PASSAGE 3

INNER LAND– SCAPES

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RELATIONAL LANDSCAPES

Kris Pint and Maria Gil Ulldemolins

Hasselt University

Between the tangible and the imaginary, we build topographies that fuse inner and outer worlds. These topographies, intimate and particular, are where our psychic lives take place. Using what poet Susan Stewart calls "the world-making capacity of language,"[1] each text in this issue becomes a psycho-geography of discovery. As with Winnicott's potential space, these papers create and mediate a zone between the external and the internal, the real and the imaginary. They are playgrounds, but they are also an invitation to togetherness, a way of sharing and journeying through in-dwelling landscapes.

Despite its undeniable prompt to motion, the *-scape* in landscape has nothing to do with fleeing, but is its contrary – a bond that shares roots with the suffix *-ship* that designates commonality, as in relationship, kinship, and friendship. A landscape is thus a land*ship*, a union with land, "a condition of being,"[2] as the etymological dictionary says. The linguistic force through which we shape our ties to the land is also "a condition of being." A landscape is thus a relation and a form, alive, interdependent, and ever-changing.

1 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 5.
2 Douglas Harper, "-ship", *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001-ongoing. https://www.etymonline.com/word/-ship.

Reading the texts we have gathered in this issue means a willingness to surrender the presumption of individuality and to shift from the I to the we. Stewart declares that "[t]he locus of action is not in the text but in the transformation of the reader."[3] Entering these written, inner landscapes necessitates an opening and merging for the reader, giving rise to a new shape that can accommodate the *-ship* in a relationship with the other's imaginaries. The asynchronous "we," formed by the shared experience of entering someone else's inner landscape, is deictic; it depends on the context. The "we" is therefore unstable, a shifter.

This "we" blurs boundaries and causes inner landscapes to begin to melt; one's favourite churchyard becomes the other's grandparents' garden – a form of spatial, emotional, and even historical empathy.

We understand the smallest, sensorial fragments of memories (something we have called "minor memories" elsewhere[4]) as something transferable and citational, that travels from one utterance to another, attaching and referring to different bodies and different situations, forging an imagined collective, a community-at-a-distance. Thus your rosebush may not be the same as mine, but our rosebush is an impossible blend of the two and of their circumstances, a kind of coexistence found in the connected independence of our mind's eyes – yours and mine.

Colm mac Aoidh proposes a tour through synaesthetic spacetime in a text laced with childhood memories. From verdant Irish streets to Aboriginal cosmology, the spatial humanities spread out in this paper, peeling off the layers of a particular, "deep" world-map, composed of both facts and legends. Emily Trenholm revisits Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis, and, more specifically, the notion of the poetic image as a way of evoking felicitous spaces. Focusing on the architectural typology of the nineteenth-century octagonal house, she moves beyond Bachelard's solipsistic daydreaming individual – the poetic image emerges from shared memories through dialogue with others, spanning generations.

Photographer and architecture scholar Nicoletta Grillo takes us on a nocturnal border-crossing. Here, photography tries to capture invisible, historical lines dividing the territory, through which workers drive between one country and another, split between the land that holds a job, and the land that holds a life. Taylor Jordan Holmes departs from the United States to follow Audre Lorde on a trip to Russia, detouring through Paris to see the Musee d'Orsay and the Louvre, and connecting with Ukraine at the beginning of the Russian invasion. Through all the wandering, Holmes obsesses about the Black woman in a French painting, weaving in and out of historical violences and pleasures.

Improv performer and writer Rebecca Mackenzie turns the landscape into a stage – and philosophers into unexpected characters; –Heidegger ice cream, anyone?. Water becomes body, and body becomes water, as three sisters experience different topographies in the possibilities and impossibilities of motherhood. Visual artist Katharina Swoboda follows the straying cats of Vienna: These urban yet wild animals not only offer a non-human view of inhabiting the city, but they also provide another perspective on the inner landscape, and become a powerful way of relating to memories and trauma and to aspects of love and motherhood.

Simona Rukuižaitė's ontology is rich in phenomenological detail. It lends to the reader the eyes and hands – and even the teeth! – of the artist as she touches and names pigments with utmost sensibility, capable of distinguishing between this pinch of ochre and that one, creating her own landscapes on her studio table. Poet and urban researcher Jeremy Allan Hawkins offers a lyrical examination of the city landscape. His

3 Stewart, 3.
4 Maria Gil Ulldemolins and Kris Pint, "Wherever You Go, You Will Be a City. Minor Memories and Tactics of Empathy in the Work of Lisa Robertson," *Writingplace* 2: Inscriptions: Tracing Place. History and Memory in Architectural en Literary Practice (2018): 64-80, https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.2.2640.

mode of observation and expression looks for relations, associations, and affinities that reveal new, and until that point invisible, possibilities in unexpected urban encounters. Finally, writer and researcher Ania Louka, theatre scholar Stella Medvedeva, and psychotherapist Alexander G. Romanitan create a triptych of voices, evoking specific inner landscapes that are the result of migration, landscapes created by a sense of longing and rupture, of no longer or not yet belonging, shaped by a complex personal meshwork of affects, memories, and stories.

Each of these texts invite us to experience spaces from the perspective of others' bodies, moving, acting, human, and beyond. Crossing borders to swim in open waters to find sand between one's teeth: spatiality is a kinesthetic affair. Each space is determined by that which occurs in them. From the magnitude of the weather, be it the wind chasing clouds or sunbeams illuminating dust, to the particular constitution offered by emotional layers, moving inwards through desire, longing, or shame: Each of these creative-critical papers presents a unique constellation of memories, emotions, events, and concepts that shape a specific space, and relates this space to others. And, coming together in the unique way autotheoretical writing allows, these effects and affects meet, influence, contaminate, and reciprocate with theories and concepts. They are not external to the territory, to the digested map – they are the territory itself, fully. Just as a psycho-geographist of the Internationale Situationniste famously used a map of London to navigate the Harz-mountains,[5] we can use the different writings, papers, here as a map for elsewhere, as well as for the place we are in. Here. Now. Our own place.

5 Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," in *Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings*, ed. Harald Bauder and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro (Kelowna, British Columbia: Praxis (e) Press), 26. http://hdl.handle.net/10214/1798.

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Gil Ulldemolins, Maria, and Kris Pint. "Wherever You Go, You Will Be a City. Minor Memories and Tactics of Empathy in the Work of Lisa Robertson." *Writingplace 2: Inscriptions: Tracing Place. History and Memory in Architectural en Literary Practice* 2(2018): 64-80. https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.2.2640.

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In this essay I take the image of three pregnant bellies, or three bodies of water, to examine body as place, place as body and risks of being born. Situated on the shoreline, a liminal space of entrances and exits, the essay is constructed as a play for the imagination. Through this performative approach I dramatize images from my own experience of childlessness, putting them in conversation with theoretical concepts such as Keller's khoric spaces, Irigary's horizon and Cixous's newly born woman, to generate new images and paths for the birthing self.

khora, chora, Cixous, Keller, Irigiary, Heidegger, Walton, autotheory, imagination, plays, birth, swimming, creative-practice, theology.

THREE BELLIES

A PLAY TO BE STAGED IN THE IMAGINATION.

Rebecca Mackenzie

University of Glasgow

Sea you return to sea, and rhythm to rhythm.

Hélène Cixous[1]

Cast:

Middle Sister: Blonde hair, swollen belly with bruises, maternity jeans, a family doctor who misses the urgency of A&E, married to S., expecting first child

Little Sister: Blonde hair, floating dress, tall, expressive hands, red and swollen all over including fingers, dance movement psychotherapist, married to A., expecting first child

Myself/swimmer: Dark hair, greying, wears a red swimsuit, various professions, latest address an English seaside town, eldest child

Schwenk: Professor for the study of movement in water

Cixous: Philosopher and swimming instructor

Irigaray: Philosopher and beachgoer

Heidegger: Philosopher and ice cream

1 Hélène Cixous, *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson, trans. Sarah Cornell, Ann Liddle, and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 57.

Keller: Theologian and seagull

Juhan: Physician and wave

Time: A few summers ago

Place: Three bodies of water

I had to pause as I thought of the place.[2] Was it the kitchen where Little Sister chops peppers, as buses rattle past the yellow brick terrace? Or further north, where Middle Sister leans over the dining table in a 1930s bungalow plunging a syringe into her belly? Was it the belly itself, in which a new being floats in the salty amniotic…the place of the child's becoming which is also the site of becoming Mother? Or was it that other belly, the bay in which I swam all summer, that inlet of water in the English Channel? There I am in that curved site of becoming, kicking, waiting to be born.

Three bodies of water then, and inside them a becoming, a not-yet, a desire to be.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Conversation with Schwenk and Cixous

Darkness. Only voices and the drip of a tap.

Myself: Where is her face waiting to exist? My child – I feel the tug of her tributary. The place where time could pour.

2 In any telling of self, place is central. This is how Edward Casey puts it: "To come to terms with the inner life, it is not enough to constitute a biography or autobiography in narrative terms; one must also, and more crucially, do a topoanalysis of places one has inhabited or experienced." He goes on to quote Merleau-Ponty: "For a knowledge of intimacy, localisation in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates." Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 289.

Schwenk: Ah, well, before we talk about daughter, I think we should start with the primordial shape. First things first. Ahem. The hollowing out of inner spaces is a fundamental process – an archetypal form-gesture in all organic reaction, human and animal, where in the wrinkling, folding, invaginating… [3]

Schwenk continues to speak softly, intoning "wrinkling, folding, invaginating" on repeat.

Myself: Life starts with a hollow? Something is hollowing me out. A desire thwarted. I wait in the grief and watch it wrinkle, fold. Child, who did not become, the density of her absence grows. I might sink with this hollow. My life might end with it.

Enters Cixous, with armbands and whistle. Switches on a lamp to reveal a stage bare except for table..

Cixous: What is this talk of sinking? Being so heavy with hollow? Hmm? You found yourself dischilded. It's the experience of mourning.[4] Now, come on. A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman.[5]

Swimmer appears from shadows in red swimsuit.

Cixous: Write your way up. Swim lines across the page, lengths and lengths. Come on. Kick! Kill the false woman!

Exit Cixous blowing whistle. Lamp continues to brighten. Swimmer climbs onto table. Lies down. Begins vigorous breast stroke.

3 Theodor Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, trans. by Olive Wicher and Johanna Wrigley (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), 41.
4 Hélène Cixous, "In October 1991…", *Stigmata*, trans. by Keith Cohen (Abingdon: Oxford Classics, 2005), 54.
5 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. by Paula Cohen and Keith Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875-93.

Myself: The grief of not becoming a mother hollowed me out. I sank under the weight of absence. Struggling for breath, I mourned the faces that never arrived – the face of child, mine as mother. Then I realised there was a presence waiting in the space within, waiting to be born. Not a Mother, but something Other. How to give birth to this form, this form beneath the depths, whose contours I could not tell?

As the circumferences of my sister's bodies expand, I go down to the bay, that basin of water, where the waves wrinkle and fold, and I begin to swim. Descendents of those first creatures that crept ashore, we carry this salty inheritance within, the saline running through our veins. Each of us began life in the miniature ocean of our mother's wombs. To swim is to return to the landscape of beginnings.

Bright wash of light. Sound of waves and seagulls.

In the summer that my sisters became Mother…

Scene 2: First swim

Watched by yellow eyes, she makes
her way to the water's edge.

She enters the water cold. Lockdown and rain. Is it illegal? She's not sure. Two women are in – one in a wetsuit, the other in a swimsuit and gloves. The water is deep iodine brown and smells of dankness and seaweed. She wades deeper and deeper; the waves are gentle rolling beasts coming towards. Her lower back is covered. Her arms are crossed over her breasts, adding a little warmth to the nipple; it's always so cold, isn't it?

She lowers her whole into the breathing self – then shoots upwards – the shock of the cold, the seizing wholeness of it. Freezing water in streams of piercing colour sinks into her

swimming boots. Like zigzags of shock. She breathes and lowers herself back in.

The women are bobbing two metres apart and talking. Their heads bobbing. Everything so friendly today apart from this strange iodine water that smells. She swims, forward up to the first set of beach houses, and beyond to the second. The sun slips behind a cloud and the sea is dark. She is out of her depth but keeps swimming. Then the sun re-emerges and all is okay again – she feels like a small child seeking the reassurance of her mother. That settled feeling of mother. Nearing the black rocks, she turns, water swills newly cold into her gloves, and she swims back.

She lowers her face into the water. Her goggles steam up, and all is a blur, but she is heading for that point – where her clothes are neatly folded on the pebbles, her tote bag and her cloak, ankle length, woollen, the colour of a faded lichen. Nearing the shore, she pulls her goggles up, turns on her back and starts to float, her feet enclosed in their engorged socks. Now, her vision on the horizon, to where there is France and between them great container ships, though neither of these she can see. Looking back at the land. The sun. The sky marked with clouds. Her pile of things on the beach. It's all so pleasing.

She gets out. Her body is pink with the cold, she feels massive, thumping up the curved incline of the bay towards the pebbles where she has left her belongings.

What she loved, she thought as she swam,
is this feeling of carrying nothing.

Myself: Just me, just me without belongings, without bags and things, without cloak, phone, bank card, or key. Just me and the sea. It's as if I entered death. Where there is nothing to take but yourself.

Enter Cixous with striped beach towel. Begins to towel-dry the swimmer.

Cixous: Ah. The surreptitious slippage of newly-born woman.

Myself: A story of yourself, like an old sundress on the beach, something you can walk out of, leave behind. Being in that old story was so painful. A carapace, the hardness of tension, the shallow breath. I become so stuck.

Cixous: [*Vigorously towelling*] Your body must be heard. Go on, ask her something.

Myself: Hello. Is it terrible? Finding yourself not a mother?… Who is this Other?

Cixous: What does she say?

Myself: Plunge.

Watched by yellow eyes she makes her way to the water's edge. Here she steps in, plunges under, and is gone. Ice cream, and flip flops, an old flask amongst the prams and windbreakers, all left upon the shore. Into the waves she goes, into the belly of the bay.

Scene 3: Three sisters

Heavily pregnant Little Sister pirouettes across the stage, off balance.

Little Sister: My baby swims inside me as I dance. She feels the touch of the sea all around her. My body is inwardness and emergence. Where does she begin, where do I end? Am I her sea?

Middle Sister enters stage with syringe

talking to the audience. Little Sister continues to dance in background.

Middle Sister: Fuck, fuck, fuck. That will be so fucking sore. Everyday, every single day I do it - inject myself. Eight months in and I'm having to inject into the bruises.

She jabs the needle into a bruise on her belly.

Fuck! Fuck!

When she's a teenager and being annoying I am going to show her pictures of my belly and say look, look at what I did to keep you in. Look. All black and blue. It looks like a planet.

She invites the audience to touch her belly. It is hard and black and blue and looks like a planet.

Swimmer, dripping with water, enters.

Myself: But won't she just say, I didn't ask to be born?

Pause. All three sisters face audience, standing in stillness, allowing the audience to watch them.

Three sisters: [*In unison*] Then I would never have known her face.

Lights fade.

INTERVAL: Keller Seagull

During the interval, as the audience get ice creams and snacks, a seagull above them circles and cries out. They can choose to ignore or to listen. But they should be careful, for sometimes the theologian can swoop down when you least expect it.

Seagull chorus: khor, khor, the empty

womb, a choric space of unbecoming.[6]

Keller Seagull: Origins are not to be located in pure realms of light. We recognise the ambivalence and chaos of the choric space and acknowledge the tragedy and evil woven in the wondrous fabric of the world.[7]

Seagull chorus: khor, khor, the empty womb, a choric space of unbecoming.

Keller Seagull: Have you heard the calls of theologian Jantzen, who develops Arendt's idea of natality?[8] She says that taking birth as the centre of our imaginary will help direct our attention to *this* world - with its bays and ice creams, its swimming instructors and flying fish - to our connection, through the maternal continuum, with all others who have been born.[9]

Seagull chorus: khor, khor, the empty womb, a choric space of unbecoming.

Keller Seagull: This birth of the self
from the maternal Godness inverts itself:
The self gives birth to God!…
Why is God born?
God got lost
And therefore wants to be born again in me.[10]

ACT TWO

Scene 1: Irigaray eats ice cream

Irigaray upon sun lounger. She eats an ice cream,

6 Heather Walton, "This World of Wonders: Theology, poetics and everyday life", Knox, F.B., & Reek, J. (Eds.). *Poetry, Philosophy and Theology in Conversation: Thresholds of Wonder: The Power of the Word IV (1st ed.).* (London: Routledge, 2019), 148.
7 Walton, 146.
8 Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 222.
9 Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 151. Bays and ice-cream etc., are my additions.
10 Keller, 224.

taking great pleasure with each slow lick. Heidegger, the ice cream, makes delighted sounds.

Irigaray: This ice cream for example is not conceptual. It is material, sensual.

Ice cream: Oh lick me, devour me!

Irigaray: [*She takes a bite of the ice cream, licking her lips*[11]] Mine is a philosophy where love is part of the subject matter.[12] The material and the sensory are given their due weight and not displaced by the conceptual.[13]

Ice cream: Oh! Oh! Yes, please, combine love and thought, thought and love!

Irigaray: The connection between our "to be" and love is what can open up a horizon beyond our traditional concept of being…it is in the interlacing of our bodies talking to one another that the transcendental matter, from which our "to be" takes shape, lies.[14] Isn't that right, my sweet?

Though of course we risk welcoming the world of the other into the depths of our intimacy…[15] Sweetie?

Silence.

In this rethinking, the surfaces of bodies - or of ideas - are not rigidly demarcated or appropriated; they remain porous and open to the flow of mutual interaction.[16] Wouldn't you say, my little one?

11 Irigaray posits that the female body is a paradigm of place and yet it is always open and moving. Lips are an example of this. According to Edward Casey, the lips "perform place" - they connect the inside and outside world through a common threshold wherein what is within the body meets what is without. Irigaray's thesis he says, proposes that "the body itself is place." More can be read in Casey's summary of her philosophy in relation to place in *The Fate of Place*.
12 Hanneke Canters and Grace Jantzen, *Forever Fluid* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 115.
13 Canters and Jantzen, 103.
14 Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 101-102.
15 Irigaray, *To Be Born*, 91.
16 Canters and Jantzen, 91.

Silence.

Irigaray: Ah. He's melted. *Lichtung*, the clearing. Never mind, a new truth can arise and begin unfolding as a world can.[17] Poor ice cream. Well, he shall be dinner for the gulls.

Scene 2: Swimmer, with Schwenk, Cixous, and a wave called Juhan

Swimmer stands at water's edge.

Myself: Where does she begin, where do I end? Am I her sea?

Schwenk: Ahem, well. That's a good question. Ahem. Let me see…Boundary surfaces, with their rhythmical processes, are birthplaces of living things. It is as though creative, formative impulses need boundary surfaces in order to be able to act in the material world. Boundary surfaces are everywhere, the places where living formative processes can find a hold, be it in cell membranes, surfaces of contact between cells, where the life forces are mysteriously present, in the great boundary surfaces between the current systems of the oceans, where various currents flow past each other in different directions - these are known to be particularly rich in fish, or in the infinitely extensive surfaces of the natural and artificial filter systems of the earth, where the water seeping through is purified and given back its vital qualities.[18]

Cixous enters briskly , interrupting by blowing whistle.

Cixous: Yes, well of course. The body is always in process with the surrounding world. As is this sea in process with everything in it.[19] So get in it!

17 Irigaray, To Be Born, 101-102.
18 Schwenk, 42.
19 This sentence is inspired by Rachel Carson in The Edge of the Sea (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955)

Swimmer jumps into the water. Juhan, a large wave, comes towards her.

Myself: I am held, touched all over!

Juhan: Touch is the Mother of the senses. The skin is the largest, the most varied, and the most constantly active source of sensations in the body.[20]

Myself: It's as you say, my tactile surface is not only the interface between my body and the world, it is the interface between my thought processes and my physical existence as well.[21]

She is tousled and thrown about by the wave.

