter “B” can be drawn into a butterfly. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

cations to promote more metaphorical and symbolic thinking behind the definition of self-identities rather than social ranks or positions. They were designed into large worksheets that the participants could physically write and draw on (motoric) instead of presenting as a list of questions. This was to further encourage the participants to consider the workshops as fun activities. The prompts are listed in the illustration below (see fig. 3).

These workshops were done online amidst the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Although some scholars have voiced their concerns about the lack of intimacy in online interactions (Schiek and Ullrich; Vonderwell), it brought many benefits to this study. Geographical limitations aside, it allowed the participants to join the dialogue from their own homes and bypass any anxiety that arises from entering an unfamiliar place in a face-to-face environment (Mealer and Jones). In addition, the “pseudo-anonymity” (Wilson et al.) created by online interaction—with the freedom to hide their faces—allowed the participants to be more relaxed and worry less about the social expectations of communicating among South Koreans. For these particular participants, it was vital to evoke a dialogue about self-identities

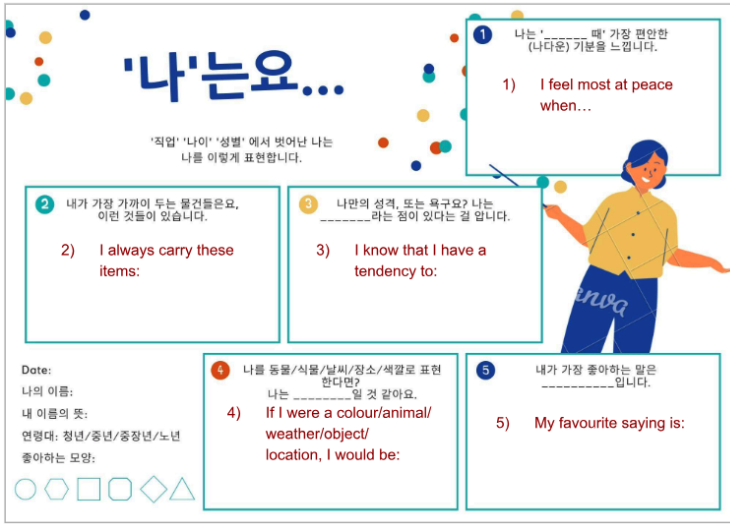


Figure 3: Sample image of the worksheet. Designed by the author. The prompts are scattered around the page for the participants to engage with the whole page. The questions were originally written in Korean, and it is translated into English here.

while refraining from any suggestions that would elicit a question-and-answer format.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants later reported that they enjoyed the sessions and shared aspects of themselves that they were never aware of. For example, one participant noted that she was only aware of how important body scent was for her once she shared that she always carried aroma oils with her. Another participant shared that she came to appreciate her passion for writing books that had been neglected in her daily life as a full-time worker and a mother. The participants were eager to combine their drawings into one cohesive symbol that represented their individuality. See the symbols collected in figures 4 and 5 below:

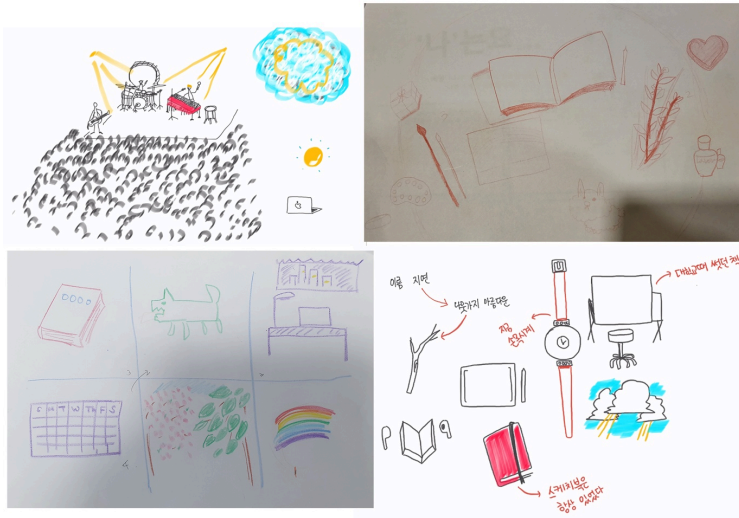


Figure 4: Participants' visual vocabularies during the workshops. Made with various materials, including colored pencils and digital media.

From the participants' responses, it can be observed that drawing and thinking about what to draw gave them new insights into their own sense of self, perhaps a new perspective of their intention during translation as noted by John Berger. Introducing the participants to the process of drawing their stories took considerable steps to ensure that they would not fear the idea of drawing and instead see the "residue of thought and action" (Taylor) that drawing provokes and the reward that follows it.

As the researcher, I entered the dialogue as the "authority figure." It was vital that I facilitated the sessions where the participants were encouraged to share, speak up, and refuse to answer if needed. This tension was quickly resolved when I entered the sessions as a fellow participant who was also ready to share her perspective with the group. I answered and drew pictures for these questions as everyone else would, and shared the personal stories behind the images. We were all under the same scrutiny and vulnerability with each other, "turning the academic from the 'participant observer' to the 'par-

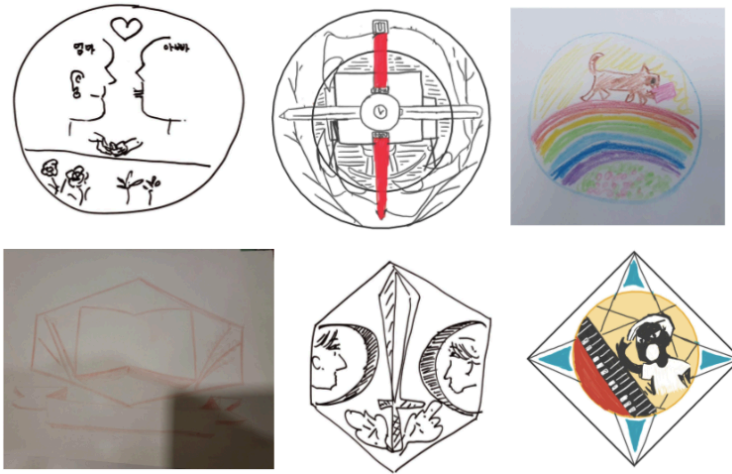


Figure 5: Resulting symbols of selected participants. Made using various media, including digital and coloured pencils.

ticipant observed” (Tedlock). In a participatory setting, all those involved are *participants* regardless of their background, including myself. I was a sharer and not a questioner, and the workshop became a venue for mutual benefit rather than a one-way stream. It was simple to resolve the issue of an authoritative figure: it was not to put myself in a position of authority. The willingness of the researcher to face the vulnerability of sharing intimate stories about myself and treating myself the same as the participants was vital in fostering empathy and trust among the group.

The project presented three challenges for future consideration. First, there was a considerable barrier between the participants and me about the notion of drawing. Although several mini-activities helped to convince the participants that drawing does not always entail detailed observation, it needs to be noted that the participants were informed about the nature of the practice-based study and were ready to be faced with creative activities. If the group were bigger or were unaware of the use of creative methods, the process of using drawing would have been significantly hindered. Drawing for data collection

is still in its infancy and presents plenty of room for development, so more experiences with other demographics or scales of participants would be beneficial.

Second, although drawing promoted deep thinking and expression without reliance on language, it also presented challenges that would not be so visible in verbal communication. Unlike verbal communication, in which all participants would coherently understand words and syntaxes, there was an inconsistency in the usage of visual symbols. For example, a participant had drawn a wolf to express her loneliness, whereas I interpreted wolves as communal animals. Cultural interpretations came into play as well, such as a pine tree to symbolize patience. The facilitator of these drawings would need to be fluent in the use of symbols in their particular participant group. Otherwise, there is a risk of misunderstanding or disagreement with the meaning behind the symbols. These challenges highlight the importance of open communication and non-hierarchical dialogue to clearly establish new conventions with the group.

From the university's ethics committee's point of view, drawing was not seen as a considerable potential harm in qualitative research. The potential of drawing in triggering emotional distress was given the same protocols as verbal qualitative interviews, such as suspending the conversation and avoiding specific keywords. There is no suitable data to measure the potential sensitivity and harm of drawing, and there is certainly very little risk in sharing drawings as it is unlikely for anyone to be able to link a drawing to a specific individual. Simultaneously, however, these drawings were seen as very intimate and honest illustrations of the participants' sense of self. Further enquiry and discussion around the ethical guidance and protocols to support creative arts research would be incredibly beneficial.

Lastly, no participant wanted to take credit for the images they had created. The participants thought that since I created the initial prompts, I would be the main proprietor of the images. I perceived the images as solely the participants' since they drew the prompts as they saw fit to their identities. Franziska Walther notes that the question of authorship in artists is often linked to their social hierarchy,

where being a singular author is somehow more noteworthy than being a co-author within a body. Similar to the solo publication of journal articles as a source of academic legitimacy for junior researchers in academia, being able to produce work that is conceived and formulated by a single person may be perceived as a higher stance for image makers. The participants' refusal to take credit, even as collaborators, may have stemmed from the recurring reminder that they were recruited to partake in my research using a method that I devised. Even though the participatory drawing process was designed to position the researcher and the participants within a "horizontal relationship" (Pereira and Rappaport 56) where every person in the development strives towards creating new knowledge, it is clear that the participants did not feel that they were on a level playing field. For future workshops that may involve a larger group of people, more careful considerations of the participants' contribution and empowerment as collaborators would benefit the pursuit of collaboration. New approaches could include, for example, implementing objects to promote storytelling (Bille) as well as drawing, and allowing the participants to decide how to resolve the research enquiry rather than imposing a predetermined set of methods.

CONCLUSION

The practice-based research project was a pilot case study to highlight the power of practice and performing activities to arrive at new knowledge. Drawing was introduced as a method to fill in the gaps that traditional qualitative research methods left when interacting with South Korean participants. Due to cultural and linguistic challenges, these participants would not be interested in participating in verbal-only or hierarchical forms of data collection. Drawing afforded more fun and subtle elicitation of sharing personal aspects of themselves that allowed them to discover new perspectives that they did not previously recognize.

Sharing drawings as a democratic communication tool does not hinder the integrity of the artist; in fact, it deepens the respect of the public. Allowing art forms to influence and benefit the public di-

rectly is a great way to demonstrate the importance of creative arts practices within society. Fine art critics sometimes assign virtue to art based on its lack of commercial purpose. Theorist Barthélémy Schwartz posits that artists “would not merit the title of auteur until they were prepared to free themselves from dependency on the marketplace,” and philosopher Theodor Adorno claims that art must “be free from commercial pressures” to “provide a critical perspective on society; its goal should be liberation from the social, economic and political realities” (Davies). However, there is a clear distinction between being free from commercial pressure and being oblivious to societal needs in favor of “self-referential” (Rohr) amusement. Regarding an autonomous person’s work to be more “artistic” than the work that is made from communities serves as another example of independence over interdependence, intellectual over manual, and theoretical over empirical.

This was one example of how the process of drawing can serve research as an alternative, inclusive, and vital tool in gaining a deeper understanding of areas underrepresented by traditional research methods. As the methodology is developed and adapted, it is hoped that there will be less discussion about whether creative practice is a legitimate form of research and more discussion about how impactful it is in creating new knowledge.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Motoric, Elaborative and Pictorial Formulas in Drawing. Left: diagram derived from Fernandes et al. Right: illustrated diagram inspired by the left. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

Figure 2: Example drawing of the Alphabet Game. The letter 'B' can be drawn into a butterfly. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

Figure 3: Sample image of the worksheet. Designed by the author. The prompts are scattered around the page for the participants to engage with the whole page. The questions were originally written in Korean, and it is translated into English here.

Figure 4: Participants' visual vocabularies during the workshops. Made with various materials, including colored pencils and digital media.

Figure 5: Resulting symbols of selected participants. Made using various media, including digital and coloured pencils.

FACILITATING SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE TAKING IN CLASS THROUGH DISCURSIVE GAME DESIGN

JASPER VAN VUGHT
STEFAN WERNING

This paper proposes and assesses a replicable game (co)design technique to encourage social perspective taking in the higher education classroom. Fully embracing the potential of research creation approaches, this discursive game design methodology approaches games as mediators of knowledge, emphasising the process of (re)creating, modifying, and comparing different game iterations. The paper reports on two classroom exercises that draw inspiration from *Dungeons & Dragons* and the *Checkered Game of Life* to foster perspective taking across different “learner personas” and different world views. Finally, this paper discusses how notating game modifications affords continuous game-based dialogue across student generations.

Cet article propose et évalue une technique de co-conception de jeu reproductible pour encourager la prise de perspective sociale dans les salles de classe de l’enseignement supérieur. En embrassant pleinement le potentiel des approches de recherche-création, cette méthodologie de conception de jeux discursifs aborde les jeux comme des médiateurs du savoir, en mettant l’accent sur le processus de (re)création, de modification et de comparaison des différentes itérations du jeu. L’article rapporte deux exercices en classe inspirés de *Dungeons & Dragons* et du *Checkered Game of Life*, visant à favoriser la prise de perspective entre différentes “personas d’apprenants” et différentes visions du monde. Enfin, cet article examine comment la documentation des modifications du jeu facilite un dialogue continu, fondé sur le jeu, entre les différentes générations d’étudiants.

INTRODUCTION

Despite their increasing prominence as a teaching tool, even serious games often become “masters of the player” (Gadamer 1989), forcing learners into a mould where only certain playing behaviours are valid and certain perspectives are attended to. Due to their increasing technical sophistication, many learners still inherently view games as products rather than a language to express and critique different perspectives. In contrast, making games can help unlock the discursive potential of the medium (Werning and van Vught 2021, Glas et al. 2021).

As a form of research-creation, game design has been used to explore the critical and communicative potential of the medium (Loring-Albright 2015; Odendaal and Zavala 2018), imagine more inclusive (socio-technological) futures (Odendaal and Zavala 2024), and design for social innovation (Bayrak 2019). In the classroom, making games has found popularity in the wake of the constructionist movement in education (Kafai and Burke 2015), having shown effectiveness in learning computational thinking (Werner, Campe, and Denner 2014), learning about specific content addressed in a game (e.g., math games, see Ke 2014), increasing collaboration skills (through a competitive spirit) (Smith and Bowers 2016), sharing indigenous culture (Kultima and Laiti 2019), and supporting empathy (Schrier et al. 2021). However, because all these approaches still focus on the creation of a single, and often finished, product, which comes with the challenge of needing to account for actual players and the painstakingly long process of fleshing-out and fine-tuning ideas in production, they still fall into the trap of resigning to (the communicative potential of) a single model (what Turkle (1997) calls “simulation resignation”).

More fully embracing the potential of practice-based approaches to research and education, this paper explores a game design methodology that distinguishes itself by never actually finishing a game but instead creating, modifying, and comparing small playable “vignettes.” Because of this, the approach emphasizes process over product to, as Nelson puts it, “discover ‘what works’ or what invites

critical insights through a dialogic engagement” with the medium (2006, 109). As such, our understanding of games shifts from an object of study to a mediator of, or tool for, knowledge, skill, and attitude acquisition. Put differently, our approach forces a continued reflection on the (flaws in) modeling and mediatizing real-world situations in our research and in the classroom.

This paper further explores this, by now tried and tested, methodological framework we call “discursive game (co)design” (Glas, et al., 2021; Werning 2020; Werning and van Vught 2021) for the purpose of social perspective taking (Gehlbach and Mu 2023) in higher education classrooms. We explore perspective taking across different world views (Kolto-Rivera 2004) and “learning personas” (Cole, Werning and Maragliano 2020) via two exercises that draw inspiration from *Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)* and Milton Bradley’s *The Checkered Game of Life (TCGOL)*. As a proof-of-concept, we report on our design experiences to explore the rationale and feasibility of using game design to promote taking different (competing or complementary) perspectives and show how notating different game modifications affords establishing a continuous game-based “dialogue” across student generations.

PERSPECTIVE TAKING IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOM

Social perspective taking (SPT), the process of “discerning the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of one or more targets”¹ (Gehlbach and Mu 2023, 283), is generally accepted as a central process in establishing, shaping, and maintaining a wide range of different types of social relationships (e.g., marriages, coworkers, in-group/out-group). And with ideological and affective polarization increasing in politics and society (Kleinfeld 2023), social perspective taking becomes increasingly important in cueing bilateral understandings in spite of cultural, religious, and political differences.

However, SPT often does not occur automatically but requires conscious cognitive and emotional effort. As Gehlbach and Mu (2023) explain, perspective taking is a complex aptitude, encompassing both a motivational component and a performance component (devising

and executing strategies) with different factors inhibiting or encouraging the process at these different levels. While this can be discouraging on the one hand, it also offers opportunities for educators who wish to broaden the scope of their education beyond the qualification of knowledge and skills into domains of socialization and subjectification (see Biesta 2020). As Parra et al. (2020) argue, on the “playground” of the classroom political friction can (and should) be made educational to “learn democracy” whereby antagonisms inherent to human relations (due to diversity and plurality) are experienced and practiced to turn them into more fruitful “agonisms” (Mouffe 2005).

Practicing SPT as a skill in higher education classrooms is by no means a simple feat, if only for the fact that it can exist in a wide range of different ways. For one, SPT can occur on a broad continuum between the more arbitrary process of trying to discern a player’s motivation or strategies for actions when designing a game (Dishon and Kafai 2020) to the much more consequential process of trying to relate to others in spite of socio-cultural differences. Furthermore, SPT can occur through direct interaction or mere observation; with the subject being present or absent; with a subject in the moment, the past or the future; with a real or fictional subject; and with a single or multiple subjects (Gehlbach and Mu 2023, 284). And finally, SPT, especially in vernacular use, is often conflated or confused with other concepts or constructs like empathy, social and emotional intelligence, and theory of mind.

Therefore, when exploring game design as a methodology for promoting SPT, the concept requires some clear scaffolding. Here, we make use of the four phases that Gehlbach and Mu (2023) identify when trying to discern what actually happens when someone engages in perspective taking. These phases offer clear and useful guidelines for our design exercises because they nicely align with different steps in the iterative process of game design without negating the complexity of the SPT process. These four phases are as follows:

1. Becoming consciously aware of a subject;
2. Becoming motivated to try and take on the subject's perspective by weighing how beneficial it will be relative to the cognitive and emotional effort required;
3. Employing strategies to gather information about the subject and facilitate inferences about what the subject could be thinking or feeling;
4. Evaluating how accurate the SPT attempt is on the basis of feedback provided directly or indirectly by the subject. (Gehlbach and Mu 2023).

These four phases have come to inspire and structure the two game design exercises we report on below, and help to understand at what level the SPT process is potentially encouraged (or inhibited).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF RESEARCH-CREATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Over the past two decades or so, there has been a slow but steady increase in the interest in research-creation initiatives in the field of media and (the performing) arts (see Allegue et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2009; Nelson 2013). Especially in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia there are increasing research-creation opportunities in terms of PhD trajectories (Ellis, et al. 2018; Midgelow et al. 2019), funding (Boyle 2012; Roms 2010), and publication venues (*Journal for Artistic Research*, *Journal of Embodied Research*). However, it seems that this increased interest in research-creation has not yet overflowed into the domain of (undergraduate) education, especially here in the Netherlands.

The reasons for this may be manifold. Practically speaking, the time-consuming nature of many research creation initiatives may keep educators from implementing them in their courses. Institutionally speaking, the differentiation from vocational universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands may implicitly or explicitly keep research universities from focusing on the development of practical

skills. And epistemically speaking, the implementation of research-creation in the curriculum challenges many of the established ideas of what knowledge is and how it is acquired and transferred.

However, despite these challenges, we are still pursuing research-creation in our undergraduate programme *Media and Culture*² at Utrecht University for the distinct opportunities it offers the media and culture student. We'll list two of these opportunities here to further contextualize the (ambitions of) the project we report on in this paper.³

First of all, we see research-creation in the classroom as a way for students to expose and challenge media conventions and habitualized perspectives of how media work and/or model the real. Here, we see opportunities for research creation to encourage a higher order of learning wherein students move beyond an application of an existing body of knowledge into a domain of invention where more conventional artistic practice and habitualized ways of knowing are defamiliarized. Or, as Bogost et al. argue in their "Georgia Tech approach to game research" (2005), "new knowledge [is created] through the discipline of making things."

Secondly, as outlined in the introduction, research-creation broadens the students' understanding of media from an object of study to a mediator of knowledge acquisition and distribution. Here, making media (and games specifically) provides students with a new modality for exploring different types of relations in (socio-cultural) systems and datasets. Werning (2020) for instance argues how our access to data is always mediatized, and that the different sensory modalities in which the data exist (through processes of visualization, sonification, physicalization (Bader et al. 2018), or, as Werning proposes, translation into games) all offer distinct opportunities and challenges for gaining insights into the dataset. Or, put differently, having students create and compare different mediatizations of (data from) the world around us encourages both knowledge of the different media and what is mediated.

DISCURSIVE GAME DESIGN AS METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

For the practice-based teaching interventions outlined below we follow the Discursive Game Design framework (DGD). Compared to previous iterations of the framework (for a more detailed breakdown see e.g. Werning and van Vught 2021), this article a) specifically considers its suitability to foster social perspective taking and also b) proposes a system to notate, archive, and compare game modifications. Based on an evaluation of existing notation systems for gameplay, this system—if for example applied over multiple iterations of a course—is essential to retrace game-based discourses and incentivize perspective taking across student generation as well as empathizing with peers beyond the participants’ own cohort.

Adapting discursive game design to facilitate SPT

Yasmin Kafai and Quinn Burke’s notion of constructionist gaming, originally formulated in 2015, already acknowledges that game-making may not only allow for acquiring and practicing technical skills but also facilitates identity formation and performance as well as the capacity to collaborate. For the case at hand, a more recent iteration of the concept, explicitly tailored to “cultivat[e] perspective-taking” (Dishon and Kafai 2020, 3), is of particular relevance. Accordingly, learner-created games (or, in our case, modifications of existing games) are conceptualized as “objects-to-think-with” (3), a term reminiscent of Sherry Turkle’s (2011) notion of “evocative objects” as the titular “things we think with.” While the connection remains implicit in the text, it is productive as Turkle reminds us that evocative objects engage us both cognitively and emotionally, for example by personalizing them or simply through repeated use. Similarly, modifying a game—possibly one that learners are familiar with, such as *D&D*—both personalizes the original game-as-object and enables thinking through the modification through repeated tinkering and playtesting. Dishon and Kafai’s findings suggest potential for SPT, indicating a perception among younger learners of “the game as a product to be used by others,” but also a “tension between participants’ focus on their own experiences and their attentiveness to players’ perspectives” (9). Therefore, it is important to “explicitly

scaffold engagement in PT” (9); while we co-design familiar games and work with adult students rather than children, this remains an important consideration.

Second, the work of Schrier et al. (2021) on running game jams in Nigeria “to support empathy and compassion” (60) provides valuable inspiration. Intercultural perspective taking is not a specific focus of the article at hand, but Schrier et al. show that both concepts like empathy and their socio-cultural preconditions are heavily dependent on cultural contexts. Their goals are “perspective-taking, identity exploration, and connection to others through the process of design” (61) with participants aged 12-20. While the two games created during the game jam are not discussed in detail, both seem to thematize situations of displacement and loss clearly specific to the region, focalized through a protagonist in a similar position to the participants.

Similarly, Annakaisa Kultima and Outi Laiti’s (2019) work on game jams with indigenous Sami communities provides anecdotal evidence of exploring different perspectives and identities—though within one cultural group—through game-making. For example, the text emphasizes the affective qualities of “perspective work,” as participants describe “reflecting their own thoughts and perspectives during this jam [...] as an empowering experience” (14).

A third and final inspiration is the work of Odendaal and Zavala Barreda (2024) on “participatory board game design” (292), which builds on the authors’ earlier (2018) work on board game design to promote algorithmic literacy and critical thinking about emerging technologies. While our source material is also analogue games—a board game and tabletop RPG respectively—the materiality of board games is of lesser concern for the case at hand. The process Odendaal and Zavala describe leads to a finished game as its product. It is split up into four consecutive workshops in which different groups (with a few overlapping members) co-design the game in different phases by using the results of the previous group(s) as material. The first group designs a “playworld,” the second the “core mechanics” situated in that scenario, the third group opportunities for “subversive play” based on the previous group’s rulebook, and the fourth group

adds the “game content” (295). The authors argue that this participatory structure, which appears inspired by techniques like the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) used by surrealist artists and experimental literature workshops like the Oulipo, enables “inclusivity and polyvocality” (308) in ways that traditional (particularly commercial) design workflows do not afford. Especially the latter is a useful concept that, albeit not explicitly defined by Odendaal and Zavala, arguably both requires and practices perspective taking, identifying with the previous groups’ design work and potential motivations.

In contrast to the aforementioned method texts, the two techniques within the DGD framework outlined in this article foreground the co-creation—as defined by Cizek and Uricchio (2022)—of existing games and game systems rather than creating new games. Even though our material is analogue games, which are usually not discussed in these terms, the process can be understood as a form of “modding” (e.g. Werning 2018), and distinct versions of the two source games (as well as subsequent modifications) will be referenced as “mods” below.

In our classrooms, this focus on “modding” existing games is not just important because it offers students a basic structure to work from and discursively engage with. It is also important because students in our courses usually have little game literacy to draw on, with the most formative experiences often dating back to games played during childhood. To get them on their way, it therefore helps to preemptively discuss artistic reappropriations of well-known games and try to distill replicable patterns of modification. For example, Golboo Amani’s *Unsettling Settlers: Intervention* (2018) works as an “expansion” to the iconic *Catan* board game that confronts colonial themes and mindsets by splitting players into settlers and “allies.” Essentially a reworked version of the original game, *Unsettling Settlers* is characteristically framed as a “play-based and discursive event” since the revised gameplay affords space to question the game’s system. Similarly, *The Social Justice Game* reimagines the equally iconic *Monopoly* as an asymmetrical game with unequal roles and starting conditions.⁴ As such, *The Social Justice Game*, and similarly modified ver-

sions of *Monopoly* (see Ender 2021) allow for players to experience how social class inequality is aggravated in a system that assumes a level socio-economic playing field. So, comparing different co-design directions and usage contexts can help establish a shared vocabulary to ease less avid players into the methodology.

Notating discursive game design

Following the principles of DGD, which prioritize sequences of design and redesign as ongoing critical discourse over any specific modification-as-text, we specifically reflect on how to notate these inherently unfinished examples to make the perspectives expressed within re-traceable and accessible to ‘reenactment’ via playtesting or further experimentation.

After a period of conceptual as well as practical experimentation in the mid-2000s, research on notation systems for game design is still scarce. Early examples inventively utilized imported metaphors such as the “chemistry of game design,” petri nets, or object-oriented programming,⁵ but remained difficult to implement since they did not scale well beyond simple game situations. The current popularity of modeling tools using repeated random sampling like Joris Dormans’ *Machinations* (e.g. Skinner and Niekerk 2017), which has become a de facto standard through its adoption by major game (as well as non-game) companies, implicitly shifts the focus towards balancing, that is, tweaking the mathematical parameters of a game system.

Balancing is certainly relevant from a rhetorical perspective, as when deliberately unbalancing a game, evidenced by (well-intended yet flawed) games such as *Ms. Monopoly* (2019), can communicate distinct perspectives and worldviews without changing any rules. However, the system does not lend itself to visualizing major changes to a game’s design, for example from a competitive to a cooperative or from a multiplayer to a single-player game. Instead, the pragmatic notation system we propose draws on the notion of core “loops” (Sicart 2015), that is, how the game unfolds in time, via a core game-play loop, potentially with subsequent and/or nested subloops representing sequences of supporting choices/actions.

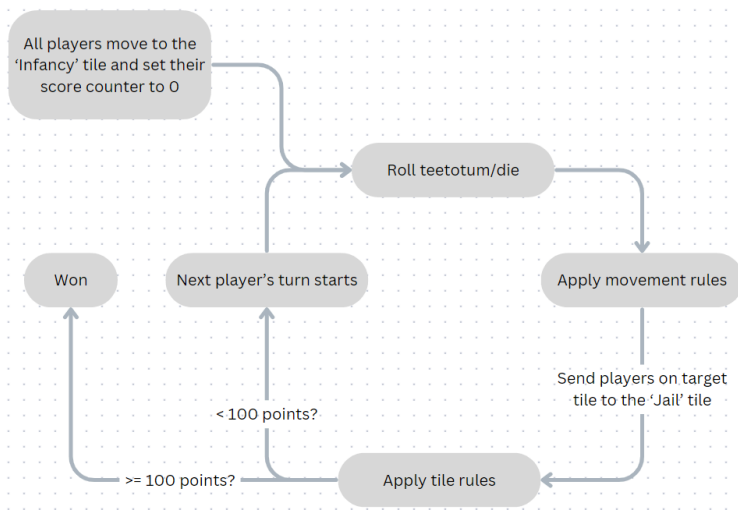


Figure 1: The core gameplay loop for a player of TCGOL as a flowchart in Canva.

These loops are not mimetic representations but necessarily represent personal choices, for example regarding the level of granularity with which the diagram represents in-game actions or the choice of labels for loop nodes. Moreover, loops are particularly easy to apply to analogue games as in our case studies because they are (at least partially) turn-based but are equally applicable to real-time games. In this case, it is useful to distinguish the timescale level that a loop represents, for example between moment-to-moment action possibilities (as in *TCGOL*) or higher-level decisions⁶ in games with multiple interlocking systems (e.g. a strategy game involving economic management and technology upgrades as supporting systems).

One option would be to use a visual concept mapping tool like *Visual Understanding Environment* (VUE), or the Quickflow feature in *Canva*, which, even in the free version, additionally affords simultaneous collaborative editing.⁷ Visualizing loops can especially help less experienced players/designers imagine emergent gameplay, and specifically *Canva* has proven to be useful because its characteristic simul-

taneous editing fits the premise of collaborative game design as a discursive and performative process.

Due to the focus on comparing perspectives and the long-term plan of eventually archiving and comparing large amounts of modifications over multiple years, a simple text-based notation style will be proposed for this study. Similar to the script used in the authoring tool *Twine*, the notation system aims for “relatively seamless connections between natural and cybernetic language” (Salter and Moulthrop 2021, 354). Thus, it should be easily readable but simultaneously incentivize a certain level of formalization, that is, it should teach participants to think about different object and action types or the specific order in which checks are performed during a player’s turn, all aspects which might otherwise easily be overlooked.

The syntax is inspired by simple scripting concepts, including sub-routines like RULES as in procedural programming languages such as BASIC, differentiation between functions and parameters (e.g. MAINLOOP and Player/ALL) or predefined instance keywords like OTHER⁸ in rules that describe interactions between players (in this case referring to the player the currently active player currently engages with). For now, the proposed syntax is only a suggestion that needs to be optimized through repeated use. This approach affords both the easy manipulability and shareability of text, e.g. via existing platforms like Github Gist,⁹ but also other text-based comparison features, such as visualizing changes between two versions of a design at a glance, or conducting semi-automated analyses of a larger corpus of notations using applications like Voyant Tools. As the notation only describes rules, it needs to be accompanied by visual materials referenced in the “script,” for example, in the case of *TCGOL* mods, custom board tiles or an additional points track. As indicated above, existing notation approaches like Monte Carlo simulations or petri nets (Muratet, Carron and Yessad 2022) tend to quickly escalate in complexity; in comparison, the scalability of this approach needs to be further explored. Notation systems usually, implicitly or explicitly, claim generalizability but, also as suggested above, are optimized for specific purposes, which normally focus

on optimizing balancing or, more recently, player retention and monetization.¹⁰ In comparison, higher-level approaches like ours, which eschew numerical balancing, are more suitable for the purpose of game-making for perspective-taking and empathetic discourse.

CASE STUDY: REPURPOSING THE CHECKERED GAME OF LIFE TO RETHINK AND RENEGOTIATE WORLDVIEWS AND VALUES

The *Checkered Game of Life* (TCGOL) is a mid-19th century American board game designed and published by Milton Bradley, which, while not widely known today, directly inspired the still popular *Game of Life* (1960). Moreover, it introduced several innovations in the much older genre of “morality games” such as “The Mansion of Happiness” (Whitehill 2015), which aimed to inform contemporary players about leading a good life and ultimately reaching “heaven” (67). While these games were almost completely luck-based, TCGOL incorporated limited luck mitigation, for example by avoiding high-risk areas of the board. Moreover, using a chess board as design metaphor instead of the traditional single path common in morality games afforded more variable and interesting “life stories” to unfold during gameplay.

This first case study involves playtesting and modifying TCGOL to express and compare different perspectives on the elusive notion of “leading a good life,” which touches upon but is not limited to increasingly frequent discussions about happiness, also in our classrooms. Differences in perspectives on the topic include diverging perceptions of happiness across cultures and age groups but also between goals like affluence and personal fulfillment (Waldinger and Schulz 2023). The observations and sample designs discussed here are derived primarily from a two-hour workshop conducted annually in a research master course titled “Play, Perform, Participate” at Utrecht University from 2019 onwards. The course usually comprises 10-15 participants; for the purpose of social perspective taking, it is important to note that the group is very heterogeneous in terms of the cultural and professional backgrounds of students, including previous experience from various humanities and social science dis-



Figure 2: The game board and original box cover of TCGOL; see https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_321475.

ciplines and also media design fields. On the other hand, participants have predominantly (between 70% and 90%) identified as female.

A complete overview of the game rules, as offered by Burns (1978) in his close reading of *TCGOL*, is beyond the scope of this article. In a nutshell, the goal is to move across the board (see fig. 2), collect points, and eventually try to obtain 100 points, usually—but not necessarily—by reaching the upper-right corner of the board evocatively titled “happy old age.” For the purpose of social perspective taking, using an old and unfamiliar game has certain advantages. For example, Mattlin (2018) uses a similarly outdated game, *Risk* (1959), to teach international relations, modifying the game together with students to fit this purpose. That *Risk* drastically diverges from contemporary interpretations of geopolitics can be an advantage in this context because its crude procedural representation facilitates critical discussions about where it fails as an accurate model and how its comparatively basic rule system could be tweaked to implement different, more nuanced perspectives on contemporary international relations. The same applies to the representations of a “good life” in *TCGOL*; according to Burns (1978), life is “symbolically portrayed [as] a very individualistic, competitive, anti-social adventure

[in which] encounters with others are to be avoided unless they are self controlled” (61). Thus, players can observe how the game nudges them to take this perspective and offers multiple avenues for exploring alternative worldviews.

While perspectives can be relatively specific and localized, over time they coalesce into more or less stable worldviews, a concept that from a psychological perspective “has implications for theories of personality, cognition, education, and intervention” but has also been “lacking a comprehensive model or formal theory” (Koltko-Rivera 2004, 3). Synthesizing previous definitions, Koltko-Rivera argues that “a worldview defines what can be known or done in the world, and how it can be known or done,” as well as sets of values determining “what objectives, behaviors, and relationships are desirable or undesirable” (4). They are similar to schemas but operate on abstract and/or hypothetical cases and ideas rather than everyday experience and are culturally transmitted, which makes them more rigid but also intensifies the consequences of a worldview being “disconfirm[ed]” (26). While a consensual definition has still not formed in the 20 years since Koltko-Rivera’s influential article, working definitions have emerged within particular fields. Dominant political worldviews include the “traditional, modern, postmodern, and integrative” (De Witt et al. 2016), and are differentiated by desired political systems and their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Common philosophical worldviews, in turn, are “positivist (or post-positivist), constructivist (or interpretivist), advocacy/participatory, and pragmatist,” focusing on modes of knowledge creation and validation (Petersen and Gencel 2013, 1).

While the psychological complications of worldviews were of lesser concern for this pilot study, the spectrum from (more localized) perspectives to fully formed worldviews as well as archetypal worldviews as inspirations provides valuable orientation for students to experiment with SPT using game (co-)design in the classroom. Below, we briefly outline the workflow and discuss recurring patterns in student-created mods.