By rubbing up against the world, I define myself to myself.[22]

She and the wave leap.

I am an open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others in the encompassing earth.[23]

Fish leap up, shoals of silver.

Everything is an invitation![24]

Juhan: We are in the midst of active and radical creation![25]

Myself: We are!

Swimmer kicks, splashing the wave into the air and all over the audience. Whistle blows vigorously.

20 Deane Juhan, Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork (New York: Barrytown/Station Hill Press, 2003), 28-29.
21 Juhan, 34.
22 Juhan, 34.
23 This sentence is inspired by David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-human World (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996.) 62.
24 Myself. Emerging from this period of grief, when balanced between the no-more and the not-yet, I said this to a friend.
25 Juhan, 10.

Scene 3: Risk of birth

Silence. Stage empty except for table and lamp.

Middle Sister: There was a loss of variability. They
traced the heart and contractions of the womb . . .
When there are contractions the baby should react.
There should be lots of variability. Lots of waves.

But the baby didn't move. The waves still.

And there was meconium staining, a
brownish staining on your pants
When the baby is stressed, they shit themselves
You know, the amniotic fluid, that thick
yellow water that the baby swims in
but they're not, they're swimming in shit.

Middle Sister gets up onto the
table. Lies down, face up.

Middle Sister: In the light above the operating
table, which shines silver, you can see them cut.

Pause.

When she came out they put her on
the resuscitation tray.

Little Sister enters. There is a beeping sound
of a heart monitor getting faster, she dances
in rhythm to it. Climbs up onto table.

Little Sister: Too many waves, too fast. They took
me, injected my spine, forced my womb to contract.
Lay me down. And in the light above the operating
table, polished silver, I could see them cut.

Pause.

I was so scared for her.

Myself: Covered in shit.

I was swimming when I swam into shit. I was
covered in shit.[26] Shit all over me. That
night vomiting, vomiting. It is difficult
to be born when you're covered in shit.

Joins the other sisters on the table. Light fades

ACT THREE:

Scene 1: Scar

Night. A fire burns on the beach. A woman,
Cixous, can be seen writing with a stick on the
sand. Another figure, Irigaray, is floating
on an inflatable mattress shaped like pink
lips. The swimmer is getting dressed.

Irigaray: Well here we are, together at last,
together at the water's edge, a liminal place of
becoming. We can reveal ourselves, the one to the
other, and provide one another with a place in which
we can come into presence in the gathering together
of our being…In this way we can attain a relation
to the world that is more true and perceptive.[27]

Myself: I swam in the dark of myself; I
swam deeper and deeper. I could not touch the
ground. Below, fathoms of unfathomable dark.

Irigaray: Our way of behaving attempts to grasp and
fix the mystery of our origin into a face, whereas
we ought always to abandon any face that has already
appeared so that we can develop. We can remain living
only at the price of a continuous becoming, which
means relinquishing what is already flowered, which
falls into appearance as soon as it has appeared. [28]

26 Thank you, Southern Water (private utility company that collects and treats wastewater).
27 Irigaray, To Be Born, 95.
28 Irigaray, To Be Born, 41.

Myself: I came swimming out of me.
I ripped right through myself.

Cixous: Traumatism as an opening to the future
of the wound is the promise of the text.[29]

Myself: All three of us ripped. My sisters, look
at their scars, in a line across their bellies. Look.

She points to the horizon.

Seagull swoops overhead.

Keller: That horizon has appeared as the
edge of chaos: a chaosmic *eschaton*.[30]

Irigaray: The divine, the horizon of our becoming.[31]

Myself: I came swimming out of the
cut of the horizon. I came swimming out
of trauma and divine becoming.

Seagull swoops.

Keller: Becoming divine is not an obligation to
become limitless; the quest for infinity would be
a renunciation, not a fulfilment, of our gendered,
embodied, selves. If the language of the *infini*
now suggests a finite, skin-enfolded participation
in the infinite, why go in quest of it at all?
Where is it but here and now, amidst our queerly
entangled, decisively limited incarnations?
Divinity in the face of natals is a horizon of
becoming, a process of divinity ever new, just as
natality is the possibility of new beginnings.[32]

Cixous: [*Pauses her sketching on the sand*] I
am inclined to use "mother" as a metaphor, yet at
the same time it is not a metaphor. This is the
secret and decisive figure that one feels living and

29 Cixous, Stigmata, xiv.
30 Keller, 226.
31 See Jantzen, 275, for a discussion of Irigaray's
concept of divine as a horizon of becoming. .
32 Keller, 226.

writing in those who write…The mother is a quality.[33]

Scene 2: Sisters go for a swim

My sister with her adjustable swimming cap on
I ask if she is cold, she hesitates,
no, she says slowly
Dimples, goose bumps on her pale thighs
Her whiteness is lunar
I miss the moment she dives in
I am swimming forward
She goes deeper towards the horizon
Far out, I feel unease
Are you scared?
She hesitates, no, she says slowly
We swim along
Wind comes skipping in from another room
As does the blue of the sky, the waves
Filled with new ideas
Opening of the Open
Fresh suspiration
We swim towards the scar.

Scene 3: Three towels

Three beach towels folded centre stage.

*Enter three sisters in their swimsuits.
Little Sister and Middle Sister each gather
a towel into the crook of their arm. They
cradle the towels like a newborn baby.*

*Swimmer unfolds her towel, holding it
horizontally. It is a large paper towel.*

Swimmer: It is time to write.

*She towels herself dry and opens out the
towel to see the patterns of damp that have
been absorbed. Begins to towel sisters dry.*

33 Cixous, Stigmata, 57.

Notes the marks their bodies have left.

Enter the rest of the cast in a line across the stage. Swimmer towel-dries Cixous, Irigaray, and Schwenk, bends down to dab the wave as it rolls past, swipes towel skyward to touch the gliding gull, then mops up Heidegger, a puddle on the floor. Exit cast.

Swimmer and sisters face the audience as if looking outwards to the horizon. The audience become the horizon. The swimmer and sisters make eye contact with audience – the fourth wall is opened. Swimmer opens towel to reveal the marks of the bodies.

Swimmer: Onto an opening of the
Open, being emerges.[34,35]

END

34 I draw this idea of the Open from Heidegger. See Casey, 335: "Heidegger's expansive view of place as dwelling and nearness – the opening of the Open, the very Clearing that makes room for the manifestation of Being and the fourfold."
35 "The openness of the Open" is how Irigaray articulates Heidegger's phrase. Luce Irigaray, Elemental Passions (New York: Routledge, 1992), 59.

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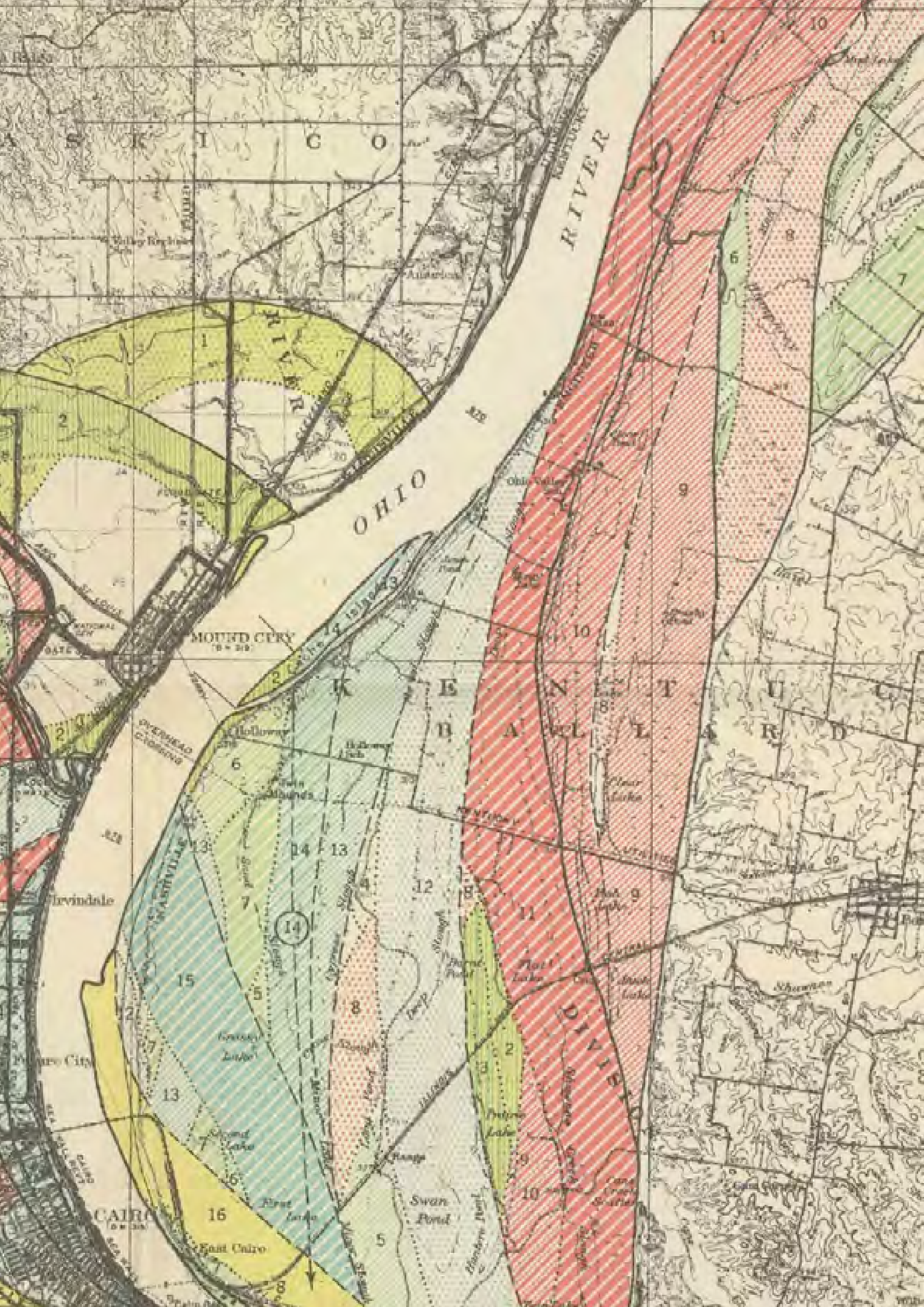

“Sable Is Said to Have a Slavic Origin” will focalise one of Audre Lorde’s least engaged words “Notes from a Trip to Russia.” I am thinking about the position of Lorde’s essay at the beginning of a volume of her most influential essays in relation to a recent encounter I had with a Ukrainian artist based in Russia. In these twinned moments of encounter, the epistle shuttled the expression and performance of fantasies of transnational solidarity. Here, I suggest fantasy as an intermediate space where internal and external desires are intimated via the epistolary form. I imagine intimation as a performative method that has the potential to articulate and construct intermediate spaces of fantasy and evoke the complex interior structures of relationality.

intimation, travelogue, epistolary, Russia, USSR, wandering, desire, Audre Lorde

SABLE IS SAID TO HAVE A SLAVIC ORIGIN

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I

Paris, 2012. I stood trance like in front of her. *Portrait d’une négresse* (1800) painted by Marie-Guillemine Benoist. *Portrait of a Negress.* I had seen her digital likeness across my screens on nights spent scrolling through the dusky blue of Tumblr back in its golden hour. It was something altogether different to see her in person. Just hours prior, at the D’Orsay, I stood equally transfixed, alone in the palatial sterility with *The Origin of the World* (1866), staring myself away into the seafoam gulf of white pussy. Whose world?

Alone in the unguarded room in the Louvre, I was free to approach her, to read like palms the strokes that authored her diffuse gaze, the pucker of her third eye resting above a bunched ivory sheath. For the first time, a black breast not there to succour a wailing white brood or some wretched white man searching for cleaner milk than his karma could purchase. The Negress was before me realer than I had been before myself. Through her gold hoop, the blank beige background and the foreground of her skin are together in Manichean repose. A loophole of retreat. Her shoulder, tucked in

protection against her form, cannot be registered as a part of her silhouette; her neck elongating into a gently curved hunch against a blue shawl, a time-worn Prussian blue that one might imagine once shone in ultramarine like the shawl of the Virgin. She is in the image of the Black Madonna.

France has more Black Madonnas than any other nation. Like the sitter in *Portrait d'une négresse*, the question of origins is at issue. While there are Black Madonnas in Christian traditions wherein figures of Christendom are envisioned as African, the Black Madonna prevalent in Europe is the subject of some historical disquiet. Her blackness is not easily negotiated with conceptions of race that shift between centuries and nations. Her sable hue has been claimed by some historians to be merely a marker of time, the influence of candle smoke, for instance, marking her the colour of the rituals of worship. Ironically, Black Madonnas derive some of their authenticity from their blackness, being that it in many cases signifies their age. Before the woman in the portrait, I envisioned myself as having become contiguous with her elegance, her stillness, as having acquired something approaching the consecrated eminence of a Black Madonna. Perhaps our mingling could redeem this woman, relieve her of the bondage of the conspicuous gaze of her white woman painter, no doubt conflating her own female sufferings with the double bind of blackness and womanhood. Perhaps this was something I could achieve through perfect stillness. Hortense Spillers notes that in the process of the instantiation of racial capitalism and the racial hierarchies of the post-Enlightenment period, the slave was rendered as "the essence of stillness," in the category not merely of the other but of what is outside of time.

Immobilised by the anthropological impulse of empire. Made permeable, this stillness becomes the museum, where modernity goes to stop dancing. I had taken the skywise Atlantic journey in the reverse to return to some strange stillness. Mobilised

by desire toward the desire for immobility.

I had come to Paris not unaware of its history as the land that endowed Black American soldiers with some dignity to return home to demand their rights. The land of Fanon's interpellation, where his desire to attain the world was drawn from him as he found himself "an object in the midst of other objects." The side of the Atlantic where Richard Wright and his spiritual successor fought over the protest novel, where Black men were left in a conditional peace to write the people's polemics. For the French during the early twentieth century, the African, the black person, had become a libidinal "well of fantasies."

A resource whose imaginative influence cannot be overstated. Even now, those considered to be the most influential and prominent members of the African American literary tradition, particularly of the Harlem Renaissance, are those who spent some of the more prolific years of their lives and careers in Paris. The Countee Cullens eclipse the Jessie Fausets. The Alain Lockes eclipse the Gwendolyn Bennets. The closing scene in Claude McKay's plotless, homosocial romp *Banjo* announces an exile: "a woman is a conjunction," says the title character as he attempts to convince his friend to skip town with him.

Taken grammatically, this is to say that a woman coordinates meaning, but does not generate her own.

In my stillness, I searched her for clauses.

II

Moscow, 1976. *Sister Outsider* opens with a little discussed essay, "Notes from a Trip to Russia," and "Notes" begins with and ends with dreams. In the dream she chooses to recount, Lorde imagines herself making love to a woman behind a stack of clothes in a Moscow department store. The love object, it turns out, is sick, and when Lorde goes to ensure she be cared for, Lorde is surprised

to learn that the necessary kidney and brain scans will be issued as soon as needed. There is a cartographic epiphany at this particular coordinate of the dream. Lorde realises that she is in Russia and that medical care is free.

Lorde's published diary entries recall at mythic scale her trip to the USSR for the Union of Soviet Writers-sponsored African Asian Writers Conference, locating Lorde, after the likes of Margaret Glasgow, McKay, and Langston Hughes, within an oft-forgotten but nonnegligible African American tradition of USSR travellogues. I always wonder about the process of deciding which essay in a collection to place at its opening. In a text that binds most of Lorde's most critical contributions to feminist and queer theory, we must first not only leave the United States, but also leave the world. Go into a dream with her. Lorde dreams like many Black Americans before her that socialism might be the cipher for survival, for liberation. Through dreams that are desires, Russia is represented mythically, steeples are "joyful promises" or "fairy palaces."

In moments she is puckeringly romantic, sentimental, saccharine, lyrical.

But for Lorde, dreams of lovemaking and living under socialism do not stand in as irrational spectres of real, material experience. In her disclosure, it is travel and movement itself that serve as a metaphor for her dreaming. In the nexus between travelling and dreaming, Lorde *wanders*, theorised by Sarah Jane Cervenak as a method of philosophical performance, expressing the illegibility of experience, of "drifts," and dreams.

Both an internal and external experience, wandering "sustains an unavailable landscape of philosophical desire."

In her proverbial quintessence as a woman on the outside, of her own nation, on the outside even of the solidarities in whose name this conference

had been called, Lorde alchemises her alienation to generate an inner landscape where her critical observations and dreams of solidarity might go to wander. Though Lorde's travellogue, in typical fashion, catalogues her movement across cities, her encounters with locals, and her impressions of social and political life through the eyes of a stranger in a strange land, the piece is only made porous, only made permeable, through mostly undisclosed dreams. Baring the belly flesh of nondisclosure, Lorde's lyric weakens the supposed opposition between the privacy of the dreaming mind and the publicness of our social conditions, between the interior and exterior landscapes of our collective being.

Kevin Quashie notes in "Black Lyric Privacy" that "We might think of the lyric as a theater of subjective consciousness, a text of feeling that marries interior and exterior."
Here, the mediating form of Lorde's wandering is the epistle, the disclosure of her inner experience *with* an outer world *to* an outer world. The epistle is the form par excellence of intimation, that which I see as the method of subtle reveal that discloses and abstracts subjective experience. A negotiation between inner space and outer space. A potential space of a radical stillness. What is often identified in Lorde as an autotheoretical approach can be thought of as the performative practice of intimation, where revelations are ambiguated.

Lorde has become vaunted. She has become tote-baggified. And she is writing, here, in a genre that is unwrestable from colonial adventure narratives, having come herself from one of the most powerful capitalist empires. I wonder, as I read and reread, what reliable distinctions can be made between emissaries of transnational solidarity and what Cervenak calls "emissaries of imperialism."
How to see the other without immobilising the other in an eternal stillness, where potential space can easily calcify into prescriptive space?

"It will take a while and a lot of dreams," Lorde

notes in the close of the account, to "metabolize" her experiences in the USSR.

Lorde does cast some doubt on her own veiled hope that the Russia of 1976 was classless or egalitarian, though muses on its advancement beyond what she calls a "breadconcern level," a plane of sustenance Black Americans had yet to reach.

In the psychic metabolism of Lorde's prose, dreams and bread interchangeably enunciate the necessary terms of liberation.

Said the sister on the outside, "We have internal desires but outside controls."

III

Santa Barbara, 2020. The week before lockdown. Shopping vintage at The Blue Door. I came across a lithograph of echoing squares in shades of coal, slate, dusk, and sand, creating the effect of falling in or being pushed out of a horizon. Sixteen hundred dollars of something that could only be left behind. But it stayed with my mind. There, with it, was none of the performance of contemplation that the museum stages. Only a kind of mothy gazing at the retreating and advancing lines, the very movement with which I was propelled into a graduate career in the same city. I wanted to live where it lived, to be pushed out of its horizon as placenta.

A year after the encounter I had begun my first quarter, found a place, and every day was staring at the blank space above my couch. Its emptiness made me furious, but not nearly as furious as the notion of filling it with something unremarkable, unmoving, sharing with me none of my own history. I think again of the lithograph, by French-Hungarian artist Victor Vasarely according to my Google reverse-image search of the grainy iPhone picture I took as a souvenir. One of the leading artists of the 1950s-1960s Optical Art, or Op Art, movement. Some of the characteristic elements of the style: patterns that instigate the sensation of movement

Figure 1: Oksana, Unknown surname. Commission of Marie-Guillemine Benoist's *Portrait d'une négresse* in the Op Art style. 2022.