In a first short playtesting round of *TCGOL*, participants are encouraged to observe and compare different tactics, explore the entire game board and pay specific attention to the spectrum of life stories created through gameplay within their group. Playing a complete round is vital to properly assess the pacing and biases in the core game's design. Yet, for a shorter session or a second round of playtesting, the game can be played with a lower point target (e.g. 60 points) or with a randomized starting configuration. In a plenary discussion, observations are collected and grouped according to themes; recurring themes include, for example, representations of wealth, education, personal values, interactions with others, and agency vs. randomness/fate. Participants are encouraged to use the updated MDA framework (Junior and Silva 2021), which distinguishes between mechanics (core, extra, and implied), dynamics (simple and complex), and aesthetics, to interpret their game experiences and organize their observations. For example, an accumulation of "dangerous" and unproductive tiles in the lower-right corner of the board (mechanics) leads to players usually trying to avoid that area (dynamics), and interpret the content of the tiles as part of a somewhat homogenous perspective on "bad life choices," which allegedly co-occur and compound each other in some people's lives.

We discuss whether these patterns can and should be interpreted as part of more or less consistent perspectives or even a worldview (Koltko-Rivera 2004). While the game, from a contemporary standpoint, reflect a "traditional" worldview and value system, these interpretations are necessarily inconsistent. Most participants voice their unease about the prescriptive nature of defining a "good life." Yet, some point out an alleged "white" perspective (e.g. as poverty and disgrace in infancy have little effect on the game's outcome) and/or a male bias (as e.g. matrimony has no effect on the game but is close to, and thus procedurally associated with, wealth). Others have sensed a culturally distinct, in this case American and/or Puritan perspective, exemplified through the "congress" tile but also the symmetrical starting conditions, which imply equal chances at success and happiness in life. Furthermore, participants noted, similar to Burns (1978), how, despite its meritocratic premise of needing to "earn" happy old

age, the game incentivizes temporarily cooperating against the leading player at the time; that is, “the higher a player’s relative point count, the more likely is he to be the target” (56). On a related note, *TCGOL* is the direct predecessor of the still actively sold and played *Game of Life* (1960-present), which would also lend itself as source material for the exercise at hand. Yet, as Burns aptly describes the 1960 version as “reinforcing middle-class values” and being “reflective of the consumption-oriented society of the Eisenhower era” (82), we felt that it might limit the students’ understanding of perspectives too much to the neoliberalism/anticapitalism dichotomy for a first pilot study.

In a second step, participants are asked to individually think of one small change and/or addition they would apply to the game, based on their personal views on leading a good life; in smaller groups like ours and with enough time, multiple suggested changes can also be solicited as long as they are clearly idiosyncratic, for example, those based on personal real-life experience. Moreover, participants are asked to intuit whether and how these changes would affect the dynamics or even aesthetics (see above) of the game. While our students usually indicate being accustomed to playing games in educational contexts, and are familiar with how different playing styles merge with potential learner personas (Cole et al. 2021), asking them to instead change and/or add rules can unsettle these roles and create opportunities for new learner personas to emerge. The suggested tweaks are collectively visualized, for example in a Canva or Google Slides document, to identify potential common themes and outline different perspectives within the group. In a third step, participants form groups, either randomly or based on shared themes emerging from the individual suggestions, to implement a more complete perspective consisting of interlocking rule changes/additions, which may also include additional components like dice, point tracks, board tiles, or cards. With sufficient time, these mods should be playtested or mock-playtested by the group itself to compare how the new gameplay experiences compare to the corresponding perspective in the original game. In a fourth and final step, the participant groups are asked to playtest and re-imagine the perspective expressed in

a different group's design. This step is vital both for the discursive game design framework—as it represents a response not just to the original game but to another, earlier response—and for the notion of perspective taking (Gehlbach and Mu 2023), as it requires engaging with the thoughts, affects, and motivations of their peers. The re-imagined mods can critique (i.e. alter or remove) procedural elements of the original perspective but also affirm them, for example by adding further nuances and integrating the changes more deeply into the existing game rules. The performative quality of social perspective taking hereby manifests itself at three moments: a) the co-design process with the group, b) playtesting the co-designed perspective, and c) receiving feedback on one's previous perspective through the lens of another group's co-design.

Two important aspects that have repeatedly surfaced across all phases and appear conducive to effective SPT were ambiguity and humour. Several aspects in *TCGOL* are, inadvertently or not, left ambiguous, such as the historical meanings of the “fat office” tile or the reasons for including labeled tiles like “truth” or “fame” without any point value or other discernible function. These ambiguities have led to insightful discussions, both on potential historical interpretations as well as on how we would think about these topics today. Another example that will be unpacked a bit further below are the blank tiles in the game that have no semantics or functionality whatsoever. Humour derived first and foremost from the incongruity between the historical game, which in many ways is clearly a product of its time, and contemporary experiences. Moreover, the necessary abstractions of the game rules, which may lead to unintended interpretations, afford defamiliarization and humour, for example as players independently from each other tried to stay away from a political career (like the “congress” tile) because in the game that would take them further away from “happy old age.” Humour affords interpretive flexibility and critical distance from the self (see Werning and van Vught 2021), which can create the motivation to engage with other perspectives (Gehlbach and Mu 2023) and can make especially personal or controversial perspectives more easily discussable. Jensen (2018) describes these functions as “interactional affordances” within so-

cial situations. Moreover, the premise that the mod students create is “just a game” repeatedly encouraged participants—without this explicitly being part of the assignment—to address deeply personal issues with their proposed changes, such as anxieties stemming from social media use, loneliness, or exhaustion due to constantly inflated expectations.

To conclude, we’d like to briefly address several recurring patterns from this case study that hint at differences in perspectives participants explored with their own creations. For example, several students, across multiple cohorts, suggested implementing asymmetrical starting conditions into the game to critique the “rags-to-riches” stories that the original game would often produce. Many of our students are sensitized to systemic inequalities based on criteria such as race, class, or gender, but especially recent cohorts repeatedly draw on personal experience as part of the so-called “bad luck generation,”¹¹ a term used by and for those who studied between 2015 and 2022, primarily under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another common high-level change was trying to implement positive player interactions (in which player actions automatically or selectively benefit their opponents) or even to turn the originally competitive game into a cooperative game. Most students agree that—at least in contemporary postindustrial societies that afford safety and acceptable baseline living standards to most of their members—interaction with others would be considered necessary for a “good life” rather than a threat.

Participants also repeatedly attempted to empathize with the imagined historical perspective, for example how the game may have been experienced by families in the 19th century. This might be a particularly fruitful exercise in a course on the history of modernity or similar topics, but for our purpose it was paramount to acknowledge the incomparably different playing contexts, effectively recognizing the limitations of SPT and the historical situatedness of perspectives. Thus, the goal was not a naive re-enactment of historical play experience but enabling a self-reflective discussion on potential perspectives of 19th century players, for example based on the style and

contents of Milton Bradley’s original manual¹² or literature providing historical context (Whitehill 2015).

Finally, semanticizing the “empty” tiles in *TCGOL* gradually emerged as particularly productive for SPT. While commonly interpreted as symbolizing idleness, boredom, and serendipity in life, these tiles sparked two prevalent opposing perspectives: many participants appreciated them as “downtime” that is important particularly because it is (and should remain) not “productive,” while others hypothesized that they could provide a “bonus” (e.g. additional movement options) as boredom can allegedly spark creativity. The second interpretation proved overall less popular—occasionally being critiqued as a neoliberal appropriation of idleness—but both are equally important for the SPT process.

CASE STUDY: REPURPOSING D&D TO SHARE PERSPECTIVES BETWEEN LEARNER PERSONAS IN THE CLASSROOM

*D*ungeons & Dragons (*D&D*) (1974) is generally considered to be the first (and most likely the most famous) example of a tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) (White et al. 2018). In *D&D*, players perform the roles of characters in a fantasy world (usually including some sort of underground maze or dungeon) that is devised by a so-called game master (GM). As a collaborative game, players set out on an adventure in the company of other players (a “party”) with their characters ideally having some complementary abilities to overcome the challenges they will inevitably face. This adventure usually plays out over a number of different play sessions (typically taking up a few hours) which together make up a “campaign.”

At its core, the game includes storytelling mechanics (by both GM and the players), dice rolling (often during character creation and combat), and a leveling mechanic with characters increasing capabilities by earning experience points. However, the constituting elements of *D&D* are also difficult to pin down because the game has seen a large number of different editions over the years with their own player and GM guides, and players and GMs also operate with

some degree of freedom in devising the game's rules, characters, setting, and adventure. As such, *D&D* might be better viewed as a platform for creating games rather than a game itself. Or, as Lalone (2019) argues in taking this metaphor to the extreme, "D&D's system is its programming language, the GM is its processor, [...] the players and GM together work as its memory [...] [and] the campaign - or connected game sessions - are what we would refer to as software running on a platform." Approaching *D&D* as a platform turns it into useful scaffolding for our game design exercises.

In our second case study we thus engaged in the first phase of *D&D* and had students and teachers develop characters using a character sheet based on a classic *D&D* character sheet (see fig. 3). By creating and sharing characters in the classroom, we aimed to encourage social perspective taking across different "learner personas." Learner personas, as we understand them here, consist of written-out, fiction-infused representations of archetypal character roles that students and teachers (can) embody while "participating in the game of education" (Cole et al. 2020, 38). The persona concept is derived from user centred design, and has been used to encourage perspective taking with (possible future) clients/patients/product users to gain a more holistic view of the needs, wants, and attitudes of the intended audience so as to adjust the product or service accordingly (van Rooij 2012). In education, our hypothesis was that creating and sharing learner personas can thus potentially increase bilateral understanding of the different challenges that students and teachers face and expose different (mis)understandings of the socio-cultural rules that govern the classroom situation.

For this case study, we draw from the filled-out character sheets, observations, and student and staff reflections derived from a two hour-long design workshop in a first-year undergraduate course titled "Introduction to New Media and Digital Culture" that took place earlier this year. The course has a cohort of about 200 students and includes eight staff members. Particularly in the English-speaking classrooms (there is both an English and Dutch version of this course), the group is relatively heterogeneous, with students coming from all over the world, bringing in their own socio-cultural backgrounds and accom-

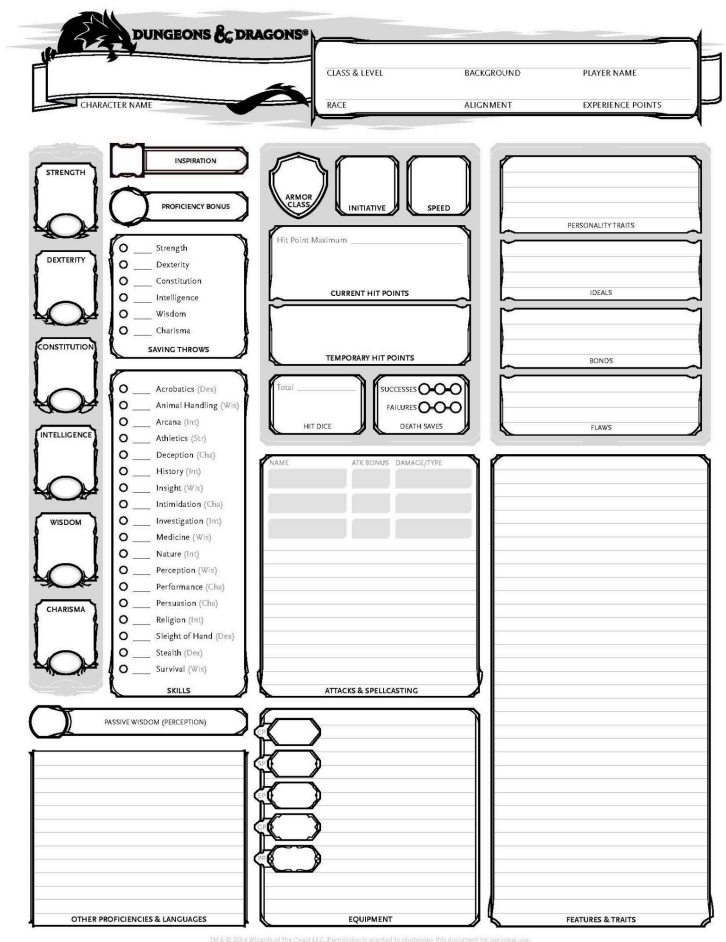


Figure 3: Selection of a 5th edition Dungeons & Dragons character sheet (<https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/character-sheets>).

panying expectations about acceptable or appropriate classroom behaviors. That means that in this workshop, the subjects of the SPT process that we aimed to encourage were present in the same room.

The exercise consisted of two phases. First, students and staff were asked to download the character sheet (see the appendix of course materials below) and individually fill it out. They were encouraged to be creative in shaping their characters in terms of “race” (it could be an elf/dwarf/orc etc.) and “class” (it could be a fighter/wizard/bard etc.), but were also asked to make sure that the characters and their traits, however fictional, would still reflect the motivations, abilities (skills), and expectations of them as students or teachers. To assist them in this process, they could draw inspiration from a list of three archetypal learner personas: the warrior, who will “plunder” the course for its relevance to their own purposes; the scholar, who wants to go beyond just a good grade and really understand the material; and the wizard, who wants to be transformed by the experience to influence the present and change the future (see appendix for more details).

The introduction of this character creation exercise caused quite a stir in the different classrooms, with students becoming giggly and increasingly animated once they started to get a grasp of what was expected of them. As we noted above, shared laughter can function as a coping strategy to alleviate anxiety about unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations (such as being asked to align oneself with a warrior, scholar, or wizard, or being asked to share one’s personal background story in a classroom setting) (Werning and van Vught 2021). However, going by the murmur in the classroom, we suspect that in this case, the giggling also related to the joy of being able to create a humorous semi-fictional character for oneself and to test its validity with classmates. As such, the fantasy element in the character sheet had certain students (re)affirm their bonds, letting each other know they were in on the joke.

Furthermore, the character sheet, and particularly its third-person phrasing, encouraged a reflective stance. As one student noted, in relation to filling out the “objectives” section in the sheet: “it forced me to think: ‘what does this girl want?’” And another student noted that when thinking about her character’s strengths, she started writing out an idealized version of herself which not so much reflected her abilities at that point in time, but future abilities that she was aspir-

ing to attain. This, in turn, started to impact the objectives she set for her character in this class.

In the second phase, students and teachers were asked to come together to share and compare their created characters to see where backgrounds, objectives, abilities, and expectations aligned or diverged. Here, they could make use of a template for a rule book (see appendix) which cued them to translate objectives and expectations into a code of conduct or rule set for the classroom and articulate strategies to employ to “win the game of education.” It also allowed them to reflect on the complementary character abilities needed (in their “D&D party”) to increase their chances of educational success.

In this phase, we again witnessed the important role of what Fine (1983) has called the “fantasy frame” (in which students and teachers develop and perform the role of their characters), co-occurring with the “primary framework” of reality (in which students and teachers exist as human beings in the classroom). One student noted that this fantasy frame added a certain “lightness” and humour to the exercise which gave them more confidence to share information about the challenges they were facing and in turn increased curiosity about how the others had framed their personal stories as fantasy characters. Here, we noted that the sequentiality in which information is shared also made a great difference. For example, when teachers went first in sharing their personal stories and struggles (showing vulnerability), that set the stage for students to jump in and share theirs.

Also, the rule book functioned as an interesting evocative object (Turkle 2011) in that it allowed for a writing down of social expectations as seemingly dogmatic rules which consequently functioned as a trigger for discussing and reassessing those rules from other perspectives (cf. Buchholz 2019). In one notable occurrence, my (Jasper’s) additions to the rule book ignited an interesting discussion around the different cultural backgrounds of certain students and their admitted struggle to abide by these new rules. For example, when I provocatively expressed my expectation around active participation in the classroom in terms of rules for eye contact, a small

group of students of Asian descent expressed unease with this new rule (after notably avoiding eye contact). They pointed out that their cultural background had taught them to be respectful of and compliant with authority (like teachers), and that they feared that making eye contact could be perceived as rude and disrespectful. This, in turn, was met with signs of support from other students who also expressed unfamiliarity and unease with the way that the Dutch schooling system appeared to be commending the challenging and questioning of authority.

Harking back to the different stages of SPT identified by Gehlbach and Mu (2023), we argue that the *D&D* exercise shows promise on two levels. First of all, the character sheet offered students and teachers an opportunity to express their learner personas on the border between reality and fantasy, thereby lowering the threshold for sharing personal information in a classroom setting and increasing curiosity for how the others dealt with this creative exercise. As Gehlbach and Mu (2023) note, motivation for engaging in SPT can increase when perceivers share experiences with the subject, and this is exactly what the *D&D* exercise facilitates. By offering students and teachers a shared experience between “real rules and fictional worlds” (Juul 2005) motivation for SPT can increase while at the same time, the stakes for sharing can decrease.

Secondly, the rule book offers students and teachers motivation and strategies for gathering information about others in the classroom by asking everyone to translate their individual objectives and expectations into a shared set of rules. This forces a sharing and comparing of personal information and an identification of commonalities and differences. Here, students and teachers are encouraged to move away from the “primary frame” and the “frames of fantasy” (in the character creation phase) (Fine 1989) into what Schousboe (2013) terms the “sphere of staging.” In this sphere, the rules, roles, and themes for the game are (re)negotiated, which more clearly puts students and teachers in the position of game designers instead of players. As we argued elsewhere (Werning and van Vught 2021), the role of the designer is significantly different from the role of a player. Where players are encouraged to adopt a single (character’s) role and

further that agenda, game designers are required to consider different perspectives, strategies, and backgrounds embodied by different players and in turn create a balanced environment for all. As such, moving into the sphere of staging forces a concerted effort to take different perspectives if one wants the rule book to offer equal opportunities for all players.

In conclusion, this design exercise certainly shows significant potential in encouraging SPT and as such seems worthwhile refining, expanding on, and validating. While we'll discuss future research directions in the outlook section below, the exercise has already ignited two small modifications that we aim to test out in new design sessions shortly.

First of all, while the current exercise is aimed at SPT with the subject being present (in the classroom), a slight modification would allow it to be used for SPT with the subject being absent. In such a case, students would be asked to devise their own archetypes around a specific (polarizing) topic. However, since it is likely that students resort to stereotyping when creating such an archetype, the character sheet exercise would need to be followed up with another exercise (e.g., the use of cue cards) to expose biases and make sure the archetype sufficiently represents the subject.

Secondly, while the current exercise purposefully makes use of self-made character sheets to seek alignment between game and classroom experience, we also see value in resorting back to the original character sheets to more fully capitalize on *D&D* as a platform. Following Lalone (2019) this would mean making use of *D&D*'s "programming language" in terms of the fixed categories of "race," "class," and "abilities," and collectively exploring what these categories mean for the situation at hand. For example, what does it mean to have charisma in an educational setting and what does the numerical information required in such a category stand for? Such an exercise would then likely trigger a collective modification of the character sheet and foster a critical conversation on the mediatizing capabilities of the game.

OUTLOOK

Both formats/techniques outlined above have been developed and are being refined as ongoing practice-based education activities at Utrecht University. They are thought experiments, but, particularly in the first case study, playtesting a familiar game with other people's rules makes these perspectives partially experienceable. At the same time, they also harness the vast amount of latent game literacy, or familiarity with the source material and with game idioms more broadly, among our students as a shared language. Aimed at educators and curriculum designers, they will hopefully provide inspiration for teaching interventions addressing a broad spectrum of potential topics that require multi-perspectival dialogue, from the climate crisis to political radicalization to controversial emerging technologies such as AI.

Both formats are being fine-tuned and evaluated individually for now. However, since both are examples of discursive game design as a conceptual framework and make use of the proposed notation system, we see ample opportunities for combining both into a more comprehensive workshop that explores the interconnectedness of worldviews and identities. In such a longer session, all four phases of SPT could potentially be experienced in the full feedback loop that Gehlbach and Mu originally envisioned (2023, 284). Particularly in the final evaluation stage, both games would act as "reality checks" for each other and facilitate a productive discussion on the underlying assumptions of the prototypes and the concepts discussed. For example, playing *TCGOL* with a given character sheet raises productive questions: Should this particular character have different starting or winning conditions? What would a specific tile mean for them? But also, how do the different "life stories" from *TCGOL* reframe the static character sheet, should the sheet be updated while playing, and how would that reflect on the malleability of personas in response to different life experiences?

For this article, both practice-based case studies are presented as proof-of-concept for how DGD may facilitate perspective taking. This means that there are clear avenues for further research, particu-

larly (but not exclusively) with regard to more robust validation. For example, Dishon and Kafai propose a multimodal investigation of the design sessions focusing on three levels: field notes and video recordings, student reflections acquired through interviews and debriefings, and analyses of participants' games through recorded playtests and the "photographic documentation of prototypes" (2020, 5). In line with the aforementioned notation system, this would be useful to approach as a longitudinal study to identify changes across student cohorts.

Furthermore, both case studies currently focus on the process of SPT and the (relatively generic) concept of personas as well as the theme of the "good life" are mere means to that end. On that note, an important concretization would be to tailor both techniques, individually or in combination, to a more specific topic, such as perceptions of the climate crisis and ecological identities.

Finally, while empathy with other people's situations and worldviews appears universally desirable as a capacity among students, it is important to critically contextualize it in terms of Jade Davis' (2023, 2) notion of "empathy culture". According to Davis, empathy is increasingly expected and demonstrated but often understood very narrowly, for example as a "quick fix for a broken culture" and as "a binary" trait someone either possesses or not (1). While traditionally it involves "taking on [more complex] mental states," in common parlance the concept nowadays refers primarily to "feeling what a[nother] person is feeling" (3), without necessarily understanding the causes of and preconditions for these feelings. Thus, learning outcomes of these interventions should be critically assessed to prevent perpetuating "empathy 'scripts' [that] can flatten someone's experience of suffering and emotions"¹³ and ensure that students appreciate the complexity of social perspectives and the people behind them.

APPENDIX: COURSE MATERIALS

Repurposing *The Checkered Game of Life* to Rethink and Renegotiate Worldviews and Values

Annotated Sample Notation: The original *The Checkered Game of Life*

// Any text in a line after // should be handled as a comment and is not part of the actual game rules.

START₁ // the numbering suggests the possibility of different starting positions

- ALL: Receive player token and 0 POINTS // ALL refers to all participating players
- ALL: Put their token on the ‘infancy’ tile
- RANDOM: First player
- MAINLOOP: First player // this denotes the start of the loop called MAINLOOP (which should always only exist once in every mod but can include multiple sub-loops)

MAINLOOP: Player // or ALL in the case of simultaneous play

- CHECK: last remaining player? \Rightarrow WIN₁ // Checks are conditional statements (like IF...THEN) but for this purpose need not be completely formalized
- Move token according to RULES: movement // RULES functions like a subroutine, i.e. while executing the loop the player briefly switches to the RULES segment with the label “movement”
- Follow TILE instructions, receive POINTS if applicable // keywords like TILE and POINTS are highlighted to enhance readability and e.g. consider alternative game components or metrics (like e.g. a HAPPINESS metric)
- CHECK: on same TILE as OTHER player? \Rightarrow OTHER: player sent to ‘jail’ TILE
- CHECK: on ‘happy old age’ TILE AND POINTS ≥ 100 ? \Rightarrow WIN₁ // conditions can be linked with AND, OR etc.

- CHECK: on TILE 'suicide'? ⇒ LOSE₁: Player // the number behind the LOSE keyword indicates that there may eventually be multiple loss scenarios; the Player after the colon indicates that only the current player loses (as opposed e.g. to ALL); formalization like this is of course not necessary but helps think specifically about elements and event sequences in a game modification
- MAINLOOP: Next player clockwise // the MAINLOOP restarts but with another player as active Player

RULES:'movement

- Roll 1 D6 OR teetotum // D6 refers to a six-sided die as opposed e.g. to a D10 or D20
 - =1: move 1 tile vertically // this syntax is structured like a switch/case statement in scripting languages
 - =2: move 1 tile horizontally
 - =3: move 1 tile diagonally
 - =4: move 1-2 tiles vertically
 - =5: move 1-2 tiles horizontally
 - =6: move 1-2 tiles diagonally

WIN₁

- Current Player wins the game

LOSE₁

- Current Player removed from the game

Printer-friendly version of TCGOL game board

Individual tiles to create a modular board

The tiles can be printed but are specifically intended for use in a software application like *Tabletop Playground* or *Tabletop Simulator* to easily prototype and playtest various modular boards. The board and tiles can be downloaded at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/sxqba3zxyssxiq8qplllx/AGinWITKA1r4Alt-spU5LNYw?rlkey=bqicvhwazk2ig3yeszixp3ky&dl=0>.

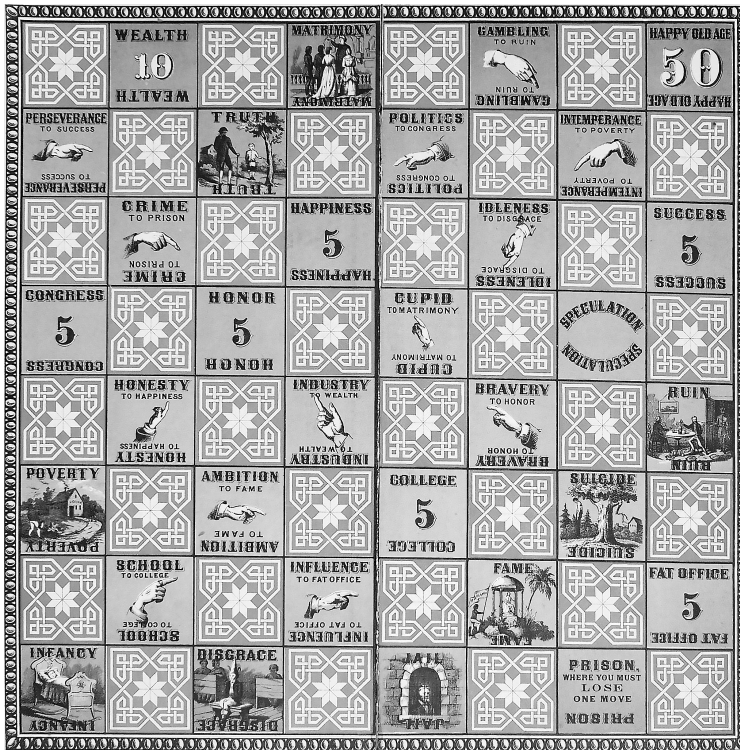



Image taken from: https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_321475.

Repurposing D&D to share perspectives between learner personas in the classroom

SLAYING THE NEW MEDIA DRAGON – CHARACTER SHEET	
Profile pic You may draw an image of your character here	Background Where does your character come from (geographically, socially, culturally)? How did your character arrive at this point (this education journey/game)? ...
(Nick)name of your character ...	Strengths What is your character good at in relationship to the objectives? Consider academic skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, writing skills, professional skills, learning preferences etc.). How will these strengths help your character achieve their goals? ...
Motivations What is your character's motivation/incentive for embarking on this journey? ...	Areas for improvement In what areas could your character improve in relationship to the objectives? Consider academic skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, writing skills, professional skills, learning preferences etc.). How could these areas of improvement hamper your character's journey? ...
Objectives What is your character's objective in this journey (long term and short term)? Take inspiration from the archetypes but elaborate here. ...	Social Expectations How do you expect your character to be interacting with your fellow student-characters? Consider verbal communication, non-verbal communication, online communication, attitude, power dynamics etc. How do you expect your character to be interacting with your teacher-character? How/where do these expectations match with your character's strengths and areas for improvement? How/where do these expectations diverge? ...
Cultural Expectations What do you expect to be dominant implicit or explicit values in this classroom-journey? Consider things like cultural values and identity norms, but also norms around work ethic and compliance with rules. How/where do these expectations match with your character's value system? How/where do these expectations diverge? ...	


SLAYING THE NEW MEDIA DRAGON – RULE BOOK


Objectives

How/where do your characters' objectives overlap? How/where do your characters' objectives diverge? What do you now understand to be the general objectives of this journey? How does this general objective match with your characters' personal objectives? How does this general objective diverge from your characters' personal objectives?

...

Rules

How/where do your characters' social and cultural expectations overlap? How/where do your characters' social and cultural expectations diverge? What do you now understand to be the general rule system (expected behaviour and values) of this classroom game/journey? How does Rule system match with your characters' expectations? How does this rule system diverge from your characters' expectations?

...

Strategies



Considering your character's strengths, areas of improvement, sociocultural background/expectations, what strategies will your character employ individually to traverse this rule system? Do you think your character has equal opportunities for achieving the objectives of this classroom game/journey as other student-characters? If so, why? If not, why not? Considering that this is a collaborative game/journey, what complementary student-characters would help you to achieve the objectives of this classroom game/journey?

...

Rule change

Considering your character's individual opportunities for achieving the objectives of this classroom game, can you think of a rule change that could increase your chances? Considering your party's (group's) opportunities for achieving the objectives of this classroom game, can you think of a rule change that could increase your chances?

...

character sheets created by the authors

Choose your Identity	The Warrior	The Scholar	The Wizard
<p>Not all of you want or need to get the same thing out of this experience.</p> <p>How will you play the learning game?</p>	<p>You're going to pass the course by taking what you need to succeed.</p> <p>Warriors rely on the assigned readings and instructor's information to complete the course requirements.</p> <p>They will plunder the course for its relevance to their own purposes and not worry too much about the details.</p>	<p>You want more than a good grade, you want to really understand the material.</p> <p>Scholars pay attention to the details and complete the course purposefully and critically.</p> <p>Scholars are ready to participate in discussion and debate.</p>	<p>You want to be transformed by this experience and gain the power to influence the present and change the future.</p> <p>Wizards look beyond the structure of the course to find relevance and connections. They are concerned with why all of this is important to humans in general.</p> <p>Wizards are passionate and curious, looking for new perspectives.</p>
	<p>Warriors show up for their team, follow instructions, complete assignments, and meet expectations.</p>	<p>The scholar makes connections between different elements in the course and contributes to our collective understanding.</p>	<p>The wizard brings back artifacts from their adventures outside of class to delight the rest of us.</p>
	<p>The warrior doesn't need to go too meta to get the job done.</p>	<p>The scholar is curious about "meta-ness".</p>	<p>The wizard goes meta... all the way.</p>

persona sheet created by our colleague, Dr. Deborah Cole for her course: *Language & Identity: Researching & Writing Who We Are*

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: The core gameplay loop for a player of TCGOL as a flowchart in Canva. [Image created by the authors].

Figure 2: The game board and original box cover of TCGOL. Image taken from: https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_321475.

Figure 3: Selection of a 5th edition Dungeons & Dragons character sheet. Image taken from: <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/character-sheets>.

NOTES

1. While Gehlbach and Mu (2023) consistently use the term "target" when referring to the subject of SPT, we opt instead for the term "subject" as a more personalized variant (thanks to the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion).↔
2. We are in the midst of a full revision of our programme which also offers unique opportunities for a more structural embedding of research-creation in our curriculum.↔
3. We focus specifically on two opportunities we see for media and culture students but acknowledge there are other (more general) opportunities for embedding research creation in the classroom as well. For example, it is often argued that research-creation has the potential to acknowledge different types of knowledge (embodied, situated,

indigenous), thereby decentering existing paradigms (Nelson 2006) and possibly making the classroom more diverse and inclusive. Furthermore, embedding research-creation in the classroom also bridges the gap between research and the vocational (increasing professional skills) and theory and the real (forcing a confrontation of ethical dilemmas and real world problems).↵

4. See <https://golbooamani.com/Unsettling-Settlers-Intervention-Game> and <https://thesocialjusticegame.org/> respectively for further information on the two game projects.↵
5. See e.g. <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/the-chemistry-of-game-design>, <https://sgruenwo.web.th-koeln.de/download/a-new-methodology-for-spatiotemporal-game-design/> and <https://svn.sable.mcgill.ca/sable/courses/COMP763/oldpapers/elad-hari-02-object-TH.pdf> respectively.↵
6. For an example of distinctions between different temporal scale levels, from minute-to-minute to day-to-day, see e.g. <https://gamedesign-skills.com/game-design/core-loops-in-gameplay/#core-gameplay-loop-examples>.↵
7. See <https://vue.tufts.edu/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xalUNnl8roY> respectively.↵
8. See e.g. https://manual.gamemaker.io/monthly/en/GameMaker_Language/GML_Overview/Instance_Keywords.htm.↵
9. See <https://gist.github.com/discover>.↵
10. See e.g. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368575708_Thinking_Monetization_into_the_Loop_On_the_Production_Context_of_Free-to-play_Games.↵
11. See e.g. <https://depechgeneratie.nl/> (in Dutch).↵
12. The document is available via the Hasbro website at <https://www.hasbro.com/common/documents/5b96f7161d3711ddb0b0800200c9a66/858C69C319B9F3691003C63AB0E8078A.pdf>.↵
13. See <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-devices-ourselves/202312/the-hidden-danger-of-empathy-culture>.↵

BREATHING-WITH OTHER-THAN-HUMANS

STEVE 4. TU

This paper outlines part of a research-creation project focused on human/tree communication on a specific campus green space of a Canadian university. As part of a multispecies ethnographic study of the university, I explore the reciprocal relationship between humans and trees via multispecies duoethnography, a method I am pioneering that draws on time, breathing-with, imagination, and artistic expression. I surface some nuances of interspecies communion, specifically emphasizing the role of breath in moving from acts of attentiveness to frequencies of attunement with arboreal beings.

Cet article présente un extrait d'un projet de recherche-création axé sur la communication entre les humains et les arbres dans un espace vert spécifique d'une université canadienne. Dans le cadre d'une étude ethnographique multiespèce de l'université, j'explore la relation réciproque entre les humains et les arbres à travers la duoethnographie multiespèce, une méthode que je développe, qui s'appuie sur le temps, la respiration commune, l'imagination, et l'expression artistique. Je mets en lumière certaines subtilités de la communion interspécifique, en insistant particulièrement sur le rôle de la respiration dans le passage des actes d'attention aux fréquences d'harmonisation avec les êtres arboricoles.

INTRODUCTION

After introducing myself on the first day of a small doctoral seminar on Indigenous place and research,¹ a classmate asked: *Why trees?* What had led me to focus my research on

trees rather than students or faculty? I like trees more than humans, I said, which elicited some laughter. I smiled, too. But while my answer had been made in jest, the truth is, no tree has ever called me a racial slur, spat on me, or told me to go back to China (a country I've only ever visited twice). Trees are neither Karens nor colonizers. They don't pollute rivers. They don't bring guns to schools or commit war crimes. They don't cause any of the wicked problems plaguing our shared planet. Humans do that all on our own.

Yet many of us seem to have it out for trees (see: Deforestation). We go so far as to plant them for the express purpose of chopping them down at a later date and turning them into furniture. (IKEA is a four-letter curse word in arborilanguage, didn't you know?) The man at the centre of the world's largest religion and one of the central colonizing industries in human history is purported to have cursed a fig tree because it didn't bear fruit. The kicker: it wasn't even the season for fruit-bearing. The general human disregard of, if not outright antipathy toward, trees exists despite the fact they sequester carbon; produce oxygen; reduce the severity of heat islands; have incalculable medicinal uses via their bark, leaves, sap; convey significant other mental health benefits simply by existing; provide food for animals, including human ones; function as habitat for squirrels and birds and insects; etcetera. *Why trees?*

(POST)HUMANISM AND THE UNIVERSITY

In her seminal essay, "The White Album," Joan Didion says, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live" (11). The philosophical tradition of humanism is one such story. While there are variations on the theme, and though these interpretations have shifted and continue to shift over time, Saba Mahmood's intentionally gendered telling of the story captures well the essence of them all: "Man is the author of his own actions *and* representations (not fate, God, or some other force or entity); that through the exercise of his will and reason, he establishes his own norms and laws. Furthermore, not only is man the author but he is also the ultimate *end* of his actions" (Mahmood and Rutherford 1; emphasis original).

A few sentences after her opening line, Didion continues: “We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely [...] by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images [...] Or at least we do for a while” (11). We tell ourselves a particular story, according to Didion, in order to make sense of life and go on living, until (for whatever reason) that story no longer works; until its explanatory power for all that we’ve experienced no longer proves believable or satisfactory, at which point, we need new stories to live (by).

The story of humanism and its corresponding premise of human exceptionalism—the belief that humans are in some way superior to, and fundamentally unique from other-than-human beings—is, I submit, a story that’s past its best-by date. I have yet to come across a more eviscerating encapsulation of humanism’s failure as metanarrative than these words from Dorion Sagan:

“We learn in grade school that plants produce oxygen that we breathe, and breathe carbon dioxide that we exhale, suggesting an essential equivalence, and a nice ecological match between plants and animals. But plants not only photosynthesize, producing oxygen, they also use oxygen just like we do. They do it at night when sunlight is not available as a source of energy. They can do this because they also incorporate those former respiring bacteria, the mitochondria into their cells. Maybe aliens have detected life on Earth but, considering us parasites, have decided to communicate directly—and chemically—with plants, our metabolic superiors.” (Quoted in Natasha Myers 57)

Maybe. After all, in some articulations of the humanist story, “human beings [...] do not have to care about other animals” (Setiya 452) or even other biotic life unless it has direct bearing on humanity (Hird; Stewart-Williams).

Yet despite an increasing recognition concerning the fallacy and hubris of assumptions regarding human exceptionalism, the university remains a deeply humanist project (Giannakakis). This isn’t to say that human-centric perspectives in higher education (HE)

have been altogether negative. From the scientific, technological, and medical innovations discovered in the university that have contributed to improving human beings' standards of living, to the emergence of student development theories that have helped better explain the formation of young people in their postsecondary years, research centring the human has had undeniable positive effects (for humans). To say otherwise would be misleading. And surely, recognizing (and granting) human rights to all human beings and not just a subset of them is an irrefutable good. To the extent that the university has been a cornerstone of social justice movements, it has yielded plenty of positives (Harkavy).

But in centring human perspectives, we have ignored and rendered silent the voices of other-than-human beings to the detriment and loss of all life on Planet Earth. The instrumental position adopted by those who take human exceptionalism for granted, that views other-than-humans as fitting for human use or consumption and reduces environmental sustainability to the impact on human well-being, has led to untold devastation, not just with respect to the negative impacts on human flourishing, but especially the eradication of untold numbers of other-than-human lives. In the words of Franco "Bifo" Berardi:

"We might conclude that, if the human experiment was aimed at expanding the sphere of rationality and reducing chaos, the human experiment is over. The very tools that enabled the expansion of rationality and human control (science, technology, industry, and information) have subsumed life to abstraction. And living warmth can only be found outside the icy wall of the citadel of reason." (123)

It's observations like these that prompt Cary Wolfe to say we are in "a new reality" requiring a posthuman "vigilance, responsibility, and humility" (47). Thankfully, there are more than some indicators that things are changing, albeit very slowly, in the field of HE (Quinn). The turn toward other-than-human species, the awareness and consideration of their ontologies, has already been felt in many university departments, impacting feminist studies (Haraway), English

(Ryan), philosophy (Marder), cultural studies (Badmington), geography (Lawrence), anthropology (Tsing), and numerous other disciplines. In other words, and to paraphrase a line attributed to speculative fiction writer William Gibson, the other-than-human future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed within the HE sector.

We are, perhaps, in the late stages of the humanist university, and brick by brick, “the icy wall” of Berardi’s “citadel of reason” may be in the process of being dismantled. For those who would like to expedite matters, there are some things that can be done. Here’s one: if stories are what we live by, we can be intentional about telling ourselves new ones. And if humanist tales populated with human heroes and their exploits have come to be recognized as rubbish-adjacent, we can tell ourselves other-than-human ones. As Luce Irigaray argues, “If we continue to speak the same language to each other, we will reproduce the same story. Same arguments, same quarrels, same scenes. Same attractions and separations. Same difficulties, the impossibility of reaching each other. Same ...same... Always the same” (“When Our Lips” 69). It’s time for the university to tell itself and the world a different story, an other-than-human tale. Life on earth is more than human and it has always been, since long before our evolution.

TELLING, HEARING, AND SHARING OTHER-THAN-HUMAN STORIES IN THE UNIVERSITY

In the university, many stories, from many perspectives, hailing from many cultures, come together. In this way, the university is something of an anthology, with chapters in a number of languages. We don’t just tell ourselves stories in the university, *we tell each other stories*. We share them with roommates, classmates, students, professors, colleagues, and peers. We tell them in order to live. We tell our stories to each other because we want to be heard, to be known, to not feel so alone, as a way of making meaning and dealing with the absurdity of existence (Camus) together.

We don’t simply tell, however; we also *hear* each other’s stories. We recognize that we have no exclusive claim to objective truth. Our sto-

ries are not superior to anyone else's. They aren't exceptional in any way. They're just ours; the ones we live by.

Stories don't end at hearing. Once we've faithfully heard each other's stories, we *share* them, if they have taken a hold of us in some way. As a site where so many stories intersect—human and other-than-human—the university has a response-ability to make time and create space for encounter and exchange: we tell ourselves stories in order to live; we tell each other stories in order to live; we hear each other's stories in order to live; we share each other's stories in order to live. In order for all of us to live.

The other-than-human turn in HE is, at its heart, about hearing the stories of other-than-humans and sharing the same. The university can facilitate this communion. In earlier iterations of this project (conceptualized in my personal journal), I framed this project as de-centring the human, but I'm not sure this is possible. Anthropocentrism is, or at least appears to be, inevitable (Katz). Nor do I believe the university's goal should be to bring other-than-human beings closer to the centre, though I leave that possibility open. Instead, I wonder if the primary aim of this institutional work should be to shift the human presence to the margins where subaltern others, humans and other-than-humans, are subjugated. We might never de-centre ourselves, but we can at least work at being less solipsistic.

The goal for those in the university, then, might be to broaden our ethical scope; to produce more thoughtful humans, attuned to the world, caring for it. This may or may not be a modest aim, but I think it can be foundational, and doesn't need to preclude other personal, educational, societal, or institutional goals. "Care," says María Puig de la Bellacasa, "can open new ways of thinking" (28). New ways of thinking mean new stories. She adds that "ways of studying and representing things have world-making effects. Constructivist approaches to science and nature, no matter how descriptive, are actively involved in redoing worlds" (30). Yes, humans have terraformed the planet, killing countless other-than-human lives, rendering untold number of species extinct (Dirzo et al.). The university

can participate in helping to form a new, more habitable, hospitable world.

That said, the Western university is materially implicated with our planetary situation (McGeown and Barry) and in colonial practices that contradict other-than-human approaches to research and learning. Universities, as institutions, operate from an onto-epistemology that prioritizes the accumulation of knowledge as a means of controlling and mastering the world (Connell). The very construction of university campuses is often predicated on the destruction and exploitation of ecosystems, including the clearing of trees, diversion of waterways, and extraction of local resources. This physical transformation parallels the erasure of other-than-humans from academic discourse, relegating them to passive resources, rather than vital participants in in knowledge-making processes (Coulthard; Todd). Such environmental impacts underscore the paradox of the colonial university that seeks to define and control knowledge while marginalizing the ecosystems and lifeforms that sustain it. This conflict of interest is particularly salient as universities increasingly embrace frameworks like multispecies studies and decolonial methodologies, even as their infrastructural expansion continues to negate these values in practice (Whyte). Acknowledging these material contradictions calls for an institutional self-awareness that transcends performative gestures (Hawkins and Kern), fostering genuine engagements with other-than-human communities and a reimagining of the university's role in relation to the land and its ecosystems.

TOWARD A MULTISPECIES ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE UNIVERSITY

In his 2017 American Ethnologist Society presidential address, Hugh Gusterson called for more critical anthropological studies of the university. Whether or not the then-extant literature was as scant as he perceived and suggested is a matter of debate (Thorkelson), though ongoing interventions (that Gusterson mentions positively) like the University of Illinois's Ethnography of the University Initiative (Hunter and Abelman) and the University of Toronto's Ethnography of the University project, along with since-published

research (Carrigan and Bardini; Clark; Thomas) are at least evidence that there is work happening in this space.

When it comes to the standpoint of other-than-human beings, however, there is a persistent gap. While the multispecies perspective has been explored in other subject areas and disciplines, there is a dearth, if not complete absence, of multispecies ethnographies of the university. This is a shame. Multispecies ethnography “bring[s] art interventions together with empirically rich ethnography to produce unexpected ruptures in dominant thinking about nature and culture” (Kirksey et al. 4); precisely the sort of generative activity that can surface other-than-human stories. If universities exist for the public and common good (Marginson), surely, other-than-humans, who co-constitute both the “public” and the “common,” should be included rather than excluded.

Richard Powers believes “only a profound shift in consciousness and *institutions* regarding the significance and standing of nonhumans will keep us viable” (quoted in Cooke 217; emphasis added). How to help generate this shift in consciousness should, in my opinion, be among the primary goals of the university, present and future. K. Wayne Yang’s avatar la paperson believes this shift is always already happening. Since the university “is an assemblage of machines and not a monolithic institution,” s-he says, “its machinery is always being subverted toward decolonizing purposes” (xiii). If decolonisation is defined as la paperson understands it—namely, “the rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous and Black and queer futures” (xv)—the consideration of other-than-human lives is absolutely a decolonising project as it endeavours to restore relations with other-than-human kin (TallBear). Such reparation is necessary for human survival, but to be clear, there are other reasons universities and research about universities should consider other-than-human lives, beyond the benefit to humanity.

First, and most simply, many of these lives are lived on university campuses. Studies of HE institutions, therefore, warrant their inclusion in research. These beings not only share space and land with students, faculty, and staff, they live there. Other-than-human ani-

mals inhabit trees, for instance, not just occupying land owned by universities, but trees—living beings, themselves, *who* (rather than *that*) are (often) the property of the universities. Some of these trees are older than the campuses, themselves.

Linda Sama, Stephanie Welcomer, and Virginia Gerde (2004) ask who will speak for these other-than-human lives? An important question, pointing us toward what's at stake: the very existence of other beings on university land. We can append another question to theirs: Who will speak, not just *for*, these other-than- humans, but *with* them? They have agency (ojalehto et al.). They're intelligent (Trewavas). They "sense and make sense of their worlds" (Myers 36). They should be permitted to articulate for themselves (Abbott; Gagliano; Karban).

Just as academics in the field of HE conduct research with students and faculty, and not just *about* them, I urge scholars to conduct research *with* other-than-human beings whose lives are imbricated with the university. Research shouldn't benefit only the ones doing the research, but also the participants and the communities being studied (DeMeulenaere and Cann; McIntyre).

Second, many non-Western traditions have long recognized the agency of plants, trees, and other-than-human animals. If the university is serious about academic decolonisation and indigenisation (Dei; Knopf), one way to demonstrate this commitment is to take seriously non-Western and Indigenous knowledges about the more-than-human world. And not just the knowledges of other human traditions, but of the non-human as well. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us, decolonisation is not a metaphor.

Trees, to name but one being who live on the university campus, have knowledges and ways of knowing that humans do not. The Muscogee (Creek) poet Joy Harjo says, for instance, that plants and trees should be talked to and listened to, as they "all have their tribes, their families, their histories" (quoted in Cooke 225). Humans stand to learn from these histories. Robin Wall Kimmerer notes, "A fundamental tenet of traditional plant knowledge is that the plants are understood, not as mere objects or lower life forms as the western 'pyramid of being' might suggest, but as nonhuman persons, with

their own knowledges, intentions, and spirit” (28). She wants to treat plants as the teachers they are; a fitting call for the university to heed.

Not only do other (non-Western) traditions recognize the agency of plants, trees, and other-than-human animals, many also attribute personhood to them and view them as kin (Hall). Deborah Bird Rose and her collaborators quote two Mak Mak Marranunggu women explaining the relationship they have to a particular plant: “‘This tree here,’ they say, ‘we call “uncle” this tree. We’re not just related to [...] animals. We’ve got relationships to trees too. That’s Mum’s uncle, stringybark” (110). The notion of kinship between humans and other species is also found in the indigenous Chinese philosophy of Daoism (Miller), which I will return to later. For now, consider chapter 42 of the *Dao De Jing*, which begins: “Tao [Dao] gives life to the one / The one gives life to the two / The two give life to the three / The tree give life to ten thousand things. / All beings support *yin* and embrace *yang* / and the interplay of these two forces / fills the universe” (Tzu 55). From this teaching emerges the Daoist view that all of life “is equal before Dao, because they come from the same source” (Fan 92). In other words, there is no hierarchy with humans at the top of an ontological ladder.

Plants and trees express care for the planet, as Bill Neidjie, a Gaagudju elder in what’s now called Australia, writes: “I love it tree because e love me too. / E watching me same as you / tree e working with your body, my body, e working with us” (4); they are worth the attention of the academy. Here, however, I acknowledge the tension noted by Anna Lawrence “between taking the implications of Indigenous knowledges seriously, whilst not simply mining them for our own theoretical purposes” (6).

Third, consider that, with apologies to Latour, we have never been (only) human; we have always been already more, and other-than. Our “species” (such as it were) is dependent on all manner of other-than-humans (Kirksey et al.), and multispecies ethnographers remind us that it’s a mistake to think that when humans make choices, it’s only the human making the choice, as if it’s only the human who

is exercising agency. As Joseph Dumit says, “Never think you know all of the species involved in a decision [...] Never think you speak for all of yourself” (xii). Other-than-humans on the university campus are agentic subjects who play an underappreciated but significant role in shaping student, faculty, and staff perception of the campus and, by consequence, the world.

One implication of this fact is that studies of human beings—such as those done in HE and other fields—are already studies of the other-than-human since “human nature is an interspecies relationship” (Tsing 144). In this sense, turning toward other-than-human lives is a matter of dealing more honestly and accurately with our research subjects.

Fourth, the potential contributions of a multispecies approach to the study of HE is vast. It will surely open up new research trajectories as scholars address the topics that interest them. If academic time is accelerating (Vostal), for instance, “vegetal temporalities pose a significant challenge to the strictures of the industrial capitalist time-space regime, inviting us to question who (or what) we would like to keep time with” (Lawrence 3). The promise of “tree time” (Roy 4) looms. Sumana Roy elaborates:

“It [is] impossible to rush plants, to tell a tree to ‘hurry up’. I was tired of speed. I wanted to live to tree time. This I felt most excruciatingly during examination hall invigilation, while keeping guard over the exhausted faces of my students, their having to condense a year into a few hours, the learning acquired at different times of the day and in different places cramped into a few hours of writing time. That was how one passed examinations, got degrees and jobs, measured success. A tree did not stay up all night to become a successful examinee the next morning.” (3-4).

How to deal with accelerating timescapes as a tree might, is, I think, largely a matter of wisdom, which plants, trees, and other-than-human animals have to offer (Kimmerer). Perhaps attunement to plant life will help humans to pay closer attention; regardless, there can be little disagreement that wisdom is needed for tackling the multi-

crisis facing the planet (Litfin). The university has for too long been focused on knowledge production without concern for wisdom (Barnett and Maxwell). It might just be that a turn toward other-than-human lives can begin to address the gap.

I must stress again, however, that I am less interested in turning to other species on the university for how they might benefit humans, and more concerned with hearing their own stories on their own terms. Lawrence claims “it is the questions asked [...] which are most valuable. Importantly, the question of *who* is this research for? In considering plants more seriously as ‘participants’, we are pushed to consider what research ‘aims’ looks like from the plant’s perspective” (13-14). She continues: “Plants are already central to our everyday lives and socio-economies, waiting for us to recognise them as kin and collaborators in our co-production of ecologically sustainable futures” (15). What, then, is the university waiting for?

TREES ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

While many avenues could be explored, my own research has focused to-date on individual trees. John Hartigan reminds us that trees “are fully theorized, in botanical terms, though not yet ethnographically, that is, as flattened subjects” (268); what’s more, “botanists describe a species, not a particular plant” (269). It is precisely the particular that interests me. The relatively few existing studies of trees on the university campus tend to have an instrumental focus—quantitative studies of the age and health of campus trees; their energy savings (building heating/cooling); carbon sequestration benefits; aesthetic advantages; impact on rainwater runoff interception; contribution to ecosystem biodiversity; and so on. What’s missing and needed is to re-imagine the university otherwise: to theorize the university from the perspective of other-than-humans. One way of doing this, of attending to other voices, is via a form of duoethnography.

Duoethnography is a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers of difference come together, juxtaposing their life histories, to offer a unique lens through which to examine

a particular issue via their multiple understandings and perspectives (Norris and Sawyer). Through the exchange of narratives and experiences, as well as reflexivity whereby researchers reflect on their own positionality and biases, meanings are both uncovered and transformed. Duoethnographic texts, being dialogic in nature, invite readers to engage actively as meaning-makers, contributing to a dynamic dialogue that extends beyond the researchers themselves.

Multispecies duoethnography extends these principles beyond the human/human dyad to “hear” the voice of other-than-human beings. It explores interspecies relationships, communication, and co-existence, acknowledging the agency and perspectives of other-than-human participants, recognizing their contributions to shaping shared environments and narratives, and promoting ethical considerations in human interactions with the broader ecological community.

With respect to human/tree duoethnography, in particular, the root problem is how a human can access the perspective of a different species. Expressed as a question: If such communication is even possible, how does one interview a tree? Each researcher has their own “rough semblance of a method” (Hartigan 253). While I value these diverse approaches, it was necessary for me to generate my own protocol. Communication with any individual, whether human or other-than-human cannot be reduced to method, nor is any approach a guarantee of fidelity in interpretation. Just as no two humans are exactly the same, neither are any two trees. In fact, no two relationships are alike either, whether human/human or human/tree. The way I relate to the Norwegian Maple across the street from my home will not be identical to the way someone else does. My knowledge of, and relationship with, this tree will not be, cannot be, the same as another’s.

In that vein, I have no multispecies duoethnographic methodological procedure to offer. What I will try to do is briefly describe my practice, which involves four components, broadly construed: time, breathing-with, imagination, and artistic expression. I resist calling these *steps* because they aren’t exactly sequential, though there must be some starting point.

Here, then, is how I have come to know and be in relationship with one of the four Ginkgoes presently living on what's known as Philosopher's Walk (PW), a 350-metre tree-lined cement path on the University of Toronto's St. George (downtown) campus, that runs from Bloor Street in the north to Hoskin Avenue in the south, surrounded by Trinity College, the Royal Conservatory of Music, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Faculty of Music, and the Faculty of Law.

TIME

It was mid-spring, and some deciduous trees were still growing out their foliage. Wanting to learn as much about trees as I could, I'd spent the last month reading books and articles by dendrologists and botanists, eco-philosophers and humanities scholars from a variety of intellectual and cultural traditions. I never stopped reading, but there came a point when I decided it was time to exit the physical study and step foot in the field.

I started going to PW nearly every day—as many days, afternoons, and evenings as possible, whatever the weather, rain or shine, staying as long as I could each time. Karyn Recollet and Jon Johnson argue that “land-based storytelling practices require us to know how to visit a space/place. There is a need to know where we are so that we know how to visit” (181). The first week, I made several daily transect walks of PW, familiarizing myself with a space I had traversed many times before, but never with any intentionality. Those prior treks were about getting from point A to point B. Now I was walking slowly, thoughtfully, deliberately, paying attention to my surroundings. I walked the paved path, but didn't restrict myself to cemented-over areas, opting instead to walk wherever I pleased, in the spirit of Tim Ingold's wayfarer, “negotiat[ing] or improvis[ing] a passage as [I went] along” (S126).

Taddle Creek, a sacred body of water for Indigenous people of the area, once flowed where PW now lies. The creek was later buried underground where it continues to flow. It was important to me to learn about its history. More significantly, I found it critical to be mindful of its enduring presence while I walked up and down PW.

Recollet and Johnson acknowledge that pedestrian movements can be a recuperative gesture, as old *miikaans* (footpaths) created by Indigenous people throughout Toronto represent particular forms of knowledge of, and relationship with, land, water, and place. Each of these paths, following bluffs, river valleys, shorelines, and savannas, represents Indigenous Knowledge of Toronto, as Indigenous footprints (as glyphs) have inscribed their knowledge of territory into the land over millennia. (184). Taddle Creek's presence continues to haunt the Walk. Inaudible to human ears, invisible to human eyes, its subterranean existence nevertheless helps sustain life above ground.

Another week in, I wanted to focus my energy on meeting a particular tree. I settled on a Ginkgo near a footbridge running from the path to an entrance to the faculty of music building. Why this tree and not another? I don't know. I've always had a fondness for Ginkgoes, perhaps that's why; a photo I took of a Ginkgo in North Korea serves as my laptop's wallpaper. I'd also read Peter Crane's wonderful monograph about the tree. It's a living fossil, and while Ginkgoes likely covered most of the planet at one point in history, it's now considered (by humans) "invasive" or "non-native" to North America. A diaspora tree, in other words.

It took me a few days to work up the courage to approach this Ginkgo. Marisol de la Cadena says to start with "[i]dentify[ing] the presences you want to think-feel with," but what if the tree didn't want to think-feel with me? How would I know? In some of the work I read by Indigenous scholars (Craft; Hernández et al.; Kovach; Luby et al.; Styres; Watts; Wilson), I learned that a person shouldn't approach an other-than-human being without that being's permission, which, at some level, made sense to me. But how could I know whether the Ginkgo permitted my intrusion or not?

Still uncertain how to proceed, or even if I could, I did—cautiously, trying to suspend any disbelief and keeping my mind open to im/possible encounters that I used to intuit were natural once upon a time when I was a child and conversed with squirrels and trees. (This was before grown-ups told me to stop with the make-believe.)



Figure 1: Ginkgo near Sönbong-guyök, North Korea.

I sat on the stone steps overlooking the Ginkgo, notebook and pencil in hand, by turns observing, sketching. Even this felt uncomfortably voyeuristic. Replace the tree with a human . . . there are ethics boards for that type of research; not for what I was doing. I set that concern aside for the time being.

From my readings, I learned how to estimate a tree's height using a triangulation method. With the aid of a tape measure and a protractor I'd borrowed from my daughter, I made multiple calculations from different vantage points to determine how tall the Ginkgo was. Eventually, I approached the tree. Still apprehensive, I put my hand on the trunk. I found the diameter at breast height and used this number to estimate the Ginkgo's age. Thirty feet tall, thirty years old, give or take. These figures, along with insights gleaned from my botanical readings, gave me some basic information about the tree, akin to knowing a human's height and age, how the circulatory system works. Hardly the same as knowing someone personally, which is what I wanted: to know *this* tree as an individual. To develop "a



Figure 2: Ginkgo on Philosopher's Walk, Toronto.

feeling for the organism” (Keller). For that, time together was requisite, just as it is in human/human relationships. So, I spent more time with the Ginkgo, bringing as many of my senses to bear as I could in our intra-actions (Barad).



Figure 3: Acrylic on paper.



Figure 4: Wax, water colour, and Ginkgo leaf on paper.

On each of my almost-daily visits to the Ginkgo, I spent time sitting beneath the tree, with no idea what I was doing, beyond an experiment in deep listening (Bath et al.). Other knowledge systems offer holistic, body-/being-centred ways of knowing premised on flat ontologies, but as these were foreign to my own worldview, they remained inaccessible to me. Understanding these approaches at a cognitive level was one thing; it was quite another to put them into practice. Simply put, I couldn't utilize them without embodying their attendant alternative worldviews. As Deborah McGregor says, "Indigenous Knowledge cannot be separated from the people who hold and practice it" (390). In other words, treating these ways of knowing in an extractive fashion wouldn't be an option even if I was willing to do so. Nor was I ready to convert to one of those other ways of living. But in discussing my research project with my family, I rediscovered a possible resource in my own Daoist ancestry.

BREATHING-WITH

Foundational to Daoism is the notion of *qi*, a word with no corresponding English equivalent that is sometimes translated as “vital energy.” *Qi*, one of “the most basic categories for the understanding of reality” (Rošker 127) going back at least 2,500 years, is imbricated with air and breath. Jing Wang notes that “*qi* was considered both the vital source breath for life and the driving force in the cosmic world” and would evolve “from a vague idea...[to] a cosmological, aesthetic, social, medical, moral concept, and eventually a philosophical system” (4). “*Qi*-philosophy,” she says, “suggests an organic, holistic, and enchanted worldview that the cosmos and the myriad things (including humans) are a correlated organism that are constantly resonating, condensing, disintegrating, and forming unity with one another. It is an enchanted worldview that holds a reverence for transformations, mutations, and resonance” (5). There is no breath without *qi*.

To be sure, breathing is pivotal to what might be termed a Daoist ethico-onto-epistemology. Zhuangzi, one of the key figures in historical Daoism, and the attributed author of the eponymous text so foundational to Daoists, has been called by Elias Canetti “the most intimate of all the philosophers” and “*the philosopher for breathing*” (quoted in Škof and Berndtson xiii). For Zhuangzi, breathing with the heels—that is, with one’s whole being—is what separates the true or authentic person (*zhenren*) from the masses, who breathe only with the throat. Nowhere, however, does Zhuangzi explain how to breathe this way; there is only the promissory claim that once this breathing is achieved, attunement with the world—which is something greater than mere awareness of and attentiveness to it—is possible. Here, we can invoke the Daoist concept of *ziran*, often translated as naturalness, spontaneity, or in the words of Brian Bruya, “effortless attention” (77). *Ziran* is to be so free from distraction that one is at syntony with the world (Aitken), or to borrow from a famous story in the *Zhuangzi*, it is like swimming without thinking about the motions. As Bruya says, “When you achieve a high level of a particular skill, you are achieving a natural level of ability, which is the highest

level of an ability” (14). This is *ziran*, the kind of ability I was seeking with respect to knowledge of the Ginkgo.

It’s worth noting that breathing-with isn’t only significant in Daoist traditions, but in Western ones, as well. So Irigaray reminds us that “breathing is the most crucial key component of our relation to ourselves, to the other(s) and to the world” (207), adding, “I cannot breathe if the vegetal world does not purify the air. We can observe today how the functioning, and even the subsistence, of the world is dependent on the quality of the air—without a breathable air, the living beings can no longer survive and they are necessary for the existence and even the governance of the world” (209). Breath, for Irigaray, is soul (*Between East and West*), an idea to which I find myself increasingly drawn. Never mind reverting to the *soul* in academic discourse; *breath* more than suffices and cultivating “[a] culture of breath” (Irigaray “Crucial Gesture” 212) becomes a possible purpose of the posthuman university.

As Achille Mbembe says, “We must start afresh. To survive, we must return to all living things—including the biosphere—the space and energy they need.” (S60). We begin to do this, he suggests, by attending to the breath we share. “All [...] wars on life begin by taking [it] away” (S61), and this is true whether the war is human v. human or human v. other-than-human life. There is an illogical logic at play. In Mbembe’s words, “Humankind and biosphere are one. Alone, humanity has no future. Are we capable of rediscovering that each of us belongs to the same species, that we have an indivisible bond with all life?” (S62). For Tomaž Grušovnik, “[b]reathing with the natural world [...] amounts to saying that we should cultivate our breath, prepare ourselves for the encounter, for the achieving of our humanity, for reinvention of ourselves, by listening to the ways the natural world exchanges with us” (127). On the other hand, Eve Mayes draws on the work of Tim Choy, and advances the notion of *conspiring*: “Conspiring (breathing-with) is a more-than-human endeavour; it exceeds human organs: plants and trees make human breath possible, and other species have other ways of breathing” (178). Breathing together, for Mayes, is “to speak together, to be in dialogue with one another” (197). Breath *is* and *as* communication.

So, I sat beneath the Ginkgo, slowly inhaling and exhaling, listening to myself breathe and also to the tree; breathing can be a form of listening, too (Alarcón-Díaz). As we breathed together, we communicated bio-semiotically.

IMAGINATION

Spending time with the Ginkgo, and breathing-with it, brought us into a kind of communion. But this was insufficient for duoethnography. It was necessary to use my imagination. In his seminal essay, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” Thomas Nagel is pessimistic about the prospect of a human perceiving *as* a bat—“to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat” (439)—or any other species. In an important aside, relegated to a footnote, however, he offers an important concession:

“It may be easier than I suppose to transcend inter-species barriers with the aid of the imagination. For example, blind people are able to detect objects near them by a form of sonar, using vocal clicks or taps of a cane. Perhaps if one knew what that was like, one could by extension imagine roughly what it was like to possess the much more refined sonar of a bat. The distance between oneself and other persons and other species can fall anywhere on a continuum. Even for other persons the understanding of what it is like to be them is only partial, and when one moves to species very different from oneself, a lesser degree of partial understanding may still be available. The imagination is remarkably flexible.” (442)

Nagel’s rumination on the power of the imagination is a reminder that, in fact, the only way one human can have an approximation of another human’s experience is via the imagination. Perfect knowledge of someone else’s perspective is impossible. I let my imagination do its eductive thing, drawing out what was latent, this latency being informed by all the research I had done. To draw on my imagination wasn’t to let it run amok. My research, along with my own storied worldview, functioned together as a self-imposed ethico-poetical boundary (Kearney).

Because knowledge must be disseminated in the university, and because other stories need to be shared to bring about change, there must be some output, a product, itself born of the imagination. Traditional duoethnographies read like a back-and-forth between two researchers. Certainly, this is one way of proceeding with a tree or any other other-than-human being. It's not the only way, though. Many art forms may be appropriately marshalled in service of translating the other-than-human's communication *as if* it were translatable.

To use art to articulate a tree's breath-as-response is to gladly admit to the lack of scientific objectivity in multispecies duoethnography. As Ki'en Debicki observes, scientific objectivity in human/tree communication may not be "altogether desirable" (44). Recollet and Johnson concur, reminding us that "the temporal-spatial and more-than-human relations that permeate well-storied places are sometimes too complex to be rendered legible" (181). "In every possible sense," says Gayatri Spivak, "translation is necessary but impossible" (13).

To be sure, there is a sense in which an alternative university requires "alternative political and decolonial modes of telling ecological stories" (Myers et al. 267). In my own work, I have, thus far, gravitated toward short fiction, in the manner of Ursula K. Le Guin (who, for what it's worth, was also deeply influenced by Daoism); but other art forms, from photography (Myers) to poetry (Burk) are just as valid. Rendering human/tree communication via duoethnography does not necessitate words. There are other ways of translating. Art can transfigure.

Once again, the purpose isn't to get the communication exactly right. We don't have that kind of exactitude even in human/human correspondence. The purpose, rather, is to do something like decentre the human, which, to reiterate, doesn't necessarily mean bringing subaltern species (i.e., all other-than-human life) into the centre, but moving consciously to the margins.

CONCLUSION

In a letter to his brother Theo, Vincent van Gogh described his struggle creating *Girl in a Wood*, and his desire to create breathing space among the Beech trees in the painting:

“The other study in the wood is of some large green beech trunks on a stretch of ground covered with dry sticks, and the little figure of a girl in white. There was the great difficulty of keeping it clear, and of getting space between the trunks standing at different distances—and the place and relative bulk of those trunks change with the perspective—to make it so that one can breathe and walk around in it, and to make you smell the fragrance of the wood.” (138)

This is what the university can do: intentionally create spaces and opportunities “so that one can breathe”—breathe with the other-than-humans that surround us, and in so doing, perhaps help to cultivate “[a] culture of breath” (Irigaray “Crucial Gesture” 212) that, if not quite fully attuned to other-than-human life, is at least more attentive of, and concerned for it.

In her response to Mahmood’s essay, referenced earlier, Danilyn Rutherford notes how “pay[ing] heed to the other others is to pay heed to the animals, plants, rocks, roads, microbes, chemicals, and all those other things that cry out to us” (Mahmood and Rutherford 5). There persists an absence of “all those other things that cry out to us” in both theorizing of the university and research on the university. Addressing this absence holds great promise.

I recognize, of course, that what I’m proposing is a story. Ultimately, we have to choose what stories we live by, shaped by our never-static political and ethical commitments. Here’s one metanarrative I accept:

“We are here because we evolved, and evolution occurred for no particular reason. Thus, on a Darwinian view, not only is our species not as special as we had once thought, but our lives are ultimately without purpose or meaning. Life just winds on aimlessly, a pointless, meandering sequence of

events. Sometimes it's pleasant, sometimes not, but it lacks any overall purpose or goal or destination." (Steve Stewart-Williams 197)

Within the narrative topography laid out by this story, then, the university must ask and re-ask what politics of knowledge and wisdom we want to be engaging in. While the university certainly doesn't need to embrace the story I've told here—one with other-than-humans in the principal cast, not just as supporting characters—there is and always will be some governing narrative or another moving students through its halls toward matriculation, guiding professors in the classroom, lab, and studio. We've seen what assumptions of human exceptionalism have produced. It's time for the university to turn toward other-than-humans and meet them halfway. Such a shift can influence the university's capacity for imagining and enacting a generation of possibilities.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Ginkgo near Sönbong-guyök, North Korea.

Figure 2: Ginkgo on Philosopher's Walk, Toronto.

Figure 3: Acrylic on paper.

Figure 4: Wax, water colour, and Ginkgo leaf on paper.

NOTES

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1. On the troubling notion of "research," and how it might be ethically reframed, see Tuck and Yang, "R-Words."↔

RESEARCH-CREATION AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN

COLLABORATION

ORIANA CONFENTE

This is a set of guiding principles for more-than-human collaboration in research-creation. As slippery terms with unclear boundaries, we must form practical and theoretical protocols to navigate multispecies activities that benefit the emerging episteme. To design inclusive frameworks for artistic experimentation, we must recognize other-than-humans as contributors rather than objects of study. Key concepts are established around valuing difference, agency, and care within postnatural arrangements to decentre the “human” in “more-than-human.” These principles are applicable to students, scholars, artists, makers, practitioners, and anyone else engaging with research-based art.

Ce texte présente un ensemble de principes directeurs pour une collaboration plus-qu’humaine en recherche-création. Face à des termes aux contours flous et aux définitions mouvantes, il est essentiel d’élaborer des protocoles pratiques et théoriques afin de naviguer les activités multi-espèces de manière éthique et bénéfique pour l’épistémè émergente. Pour concevoir des cadres inclusifs favorisant l’expérimentation artistique, nous devons reconnaître les entités autres-qu’humaines comme des contributrices à part entière, plutôt que comme de simples objets d’étude. Les concepts clés de ces principes reposent sur la valorisation de la différence, l’agence et le soin au sein d’arrangements post-naturels, dans le but de décentrer l’« humain » du « plus-qu’humain ». Ces principes s’adressent aux étudiant-es, chercheur-es, artistes, artisan-es, praticien-nes et à toute personne impliquée dans une démarche artistique fondée sur la recherche.

INTRODUCTION

At the Venice Architecture Biennale 2021, a fox, rat, wasp, pigeon, cow, boar, snake, beaver, raven, mushroom, and several people were invited to gather at a four-metre long wooden table for a multispecies banquet to “find new ways of living together” in the wake of climate change (“Refuge for Resurgence”). Presented by speculative design studio Superflux, *Refuge for Resurgence* was a call for do-it-together (DIT) practices and more-than-human communities in times of political, social, and ecological uncertainty.

Unlike do-it-yourself, DIT is about working and being together in the world, while negotiating the tensions that arise from existing in/as collectives (“inclusivity/exclusivity, good/bad relations,” and so on) (Singer et al. 12-13). DIT strategies should be applied to the knowledge produced and shared through research-creation. As defined by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), research-creation is: “an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation.” Also referred to as artistic research or research-based art (Bishop; Steyerl), research-creation spans many mediums and has no singular approach. It is an expansive and unfixed vocabulary at this time.

Likewise, “more-than-human,” a concept related to (and sometimes used interchangeably with) the terms nonhuman, other-than-human, multispecies, and postnature, is considered an unfixed vocabulary (Ducros). In this text, “other-than-human” denotes things that are not human (plants, animals, minerals, or others), while “more-than-human” refers to a state of interconnectedness between human and other-than-human entities. I prefer the term “other-than-human” over “non-human.” This language follows the recommendation of Gabriel Alonso, who suggested that it is violent and uninteresting to focus on the negation of “humanness” as a defining characteristic.¹ Our understanding of what is more-than-human is “constantly evolving in meaning and content to reflect a dynamic critical inter-

vention about what it means to be human as humanity must face various catastrophes” (Ducros).² What’s more-than-human is always transforming and never complete.

Behind the *Refuge for Resurgence* exhibit, Superflux designer Ed Lewis says, “We must re-frame ourselves from the apex of the ecosystem to a part, like any other” (Kazior). Donna Haraway stresses how unavoidable it is to make-with others by sympoiesis, “collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. These systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change” (*Staying with the Trouble* 61). As researchers and artists, our “sym-poietic collaborators” are our “co-laborers” (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene” 161). In other words, to collaborate with others is to do-it-together.

Research-creation is the framework that structures my artistic practice. My work is process-based, iterative, and experimental. Rather than striving for an aesthetic standard, I seek new methods or habits, which blurs the boundaries between acts of “research” and “creation” for me. As my practice is interested in postnatural ecologies and sustainable approaches, I rely on DIT strategies and more-than-human exchanges, particularly with elements of the biosphere such as plants or minerals.³ More-than-human collaboration is essential for the research-creation that I participate in.