- flashing, vibrating, swelling, and retreat. The style has the particular effect of creating nauseatingly lasting afterimages. Looking back on many of the prominent works of this perceptual art form now invokes early Microsoft Windows screensavers or the psychedelic aural gyrations of the nineties-era Windows media player. One may retreat from the optical to elicit its movement. I advanced. But the specific lithograph in question cannot be found online, not even its likeness.

Santa Barbara, 2022. After two years' longing, I turned, as one does, to Etsy. I found a woman named Oksana, living in Russia. For years it seemed, Oksana has been taking classic works of European painters and rendering them in the Op Art style. Caravaggio. Vermeer. Rodin. *David with the Head of Goliath* (1610) by her hand had become like the whirlpools of fingertip flesh, churning the chiaroscuro so that it resembled a pregnant storm cloud. If a commission in this style was possible, and her renderings convinced me that this was a possibility, then ten years out from my moment of stillness with the subject, the Negress, in Benoist's portrait, we would reconvene in my living room. Above the rose Chesterfield, in a space where light, dust, and movement might extend her form outside the portrait's frame. I was interested in a representational liberation. Oksana, my would-be confederate.

I felt a kind of love for Oksana for having lived out a recent past that culminated in these little manipulations of history. But more simply for having the same thing on her mind. I pictured her searched by the light of a huge Venetian window, feet akimbo, acrylics splayed and all, and in doing so became a guileless beast like every male artist that ever trained his consciousness on a woman stranger. *Oksana in Moscow,* oil on canvas. *Taylor in Santa Barbara*, mixed media. I sent her a direct message asking if she would accept a commission in the style of her renditions of Vermeer's *Girl*

with a Pearl Earring (1665) and Bouguereau's *Dante and Virgil* (1850). Same day: She could take a shot at the painting. She had given up on the precious fusions because not many people had purchased them. She assured me it would take some time. A few days later, after I invoked the painting of the Negress and some potential colours for the reproduction, Oksana issued a "funny fact." She had tried to work with the piece before in this style, but the inspiration did not come. This was a chance for her to woo it back. Fate, she called it. From the Latin *fātum*, "that which has been spoken." Kismet, I called in response. From the Arabic *qasama*, "to divide."

Draft one privileged the face over the body, the Negress's face both detailed and obscured by gestures of ochre and Persian green. We discoursed, traded edits, and went into the piece again. Draft two, what would be the living final attempt, obscures the subject up close and reveals her at a distance. I worried about having to walk away from the Negress in order to see her. Oksana "fell in love" with the original while working on it, though she was unsure about the thickness of the distorting lines rippling against the sitter's form. The effect of the orange and green creates a sort of sepia tone in this version. The allegory of French independence is lost in this coloration, while greater definition of the hues of the sitter's skin is found. We fretted together about losing the richness of the fabrics and the damp sprawl of her gaze.

Our worries settled as sediment in the chat. A few weeks went by before her page was no longer accessible. I stirred our discourse anyway, hoping for a sign of life. "Freaked out by the war. From Ukraine. Unable to continue working on the painting now as I am completely morally crushed." Followed by a link to the most recent, and final, draft. These DMs remain, for me, the only evidence of our collaboration. A space that contains potential, but admits nothing of a person for whom the same space has been closed. If the

DM is the modern epistle, its susceptibility to intercession only then pierced my consciousness with the force of something approximating truth.

To Lorde, Moscow seemed a lot like New York. She comes to learn that they differ on the matter of foundation. Whereas New York is built on bedrock, during Stalin's time Moscow's earth was sunken in with material brought from the Ukraine. Strange, per Lorde. The city appeared to her to be standing "on human will."[1]

IV

When Lorde asks her guide about the legality of homosexuality in the USSR, the host responds laconically that there is no official position on the issue, because it is not "a public matter."[2] Lorde seems to close off the subject as a conversation piece after this inquiry, which leads into the conclusion of the diary entries. However, the scene that follows opens the space of desire foreclosed by the guide's brevity. As Lorde sits in one of the conference meetings she is in Russia to attend, she listens unflinchingly to the words of Toni, a Chukchi[3] woman, who speaks of hope in the face of the mounting disappearance of her people, of whom only fourteen thousand remained. Lorde narrates her affinity for Toni, pitching her attention across the room as if across the Bering Strait. Seeing in the struggle of Toni's people a struggle she knows all too intimately, she feels as though the two of them alone "shared that knowledge and that threat."[4] Something about Toni being from the Northern outskirts of Russia, something about the distance her presence implies draws Lorde in. After her talk, Toni comes to sit with Lorde, remarking through her interpreter that she had been searching for Lorde's eyes in the crowd, that she felt she had been speaking directly to Lorde's heart. Toni tells

1 Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984):19.
2 Lorde, 32.
3 Lorde refers to Toni as "Chukwo." Altered here in keeping with traditional spelling.
4 Lorde, 32.

Lorde how beautiful she is. She moves closer. They hold hands for the remainder of the evening. Lorde is kissed as the interpreters look on smirkingly.

This was both a private and public matter. Like overhearing a telephone call, any of the other guests that only spoke Russian or English would experience, in all their publicness, the love words traded by only one of the women. Some might have been able to understand both. But none, including the lovers and interpreters, in the interaction could possibly disclose the full experience, as this flirtation was a collective effort. A connection both mediated and direct, distantly longing and passionately proximal. Lorde writes, just before they part, that she and Toni had "connected somewhere in the middle of the Aleutians."[5] The imprecision of their congress, its mediation, its givenness to being transported, reveals and conceals a negotiation between inner and outer landscapes. Just as Lorde opens the telling by intimating a sketch of a dream, that porousness reappears at the end of the telling, wherein landscapes of desires open themselves up in moments where the publicness or privateness of affections becomes impossible to discern.

Wandering, according to Cervenak, resists the borders of textuality, and at the same time is some "mutant form" of it.[6] Lorde's epistle wanders as Lorde wanders, intimates as Lorde intimates. Into the Tashkent markets for grapes. Into the living rooms of mothers who also long for peace. Into lovemaking on the black magma of the Aleutian archipelago. Off of the page and back into her dreams, where we cannot follow.

V

The Free Negress Elisabeth was originally published in 2000, roughly twenty years before *Portrait d'une négresse* was renamed for the enslaved woman the painting depicts, Madeleine.[7] The novel, written by

5 Lorde, 33.
6 Cervenak, 3.
7 McLeod, Cynthia. *The Free Negress Elisabeth*. Arcadia, 2008.

Surinamese author Cynthia McLeod, was released after over a decade of personal research. What McLeod hoped to do was give a name and a telling to the life of a woman named Elisabeth Samson, a wealthy Black woman who was known by her name in Suriname, but whose existence was scarcely recorded in the national archive. Samson is a marvel according to our limited knowledge of daily life in the colonies and on the plantations, not merely due to her wealth, but due to the fact that she was born free and, herself, owned human beings as slaves. What is the resonance between Madeleine, an enslaved woman, and Elisabeth, a wealthy slaver? The resonance is one invoked by McLeod, and perhaps her publisher, as Madeleine's portrait is featured on the novel's cover.

When this novel originally passed hands between some friends, the power of the association arrested us. Not knowing of the recent discovery that the woman sitting in Benoist's painting was an enslaved woman named Madeleine, likely brought to France from Guadeloupe, we joined in the centuries of fabulation that had been accruing on her form. We imagined that she was not the Negress, not Madeleine, but Elisabeth. This shared fabulation very nearly crushed our love for her. That instead of an enslaved woman briefly captured in all of her flesh-bound beauty, this was a woman who had profited from the traffic in human bodies. She was on the other side of the whip. This was not my Black Madonna. McLeod's tenor is opposite. Her monumental uncovering of Samson's life is laced with a celebratory glee. Samson is a marvel for McLeod. For us, she was a defector.

When *Portrait d'une négresse* was first exhibited, one critic, Jean Baptiste Boutard, referred to it as horrific, as *noirceur*, a black stain.[8] I thought my own gaze exalting, as if I could rescue a woman with my eyes. Our discovery of Samson briefly restored the stain. I can envision the image of the painting falling from its place on that wall, toppled by its needy onlookers. McLeod was a huge

8 James Smalls, "Slavery is a Woman: 'Race,' Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's Portrait d'une négresse (1800)," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 3, no. 1 (2004).

success, travelling all the way to the Hague to recover enough documentation to put together the story of a woman who managed to live what many would consider a dignified life under slavery. If Samson was rare, it was not merely because she managed to make a fortune before the age of even thirty, it is because she is the rare black female colonial subject of the eighteenth century whose life can be even partly culled from colonial archives. In "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman grapples with the narrative quandary of telling stories about what we cannot know – "impossible stories."[9] At the heart of telling impossible stories, stories that seek to scrawl notes in history's folios, is the volatility of the subjunctive. History is suffused with desires for the stories we want to hear, for total knowing, for a kind of existential punctuation that is never available in life. If archives attempt to approach the other and the lands of the other empirically, desperately hoping that figures will erase names, then travellogues approach them subjunctively, with the palpable desire to enclose and disclose the other in complete knowing.

The Negress named Madeleine is not Elisabeth Samson. Her true name is somewhere private.

VI

Saucy golden onion steeples and "Thanksgiving-turned" trees under a pumpkin sky.[10] In Russia, Lorde proclaims, "everything is seen in terms of food."[11] The phrase hand to mouth accumulates meaning here, the space between one's hands and one's mouth being, in Lorde, a sort of labour time. All other tasks are measured by how much food one's hands can produce, all other values measured out in hand-to-mouth time. In the potential space of Lorde's epistle, food, the body, land, and architecture are amorphously continuous. The way in a dream sometimes a child might be fattened for eating, an altar might gnash and beg, a familiar

9 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe* 26, (2008): 10.
10 Lorde, 15.
11 Lorde, 15.

presence with no face might become a door, the food, bodies, and buildings of Russia are rendered impressionistically. In one moment, Lorde describes an act of translation by a Russian waiter, wherein Lorde is able, despite speaking no Russian herself, to order a bountiful meal made up of lemon piquant fish soup, mackerel, sturgeon, bread, tea, and white wine. What Lorde's Russian phrasebook permitted by way of speech surely would pale against her recollective prose, relating the meal as delicious, delicate, rich. Describing it with all the fervour and besotted blush of a bustling imperial banquet, despite her having been alone with only a waiter who was tasked with "deciphering" her desires.

When her guides take her to the cities of Tashkent and Samarkand in Uzbekistan, Lorde marvels at the local industry. Between luscious descriptions of the Uzbeki landscape and architecture, Lorde remarks on the incredible capacity of Russians and Asians to work together in not an industrial land, but, for Lorde, an *industrious* one. Here, seeming racial harmony begetting a cooperative industriousness appears to draw Lorde toward the USSR's experiment. It is in her encounters with the "descendants of Ghengis Khan," though, that both Lorde's desires and her misgivings about the viability of the USSR as a political and social model swell into and out of the prose.[12] One can hardly deny the aura of orientalism surrounding Lorde's recollection of Uzbekistan, always there together with her incisive attention to what might naturally fall outside of her critical vantage. In moments, Lorde's prose gilds the Uzbeki people in gold, noting them as warmer and more passionate than the Slavs. Covered in salt and once called the "Hungry Dessert," the land between Tashkent and Samarkand in Lorde's rendering ascends to a biblical scale: "The feeling of a dessert having been reclaimed and bearing huge fruit is constant. Later on, as we headed on south after the great feast, we stopped at an oasis, and I picked some flowers."[13] Tasting salt

12 Lorde, 22.
13 Lorde, 25.

in the flowers, Lorde remarks that "it was as if the earth itself was still…pouring salt into its products." In this median, industry exceeds the people's hands and is attributed to the land itself.

The edible as the embodied is the crux upon which Lorde's vacillations between valorising and critiquing the USSR are articulated most completely, as well as where she performs some of her most striking intimations. In a village of roses on a collective farm, Lorde is hosted by a woman like herself, one with several children. A woman whom she believes, despite their differing nations, shares her hunger, her same desires, a woman who also wanted nothing more or less than the right of all children to live peacefully on earth, to "somehow make fruitful the power of their own hands."[14] If, as Quashie notes, "the lyric dramatizes a scale of feeling," Lorde's lyrical recourse to this idiom inflates to the level of myth her desire for transnational solidarity.[15] In Lorde's prose, solidarity is sought at every port of human sense. Speaking English to her host's Russian through the translator, Lorde muses that she "felt very strongly that [their] hearts spoke the same tongue."[16] Perhaps something about the mediated nature of the conversation forced reliance on the senses and recourse to the organs as the realms of that which is felt deeply but evades direct speech. In Lorde's myth, desire is spoken by the heart. Here, Lorde performs what Lata Mani, in *Myriad Intimacies*, describes as the relational grammar of polyexistence.[17] Achieved by a metaphor that directs shared speech not out, as authoritatively universal, but into the body, toward the heart as both deeply personal and profoundly relational. Lorde conveys a logic of interiority that mirrors the form of the epistle. Despite the gestural implications of Lorde's embodied metaphors, the dialogue these women share is excluded. This same

14 Lorde, 26.
15 Quashie, 58.
16 Lorde, 26.
17 Lata Mani, *Myriad Intimacies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 11.

choice does not hold for the rest of the piece, which narrates various conversations between Lorde and her travel companions and translators. It is here in Lorde's fantasy of polyphony that a potential space, a space exceeding essentialism and containing a vision of relationality, emerges by way of a silence. Hearts with tongues, fruitful hands, the bridesmaid's little finger grapes that give the impression that they exist by will.

We have internal desires but outside controls.

VII

London, 2020. In a foreword to her short book of essays, *Intimations*, Zadie Smith describes turning to Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* for some guidance. She notes that though the book did not succeed at making her a Stoic, nor did it assuage the anguish of living through a global crisis, Smith did cull from it "two invaluable intimations": that "talking to yourself can be useful. And writing means being overheard."[18] Smith conflates speech with writing, privacy with publicness. This at a time when the quotidian joy of people watching, of overhearing, had ceased. When social life had been banished within what seemed like days into the neglected corners of our homes. To talk was to write, and to write was to be heard.

In contemporary use, intimate refers to that which is private and to be made inaccessible to the public. Sometimes, intimates refer to genitalia or the garments that cover genitals. It is what is close to and of the body, all its folds, appendages, all its fluids. That is, intimate in its noun form. In its verb form, intimate means to make an implication, to hint, to suggest. A minor provocation that stays as close to the body as speech can, in whispers, in private correspondence, in gesture. Common use obscures a parallel history of usage. A history in which intimate, in its verb form, was used to refer not only to indirect speech but also to formal declarations of war. Placing

18 Zadie Smith, *Intimations* (New York: Penguin, 2020).

intimation on an axis between that what is private and close to the body and what is public and compels the collective body. This is the seeming paradox that Smith distils in her foreword, and the one that gives energy and movement to the epistle as a form. But the multimodality of intimation is not a paradox. It is not incommensurable within itself. Rather, intimations are relationality in motion. They generate suspicion around the fictive opposition of public and private, of inside and outside, of subject and object. As Lata Mani writes in *Myriad Intimacies*, "our conceptual categories and linguistic conventions attempt to contain the near-infinite pluralities in which we exist."[19] The epistle creates a space that is not inside experience or outside it, but a space of dreams, of contemplations, space where potential may emanate like the aureola surrounding the face of the Madonna.

Lorde stood baking, a raisin in the Samarkand sun outside of a porcelain factory, musing on the apparent indifference of her travel companions to the oppression faced by Black people of the United States. In the posture of the weary traveller, Lorde intimates one of the few pointed remarks of suspicion that dapple the diary, that the Soviet people are a people "who can not yet afford to be honest."[20] But certainly myths can never afford to be honest. Nor dreams.

19 Mani, 18.
20 Lorde, 28.

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This essay explores an ancestral home as a poetic image, as in Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*. It considers who the poet of such a poetic image might be, and how such a poetic image of the house can be "inhabited" or "dwelled in" through labour of the mind and body. Specifically it considers how the nineteenth-century octagon house design can be considered a feminine space as well as an uncommon poetic image.

poetic form, Bachelard, home, octagon house, family.

A MULTIPLICITY OF FORMS: THE OCTAGON HOUSE AS POETIC IMAGE

Emily Trenholm

The Poetic Image

When I tell someone I am trying to write about my grandmother's childhood home, they ask what my relationship to it is. Aloud I say, "It's complicated," but to myself I say, "Imaginary." To be frank, I've only physically been inside the house a few times. But in my thoughts, I visit it almost daily.

On my first visit almost a decade ago, I was accompanied by my mother and second cousin. We drove the county roads together to eastern Wisconsin, just south of Lake Winnebago. One of my primary memories is the wallpaper in the two-story staircase that was about to be painted. The only pictures I took that day were of this wallpaper. There were three different floral patterns visible: cream on tan, bright yellow, and white on pale pink. The first two had worn away in places like a topographical map in which the bottom layer was the oldest. It was like looking at the rings in side of a tree trunk, I thought later – as if multiple generations' versions of the house were present at once.

The house is octagon-shaped. I have held this fact close like an heirloom seed in my pocket. I have held it like a talisman, not knowing why, but not being able to put it aside either. It is like a burnished stone in the centre of my mind.

A seed, a talisman…this is not quite right. To be precise, I feel like I have inherited a poetic image. I will attempt to explain this.

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I use the term “poetic image” specifically in reference to the philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s book *The Poetics of Space*. I was initially drawn to his book because of its title. I have often felt that there is a spatial element to poetry. It seems we do not just read a poem - we as readers enter a poem. *Stanza*, from the Italian, means “room.”[1] I enter a poem, I exit a poem - and somehow I am not the same. I, the reader, have been psychically rearranged, as if I entered a new space.

Bachelard explains his poetics as follows: “If there is a philosophy of poetry, it must appear and re-appear through a significant verse, in total adherence to the isolated image; to be exact, in the very ecstasy of the newness of the image.”[2] He then focuses on several poetic images that have a spatial or architectural element - the first being one’s childhood home, which he calls “the human being’s first world.”[3]

Ultimately he explores what it means to inhabit spaces physically and psychically via the imagination. The childhood house, for example, is both the site of much daydreaming and the object of daydreaming. He emphasises that “The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer.”[4]

Bachelard emphasises that along with imagining,

1 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed August 30, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stanza
2 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 1.
3 Bachelard, 29.
4 Bachelard, 28.

reading too can be an active process: “Poetics comes from poiesis, meaning ‘to make,’ and for Bachelard this is a two-way process; we are made by material images that we remake in our turn.”[5] Daydreaming here goes further than memory. We reinhabit the spaces of memory by revisiting them and adding onto them through active imagination.

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I have an inner image of the outside of the house. Is it from looking at a photograph? Or from standing in front of the house myself? Facing the front door, the house looms above. The front wall confronts the viewer head on, and two walls on either side taper off at an angle receding to the right and left. On the right side, a rectangular addition creates a visual contrast. It is painted a stark white and the tin roof glints brightly overhead. A single step leads up to the elevated porch leading to the front door. The front porch is supported by two thin columns of wood and the top is edged in a moulding of curves and cut-out diamonds painted a royal blue.

In the distance, behind the house to the left, a barn stands tall. To the right, obscured partly by the house, is a shed painted the same red. Beyond these are hilly fields that once grew crops but are now overgrown. Along the horizon to the left is a thin glimmer of blue, the Fox River, and to the right a smudge of green woods.

In my active imagining, the house is a castle tower anchored firmly in the earth, as if it has been here since time began. It is a lighthouse in its near-cylindrical shape, a structure that resists strong winds and tumultuous waves. It is a white gull perched solidly on seaside cliffs, watching closely for any hint of movement, a sign of fish. It is as if the house watches me intently.

Brauch in American Architecture

My fascination with the house is largely due to

5 Richard Kearney, introduction to Bachelard, xix.

its shape. An octagon seems like an unlikely shape for any house, let alone a farmhouse. There is an element of the extraordinary tied up in the ordinary. Why, I wondered, an octagon house?