This is a call to shape the emerging episteme of research-creation within inclusive frameworks “all the way down” (borrowing a phrase frequently used by Haraway in her texts to describe the depth of our interconnectedness in the world)⁴ to cease thinking of other-than-humans as backdrops or accessories for human activities. Using more-than-human collaboration as a theory-method challenges human-biased perceptions of creativity (Van Patter et al. 86), shifting interest from mankind to the potential of all matter—human, vegetable, mineral, and more.

The principles that follow are works-in-progress that were first presented during the “Research-Creation Episteme: Practices, Interventions, Dissensus” symposium at Trent University in October 2023. They are a call to:

1. Recognize that more-than-human relationships are beneficial for research-creation;
2. Push the limits of research-creation beyond the university framework;
3. Accept that because humans facilitate research-creation, we are responsible for valuing contributions by both human and other-than-human actors through our practices; and,
4. Above all, practice care with other-than-human collaborators.

I am offering them, along with snippets of the theoretical and practical contexts from which they were conceived, as an independent researcher and artist who hails from Canadian academia. These principles serve as reflections and reminders for myself while navigating research-creation and more-than-human collaboration, in hopes of also being applicable to other students, scholars, artists, practitioners, makers, supervisors, and anyone else engaging in modes of research-based art. As such, this text is open to interrogation and expansion.

1. MORE-THAN-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS ARE BENEFICIAL FOR RESEARCH-CREATION.

More-than-human relations are everywhere. Human beings are not even alone inside their own bodies, which are full of self-organizing minerals, microbes, and other materials (Bennett 10; Sidebottom). These “shifting assemblages of humans and nonhumans” are “the very stuff of collaborative survival” (Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* 20) and they are essential for the co-production of knowledge (Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* 20-21).

Human-vegetable-mineral-other assemblages are key for artistic and scholastic investigations.

Philosopher and jazz clarinetist David Rothenberg collaborates with birds to compose music that neither could play separately (“David Rothenberg - Interspecies Musician and Philosopher”). When actor Mihai Florea feels incapable of working alongside other postgraduate researchers, he collaborates with a stick—although he frames this exchange as performing in solitude (an interpretation that I disagree with) (Florea). Within my practice, which currently explores alternative photography in the pursuit of sustainable darkroom methods, the botanical processing and printing of film is not possible without plants. These more-than-human interactions allow artist-researchers to participate in making works which are not possible otherwise. By embracing the openness of research-creation with other-than-humans, we have space for indiscipline, to play with(in) our assemblages and leave room for the “surprising change” that Haraway says is achievable through sympoiesis or DIT.

It is a simple principle but it is fundamental. Recognizing the importance of more-than-human relationships is the first step towards cultivating practices that support collaborations which advance research-creation.

2. RESEARCH-CREATION MUST PUSH ITS LIMITS OUTSIDE THE RESTRICTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY FRAMEWORK.

By SSHRC’s definition, research-creation is entangled in academia, a neoliberal and colonial institution that overlooks and undervalues humans and other-than-humans alike (Bishop; Steyerl 55; Van Patter et al. 86). Ownership over research-creation works are institutional-political questions (Chapman; Simoniti 129).

Hito Steyerl argues that to maintain innovation and resist domination, research-based art practices shouldn’t be limited to becoming yet another discipline under a university’s purview, despite the episteme’s current trajectory (61-62). Consider bio-art. Historically, bio-art experiments have been supported by academic institutions more

than contemporary art organizations (Simoniti 122). Vid Simoniti examines Maja Smrekar's *K-9_Topology* (2014-ongoing) as an example, a performance art collaboration between the artist and canines (120). On Smrekar's series, Simoniti remarks:

"Should we say that an artistic practice, such as Smrekar's, is assisted by the research she undertakes into evolutionary biology? Or should we say (more ambitiously) that, in some sense, such a practice constitutes research into evolutionary biology? [...] The issue at stake is whether we ought to see artistic research as knowledge-producing, and therefore belonging to the academy, or (merely) as art that is inspired by an academic field." (121)

Simoniti's concern about absorption extends to research-creation as a whole. Overlapping existing academic structures and the pursuit of artistic research risks forming what Simoniti calls another "methodologically homogenous discipline" (126). If conforming to an academic discipline, bio-art such as *K-9_Topology* could be subsumed by bioengineering, which might complicate standards for ethical scrutiny, utility, significance, and aesthetics (Simoniti 125-27). Appeasing bureaucratic divisions could also make multispecies explorations impossible. David Rothenberg remarks that he feels fortunate to be conducting his collaborations with songbirds at his current institution, because his investigations fall between arts and science faculties, and "only at [the New Jersey Institute of Technology] could a philosophy professor decide he wants to start making music with birds and not get thrown out onto the streets" ("David Rothenberg - Interspecies Musician and Philosopher" 0:03:09). Moreover, becoming established as a normative academic discipline means complicity in modes of cognitive and cultural capitalism (Steyerl 61), although this is not to say that research-creation is free of such issues otherwise.

Art historian Claire Bishop criticizes research-based art for "open[ing] avenues overlooked by hegemonic historical narratives but tend[ing] to shore up a canon of white male protagonists, effectively consolidating received history rather than contesting it" (Bishop). Turning to Sadiya Hartman's method of "critical fabulation,"⁵

Bishop comments: “For fabulation to have critical currency, it matters which histories are being retrieved and why.” Within critical making and design, it also “matters what matter we use to think other matters with” (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 12). Fabulating, or storying-with, is a literary and scientific method for understanding and building worlds, creating and transforming knowledge or truth (Van Patter et al. 87-88). If the only matter that matters is hegemonic and homogenous, it restricts the stories that can be told, the knowledge those stories can generate, and the truths that can be evaluated or assessed. Moving away from “education-as-usual” and towards multispecies belonging makes space for diverse fabulating:

“Taking a “posthuman turn” in education therefore involves a shift from learning-as-cognition to a focus on connections between humans and non-human others; a move from the primacy of the written and spoken word to the re-emergence of the embodied self; and a recognition that other-than-human agents are always present in processes of learning. [...] Posthumanism can offer a much-needed affective turn towards the kind of social justice that accounts for difference; enacted through a process of de-familiarization from the dominant vision of education.” (Sidebottom)

More-than-human collaboration can articulate and appreciate other-than-human storying, knowledge, and truth in otherwise restricted practices (Van Patter et al. 89). Therefore, human and other-than-human collaboration in research-creation resists academic conformity and domination, and should continue defying rigid categorization within the university. After all, “artists can become bioengineers, but then we simply have more bioengineering” (Simoniti 129).

3. HUMANS FACILITATE RESEARCH-CREATION, AND THIS RESPONSIBILITY CALLS FOR PRACTICES THAT VALUE CONTRIBUTIONS BY BOTH HUMAN AND OTHER-THAN-HUMAN ACTORS.

For better or for worse, the human artist-researcher controls how to make meaning out of their more-than-human exchanges. Almost anything can be a potential collaborator, but we determine what we want to engage with by deciding the settings for research-creation and interpreting the outcome for other humans.⁶ Research-creation is an act of translation: “That does not mean that it translates correctly – but it nevertheless translates” (Steyerl 61). We have to be responsible translators.

To be a responsible translator means advocating for the agency of other-than-human contributors. How to do so depends on the specifics of the more-than-human exchange, but ultimately, the artist-researcher should resist the “homogenization and passivization of external nonhuman ‘nature’ resulting from anthropocentrism” (Van Patter et al. 85). Denying the agency of “objects” leads to their domination and appropriation (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” 592-93). Maintaining inequalities through intersections of “power/knowledge/art—which reduced whole populations to objects of knowledge, domination, and representation” needs to be “countered not only by social struggle and revolt, but also by epistemological and aesthetic innovation” (Steyerl 59). The “epistemological and aesthetic innovation” needed here is recognizing other-than-humans as collaborators rather than research participants or objects of study. Doing so allows artist-researchers to “generate knowledge for and with others, rather than about them,” which should be one of the main objectives of more-than-human collaboration (Van Patter et al. 86). Human contributors must attempt to decentre themselves as the primary knowledge producer or storyteller, sharing that status with their other-than-human contributors.

Tuula Närhinen decentres herself in her image-making project, *Touch of Rain* (2011). Närhinen provides instruments for the rain to create its own impressions on various photosensitive materials,

which she describes as “both innovative and essentially worldmaking” (Närhinen 629). In the artist’s words, “Nature demonstrates its creative capacity by producing ‘portraits’ of itself,” drawing from the “shifts and translations that showcase the natural event—(re)produced by devices, images, and experimental methods” (Närhinen 629-30). Phytography is a cameraless, low-toxicity form of alternative photography that I employ in my practice. It involves exposing the internal chemistry of plants on photosensitive surfaces to create images called phytograms. Filmmaker Karel Doing claims phytography is important for biosemiotics as “the phytogram translates a plant’s experience of the world into an image that is legible for humans: plant sensation captured on film” (32). When I create phytograms, I don’t know how my images will look—I am responsible for selecting plants and scattering them on filmstrips, but the composition and intensity of the exposure is up to the plants and the sun respectively. I list the foraged plants that I work with as co-artists to highlight their presence in not only the artwork but also the process of image-making (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). In all cases, the human contributor facilitates an interaction while the other-than-human contributors (water, plants, the sun) take on a prominent position of authorship.

Recognizing the capacity of other-than-human actors is a necessary step, but not a novel one. Western worldviews tend to categorize other-than-humans as an “insignificant Other, a homogenized, voiceless blank state of existence,” a binary that only reinforces the human “domination of Earth” (Hall 1). However, “many cultures, including Indigenous Peoples worldwide” do not share this anthropocentric opinion—and now Western science is beginning to reflect “these ancient, long-standing Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies” after colonialism “all but destroyed a way of life and a perspective that sees the natural world as vibrant, alive, and filled with non-human lifeforms” (Tingley 5).⁷ Regarding both humans and other-than-humans as equally important in research-creation can be an anti-colonial attitude and a step towards adopting methodologies that disrupt homogenization, as long as those other-than-humans are not fetishized in the process.⁸

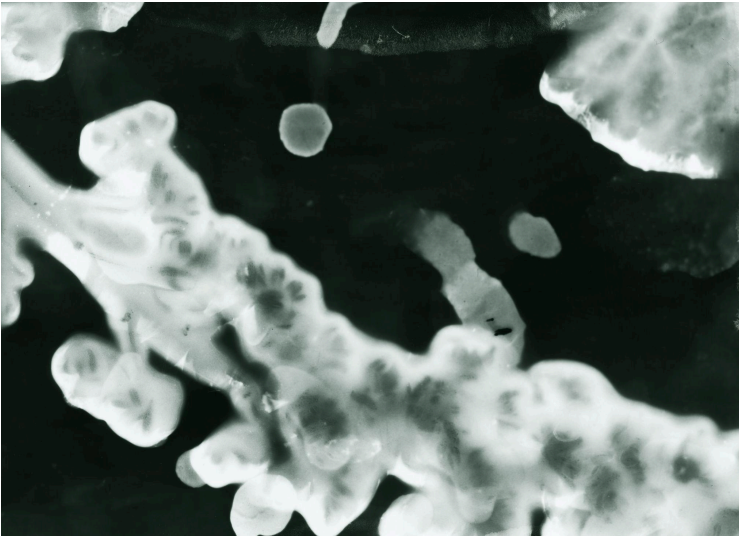


Figure 1: Oriana Confente and wild mignonette, Exercises in seeing as a leaf #2 (details), 2023, silver gelatin print.

4. HUMANS MUST PRACTICE CARE WITH OTHER-THAN-HUMAN COLLABORATORS.

This principle cannot be understated: humans and other-than-humans deserve care-full collaboration.

The Bureau of Care⁹ foregrounds a concept of care as “collective and structural practice not only for others but *with* others” (Fokianaki). This perspective is a radical departure from the care-less and isolating networks that many humans and other-than-humans exist within (The Care Collective et al. 94; Fokianaki). For arts-based practitioners and beyond, care-full change encourages knowledge sharing while re-examining labour distribution and compensation to dismantle institutional inequalities (Fokianaki).

Within more-than-human research-creation, “The presence of the non-human in art is central and ubiquitous, and the artist is ethically implicated in its management and engagement” (Beitiks 151). Care

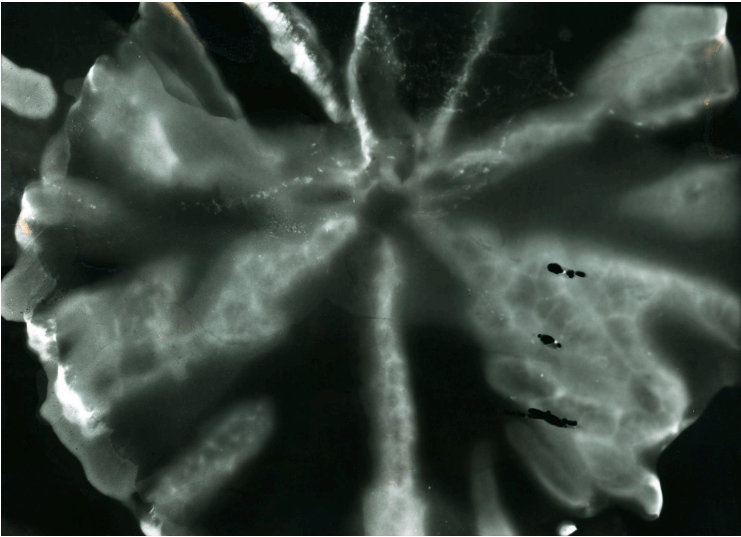


Figure 2: Oriana Confente and common mallow, Exercises in seeing as a leaf #2 (details), 2023, silver gelatin print.

is an ethical issue (Fokianaki). In my experience, there are often formal ethical guidelines for facilitating more-than-human exchanges in research with non-human animals but not other types of other-than-humans. We might have a standard duty of care mandated to exercise experiments with birds or canines, but what about sticks or rain? As the human who is facilitating a more-than-human act of research-creation (principle #3), who understands that this collaboration is beneficial for their work (principle #1), we must go beyond the minimum institutional expectations of care (principle #2).

As responsible research-art facilitators, we know that care-full collaboration upholds the value and agential power of all parties in research-creation through meaningful acknowledgment of contributions by every human and other-than-human involved.^{10,11} In that spirit, sharing the symbolic goods of authorship is one step closer to an inclusive, care-full research-creation practice.¹² But caring is com-

plicated. It shouldn't be confused with romanticizing more-than-human relationships, or limited to noticing that the other is there.

Agnieszka Kurant outsourced labour to termite colonies to produce *A.A.I.* (2014), an acronym for the phrase “artificial artificial intelligence” which was coined by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos (Kurant and Termite colonies). The termites were presented with coloured sands, gold, and crystals to build glittering, fluorescent mounds over a period of several months under the supervision of Kurant and entomologists at the University of Florida (Braithwaite; Kurant). Kurant, concerned with collective intelligence and the diffusion of authorship, credits herself and the termite colonies as creators of the series (Kurant; Kurant and Termite colonies). But is this care-full more-than-human collaboration? It's unclear what happened to the colonies after they were evicted and their mounds were lacquered in preparation for exhibition (Braithwaite; Kurant; Kurant and Termite colonies). It's also unclear if her other-than-human contributors were somehow compensated for participating in what the artist describes as “a sort of harmless, organic sweatshop” (Kurant; Braithwaite).¹³ Kurant expresses interest in bringing attention to creative hierarchies (Kurant), but does not challenge them. Kurant's research-creation collaboration raises questions about new ways to recognize other-than-human authors and how to share symbolic and material goods that meaningfully align with other-than-human values. What matters to a termite? Termites don't care if they're listed as co-authors of an artwork. They might care if they lose their home, though.

My alternative photographic series, *Exercises in seeing as a leaf* (2023-), is an exploration of more-than-human image-making. I can never truly know what matters to the leaves, flowers, twigs, or stems that I work with. I can only assume what care-full behaviour must be as an inhabitant of the same landscapes. Caring for wild plants involves mindful foraging practices—collecting only as much as I need.¹⁴ It involves using a biodegradable film developer solution so that plants can be composted at the end of our process, returning them to the earth. It involves learning about each plant, even before it is foraged, so that I can not only refer to them by name when my

work is eventually shared with the public, but also become aware of their history, characteristics, and home. I might not fully understand their perspectives, but I do my best to practice reciprocity and engage with their specific environment (especially as those environments are impacted by human activities which have triggered climate change and biodiversity loss).

I listen to Moe Beitiks's advice on performing with other-than-humans ethically and care-fully as an artist-researcher:

"We can consider the potential influence of the work on perspectives toward non-humans. We can care for the material beyond its responsibility to the work. [...] We can facilitate the human-non-human relationship. Be with things. Care for things. Listen to things. Try not to be an asshole to things. Give space to things on what could be their own terms." (156)

There is no universal understanding of the world. This is as true amongst human beings as it is true beyond our species. Although we can decentre ourselves as much as possible, when we realize that we cannot fully comprehend our other-than-human collaborators, we will likely try to approximate understanding through anthropomorphism. And that's okay—there is evidence that anthropomorphism might be a useful tool for empathizing with other-than-human perspectives (Bennett 10, Beitiks 155). If we relinquish control and embrace the role of co-creation, we can facilitate a collective, relational experience that values the research-creation process as much as the resulting artworks. More-than-human-making accounts for difference: "We are in this together; but we are not one and the same" (Braidotti 52). Try to get to know your collaborators, give them space to act on their own terms (even if it doesn't seem logical), and acknowledge their contributions.

Care is the difference between collaborating with other-than-humans and using them as pawns in our pursuit of knowledge production. Care-full more-than-human research-creation is a horizontal exchange. As concepts shift and parameters are redefined, it is clear that it is no longer acceptable to reproduce the myth of the in-

dividual artist-researcher acting alone. More-than-human collaboration is an important axis for research-creation and we must develop and adhere to standards to uphold the integrity of all actors involved in the process.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Confente, Oriana and wild mignonette, *Exercises in seeing as a leaf #2 (details)*, 2023, silver gelatin print.

Figure 2: Confente, Oriana and common mallow, *Exercises in seeing as a leaf #2 (details)*, 2023, silver gelatin print.

NOTES

1. Gabriel Alonso is the founder of the Institute of Postnatural Studies in Madrid, Spain. Our discussion took place when he taught the "New Ecologies: Decentralizing the Human Through Contemporary Practices" course in the spring of 2024. "Non-human" is a widespread term in ecological conversations and it will still appear in quoted literature.↔

2. Sometimes attributed to David Abram's book, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (1996), "more-than-human" also draws from the works of environmental scholars such as Donna Haraway to acknowledge the agency of other-than-human actors and interspecies entanglements between people and the rest of the world (Kazior). To be more-than-human recognizes that we live in assemblages, "a term Jane Bennett borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to illustrate that bodies can be affected by encounters with other bodies as sites to manifest the non-hierarchical power of related matter" (Confente et al.); "living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within" (Bennett 21-24).↵
3. I have worked with both organic matter, namely foraged plants, and inorganic matter, such as electronic waste (e-waste), although I consider obsolete digital technologies to be an extension of the biosphere. A computer is made of rocks, after all (Evans), and a cellphone is "a mineral sandwich in your pocket" (Wark 4).↵
4. Several instances of Haraway using the phrase "all the way down" include: "I tell stories about stories, all the way down" (*The Companion Species Manifesto*, 21); "Poiesis is symchthonic, sympoietic, always partnered all the way down..." (*Staying with the Trouble*, 33); "...there are turtles upon turtles of naturecultures all the way down" (*The Haraway Reader*, 2).↵
5. Saidiya Hartman introduces critical fabulation in her essay, "Venus in Two Acts" (2008).↵
6. In Bruno Latour's examination of an empirical study on soil and vegetation, "Latour demonstrates how the 'facts' extracted from nature are in fact 'fabricated' (sic) by the researchers. Latour argues that we have no direct access to knowledge. It is only through a chain of representations and the parsing of that chain in both directions that natural phenomena are identified and understood" (Närhinen 629).↵
7. For examples, see the *more-than-human* group show presented during the CONTACT Photography Festival at OCAD University, Toronto, Canada in 2023. The show exhibited media artworks engaging with the intersection of art, science, technology, and Indigenous worldviews to embody more-than-human ecologies. See also, *Pollution is Colonialism* by Max Liboiron (2021), which explores our complicated relationship with plastic. Liboiron's research practices incorporate In-

digenous concepts of land, ethics, and relations, showing us how scientific methods can resist or reinforce colonialism.↵

8. Romanticizing more-than-human relationships without caring for other-than-humans—through tokenization and lack of meaningful action—is actually an extractivist, colonial attitude. See Max Liboiron’s critique on fetishizing kinship in *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021).↵
9. According to the Bureau of Care, an interdisciplinary research project initiated by State of Concept Athens, care is one of the most important foundations for Martin Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world—although his theory is too self-oriented, which is corrected by feminist scholars who position care as community-based instead (Fokianaki; The Care Collective et al. 21).↵
10. The Climate Justice Code, a tool for artists and art organizations across the Global North, calls “not imagining or assuming one kind of being or one mode of existing at the center of our practices” a form of non-extractive care (MacBride 18).↵
11. This aligns with what Anna Tsing calls the “art of inclusion” or “noticing” other-than-human collaborators, which she applies to loving fungi—a fulfilling and inspiring action for her in times of extinction (“Arts of Inclusion” 192-94). Tsing notes that “human exceptionalism blinds us” to recognizing the beauty of interdependence (“Unruly Edges” 142-44). Ecosophers urge us to demonstrate care by respecting the life and well-being of all humans and other-than-humans alike, through attentiveness and empathizing with others (Abram 50). Slowing down and paying closer attention to things we might have otherwise ignored is an empathetic position.↵
12. Citation can be a feminist act that puts us in the context of other thinkers, regardless of the legitimacy they have been allocated by hegemonic institutions—that’s how to build an anti-canon (Seu).↵
13. Kurant paid thousands of human workers for their contributions to *Assembly Line* (2017) (Kurant).↵
14. I learned responsible foraging techniques from a variety of formal and informal resources. See “An Introduction to Responsible Foraging” by Kate Hoff on the *North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems* blog for an adept summary of what to keep in mind when foraging.↵

THIS ESSAY HAS A SOUNDTRACK

MARTIN ARNOLD

“This Essay Has a Soundtrack” really does have a soundtrack. It is a piece of music composed, performed and recorded by the author that uses a processed version of the essay as its score. The recording of the composition is offered as a possible musical accompaniment to reading the score. While this places such a reading within the field of research-creation, the essay actually engages this field more through speculating about the essay form as a fluid, open, indeterminate and unsubstantiated thing that can, as Adorno puts it: “blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts.” This engagement with the poetic, aesthetic potentials of the essay serves as an entrance to touching on aesthetic theory more generally, in contact with Montaigne, Adorno, Born, Menke, Seel, Lyotard, Culler, Cazdyn, and Trinh Minh-ha among others. While the essay suggests

« Cet essai a une bande sonore » a véritablement une bande sonore. Il s’agit d’une pièce musicale composée, interprétée et enregistrée par l’auteur, qui utilise une version traitée de l’essai comme partition. L’enregistrement de la composition est proposé comme un accompagnement musical possible à la lecture de la partition. Bien que cela place une telle lecture dans le domaine de la recherche-création, l’essai s’immerge dans ce domaine davantage en spéculant sur la forme de l’essai comme une entité fluide, ouverte, indéterminée et non fondée, qui peut, comme le dit Adorno, “ouvrir ce qui ne peut être absorbé par des concepts”. Cette réflexion sur les potentiels poétiques et esthétiques de l’essai sert de point d’entrée pour aborder la théorie esthétique de manière plus générale, en contact avec Montaigne, Adorno, Born, Menke, Seel, Lyotard, Culler, Cazdyn, et Trinh Minh-ha, entre autres. Tandis que l’essai suggère que le lectorat devrait

readers should search for and experiment with alternatives to the translation and interpretation of metaphors when thinking research-creation, the author, does this more as a performance, banging around in-between the thought of others, rather than as a sustained, cogent argument.

chercher des alternatives à la traduction et à l'interprétation de métaphores, et expérimenter avec elles lors de la réflexion sur la recherche-création, l'auteur le fait davantage en tant que performance, en se déplaçant entre les pensées des autres, plutôt que comme un argument cohérent et soutenu.

[Download audio](#)

This essay really does have a soundtrack. I composed it, performed it, and produced a recorded version of it through electronic/digital technology. Please refer to endnote #1 now and, if you wish, follow the instructions to get the soundtrack going before you read on.¹

That I am a composer of music, variously notated, as well as an Assistant Professor in the Cultural Studies department of a Canadian university, bears on the constitution of this essay; more on that below. That this essay has a soundtrack, also qualifies it to be a piece of what Canadian academics would categorize as research-creation; more on that below as well. But first:

This essay does aspire to be an essay. It aspires to be an essay worthy of the name this form has been given since Michel de Montaigne turned a French verb into a noun with the writing, publishing, and (significantly) near-continuous revising of his *Essais* (*Les Essais* in modern French; in English: *Essays* or *The Essays*) in the late 16th century. “Since Montaigne, the literary essay has been founded on uncertainty. As has often been pointed out, “to essay” means to try out or to experiment – to give something a go without being sure of the result” (Russell 154). When reading criticism of Montaigne’s essays they are variously described as tentative, non-conclusive, open, indeterminate, digressive, indirect, exploratory, haphazard, fragmentary, partial, and so on. David Russell also mentions that “Montaigne himself peppered his essays with confessions of his own inadequacies”

(155). I do not invoke an aspirational affiliation with Montaigne's essays *only* by way of offering an excuse for the digressions, polyvalent tangents, loose ends, ungainly proportions, tangled references, flagrant compressions, truncations and fragmentations, drifting detours, incomplete speculations, discursive spillages, and uncertainties and (certainly) inadequacies you will encounter in this essay. Thinking about the form of the essay as imagined together with Montaigne and other critical thought that draws on his subtle provocations allows a way into a discussion of the provisional topic of this essay: complexities around thinking research-creation.

If this essay did not have a soundtrack would it still be a piece of research-creation? I guess the answer is "possibly," but a more emphatic argument could be made for an essay by Montaigne: R. Lane Kauffmann writes: "It is the literary and rhetorical quality of his style that gives Montaigne's essays their air of epistemological openness and indeterminacy" (*The Theory of the Essay* 16). And Kara Wittmann writes:

"The Montaignean essay offers a form of aesthetic knowledge that attracts philosophers and critical theorists looking for "a particular kind of inquiry that is neither poetry nor philosophy but a mix of logics, dislogics, intuition, revulsion, wonder"" [quoting Retallack, Joan. *The Poethical Wager*. University of California Press, 2003, p. 4] (80).

It is its relationship to the rhetorical, the literary, the poetic—that is, the aesthetic—that allows for the possibility that the Montaignean essay may enter the scope of the term research-creation. But before pursuing this potential, some clarification of terms seems in order (any digressions that ensue notwithstanding).

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada's federal research funding agency, defines research-creation as:

"An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, schol-

arly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula." (Definitions 1)

I think this definition is suitably vague enough to work as a starting point for a wide variety of activities. I would question the term research-creation; I cannot think of any kind of reporting on/response to the outcomes of intense searching (i.e. research) that would not be creative.^[^2] However, SSHRC makes it clear that what the term actually covers is the combination of *artistic* creation and more traditionally produced academic research (I suppose they were looking for something a bit less on-the-nose than "arts-based research," as it is often called in the United States, but more suggestively poetic than "practice as research" or "practice-based research," preferred terms in Australia and the United Kingdom). It is not the project of this essay to examine possible combinations that could fit the SSHRC definition or work through (even a bit systematically) the possibilities and problems that can arise from pursuing this mode of research within any version of the Academy one might formulate. There are scholars who are doing that work and have been for some time.² What I am concerned with here is questioning the implementation of terms like art/art forms/artwork/artistic expression/artistic meaning/etcetera as if they are generally understood (if malleable and moveable) givens. My concerns here are broadly political, even if they are manifested more through essaying political resonances than incisively advocating for any agenda. One way to continue is to carry on thinking about the essay.

T. W. Adorno wrote "The Essay as Form" between 1954 and 1958. He only mentions Montaigne once, and then, he is quoting someone else. However, he does this in the context of one of his most dynamic assertions concerning the essay:

"Doubt about the unconditional priority of method was raised, in the actual process of thought, almost exclusively by the essay. It does justice to the consciousness of non-identity, without needing to say so, radically un-radical in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total."Perhaps the great Sieur de Montaigne felt something like this when he gave his writings the wonderfully elegant and apt title of Essays [...]" [quoting Max Bense, "Über den Essay und seine Prosa," Merkur, No. 3, March 1947, p. 418] (157)

I have read many articles that incorporate ideas ostensibly taken from Adorno that acknowledge how problematic it is both to attempt to condense, summarize, or in any way encapsulate his thought, and/or to attempt to extract ideas from the always-complex set of contextual relationships and compound interconnections Adorno inevitably puts forward. I join them in this acknowledgement. With that in mind, I pull in Adorno to raise the stakes around thinking the essay as fluid, open, and unsubstantiated. The "consciousness of non-identity": the resistance to thinking something *is* something, where the somethings either side of "is" are thought in *essence* to be the same ("identity" comes from the Latin root *idem* "same"). To think something *is* something is a kind of closure; it defines (from *de-* (expressing completion) + *finire* "finish" (from *finis* "end")). Moreover, it is based on a principle (from Latin *principium* "source," *principia* (plural) 'foundations')—that from which the essay refrains; as Kauffmann puts it: "[In]The Essay as Form" [t]he essay is said to reject the identity principle upon which all systems are based - the epistemological assumption that their network of concepts mirrors the structure of reality; that subject and object, the *ordo idearum* and the *ordo rerum*, are identical. What motivates identity thinking, in Adorno's view, is the urge to dominate or control reality [...]" ("The Skewed Path" 77). Of course, Adorno goes much further in asserting the political motivations Kauffmann refers to:

"[The essay] is being crushed between an organized science, on one side, in which everyone presumes to control everyone and everything else, and which excludes, with the sanctimo-

nious praise of “intuitive” or “stimulating,” anything that does not conform to the *status quo*; and, on the other side, by a philosophy that makes do with the empty and abstract residues left aside by the scientific apparatus [...] The essay, however, has to do with that which is blind in its objects. Conceptually it wants to blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts [...]” (Adorno 170)

Throughout “The Essay as Form” Adorno accuses “science” of foreclosing more open, sceptical, critically exploratory, continuously free-flowing thought. I think he really is calling out actual institutions of “organized science,” but I read “science” here as functioning more as a metaphor for any kind of instrumental reason that constructs foundations and principles that ground and support social-cultural power-structures. And Adorno does not stop with chiding any philosophy that buys into “science’s” prescriptive and proscriptive rationality by treating that which is remaindered by science as empty and abstract residue; he implicates some (organized) philosophy in his accusations:

“The essay does not strive for closed, deductive or inductive, construction. It revolts above all against the doctrine - deeply rooted since Plato - that the changing and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy; against that ancient injustice toward the transitory [...]” (158)

So how can the essay attempt to be open/perpetually in-motion/transitory; how can it “blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts?” The title of “The Essay as Form” proposes Adorno’s answer: it attempts this through form. But not form as preexisting structure, a container that content is poured into; maybe, rather, a kind of formless form³ that emerges from the essayist’s flow of thought, that is that flow; it is form imagined as a kind of dynamic rhetoric, where the flow of thought is as impactful as its apprehended, discursive, communicated meaning. Kauffmann says: “While the systematic philosopher employs rhetoric as a supplementary device to summarize the results of his thinking, the essayist does not separate the conceptual and the rhetorical moments of thought” (“The Skewed

Path” 80). Adorno ups the ante in setting what is at stake in the relationship between rhetoric and systematic thought:

“If the truth of the essay gains its momentum by way of its untruth, its truth is not to be sought in mere opposition to what is ignoble and proscribed in it, but in these very things: in its mobility, its lack of that solidity which science demands, transferring it, as it were, from property relationships to the intellect. Those who believe they must defend the intellect against the charge of a lack of solidity are the enemies of intellect: intellect itself, once emancipated, is mobile. As soon as it wants more than simply the administrative repetition and manipulated presentation of what already exists, it is somehow exposed; truth abandoned by play would be nothing more than tautology. Thus historically the essay is related to rhetoric, which the scientific mentality, since Descartes and Bacon, has always wanted to do away with; that is, until, appropriately in the age of science, rhetoric decayed and became a science *sui generis*, the science of communication.” (168)

As ever with Adorno, there is too much to unpack here. But, putting aside what he might mean by “truth,”⁴ I would underline Adorno’s thinking of rhetoric as being intrinsically mobile and radically playful. He also positions a version of rhetoric (one potentially embodied by the essay) as opposed to a version of communication, communication as a science, solid. This is not to deny rhetoric’s historical connections to communication. Adorno continues:

“Of course rhetoric has always been a form of thought which accommodated itself to communicative language. It directed itself to the unmediated: the substitute-satisfaction of its audience. Yet the essay preserves in the very autonomy of its presentation, through which it distinguishes itself from the scientific mode of communication, traces of the communicative with which science dispenses. The pleasures which rhetoric wants to provide to its audience are sublimated in the essay into the idea of the pleasure of freedom vis-à-vis the object, freedom

that gives the object more of itself than if it were mercilessly incorporated into the order of ideas.” (168)

So yes, there is a history of rhetoric functioning in its typified manner: servile to communicative language, providing a pleasurable entertainment instrumentalized to persuasively emphasize (“summarize”) the meaning the rhetorician is attempting to communicate. But the essay enables rhetoric—figures of speech—to exceed, spill beyond, the ideas it means to communicate. It is here where experiencing the rhetorical becomes aesthetic experience.

But before I speculate about aesthetic experience and “art forms” (hearkening back to SSHRC)—the differences and interweavings of these terms—I want to put forward something of the complexity of this undertaking up front. In her article “On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity,” anthropologist and musicologist Georgina Born writes:

“Music is perhaps the paradigmatic multiply-mediated, immaterial and material, fluid quasi-object, in which subjects and objects collide and intermingle. It favours associations or assemblages between musicians and instruments, composers and scores, listeners and sound systems – that is, between subjects and objects. Music also takes myriad social forms, embodying three orders of social mediation. It produces its own varied social relations – in performance, in musical associations and ensembles, in the musical division of labour. It inflects existing social relations, from the most concrete and intimate to the most abstract of collectivities – music’s embodiment of the nation, of social hierarchies, and of the structures of class, race, gender and sexuality. But music is bound up also in the broader institutional forces that provide the basis of its production and reproduction, whether elite or religious patronage, market exchange, the arena of public and subsidized cultural institutions, or late capitalism’s multi-polar cultural economy.” (7)

I do not take the above as a definition. Rather, it is an incomplete set of associations that point to how radically heterogeneous the assemblage that gets called “music” is. And, while words like “fluid” and “immaterial” might seem specifically applicable to discussions of music, I would argue that, with some editing of particular terms, all of the above could be applied to the experience of any culturally designated art form (we have already seen words like “fluid” and “immaterial” applied to the quasi-Montaignean essay). In “Listening, Meditation, Event,” Born expands on the above:

“Musical experience entails and proffers relations between objects and subjects; indeed it construes what might be called a musical assemblage - a series or network of relations between musical sounds, human and other subjects, practices, performances, cosmologies, discourses and representations, technologies, spaces, and social relations. Music is never singular, but always a multiplicity; it exists only in and through its multiple and changing mediations, in the guise of such assemblages. There is no musical object or text - whether sounds, score or performance - that stands outside mediation; just as, we might say, there is no musical subject that exists prior to an engagement with the musical object in the act of listening. Yet it is perhaps uncontentious to suggest that for most listeners a significant musical experience is one in which the listener, entangled in a musical assemblage, feels and finds herself transformed.” (87-88)

When we discuss any so-designated art object/ work/ form/ discipline/ practice/ praxis/ milieu/ history/ evaluation/ etcetera, we are talking about some subset of potentially endless constellations of “multiple and changing mediations.” But when we think about anything like transformation emerging from entanglements with these fluid assemblages, we are thinking about aesthetic experience.

I am worried that in what follows I might seem to be separating thinking about the aesthetic experiences that can emerge from engaging the presentations of artists (i.e. artworks) from the multiplicity of cultural, historical, social, and personal mediations—the endless

(and endlessly engaging) morass of ecological meanings⁵—these presentations also embody. In particular I am worried about anything that smacks of Romantic (or modernist for that matter), numinous transcendence. To my mind, there is a kind (or maybe many kinds) of otherness to aesthetic experience, but I am attracted to thinking that imagines these differences playing out as a part of an imminent, lived world. Indeed, contemporary German philosopher, Martin Seel, stresses that aesthetic experience is ubiquitous and perpetual, and often does not involve the presentation of art.

In his book, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, Seel writes: “A red ball is lying on a green lawn. Everyone who can see and speak and doesn’t happen to be color-blind can see *that* it is thus” (26). This is the start of an extended passage that puts forward all kinds of observations, impressions, recognitions, speculations, extrapolations, itemizations, and categorizations about and around the ball and the lawn and the ball and the lawn together and whose ball it is and whose lawn it is and their uses. In the throes of this he states:

“We can treat a ball in many different ways without treating it aesthetically. The question of the sensuous composition, of the inner constitution, or the appropriate use of a ball or any other perceivable object can be posed and answered without aesthetic intuition. Of principal importance in the aesthetic encounter is not the ascertainment of a visible and an invisible constitution, the investigation of an essence, or optimum use. Frequently, they are of no importance at all. In no way are they necessarily of importance. We do not have to look for the theoretical or practical determinateness and specification of something in order to encounter it in aesthetic attentiveness.” (26)

Seel continues to propose the possibility of the emergence of aesthetic engagement in this situation, as a multitude of different aspects of it take hold of perception and reflection. And reflecting on this, he says:

“Everything together is at the focus of reflection here. This reflection too is aspectlike, for we perceive this or that facet of the ball, thus perceiving the ball as this or that; but the reflec-

tion is not aspect-bound. It goes beyond a perception ascertaining this or that, and not only because it pays attention to qualities that can be discriminated conceptually not at all or only with great difficulty, as is the case with the color nuances of an object, for instance. It also pays attention to a feature diversity of objects that cannot be exhausted conceptually. Not only the conceptual inaccessibility of the nuances of the sensuous phenomenon is responsible for this inexhaustibility, nor only the impossibility of a complete characterization of all of its sensuously discernible features. Over and above these there is a conceptual incommensurability that follows, first, from a simultaneous reception of various aspects of the object and, second, from a consideration of their momentary appearance. Aesthetic perception is directed at the concurrent and momentary givenness of its vis-a-vis. Here it is a matter not of grasping the individual qualities of an object, but of their *interplay* here and now (in this light, from this standpoint, or from this change of perspective).” (27)

Seel is not describing some kind of aesthetic perception/reflection here, but rather the emergence of aesthetic experience from a particular mode of perception/reflection of the same aspects of the ball-lawn situation that could also be treated non-aesthetically. It’s a perception/reflection that focuses, with particular attention, on happenings: the *momentary interplay* of simultaneities. However, the aesthetic event that is given rise to is not only conceptually inexhaustible—uncontainable by any representation that would define it as objectively complete—but is incommensurate with conceptual representation. Seel also speaks to these ideas in an article titled “The aesthetics of appearing,” this time in relationship to aesthetically experiencing a plastic bag blowing in the wind:

“When I observe the flight of a plastic bag aesthetically, I observe the flight of a plastic bag – and the intensity of my observation is in no way diminished by the fact that I know what kind of object I actually see. Aesthetic appearing is not primarily an appearing of something; [...] it is not grasped in the role of something or as a sign for something else. All anticipation

[Vorschein] or semblance [Anschein] in the field of aesthetics is to be understood in terms of an appearing that does not merely serve the function of a revealing or illuminating representation." (19)

In his book, Seel does suggest something of the complexion of the not-something that he conjectures is appearing in aesthetic experience. He describes it as resonance or rustling—the perceivable, immanent, affective trace of the unrepresentable: “we live through phases of an acoustic or visual resonating, of an occurrence without anything recognizably occurring, something that can be followed sensuously but not cognitively apprehended. Sensuous perception here goes beyond the limits of epistemic consciousness (*Aesthetics* 9). When he experiences the flight of a plastic bag aesthetically, it is the plastic bag and its aerodynamics he is cognitively apprehending, along with whatever he *knows* contextually about this describable (that is, representable) occurrence. But simultaneously, he is experiencing a resonance that does not belong to these aspects, that is the *transitory* rustling of an” occurrence without anything occurring.”

Further along, Seel does go further in suggesting what is at stake—again, in a broadly political sense—with aesthetic resonating:

“In attentiveness to mere resonating, an encounter with formless reality takes place. The real, which is otherwise perceived in this or that form and is ascribed this or that meaning in this or that form, appears here without these forms and without the meaning usually associated with them. What was previously located in a social or cultural order, what previously had an existence that could be anticipated and fixed, now reveals itself in a submeaningful appearing. In this way, there occurs for perceivers an encounter with the limits set on the shaping, understanding, and availability of the world - one can also say, an encounter with the limits of one’s own, uniquely historical, uniquely cultural world. Reality reaches appearance in a non-graspable version.” (*Aesthetics* 145)

As we found with the politics I ascribed to Adorno's statements regarding the rhetorical form of the essay above, Seel is proposing the aesthetic—in this case imagined as experiencing the resonance of an appearing in which *no-thing* appears—as a break with the graspable, historically and culturally mediated, that is, discursively rational world. And, as was suggested in our encounter with Adorno (a suggestion that will be taken up below), one of the effects of aesthetic experience is to encounter a limit to rational knowledge.

When Seel refers to “mere resonating” he is talking about the apparitional rustling one encounters in situations not directly intended as art events. He does recognize that there is a difference between aesthetic events that arise from situations like those described above and that which happens when one is presented with an art-work, culturally designated as the potential locus for an aesthetic experience. Key to this difference is that they are intentional presentations:

“Works of art are *constellational presentations*. Presentations are constellational when their meaning is tied to a nonsubstitutable rendering of their material - nonsubstitutable in the sense of not being replaceable by any other combination of elements.” (Aesthetics 95)

I take “nonsubstitutable” to mean radically particular and specific, that is, non-translatable. When the constellation, the cluster of related elements, that constitute the artwork are experienced aesthetically (which is not a given; any artwork can be treated as non-aesthetically—materially, historically, personally, subjectively, etcetera—as a red ball or a plastic bag can), that experience cannot be represented in any other way, cannot be abstracted as being an iteration of a meaning (even a numinous one) that exists outside of the specificity of the presentation. Seel's book is very much about artistic resonating, which he introduces this way:

“Up to now I have spoken only of mere resonating, not yet of artistic resonating. [...] When I stated earlier that the perception of resonating is an encounter with formless reality, then this should not be equated with an unformed reality, because in the resonating of art we are concerned exactly with a form

of formless appearing. In contrast to the resonating of nature or of the city, the resonating of art is an arranged resonating and its perception an arranged encounter with a resonating. [...] However it is set up, resonating transpires in the work of art as a dissolution or nonoccurrence of acoustic, linguistic, figurative, choreographic forms; expressed in terms of the theory of production, it transpires as forming beyond the formation of forms. The work reveals itself as the formation of a formationlessness from which the work's forms stem, in which they disappear, against which they must assert themselves." (152)

Probably obviously, "a form of the formless" and "the formation of a formationlessness" has me thinking about the form of the "Essay as Form."

While this is still a cursory (and, no doubt, inadequate) encounter with Martin Seel's thought, the time and space I have given to it here is largely because, even as such, it offers an alternative to thinking of aesthetic experience as grounded in the apprehension of the creative expression of a maker. Moreover, Seel's alternative extends to engagements with works of art, thought of as presentations of forms of an appearing formlessness. Seel posits this as the case regardless of the artist's rational intent or conscious beliefs, assuming that, in any case, an artist is presenting a work in hopes of aesthetic experience happening for others.

Of course, conceiving of the aesthetic as being somehow *other* to coherent, rational, discursive knowledge (whether disinterested in, antagonistic to, transcendent of, etc.) is nothing new in European and post-European thought (it goes back, at least, to Plato, including his often vexed relationship to the affective powers of rhetoric and poetry, practices he links together). However, despite this, it seems to me that there remains a belief in these traditions that art is still in some way a medium for self-expression and that someone can somehow use it to *say* something. Thinking about the artwork as a polyvalent assemblage (of the cultural, the historical, the social, the personal—all the aspects we encountered in the Born quotes), this belief is not

totally wrong: everything about an art event that can be *not* treated aesthetically can carry discursive meanings that can be grasped, interpreted, and understood (the environmental meaning of the artwork). But (following thinkers who inspire my thinking around my experiences with aesthetic events) the aspect of the assemblage that makes art art—what Seel calls a resonance of appearing—does not communicate meanings.

“It is not that something appears to us in the work of art, but rather it is the art work that appears (to us). In this context, fireworks become paradigmatic for Adorno of what the aesthetic object is in the process of appearance: “Fireworks are apparitions par excellence. They are an empirical appearance free of the burden of empirical being in general, which is that it has duration: they are a sign of heaven and yet artificial; they are both a writing on the wall, rising and fading away in short order, and yet not a writing that has any meaning we can make sense of.” [quoting Adorno, *T. W. Aesthetic Theory*, translated by C. Lenhardt, Routledge & Kagen Paul, 1984, p. 120] (Menke 152)

That’s from *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, written by German philosopher, Christoph Menke. It links to Seel’s aesthetic of appearing and it brings us back to Adorno, here (apparently) celebrating the transitory aspect of fireworks. But do not think that describing an aesthetic event as not having “any meaning we can make sense of” implies that the artifact is nonetheless the medium for a meaning, just one that we cannot make sense of. Indeed, this quote is extracted from a dense passage where Menke works through Adorno’s arguments for why aesthetic experience is *not* a kind of epiphany, a revealing of a mystical, if ineffable, meaning. Elsewhere, Menke, with Derrida and Adorno, rebuts the concept of polysemy as it applies to aesthetic experience—the idea that the incomprehensibility of art arises from it having a multiplicity of multidetermined meanings. Among more specific critiques, a problem put forward with conceiving of art as epiphanic or polysemic is that it still focuses on meaning, that it views understanding as a product. In both Adorno’s and Derrida’s projects, the stability and

definitiveness of meaning is profoundly called into question. Menke sees both (in different ways, with different trajectories) as presenting understanding as a provisional, tenuous process that never reaches a conclusion, that never grasps a fixed, unified meaning. Of course, functional communication does exist between humans, but Menke, with Adorno, calls that “automatic”: “automatic repetition” of the known functioning as “automatic understanding,” an understanding that only exists within the preexisting limits of preexisting knowledge. Menke writes:

“In automatic understanding, identification is a result; in aesthetic understanding, by contrast, it is a process. [...] The automatic enactment of understanding is either totally atemporal or totally temporal in the sense of mere repetition; its processuality disappears in the result of the process. By contrast, in nonautomatic enactments, processuality is constitutive; whereas automatic understanding is summed up in the act of identifying its object, the nonautomatic enactment of understanding is irremediably temporal. The time taken in its processual constitution does not disappear, but persists.” (31)

I think it is significant that Menke shifts to discussing the “enactment of understanding,” rather than understanding per se, because in the context of his book, what aesthetic understanding could be is a necessarily unanswerable question. Aesthetic experience, because it defies re-presentation, can only be thought negatively, in terms of how it is *not* reason. And it is the “negativity” of the aesthetic in relation to rational understanding, instrumental reason, and definitive knowledge, that allows us to consciously register its difference from those conditions.

“Aesthetic experience is the experience of the failure of automatic understanding and, in this, the self-producing superabundance of the aesthetic object vis-à-vis every act of understanding. The fact that, as Derrida sometimes puts it, an “overpowerfulness,” an “autonomy,” or a “surplus” [quoting Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 73, 178, 289] vis-à-vis the

definition of its functional meaning inheres in the aesthetic object in its meaning-averse materiality is not a quality of all objects, but a quality they first achieve in the process of the aesthetic deferral of understanding. And they first achieve this superabundance of meaning in this movement because it is first this movement that breaks with nonaesthetic automatic processes, which reduce signifiers to their meaning function. They first become autonomous as the objects of an experience that has separated itself from the automatic processes of understanding by releasing in it a processuality that subverts every meaning-generating result." (69-70)

The aesthetic subverts meaning-generation. And given the intertwining proposed here of rhetoric and the aesthetic, while I do not doubt that "rhetoric has always been a form of thought which accommodated itself to communicative language," this proposal suggests how wildly subversive this accommodation could potentially be. The essay (as form) can be considered an example of this uneasy coexistence.

Rhetoric involves figures of speech. This may seem obvious, but what might constitute a *figure* of speech turns out to be a dizzyingly complex site of speculation. It involves (at least) the shapes, the forms, the lines, the volumes, the weights, the temporality, the multi-sensed rhythms, the multi-sensed material density, and the multi-sensed resonances of discursive thought/language and its components. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard wrote *Discours, figure* in 1971 (published in English in 2011 as *Discourse, Figure*). And while it variously explores the complex antagonisms at play within the radical differences the two terms set in motion, it resolutely avoids constructing a dialectical relationship between them. Not even a negative dialectic, following Adorno, where there is no synthesis available between the two terms, no potential for a new knowledge to emerge that could encompass and reconcile their difference in a previously unimaginable way. Lyotard proposes a more incommensurable relationship, but one where the processes of the figural and the discursive are inextricably bound. Bill Readings, in his

remarkable book, *Introducing Lyotard*, provides a glossary of terms that is helpful here in furthering this (very limited) introduction of just a bit of Lyotard's thought:

"DISCOURSE: The condition of representation to consciousness by a rational order or structure of concepts. Concepts or terms function as units oppositionally defined by their position and relation within the virtual space of a system or network, a space that Lyotard calls textual or perspectival. The calculation of such relational positions is the work of ratio, or reason. The condition of discourse apprehends things solely in terms of the representability by or within its system, as meanings or significations that discourse may speak." (xxxix)

I find this gloss works well when thinking about discourse in any context, not only in relation to Lyotard's thought. However, the indication that Readings gives as to how one might think the figural in relation to Lyotard is more rarified:

"FIGURE: The figural is an unspeakable other necessarily at work within and against discourse, disrupting the rule of representation. It is not opposed to discourse, but is the point at which the oppositions by which discourse works are opened to a radical heterogeneity or singularity. As such, the figural is the resistant or irreconcilable trace of a space or time that is radically incommensurable with that of discursive meaning." (xxxix)

Together, these glosses suggest why, for Lyotard, you cannot think discourse and figure dialectically: "If the rule of discourse is primarily the rule of representation by conceptual oppositions, the figural cannot simply be opposed to the discursive. Rather, the figural opens discourse to a radical heterogeneity, a *singularity*, a difference which cannot be rationalized or subsumed within the rule of representation" (Readings 3). Readings tends to refer to heterogeneity and singularity together in their relation to the figural; back to the glossary:

"SINGULARITY. The radical specificity of events, their radical, once and for all 'happening' or eventhood, and hence their het-

erogeneity or sheer difference from all other events. To put it another way, singularity is what is lost in translation.” (xxxiv)

The figural is what is in the perpetual process of *appearing* in aesthetic experience. Yet, like Seel’s apparitions, Lyotard stresses that the figural is invisible—an active, *singular* presence *at work* (in motion) in given perceived representations, whether they are figurative (a red ball on a green lawn) or textual, whether presented as visual or audible or haptic or a combination together and with the other senses. And like Seel, Lyotard finds in art a *presentation* of the processes, the *processuality*, of the figural. Near the beginning of *Discourse, Figure*, he discusses the noise of discursive utterance that one encounters and attempts to organize and discipline while trying to understand the message being *said* by discourse. Then he writes:

“What cannot be tamed is art as silence. The position of art is a refutation of the position of discourse. The position of art indicates a function of the figure, which is not signified – a function around and even in the figure. This position indicates that the symbol’s transcendence is the figure, that is, a spatial manifestation [space being perceivable by multiple senses] that linguistic space cannot incorporate without being shaken [Readings’ translation reads”overthrown”], an exteriority it cannot interiorize as *signification*. Art stands in alterity as plasticity and desire, a curved expanse against invariability and reason [or perhaps “against that ancient injustice toward the transitory,” invariability’s other], diacritical space. Art covets the figure, and “beauty” is figural, unbound, rhythmic.” (Lyotard 7)

Throughout *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard is concerned with figural appearing in visual art forms, especially painting. However, he does spend a substantial amount of space and time on rhetoric, in particular the metaphor (and its relationship to metonymy). As with Adorno, he acknowledges metaphor’s ability to accommodate its functions to the furtherance of communicative discourse. Against this, Lyotard proposes the figural, the poetic, the aesthetic potentials of metaphor:

“[Metaphor] achieves poetic status not when it refers to an already scripted language [*langue*], or in any case to a code generally accepted by the speakers, but when it transgresses it. Such a transgression does not consist in the shift from ordinary language (of signified 1) to the supposedly affective language (of signified 2), but instead in the use of operations that have no part in language 1.” (318)

This last bit is crucial: for Lyotard the poetic does not produce other (affective) meanings; rather its mobilization of other operations serves to deconstruct the processes of meaning signification in communicative discourse, making its “processuality” apparent in the wake of the transgression of the “automatic understanding” of “language 1,” along with the transgression of the assumption of some other significant (affective) meaning emerging from the interpolation of a supposed “language 2.” Readings picks this up:

“Metaphor [...] is only figural when there can be no retranslation of its excess back into ordinary language, when it is an excess over meaning (signification), rather than just a surplus of meaning. Thus for example, [William] Blake’s sick rose⁶ is figural insofar as it resists being decoded as merely a multiplicity of significations (lost innocence plus venerable infection plus corrupted church, etc., etc.). [Here Readings links to this endnote:] “This insistence on the opening of a radical heterogeneity to the literal order of meaning by the figural is closely parallel to Derrida’s distinction between the effect of dissemination opened by the trace in which meaning both multiplies (re-seeds itself) and is radically dispersed (recedes) and the polysemy or simple accumulation of literal meanings in rhetorical language that is the object of traditional formalist criticism.”]” (24)

Metaphor is figural as long as it continues appearing as a singularity—persists in its radical specificity as an event, and resists giving up its event-ness to translation/retranslation/interpretation. This then is the crucial problem manifested by metaphor: it can be wildly, untamably figural—a rogue process at play within an aesthetic experience

of resonant appearing—or it can serve as the epitome of an expressive, meaningful creative device, positioned for a hermeneutic approach to aesthetic meaning to interpret.

Jonathan Culler speaks to this issue in the context of an essay discussing the ascendancy of the metaphor as a focus of burgeoning research and interrogation within academies and institutions devoted to literature:

“Of all the figures metaphor is the one that can most easily be defended or justified on cognitive grounds [...] Whatever may be true of other figures, metaphors generally make claims that could in principle be restated as propositions, albeit with difficulty and prolixity. Doubtless for this reason, metaphor has long been thought of as the figure par excellence through which the writer can display creativity and authenticity: his metaphors are read as artistic inventions grounded in perceptions of relations in the world.

“In privileging metaphor and making it the heading under which to discuss figurality in general, one thus asserts the responsibility and authenticity of rhetoric; one grounds it in the perception of resemblances in experience, in intimations of essential qualities. One represses or sets aside rhetoric as a non-referential play of forms by taking as representative of rhetoric or figure in general a figure whose referentiality can be defended.” (191)

Culler is choosing to set aside the aesthetic potentials of metaphor here to focus on its exemplary propensity to be subsumed by hermeneutic aesthetics versus other (less currently fashionable) figures of language (although elsewhere in the book (p. 208) he does engage complexities that arise from attempting to restate, that is, interpret, Baudelaire’s *Spleen*—“I am a cemetery abhorred by the moon...”). But in presenting the privileging of metaphor as meaningful, cognitively graspable, interpretable signification as a repression of nonreferential play, Culler connects with one of the initial impulses I had while wondering what to write about in this essay, the ob-

servation that much of the discussion around research-creation ends up presenting art work as discursive metaphor (perhaps figurative, but non-figural), “whose referentiality can be defended.”

I’ll plead-the-essay and leave the pervasiveness asserted by that observation unproven. And, nonetheless, I would like to address a few issues adjunct to it. First, I would say that most (maybe all) art-making can be considered research, whether the maker thinks it is or not. All art presentations are created in a milieu, a cultural field, within a cultural-historical episteme that govern creative possibilities and the creative choices (materially and methodologically) that can be made within. Emphatic searching (that is, research) around how one’s work connects to contexts that precede one’s endeavours and in which they will take part, is required regardless of the ideology one adheres to. Second, all the historical/ cultural /social /individual /etcetera that any given artwork mediates and takes part in—all of those infinitely interconnected loci—can be explored, studied, and speculated on, cognitively and discursively. Everything in and around art presentations/situations that is *not* aesthetic experience can take part in broader research directed at any of the environments that any artwork is meaningfully a part of. However, if this essay was a manifesto, what it would assert is that art presentations cannot function as mediums to *say* something that can be abstracted, translated, and interpreted to be coherently integrated into some broader discursive meaning. That does not mean that we cannot discursively engage with aesthetic experience—this essay, on various levels, tries to do this—but the engagement is radically provisional. Menke addresses this:

“Aesthetic experience can only be expressed in interpretive speech in such a way that this speech suspends the impression of giving an adequate reproduction of the properties of the object of the experience aroused by the continuity of its statements. The basic principle of aesthetic interpretation is thus an unsublatable simultaneity of “blindness” and “insight.” (7) Only by having a blind spot (and showing this) can interpretations relate to aesthetic objects in their negativity vis-à-vis all understanding and express aesthetic experience; it is

only the blindness of interpretations that makes insight into the aesthetic possible. Correct (and correctly understood) is only that interpretive speech that—in the articulation of a textual reading—reveals itself also to be a “misreading”—that fails to grasp the aesthetic due to the illusion of continuity among its statements.” [Endnote 7 reads: *Blindness and Insight* is the programmatic title of one of Paul de Man’s collections of essays. The explanation for the title is found in the text in this collection entitled “The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida’s Reading of Rousseau”] (111)

Then, if there is a purpose to talking about aesthetic experience, it is to present a blind spot, deconstruct the illusion that discourse and lived experience—not only aesthetic experience—are continuous and coextensive. The statements of this deconstruction are only useful if they somehow express a specific, particular *not*-understanding.

It seems to me that the “illusion of continuity” between meaning and affect is very much in play in some conceptions of rhetoric, so much so that, in the context of how rhetoric is traditionally understood, it is hard to think of a direct connection between speech and figure as illusory. Integrating figures of speech into discursive statements really can be persuasive, really can contribute to galvanizing agreement around what feels like shared understanding. But if this essay was a manifesto I would assert that there is a joy beyond pleasure (against my better judgment, I would be tempted to say *jouissance*, following Barthes’ usage), if subtle to the point of non-recognition, in being carried away in the unsayable, invisible flux of the resonance of appearing. This joy-that-is-not-pleasure is incommensurable with cognitive understanding and therefore the two are *not* mutually exclusive. They can be simultaneous, but, if they are thought of as continuous and coextensive with each other, that is an illusion. That is, certainly one can vigorously interrogate how and why Baudelaire might be “a cemetery abhorred by the moon”—and I can imagine that activity being pleasurable—but it is incommensurable with the affect that can come from being inside the resonance of the initial, *singular* transgression of meaning that metaphor presents. The illusion of

continuity is why similarly slinky polyrhythmic grooves can seem equally “persuasive” while occurring simultaneously with Marvin Gaye singing about the tragedies of civil injustice and global strife (*What’s Going On*), seduction and sex (*Let’s Get It On*), global environmental catastrophe (*Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)*), and the pain of love gone wrong and lost (*I Want You*). This does not preclude the existence of ensconced conventions that allow materials used in art works to be apprehended symbolically, as indices of culturally understood meanings and feelings. For example, musical soundtracks are full of them: musical textures—melodies/ harmonies/ rhythms/ timbres/ amplitudes—that let you know whether what is happening (or about to happen) is happy, sad, poignant, scary, etcetera; but these responses, these understandings are culturally and historically pre-conditioned and are ubiquitous, generic, and essentially facile. When a specific soundtrack gets under your skin, it’s because it is *singular*. (By the way, how is reading this essay simultaneously with listening to—or, at least, hearing—the soundtrack working for you? Is anything happening?)

Maybe because of my deep engagement with popular song, another favourite example of the discontinuity between, the incommensurability of discursive meaning and aesthetic experience is the use of rhyme (especially end-rhyme) and metre in poetic language. They can be thought of as figures of speech, but I have not encountered them being discussed as rhetoric. I think this is because, rather than being taken as creative artifice added to meaningful statements to heighten their affect, they exist, on the one hand, as preexisting limits (sure, you can say something, but it has to have a particular sound—it has to rhyme—and it has to flow in a particular rhythm that will prescribe the words you choose outside of their meaning) and, on the other hand, as a specific phenomenal event, a *singularity* that cannot be abstracted, that would be lost in translation. The transgression of meaning inherent in shaping language to rhyme and metre in song is so ubiquitous that its transgressive nature is practically unapprehensible. Maybe this has something to do with the specific sound and flow of the words taking part in the sound and flow of the music rather than the common assumption that the music

is supporting the meaning of the lyrics. The transgression becomes more apparent when metre and rhyme take part in forms more closely linked to discursive and narrative meaning. Discussions of, for example, Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*, Bertholt Brecht's versification of Marx and Engels' *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (the *Manifesto* rewritten in hexameters), or Sally Potter's film *Yes* (where the dialogue flows in rhyming iambic pentameter), could ensue, but not here and now.

So what can art—presentations of situations intended for singular aesthetic experience—have to do with discursive accounts of rational research? Positioned as a dualism, probably the answer is: “nothing.” However, if one thinks of the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, the figure and discourse, as incommensurable heterogeneous processes at work in the formation of a human psyche,⁷ but nonetheless processes that each variously interpenetrate the other's workings despite their incommensurability,⁸ then one can view any creative production (remembering Whitehead's formulation of creativity as the creation of new possibilities of experience, discussed in endnote # 2) as intrinsically hybrid, singular events that are nonetheless assemblages of various kinds of psychic activity, unconscious and conscious.

The essay (as form) is already an example of this kind of assemblage. It is a site of transitory, fragile experimentation. I am thinking of the experimental in the way it is discussed by filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha. Trinh is ostensibly a maker of ethnographic documentaries (they would offer provocative examples of what research-creation might or could be). However, these films do not operate or register within the representational conceits of the documentary film milieu. They are profoundly, if subtly, experimental. In an interview, when asked why she “wanted to merge experimental with documentary filmmaking,” Trinh replied:

“I have never thought of them as being separated.”Experimental” for me is not a genre nor an approach to filmmaking. It is, in a way, the process of unmasking readymades, or more commonly put, of making visible what remains invisible (ideologically, cinematically) to many, including oneself; what does

not correspond to the established codes and is not always known in advance to the spectators as well as to the filmmaker. If “experimental” is a constant questioning of the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmmaking, then it cannot be separated from the material, whether one chooses to call this material documentary or fiction.” (“Questioning Truth and Fact” 183)

Awareness of the figural and sensitivity to the incommensurable appearing of its resonance can help unmask readymades. The essential invisibility of aesthetic processes can by their otherness, their negativity, expose preconditioned codes that are only hidden because they are automatically understood. But the point of the “constant questioning” Trinh refers to is not fundamentally critical. Elsewhere she writes:

“As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze remarks, our civilization is not one of the image, but rather, a civilization of the cliché. We often read images on the level of metaphors and perceive meaning as something there, already existing. What seems more difficult is to see an image as image, without metaphors, with its excess, its radical or unjustifiable character. To find again, to restore all that one does not see in the image [or sounding gesture] is not simply to parody the cliché or to correct it. Rather it implies disturbing the comfort and security of stable meaning that leads to a different conception [...] in which the notions of time and of movement are redefined, while no single reading can exhaust the dimensions of the image [or sounding gesture].” (*When the Moon Waxes Red* 110-111)

Of course, I added “sounding gesture”; this passage had a crucial effect on the way I imagined making music.

I’m sure you have noticed my essay is made up of a (probably inordinate) clamour of voices (often uneasily made to collaborate, often interrupted) other than my own—and often, voices speaking about other voices. I asked toward the beginning if this essay could be consid-

ered research-creation if there was no soundtrack. The answer would be yes if a reader could somehow dance with the ungainly rhythm of this performance of me reading, of me banging around, perpetually rebounding, in a space activated for me between these voices. The answer would be yes if, along with the noise of me *trying* to add my (certainly inadequate) voice to the discursive noise of my readings performed here, some kind of untamed silence (following Lyotard) also emerged.

I also collect these voices here because they all, in different ways, contribute to the methodologies I employ and praxis I act out in experimenting with musical situations in the context of the cultural fields I work in. How others say things matters to my music-making and fuels my own discursive engagement with it. As such, the soundtrack to this essay is as much a radiation of these other voices as are my discursive attempts, my tries, at bringing them together more-or-less rationally. These voices (and many, many others) give me permission to think music and music-making away from metaphor, away from reified meanings and meaning-making (reified as ineffable/ numinous/ transcendent but meanings nonetheless). These voices suggest (discursively) material possibilities for sharing music-making in which presentation and performance are not confused with the pretence that I'm saying something graspable/ holdable/ intentional. The relationship of this soundtrack to this essay is not supportive or persuasive—any rhetorical impacts it might add to reading this essay-of-me-reading are in excess, more figural tangents in play. The soundtrack is made from this essay but it is not *about* this essay and the discourses it puts in play. And it is not exemplary: it doesn't sound *like* the ideas I am essaying (it is not a metaphor).⁹ I actually find it hard to read the essay while the soundtrack is playing, even very softly; I find I get distracted and just attend to the music. However, that's only a problem in the context of discourse; figurally it is another singular assemblage to be experienced (and maybe reflected on discursively; or not). And maybe another set of potentials (maybe less distracting?) would arise if I read the essay out loud along with the soundtrack. Or if someone else read the essay out loud and I lis-

tened to it together with the soundtrack. This might call for research-creation.

I won't pursue these potentials here. But I can think of at least one other who has experimented with such listening situations. And it seems fitting in an essay filled with so many different voices to finish with yet another reference, this time to someone else's (sure, let's call it) research-creation. And I really am leaving you with a referral more than a further discussion.

Eric Cazdyn is a theorist who also presents situations intended to enable singular aesthetic experiences. For at least the last ten years many of these situations have involved the Blindspot Machine. In part it is an apparatus involving four video cameras mounted on an automated tripod, each pointed in a different direction 90 degrees away from the other, slowly panning in a circle. But that is not all the Blindspot Machine is:

"Since the initial experiment, I have continued to build and rebuild the Blindspot Machine. It is still composed of four video cameras and an automated rotating head and it is still intended to make blindspots, rather than to expose them. In this way the Blindspot Machine is diametrically opposed to surveillance: whereas surveillance desires to make everything visible, the Blindspot Machine desires not to make everything invisible, but to make room for something else.

"One of the things for which the Blindspot Machine makes room is the very way we understand what a blindspot is in the first place.^[^11] And how we might experience it. It took me several years to realize that the Blindspot Machine is not the apparatus itself. It is, rather, a totality. And like all totalities (contrary to how they are often understood), it is unrepresentable, dynamic, and open. This machine as totality is composed of various elements: 1) the materiality of the multi-camera rig; 2) the films that the rig generates; 3) the live overnarrations that accompany certain screenings of the films; 4) the concepts of, and the arguments about, the blindspot and associated categories; and 5) the written documentation of the

project itself, including this chapter. This chapter, therefore, is not about the Blindspot Machine, it is part of the Blindspot Machine.” (Cazdyn 243)

An early version of the Machine was presented at Western University in late 2014; the name of the presentation was “The Non-Coincidence of the Future.” And this version of the Machine includes a soundtrack-of-sorts that I composed and played in.

That’s what I’m referring you to; a video document of “The Non-Coincidence of the Future” can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5QRmTVlWKw>

I asked Eric once what he thought the soundtrack was doing in the “The Non-Coincidence of the Future.” It didn’t seem to be a burning question for him. Maybe the word “incommensurable” was spoken... I think we both thought that it somehow worked, that it was part of something happening (I’ll say now that I think of it as part of the singularity of the event that is this version of the Blindspot Machine). But at the time we were (or, at least, I was) fine with not understanding quite what that meant.

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NOTES

1. The easiest way to access the soundtrack is to go to my Soundcloud page: <https://soundcloud.com/martinarnold>. There you will find a track called *Essay OST*. Once you have a playback system ready to go, and keeping in mind the advice below, push play and return to reading the essay with the soundtrack going. If you wish to listen to a higher fidelity recording than the Soundcloud stream and you are set up to play back digital soundfiles, you can find a .wav file of the soundtrack available for download at: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/b1ez8d3j857vy1yucqdcz/AMl4WmWw_ekyTb_w8_sO5mM?rlkey=ps6osw2lso5zi6t744duf1gky&st=7cfd7qf1&dl=0. (You will probably need to cut and paste that entire url into a browser address window; links that are split by line-breaks often do not make live the full url). I recommend you use the highest fidelity stereo playback system you can access. This can involve high quality speakers or headphones, although the experiences of the work-as-a-whole will be very different depending which of these options you choose. Experiment with the volume of the playback. Try to have the soundtrack be as loud as possible without it distracting you from understanding what you are reading in the essay. This might mean that the soundtrack will be playing very quietly. This is absolutely fine; just keep in mind that the amount of sonic material that you hear will diminish after the volume goes below a certain threshold. This diminished experience of the soundtrack is completely valid for my purposes here. However, at some point after you have completed listening to the piece as a soundtrack to your reading of the essay, you might be interested in listening to the music at a higher volume just to check out more of what is sonically present on the recording. You might finish reading the essay before the playback of the soundtrack is completed. It is completely up to you whether you listen to the music until it is over or you turn it off when you are done reading. If you choose the former option, do not turn up the volume; keep listening to the music as it was while you were reading. I suppose there is a possibility that the soundtrack would finish before you have done reading the essay; that is not a problem, just keep reading until you are finished. [^2]: Rather than ar-

gue for the creativity involved in, for example, pure maths, the formulation of labour histories, or treating depression (not to mention creating meals or playing almost any skill-based game), I would offer the following quote from Steven Shaviro's book (significantly titled for the essay at hand), *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*:

“As Whitehead says,” a new idea introduces a new alternative.” It offers us a new way of approaching and understanding experience. In doing this, it is itself a new experience; and it also makes additional new experiences possible. [...] If philosophy is an adventure, involving the creation of new concepts, this is because every aspect of life and thought already is (and always must be) creative. Whitehead insists that creation is not a rarity [...]” (149)

↩

2. In particular, I would recommend *Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and “Family Resemblances”* by Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (Concordia University), written back in 2012.↩
3. I am daring to emulate Adorno's turns of phrase when he proposes the essay as “radically un-radical” and “methodically unmethodical.”↩
4. I cannot imagine Adorno agreeing with me (really, on anything), but I would like to think “truth” in this context as connected to a proposal by another complex thinker (waiting for me to hit-and-run, down the road of this essay), Jean-François Lyotard: “[Truth] does not speak because the truth is not the signification of a state of affairs by means of concepts: the truth is precisely what resists signification, reduction to the concept, articulation within the flat and transparent space of the arbitrary oppositional structure of the *langue*” (Readings 30).↩
5. See Clarke, Eric F. *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*. Oxford University Press, 2005: “Ecology is the study of organisms in relation to their environment, and the approach to perception presented in this book is characterized as ecological because it takes as its central principle the relationship between a perceiver and its environment. [...] My main aim is to discuss the ways in which listeners interact with the general auditory, and more

specifically musical, environment: to discuss listening to music as the continuous awareness of meaning, by considering musical materials in relation to perceptual capacities” (5). “My primary focus is contemporary listening—the experiences of listeners at the start of the twenty-first century. But those listening attitudes and practices did not just appear from nowhere: they have their own history and have come about by means of a historical process that continues to exert its influence” (9).↵

6. *The Sick Rose* by William Blake:

O Rose thou art sick,
 The invisible worm,
 That flies in the night
 In the howling storm:
 Has found out thy bed
 Of crimson joy:
 And his dark secret love
 Does thy life destroy.