The octagon design was created by nineteenth-century phrenologist and amateur architect Orson Fowler. That century marked a time of reform and inventiveness, and phrenology was thought at the time to be another sound application of the modern scientific method. While it mistakenly correlated the shape of the skull with mental traits, Fowler's profession gives insight into his interest in the relationship between the outer and the inner nature of things. He applied this thinking to the octagon house, which he designed based on the premise that a house's design affects its inhabitants' quality of life and state of mind: "Especially will the quantity and quality of man's intellect evince themselves in the houses they build […] and rooms should be conveniently located, as regards each other, especially adapted to facilitate family ends."[6]

In her book *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture*, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy wrote a comprehensive ode to American architecture, specifically pre-industrial anonymous architecture whose buildings "tell not the official but the private history of a culture" and whose designs are "serviceable and timelessly beautiful."[7] In other words, they fulfil both of the key elements of architecture – form and function.

Fowler's interest in efficiency can be seen as an interest in the function of the house. He chose the octagon shape because it is second only to the circle in its ratio of perimeter to volume. As Fowler says, it "incloses the most space"[8] and uses less material to build than a rectangular or square building. He was also interested in the function of space as being conducive to the lives being

6 Orson Fowler, T*he Octagon House: A Home for All* (New York: A.R. Shephard & Co., 2015), 11-14.
7 Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture in North America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 11-12.
8 Fowler, 56.

lived inside. He designed a symmetrical floor plan that devotes equal space to each room, and each is devoted to its own activity – the kitchen, the dining room, the sewing room, the bedrooms. This makes the house's inhabitants feel comfort and the "perfect satisfaction of the home element," and it provides every family member with an "'own room' feeling."[9] He exhibited a kind of egalitarianism (the subtitle of the book is *A Home for All*) and showed how the house could lead to harmony of thought and of labour. He did not seem to focus much on the formal aspects of the house, except in the possible ornamentation he suggested – cupolas, wraparound porches.

Moholy-Nagy also speaks of a particular concept in American architecture called *brauch*. She describes it as how individual architects or builders "respond to the challenges of a new environment with […] tradition and intuitive talent," a kind of intentional melding of the new and the old, "modifying that which is inherited and transforming that which is given."[10] There is a kind of echo here of Bachelard's poetic images which we "remake in our own turn." Surely Fowler, though by no means anonymous in his promotion of the design, could be said to have created the octagonal design in this spirit: "Why continue to build in the same square form of all past ages? Is no radical improvement of both the external form and internal arrangement…possible?"[11] This uniquely American style of architecture has multiple influences as well as a new aspect. In Europe there were existing precedents of using the octagon shape for fortresses and watchtowers.[12] Fowler's creative act was in applying the octagonal design to a house.

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Was Fowler a functionalist with no real regard for form? Even his work as a phrenologist seems to imply a belief that form is only in service of

9 Fowler, 63.
10 Moholy-Nagy, 21-23.
11 Fowler, 4.
12 Moholy-Nagy, 130-132.

function. And yet, as I study the octagon form, as I revisit the image, I begin to wonder. Moholy-Nagy calls architects "the artificers of forms" – akin to the poet. Fowler wrote an entire book on the octagon design, mostly made up of practical building instructions. As Bachelard explains, there is "an essential difference between an absolute image that is self-accomplishing, and a post-ideated image that is content to summarize existing thoughts."[13] And yet there are moments in the book when Fowler's sudden philosophical musings seem to reach beyond the values of progress towards beauty. He asks, for instance, "Nature's forms are mostly spherical […] why not apply her forms to houses?"[14] Was there some initial moment of his being struck by an image of the octagon itself? Perhaps in tracing the literal origins of the octagon design, I risk letting the "being of the image lose its original light."[15] Perhaps I must approach the octagon house not only as architect or historian, but as poet.

The octagon house on the inside: I am in the living room with the open floor plan and the walls each have a window. The walls are as much window as solid wall, as much a view of the exterior as the interior of the house. The space is infused with light and a feeling of spaciousness pervades. My body feels as wide as the walls or the walls are the width of my body. My gaze extends to the expanse of fields to horizon's edge and I am there somehow as well as here, breathing in the cool shadows of the wood.[16] This is surely the vastness – which "opens up unlimited space" – that Bachelard spoke of in his discussion of the qualities of space, his "intimate immensity."[17]

My experience of being inside the octagon house makes me wonder if Fowler ever imagined being inside before he designed and built it. Did he in a daydream conjure an image of an ancient tower of stone, protected solidly from the outside world (as in the outside of the octagon house)? Or did he imagine himself inside a bird's nest, a round and enveloping shape that was spacious and airy (the octagon house inside)?

It is as if he began with the reverie of a bird's nest and rationalised this reverie in retrospect. What evokes the shelter of a round structure (as Bachelard characterises in his final chapter, the "image of being") but can be practically built (using two-by-fours, accommodating traditional furniture) with the addition of corners?[18] An octagon.

The Dream House

Fowler created a new design, and yet sought to have it replicated as a prototype. The first octagon houses were built in New York, and there are few octagon houses west of the Mississippi. My Challoner ancestors who came from Yorkshire, England may have seen one of these octagon houses when they arrived in New York, where they stayed for several years. What qualities of the octagon might have been transferred when they replicated the form?

The fact that they chose the octagon design, with its unique foundation and unlikely shape, makes me think that my relatives were both skilled and inventive carpenters. They most likely chose the design because of its efficiency.

Many octagon houses that were built were elaborate, three stories or more, with wraparound verandas, buttresses, even in one case a domed roof. They belonged to middle- or upper-class families eager to follow the latest modern trends. And yet the octagon makes for a good farmhouse. Its many windows allow whoever is inside continuous observation of the fields, workers, children, and animals outside. Its fieldstone foundation makes for a practical solution to the fact that farmers must remove stones from their fields before they can plough them. My grandmother's octagon house, two-stories high without a wraparound porch, in

13 Bachelard, 172.
14 Fowler, 82.
15 Bachelard, 248.
16 Bachelard, 214.
17 Bachelard, 214.
18 Bachelard, 252.

contrast to most of the others, evokes simplicity.

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When one lives in a house, one cannot long for it. When one is inside of the poem, one cannot long for it. As Bachelard highlights, the newness of the image of the childhood house is in part created by the yearning for it: “It is not until late in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories.”[19] Bachelard gives the example of a man who lived in a cottage and longed to build a manor. Once he had built the manor, however, he longed again for the cottage.[20] In this example and in his discussion of the difference between the image of the childhood house and the house our adult self dreams of building, Bachelard helps me accept that my grandmother can only psychically inhabit the octagon house now: “Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact that we shall not have time to achieve it […] It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality.”[21]

As she approaches ninety, it makes sense that my grandmother’s yearning for her childhood home has increased over time. Perhaps she thought of it more when she retired from being a cook and had more time to daydream. Or perhaps when my grandfather passed away and she moved to an assisted living place, and her ties to familiar spaces were cut. And certainly her current dementia has sharpened the image of the octagon house in her mind. It seems as if the details of the present and near past are often lost in an undifferentiated mass of ocean in her mind, and her childhood memories are an island in the centre where she can sometimes rest.

It seems that her years inhabiting the house (with the boundless tenor particular to the dreams of children), combined with the intensity of her yearning, make the poetic image particularly vivid for her. Each time I talk to her, she communicates a different shade or fragment of the image to me and reads another line of the poem. Sometimes I fill out the image a bit more by asking her a question or by remembering her words later and conjuring my own images - in these moments we co-create the image.

But there is one day in particular I remember when it was as if she read to me whole stanzas at once. I am living in Colorado and I am snowed in. The juniper bush out my window is covered in large drifts of snow and the snow on the pine tree branches bends them down low to the ground. The weather keeps me inside, and I decide to call my grandmother as I curl up under several blankets on my bed. She answers. I ask how she is, and she responds that she has been thinking about her father.

This is unusual - we usually begin by talking about how she slept and what she had for lunch and eventually begin discussing the past. She has delved right in. I ask her what he was like. She answers that he had a strong booming voice when he called the cows in, and she continues talking, unlike our usual pattern of me asking questions and her giving short, reluctant answers. Now her words follow in a continuous thread of thought. She seems determined - she has something she needs to say. I hold my breath, suspended in the moment with my unasked questions caught in my throat. I am listening with my whole body and we are reinhabiting the octagon house together in real time. She tells me memories of her mother and father, of her childhood living in the octagon house. She gives me a view of the image from the inside - what it felt like to dream in and inhabit the space.

I became convinced after this that for me it is not Fowler or my Challoner ancestors that are the origins of the image of the octagon house. Instead my grandmother is the poet.

19 Bachelard, 53.
20 Bachelard, 84.
21 Bachelard, 81-82.

For my grandma to convey how it felt to live in the octagon house – memories that convey a certain feeling or quality – is to get closer to the reality of an internal landscape. How a space felt from the inside moves towards what Bachelard implies is interior rather than exterior thinking.[22]

My grandmother tells me that the far bedroom upstairs was hers and her sister Elaine's. Elaine was one year younger and, being the youngest children of four, the two were like twins. The room's window faced south, with a view of the road and a neighbouring farm. In a photograph, they stand next to each other; both wear overalls and each holds a rope tethering a Guernsey calf no taller than they. Though Elaine smirks and Mary glares at the camera, they lean towards each other slightly as if in confidence.

Their room was oddly shaped, with five walls. Their sister Ruth described it as "a room with the corner cut off." The short wall, the cut off part, pressed inward with the quality of a hermit crab withdrawing into its shell. For them it was a space of intimacy and secrets. It was the two of them behind a closed door, each always leaning towards the other to whisper in her ear.

It was here that one day they had a shared dream: an image of a coffee table in a refined parlor with lace curtains, a full silver tea set, an elegant woman who sat and provided tea to her guests. Inspired by the fullness of the image, taken hold of immediately, they rush to the barn, grab their father's hand saw from its high hook, and together chop the legs of the kitchen table in half – to create the coffee table.

Sometimes when the family (Father, Mother, Ruth, Robert, Elaine, and Mary, my grandmother) sits around the table to eat a meal, her father recites a poem instead of saying grace. They sit in the dining room on the eastern side; the window looks out on the fields and the woods beyond. It is sunny and open, next to the entryway and living room with its many windows. Today in his strong tenor he recites William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis," and perhaps they all are dreaming variations on the same dream for several minutes. The way the bright sunlight strikes the table just so, illuminating hundreds of pieces of dust, conjures both "the wings of morning" and the decay of the dust. As the wind blows against the window, death becomes a force out there mixed with the wind and the animals that are buried under the shade of the trees. And yet they are inside – together. A feeling of shelter.

The barn is warm and quiet. With its small windows it becomes a blanket pulled overhead with a loose weave – dark with pinpricks of light. It is like a hut, and the cows' warmth is the fire that warms it. Her father hand-milks and my grandma runs the milk machines. He cleans the cows' udders with a warm cloth, and she brushes their sides, cooing at them. Then she attaches the machine which adheres to the cow's udder through light suction. As she monitors its pumping for several minutes, she can become idle and snatch a few moments of daydreaming. It begins with what she can see – the biggest calf in the pen near the door, a Guernsey. She imagines that in full daylight its brown coat is sleek and unblemished by mud or insects. She leads it into a full arena, wearing a yellow pinafore dress and buttoned shoes. All the judges see the calf just as she does – its shiny coat, the clean line of its shoulders extending into its backbone, its neat brushed-out tail – and she is presented with a blue ribbon tied around the winning calf's neck. The click of the milking machine brings her back to the barn. Feelings of grandeur, pride, intimate immensity.

It is hard to say exactly how, but space confers certain qualities on experience.

22 Bachelard, 248.

The Dialectics of Inside and Outside

Outside, the octagon house evokes protection, solidness, watchfulness. Inside, it evokes openness, spaciousness, extension. How can it be all of these at once? How can these seeming contradictions be overcome?

Bachelard devotes a whole chapter to the dialectics of inside and outside. He implies that these opposites can at times both be present, can form a kind of unity: “Inside and outside are not abandoned to their geometrical opposition. From what overflow of a ramified interior does the substance of being run, does the outside call?”[23]

It is a house that evokes the outside inside. The delineation Bachelard says the house makes between “the I” and “the non-I” is softened here. Bachelard’s other terms for “outside” and “inside” are more accurate here – “here” and “there” or even “this side” and “beyond.”[24] The octagon house creates this effect in part by the many windows and multiple views they allow in one glance:

Barn looming

silent as a shadow

Gravel road

tapers out of sight

wistfully

Sapphire thread of river

fluid edge

of the known world

The multiplicity of views, like the refraction of a gem when the light hits it just so, a crystal’s infinite cleaving. The many views make the world feel larger than it is.

23 Bachelard, 245.
24 Bachelard, 228.

In this way the octagon house is a house that evokes a field. The field is an entity of openness. Even when it is fenced in, its commitment to growing overtakes the fence and goes beyond this attempt at limit and boundary. A field also evokes the farm that is a key part of the octagon house in its full form.

A house that evokes a field steps closer to the world. Rather than totally protecting the dreamer from the outside world, the house that evokes a field forms a tether with the world, so that one “lives a daydream that is awake, but above all [the] daydream remains in the world, facing worldly things.”[25] It allows the “I” to remain connected to the “non-I” and thus more closely state its kinship with it.

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For all its airy spaciousness, my grandmother’s octagon house with its open floor plan is rare. There is, however, in designs with a closed floor plan still a distinct sense of centrality, as in the structure of the nest. The centre of the house may have a staircase or rooms on the perimeter that open into the same central space. Unlike a rectangular house, there is a gathering together of rooms at the centre, or a raying out of rooms from the centre. There is an axis here, a centredness and rootedness, an invisible pole: “Tree always in the center […] feasting upon/Heaven’s great dome.”[26]

I sit in the corner of a rectangular room as I write this now. As a child, one of my favourite places in my own childhood home was perched on the counter in the corner of the kitchen. Here I could feel connected to the centre of the house and all its activities, but still separated from them and free to observe and daydream. I felt myself become a part of the cabinets. The corners of the octagon house, however, are of a wider angle. They do not evoke the same feeling of protection Bachelard speaks of: “An imaginary room rises up around our bodies,

25 Bachelard, 105.
26 Rilke, Ranier Marie, in Bachelard, 254.

which think that they are well-hidden."[27] Instead it is as though the door to this room is ajar.

Perhaps, because of its lack of traditional corners, the octagon house is less conducive to dreaming and more conducive to observation and physical labour. Though daydreaming begins with observation, and labour can be conducive to daydreaming. I experienced this when I lived on a farm for several years, picking the beans or milking the cows. The repetition of a movement can tether a person to their body and also give the mind space to dream. Varied observations and freedom of movement would seem to be necessary conditions for daydreaming.

Since I have established that the views from an octagon house are varied (especially with an open floor plan), perhaps I can now ask, What movements would the octagon house allow for and nurture? Given that in the nineteenth century the house was primarily the domain of women, the octagon would need to accommodate all the varied movements of women. Cooking food, tending to children, mending clothes.

In the closed floor plan, a woman might move from room to room, from task to task, in a kind of looping motion, always returning to the centre room. Fowler mentions women specifically several times in his book: "To large houses women object that it takes such a world of toil to keep well […] [Yet] compactness of rooms […] facilitates the grouping of rooms around or contiguous to one another, thereby rendering the passage from room to room both short and easy."[28]

Bachelard mentions women as well: "The minute we apply a glimmer of consciousness to a mechanical gesture…when a poet rubs a piece of furniture […] he increases the object's human dignity […] From one object in a room to another, housewifely care weaves the ties that unite […] awakens furniture that was asleep."[29] Bachelard even implies that the

27 Bachelard, 156.
28 Fowler, 65-67.
29 Bachelard, 88.

interior thinking he values is associated with women and that their imaginings have uniquely creative potential: "In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside."[30]

In this regard, there is one aspect of the design of my grandmother's octagon house that seems to fail to reach its ideal. Fowler's design is egalitarian in its symmetrical floor plan. But my grandmother's house is asymmetrical-a large rectangular addition extends from the eastern side. It contains the kitchen-arguably the most important room for woman's labour in this domestic space. The room where my great grandmother, the farm wife, spent a majority of her days.

The kitchen has only two windows on the south side and on the northern side is a screened in porch where the roof hangs low. I remember a cabinet structure that before renovation supported the stove and the kitchen sink was at a diagonal, making the dimly lit space seem even smaller. Like a hallway, I think. Not like a room at all. With its lack of light, it evokes a cellar. It does not have, however, the warm, sheltered feeling of the barn, with its living inhabitants and the movement of milk. Bachelard, inspired by Jung, speaks of the cellar as an encounter with the unconscious, and of shadow.[31] It seems that not all of a woman's labour is given equal consideration in this design.

Even in spite of its failures, its contradictions, the octagon house is an image and a space full of possibility. It is a multiplicity of forms, hard to pin down exactly. I begin to ask myself: what kind of house would a farm wife have designed for herself?

Women and the Labour of Mind and Body

My grandmother has deeply inhabited the octagon because she has dreamt here and laboured here.

30 Bachelard, 88.
31 Bachelard, 40.

The repetition of her movements form a continuum. “Life originates forms,” as labour and movement originate life.[32] Perhaps to dream in a space is to inhabit the space, but to dwell in the space is to also fill it with care, attention, and physical movement. “Dwell” is a word that itself extended its stay and evolved in meaning from “to delay” to “to linger” and finally “to make a home.”[33]

In one of his chapters, Bachelard writes of shells as one of his examples of a primitive image of inhabiting: “the mystery of form-giving life, the mystery of slow, continuous formation.”[34]

Rachel Cusk, in writing about artist Louise Bourgeois’ fibre self-portraits, reflects on the relationship between women, specifically mothers, and cloth: “Cloth expresses a new legitimacy, soft and unprestigious, meditating between body and world, a record of female process.”[35]

I learn from my second cousin that at one time the stairway was a tight spiral. An image emerges in my mind of a woman knitting cloth in the centre of the living room. As stitches accrue, the cloth spirals out and around her, becoming indistinguishable from her body, like the shell before it solidifies.

“In the organic, the evolutionary, lies the source of woman’s authority. Woman has special knowledge of process as the unifying characteristic of that which can be made,” Cusk writes.[36] The body here holds knowledge. Just as the bird does in making its nest. Bachelard quotes Michelet in his description: “The instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird […] by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls.”[37]

As the moon moves water away and towards, as

32 Bachelard, 133.
33 *Etmyonline*, accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=dwell&utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=ds_search
34 Bachelard, 126.
35 Rachel Cusk, *Coventry* (New York: Picador, 2019), 141.
36 Cusk, 142.
37 Jules Michelet, *L’oiseau*, in Bachelard, 121.

spirals unwind, as horizontal lines embrace the ground, as women press back the walls of the house with the quality of their attention, the octagon evokes an organic, earthly movement.

Bachelard’s original image of the house emphasises verticality with its numerous nooks and corners: “A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward” and “illustrates the verticality of the human being.”[38] Here a masculine space is evoked. The octagon house with its horizontal orientation, its proximity to the circle, and its openness evokes a more feminine space. Perhaps the octagon house requires its own phenomenology.

~

The poetic image is forged from dwelling. The reader meets the poet in the doorway and is at once inside and outside, overcoming for the moment the separation caused by yearning. The tower, the nest, the barn, the octagon, the field. This multiplicity of poetic images form a unity, a long-form poem.

Each time she remembers or speaks to me about the house, my grandmother reinhabits and thus re-creates the house. She goes beyond remembering. By transmitting this image to me, she has projected into the future - the eternal image - and teaches me both how to inherit and how to create. How to dwell and how to dream.