Poetry Foundation. www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43682/the-sick-rose. Accessed 11 August 2024.

↵

7. In *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard digs deeply into psychoanalytic theory, mobilizing Freud in a very unorthodox manner often versus the linguistic reading of Lacan (my introduction to Lyotard was a chapter of *Discourse, Figure* that was the only portion of the book translated into English until 2011: appositely titled “The Dream-Work Does Not Think”). Also, if this was a different (at least, longer) essay (and I was a different thinker), I’m convinced that thinking with Julia Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language* would enhance the discussion at hand; it would probably involve some kind conversation between Kristeva’s

formulation of the pre-linguistic, pre-subjective semiotic *chora* and Lyotard's invisible but inferred figure-matrix.↔

8. As Bill Readings says: "For example, clarity in speech consists in banishing the interference of rhetorical figures which give rise to ambiguities, yet 'clarity' is itself a rhetorical figure, a metaphor for the absence of metaphor. Figure is not a simple exteriority that cannot be interiorized as knowledge, but is the opacity or disturbance that marks the operation of representational interiorization as an operation, a process" (23).↔
9. It might seem strange that what follows is an endnote. I'm going to describe a bit of how the soundtrack was made and its material relationship to the essay. This description matters because without voices like the ones presented here, I wouldn't think it could be engaging to experiment with the kind of listening experiences offered by methodologies like the ones I'm about to describe. That the essay is, in a sense, the score for the soundtrack matters materially *not metaphorically*. This description happens by the way, but as an aside, thus the endnote. So by the way: the seven pitches of a post-European major scale starting on C (the white-notes of a piano) are given letter names in German: C, D, E, F, G, A, and H. In English, the pitch named H is named B; in German the note-name B designates the pitch that in English would be called B-flat. So German offers distinct letter names for eight pitches in total versus the seven offered by English. To make the score for the soundtrack I removed all the letters from my completed essay except for C, D, E, F, G, A, H, and B. Reading them in order as note-names, I performed and recorded four versions of two different prescribed but indeterminate playing procedures, two on melodica and two on tenor banjo. I performed the procedures for one hour and nine minutes each time because that's how long it took me to read the essay out loud when I recorded me doing that. The electronic effects one hears emerging in the soundtrack came about by me fading in two tracks of the recording of me reading vocoding the four tracks of instrumental music mixed with two different vocoder settings. Vocoding is an electronic process that uses the real-time analysis of the timbral/spectral attributes of one sound (in this case, me reading my essay out loud) to filter/signal-process the timbre of another sound (the mixed recordings of me playing the musical tasks based on the order of letters in my essay). These processes don't need to make sense or require further explanation in this context. Here what matters is that they evince a very different set of creative ideas and methodologies

than those I was exposed to when my first composition teacher asked me what I wanted to say with my music. [¹¹]: I think the blindspot has something to do with the blindness of interpretation Menke discusses above. But I could be wrong. Cazdyn writes:

“We think we know what a blindspot is. It is what we cannot know, what we cannot see, what we cannot represent. From human anatomy to aesthetics, from philosophy to psychology to politics, the blindspot, we think, is the missing element that structures the visible, the thinkable, the feelable, the actable. But this definition-as-lack is not what the blindspot is. The blindspot is not some transhistorical category with a singular function. It is, rather, nothing but the dominant ideology of what the blindspot is at any given time. And today, the blindspot – the dominant ideology of the blindspot as that which is missing – is the deadliest weapon used by those in power. [...] And now we are left with a question: if to expose, to conceal, and to disregard the blindspot are equally debilitating, equally reactionary, then where does this leave us regarding the blindspot at our current historical moment? I claim that all the dominant discourses of the blindspot today make us docile and weak political subjects. They drive us crazy. They reproduce what is and squeeze dry what can become. But they are also things that never remain still, both the blindspot and the concept of the blindspot. Therefore, they can also become something else, they can make room for their own radical potential.” (242)

Those are fragments of a necessarily unfinished argument.↔

WRITING BY NO LONGER WRITING

MARGOT MELLET

This article explores the concept of “de-writing,” which involves suspending writing, diverting it in order to better understand it in a research-creation approach. De-writing is then considered as a new regime of the act of writing, particularly in connection with digital media culture. The article analyzes the mediatic and ontological change of writing through the work of Friedrich Kittler. It examines how writing in collaboration with the machine calls into question the notions of originality and the primacy of the human in creativity. As an epistemological and performative model, the article introduces the idea of “misuse,” where a use of a tool, format, or medium deviating from the use initially intended, allows to explore new modes of writing.

Cet article explore le concept de « désécriture », qui consiste à suspendre l'écriture, la détourner afin de mieux la comprendre dans une approche de recherche-création. La désécriture est alors envisagée comme un nouveau régime de l'acte d'écriture, particulièrement en lien avec la culture médiatique numérique. L'article analyse le changement médiatique et ontologique de l'écriture à travers le travail de Friedrich Kittler. Il examine comment l'écriture en collaboration avec la machine remet en question les notions d'originalité et de primauté de l'humain dans la créativité. Comme modèle épistémologique et performatif, l'article introduit l'idée de « détournement » (misuse), où une utilisation d'un outil, d'un format ou d'un média dérogeant à l'utilisation initialement prévue, permet d'explorer de nouveaux modes d'écriture.

INTRODUCTION

In 1992-1993, Friedrich Kittler, a researcher and media specialist, began a short paper by saying rather casually:

“Wie wir alle wissen und nur nicht sagen, schreibt kein Mensch mehr.” (Kittler 1993)

“As one knows without saying, nobody writes anymore.” (my translation)

If this echoes today’s concerns about the presence of large language models such as ChatGPT on the publishing scene, particularly in terms of their ability to produce narratives, coming from a media specialist at the end of the 20th century, it may also imply something more than the fear of human obsolescence. As Kittler himself writes this sentence, his assertion is not to be taken literally, but epistemologically or symbolically: in the eyes of the media specialist, writing with new media occurs under a different regime of inscription. Writing itself has changed ontologically. If we ignore the existing characteristics of writing in new media, or if we deny that a radical shift has occurred, we are, by extension, ignoring the very process of writing itself: we are no longer writing insofar as we fail to grasp the concrete modalities of writing on an intellectual or sensible level. In the form of a provocation, Kittler’s sentence urges us to dig deeper into writing and the way modern writing devices operate, in order to understand the new writing regime. This tension of a writing that slips out of our grasp is what we propose here to call “dewriting.”

The present essay will explore the idea of dewriting, of no longer writing in order to grasp writing, through a research-creation approach. Dewriting considers research-creation in literature as a search for what writing in new media becomes: a search for how writing emerges beyond the model of the printed word, beyond an injunction to produce writing. The search for writing alone is a creative process. While media studies is largely involved in this research, the essay is mainly addressed to literary studies. De-writing, conceived as a new regime of the act of writing, recalls the technical

reality of writing that has been present at least throughout the modern era of literature. However, it seems to be more evident in digital media culture. The characteristics of this shift will first be analysed using Kittler's work on the modern mediatic period. Looking at writing in terms of a collaboration with the machine, acknowledged or not, leads to challenging the idea of originality and the primacy of the human being in creativity. This will lead to the introduction of a possible mode of research-creation (the *Misuse*) via the image of the puzzle. Misuse is defined as the misappropriation of a tool, format, or media: the writing no longer corresponds to what had been planned or anticipated in the media. It's diverted from its intended purpose, and new modes of creative writing emerge. This approach combines research and creation in literature inside the media, and establishes research-creation as a unique perspective of its own (rather than a single approach that simply links the two. In the form of a practical tutorial adopting a manifesto tone, the paper explores a diffracted perspective on literature and on research and creation in which we write by no longer writing.

NOBODY WRITES ANYMORE

Having studied the cultural implications of the media, and more specifically the reading, writing, and recording devices employed in the arts, Kittler argues that the transition between 1800 and 1900 represents a profound paradigm shift for Western society, insofar as it affects all the levels that constitute it: representations, imaginaries and systems. This shift began with an initial destabilisation that the new media continue to pursue, inheriting the momentum of a combined process of mechanisation and automation. At the dawn of a new century, Kittler's statement is in fact part of a larger and more ambitious enterprise of media research pursued by the ensemble of his work as a network of discourses (which is the title of one of his most widely known works, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*). His goal as a media theorist is to address the problem of models of thought within the human sciences, their biases, and the media-technical preconceptions about modern technologies for recording and transmitting knowledge that, like clouds over our

minds, stand in the way of understanding the writing devices that are concretely at play.

Given that an inscription cannot be isolated or extracted from the media and technological context in which it exists, the boundaries between human and non-human become more permeable, and the solid foundations of human intentionality begin to crumble. Among the case studies Kittler analyses to develop this idea, the literary imaginary of the machine plays a crucial role. The presence of the machine in the creative process of writing defines its very existence, and by changing the writing system, turns literature into a form of media research. How, then, does the literary medium now function in relation to creation?

Is it you, Master Goethe?

A major media vector of cultural change is embodied in the form of the gramophone. As the first element of his book *Gramophone, Film and Typewriter*, the gramophone constitutes this complete ability to listen within the world, that is, to listen to its noise, but also to what we humans cannot hear.

“Das Grammophon entleert die Wörter, indem es Ihr Imaginäres (Signifikate) auf Reales (Stimmphysiologie) hin unterläuft.” (Kittler 1985, p. 310)

“The gramophone empties the words of their meaning by diverting their imaginary (signified) to their reality (vocal physiology).” (Kittler 1990)

As a technology that radically changes the notion of listening and the real presence of sound, it is not surprising that the gramophone has been used as a figure in literature to make the absent, the beyond, or the out-of-this-world genius speak. In this sense, the gramophone is used by Kittler as one of the symbols that represents the modern shift in emerging inscription modalities: from now on, the inscription is detached from the human and the machine writes over the human's words. To illustrate this idea, Kittler refers to Salomo Friedländer's short story “Goethe speaks on the Phonograph” (1916), which is both

the story of a technological fantasy at the turn of the century and a romanticisation of the transition from one poetic age to another.

The story is structured around the desire of a woman, an ardent reader of Goethe's works, and the disappearance of the philosopher she deeply misses. To her long-suffering lover, the professor and engineer Abnossah Pschorr, Anna expresses her desire to hear Goethe again, as follows:

"Ach, Herr Professor, ich hätte wenigstens so gern Goethes Stimme noch gehört! Er soll ein so schönes Organ gehabt haben, und was er sagte, war so gehaltvoll. Ach, hätte er doch in einen Phonographen können! Oh! Oh!"

"Oh, Professor, I would have liked to hear Goethe's voice at least once more! They say he had such a beautiful organ and that what he said was so rich. Oh, if only he could have spoken on a phonograph! Alas! Alas!"

Using the classical codes of romance, the story follows Abnossah's efforts to win Anna's heart by resurrecting Goethe's voice from the dead and from words.

As a symbol of technical invention, Abnossah decides to make Goethe speak by designing a sound device connected to the reconstruction of the philosopher's airways: just as Anna had wished, to make Goethe speak on a phonograph. In this sense, the technical future of literature is presented in the narrative in terms of the decline of religious, sacred, and legal imperatives: Abnossah goes so far as to illegally exhume Goethe's body in order to create a replica of his vocal chords.

The sacred nature of the author, however, remains reincarnated in the inner mechanism of a machine that is only vaguely described: a mannequin associated with a phonograph, or a kind of anthropomorphised gramophone. According to Abnossah's theory, for this invention to be as inspired as the philosopher was, it must be located in the place where Goethe breathed his last: Goethe's office, a place of work and thinking, thus becomes the space that seems to imply that mod-

ern objects of literature depend on a precise context in order to operate. The voices of geniuses leave fragments in suspension, invisible and inaudible to even the most passionate human being, but recordable by the machine which, as a good mediator between worlds, allows them to be transmitted to people. Once this mystical state of connection with the world was established, Goethe began to speak *on* the phonograph, first producing a rattle and then, like a car starting up, moving into continuous words and sentences.

Designed to win Anna over, the Abnossah recreation of Goethe only drives the two individuals further apart: she demands to hear more and more, for longer and longer, just as the media system becomes a system that produces a need to be hypnotised by its voice, without ever fully regulating the desire that precedes the demand.

Abnossah finally understands this system and uses it to his advantage, first destroying the machine and then promising to rebuild it on condition that the marriage is consummated (“Après les noces, meine Taube!”, “After the nuptials, my dove!”). The technical romance, which uses and also the motif of the impossible love triangle—Abnossah loves Anna, who loves Goethe, who loves nobody—ends on a principle of blackmail, in which the machine of literature, the new discourse system, is the means/media for ingenious men to get what they want.

As fiction spills over into reality, and as a sign of the invention of media by literature, a number of contemporary research-creation projects have set out to restore voices from beyond the grave. These include the 2015 project by Flavia Montaggio, Patricia Montaggio, and Imp Kerr to restore Nietzsche’s voice using his genotype, a text-to-speech synthesiser, and a 3D printer to reconstruct his trachea and larynx; or the 2020 project by a team of researchers at the University of Tübingen to restore the voice of a 3,000-year-old Egyptian mummy by measuring the phonatory apparatus and reproducing it using an 3D printer. In both projects, the method is identical to that of Abnossah. The aim is to mould the organ of the deceased, to use a phonatory device, and to capture the traces of a cultural epoch so that the restoration makes sense to contemporaries.

The author now exists in the age of machines that make discourse a technical function of its media-technical environment (Kittler 1990), and even a white noise of a medium (Guez et Vargoz 2017), so much so that it merges with the technical and machinic nature of writing, now modern and detached from the human. The new discourse systems rely on remediation methods based on technical research-creation, working on a literary myth (Goethe, Nietzsche) in the non-human mode.

The delicate Nietzsche

In addition to the gramophone's imaginary, new writing systems also refer to another important moment in the age of modern technology: the typewriter, which represents a major cultural shift for literature. The introduction of the typewriter made it possible to examine the technical reality of writing. In 1882, Nietzsche, who was suffering from severe migraines caused by increasing short-sightedness and the efforts to decipher handwritten pages, decided to use a typewriter, the Hansen Ball, to continue his work.

"Unser Schreibwerkzeug schreibt mit an unseren Gedanken."
(Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, end of February 1882 (Montinari 1975))

"Our writing implements write with us on our thoughts." (my translation)

It is not surprising that this quote from Nietzsche has been borrowed by Kittler, as it reflects a perspective on literature that anticipates media studies as it no longer conceives writing as exclusively human (it never was, after all). The modern trajectory of Nietzsche's researches is an important case for Kittler's analysis, as it embodies the transition to a form of writing that sinks ever deeper into mechanisms that are no longer in the hands of the writer, what Heidegger calls a "growing devastation of the word" (Heidegger 2011, 141).

"Man himself 'acts' and 'manoeuvres' thanks to the hand; for the hand, together with the word, forms the essential characteristic of man. [...] Not only prayer and murder, greeting and

thanksgiving, oath and sign, but also the 'work' of the hand, the 'craft' and the instrument take place through the hand. The handshake seals a pact. The hand initiates a 'work' of destruction. The hand is only used as a hand where there is dismemberment and displacement. No animal has a hand, and a hand is never born from a paw, a claw or a nail. [It is only from speech and with speech that the hand is born. It is not man that 'has' hands, but the hand that carries the essence of man, for speech as the domain of the essence of the hand is the foundation of the essence of man." (Heidegger 2011, p. 132, quoted in Kittler 2018)

In fact, the hand writing on the typewriter *composes* the letter differently, activating a mechanism that, out of sight, with a shift of gaze, will write on it.

"When handwriting, the eye must constantly observe the written line, and only that line. It must monitor the execution of each of the written signs, measure, direct - in short, it must lead and guide the hand as it draws each line. The typewriter, on the other hand, produces a complete letter at the right place on the paper by a simple, brief pressure of the finger, a place which is not only not touched by the writer's hand but which, being far from it, is in a completely different place from where the hands are working." (Herbertz 1909, 556)

So the machine writes with/through/between our fingers. The context of writing shapes the author, and so the Nietzsche-with-the-machine is another Nietzsche. Nietzschean writing becomes the site of a meeting between delicate mechanisms and short-sighted eyes.

The writing ultimatum

The Kittlerian affirmation of de-writing, cited at the beginning of this article, refers specifically to computer programs. With the new media, writing is no longer posited according to the same modes and characteristics of existence: it is now "an electrical inscription engraved in the silicon of our computers, in other words an electrical differential" (Guez et Vargoz 2017). Kittler's precaution is therefore a

warning against the tendency to repeat principles of use and study that belong to the old mode (the mode of printed paper). Ontologically, writing is no longer the same, and the circumstances in which it is produced and relates to us are no longer the same. This is also noted by Guez and Vargoz, who have studied the approach of the mediologist, particularly with regard to the question of the figure of the author:

“Si nous n’écrivons plus, c’est parce que les médias techniques, à partir du XIX^e siècle, ont pu capter du réel des données qui échappent à la perception humaine : le gramophone enregistre des oscillations non perceptibles à l’oreille humaine, la machine à écrire, augmentant la vitesse d’écriture, permettait d’automatiser le geste d’écriture et d’extorquer à ce qui était devenue une machine humaine ce que la lente écriture manuscrite ne pouvait lui soutirer, les circuits intégrés de l’ordinateur traitent les données plus rapidement que n’importe lequel ou laquelle des calculateurs et calculatrices humains employés jusqu’à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.” (Guez et Vargoz 2017)

“If we no longer write, it is because since the 19th century technical media have been able to capture data from reality that escapes human perception: The gramophone recorded vibrations inaudible to the human ear; the typewriter, by increasing the speed of writing, made it possible to automate the act of writing and to extract from what had become a human machine what slow handwriting could not extract from it; the computer’s integrated circuits process data faster than any of the human calculators and calculating machines used until the end of the Second World War.” (my translation)

There is, then, a form of withdrawal of writing from human understanding that is not peculiar to computing machines, but concerns modernity in general, in all its diversity of objects and technologies. The mediologist proposes a solution to this problem of loss of understanding, which he himself has helped to uncover:

"I can't imagine that students today would learn only to read and write using the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. They should at least know some arithmetic, the integral function, the sine function, everything about signs and functions. They should also know at least two software languages." (Griffin, Herrmann, and Kittler 1996)

This statement is rooted in the belief that the human sciences must teach computer languages, insofar as they ontologically determine modern writing, and even modern culture.

Culture as a "system of signs," to use Kittler's expression,¹ is a formula that reduces literature to a body, to the phonograph, to the typewriter, which is not only a technical device (like a computer) but, in the case of the digital environment, a compound of writing and computable epistemological models. The radicalism of this perspective on literature is commensurate with the resistance to it, and among the a priori denounced and targeted by Kittler, the a priori of abstraction, the one that limits literature and a large part of the human sciences to ideas (in the Platonic sense), is the most tenacious because it is the cement of a tradition and of certainties.

"Once I met a young professor of German literature, who addressed me during a lunch break at a conference. He told me, "Mr. Kittler, you are wrong. You always tell us that in order to understand the computer age one has to be able to program one's own computer. This is silly," he said, "Computers are like cars. You don't have to understand the internal mechanics of a car in order to drive it. Look at me," he said, "I am a professor of German literature without ever having written a poem." And I told him that if this was the case, he was no scholar of German literature." (Khayat and Kittler 2012, 14)

What shines through in this anecdote, which Kittler no doubt romanticizes somewhat, is the idea of a culturally delimited domain: one whose boundaries have no bearing on thought or theory. However, and this is the whole point of Kittler and media studies more generally, this idea is false, it is a «narcissistic narcosis," to use Mar-

shall McLuhan's phrase, so much so that it reinforces the fantasy that humans dominate their elements (that they are masters of the tools they design and market) and that their minds are physically detached from them. Like the Copernican, Darwinian, and Freudian revelations, the ultimatums of media studies are ontological destabilisations: humans are no longer, and never have been, at the centre of their culture, of their writing.

"Writing is frightening because it escapes the human, and this fear triggers resistance: moral resistance to the aberration of this power. The negative judgement against writing is precisely a moral judgement. The term inhuman contains this provocation." (Vitali-Rosati 2020)

Kittler switched off

Moving away from the ontological aim of the media approach is what Kittler pursued in the last years of his research and life. In other words, the media context is decisive not only in terms of epistemology, science, or culture, but also in terms of ontology, in terms of the very existence of things.

"Nur was schaltbar ist, ist überhaupt." (Kittler 1993, 182)

"Only that which can be switched is, fully is." (my translation)

What he had already announced in 1993 evokes both a transhumanist imaginary in which, as in Asimov's proposal, humans are the reproductive organs of machines, and a consideration of established ways of thinking. In the computable principle, everything that has been represented by a model can be implemented: modelling, like the moulding of Goethe's vocal chords, makes it possible to impose a form, to *inform* a principle, and to implement its technical body. In this way, love or death, Goethe or Kittler can be implemented.

If the eruption of the sacred or the untouchable leads us to focus on the capabilities of artificial intelligences, media studies, on the contrary, encourages us to think upstream: to question cultural models. And the question that Kittler answers here, certainly without hav-

ing posed it openly, is how existence is now established, in what ways and on what models. Being and writing are now implemented in the binary logic of on/off. In other words, there is no eternity, no constancy, no immovable, untouchable, unchangeable certainty. Or, in short, there is no unchanging essence, only a state that can be switched on or off. According to reports from the end of Kittler's life, this conception of existence would accompany him to his deathbed in Berlin, since his last words are said to have been "Alle Apparate ausschalten" (Cruz and Kittler 2017, 4), using the root *-schalten* to call for the shutdown of the machines that fed him.

THE PUZZLE : MEDIATED MISUSE AND CREATIVE DE-WRITING

Beyond the imperative to step up in terms of competence, what stays out of Kittler's ultimatum is precisely the invitation to explore the measures of a writing environment no longer according to the rules of the old mode, but according to the mode of this un-writing. Unwriting is focused on the notion of originality (as demonstrated by Goldsmith's explorations of re-edits and reprint of the same content), while dewatering focuses on the question of diverting the medium: unwriting refutes the notion of textual originality and shifts it to the medium (where a text is first and foremost a media arrangement); dewatering explores writing through research and creation on how writing is defined in the medium. Instead of fighting it, we should embrace the un-writing of writing in order to explore how we un-write our writing. In this second phase of reflection, to illustrate the process-oriented rather than product-oriented approach, the image of the jigsaw puzzle provides a means of exploring research-creation under the principle of deciphering and diverting.

"Wo es nichts zu verstehen und nichts zu deuten gibt, vor einer Menge von Abfällen ist es das Erste, Ordnung zu machen. [...] Was zählt, ist die Relevanz oder Pertinenz in einem Puzzlespiel, nicht die Bedeutung in einer Welt." (Kittler 1980, 10)

"Where there is nothing to understand and nothing to interpret, in the face of a mass of rubbish, the first task is to put

things in order. [What counts is relevance, relevance in a puzzle, not meaning in a world.]”

The puzzle represents a fragmentation principle that initiates a quest, a thought process between the pieces. Applied to writing, this image enables us to consider the act of writing as a search for articulation between technical instances.

The spirit of Kittler

In this sense, Kittler’s work does not condemn all possibilities of collaboration with the machine. The tool has a definite influence on its user but beyond the dystopian submission to software, there remain “mechanisms of power/knowledge that define our daily reality” (Kittler 1990, 82), which Kittler has rightly sought to expose. In embodying his assertions in his practices, Kittler is certainly one of the first humanists of his generation to embrace digital spaces for writing and programming from a perspective of the Humanities. Kittler’s concepts are not free of ideality or new a priori, despite an education that is not limited to the 26 letters of the alphabet, and a writing practice that delves into the technical and media foundations of writing systems.

“Kittler’s disciple Wolfgang Ernst has said, “Kittler wrote in a ‘polemic style’ of Assembly—You have to know what I’m saying already”. Kittler could not explain all of his code or “retrace his steps”: “it was irreconstructable”. For Kittler, “His assembly writing was so close to subconscious ... A kind of ‘automatic programming.’” He described the process: “Kittler always spoke about coding in assembly as a deep psychological and analytical process. He would enter a kind of trance. Afterward, he couldn’t really tell you how he came to write it that way. He would mostly work on it at night.” (Marino 2020)

What is referred to here as assembly language is the lowest level of machine language representation in human readable form. This language remains complex because of its non-intuitive syntax: the bit combinations of the original machine language were represented by

mnemonic symbols. Media and technical exploration has its limits, even for the writing of a mediologist.

Despite the grandiloquence of academic projects such as McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, there are limits or walls to practices and concepts. A certain part is left to mystery, and Kittler's writing process, as recounted by Wolfgang Ernst, who perhaps also romanticizes, seems to involve an element of trance. Kittler's research is part of the establishment of media archaeology. This archaeology also begins, for Kittler's case, with personal writing, with the exploration of recording environments that may always escape our understanding or documentation in the logical stages of their operation, although this does not mean that the writing produced at each stage does not emerge from precise technical and media conditions.

If Kittler explored the code and a commutable approach (implementation in a machine) to the world to the point of turning it into a personal philosophy, his perspectives on writing as a process and as a media movement that constitutes the object of excavation and analysis open up a different approach to research-creation in literature. Entering a new cultural mode, literature faces not only its images turned upside down by transhuman machines, but also its foundations: the literary phenomenon is set up according to different modalities that contradict or re-articulate the a priori assumptions of creativity, originality, and exclusivity.

Creative unwriting

Although the challenges to the institutional and poetic structures of literature did not emerge only with the arrival of the machine, the mechanisation of writing has certainly played an important role in the exploration of forms of expression that thwart the codes of an established culture: from the Surrealist pages (with typographic exploration to « play » with letter's shapes) to the Oulipian procedures and the various generations of poem generators, literature has transformed its creative models, seeking ever more exceptions and reversals.

"We call potential literature the research of new forms and structures that can be used by writers in any way they wish."
(Benabou 2000)

In the OuLiPo group, founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, the principle of constraint already foreshadowed the modelling of a literary production process, a mathematical or calculable model for the experimentation of literature to be reproduced under the same conditions. The poetic group, which brought together writers and mathematicians, saw itself as a meeting between an art of expression and a technical logic. Having applied mathematical or computational principles to literary ends, understood (almost) as an exact science, the Oulipian literati played with code as a literary machine. Redefining the principle of textual production and, by extension, what literary writing actually means, the Oulipian text is a set of methods that define the boundaries of a dialogue, delimit a framework for randomness, document the process of creativity, and thus desacralise literary genius to replace it with the importance of the model.

"What some writers have done with talent (or even genius), but some have done only occasionally [...], the Oulipo intends to do systematically and scientifically, and if necessary, with the good offices of 'information processing machines.'" (Le Lionnais 1973, 17)

The common ground, and indeed the continuity, between the machinic explorations of literature can be seen in terms of automation and infinity. From Stratchey's first love letter generator [1952], to the paper hypertext of Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliard de poèmes* [1961], to Jean Baudot's first poem generator [1964], to more modern explorations such as Balpe's generators or his GPT version instantiated by the author Thierry Crouzet (called [ThierryGPT](#)), the thread running through the machine's literary compositions is as much the idea of defining the process of an art, of understanding the concrete conditions of its creation, as it is the shifting of literary art from product to process. Indeed, it is not so much a question of written works—*Cent mille milliard de poèmes* is literally unreadable, and the generators

are potentially inexhaustible in the possibilities of textual composition—as of writing devices or literary architecture. If we turn to the literary products they designate, it is indeed the articulation of the media pieces that crystallises the literary experience: the *Cent mille milliard de poèmes* are pieces of paper to be grouped together without one version prevailing over another. Composition becomes a quest to understand how a literary idea has been technically implemented.

If the sacredness of composition or the humanist a priori that might inform it are undermined in the experimental generation of literature, so too are questions of intentionality. With direct reference to Kenneth Goldsmith's approach and the thinking behind *uncreative writing* (2011), the proposition that emerges is one of questioning the very principle and use of intentionality: in other words, evacuating the question of whether the machine *thinks, writes, creates* by intending to do so (which we couldn't determine for a human either), and instead asking the question of how, by trying to understand how it works, I *think, write, create* by it.

The misuse

"It seems to me that the only necessary condition for an artist is to master all the tools that can have an impact on his art, to digest them and then to use them or not, depending on the circumstances." ('T'es pas techos, t'es pas artiste', Crouzet 2013 [<https://tcrouzet.com/2013/05/08/tes-pas-techos-tes-pas-artiste/>])

The mastery of the medium outlined by Kittler and Crouzet is not about expertise; it is not about turning literary scholars into computer scientists, but rather about exploring new conditions in literature and even in the media. As McLuhan puts it,

"Artists of various disciplines are always the first to discover how one medium can use or liberate the energy of another."
(McLuhan 1964, 75)

In other words, the approach to the literary applied to the digital, because it aims at other horizons, diverts, *de-familiarises* (Shklovksy

2015) systems of inscription from their original purpose. From this perspective, creative insolence is the order of the day, literary research in the digital media finds modes or spaces for diverting writing.

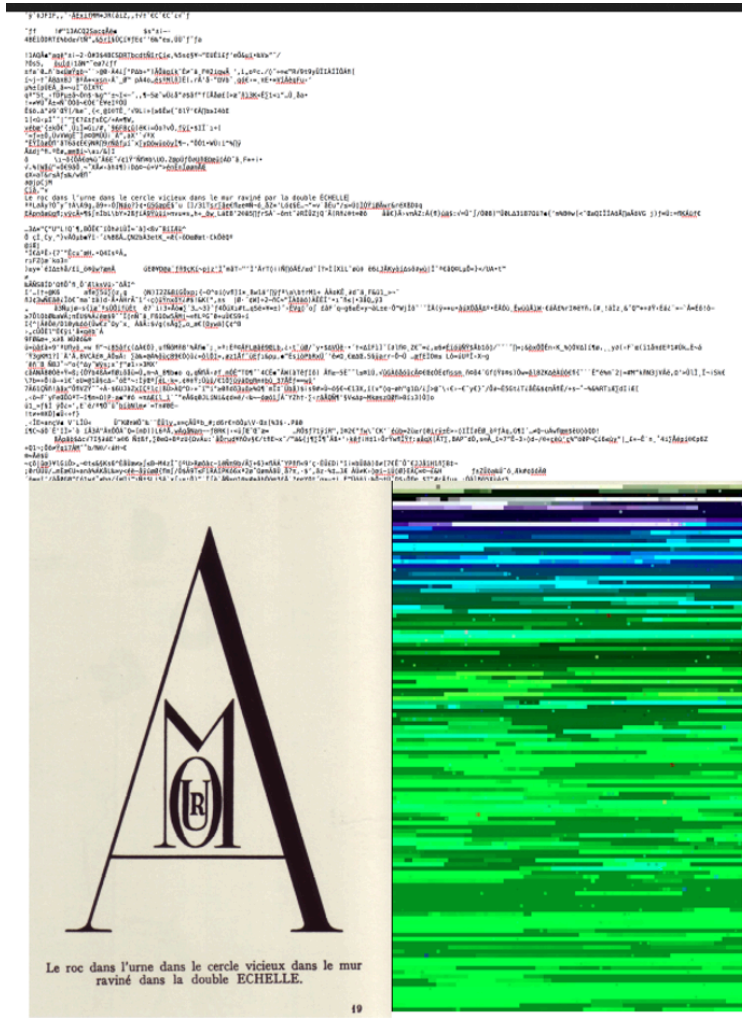


Figure 1

The image text encoding misuses shown above are based on Goldsmith's methods:

"Let's take a .jpg of the famous Droeshout engraving from the title page of the 1623 First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays and change the extension from .jpg to .txt. When we open it in a text editor, we'll see garbled code. Now let's insert his ninety-third sonnet into it, three times at somewhat equal intervals, and save the file and change the extension back to .jpg."
(Goldsmith 2011, 22)

What Goldsmith then shows is an image of Shakespeare (before and after the misuse of his signs). The writing game is a misuse of an image, a literary figure, where the intrusion into the code is an act of creative research into the new modalities of existence of writing. The misuse can also be found in the use of writing tools: the text editor is misused to corrupt an image, the image viewing tool is misused to display a corrupted image (and on some operating systems you have to force the display). In the case of Goldsmith's creation (and it's applicable to all his research-creation work), the writing process involves exploring the writing device and playing with the limits of inscription: as the conditions of writing's existence have changed on screen, new modes of writing become explorations that make inscription dysfunctional, or take it as an agent of dysfunction.

The puzzle itself can be turned upside down: it's no longer a question of solving, but of assembling the pieces in a different way, beyond the combinations initially envisaged, to reveal another image of the composition.

WRITING BY NO LONGER WRITING

The notion of de-writing, based on my reading of Kittler, leads to a highly paradoxical observation: today one writes by no longer writing. This paradox allows us to respect the concrete, mediated, and technical nature of writing, while at the same time allowing for the creative exploration of the literary phenomenon. De-writing in itself is not only ontological (the human is no

longer at the core of writing) or epistemological (writing is no longer within his grasp), but also practical: research-creation is a way to pause, interrupt, or postpone the productive process of writing in order to explore the modalities of its emergence. In other words, the deconstruction of a priori assumptions about writing, in theory and practice, encourages research-creation to explore how writing emerges from technical and mediatic conditions. This perspective expands literature, transforming what writing can mean and do (in terms of sign or performance) to challenge its limits and shape its misuses.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1 : Encoding *Le roc dans l'urne dans le cercle vicieux dans le mur raviné par la double ÉCHELLE* in the page of *Le roc dans l'urne dans le cercle vicieux dans le mur raviné par la double ÉCHELLE* poem.

NOTES

1. Kittler's "system of signs" refers not only to the network of discourse (as translated in the English version of his book), but also to a system of inscription, note-taking, and recording of writing.↵

VORTEXT: DERRIDA, LACAN, LIFE

CONCETTA PRINCIPE

This research creation project is a poetic rendering of a portion of the story of getting my PhD. The relationship between the text and vortex of theory (Derridean, Lacanian among others) and the quotidian, generate this “vortex” of prose poems. Inspiring the research are neighbours, dinner menus, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the news, Betty (Davis, Crocker, Goodwin, Boop), Homer, Dante, the Inquisition, my dissertation defence; Derrida’s essay on *différance*, his ideas on the universal and autobiography, and his texts *Archive Fever* and *Acts of Religion*; and Lacan’s reflections on lack, the absence of the universal woman (*Seminar XX*), and the *objet a* and *Das Ding* (*Seminar XI*). Thus the poetry of scholarship.

Le présent projet de recherche création est une interprétation poétique d’une partie de l’histoire de l’obtention de mon doctorat. La relation entre le texte et le tourbillon de la théorie (derridienne, lacanienne entre autres) et le quotidien, génère ce « vortex » de poèmes en prose. Des voisins, des menus de dîner, *Sire Gauvain et le Chevalier vert*, les nouvelles, Betty (Davis, Crocker, Goodwin, Boop), Homère, Dante, l’Inquisition, ma soutenance de thèse; l’essai de Derrida sur la *différance*, ses idées sur l’universel et l’autobiographie, et ses textes *Mal d’Archive* et *Foi et savoir*, ainsi que les réflexions de Lacan sur le manque, l’absence de la femme universelle (*séminaire XX*), et l’*objet a* et *Das Ding* (*séminaire XI*) inspirent la recherche. Ainsi, la poésie du savoir.

A SHORT PREAMBLE

In my lyric memoir titled *Discipline N.V.*, published with Palimpsest Press in 2023, I tell the story of getting my PhD while handicapped by a number of things, including being perimenopausal and suffering from anxiety and depression. Added to that, I was struggling to grasp the complexity (simplicity?) of theory while staying on top of the demands of being a mother; to put it another way, I was considering the relevance of theory to life. How does understanding ontology feed my child? The disjunction between theory and life (or praxis) is expressed in the poems of the book using literary strategies such as the fragment, non-sequiturs, metaphors, and alliteration. In essence, the book is a research creation project involving the poetic intervention of scholarship. “Vortext,” using the same stylistic strategies, continues that project.