38 Bachelard, 39.

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Troubled by the violence inherent in the narratives of immigration, we delve into our own personal stories to look at ourselves not as severed beings but as continuous landscapes. In our autotheoretical triptych we evoke Winnicott's notion of potential space and we converse with Vygotsky's notion of perezhivanie to understand the formation of our inner landscapes and their impact on our identities. We engage with Serres and Massumi to paint these landscapes with timeless, topological strokes. And we come to understand that our capacity to (have) be(en) lost is not an experience of loss, but one of finding ourselves.

immigration, narratives, identity, formation, loss, lost, experience, autotheory, triptych, Eastern European, Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, Greek, Winnicott, potential space, Vygotsky, perezhivanie, Serres, Massumi, time, timeless, performative writing, personal stories

KNEADING SPACES: RE-CLAIMING WHOLENESS IN THE NARRATIVE OF IMMIGRATION

Ania Louka(shevich), Stella Medvedeva, Alexander G. Romanitan

Forewor(l)ds

As we sit, at a safe distance, and watch the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, we recognise the winds of war and rupture, tearing holes in lands, peoples, and cultures, splitting apart countries, human bonds, and identities. We find these winds familiar: All three of us are children of Eastern European immigrants and, in our journeys, these winds have chased us out and away, have carried us across the world, have ripped out pages from our memory books, and have torn holes in the fabrics that we are made of. Tearing, splitting, ripping, rupturing: We notice the violence embedded in these words – words that have shaped our understanding of ourselves. We are reminded of the words that have described our immigration stories, too: journey, displacement, relocation, resettlement. All of them words that imply the existence of a linear space tied to the binary system of here and there, of backwards and forwards typically separated by a

great geographical distance and at least one border. Words that imply the progressive movement from one side of the border to the other, thus introducing into this system the dimension of a binary time: of ends and beginnings, of before and after, of the old and the new. Words that situate the cause for our struggle, trauma, and loss, associated with our immigratory experience, at the other side of the border, in the past tense, left behind. Words that do not speak of our here and our today.

We – three individuals with distinct personal experiences of immigration – perform an experiment to seek what lies behind the terms that have identified our experiences and ourselves. We lean into our own experiences of displacement, as manifested in our dreams, the shaping of our sense of self, and our experience of the present. Our stories stand side by side, conversing with theory and with each other. Written in a dialectic and reflective process, these distinct autotheoretical narrations derive meaning from one another's immigration experiences, composting[1] into an authentic landscape of immigration. This landscape, ever-shifting, tugs and pulls at us as we journey through life, traversing borders, and confronting the unsettling news of wars that repeatedly rupture and redefine our identities.

While we choose to present our stories individually, we invite the reader to weave their own path through them and establish their unique connections. This structure honours the personal nature of each narrative, celebrating its intricate complexities. More importantly, it acknowledges the significance of our individual processes of meaning-making. In autotheoretical research, meaning emerges not solely from our personal narrative but also from the very act of writing. As we pen our experiences, our stories are reshaped and transformed, yielding new insights. To put it differently, we write to make sense of our raw and incoherent personal experience, a sense that arises from the ways that we engage with writing. Thus, Ania's passage mirrors the very essence of her migratory story: immersed in loss, and driven by the quest to find her missing pieces. Throughout her writing journey, she collects fragments of personal anecdotes, snippets from the stories of others, theoretical concepts, and fragments of discussions, all with the intent to reconstruct her own narrative. Stella embarks on a different path; faced with the linguistic challenges of expressing her unique inner experience of immigration, she turns to writing as a means of accessing her felt sense[2] surrounding the issues at hand and their origins. She then uses this sense to build connections between her inner perceptions and the realities, shaped by theory. Meanwhile, Alex takes a distinct approach, delving into the transgenerational impact of his parent's immigration through performative writing. His writing unpacks specific moments of his life to reveal the layers of meaning hidden within them, illuminating the diverse dimensions that have shaped his experience.

When compos(t)ing this paper, writing alongside each other, our individual processes of sense-making transcended the personal realm. As we communicated the ongoing progress of our writing to each other, the meaning of our personal stories constantly evolved and transformed. In a way, the true sense of our inner experience of immigration, as presented in this paper, emerged from the profound act of sharing these stories with one another. Therefore, the ensuing autotheoretical inquiries that we present are to be read both independently and together, recognising that each represents a distinct story and a unique way of making sense but also noting their interconnectedness resonating across the entire paper.

Vyhr'[3] (Ania's identity landscape)

1 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

2 Eugene Gendlin, *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning : a Philosophical and Psychological Approach to the Subjective* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997).

3 Vyhr': whirlwinds, such as tornadoes, in Russian. In Slavic mythology, a dangerous wind, born out of malevolent forces.

RUPTURED BOOK
Having moved from Ukraine to Greece when I was little, I have always wondered which of my childhood memories are true and which are memory moulds - supplied by my parents and filled with my eager imagination.
I am like a book whirling through a tornado, with most of its **pages** torn away. You can still see the ragged, cream stubs where memories used to be, but the writing is lost forever, turned to mental mulch by the violent passage of time and space. In a way, my life is spent collecting the lost **pages**, trying to fit them into my book. In a way, my life is spent trying to fit in.

(**page 17**) The fresh, cold smell of a live pine tree, scraping with its purple and gold star, the ceiling of our house in Mariupol'? I'm pretty sure that's real.

(**page 77**) Me jumping from ice floe to ice floe on a frozen Sea of Azov? That's probably my hopeful imagination filling in the gaps.

I don't remember much from the journey to Greece. Two memories stand out, and both feel symbolically significant:
(**page 287**) One is of my mother knitting my sister a black woollen sweater on the long ride to our new home, an oversized sweater that has ended up after all these years in my own wardrobe, to be worn on rare, exceptionally cold days. Much like this sweater, my identity feels like something knitted for me by other people. The wool might be mine, but the sweater doesn't quite fit , and it is way too warm for the Greek weather.
(**page 290**) The second one is of my head hitting the glass window of the taxi that eventually took us from Thessaloniki to Ioannina, as I fell in and out of sleep on the long way there. Somehow, sometimes, it feels like I'm still on that taxi ride, the cold window

on my forehead (**pages 290-3097**).
I'm behind my peers who work, behave, and exist in a way I don't - I feel like I exist in the realm of "never quite there." Just like in "queer time," the notion that queer people's life milestones (coming out, marriage, children) are different from those of heteronormative people and do not follow the same linear trajectory,[4] I'm seconds, minutes, years out of synch with the rest of the world. I'm on "immigrant time."
I don't remember much else, neither from the journey, nor of the first years in Greece. What I do remember is the embarrassment and the shame of not speaking the language (page **450**). I remember the sanctuary of my home and of books. I don't remember missing my past life. I miss it now. As in, "I long for it," but also as in "I've lost it." I wonder what happened between then and now, to make me feel this way: "then" I might have been embarrassed, but I was whole. I was me. Now, I am not.

LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT LANDSCAPE
I am not the first of my people to move so far away that the landscape around me becomes unrecognisable. I'm sure this statement is true for most people, but it's especially true for the Greeks of Azov.
(**page 2**) I come from a long line of Greeks that thousands of years ago moved north - from Chios, from Smyrna; the initial landscape is lost, smudged with an impatient thumb on a hastily drawn map - and then south, and then east, to settle in Mariupol'. Hundreds of thousands of Greeks stayed in Mariupol'. Until the rupture of the Soviet Union, the war between Russia and Ukraine, momentous events that create tidal waves strong enough to displace people once more. Nothing is settled.
I feel these restless people moving beneath my skin, unsettling me. As an immigrant, even one with Greek roots, I am not settled in this country. I feel uncomfortable calling it "my" country -

4 Dustin Goltz, "Queer Temporalities" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Jon Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

my identity does not coincide with a place.
Egoz notes that nomadic communities are stigmatised and excluded because of their "landless" condition.[5] Is this something that can give meaning to my experience? I look at urbanisation, internal migration in Greece, with the hope of better understanding movement (albeit on a different scale) that does not cause a rupture: Greeks keep a very strong connection with their villages, their places of origin. Do I feel excluded because I do not have a *chorio* (village)? Am I excluding myself because, although Greek, I do not have a Greek point of origin that can be safely offered when I'm asked "Where are you from?" It's not enough to reach inside the bottomless sack of time and pull on a thread that connects me to those Greeks that left thousands of years ago. I need both the memories and a specific place to tie my identity to.
If memories, the memories of a real place, could be an anchor weighing me down into an identity (a prescribed, specific, clearly outlined identity I can share with others - not the nebulous feeling of who I am), it feels like my displacement through space has knocked my memories out of place, leaving me in an identity limbo.
This is a personal attempt at being redefined. As something more than "rootless," "immigrant," "displaced," and a little less than "rooted," "local," "placed," since none define me, and the linear spectrum between the two does not come close to encompassing what it feels to be me.
A recent paradigm shift in migration studies moves away from the idea of "rupture." Migration does not need to signal identity displacement.[6] Sedentary societies need not be the norm. I want to internalise this theoretical shift but it's hard, since my real-life experience is just that - feeling displaced and lost.

5 Shelley Egoz, "Landscape and Identity: Beyond a Geography of One Place" in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, and Emma Waterton, (London: Routledge, 2012) 272.

6 Aivar Jürgenson, "Between Landscapes: Migration as Rupture and Its Expression in the Landscape" in *Ruptured Landscapes*, ed. Jonathan Miles-Watson (New York: SpringerLink, 2015), 111.

(**page 2157**) War in Ukraine stirred things up for me, drawing connections with things I didn't register were there ("I picked up on something untold, silenced, violently cut out.")[7] With my mind already turned to Ukraine in a way it hasn't for many years, since we left it - an intensive absorption of information about a place I feel I'm now losing in a new, violent way - I soon come across a distant relative, a painter, Arkhip Kuindzhi. I discover he shares my amalgamation of roots, a Greek Ukrainian who lived in Russia. Inadvertently, I turn to him for answers: "Who are you? Can you tell me who I am?" He is much more than his ethnicity, I know (he once fitted a wounded bird with a sling to heal a broken wing, or so the story goes). To the question of who I am, Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, all of the above, I look but do not find answers in Kuindzhi's life: His nationality is contested - his fame makes Ukraine and Russia both claim him as their own, while he himself strongly identified with being Greek, all the while choosing to spend his life in Russia. So I turn to his art.
And here, Kuindzhi doesn't disappoint me. His predominantly Ukrainian landscapes feel like the answer to a question he hadn't known had been asked of him - my need reaching back through time, or obliterating time as an irrelevant, artificial notion, and instead, elevating my identity quest into a force of nature.
I stare at his paintings - a snowed opening in the woods, a village lost in the undulations of Ukrainian open spaces - and recognise a longing, a catch in my throat. These landscapes are not only familiar. They have a smell (**page 40**). They create a curious feeling deep inside me: It feels like their distinct points correspond perfectly with my inner image of what space outside me should feel like. I've been searching for those landscapes, for that tingle of recognition. I believe that some landscape has been imprinted on me, and I'm looking for it, with the hope that if I can't control what my memories are and whose they are, I can trust

7 Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 43.

this primal imprinting: my brain moulded into an inner landscape that is a reflection of an actual, physical one that makes me feel safe, but also an imprint of any and all parts that make me into what I am.[8] Perhaps there's a single slot in my identity machine: Like baby ducks that imprint on a single face, I imprinted on a single place and then spend my life forever tethered to it with an umbilical cord made of memories, nostalgia, a need to belong. I'm not giving up. With this place lost in the depths of time and across borders, I dig deeper at the intersection of place, memory, and identity. Place can be seen as "an external fundus of memory."[9] How I understand this is that we morph and are morphed by the landscape we inhabit, our memory taking form from the landscape, and simultaneously bestowing meaning to something that wasn't there before: the "landscape." But can this external landscape give me the meaning back? I want it to shine light on my internal world, for me to find the in-between world where the two come together. I start to feel that the questions I've been asking are leading me into a cul-de-sac. There must be a world of meanings where the external and internal come together, according to a different perspective. It literally feels like my thoughts need a change of scenery.

DISCOVERIES

In the end, I feel deflated – while finding a potential primordial landscape offers some respite from my exhausting quest, it still doesn't feel like a definitive answer. It doesn't change me. Having left my country of origin, finding myself with a new social identity – an immigrant – I struggle to find how this shift has affected my self-perception. Authentic bits from my past feel precious, nostalgic, and very likely misremembered or already altered beyond recognition

8 Nadia Lovell, Locality and Belonging (London: Routledge, 1998).

9 Charis Lengen, Christian Timm, and Thomas Kistemann, "Place Identity, Autobiographical Memory and Life Path Trajectories : The Development of a Place-time-Identity Model" Social Science & Medicine no. 227 (April 2019), 21.

by the passage of time and by movement through space. My meaning is created outside me – by a theoretical identity – and then narrated to me. Throughout this quest, I realise I've been looking for barriers and boundaries against which I can define myself (before and after, Greece and Ukraine), because "the physical and conceptual act of being outside or inside, of crossing borders, presents a challenge and an opportunity to create self and identity."[10] I search for who I was before I came to be who I am. In a therapy session (**page 2001**), my therapist talks about my "rupture" (**page 234**), my "me before I came to Greece, and the one I was after." Was I not the same person? I was definitely transformed by this experience – but what else is life, if not a constant transformation by experience? Would I feel "ruptured" if no one had told me I was? The answer comes to me, not like a page in the wind, a single artefact to grasp, but like the view from a mountaintop – it was already there, I just couldn't see it before. I know I cannot ignore my trauma, or my parents' trauma – but the narrative of me being "ruptured" actually tears me apart. I start to think that the tornado, the *vyhr'*, that threw me across the world, didn't leave me in pieces, it just landed me at the bottom of this mountain for me to climb. But now, from the top of this mountain, I can see it all: hidden memories, sealed places, the political implications of it all. Words sealed tight into bordered, strictly delineated meanings; these don't leave room for the expression of a collective individuality, a collective where each individuality does not divide but comes together. Two-dimensional words don't allow space for the three-dimensionality of individual experience. Judith Butler, in *Frames of War,* talks about how the political and the inner come together at the level of words, how interdependency is precluded by the meanings we use: "an ontology of discrete identity cannot yield the kinds of analytic vocabularies we need for thinking about global interdependency and

10 Ibid., 23.

the interlocking networks of power and position in contemporary life."[11] Words can divide, when they do not reflect the multidimensionality of the living world. Gabriele Schwab, in *Haunting Legacies,* takes Butler's words and brings them one step further, talking about the fact that "a theory of multidirectional, composite, and transferential memory is more attuned than an identitarian memory politics to such global interdependency."[12] Memory, identity, and words, all needing to be broken wide open in order to encompass more. Just as it's important to remember in a shared space, an inner space of shared experience and human memory, it's equally important to come up with new meanings to describe this collective inner landscape.
I don't know how to "come together" on my own. But I can look for new spaces where I can remember "together." Where I can exist "together," finding the knowledge I seem to crave in order to understand myself, in the collective experience of people. This almost obsessive, fetishistic perusal of my own story falls apart in my hands, like a loosely bound book. There's not enough here for me to make sense - there never will be, there can't be. My past is lost and is with me forever at the same time, just not in any comprehensive, word-ed way. I cannot describe it to myself, but maybe others have walked through their own inner landscape and shone light on different parts of it, ones forever obscured to me. If I allow myself to stop clinging to a guarded, bordered inner self and allow humanity to walk through it, into it, I can possibly, finally understand myself. If I open up my inner landscape to the world, letting go of notions of special landscapes and memories and stories, perhaps then I can become an encompassing whole, a *topos* of people instead of a person.
Oblaka[13] (Stella's story)

My teacher, my doctor, the bank teller stumble over the pronunciation of my last name.

11 Judith Butler, Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? (London: Verso Press, 2010), 31
12 Gabriele Schwab, Haunting Legacies (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 31.
13 Russian for clouds.

The piled up consonants force their tongues
onto untravelled paths inside their mouths.
The linguistic struggle seeks
relief with the question:

Where are you from?

The struggle is now mine.
I search for words that could explain.
A nice clear answer.
And then move on.
But my throat contracts.
My mouth feels dry.
No vowels, no consonants.
No answer is good enough.

At home, my sister and I engage in maths.
We carefully weigh our ancestry.
We measure each component of our ethnicity.
We divide by the percentages of our inheritance.
We add up the fractions of ourselves.

And the formula works. We finally have an answer!
We are half Greek (only half).
We are a quarter Russian (just a quarter).
We are a quarter German (a mere quarter).

But I keep on wondering.
Do a half and two quarters make a whole?

The question of my ethnic origin has always highlighted a discontinuity in my being. It implies that I am here, but not *from* here. It implies that I am here but only in part. It evokes the vocabulary we have associated with an immigrant's identity: displacement, relocation, and dividing borders. A vocabulary emphasising loss - loss of language, culture, and identity. This vocabulary fails me. Its words feel like knives on the continuous plane of my existence, trying to sever and split my being into pieces. There is a dissonance between my personal sense and the words available to me. Yet, words and personal

senses are highly interconnected. According to Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, the development of oneself occurs through an ongoing dialectical interplay with their environments – and more specifically, their culture and language. The consciousness of an individual's experiences emerges from the dialectical clash between their current understanding of an experience and the words that they are provided with. In this model, the words are not merely employed to express one's understanding of their thoughts, but they are offered as a means of creating that understanding, and realising their thoughts. In other words, thought cannot exist without the words that define it: "thought is born through words."[14] Through the words that I have been given to shape my identity, I grew to think of myself as split and severed, going through life with pieces of myself dislocated and displaced, lost somewhere behind uncrossable borders, lost in a time long, long ago. But, luckily, it has not been only words that I have been given. There have also been stories. Many stories about the different journeys of my family members' migrations. Stories, stretching into the past, several generations back. Stories stretching across the continents of Europe and Asia. Stories, speaking of displacement, exile, forced relocation, and nomadic life. Stories that speak of rupture, yet none of them a rupturing story. Hearing those stories, as a child, I used to feel at ease. I used to trace the journeys of my grandparents and parents on the map, drawing long paths that intertwined and crossed over each other.

It is those paths,
I'd think to myself.
It is those twisting, weaving,
crossing paths that made me.

These paths were made by many people but the story

14 Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. Eugenia Hanfmann, Gertrude Vakar, and Alex Kozulin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 270.

they narrate is mine alone. It is a story of what came before me, but also the story of what I am made of. And it is a story with no conclusion. Deeply embedded in the fabric of myself, its meaning twisted and stretched but essentially unchanged, this story narrates itself repeatedly in the now. To understand it better, I employ a lens that can unify my past with my present on a continuous plane. Vygotsky's term *perezhivanie* lends itself effectively to this.[15] Untranslatable into English, the Russian word's meaning can be rendered as the neologism meta-experience, or even better, re-experience. The term describes the psychological mechanism involved in the process of immediate interpretation of a lived experience: The new experience is processed and internalised through a dialectic interaction with the emotional and cognitive terrain of a person's inner world – a terrain made out of the past interactions of a person with their world and their projections of their future. In this term I find the lingering effect of my migration story in my present. I see it not as a concluded event, but as an internal landscape, created by and in my past, giving meaning to my present and shaping my view of the future.

It's not a place that I am from.
I think I am from a story.

Maybe I am a story.

A story is not here or there, nor now or then. It is my own and also of others. It lives somewhere in between, on a plane that transcends time, space, and individuality. Donald Winnicott painted the picture of a similar spatial dimension: "an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute."[16] Originally discussed as the space located between the infant's inner world and the external object of

15 Lev Vygotsky, "The Problem of the Environment," in *The Vygotsky Reader*, ed. Rene Van Der Veer and Jaan Valsiner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
16 Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

the mother, Winnicott's general term of *potential space* describes an aspect of a person's psychology that determines their sense of themselves and their world. In the mother-infant relationship, the responsiveness of the mother to the needs of the infant, that is, the supportive correlation of the infant's inner experience of their own needs with their experience of the external world, facilitates the creation of a potential space characterised by a sense of safety and security. The existence of this space, thus located between reality and fantasy, enables the infant to safely experience their true inner impulses. Yet, the shaping of one's potential space does not end in childhood. Winnicott suggests that the therapeutic relationship between a client and their psychotherapist can act formatively on their potential space.[17] His legacy has stretched this concept even further to include several human activities, such as spiritual practices and artistic creativity. Thomas Ogden proposes the concept of a dialectical synthesis as "a possible paradigm for the understanding of the form or mode of the psychological activity generating potential space."[18] Not unlike Vygotsky, Winnicott's perspective sees the formation of one's sense of self-awareness as the product of their inner experience with their external world and locates this sense on the plane of the potential space. I was just over two years old when we left Moscow. The day has survived in my memory in the form of a recurring dream, dreamt often throughout my childhood.