The intellectual schools of thought that I am drawing from in this long poem are deconstructionism and psychoanalysis. Since poetry is a project of language, the Derridean *différance* is a gold mine for my work: meaning is expressed in the chain of connotations, embracing deferral of meaning and repetition. In other words, I build metaphors that problematize what scholarship thinks it can accomplish. Moreover, I embrace Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of universalism in favouring the particular: i.e., if human rights are universal, why doesn’t everyone benefit from the same human rights? I join Derridean principles with the Lacanian idea of the subject’s search for the truth of her desire. In Jacques Lacan’s terms, the truth is always partial or achieved only on the path of lies. Thus, desire traces deception which circles the lack at the centre of the subject, the hole of being that is never filled/fulfilled. The two discourses combined with the text of daily life are the “textual modes” that come together as a vortex, which is why I am naming this “Vortext.” You could say that this synergy has at its heart the “search” in research creation.

This project is an intervention in the academy in that it unbinds the hierarchy of scholarship over artistic creation: who says that poetry can’t be a viable kind of scholarship? For that matter, who says scholarship needs to be in the “essay” form? So I am “essaying” in the spir-

it of Michel de Montaigne's experiment with personal reflections by experimenting with genres to tell the story about being a PhD candidate. The text destabilizes the borders that distinguish scholarship from poetry by joining them so tightly that meaning is achieved only in a liminal state, and even then, it is ambiguous. I mean, in scholarly terms, that the thesis evades the text. In concert with this evasion is a test of scholarship as creative practice. If literary research gets its definition and authority from using poetic text for analysis, this poem inverts that hierarchy by making poetry the vulture of research. I literally use my dissertation experience for metaphor. Terms such as Logos, Symptom, Messianism, and Homer promise an intellectual discourse, but the poems defy that expectation by breaking down any argument with intrusive inner thoughts, anxiety, or life events such as a neighbour being arrested, someone hurting their foot, or a dinner in need of preparation. Put in literary gothic terms, this poetry is created of theory and may be considered its monster.

Inspiring the search in the pages ahead are neighbours, dinner menus, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the news, Betty (Davis, Crocker, Goodwin, Boop), Homer, Dante, the Inquisition, my dissertation defence; Derrida's essay on *différance*, his ideas on the universal and autobiography, and his texts *Archive Fever* and *Acts of Religion*; and Lacan's reflections on lack, the absence of the universal woman (*Seminar XX*), and the *objet a* and *Das Ding* (*Seminar XI*). Thus the poetry of scholarship.

LOGOS

Faith. In the fast lane of an auto-da-fé. What do you believe in? Derrida on faith, circling his circumcision. Faith in the word as your word "rack." A first letter of the self. The "a" of the article of faith. The faith that there was an aleph. Fasten your seat belts, the judges are ruthless. Fasten your bones to the rack. Faster than that. Faith is a man-made object. Sort of like a wheel or a word. The word is *fides*. It is your world that circles the oral sun. Confide in him; fidelity is my game; trust me, the flames won't hurt you.

FEVER

Difference. *Différance*. Where there's smoke defer to the magistrate. Fair and feral. Bus fare and tame as the whip cream on your blond cake. Beat me with your deferrals and I'll raise you a pancake. I cannot. I am supposed to defer to courtly justice. Why? The dialectic of difference. Never got it. The negative theology. Never respected the difference of this butter from your toast. Eat my crumbs. Archain. Arche. Archon, Arghh. Don't waste your time, says the big ego who liked to know it all. How about that universal, eh?

HOLE

Universal time. Universal veil. Lacan likes me in my Salome dress. Fail. There is no woman nor is this a vale of universal tears filling academia with flowers and singularity. Uni-versifying the streams of intellectual practice. Ridge and rote. Bridge the universe. Moten and versatility. Diversity. Versus. Verse is another word for poesy. *Poiein*, to create. Universalistic is unrealistic. *Vert* as, in the French, green. Verily, I will *différance* the Green Knight. Oh no, Sir Gawain again. Or not. Reversing the irreversible. Vertices. Universals. Inversing the difference. University, if you can stomach it. Come full circle and bend the vorticular subject with teleological mandates: the totality. Not catholic necessarily. Verily. Versus the way that Betty circled winter on the lake last summer. Protons so thick. So very.

MÖBIUS STRIP

The atom. Adam is a spinning thing in western history. What is it? The lake is round and scansion that. Circle "mi, do" or don't. A circular argument, the article of singularity declines in multiple dances on Monday nights with green-as-they-come candidates. On a summer night, the neighbour sings low and soulful at the very hour when only one person has a window opened at such a crack that the music fills the room with listening to mom hum when she hung the clothes on the line. A clothesline circles the backyard. A coniferous argument renders the laundry dry so it is fine to sit down and watch eter-

nity get away with it. Fit that into a square hole, I dare you. Spin this on the vorticose wedge. Talk about walking the deferral to the corner. Circle back and nail Paul's circumcision as a flesh fetish. There is no right turn in defense mechanisms. Right this way.

SYMPTOM

Rights. Right away. He built the garage on the right of way. The universal subject has no rights. The subject of human rights. The right way. Give him these cans of salmon and don't tell him who sent them, said the father. Doing the right thing. A gift of canned fish for the neighbour. Salmon swimming the wrong way. The garage is listing right and the landlord doesn't care if his tenants get sick. Human rights, eh? The law is clear, and the police can enter if they deem it is unsafe. Who has the right to tell me what I can do? Right of return. Right turn. Right along the border, he cut the bushes for you. After all was said and done, the turn was linguistic and Moses was lifted. Left. Left or right. He needed a break. Right of the lane. She broke winter inside herself then touched her ear, sprained her left foot. Antithesis.

MESSIANISM

Dialectical anxiety. Dialect. Deferred. Vernacular on the streets, diurnal. Deferral. Dial the number and don't expect short ribs. First Hegel and then dialysis. No, the thesis must have white blood cells. Where is your diagnosis coming from? The delicate tongue of the ancient mariner. The delectable structure of this and that; here and there; now and never again. Dis and dat, jokes the good neighbour. *Das Ding*. Is and is not. As Parmenides said: What is, is and what is not, cannot be; but if it can be thought, even if it is not, it is. The dialogue. Logo. Ego. Lesbos. Vamos. Leggo my eggo. Ergo, I am what I am and am no doubt.

DAS DING

Am. Amber. Ambulance. Perambulate. Periodontist. Ach, it aches. A as the article; a as the object; A as the aleph; ach, my foot hurts. Podiatrist in the archive. Arachnid. Anterior thoughts of the future moon in Scorpio; antipathy and postmodern indifference; auntie, why are you late again, we have missed you? Ant hills and anemones; art and ass; assuage the apple of my eye; aster, and an apple again, ambling down the asphalt. Artichoke salad. Betty, go catch her before she salads the speech again.

HOMER

Ain't too big a hole. Hole in the wall, glory or fury. Cavities fill the camera aperture, a mouth that eats the fish, whole. The holy see full of incense. Holy smokes, I can't breathe. Fire in the hole. Fire in the hole. They repeat that because when it is done, it cannot be repeated, much as when a cake is devoured it is toast, when a shoe is lost, the pair is dead, when the glass is broken, the contract is sealed. There is one katabasis, one first day of school, one tenth birthday or ninth anniversary, one defense, and you sink or swim.

BIKINI

Swimming the semester while the prime minister defends with tensile instruments and the child brimming with shrimp. Shimmer. Grim reaper in the rhyming trim-work of his new home, which means he didn't pay attention to what was happening in the kitchen. Kosher means no shell fish and two sinks. It is August. So much sand around her and so many husks of having eaten. The board room was avoided, flat as a beach, pulsing in the sun. There is too much object of desire, he said, as if the salt had somehow fallen off the shelf, wedged its way between her shadow and the sea. When the sun sets, the world spreads flat, round. A lone swimmer, glimmering in the bowl of Eden's forbidden pickles, aleph of my heart, artichokes and clover. Is that what you meant? No, Betty said.

DEFENCE

No, he said. A rite of passage, a descent right into the katabasis. Yes, I wore cotton as armour. No, I won't drive you. Yes, I was not dove white, but tabula rasa. Not even lipstick. Nobody wore the low heels but I wore the wheels down to the rims until the next omission. Emission. Admission. Inadmissible evidence boring down on him. Excuses are embarrassing. Bear with me. Betting on Betty to get me out of here. Police wires and a white shirt to confess in. Surrender. Another fender bender. How harsh the wrack he thought as he disinterred the salmon. Camera-errata, full of fire and fury. They were inside the cave of the aleph, strapping my appendages to their punctum, demanding I explain my faith. "Yes," I said and smiled for the camera.

(WHAT WE DO) FOR THE LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE AND FOR
THE LOVE OF ART

AGATA MERGLER

1. INTRODUCTION

S*ophia*—wisdom—was the desired object of a philosopher, the first one in the Western context to recognize the value of non-dogmatic, non-mythological knowledge. Philosophy, the love of wisdom, does not possess the desired object, philosophy follows wisdom, as Karl Jaspers reminds us (*Ways to Wisdom*). Philosophising is always an activity of *becoming* wise; thinking, *theoria*, is a practice of thinking (e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer reinterprets Aristotle’s vision of *theoria* in this way;¹ see also Monique Tschofen’s article in this issue). Wisdom, initially not strictly differentiated from episteme, could encompass a lot. For Heraclitus, knowledge was connected to *logos* (112). For Plato, knowledge was *episteme* (*The Republic*). Both were always contrasted with *doxa*, opinion, hearsay, and in general, with whatever people believed without proper inquiry.

With Plato’s metaphysics the position of episteme comes to the fore. The knowledge of ideas and forms is the truth, material reality being only a mere unstable shadow or very weak representation of some aspects of it. Still not yet dividing theory and practice, or ethical and intellectual endeavours, Plato rejected, however, the arts (especially poets, removing them from the ideal city-state) as the weakest in representing truth, since what they represented or copied (he uses “imitation,” *mimesis*) were the mere shadows on a wall deep in the

cave away from the light of truth. Those representations could only be imperfect distant imitations of ideas, thus artistic works would be twice removed from the truth (Plato, *The Republic*, Book X). In this diminishing of art's position Eva Meyer and Eran Schaerf see a reaction to art's access to a different kind of knowledge, as "the poetic act [would be associated] with a peculiar, mysterious, or even dangerous sort of knowledge" (109). Since then, art's relationship with epistemes of "true knowledge" has been fraught with difficulty and continuously contested. Aristotle divided philosophy into theoretical and practical endeavours, which introduced the theory/practice divide—a quite modern attitude—and millennia later, we have begun to notice that certain layers and depths of knowledge, for example connected to the particularity of human experience, but also the commonality of human experience as being-in-the-world, have been misrepresented or underdeveloped. Thus, we were missing out on what we were learning from certain parts of our life (different thinkers at different times notice this: Montaigne, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, and finally the 20th century criticisms of various kinds).

The *Research-creation Episteme?* symposium, held on October 31, 2023, and organized by me and Josh Synenko, the editors of this special issue, asked the numerous participants one clear question among many: whether creative inquiry existed and provided knowledge. We asked for answers in a simple format of manifestos, straying away from treatise-formats, to entice us all to rethink knowledge production itself, and the role of arts in it. During the conference Ami Xherro, María Angélica Madero, Sarah Matthews, Caitlin Fisher, Rob Winger, Concetta Principe, and many others posited pluralistic understandings of knowledge, theory, and practice in knowledge production and its methods. Some of these presentations have found their way into this issue in the more standardized but not unproblematic format of academic articles. Nonetheless, the question has emerged in both instances: could art now, circa 2300 years after it was discarded as a source of truth by Plato, regain a place at the table of the wisdom lovers and truth seekers? Whether there were any of these left in academia also emerged as a question.

Having worked on this project now for more than 16 months, and having worked in artistic research projects myself,² I have an opportunity in this afterword to make my own manifesto about research-creation. Maybe more appropriate would be a fair account of the gathered experience, or simply a presentation of knowledge gained.

The overall view of the situation of research-creation or artistic research in the current moment of knowledge production systems development has brought me to one belief I can share upfront: only authentic art-as-research can have a significant impact on changing the knowledge production circuits and systems as they are now part of innovation and labour markets. That is certainly something I learned. I can also share a tentative hypothesis painted with quite a broad brush: to revolutionize knowledge production with art, one cannot domesticate it, yet such an unrestrained revolution might bring consequences, which in turn might very well shatter illusions and solid beliefs about knowledge production altogether. (And we live in a post-truth era often blamed on postmodernity; so, if that is what has been learned, is there any love left for either knowledge or art?)

2. DEFINING TERMS

What are we talking about, then, when we talk about artistic research, research-creation, knowledge, knowledge production, and their cognates? “Artistic Research,” a term “taken for granted perhaps even overused” (EU4ART 9), is seen as a ubiquitous term often used alongside and in the context of interdisciplinary research, innovation, and education funding policies in the European Union research realm. It shares a lot with the Canadian term “research-creation.” Both are now used everywhere in academia and by research funding policy makers; they are concepts very much belonging to the 21st century’s vision of knowledge production connected to interdisciplinarity/transdisciplinarity, knowledge mobilisation, and innovation. As the authors of *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* already in 2008 write: “terms that have become commonplace in the discourse of contemporary art – such as knowledge production, artistic research, and interdiscipli-

nary practice – remain arguably as nebulous and contested as ever” (Hlavajova et al. 7). The situation does not seem to have changed very much in the last 18 years. For the sake of clarity, I would like to write about “artistic research,” but in its definition-wise nebulous state, it can often be seen as synonymous to “research-creation.”

One of the definitions, according to *The Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research*, “signed on 20 June 2020 by all major organisations of European art schools” (Cramer and Terpsma) states the following key features of Artistic Research:

“Excellent AR is research through means of high-level artistic practice and reflection; it is an epistemic inquiry, directed towards increasing knowledge, insight, understanding and skills. Within this frame, AR is aligned in all aspects with the five main criteria that constitute Research & Development in the Frascati Manual. Through topics and problems stemming from and relevant to artistic practice, AR also addresses key issues of a broader cultural, social and economic significance. AR is undertaken in all art practice disciplines - including architecture, design, film, photography, fine art, media and digital arts, music and the performing arts - and achieves its results both within those disciplines, as well as often in a transdisciplinary setting, combining AR methods with methods from other research traditions.” ([The Vienna Declaration](#))

The Canadian definition of Research-creation from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) presents the following key components:

“An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator’s work, conventional works of technological develop-

ment, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula.” ([Definitions of terms, SSRHC](#))

It also mentions but does not limit “fields that may involve research-creation,” such as “architecture, design, creative writing, visual arts (e.g., painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, textiles), performing arts (e.g., dance, music, theatre), film, video, performance art, interdisciplinary arts, media and electronic arts, and new artistic practices,” so basically any creative endeavour. Furthermore, for criteria of evaluation for research-creation and artistic research projects, often the “clear research question,” “theoretical contextualization,” and “well-considered methodological approach and creative process” (see SSHRC funding criteria) are mentioned as necessary points. There is nothing really novel except for the addition of the “creative process” in this list, at least not for anyone who works in the humanities. And it is hard not to see creation as already part of the humanities or for that matter any academic knowledge production process, especially in the times of continuously stressed connection between research and innovation.³ As for the *Vienna Declaration*, critics see that it uses “grotesque neoliberal-bureaucratic language,” attempts to put the artistic research into very narrow and criticized frames of the Frascati Manual, and, most importantly, “doesn’t mention artists at all; they literally don’t exist in its text” (Cramer and Terpsma).

It is worth adding that this move to creation in knowledge production (which is not new, at least not without its own history, and not without controversy) created a plethora of terms, which appeared and were listed by a member of the audience during the 2023 conference on *Research-creation Episteme?* at Trent University, who reminded us all how dizzying this innovation might seem, when every country, or even university, rewrites the terminology and provides its own concepts. Among many we have: research-creation, art research, artistic research, practice-based research, artistic-practice-based research, creative-practice based research, etcetera. Below is a photo I took that conference day, which presents the probably not exhaustive list of terms mentioned during the conference which I managed to put down on a whiteboard (see fig. 1). Not all these terms

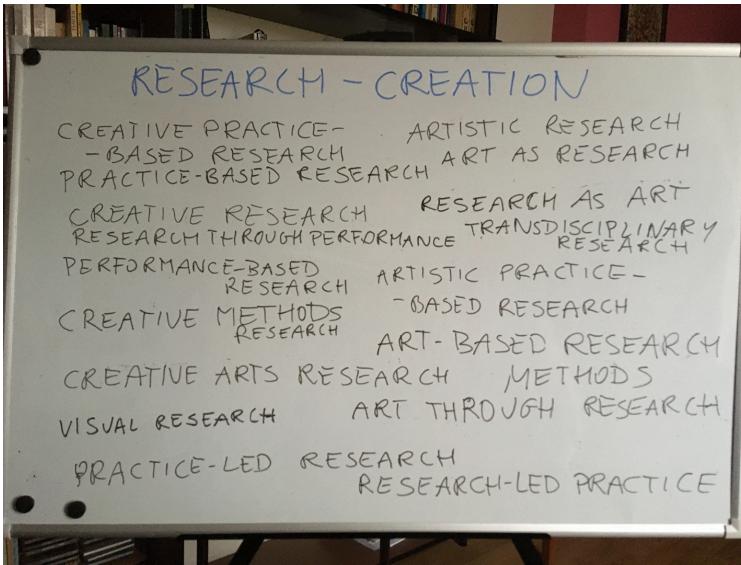


Figure 1: A whiteboard with a list of terms titled "Research-creation" gathered during the symposium, October 30, 2023.

have the same meaning or connotation, and not all could be synonymous, but together, in a Wittgensteinian fashion, they might be connected by family resemblance.

Delving into definitions provided in the literature on artistic research and related terms, one can come across various discussions. Julian Klein, in answering the question "what is artistic research?" proposes that "art as research" is not accurate; instead, he sees that it is research that in its practice "becomes artistic" and not art becoming research. For him the question should be "When is research art?" and the "correct" expression should be "research as art" (2011, 4).

Henk Borgdorff proposes that to call something artistic research is "to denote that domain of research and development in which the practice of art—that is, the making and the playing, the creation and the performance, and the works of art that result—play a constitutive role in a methodological sense" (101). Moreover, in the reflec-

tions on artistic research practice, the process of acquiring the artistic knowledge and that said knowledge (in other words, the method and the substance) are “fused.” There is, however, within science, a separation of knowledge as the outcome and the method as a way of achieving the outcome. And, as Klein writes about science: “Reflection comes after [whereas] Artistic experience is a form of reflection” (2011, 5). Artistic practice is the fusion of theory and practice, something mentioned by continental philosophers who see *theoria* as a practice of thinking, and thus the division as void, or artificial.

There are, however, many other attitudes to artistic research, which are very much systematic and “formal” (Sullivan 191) in the way of making distinctions and divisions despite the conviction of arts research autonomy; that is, that “it has to be grounded in practices that come from the art itself” (xvii). Graeme Sullivan provides a framework for practice-based artistic research listing the following areas: “visual arts knowing,” the theoretical-practical level that is exploring problems, which Sullivan calls “transcognition”; conceptual, “thinking in a medium,” when the artist creates works that are part of the research process; dialectic, “thinking in a language,” when human processes in the creation of meaning are explored (beyond direct communication); and in the contextual area, practice, which results in social transformation (129-130).

All these proposals have different relationship to the official definitions and to the understanding of knowledge production itself, which if presented here would change this afterword into something entirely different than intended.

Most of these descriptions or definitions present attempts to fit artistic research into a current knowledge production system. But how do we define knowledge and knowledge production? How have we been defining it? And what place can artistic research find in this system?

Eva Mayer and Eran Schaerf in a provocatively titled article “What Does Art Know?” ask about knowledge definitions that use personal experience or being acquainted with something, understanding certain relations, or the recognition of patterns as a basis (109), which expand the understanding of knowledge modelled on science.

Furthermore, in an academic setting any knowledge production, which is work, also becomes labour. Although neither knowledge nor art are actually productions in the sense of the labour relations of capitalism, all of them should of course be recognized and remunerated. Among the texts gathered in this issue, many address either an institutional critique (and decolonial, as in Stephen Tu's text) or a critique of the commodification of artistic work and research (as in Madero and Carney's article), which pushes research work and artistic work into narrow frames of labour. One of the common definitions of research used in the education policies mentioned is "any creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications" (OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms 2008). It is thus a relatively wide term, and in such an understanding we work on research, even when we labour over it. However, the most recent policies (like the *Vienna Declaration*) propose an understanding of research connected to innovation and to applicability as well, thus simply connecting it to a neoliberal agenda behind research funding.

3. WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

When Josh Synenko suggested that I join him in creating the research-creation conference event, I was instantaneously interested. I was intrigued to have an opportunity to see in this event, like in a kaleidoscope, what research-creation was able to achieve for such different artists and researchers. My hopes for the symposium were quite high. I hoped that there would be multiple ways presented in which we could make artistic research—critical, political (micro-political), decolonial, collaborative, and community-building—and that through them possibilities could emerge of contesting established hegemonic knowledge production systems, and overriding or changing elements of the commodified education system. The manifestos delivered on these very expectations. The symposium has provided me with hope for a more pluralistic knowledge production system as a real possibility. However, many factors preventing even these possibilities were raised during

conference discussions and have been more specifically articulated in the texts of this issue. The work on the issue also provided an insight into various issues, such as with the formats of academic peer-review (see Josh Synenko's Afterword in this issue).

The same can be said based on my own practice in art research and information I gathered through literary surveys and talks with artists, which provided me with a mix of hope—a glimpse into possibilities of artistic research—and suspicions about artistic research being only “a matter of rhetoric, of branding [...] [amounting] to little more than simulation” (Lütticken 85), as well as an understanding of the roadblocks and dangers.

Several years ago, I had an opportunity to discuss artistic research with art students from Universidad de las Artes, from Guayaquil, Ecuador.⁴ For their degree they were required to accompany their final art show with an artistic research thesis following new academic rules. Some students were annoyed by the need to borrow methods from outside of art to prove their academic abilities, while others were not happy that artistic practice in itself without the “academic component” would not count as enough for their degree. These claims resounded again during the symposium with participants mentioning “the problem of disciplining art into a discipline.” Others saw it as a possibility of recognition for the research they as artists had to undertake in their practices anyway. The polite students didn't point to that right away, but I realized that they found this necessity to present artistic research as an imposed bureaucratic and Northern/Western modernizing novelty. This strongly echoed Hito Steyerl's sentiments that artistic research is a “predominantly First World metropolitan artist's endeavour,” and that “Artistic research as a discipline [...] presents an attempt to extract or produce a different type of value in art” alongside the direct market value of art becoming part of “cultural capitalism” (Steyerl, paragraph 26). Recognizing the same issues that the Ecuadorian students raised, Steyerl points to the fact that artistic research as a discipline has been combined with applied arts, and connected thus with “innovation,” “city marketing,” etcetera. Steyerl's text “[Aesthetics of Resistance?](#)”

(2010), which strongly influenced my understanding of artistic research, and which I am using here, traces the many mentioned problems to the point of integrating art as artistic research into (increasingly) commodified education systems (see also *On Knowledge Production* (2008), by Maria Hlavajova et al). Finally, and even more importantly in these discussions with students, it transpired for me that artistic research simply proved to be another form of gatekeeping these Global South artists would be experiencing in the global art market.

Additionally, if Florian Cramer is right in his frustration⁵ and we have created artistic research in academia to give work to “poor artists” and now academics are actually taking over and de facto invading art, then the current situation is a fight over territory and paychecks by two often precarious groups of the intellectual or creative class (if it still exists and existed in the first place).

Contrary to such concerns, and somewhat following Steyerl’s hopeful claim that artistic research can provide “resistance against dominant modes of knowledge production” (paragraph 21), the symposium manifestos were calls or postulates for various changes of foci in research-creation and its possible revolutionary and disruptive nature in relation to the current knowledge production system. Among the manifestos we heard about queer making (Kush Patel), autotheory (Gabriel Menotti or LA Alfonso), embodied knowledge (LA Alfonso, Milosh Radič), non-linearity (María Angélica Madero), care (in many more presentations than those under the section on “Care”—see the symposium program reproduced in figure 2 below), non-dominant ways of disseminating knowledge (Anamaria Garzon Mantilla, Anna Pasek, Mehvish Rather, Cimarron Knight), decolonization, and Indigenous knowledges (Nadine Changfoot, Missy Knott, and Jonathan Taylor). There were so many manifestos that it would be impossible to discuss them all here. But, as mentioned, many manifestos touched on care in knowledge production and dissemination and other theoretical/practical issues that inspire me directly in thinking about artistic research. Kush Patel reminded me about the severed connection between ethics and knowledge when

he mentioned using a method of “moving at the speed of trust” (Adrienne Maree Brown’s method). Monique Tschofen’s and Sarah Matthews’ interventions called for slow scholarship and art as a more holistic practice resistant against the compartmentalization of knowledge production, as a way of knowing (Matthews) and as a new image of thought able to change thinking (Tschofen). Gabriel Menotti reminded me of yet another division we’ve become accustomed to, when he simply stated, “every knowledge is practice.”

=====	9:50-10:00
Program	Break
=====	
9:00-9:10	10:00-10:30
Introduction	Pedagogy
Agata Mergler & Joshua Synenko	Mod: Rob Winger
9:10-9:30	Game Design as Teaching Strategy and Research
Design	Practice
Mod: Agata Mergler	Jasper van Vught
Everyday Divine: A Wellbeing Modality for Post-Pandemic Society	Research-Creation as a Practice of Freedom
Megan K. Hughes (she/her)	Cimarron Knight
Queer Making	Research-Creation & Education
Kush Patel (they/he)	Kelly Egan
9:30-9:50	10:30-11:00
Autotheory	Theory
Mod: Agata Mergler	Mod: Kelly Egan
Reflecting with/on Curating: a Couple Lessons from Autotheory	Reconsiderations of Theoria in Research Co-creation
Gabriel Menotti	Monique Tschofen (she/her)
Research/Creation: How Do We Get to the Heart of the Matter?	Manifesto on Non-Linearity: Embracing Art's Multidimensional Knowledge
LA Alfonso (he/him)	Maria Angélica Madero
	Can the World Even Be Known as Itself or Will I Have to Die in It First?
	Ami Xherro

<p>11:00-12:15 COFFEE & SNACKS w/ Prof. LAURA U. MARKS (SFU) Senior Common Room, Scott House, Trill College</p> <p>12:30-12:50 Gesture</p> <p>Mod: Laura U. Marks</p> <p>Our Bodies Are Supernal in their Bionic Dynamism: Research in Processes of Art Making Involving Automatic Corporeal Gesture in a Flash Milosh Rodic</p> <p>"Make Weird Shit": a Gestural Mode of Curriculum Development Darren Berkland (they/them)</p> <p>12:50-1:20 Institutional critique 1</p> <p>Mod: Laura U. Marks</p> <p>Against Methods Sara Matthews</p> <p>Yeah, Okay: On the "Research-Creation" Label as Old-school Double Standard Rob Winger (he/him)</p> <p>This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Pretending We Want the Academy to Change but Not Acting Like It Caitlin Fisher (she/her)</p>	<p>1:20-1:30 Break</p> <p>1:30-2:00 Institutional critique 2</p> <p>Mod: Jessica Barr</p> <p>Boundaries Unbound: Abstract for a Manifesto Klara du Plessis (she/her)</p> <p>The Elephant Manifesto: A Call for Methodological Metamorphosis Thoreau Bakker</p> <p>Discipline Discipline Concetta Principe</p> <p>2:00-2:20 Writing</p> <p>Mod: Joshua Synenko</p> <p>Research Creation in the Writing Centre Liam Monaghan</p> <p>Creativity and Research in Graduate Writing Pedagogy Daniel Aureliano Newman</p> <p>2:20-2:30 Break</p>
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<p>2:30-2:50 Process</p> <p>Mod: Joshua Synenko</p> <p>Notes on Moving and Drifting Scott Birdwise</p> <p>Never Try to Follow Talking Animals: How a Research-Creation Component of a Scholarly Work Spun Off Into a World of Its Own Rick Cousins</p> <p>2:50-3:15 Collaboration (human, vegetable, machine)</p> <p>Mod: Anne Pasek</p> <p>De-Writing: A Manifesto for the Misuse of Writing Margot Mallet</p> <p>Research-Creation and More-Than-Human Collaboration Oriana Conforte</p> <p>3:15-3:30 Break</p>	<p>3:30-4:00 Circulation</p> <p>Mod: Agata Mergler</p> <p>Post(s): Reinventing What an Academic Journal Should Be Anamaria Garzón Mantilla (she/her)</p> <p>Towards a Politics of Circulation for Research-Creation Anne Pasek (she/her)</p> <p>Guerilla Pedagogy: Teaching, Creating, and Disseminating Art in Conflict Zones Mehvish Rather (she/her)</p> <p>4:00-4:30 Decolonizing</p> <p>Mod: Joshua Synenko</p> <p>Wshkigmong Dibajmowman/Curve Lake Storytelling: Decolonizing Research-Creation Spaces Nadine Changfoot, Missy Knott and Jonathan Taylor</p>
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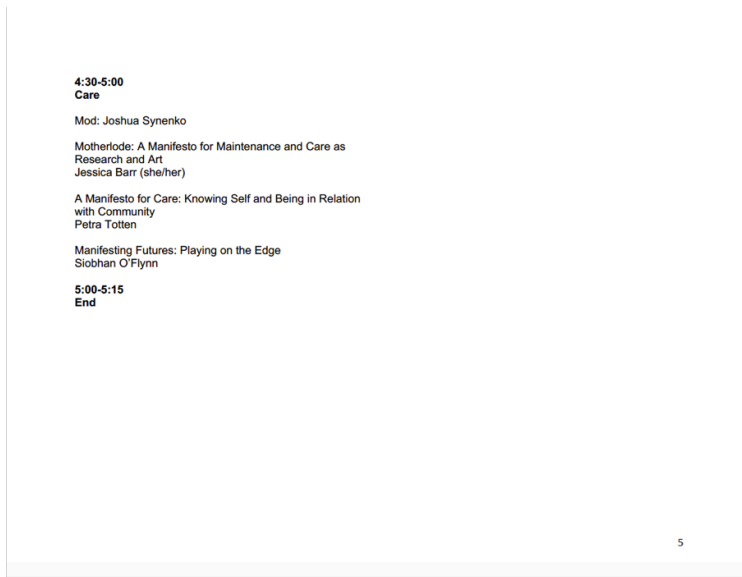


Figure 2: Pages 2-5 from the symposium program, October 30, 2023.

What we have learned from post-Darwinist biology and even more acutely from the reality of climate disaster is that diversity provides better chances for survival. Being faced with a post-truth reality, especially the reality of AI “producing answers,” and with post-creative reality, now with AI “producing art,” we are fighting for survival for both spheres of understanding and of creating, for the love of *sophia*, *logos*, or *episteme*, and for the love of art. The more diverse our methods, and the more complex and thought-through our methodologies supporting our methods of arriving at knowledge and learning, the better our chances of survival. Revolution brought by art research playing with typical knowledge production methodologies, that is, with methods and definitions of what methods and production of knowledge might be, is also a way for other knowledge production methodologies to assert themselves against the neoliberal capitalist shortsighted funding-based knowledge production system we deal with every day now. Revolutionary possibilities documented in this issue include the previously mentioned atypical forms of peer-

review (see Synenko's Afterword); more open views on methods and of methodology (see articles by Van Vught and Werning, Sung, as well as Mellet, Dronsfield, and others); more collaborative work (see articles by Tschofen, Xherro and Foran); wider understanding of knowledge production which moves beyond or away from new, reproducible intersubjectively understandable insights into objects of study, for the sake of attempts at understanding with others, including non-humans (Tu's and Confente's articles); learning new sensibilities and ethics (see Tu's collaboration with trees and Confente's collaborating with animals), learning limitations to knowledge and art dissemination and education—political, personal, ethical (see Rather's article); and finally disseminating that knowledge in various ways outside of Western academic publishing or common higher education systems (see Rather's article, or Garzon Mantilla's manifesto during the conference).

4. WHERE IT ALL LED ME—THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Not every artistic research practice can be successful in its resistance to current knowledge production systems, but what I have learned from the many presentations at the symposium and the articles gathered in this issue may provide us with things to do for the love of knowledge and the love of art to count again.

It doesn't matter if we follow the Deleuzean line of thinking, in which action/acting/becoming and rejecting the focus on truth can be embodied by art practice-based research (for example see Paul de Assis's and Paolo Guidici's *The Dark Precursor: Deleuze and Artistic Research*), or if we follow truth as the ultimate goal of inquiry rejecting method as a specific way to achieve truth with Gadamer, and instead follow the task of thinking (*Truth and Method*). Both of these can be realized through research-creation. And both can beat the danger of commodification—the real danger that necessarily makes any research an ethical endeavour. The question of when research becomes art (Klein) might be answered—maybe when it becomes

thinking practice or truth-focused practice and thus is political and ethical. Like in Plato's times, when thinking and ethics were seen as indiscernible, when one knew what truth is, what justice is, and what good is, they would act accordingly (so called intellectualist ethics), we might realize, that these layers of thinking and ethics and politics (Aristotle) are in truth indivisible. These divisions have been applied for analytical reasons only, which we seem to have forgotten, and thus have only been superficial. And yes, we call on Plato despite his rejection of artists and poets, and Aristotle and the ancient ethical intellectualism, since just as Hannah Arendt in times of need called on this ancient Greek concept we are again in times of need.

Hito Steyerl sees the revolutionary or resisting potential of artistic research in the fact that it often can lay some claim to singularity producing "its own field of reference and logic" (paragraph 21). We already have a form of knowledge that has never adhered to the criteria modelled on a specific vision of science: that is philosophy. If philosophy can be art, as Luce Irigaray would say, then also maybe art can be philosophy. Maybe it is because, according to Jean-François Lyotard, postmodern artists or writers find themselves in the position of a philosopher (*The Postmodern Condition* 81) and thus were supposed to create artworks or texts which would not adhere to pre-established categories of evaluation, but they would provide new rules of their evaluation within them as if they had been established long before the production of works. Such interventions, which Lyotard calls events (81), would expand knowledge with scopes of art/writing evaluations as well. Lyotard's controversial at the time book focuses specifically on knowledge production in postmodernity.⁶ We already have a longer history of artistic practice or artistic knowledge production inadvertently connected to philosophy. Whereas philosophy does not fulfill directly the matrix of conditions and parameters of neoliberal academia (e.g. Wittgenstein would not be eligible these days for a PhD) and strictly following these criteria would make philosophy into something even worse than sophistry (adequate knowledge for adequate pay). However, it is not about "submitting, or not, art to philosophy" as Irigaray, another postmodern thinker, might remind us, connecting the need for "transforming our

energy through a continuous artistic process” to an ethical/critical layer again—the reality of “beings-in-relation,” where art can be even more critical in its interventions than morality (Irigaray 55).

The revolutionary streak in artistic research that could be seen both as political and ethical, one that is connected to institutional critique, decolonization, activism, working against a regime even, can also be seen as Alain Badiou’s “fidelity to the event.” Following a discussion of contemporary art’s intervention into artistic research via symptomatological practices, Sven Lütticken uses it to present it as an almost revolutionary act of resistance. Pointing to Badiou, who “identifies knowledge with a regime of transmission and repetition, and opposes it with the revolutionary truth-event, which shatters the order of knowledge,” Lütticken equates “fidelity to the event” with fidelity to symptoms (106). According to Lütticken’s reading of Žižek, any symptoms or outbursts can be recognized as information about failed attempts of the past to intervene in an oppressive system, in other words, failed revolutions (Lütticken 106). Thus celebrating “the symptom as non-knowledge [...] that escapes the grip of the concept” is not exactly correct for symptomatological arts, because symptoms may be information (106). “Treating the symptom as that ‘unknown known’” and thus questioning current knowledge production system, contemporary arts make “the main weakness of much artistic ‘knowledge’—its complete lack of academic rigor or accountability—into a strength, critiquing the rhetoric of knowledge” (Lütticken 106-107). This is the political (and ethical) potential of art’s singular way of knowledge production, which for Lütticken lies in its task of remaining loyal to the symptoms.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND A MANIFESTO

The practical solution, like the open-peer review mixed with regular blind-peer review process, has been already described by Josh Synenko in the other Afterword, and so my task here becomes more theoretical and speculative. It is definitely not about looking for the consensus on what artistic research is or can bring; the dissensus proposition, that is, that it should not be avoided at any

cost but actually not resisted or even encouraged for the sake of plurality of knowledge, is one worth pursuing. The more diverse our knowledge production methods, the more chance for discoveries, insights, and milestones for humanity to find. Contrary to this pluralistic ideal, the current approach to knowledge mimicking market competition is only ever short-sighted, bringing solutions quickly but usually ones that are superficial or short-lasting.

Looking at it globally, it is never properly merit-based but de facto funding access-based; the rich and already privileged have the most funds to spend on research. The minor research, maybe very innovative, but not coming from dominating cultures or dominating disciplines, will be stopped at the gate. We are losing a lot of possible knowledge in the current competitive but not really fair systems. For those who with artistic research question these systems, their power-relations, their centring around specific views of what knowledge is, there is a possible place in “competitive academia” perhaps as a form of “disruptive innovation”—a term coined by Silicon Valley moguls,⁷ and criticized by Bernard Stiegler⁸ among many others as dangerous. These technocratic powers influence higher education policies as much as they do everything else these days.

The true value of artistic research, as authors in this issue prove in their careful inquiries, is its power to neither self-instrumentalize nor to instrumentalize the objects of research,⁹ to not divide between theory and practice or practice and reflection, and to not put ethics last. Furthermore, I follow Borgdorff’s use of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* to support the understanding of artistic research as critical—because it goes beyond aesthetic judgment, and with art judgment it is not only producing artefacts but in artistic experience we experience “what it means to have any experience, knowledge, and understanding at all” (100)—and I would like to posit that art as research has the power of critique. The really revolutionary artistic practice is self-aware and does not think only about “can we do it” to add a reluctant “but should we do it?” later. Imagination, thinking, and moral sense or empathy are not to be divided into separate specializations as we often do in the labour market. The return to love of

wisdom might be what is the most innovative about artistic research, and probably the least “disruptively innovative” in the sense of high-tech Silicon Valley definitions.

What I have thought of after the symposium, working for several years in an art-as-research project, and working for over a year on this special issue is not easy to summarize. But here is my own short manifesto for art-as-research.

Artistic research, or for me art-as-research, has to bring knowledge, without making novelty its main aim. Artistic research still needs to be art, thus even if no beauty or aesthetic invention is its goal, aesthetics in the sense of aesthesis, connected to sensibility (a term initially connected to aesthetics long before modern aesthetics definitions of Kant or Burke etc.) has to be part of it. Artistic research makes us see/hear/touch/feel something we haven't yet or haven't realized yet and thus it lets us learn, understand, and know ourselves and the world better (compare Julian Klein's understanding of artistic research as an “artistic mode [...] as the perceptive mode of felt or sensed framing of multiple layers of reality” [2018, 83]).

Even if novelty is not its key feature, with continuous shock and novelty being now so commodified and ubiquitous, a critical edge has to be the feature (see Madero and Carney, Dronsfield in this issue), as well as the shaking things up by reminding us of something, making us feel something we forgot, or revealing something lurking under the surface, that has always been the domain of the arts.

Artistic research or art/research has to be knowingly, consciously collaborative, and engaging in collaborative research-creation (see Foran and Xherro), where dissent is not a problem but brings diversity. Collectives or collaborations do not speak in one voice only but are often rather like Gregorian choirs (see Tschofen on her experience with the Decameron collective).

Most of the research has never been done in a vacuum (even Einstein's) or by a lone wolf genius in an act of sacred discovery. Research is done and art is made in a context. Artistic practice-based research is best as critique (one thing we might want to save from the

Enlightenment: critique understood as a movement of thinking that is always self-critical and never fully satisfied). Thus, finally artistic research needs to be political, otherwise it is commodifiable and non-resistant to powers that be; but if it is political and critical, it has to be decolonial.

6. OUTRO

Having used the analogy between philosophy and art as knowledge producing human activities throughout this text, at the end I have to point to their major difference which present as their respective strengths: artists are the “first responders” to world issues, often “canaries in the coal mine,” while the philosophers wait until dusk for their owl...

So, with all the hope for the remaining love of knowledge and of art, hope for the happy marriage of the two in art-as-research, and hope and apprehension of the possibility of it being radical enough to bring a knowledge production system shake-up, in the current political climate and with seemingly more pressing issues needing to be addressed first, a philosophically inclined person has to wonder with Steyerl:

“what do we do with an ambivalent discipline, which is institutionalized and disciplined under this type of conditions? How can we emphasize the historical and global dimension of artistic research and underline the perspective of conflict? And when is it time to turn off the lights?” (paragraph 28)

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: A whiteboard with a list of terms titled “Research-creation” gathered during the symposium, October 30, 2023. Mergler, Agata. *No title - photograph*. October 30, 2023, archived in Poznań, Poland.

Figure 2: Pages 2-5 from the symposium program, October 30, 2023.

NOTES

1. Gadamer revised typical interpretations of Aristotle in which theory holds a privileged position in pursuit of philosophical knowledge separate from practice and action. Instead, Gadamer uses the Aristotelian term *phronesis* in a reinterpreted way and with it rejects theory-practice dualism of that common reading of Aristotle and one later established by Kant. Furthermore, for Gadamer, truth in philosophy is not found in following a method (as in using “distance” of abstraction or objective distance in sciences) but it is fundamentally practical. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Lob der Theorie,” in *Gesammelte Werke 4*, 1987, pp. 36-51 (“In Praise of Theory”). In this text Gadamer states that even for Aristotle theory was always eventually practice, or rather that truly human practice is always already theory (pp. 50-51).↔
2. A lot of my discussion here comes from these long-term experiences: my own experience of working within an art-as-research framework in a collaborative project *Haptic-Visual Identities* with Cristian Villavicencio since 2015/2016, and from this experience of working with Josh Synenko on the *Research-creation Episteme?* project, initiated in 2023,

- bringing the conference in October 2023 first and now this special issue of *Imaginations*.↵
3. For extensive discussion on the topic of artistic research versus standard [Frascati Manual] model of research as well as standardized view of research and innovation connection, see Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties*.↵
 4. These remarks are a summary of my talks with artists and art students during my dissertation research visits in Ecuador in years 2016-2019. I was able to give artistic talks (with Cristian Villavicencio) and lectures (also specifically on artistic research) a couple of times, not only at Universidad de las Artes in Guayaquil but also in Quito at San Francisco Universidad. Funding for the research trips was provided mostly by York University, Canadian grants, and for talks/lectures additionally by the Ecuadorian universities.↵
 5. In discussion on Facebook about the Rachel “Raygun” Gunn’s Olympics breakdance routine, Cramer answers the question of it being a sign of artistic research taking over thus: “If this means that people with university PhDs and next to zero competence in art practice are taking away opportunities from art practitioners, in the practice field itself [!] and just because the latter’s education is considered inferior... - then it’s a takeover of artistic research in exactly the opposite way that artistic research had been intended (namely, as a way to create research opportunities for art practitioners)” (Florian Cramer, Facebook account, August 19, 2024, accessed: December 26, 2024).↵
 6. Its full title is: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.↵
 7. <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/disruption-neither-innovative-nor-valuable/>↵
 8. See: Bernard Stiegler’s *The Age of Disruption. Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*. Polity, 2019.↵
 9. Despite the existence of the multi-million-dollar global art market, that is. I do not want to seem naïve. Art is a commodity like any other, but artistic research does not usually produce outcomes – objets d’art – that are saleable, or easy to sell. And it is rather a chance for those who do not participate in the global art market to have a living as artists in the academia with a monthly paycheck.↵

LET'S ABOLISH RESEARCH-CREATION

JOSHUA SYNENKO

I.

Welcome to my research-creation project. The subject of my research-creation is academic peer review.

In 2018, Mieke Bal published a short manifesto in *Media Theory*, [Let's Abolish the Peer-Review System](#). The missive, which appeared on the nascent journal's blog, originated from an e-mail Bal wrote to the editors of this journal, *Imaginations*, in response to a query about whether she would continue her stewardship on their advisory board. Bal's manifesto aroused a fair amount of criticism on the blog (fig. 1).

While reactive impressions have their time and place and should be assessed for their merits, it struck me then, as it does now, that many of those commenting on Bal's manifesto simply missed her point. In my view, Bal is less interested in providing arguments for the destruction of peer review—an almost unthinkable proposition—than she is in reasonably concluding that system failure is the only remaining viable option.

Peer review is fundamental not just to academic publishing but to the entire context for producing knowledge in a university, whether in the sciences or the humanities. It also informs how universities are administered, from the process of hiring, tenure, and promotions to that of developing methods of teaching and building curricula. Historically, peer review has helped to counter the incursion of admin-

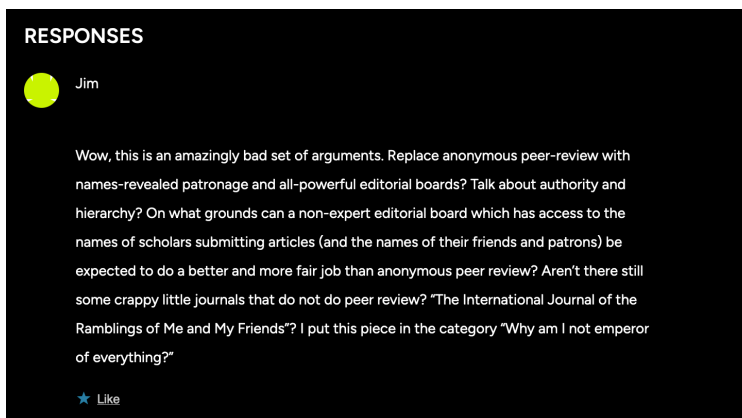


Figure 1: Comments on Mieke Bal's blog entry in Media Theory.

istrative methods adopted from the business world, where competing pathways of knowledge are both measured and validated on the basis of their relative exchange values. Bal writes, however, that by achieving the status of a “rule,” the peer-review system fails to deliver on its promises. More specifically, through a reflection on her long career, Bal observes that journal peer review is beholden to a neoliberal, rule-bound institution that awards hierarchy and behind-the-scenes authoritarian power, reduces inventiveness to a formalistic procedure, slows down an already burdensome administrative process, and disempowers junior scholars and editors alike. One can assume that peer review in university administration has met a similar fate.

Bal's suggestions to recuperate from this unhealthy situation include providing support for editors to make editorial decisions and relying more on the journal's editorial community for reviews. Neither of these alternatives need result in adopting unwieldy or undemocratic control over the editorial process or reducing rigorous scholarship to the “ramblings of me and my friends” (to quote Jim above). These alternatives rather expose the peer review system to a line of questioning about its methods and encourage scholars to evaluate lingering assumptions about what it means to be a reviewer. At the very least,

they contain an invitation to think otherwise. The task of revisioning peer review was part of the inspiration for making this special issue. My co-editor Agata Mergler and I sought to develop an approach to peer review that was mindful to protect our editorial autonomy, allowing us to produce a coherent and meaningful issue (and—importantly for us and our junior contributors—to get the job done on time). Equally important, however, was our desire to encourage participation from our contributors through developing a multi-stage review of *actual* peers.

Our approach to peer review worked along two axes: 1) We conducted an anonymous review solicited by an expert in the field, consistent with the process identified by the journal; and 2) We conducted a collegial peer review, which involved pairing authors together and inviting them to comment on each other's work. As a further step, after receiving their written comments, we scheduled a half-dozen (virtual) face-to-face meetings. In these meetings, moderated by Mergler and me, we encouraged authors to discuss each other's work and offer helpful advice. We also encouraged more general conversation about each author's creative work and how their written piece represents and/or complements it. After the meetings, we wrote decision letters based on the anonymous review, the author's comments, the results of the conversations, and our editorial assessment of the entire process. On the face of it, this approach responds to Bal's (2018) demand for "alternative possibilities to achieve what the system is meant but fails to achieve: quality control, or rather, quality stimulation."

Our experiment in peer review did not seek to add "rigour" for its own sake. We also did not wish to "abolish" the peer review system, or even resuscitate it, and we did not claim to be heroic trailblazers in the wake of its demise. Our aim was merely to act as a facilitator for creative researchers, and to guarantee a space, however temporary, for an academic community that was not bound up in fragile notions of identity, creed, or mutual self-interest. On this basis, you could say that our desire was to make a space for *dissensus*. Though used and abused, Jacques Rancière's (2010) concept of *dissensus* is instructive in this example because it is anchored in a constitutive separation

of terms. In other words, by foregrounding how gaps in knowledge are expressed, the concept reveals a dynamic interplay of forces that could not be preceded or overshadowed by pre-existing actors, subjects, or concepts. More specifically, dissensus pushes back against normative ideas of community, which tend to feature prefabricated identities bound up in the pursuit of reputedly common goals and common sense.

“The partition of the sensible is the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*), the *nemeîn* upon which the *nomoi* of the community are founded. This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation.” (Rancière 2010, 36)

II.

Our concept for this project was framed by a question about something very abstract. It asked: are we now working (together) in a research-creation *episteme*? In other words, have we entered an epoch of “creative” research, requiring the retrofitting of university systems and evaluative practices to support this seemingly new platform for producing and disseminating knowledge? Have members of the university—at least those in the humanities—likewise shifted their emphasis away from knowledge and knowing as such? For Mergler and me, there was no template for these sorts of conversations, and certainly no direct or practical basis of support for how we raised them. There were no elaborate schools of thought to build on, no specific communities to flatter with citations, no methodologies, and approaches to uphold or contest. In fact, because the work we set out to do was premised on a question about something very abstract, there was no material reason to have these conversations at all. As such, we presupposed nothing except the fact that the question existed, that it has been circulating for some time, and that we, for better or worse, were among those who asked it. You could say that our effort to build a space for scholars to congregate at this juncture—around the question concerning the very existence

of a community—was itself a kind of research-creation experiment. It arose from a desire to ask questions instead of receiving answers, and to seek conflict as opposed to combat. Speakers at our conference, hosted by Trent University on October 30th, 2023, and contributors to our journal issue each responded to this question, expressing inventive and often provocative pathways toward an answer.

If Mergler and I managed to achieve a “community” of scholars during this lengthy process, it would be one that is inoperative to any conditionality, rule, or objective. Often, for example, the responses we got derided the notion that research-creation should even be validated as scholarship. Looking to Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), we could say that the formation of community is never reducible to an absolute state of affairs. Assuming it could provide its own justification for existing—beyond any eventuality, and without any relation to the outside—such “community” would simply dissolve in adversity. The lesson here is that invariant ideas about the substance of communities are routinely vulnerable to interruptions, diversions, unexpected bridges or relationality, and existential threats of various kinds. The “idea” of a community is therefore inoperative in the sense that it remains perilously bound by a negative relation to adjacent terms. Nancy writes:

“Society was not built on the ruins of a community. It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something—tribes or empires—perhaps just as unrelated to what we call “community” as to what we call “society.” So that community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is what happens to us—question, waiting, event, imperative—in the wake of society.” (11)

The method of peer review in operation at most journals in the humanities reflects a system dominated by senseless rules and broken promises just as Bal observes. However, such journals also reflect Nancy’s observations regarding the tenuous finitude that plagues communities in general. In our case, the completion of both the anonymous review of experts and the collegial review of actual peers straddled this inoperativity. It was peppered with mixed results, de-

lays, and disappointments of various kinds. Limited by cold call-style e-mails, Mergler and I were challenged to find qualified reviewers who were willing to complete the thankless job. The sector's stratified labour conditions were on full display among those who declined. While most established folks were unwilling to participate in the review process, many of those on the fringes were unable to. Examples to this effect appear below in a sequence that reflects the typical search for a single article. In this case, our top choice met us with a flat dismissal, followed by our second choice (a disclosure of research commitments), followed by our third choice (an expression of concern about the amount of work that a review involves), followed by our fourth choice (a statement of caution about the amount of knowledge expected in the research area). The pattern of declines featured here provides a snapshot of concerns surrounding the abject conditions of academic labour, with subtle indications about how specific groups of people might imagine their place in the system and how they benefit (or not):

Josh

Thanks for the ask/invite. Might have been good to include information and name of journal. I had to google this.

I'm not able to take this on.

Thanks

Sent from my iPhone

I'm afraid I just saw these emails - they all went to my junk folder, which I happened to just check today. Unfortunately, I'll have to decline this request as I'm on research leave for the year.

I'm honoured you'd think of me for this opportunity! Though the essay sounds interesting, I'm afraid I cannot commit to anything right now given my current precarious work situation (working as self-employed translator with unpredictable workloads, and always looking for something more stable). With this in mind, I wouldn't be able to dedicate enough time and energy to complete a peer review of great quality - sorry.

I am tentatively interested - I admittedly don't have much experience in editorial or peer review processes, and haven't been doing much academic work for a while, so I'm a bit out of the loop on current discourse, aside from loose familiarity with some of the implicit references in that abstract.

Bal's piece addresses this worrying pattern. She highlights how it affects the quality of the reviews received, and particularly how it foists the burden of responsibility onto those who are precariously supported by the institution. Given how peer review is integral to the merit-driven governance of university systems, as mentioned above, the troubling conditions of unpaid, downloaded, and de-skilled labour is egregious, especially considering how easily these hierarchies are reinforced. At the end of the day, peer review is a deeply unfair system that is riven by inequities. In most cases, for everyone involved, it boils down to a question about the individual need for personal time, whether it be the ability to commit the time that is needed and the desire for self-preservation, weighing the obligation of time already claimed, or balancing between work and life, time, and energy. As Nancy writes, communities tend to develop through an antagonistic relation to death.

Adjacent concerns were raised during the collegial review. At this stage, Mergler and I had to constantly explain the process that was

underway and the specific purpose for the meetings. The labour of repeating only further exposed how the peer review system (and its failures) have become so engrained in our scholarly practice. The system informs how we relate to each other on many different levels. In the case of one junior scholar, for instance, the mention of an additional review stage struck the ear as punitive, and at best, time consuming:

I am a little confused about the purpose of the meetup in the overall procedure of reviews - it seems that it is an added layer of revision to consider on top of blind peer reviews, so it feels like having to answer to 5 reviewers ...

In an off-handed way, this defensive reaction is an obverse reflection of Bal's (2018) comment that academic peer review is "fundamentally conservative," in other words, that peer review validates a gatekeeping practice in which authors are cajoled into citing top authors, texts, and fields of study. Having five reviewers doing the gatekeeping instead of two might have been panic-inducing for this author. In these moments, Merger and I would be persuaded to further develop the concept of the meetings. Initially, because they were meant to be experimental and open-ended, it felt counter-productive to set an agenda. Gradually, however, after being repeatedly prompted to answer what are otherwise reasonable questions about the process, I discovered that this level of interacting was helpful for working through some of the contradictions of the existing system, and to focus on how the meetings could interrupt or reset the terms of review in general.

Senior scholars faced similar challenges. Indeed, for someone who has grown familiar with the double-blind peer review system—especially for those who have been on both ends of the process—the suggestion of an additional stage might have been confusing. In one specific case, it interfered with an author's imagined role as a reviewer:

I have acted as an external and anonymous reviewer for a number of journals. Were I review-

ing ■■■'s essay in that capacity I would, I'm afraid, reject it, without even the recommendation of a re-write for re-submission.

This reaction was fascinating to me because it condensed so many assumptions about the peer reviewer's authority and responsibility into a single sentence—it is, quite by accident, a prime artifact of Reviewer #2's storied legacy. After all, how could the task of the reviewer be otherwise than providing a scathing indictment of a contributor's sloppy work? And how could this still be achieved in the context of a collegial—that is, non-anonymous—exchange? For the author, this unfortunate circumstance led to additional questions:

May I ask, do you have guidelines for how the first of the two reviews is to be, or could be, carried out?

How will the review process be made explicit or transparent to the reader of the journal?

Will the exchange between the writers be evidenced in publication, and if so how?

Have you considered the possibility that one of the contributors might reject the other's work, and if you have what contingencies have you made?

For instance, would you publish one and not the other?

Is it the intention that the second review be carried out as a standard academic review, ie not "experimentally"?

While many of the answers to these were implied in the copy of instructions sent to authors and simply needed to be repeated, this line

of questioning about the process is significant because it exposes the limits of the so-called “community” that could possibly emerge from the staged encounter of such meetings. Barring misunderstanding, avoidance, defensiveness, and outright refusal, Mergler and I set the bar extremely low. Although we had our own comments to make, and a general sense of how each meeting might unfold, we opened them with the briefest of instructions. We were adamant that this was a time for authors to get to know each other. And, in fact, some meetings had moments of levity and true connection. Others were deceptively rich in detail. And others were conducted more formally. For instance, one meeting had the vibe of a graduate seminar, prompting Mergler and I to act more as course instructors than as editors or facilitators.

To take stock of these different experiences, I refer to Monique Tschofen’s (2024) compelling piece in this issue about the alchemy of co-creation. Tschofen’s work instructs my own thinking on the subject. Notably, it strikes me that while everyone in academia willingly accepts the standard practices for publishing and peer review while being aware of its problems, many try to find surreptitious ways to overturn them—often to protect themselves from its most harmful outcomes. However, while these protective bubbles are intrinsically valuable, bring joy, and inform how to build a politics of resistance, they are also liable to pop.

This is how I view our experimental author meetings. Being supplementary to the standard practices, they were, as I mentioned above, totally unnecessary. They did not serve any other purpose than to engage discursively with another person’s work. None of the meetings were particularly conclusive. The difficulty of scheduling the meetings, sometimes with five academics across three time zones, was both maddening and absurd. On the other hand, I note that one meeting brought needed clarity to an author’s work in a way that would not have been properly communicated otherwise. Helpful instruction led an author to think differently about her subject in one, while a potential collaboration was formed in another. And in yet another, we witnessed a commiseration between future friends. To reflect on these meetings more speculatively, you could say that they

provided hints about what sort of future peer review system could possibly replace the current one. Repeating Nancy's (1991) basic argument, a community like this one must not be built without reference to the fate of death. By rejecting the tyranny of rules—and indeed the standard practices and systematic violence of academia—the authors who attended our meetings were constantly confronting them, identifying their limits, and participating in their decomposition.

III.

Consistent with dissensus, the aim of abolishing peer review is more reminiscent of decentring the logos or “living in the ruins,” as espoused by the postmodernists, than with overt destruction (Readings 1996). In other words, through the act of abolishment, we are tasked with fostering a sense of *being-with* that stems from a gap in the sensible as Rancière describes, and from a radical questioning of the agreed-upon terms by which spirited debates between actors or subjects can be held.

This gap is where I situate Tilottama Rajan's (2001) commentary, “In the Wake of Cultural Studies: Globalization, Theory, and the University,” where she writes, “it's important for us to remember that ‘university’ originally meant a group of people and not a place or institution” (77). Far from being a rallying cry for the nostalgic return to a bygone era when universities featured such a group of people as opposed to admins, I argue that Rajan's observations provide us with a roadmap for the dissensus of institutional process. Imagine, for instance, a group of people congregating around an idea, problem, issue, or question, and how the participants in that group might harbour different and potentially conflicting perspectives, many of which will fall by the wayside. Then imagine this group adhering to a unified set of assumptions, practices, parameters, and evaluative logics, and consider the inevitable gaps that this structuring might introduce. By adopting a genealogical approach with respect to both the unifying terms described here and their points departure (and the potential for conflict that such departure implies), Rajan compares

successive models of the university to determine how various situated ways of knowing—epistemes—inform and/or disrupt the process of learning and research.

In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, a model developed by Immanuel Kant during his censorship by Frederick William II circa 1798, the university is represented by a medieval distribution in which the various disciplinary branches are aligned with corresponding agents of social power, whether they be theology, medicine, or law (1992). Kant acknowledged that while this distribution rightfully continued into modernity, there was a growing need to introduce a “lower” faculty of critical philosophy to perform a structured interruption of the model. As Kant wrote in his essay, the lower faculty should be given the right to hold those in power to account for the rationality of their decisions or lack thereof. Though never realized, this model offers a groundwork for conferring legitimacy and institutional protection to the practices of “critique,” and it also bolsters the significance of the university when it comes to supporting social bonds. Undoubtedly, critical reflections, at least in the humanities, have shifted dramatically in the wake of “postcritique” (Felski 2015) and with the introduction of frameworks that seek to move away from the kind of upright and productive knowledge on which critique depends, as in evidence by the growing literature focused on “care” (see Tschofen, this issue).

While these debates are important for context, Rajan commits most of her article to the legacies (and presumed virtues) of the German research university at the height of philosophical Romanticism, an institution that was dominated by the likes of Fichte, Hegel, and the Schlegel brothers. For Rajan, the Romantic model of university knowledge returns to the distribution of the *Enkyklos paideia*, the “circle of learning” that is situated at the epicentre of a university consisting mainly of a group of people, not the bureaucratic model of a bricks-and-mortar institution (68). Returning to this moment to evaluate the contemporary situation is valuable because it shows us the possibility to imagine how learning can be achieved through a pedagogy of *Bildung*, which helps us to develop pathways of knowing that are shared between generations of scholars, and ultimately

to articulate coextensive knowledge streams which are grounded by foundational disciplines, whether it be literature or philosophy or contemporary formations. This foundation not only brings a sense of coherence to the overall structure of the university as a culturally embedded institution, but it also lends a sense of purpose to the scholarly pursuit. It elevates critique as a modality of learning as opposed to the mere deployment of rationality, and it frames the activity of learning as the labour of a diverse but unified collectivity.

Rajan examines the Romantic university as a precursor of deconstructionism that flourished in the aftermath of WWII. Just as Hegel wrote about the onset of *kenosis* in the final pages of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1979), Rajan wants to focus our attention on the Romantic university's adoption of "encyclopedic method" (2001, 69). By putting these two in alignment, Rajan reveals how disciplinary knowledge, as referenced above, is deeply interconnected, but also radically negative or unbounded. Bringing the Romantic thinkers into dialogue with Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, published in 1966, which details the gradual deconstruction of the modern episteme, Rajan observes that in both approaches, knowledge is that which "unworks itself" through a dynamic process of rethinking both the foundational terms and diverse relationality of institutions like universities (80). Working from the premise of an uneven or disjunctive foundation that works against absolutism at every turn, this model aligns with a practice of learning that supplements and thereby disrupts the functioning of the institution—a dissensus, in other words, that sharply contrasts with the Foucauldian characterization of modern-day "human sciences." As Rajan writes, the mention of "human sciences" in *The Order of Things* refers to "the modern academy's bridging of the humanities and social sciences under the form of a corporate merger, rather than an asystatic deployment of fields of knowledge to unsettle one another" (81).

Writing in 2001, Rajan's major concern at the time was not about human sciences but about the troubling influence of "cultural studies"—its grotesque doppelganger. Rajan refers less to the peripheralized discipline that many may associate with the term today, than

to the encyclopedic form of a dominant way of knowing, one whose stature resembles that of literature and philosophy during the Romantic period. According to Rajan, the rising tide of research with a “cultural focus” has developed into a core organizing principle of the university (67). Cultural research reflects an era defined by globalization, pejoratively depicted as the withering of cultural differences and political geography. Rajan goes on to claim that academic *culturalism* supports a homogenization of knowledge consistent with Western contemporaneity, featuring an impoverished vision of worldliness that is beholden to market forces, and communicated by a pluralizing rhetoric that treats instances of cultural specificity as mere exchange value. At best, this emergent practice of knowledge “exemplifies cultural study as the mimetic repetition of the technologization it studies” (Rajan 72). It reinforces a mutually beneficial relationship between the powerful actors that rule the social world, and the institution of the university with a mandate to produce its knowledge. It certainly does not achieve the kenotic—“self-emptying”—or “asystatic” deconstructionist impulse that (allegedly) lay at the core of universities in days from the past (81).

Rajan’s indictment is balanced by her desire to redirect the focal point of knowledge and its practices of learning and research back to the conditions of its own undoing, which is part and parcel of any deconstructionist labour. Through the immersion in a competing encyclopedic method that she labels “Theory,” Rajan situates culturalism as a parasitic form—a form that is endlessly attached to the precepts of theoretical inquiry, but which lacks the depth of understanding that it can bring to light.

Such an indictment can be found in other thinkers around this time. Notably, in *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak presented a similar argument, suggesting that hegemonic Cultural Studies represented a generations-long invasion of the humanities by Western values and practices:

“Academic “Cultural Studies,” as a metropolitan phenomenon originating on the radical fringes of national language departments, opposes this with no more than metropolitan lan-

guage-based presentist and personalist political convictions, often with visibly foregone conclusions that cannot match the implicit political cunning of Area Studies at their best; and earns itself a reputation for “lack of rigour” as well as for politicizing the Academy.” (2005, 8)

For Spivak, the preferred method of humanities scholarship originates from a capacity for deep language acquisition. Located at the intersection between Comparative Literature and Area Studies, Spivak maintains that the humanities could support a rigorous commitment to non-Western language training, and to radically exploding the Eurocentric focus of literature study in particular. By delving into literature learning as opposed to a cultural object or social practice, the humanities can gain a foothold on their promise to act as a gateway for knowledge about culture that is premised on the reader’s respect for idiomatic learning. In other words, Spivak maintains that knowledge centered on idiom is capable to reintroduce “the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a ‘life’” (13).

IV.

For both Rajan and Spivak, there appears to be a strong desire to engage in modalities of learning and research that move beyond the quantified, identity-laden, overly politicized, and indeed “presentist” knowledge form that is most engaged with in Western humanities university departments (Spivak 2005, 8). These pursuits result in a congealed product that is too easily exchanged in the marketplace of ideas – and now, increasingly ridiculed and attacked by the right. In its place, we find efforts both to engage with the limits of our investment in values that lead down this path, and with an openness to radical alternatives, whether it be through language training as an enrichment of cultural knowledge, or through deconstruction of the episteme in the guise of Theory.

If we consider the many changes that have come about since the early 2000s, we can use these approaches to reflect on the conjuncture

of the present moment. For instance, where does “research-creation” (the new buzzword for “cultural studies”) fit in all this? And what, after all, has “research-creation” become? Is it a rule? An episteme? What is at stake in such a project?

As this special journal issue demonstrates, there are no pre-set or definitive answers to these questions. Some of our contributors choose to explore these questions through co-creation (Tschofen) and through questions of intimacy (Foran and Xherro), through guerilla pedagogy (Rather) and theories of abduction (Madero and Carney), through questions of relationality (Dronsfield) and aesthetic experience (Arnold), through critical making as a modality of shared experiences (Sung) and play (van Vught and Werning), through writing (Principe) and de-writing (Mellet), and through celebrating non-human epistemes and the gaps contained therein (Tu, Confente). Given the sheer diversity of these offerings, it stands to reason that a major lesson of this special issue is that while there are many ways of knowing, there are an equal number of ways to untether or unwork what we know.

The other side of this equation is less promising. While the diversity of approaches from our contributors offers exquisite alternatives for research-creation, there are always countervailing forces at play. In recent years, we’ve heard louder calls for a working definition of the practices surrounding research-creation. These concerted efforts will inevitably result in new mechanisms to quantify, evaluate, and award – key ingredients for the recognition of academic work. For now, the criteria seem rather permissive. For instance, the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council \(SSHRC\) definition](#) can include many different varieties of practice-based approaches under the auspices of meritorious research, and in fact, it represents a significant expansion of the latter. On the other hand, more suspiciously, SSHRC’s permissive guidelines can be understood as a concealed initial effort to gather and mine information, which is pertinent if you consider the uncertainty of defining this practice in the context of university-level research. As the patterns of academic labour will show, the institution rarely squanders an opportunity to benefit from the work of others. Given that, how long will this permissive stage last? When

does permissiveness return in the form of a prerequisite, restriction, or denial?

In the department where I teach, questions about research-creation are at the forefront of both our imagined future (as applied concretely in our approach to student recruitment and retention), and the many opinions and viewpoints that unite and separate us as colleagues. So far, our approach has settled on collectively interrogating the art *object*, and specifically on whether *the object* can be deemed “exhibitible” by an outside individual or group. In many ways, this follows the criteria of writing a dissertation in our PhD program, namely that the result be evaluated for “publishable quality,” and that the finished work meets this benchmark by an independent examiner. Both criteria are problematic for reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper. What I want to draw attention to here is that these evaluative models betray an obsession with *the product*, as if *the product’s* ability to behave as an exportable commodity is an indicator of value. On a deeper level, obsessing over the product and over productivity in general is anchored in a Western colonial mentality that brackets definitions of knowledge and research by the author’s capacity for originality, discoverability, and ownership. At the very least, this runs counter to how we teach graduate students to conduct their research.

One of the pressing issues that tends to arise in these debates is not only a fixation on the products of research, but on questions about art as such, whether it be the art object, the process of artmaking, curatorial practices, or aesthetic experience. To be sure, these debates are important to advancing research-creation as a viable pursuit, and they have undoubtedly captured the attention of many contributors of this special issue. Incorporating artistic practice into academic contexts is both crucial and ongoing. On the other hand, the focus on art, and on the diversity of its products often have limited benefits, especially when it comes to justifying artistic practice as research in the classroom. At worst, the institutional pattern of connecting art practices through a growing fixation upon objects of quality leads to an unseemly pedagogy, often resulting in cult-like

teaching styles that award students of quality and disregards the rest. It should come as no surprise that such dynamics trend bad.

Gerard Vilar (2018) offers five compelling alternatives for the consummate creative researcher. Most notably, by framing the artist as a *social* researcher, Vilar shows how the practiced dimension of the resulting “work” can break from the demand to produce an object of quality. In this alternative, the work becomes a means to an end and a tool to answer research questions. Certainly, technical skills may be needed for the completion of research, and the product itself may follow conventions of the practices associated with those skills, such as in the case of making a documentary film. But under no circumstances must the work congeal into an object and be assessed for its qualities. Correspondingly, the curatorial researcher is ensconced in the practice of arranging objects in time and space, often in such a way as to support an argument. The artist as a challenger of norms is conceived as an individual who *detourns* the social order through playful deconstruction. The artist conceived as an explorer of the great beyond looks outside the social fold to speculate about an unwritten future. In all these alternatives, the outlier appears to be the artist as a producer of objects, which is where I situate most of the current discourse.

Vilar ends his short article with a meditation on the challenge of thinking versus knowing:

“Thinking is much larger than what is known. Art, religion, philosophy and science are forms of thinking about the world, ways of trying to make sense of it, to establish meaning. But thinking and knowing do not necessarily coincide.” (9)

Consistent with Vilar’s observation, I argue that research-creation can provide a framework for thinking beyond knowing, for communicating in ways that don’t easily settle into forms of productive knowledge. As Vilar observes, such a practice of thinking and working-through can be provocative or disruptive, especially if you consider everything that is collectively known. Whereas knowledge is situated firmly in reality, thinking sits adjacent to it as a constant ex-

change between truth and falsehood. Vilar quotes Picasso, who said, “art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given to us to understand” (8). In other words, art—assuming we have resigned ourselves to this limitation—is not reducible to an object of knowledge but is rather akin to a process that generates an act of thinking or working-through. Thinking is separate from knowing insofar as it creates pathways toward truth—not a spherical or shiny object to be sold in the marketplace of ideas, but a thorny, knotted reality.

Vilar’s meditation informs my suggestion that we abolish so-called “research-creation.” At best, research-creation cleaves toward the possibility of exploiting the gap in our standards of evaluating scholarship. Research-creation is strongest when it makes a place for critical practices that did not exist before it was articulated as a possibility to advance knowledge in general. To cull a phrase from Rajan, research-creation must achieve the status of being a practice that “un-works itself” (80).

In calling for the abolishment of research-creation, I am not advocating for its outright destruction. Nor is my aim to destroy the potential to yield livable results through them or to lose the ability to instrumentalize their perceived value for those who struggle to gain a foothold in the university. Abolishing the institutionalized terminology surrounding the work to which it is associated does not mean abolishing the work. After all, research-creation *is* research. My aim in this afterword and in the special issue is not caught up in these quagmires. Rather, my aim has been to shift research toward creating a pathway for collegial peer review in ways that are consistent with Bal’s counterproposal. Together with my co-editor Agata Mergler, our aim was to establish a community of scholars that does not rely on precarious tendrils of a conventional or pre-established social bond, whether it be in the name of identity, creed, or self-interest. Our research-creation experiment has aimed rather at developing a community of those with nothing in common, and to create a space for ideas that has no basis or even will to persevere beyond its use value.

If research-creation becomes standardized into a rule and cajoled into upholding markers of quality, then the cause for it has already been lost. In that case we should, *by way of its abolishment*, find ways to protect ourselves from its reach.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Comments on Mieke Bal's blog entry in *Media Theory*.