I look at the great mirror of our
building's entrance hallway.
In the reflection, I see my mother
holding me by the hand.
I see the street outside.

17 Donald Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (Milton, England: Routledge, 1984).

18 Thomas Ogden, "On Potential Space," in *The Winnicott Tradition: Lines of Development – Evolution of Theory and Practice over the Decades*, ed. Margaret Boyle Spelman and Frances Thomson-Salo (London: Karnac Books, 2015), 121.

I see the sky.
A spring Moscow sky.

My mother is looking anxiously at the street.
We're running late.
She pulls my hand – she pulls me out to the street.

But I am transfixed, looking at the mirror.
The form of an enormous cloud
materialises in the glass.
Its approaching has a sound – heavy,
hollow, thudding steps.
We're running late.

My mother pulls me out into the street and we run.
We turn around corners, onto new streets.
We're running away.
We're running out of time.
The odd cloud's steps are nearing.
Its gigantic form fills up the sky.
We run and run but we cannot outrun the clouds.

I think of home. Cloudless, skyless, safe home.
I want to go home.
But we are running away.
Away from home.

My dream stands as an image of a part of my potential space, formed by the internalisation of my immigration experience – its frightening aspect manifested, through my childish imagination, in the form of perilous weather. Yet, when sensing my inner world, it is not the insecurity that prevails. The experience's formative effect on my potential space seems to transcend the fear experienced in the moment, constructing, in contrast, a space of safety.

I am much older.
I am nine.
I am thirteen.
I am twenty-two.
I am thirty-five.
I am in the car, being driven away.

I love being driven.
I relax in the sensation of the car's
gentle gliding on the asphalt.
I quiet down watching houses, street
lights and forests flash by.
We are so fast.
And there's plenty of time.
I savour our ceaseless, passive movement forwards.
I imagine it lasting forever.

From the window I can see the clouds up in the sky.
They look like they are gliding along with us.
The clouds and I, in a perpetual movement forwards.
Giving me a sense of peace.
A sense of home.

This sense of home is what Winnicott describes when discussing one's capacity to be alone. In this state of pure relaxation, one "is able to become unintegrated, to flounder, to be in a state in which there is no orientation, to be able to exist for a time without being either a reactor to an external impingement or an active person with a direction of interest or movement."[19] In this state, one's whole existence is contained within their potential space. Immersed in the landscape of their own inner world, any impulse or sensation that emerges cannot but feel deeply personal and profoundly real. No words can describe better the satisfaction of the experience of being absorbed in one's own inner landscape than Winnicott's term: *ego orgasm*.
To reach this climax of the sensation of myself, I need to be submerged in a space that is not divided, but continuous. For, how can I experience my true self, how can I feel at ease within my inner landscape, when that is broken and divided, rigidly segregated into regions of ethnic identity, of past trauma and heavily bordered regions?

I am much older.

19 Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*, 33.

I am in the car, driving across Europe.

As I sit in my seat, the world
around me forms and deforms.

I see the land stretching on and on.
I see the smooth open fields explode
into dense, pathless forests.
I see the flat land undulating into green hills.
I see the hills rise to rocky
mountains towering over us.
I see the mountains slope into serene lakes.

I speed on motorways, past massive,
unrecognisable cities.
I slow down into single file country roads.
I merge back into the motorway.
I drive for days.
I drive through days.
From the window of my car, I see no borders.

I search for words to describe my inner landscape as a place that unites my past and present, my moments of trauma and moments of ego orgasm. Words that allow me to experience the sense of myself as continuous and constant, yet soft and flexible. I find such words in the mathematical realm of topology, "from which rigidity was long ago banished and only continuity holds sway. The land of topological transformations, which can bend-and-stretch-and-compress-and-distort-and-deform [...] but not tear or break."[20] I want to narrate my story with such words. A story of how the world twisted and bent to bring people from far away together. A story of how languages and cultures intertwined. A story of how time and space can stretch to fit all of me in it. A story of continuity and wholeness.

Where are you from?
Ah, well… It's a long story.

20 Ian Stewart, *Flatterland: Like Flatland, Only More So* (London: Macmillan, 2001), 89.

Cartof[21] (Alex's trip*-ing*)
I
My mother smokes.
She always did.
Many cigarettes,
Many packs of cigs,
Smoked away
Over the day.

A pack,
A new pack,
Started with a twirl of the plastic wrap.
Unwrapping the top of the pack
And her palm crinkling away that plastic wrap…

[As I write of this moment,]
[I find my mind]
[Swelling in the sounds]
[The smells]
[The here heres]
[Of this moment.]
[And I want to play.]
[But…]
[I'll leave that for another day…]

With a burning lit cigarette,
My mother would shift through the ash in the ashtray.
Swirling it round around
Side to side
Around side
Backside
Inside…
Ash to wonder in.
Ashes to wander with.

A way to connect to
Days that were over
Days that were away.
Over and away days
That are today days.

Today days percolate with away days

21 Romanian for potato.

Pulsing always with days
That are over and done
And yet undone.

You see…
As my mother smoked away those cigarettes,
I understood,
I learned,
That those days,
Those undone days
Live today.

My mother smokes.
Everyday
All day All days.
You'll find her smoking even todaydays.

There she is
In the kitchen
On the far end of the table
Near the window
Twirling those wraps
Baking those tips
Shifting that ash
Smoking away days…
Smoking *awaydays* into *todaydays*
twirlingbakingshifting days

III

Why do you write like that? Latour asks Serres.
You start in one place, and end up in another.
Why do you write in such disconnected ways?
Some would say your writing is poetry.
I don't find any offence in that.
Well, some would dismiss your writing
as simply creative writing.
Negating your writing as playful
embellishments and not knowledge.[22]

22 Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time: Michel Serres Interviewed by Bruno Latour*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

My writing is not linear. It is not flat. There are no borders to defend in my writing.[23] Rather there are spaces, times to fold into. Spaces and times to unfold and to knead. Poetry, creative writing, helps us access knowledge hidden or tucked in. Words, the rhythm of these words, the space of these words - what I mean is the writing of these words can help twist, bend static symbols to more than their indications. Writing words can bring out more meaning in words. Poetry, creative writing, I would call it *performative writing*,[24] can reveal what is in-between a symbol, a word. That line in the ground, a border, can simply be understood as an indication of separation. Separating Romania-Yugoslavia, mine-yours, before-after, lost-found. Its flatness helps us stand or under*stand*, but it does hide the complexity of what is in between that line. Not in between the points of the line - No. I am speaking of an expansive, flexible space *in* that line. A *width-ening* of the line. What is gathered in the width of that line? What complexity of relations does this line hide? What complexity of relations does this line hold? As I fold into, tuck into that line, I access the life in that line. The understanding of that line in the ground shifts with writing. My understanding of that line no longer lies flat under my feet, but rather fills my mouth with soil. That line, with all those critters living in it,[25] with all that time living in it,[26] is a space that nourishes thoughts, minds, hearts, identities. When I communicate, when I write, according to Serres, I am engaging with time. Sharing is time. As Carlo Rovelli[27] so poignantly explains, time is not constrained to the ticks of a clock. These ticks are a way we have found to measure time, but time is beyond a measurement. It would be similar to making sense of a living organism by

23 Ibid.
24 Ronald Pelias, *The Creative Qualitative Researcher: Writing That Makes Readers Want to Read* (London: Routledge, 2019).
25 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
26 Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
27 Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time*, trans. Erica Segre and Simon Carnell (Harlow, England: Penguin Books, 2019).

simply connecting with the measurement of weight or mass. Time is an event and communicating is eventful.[28] Through this engagement with time, these channels, tunnels, passages to other space*times* are accessed. When I write/speak of the*Granița*Border, I am in time and I am passing into space, spaces.

This is why Serres writes in such disconnected ways.
This is why I write disconnected.
This is not a story that conquers. This is not a story that flattens. This is a story that shifts roundaround. A story that nourishes. That gathers, grows, and complicates.[29]
that line no longer lies flat under my feet,
but rather fills my mouth with soil.

II

A pack.
A new pack,
Started with a twirl of the plastic wrap.
Unwrapping the top of the pack
And her palm crinkling away that plastic wrap…
A lift of the lid
And you would hear
A slip
or a slid.
A lid slid.
And then
A snatch
And a catch
At that foil flap.
A pluck
To reveal what's tucked
Inside-
Cigarette tops
Packed-in
Side by inside
With a smell
Packed-in

28 Serres, *The Parasite; Michel Serres, Variations on the Body*, trans. Randolph Burks (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2012).
29 Ursula Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (London: Ignota Books, 2019).

Tucked-inside as well.
A swell of
Mmmmm…. what a smell…
A final pluck
With a cig slid
And a tuck into
A lip-press-pucker-lip.
Then a click of a light
Do you have a light?
A click
To light
The tip.
And with that cig tip lit,
Mmmmm… what a smell!
Another swell of a smell.
A burning cig tip,
A tuck in
Correction – A suck in,
And it bakes...
 Burning warm, burning red.
The cig tip bakes
Baking…
Baking…
And a memory swells.

IV

I search for words. I've been searching for words since I was a child. Struggling with reading since the beginning, I remember sitting in class searching for the words that I couldn't read. Searching so that I could sound them out before it was my time to read out loud to the class. In a defining moment of this search, I remember standing in front of the class, where Mrs. Arnold had summoned me to stand and search for the word "drum" in the text we were reading. An act to shame, an act to illiter-*ate*, an act to somehow prove I was not doing my work… I don't know. And, I didn't know. I didn't know what I was looking for. I didn't know if it started with "d," or "'j," or "gd." Was it an "a" vowel or "u," maybe an "o," and sometimes "y."
No matter how hard I looked, no matter how hard

my eyes pressedforcedinto the letters on that page, I couldn't find that word. And, I remember, I remember returning to my desk feeling *bad*. What I understood then, was that I was feeling my *dumbness*. I have this distinct feeling of recognising this empty space in my mind in me that was my dumbness, my stupidness… my incompleteness.
When I didn't know the words.
When I didn't understand the language.
When I couldn't get what people were talking about,
This empty space in me would be felt.
A rere-knowing that…I don't know.
I can't know.
I am not from here so…
I won't know.
Ever.
A landscape that is inaccessible. Flat.
Distant. Away. Out of reach.
And, yet, inside me.

III

And I sit
On the other end of the table
Watching her
Wondering about where she is

Mami, what are you thinking of?

Shifting in the ash,
Staring away
She lets out

Potatoes

Potatoes?

I'm thinking about cooking a tocăniță today.
Go and check, how many potatoes are there...

Rushing – because I LIKE being helpful – I check in the basket under the sink.
One.

Only one.

Mami, we only have one, Mami.

Tocănița is a stew made with potatoes or rather made *of* potatoes. You boil the potatoes until they begin to melt away, making a thick, chunky stewiness of a stew. It is starchy - comfy - homey - - You need a sack of potatoes for tocănița.

We can't make tocănița with just one potato, Mami.

A shift, a stare.

One… Only one…. Hmmm.

I can go! I can ***run****rush to the store.*
I'll get a ***bag****sack of potatoes.*
So MANY potatoes we'll make the best tocănița EVER!

Shifting round
Swirling roundround

No…Leave it, leave it. We make it with one. Only one.

Mami! But I can go. I can go outside. I'm fine -
It's just down the street. I'll ***run****rush****rush*** *and*
be back in five minutes - FOUR minutes! TIME ME!

No leave it… It bad out there. Look… the wind. It winding cold. Just... stay. Stay here. Stay home.

Shifting swirling
Baking burning
Smoking
Mmmmm…. what a smell

Don't worry. It nothing to worry.
One potato is enough for us.
We make it with one. Only one.

These todaydays were days that were better to just stay in. *Leave it. Don't trouble yourself with going out.* Out there.. Away… It was a slow day. A lost day. A day to lose time - to loosen time. Days that felt suffocating give me space yet safe. Days that made you crave for a space a weird space. An inside-outside space. A behind space. *I want to jump into that space at the back of kitchen cupboards. space* My mother was never nervous with her smoking. There was always time given. Time being created. Time being given its time when she smoked. No *run**rushing* - *tapping - fidgeting - No leg shaking ticking ticks.* None of that. Instead… a stare, a shift, a swirling with time. A loose time which for my mother was a time to lose, to loss, to let loose. A todayday of awaydays to loselossloosenlost.

IIX(

I search for words. I search for words I don't have. Words that exist somewhere between language, between languages. Words that exist between us, between I. And I search for words that don't exist at all, knowing only that the words I do have just don't hit the spot. So…
I write.
I write a word.
I write at the word,
Write into it.
I scratch at the word. Not at the meaning, but at the feeling.

I write about what *happened*. And in scratching at it, I feel something in my belly *happening*. And I find that in between these words is where *Mmmmm…* the scratch hits the spot. I now write of a *happened**happening*. Words that don't make sense. Words that don't fit. Lost words. Missing words. Words that speak of not being from here. *It winding cold.* These words, the writing of words that don't exist, is at times ignorant writing, illiterate writing, and at other times poetic writing, lyrical writing. In searching for words that I don't know,

I sense the fear of being called out: *Stupid, Foreigner, Can't you read! What's wrong with you? Speak English!* In searching for words that I don't know, I can fall into the disempowerment of the words I speak, of the language I do have. Stuck with sounding out words, fitting myself into them, spelling them correctly, is not working from that *potential space*.[30] It is getting lost outside of myself. It is letting go of mespace. And, in holding on to Serres, in losing words, speech, I lose time; time being the eventful happening of life that connects us, connects space, connects life. I lose that which *kneads* us.
V//

My mom ran across the *Border*. *Mama a fugit Granița.* *The border* being the one between Romania and Yugoslavia. I never understood the *Granița* Border, to be a line, a boundary that separated two countries. Rather it was a space, a whole space with an up and down, with a length, width, and depth. A whole, full space that was roundaround me. I knew the *Granița* Border as a space where something happened. A dimension of understanding which when taking in the landscape of the *Granița* Border is lost. Similar to when one finds the *Granița* Border on a map, the depth of this space is lost. I remember (or maybe I don't remember) a larger-than-life map in my third-grade classroom. I can feel my fingernail scratching at this line on the map between Romania and Yugoslavia. Picking at it - Digging into it to reveal something that the map does not show. A space where something still happens. Inside that flat line, inside that flat landscape, this passage that happened is happening - a *happened**happening*. Now, right now, I find myself handing over my passport to the border agent and I feel something in my belly shifting. Now, right now, I walk up to the UK Border Force desk at Edinburgh Airport and my belly is churning. Now, right now, I scan my passport at the e-Gate at JFK and my belly is twisting. Now, right now, I am driving. Driving across the

30 Winnicott, Playing and Reality.

border, that border - - the *Granița* Border. I roll my window down and hand the border police officer my passport. Glancing down at my passport, then staring off towards the cars waiting behind us, the officer asks, *Ce zice aici? What does it say here?* Showing me my passport, with the officer's finger indicating Place of birth I read out loud - *Brooklyn.*
Inspecting my Romanian passport, the officer asks, *Cum este posibil? How is that possible?* I feel something in my belly shifting, churning, twisting. I grab onto it. I respond to the officer, *Mama a fugit Granița.* Seeing me grab at my belly the officer asks, *Ce ai în mână? What do you have in your hand?*
Nimic. Nothing.
I lift my arm up and away to show,
N'am nimic. I have nothing.
And yet there -
Here-
In my lap,
I find resting against my belly a... *Potato.*
One…. only one.
I fold into it, lean into it,
grab at it, and hold it.
I look up and I am *inside* that
landscape of the *Granița* Border.
Me with two others hunch behindinside a bush.
We sit near each other.
We sit on top of each other.
nearontop *inside* eachanother
And this potato in my lap,
This one potato is for us on this passage.
As the potato passes roundaround
Kneading between us,
Kneading us,
We bite into the potato.
And with it raw,
Each bite *cracks*.
Each bitecrack tastes of dirt.
Each bitecrack fills our mouth with soil.
Each bitecrack smells…
Smells of the ground.
And, *Mmmmm… what a smell!*
I am here.

I am hidden. *Each bitecrack hereheres us.*
I am nourished.
Don't go out. It winding cold. Stay.
This one, only one potato is enough for us.

Again, staring off towards the
cars waiting behind us,
The border police officer hands me back my passport,
And lets out,
Ce noroc.
I take back my passport
And I drive away.

I repeat his words,
Out loud, but in a whisper,
Ce noroc.
My partner, in the passenger seat asks,
What's that?
I repeat it louder.
Ce noroc.
The officer said "Ce noroc."
What does that mean?
What luck.
Or… How lucky.

that line no longer lies flat under my feet,
but rather fills my mouth with soil.

X?V

Somehow, somewhere
In writing
I found that drum
And it reminded me of being dumb
And now I write of a drumdumb.
A drumdumb
Is a space where
dumbs and dambs
dombs and doombs
Come out to play.
An empty space

Inside me
Wherewhere
Somewhere I can play.
An empty space that I can be lost in,
Because I'm okay… I'm okay… I'm okay
I'm okay being lost.
Those days my head is hitting the
glass window of the taxi
Those days I am in the car, being driven away
Those days I am smoking todaydays into awaydays
Are all days I'm okay to sit…
And be lost.
loselossloosenlost times

Through these passages, these journeys, I am understanding my capacity to be lost. My capacity to get lost and still hold on to mespace. A capacity that opens an empty space, landscape, an *emptyscape* within me to create in. A shift from a loss in me, to a capacity in me to lose myself. When one is lost, really lost, the first thing one does is "roll our eyes up"[31] and away from the static image in front of us. One goes inward, tuning into one's sensational self our fleshy self to register the quality of where one is. It is in this mespace that the outside space loses its boundaries. In this lost space, space becomes eventful. Space becomes something in time and one needs their flesh to flesh it out.[32]

When we are lost,
We pull our eyes from the flat map in front of us,
We pull our eyes away from the letters on the page,
And let our head fall back,
Our eyes roll up,
And our mespace
stretchestucksfoldskneads into
A *drumdumb*
A *happenedhappening*
A *widthening*
A scratch that *Mmmmmm….* hits the stop.

31 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 184.
32 Ibid.

My eyes roll back,
My head follows,
I fall into me.
And I feel alive
Because I've arrived.

Afterwor(l)ds

As we sit around the table, theorising about our identities and inner landscapes, I imagine us as three transparent bubbles that provide windows into a continuous, shared, endless space - an imagined inner landscape, a shared potential space that morphs and transforms, mirrored back to us as our separate gazes focus on different parts. Our stories intertwine in an eternal dance, forming a collective "We" that is greater than the sum of its "I"s. Yet despite the interweaving, our stories are not fused. They retain their individuality, anchored to the complexities of each "I." In the doughy meaning that we are kneading, they leave room for gaps - spaces where interpretation and significance reside. These gaps serve as an antidote to marginalising the reader's personal experience.[33] They invite in additional narratives, creating room for other "I"s to contribute their unique intersectional complexities. They become blanks, waiting to be filled by the distinct felt sense of each reader's experience. By preserving the separation of our stories and honouring the emptiness in between, we allow for the "We" of the authors to expand and envelop the reader. This inclusive approach forsters a shared sense of belonging, inviting the reader to become part of the collective tapestry - this interconnected we-space - woven from our shared experiences. It also embodies the topological essence of our understanding of inner space and time, as well as the intricate interplay between personal and shared experiences. In this light, the multiplicity of our migratory experiences becomes timeless, transcending the individual boundaries, and proclaims our demand: the need to articulate our immigration narratives using a vocabulary that captures not only the rupturing nature of our geographical displacement, but also the enduring continuity of our shared inner experience of life.

33 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991).

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Contemporary urbanist practice suggests experiential immersion in the landscape belongs in its role as the privileged mode of spatial knowledge production in prefigural design phases. The ways in which these immersive transects and treks build from experience to spatial knowledge is unclear, however, particularly when the urbanist field appears just as open to economists as to architects. In this article, I question my early practice as poet-urbanist, asking how the lyric mode can be read as an approach to understanding landscape experience. In so doing, I am confronted by the notion of event, as the space/time of encounter in which the poetics of relation evolve in my territorial knowledge, but filtered through an understanding of lyric affordance and the rapprochement of the environment via the animating device of address.

address, encounter, event, experience, landscape, lyric, poetics, relation, urbanism.

INVERTED ADDRESS: LYRIC EXPERIENCE IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

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I begin on Sunday at Stockbridge Market. People are queueing up for pastries and hot drinks. Nearby, a boy is tempted to touch the dead pheasants hanging at the entry to the market. I am thanking the two poets I've just met for coffee, Anne-Laure and Tessa, and preparing to head off in the direction of The Walkway. I hope to make the most of the fading afternoon, following the river to its mouth along a path I've never taken before, to see things I've never seen before, and feel what I haven't felt before. The sun is strong, but so is the wind, and the short days of late November have been catching me off guard, so I walk briskly to build up some heat and reach the Water of Leith before I lose the daylight. It doesn't take long before I am riverside, moving toward the port, cold but still catching a little of the enchantment as the afternoon softens into an early twilight, and the riparian flora take on forms and hues that evoke the territory of dream.

Later, though, I have almost nothing to report, not to myself or anyone else. I can say I had a

pleasant walk, if a bit twee, and even though I probably checked my phone too often, or tried to take too many pictures, or caught myself wishing I'd indulged in another coffee before setting out, how can I admit that, at least until the Port of Leith itself, I could feel the weight of a mild disappointment accompanying me? That my route remains vague in my mind even if I can recall various points along the way? That in truth, The Walkway, its atmospheres and congress, touched but did not mark me? Except for maybe during a moment in one low road, where path gave way to pavement, and alongside blank brick homes a massive steel floodgate stood open, painted with a giant, childish flower. I took no pictures of it, but it's still the case that within me this gate opens and opens.

If I am honest, I set out with a bundle of expectations that would always have been difficult to satisfy and are almost as hazardous to articulate now. It was not simply a case of expecting to be impressed, enchanted, or struck by the sublime. I went without a brief but intending to immerse myself in the landscape of the Water of Leith in order to learn something ineffable and immanent about it, while I was also in the process of fashioning myself into a new role as a poet-urbanist in the making.

I was already a poet, but after several years of teaching at a school of architecture in France, I had finally allowed myself to acknowledge a growing interest in urbanism, and a desire to bridge the indeterminate gap between literary activity and spatial practice. On one hand, I had noticed that there were architect-urbanists, economist-urbanists, ecologist-urbanists, and so on, but I had yet to meet an urbanist who deliberately inflected their work in the posture of a poet. On the other hand, I had an intuition about a potential shared field of action between spatial design disciplines like urbanism and contemporary poetics centred on situated, embodied, and material practices. So, holding past experiences in mind, I went to *faire du*

terrain,[1] as I had learned to say amongst colleagues.

In urbanist practice today, we can almost take for granted this notion that immersion in territorial realities produces new knowledge as the urbanist is given to encounter not (just) the city of state chronicle or as officially sponsored by the tourism board, but rather the heterogeneous, multitudinous assemblages that live beyond synopsis. This commitment has been so normalized or naturalized that we expect a luminary like Paola Viganò to forgo following the established lines of cartographers – whether human-generated or machine-automated – choosing instead to make her own maps and models when exploring project scenarios for Greater Geneva, for example, in order to stage the possibility for fresh encounters with the territory.[2] If we combine this established posture with recent renewed interest in various and sundry walking practices, whether in the footsteps of Francisco Carreri and Stalker Collective, inscribing the landscape with a kind of proto-architecture of crossings,[3] or pursuing more performative and interrogative ambulations with contemporary artists like Elena Biserna,[4] urbanism would seem secure in its story of situatedness and embodiment. As Orfina Fatigato recently said, referring to a dedicated colleague, everyone appears to be "an urbanist of the foot."[5]

And yet I ask myself, given such a broadly adopted posture, what differentiates current urbanist practices from one another? This is a way of asking what kind of urbanist I am or want to be. A practicing poet for over two decades, *cittadino* and

1 A translation according to Saint Jerome would probably carry a spirit of "going into the field" and "doing fieldwork," but the peculiar French way of lettering how we will "do/make some terrain" speaks to a continental understanding of the constructed character of landscape, even before reflections on the anthropogenic contours of European cities.
2 Paola Viganò, "Du sol et du travail: La transition, un nouveau projet biopolitique," *Fondation Braillard Architectes*, 13 October 2020, YouTube Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeRdVToU5kY.
3 Francisco Carreri, *Walkscapes: Walking as aesthetic practice*, 2nd ed., trans. Stephen Piccolo (Middleton, WI: Culicidae Architectural Press, 2018).
4 Elena Biserna, *Walking from Scores* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2022).
5 Orfina Fatigato, Personal remarks in the presence of the author, October 27, 2022.

committed pedestrian, I should be at home in European urbanism, with its penchant for trekking and spatial semantics. To stage the context for contemporary urbanist practice, Bernardo Secchi writes of the "immense archive of material signs" spread over the majority of the planet and suggests an urbanism not only of reading these signs, of reading the palimpsest as theorized by André Corboz, but which "acquires meaning within a narrative," while finding agency precisely in the figures which cross the space between discursive practices and concrete spatial interventions.[6] This, it seems, would be fertile ground to walk as a poet-urbanist, working through the archives, peeling back the sheaves and layers of meaning, so as to find space in which to write new figures and add to the accumulation of signs. Secchi himself would be a good model as thinker-writer-designer - as urbanist - with his methods of sectioning the city on foot to discover new or renewed notions of urbanity such as a porosity, for example, manifesting in work today under the sign of (a) Greater Paris. It helps, then, that I have had experiences which seem to rhyme with this culture of urbanism, even if they had no relation to the operational dimensions of the discipline.

Eight years earlier, still in Edinburgh, but further east, Tom and I cross through an opening in a chain-link fence, leaving the service road behind us to walk a dirt path along a low wall, tracing a way between the bay and a waste management facility. We are headed to Portobello under an unusually bright January sky. Suddenly, as we turn a corner, up looms a white spherical structure, massive and windowless, two skips and a somersault from the water, tucked safely behind another fence laced with razor wire, vaguely lunar as it reflects the pale sunlight on us. I stop to take a picture but cannot capture it in a way that satisfies me. I take another and another, but nothing seems adequate to its uncanny grandeur. We will continue to walk - I

6 Bernardo Secchi, *Première leçon d'urbanisme* (2006; repr., Marseille: Editions Paranthèses, 2006/2011), 14-19. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.

am full of ideas and theories, riffing at Tom as we go - and we will reach the beach and the boardwalk, laughing at ourselves and the small dogs struggling happily in the sand. I cannot remember much of the journey, though, or I want to say I have now little remnant experience of it overall, not beyond an elusive feeling of gratitude to a friend and a place. In other words, I am left without much for the makings of story. If I do maintain a strong feeling of relation to that specific landscape, then, and I do, it is in the way it is drawn as if by gravitational force into and around the grassy space at the foot of the great sphere I could not capture in image or dislodge from my imagination.

The sphere appeared to me that day as an event. At the edge of a city I had only ever known for its tightly packed, storied core, I encountered an entirely new object, unexpected and untold, reopening previously established conceptual maps in an ambiguous expanse between the city port and the town beach, where the water of the bay and the waters of the waste management facility came - I want to say - dangerously close to one another, and where the sky played on our faces as a reflection that had been for me, until that moment, impossible. I say *event* because - even as it seemed an echo of the forms of the architecture of astronomical observatories, geodesic domes, golf balls, amusement park pavilions - something singular in the experience worked as a pivot in my understanding of the temporal and spatial fields which make up the city. The place could not have existed for me before, but now, in an urban fabric of national galleries, royal palace complexes, parliamentary seats, royal botanical gardens, castles, cathedrals, universities, bookshops, pubs, playhouses, cinemas, stadiums, supermarkets, chemists, bookies, and flats, there is a place for the well-tooled smoothness of the sphere and its pull as much on the water as on the long stretches of dull grey road as on me.

Drawing from Alain Badiou, I choose to refer to event and not landmark, to signal a marker more

radical than a mere distinguishing feature on the horizon, something more like the experience of a rupture in the very notion of a landscape. For Badiou, the event is “something that brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable,” not as “the creation of a reality,” but as “the creation of a possibility.”[7] In my case, the landscape that I had known prior to the event was finite, closed, and circumscribed by an image of the city that had failed to renew itself in my imagination. The possibility of a landscape that continues to open onto new forms and improbable structures could only be reached through some kind of break with the fixed image, not just to add something missing to the former picture, but to render the prior vision totally new through the break. Badiou was, of course, concerned as a philosopher primarily with the definition of a radical political event, and offered a mathematically restrictive account of what was, in his view, the rarity of such events. In that sense, it is hard to believe he would have much interest in my encounter with an unexpected sphere or in my understanding of a particular landscape. At the same time, his own description of the event points to a moment and space where the given situation is upended by the appearance of what in the situation itself previously seemed impossible or, in some cases, did not *seem* anything at all for want of being able to appear. It may be that such a description lends itself readily to thinking about the master narratives of state power and the appearance of previously unthinkable radical movements at odds with that power, but I am particularly interested in Badiou’s thought when we think across other scales. By transposing his understanding of event into a language of landscape poetics, I begin to see how, in the field between embodied urbanist experience and the dominant - most often narrative and imposed - imaginaries, space opens up for new possibilities to emerge from the territory. The urbanist, in this case guided by a friend, drifts away from the established path - be it a Royal Mile or a Leith Walk - to discover an expanse of endemic grasses, rough concrete, utilitarian fencing, technical facilities, and an uncelebrated stretch of water, all given the potential for new meaning in a moment of encounter. In my case, the scale of my encounter with the sphere - I now believe it to be a digester, diligently staging anaerobic metabolisms to create methane-based energy from our excrement - was rather small, especially in terms of its consequences, but this relative lack of significance in global terms would never be able to make it wholly inert.

7 Alain Badiou and Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 9.

* * *

I arrive now, a few years still further back, this time in eastern France, at the point where and when I meet the heron. It may be the fifteenth or the fiftieth time in which I meet this particular bird, I cannot be sure, but there are always reverberations from the first meeting. In a narrow, wooded valley, flanked on one side by a heavily used motorway and the old city fortifications on the other, I stop my bicycle beneath an underpass to greet the heron standing near the opposite bank of a river that should have long ago lost its vocation as a moat. With water rushing below, the sound of motor traffic overhead, the scent of mud and petrol fumes, and the heron stock still in the act of hunting, I am caught fully in the moment, in total rupture with the life of duty that has brought me to this point - in time, in space - placed at the lip of the incongruence between this place and the historic centre of a European capital, less than a kilometre away. As begins to seem usual, I am standing in a gap, a residual space between infrastructures, discovering what grows there, spun off my prior axis by one of the figures I have met. This time it is not architecture but the heron, not a sign but a non-human actor, another - an Other - life shaping this territory in the furious energy of its pose, that tears into my understanding, bringing me to sense how the edges of a city are not necessarily at

its farthest extremities, but can also be held deep within, like the vestigial folds of a bodily organ.

It is becoming more difficult to say exactly how I came this way, by what route. As a researcher walking the walled-off perimeter of a decommissioned industrial zone west of Naples, slowly growing back green and red and purple despite the metals and other chemicals polluting the soil? As a master's student skipping a home football game to photograph the immobile lock and dam across the Black Warrior River? As a child tracing a line of abandoned service rails running through the woods behind his neighbourhood and then behind the shopping plazas and then out toward the city limits in a Hudson Valley town left stripped of industry? As a recent college graduate paddling in a canoe through the oily water of the Gowanus to test planting sea grass against sludge? As a guest following the canals on foot from Delft to the sea, to see what really lies in the lowlands? As an immigrant cycling between factories to reach the Franco-German border, startled at one instant by the deep tang of malt on the air? Residual space, urban infrastructure, pollution and both the human and non-human lives resisting it, and, frequently, water: there are particular textures to the conditions that trigger my perception of a landscape and to the kinds of experience they produce. I think of these experiences as lyric, in that in their becoming, they reframe a world and its possibilities through the production of new relationality.

In literature, the lyric is most often equated with the musical, which is also a frequent proxy for the beautiful, and even the pathetic, for reasons that are roughly as historical as they are wishful.[8] *Lyric* comes from *lyre*, the harp-like stringed instrument that accompanied the singing poets of ancient Greece. Among several contenders, one popularly held origin myth for Western notions of lyric poetry,

8 For a thorough presentation of modern and contemporary accounts of the lyric in literary *criticism see The Lyric Theory Reader:* A Critical Anthology, eds. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 1-5, 114-15.

the figure of the bard Orpheus, connects us to a tradition, a pathos, and also the musical instrument. He appears in sources as varied as Pindar's odes, Aristophanes' comedies, and Plato's dialogues, but in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we see the singer, overcome by grief, strum his lyre, and succeed in gathering not just an assembly of wild animals but also a new grove of trees around him, each individual moved emotionally and spatially by his song.[9] In this myth, we can see the figure of the poet as the one with the power to move the world with the emotive musicality of language, and to create new forms – in this case, the grove – within the forest of signs. While there are other arguments for the origins of lyric, it is particularly tempting to find a model for the poet-urbanist in such an Orphic perspective, shaping the landscape through the imagery of a text, bridging the discursive and the material with song. Due to my own predilections, I also cannot totally ignore Orpheus's encampment on the banks of the Styx, his residence at the periphery of the land of the dead. The lyric cannot or should not be reduced, however, to its musicality, its pathos, or both. As Jacques Rancière has already described with nuance, lyric poetry cannot be fully equated to music, since language carried to the extreme of musicality would simply be music itself, and a similar argument could be made for language carried to the limits of emotional expression.[10] Short of such extremes, though, and in the territory of poetics conventionally discussed in terms of modes of representation, it may still be worth asking what remains of the lyric if we look beyond the mere presence of aesthetics and pathos as generic criteria.[11]

9 See Book X: "When here the heaven-descended bard sat down and smote his sounding lyre, shade came to the place," Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Vol. II, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977/1989), 71.

10 Jacques Rancière, *La parole muette* (Paris: Editions Fayard / Pluriel, 2005).

11 Alternative but still traditional oppositions in the lyric are described as being between sound and sense ("a prolonged hesitation between sound and sense," Paul Valéry, cited in Gorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999], 109), or between melos and opsis (sound and image in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957]), but in relation to the Orphic myth, I am opting to call attention to the plaintive character of lyric in popular reception.

In *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler shines a light on the finer difficulties of what may initially seem to be of a mostly disciplinary nature when it comes to the study of genre and a definition of lyric poetry. A literary critic can easily fall into dogma when taking up either a too-essentialist or a too-sceptical position on the literary value of the study of literary genres, and potentially miss how “a broad conception of lyric as genre” can provide the capacity to “enlarge the possibilities of reading and engagement.”[12] Culler guides us instead toward a more flexible understanding of the lyric genre(s), in order to avoid the *mise-en-abyme* of generic definitions and rather to allow a group of tendencies to emerge. In other words, he invites us to make strategic use of the generic frame, without absolutist commitment, to the benefit of relationships to be observed or even induced across a diversity of texts considered to be lyric. This is where Culler’s own project on the lyric began, from an early observation of and “fascination with lyrics’ strange way of addressing time, winds, urns, trees, or the dead.”[13] This fascination led to a foundational essay on the figure of apostrophe – where the lyric speaker addresses anything that could not be expected to answer in conventional logical terms – and a career-defining break with the dominant schools of literary criticism that had trained him.[14] In his advocacy for a reading of the lyric across historical periods and cultural geographies to allow for tendencies to emerge, the problem gains contemporaneity as we ask not what lyric is, but what can it do, what can we do with it, and what affordances it brings. I understand these to be questions of the strategic arrangement of specific conditions of possibility for creative action that we gather under the heading of the lyric – in other words, I consider the problem

12 Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 90.
13 Culler, vii.
14 Any dispute with or disregard for Culler’s thinking on the basis of his long commitment to and prolific contributions to structuralist and post-structuralist theory are likely to overlook how much of the contemporary field of literary criticism owes its current formation to positions he has developed, both with and without collaborators.

to be modal. Within and beyond the written page, then, I ask what the modalities of the lyric can afford me in practice? It must be more than mere encounters with difference in the urban landscape, which would not be the special province of poets.

When Secchi and Viganò set out to gather and build narratives in Greater Paris based on rhetorical figures, they are engaging with a logic of persuasion, seeking to shift the discursive field at work in the play of actors so as to convince stakeholders to commit to spatial projects and the requisite interventions that would transform the city and territory.[15] These are urbanists as rhetors, as negotiators, as planners, whereas I believe the urbanist as poet would have to work in a different modal register, with a lyric approach that while maybe not permanently separated, for example, from the arenas of rhetoric – such a drastic schism could not be *real* – does operate primarily via other logics, that is, other poetics. In truth, I believe every “urbanist of the foot” is, at least at certain points in their practice, in pursuit of lyric experience, meeting their spheres and their herons, even if a more operational mode may follow. First, though, there is the moment of encounter, and the *mise-en-relation* (putting into relation) made possible through it, one that catches us in a dialectics of address.

* * *

On Via Bagnoli, two of my colleagues and I are tracing the edges of an aporia. The city fabric stretches northeast to our right, the industrial zone hidden behind a concrete wall to our left. On the right side of the street, my companions notice how small apartment blocks give way to villas built for the managerial class of the now defunct mills and factories. On the left, I follow the sliver of pavement at the foot of the wall, squeezing between the concrete and parked cars and scooters,

15 Jeremy Allan Hawkins, “From Narrative Objects to Poetic Practices: On Figurative Modes of Urbanism,” *Urban Planning* 7, no. 3 (2022): 430–39.

lines of oversized trash hoppers, abandoned junk, piles of discarded fruit crates. The wall is itself a kilometre-long palimpsest of graffiti art – signatures, declarations, warnings, invitations, invective, encomium. Three meters above me, planters placed on the top of the wall by former workers flash brightly with endemic plants flowering into late October. After walking for twenty minutes, I see a stand of trees rise suddenly a few metres behind the wall, hinting at processes invisible from the road. It is thirty years since the last factory shut down operations, but the site has been anything but inactive. From another vantage we will be able to look out on how the old industrial structures emerge from a verdant elsewhere, and never will I have seen a place on earth so evocative of "the Zone" in Tarkovsky's adaptation of *Stalker*. Now, though, I can only look on the life of the paint on the wall and the scree of ancient windshields in the road. I do not know what my colleagues are discussing on the other side of the street. Across from them, I appear as their uncanny reflection, walking the wall. All at once, I reach a point where I am struck by the sudden smell of the sea, still unseen though less than 200 metres away.

This time the event which triggers lyric experience is nothing so specific or contained as a geometric structure, nothing so concentrated in living as a heron poised in the stasis of the hunt. It starts before the Via Bagnoli and goes past the advent of the sea, though without any of the makings of story. The experience moves around a site, skips across certain spans of time, and holds up various figures as if etchings – a wall of graffiti, an expanse of polder vibrant with rust-coloured and magenta grasses, two chimneys breaking the horizon, a gate closed to the trees, empty fruit crates piled higher than I could reach even jumping. The event comes in the form of a multiple, a heterogenous array assembling loosely around a time and place, confronting me with its collapsing scales of magnitude and the countless dynamic components of an

urbanity some would call dormant or even dead. It is an encounter with the millions of plants and fungi growing despite soil too poisoned for even the most cynical of promotors to build sea-view condominiums. It is a meeting with a three-decade moratorium on nearly all human activity inside a given perimeter. A rendezvous with the material value of fencing.

Unlike narrative modes, which even in the most experimental forms must reckon with degrees of causal sequentiality, or expository modes, which are beholden to revealing an object in coherent frames, I understand lyric modes to specifically allow for the *rapprochement* of what would otherwise be distant, disparate, or even alien. This is the very structure of metaphor,[16] where dissimilar terms are brought together in a comparative couple, despite their apparent difference. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, reading across Paul Ricoeur and others, argues for the critical role of metaphor in architecture as a mediating device between cognition and material reality, loosening objects from their fixed denotations, and giving birth to new images in language, which in turn give way to an "increment to consciousness" and all the affordances that come with it.[17] In Bagnoli, I can take this plainly, to examine how bringing together the closure of steel manufacturing and the slow growth of a singular local ecotope can revive – enliven, reanimate, resurrect – what we understand and feel when we think of an "industrial park." But if metaphor powers much of what is found in lyric poetry, it has no special allegiance to the latter, and in truth, I want to understand the

16 As has been noted by an anonymous reviewer of this essay in an earlier form, the linguist Roman Jakobson made a strong critical distinction between the figures of metaphor (likeness) and metonymy (contiguity), specifically associating the former with the foundations of poetry, and the latter with the foundations of realistic prose. I prefer to avoid this particular opposition here, not to deny the pertinence of Jakobson's theory, but out of an interest, in the scope of this essay, in the lyric as it can be understood before the appearance of a rhetorical situation. See Roman Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," in *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*, eds. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 41-48.

17 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016) 183-86.

moments of rapprochement before lyric formation is given either provisional or enduring shape. In other words, I want to better identify the lyric mode of experience itself, which in landscape would correlate to these encounters that draw us closer to what is outside of us and what make us receptive to affinities despite or even through alterity.

When Edouard Glissant proposes a "poetics of Relation," he does so in defence of a world of particulars in danger of being ground down into just another indistinguishable stretch of the absolute (in urban architecture, the blankness of Rem Koolhaas' assessments of context),[18] because any practice or thought that would efface the particular would be impermissive of alterity by default. In Glissant's formulation, this takes on special resonance in the material of language through monolingualism and the worlds of difference and therefore experience that are lost when languages such as French Creoles fade from existence. Differences act as conditions for experience in a poetics of relation, after all, since only the movement from and between positions of difference allows encounter with an Other that provides us anything like knowledge or consciousness. "Encountering the Other superactivates the poetic imagination and understanding," Glissant writes in a discussion of Victor Segalen that pre-emptively describes my own encounters in the peripheral city.[19] Faced with new life on the grounds of a dead factory, and with a heron silently stalking a noisy underpass, with a sphere reflecting the light of the sky as it digests human waste, or even with a gate painted gaily with a flower while it waits on flood - all this prior to the formation of any new linguistic material, let alone a metaphor - I am enlivened by the experience of relations previously unknown to me and the opening of new situated understandings of the city and the territory. I am not inspired - inspiration

18 Including, but not limited to his writing on "bigness" in Rem Koolhaas et al., *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau (London and New Yori: Monacelli Press, 1998).
19 Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) 29.

being the key to a passive poetics of waiting for it to happen *to* the poet - as much as jolted by the energy of differential relations put into play, in part due to my will to cross the territory. "Poetic thought safeguards the particular, since only the totality of truly secure particulars guarantees the energy of Diversity," Glissant explains or warns.[20]

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The energy of encounter can be thrilling, and if there is something I share with nearly every urbanist I have met, it is the pleasure taken in fieldwork, the desire to set out - if we do not all always set out exactly to err - and to meet the unexpected and the particular in the terrain. But like any thrill, it cheapens if only sought out for itself, and if Glissant argues that "the power to experience the shock of elsewhere is what distinguishes the poet," it is not to create a philosophy out of that singular shock, but to bring it into play within the deeper context of a *mise-en-relation*.[21] Meeting the heron, I am startled by the abrupt experience of difference that brings into relief the relation of particulars. From the jolt of my initial encounter, however, an event that disrupts my prior understanding of the landscape and its creatures, my imagination addresses not only my relation to this individual bird, but also with particulate pollution in the air, fluid dynamics in the river, bushes and trees and insects and rodents, paving stones laid by long-absent workers, the roots pushing them up or mud swallowing them down, my own awareness as a node of energy, my constantly networking mobile phone, my bicycle stood still, decaying leaves, a scrap of blue plastic. All these particulars come into play in a space just twenty metres square. But I must also readdress my understanding still further, beyond my focus on the heron, to where a hundred metres away men are cruising in ones or twos on the small trails flanking the main path, or where the drug users who also sometimes cruise often gather

20 Glissant, 32.
21 Glissant, 29-30.

in one lobe of parkland rising over the water, up a small slope, and tucked into a curve in the motorway like an oxbow lake. But also to the small tent city that has appeared with the winter thaw and following another shockwave of violence in Syria. And also to the people more regularly hidden behind the locked fences and closed hedgerows of a long, narrow strip of allotment gardens, planting their annuals and salad greens. And to the joggers sweating off last night's *fête*, or to the other cyclists cutting their own trajectories away from the major roads, and to the people in a small parking lot just out of sight, meeting driving instructors as they chase automotive licence. If I were to stop with the thrill of the heron, I might even forget the fish in the river, or the fact the bird is fishing for them. The *mise-en-relation* of the lyric experience of landscape should tend toward proliferation. This calls back also to Badiou, who argues against the significance of simply marking an event, noting "the entire effort lies in following the event's consequences, not in glorifying its occurrence."[22]

If there is a certain metonymic quality to how I represent these relations now - this lateral slide that might give an impression of continuity and contiguous space - it reminds me of how I could stake a claim for the lyric as a necessary component of descriptive urbanism, where the encounter with the territory is both subject and object of the descriptive act that would prefigure the territorial project. As Viganò reminds us, "every act of description is an attempt at logical restructuration of the world, proceeding through deconstructions, erasures, and highlighting," offering up new understandings upon which we can cast our vision onto possible futures.[23] In her case, this is specifically a way of challenging the traditional linearity of the analysis-design approach to urban and territorial projects, with

22 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 211.
23 Paola Viganò, *Territories of Urbanism: The Project as Knowledge Producer*, trans. Stephen Piccolo (Lausanne: EPFL Press: 2010/2016), 171.

a "hybrid space" opening "between description and project"[24] where the evocative image has the "capacity to structure the gaze that reads, and to already be design."[25] It would be tempting, even reassuring, to lash myself tightly to this position, to be able to say that, when I was a small boy following railroad tracks and looking for dead bodies, I was already pursuing the encounters which would allow me to design the territory. Perhaps.

Glissant writes, though, that the "poetics of Relation interweaves and no longer projects" and that "it inscribes itself in a circularity," which, if taken at face value, could question the sense of an urban or territorial project with an aim - however multi-actor, however multi-disciplinary - to transform spatial realities.[26] A more nuanced reading, though, suggests that "interweaving" still transforms space, but with an emphasis on the existing in lieu of a teleological product, and Viganò would surely agree with Glissant insomuch as even her most concrete spatial realizations can only be conceived of as temporary installations in the scheme of a never-ending dynamics of relation, not to overlook the social relations that are increasingly present as "project material" in her design work. But the lyric experience of landscape with which I am concerned is not simply a question of relating to the Other and then casting the gaze further, and then further still, to find and gather particulars to be woven. It is not any more intrinsically metonymic than it is metaphoric. Its logic or rather force of rapprochement requires no *a priori* structure to bring terms together across disparate positions in space and time. The heron, the industrial zone, the sphere, and the floodgate approach one another without a prior figure to encompass or hierarchise them.

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24 A reminder of Secchi's previously mentioned figures, which cross the space between discursive practices and concrete interventions.
25 Viganò, *Territories of Urbanism*, 162.
26 Glissant, 32.

In Ovids's retelling of the myth of Orpheus, the anthropocentric nature of the story, of the poet bending the world to his song, can distract from the ways in which Orpheus's words do contribute to a collapse in distance between species, a shortening of psycho-affective distance as plants, animals, and gods are moved by an expression of grief. Luckily, Culler analyses a more modest but perhaps even more generous example in ancient Greek lyricist Sappho's "Ode to Aphrodite," in which the poet invokes the goddess of love in order to request her intervention in an affair of the heart.[27] In both cases, the lyric displays an incredible power to summon into presence – at least of mind – through the device of address. Even when the so-called speaker of the poem is distinct from the poet, the vocation of the lyric to be voiced creates what Heather H. Yeung identifies as a "vocalic space" by positioning the voice in the body of that utterance, a space taken to its full extension when an address is formed to reach an otherwise alienated addressee.[28] In Sappho's "Ode," the address is capable of crossing the span between the banal corners of a thwarted love affair and the celestial realms of the gods. In spectacular fashion, the lyric invokes Aphrodite to such great effect that the goddess is made to answer: "Oh who is hurting you this time, Sappho?"[29] The vocalic space of the lyric reaches the heavens and welcomes Aphrodite into it, interweaving her with the voices of the poet and the reader.

Though my own sense of lyric experience may be drastically less divinatory, I see my encounters with alterity as being caught up in the rapprochement of address before metaphor. What surprises me, however, is that, unlike a lyric text where my voice may invoke and summon through the device, the lyric experience prior to writing seems to *invert* address, directing it instead back toward the poet. On the one hand, the event of initial encounter interpellates me – interpellation itself being a form of address – drawing me into relation, for example, with the sphere of the waste management facility; on the other hand, each new encounter appears to make a conduit of me to call out to other encounters, and call out to what I have previously known of the landscape, so that the heron not only comes into relation with the drug users up the hill or the renaissance architecture of the more distant historic city centre, but also with the red grasses of the Neapolitan industrial zone and the rails I followed as a restless child.

Discussing more-than-representational theories of landscape, Emma Waterton reminds us that we must "be prepared for landscapes to 'answer back'" as we take into account non-human and post-human agency, as we reckon fully with what embodied practice means and how it interacts with us.[30] This strikes me as critical to understanding lyric experience – not as a narrative thread with its causal sequence, but as a state of receptivity to the landscape's response, even if it is responding to an act as simple as the paying of attention. In myth, it answers back literally: The Maenads eventually tear Orpheus apart out of anger at the way he endlessly addresses the world around him with his grief. In practice, it can be a reflection of the light, a rushing of water, a rank smell, or just an extension of awareness from a previously unmarked point. Lyric experience of the city, the territory, or the landscape seems as much about listening, or, to use Pérez-Gómez's terms, *attunement*, as it would be about any lyric production that may follow in a projectual form. It is a question of receptivity to the address of the encounter with alterity that would open the poetics of relation to us.

And so, when I am following the Water of Leith on a bright day, alone, having left my friends behind, and find myself struggling along the

27 Culler, 10-16.
28 Heather H. Yeung, *Spatial Engagement with Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 67.
29 A playful paraphrase of Aphrodite's answer, available in a modified version of John Winkler's translation in Culler, 11-12.

30 Emma Waterton, "More-than-Representational Landscapes," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, 2nd ed., eds. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, Emma Waterton, and Mick Atha (London: Routledge, 2019), 96.

wooded slopes and soft brush growth of the banks, I feel the burden of disappointment, even low-level frustration at the apparent lack of event. Where is the encounter I am seeking? Where is the point in which I feel the approach of difference? A footbridge is quaint and practical and that is all. A statue partially emerging from the river doesn't speak, to no one's surprise. On the path everything is tidy and suggests maintenance; to the sides, nothing appears wild or untamed. I already feel too close to my fellow walkers, while at the same time we do not communicate even with gestures. Whatever the maps suggest, there is nothing residual here, this is no city edge. I take my phone out again and again, waiting for something or someone to reach out, framing images I am uncertain ever to use or even to keep. Am I the problem, am I not receptive to it all? Badiou writes that preparedness for the event "consists in being disposed to welcome it."[31] To welcome the event as a poet-urbanist would be, in Badiouian terms, to show fidelity to past events and dispose oneself to the appearance of an impossible address, one that would appear at the boundaries of a situation that could not see it, let alone admit it into the situation itself. It would be to open oneself to the possibility of a lyric experience to call into relation what had previously been unthinkable. On The Walkway, I cannot help but be frustrated at the order which seems to preclude any such thing. Until I come to a floodgate painted to bloom against the water when it rises, and there the verse appears to end in a kind of enjambment.

31 Badiou and Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event*, 12.

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The essay interweaves processes of pigment collection, and wanderings through landscapes together with cultural and geological backgrounds of earth pigments. The narrative unfolds through a vertical method of storytelling: Interrupting the horizontal storyline, at times the story freezes and drifts towards inner ponderings about the relations between alchemical methods of paint-making and the material origins of painting. Marked by cursive, the pigments gain an aura of individuality, shifting focus from the generalised meaning of colour towards pigment ontology.

materiality, earth pigments, pigment ontology, landscape(s), deep time.

WANDERING THROUGH LOST MEANINGS: OBSERVATIONS ON PIGMENT ONTOLOGY

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Research on Devonian ochres, 2023.

In the Belly of the Ochre Massif

In late autumn, E. and I visit the Ochre Conservatory.[1] After pacing around the perimeter of the grounds, we suddenly find ourselves on a French guided tour - the museum worker does not speak English. A group of elderly Frenchmen take turns asking who we are and what we are doing here. In broken French, E. tries to explain

1 *Ôkhra – écomusée de l'ocre*, Roussillon, Provence, France.

that I am a doctoral candidate in fine arts and the purpose of us coming here is to gather materials for research on local *ochres*.

As I enter the Conservatoire's Museum, I am greeted by the smell of dust and by walls painted in soft brown and red hues. Old shelves are filled with glass vials of various shapes and sizes; most of them have carefully calligraphed labels, already yellowed from age and dust. Among the blue pigments on the upper shelf there is a bottle of synthetic *YInMn blue,*[2] which oddly contrasts with the cohesive whole – the label printed in Calibri font and attached with adhesive tape seems out of context. On the floor, bags made of double-layered paper full of earth pigments are lined up, marked with stamps of the ochre factory, and referring to a location of export. A shelf of bottles, densely packed into a niche, is covered with a metal mesh; perhaps to prevent someone from disturbing the bottles or to prohibit a curious visitor from having the audacious idea of putting one in his pocket.

Each display glass case has French inscriptions: *couleurs artificiel, synthetique, animal, végétal, mineral.* My sight dissolves in the wide range of diverse colours; a blue cake of pure ultramarine is elegantly packaged in a box on which *bleu outremer* is emblazoned in golden script. Wax-sealed necks on the flasks keep the coloured dust from getting out. The cochineal beetles are capped with a glass stopper that prevents even the smallest insect leg from escaping. The resins of the binders, crystallised into irregular shapes, are labelled as *shellac, sandaraque, gomme arabique, gomme gutte, copal, dammar, jaoui, masticen.*[3] I feel an urge to touch the crystals and feel their texture; however, the cleanly wiped glass of the cabinet window reflects my impertinent thought.

2 The synthetic blue pigment was accidentally discovered in the University of Oregon lab by chemist Mas Subramanian and his student Andrew Smith while developing materials for electronics devices. The Shepherd Color Company, "YInMn Blue | Creating & Supplying Blue Pigments Globally," accessed December 27, 2022, https://www.shepherdcolor.com/yinmn-blue/.

3 Types of tree and shrub resins used for varnish production.

The worker at the conservatory continues to talk empathetically about the processes of ochre extraction: the cleaning, grinding, processing and purification mechanisms stretch across the entire conservatory grounds. I strain my ears to catch the sporadically comprehensible words. A couple of metre-deep basins were built for storing and drying the purified ochre. Sewers run through the courtyard to drain the filtered pigment into the pits separating sand from the pigment. The purified ochre settles at the bottom of the basin forming a layer around forty centimetres thick. Then the pigment is dried for several months before being cut into rectangular tiles.[4]

I wander around, reading the plaques affixed to the red-painted buildings scattered around the site. They tell the story of the complex process of extracting the ochre, perfected in the eighteenth century by Jean-Etienne Astier, a story consisting of the stages of sieving, washing, separating ochre particles, and drying. An important part of the process was the worker's sense of proper timing – knowing when to open the valve and let the water, laden with particles of clay and aleurite, drain. A simple test, repeated, helped him identify the right time: If he could no longer feel the squeak of sand between his teeth, it was time to open the valve.[5]

Many abandoned mines can be found scattered around the Luberon region; they have been disused since the end of the nineteenth century when the technology of ochre extraction became mechanised. Before then, the pits were excavated by two people working side by side, one right-handed and the other left-handed, which made it easier and more efficient to dig deeper.[6] However, their iron tools wore out quickly due to the presence of quartz in the sand. Nowadays, quartz dulls the edges of excavator buckets, but the Ochre Conservatory, once a factory and today a museum, remains a

4 Sophie Mariot-Leduc and Catherine Gardonne, *Ocres du Luberon*, (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 2010), 58.

5 Mariot-Leduc and Gardonne, 57.

6 Mariot-Leduc and Gardonne, 47.

romantic reminder of the past, with a profound tradition of extracting the earthy pigment.

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The yellow dust particles cling to my clothes; I try to brush them off, but they settle playfully on my light-coloured jacket. At the entrance to Le Colorado Provençal, a sign greets me – *wash your clothes with icy water to remove the ochre*. I am intrigued by the chance it will not wash off, and I recall a story I discovered while talking with a textile artist about a specific method of dyeing fabrics by dipping the material in a pond of clayish soil. The inhabitants of the islands of Southern Japan call this technique *dorozomi*.[7] When the Japanese samurai occupied the area in the seventeenth century, the locals buried their kimonos in clay pits to hide them from the dreaded invaders.

I choose the longest route, starting in the eastern part of the park. A mountain of vibrant ochre looms before my eyes; rivulets of limonite trickle from beneath the pinkish surface. I notice immediately that the yellow there is cleaner. Here and there are sinkholes, rain scrapes, and paths carved by centuries; wind and rain have smoothed the sharp slopes left by mining activity. The layers reveal steps sculpted out in the last century, and I climb them to find myself in the belly of an ochre massif. Wooden poles are lined up along the slopes at a respectful distance; they testify to paths trodden by carelessly curious travellers. In some places the sgraffito, carved by past generations with the names of those who visited, is inscribed into the rocks. Plant and tree roots reinforce the soft ochre, burrowing into it as if trying to trap it (*Pinus halepensis*, various species of *Phrygana* scrubs). As the path winds on, an almost painfully red landscape greets me from around the corner. I squint.

The history of the formation of the ochres dates to the Early Cretaceous period (about 100.5 million

7 *Asian Textile Studies*, "Mud Dyeing," November 4, 2019, http://www.asiantextilestudies.com/mud.html.

years ago), when the Provence region was submerged under a shallow sea. During the Cretaceous, Provence was located on the shelf of the Eurasian continent; as the adjacent continents subsided, particles of organic matter and quartz were carried by the wind and deposited in Provence. Sand layers settled on the seabed; they turned green with the formation of the clay mineral glauconite, which became the base material for the formation of the ochre massif. During the Late Cretaceous period (about 90 million years ago), the sea retreated due to the movement of tectonic plates. In the humid, mild tropical climate (Provence was then closer to the equator), the iron in the glauconite began to oxidise and became goethite (iron oxyhydroxide). The processes of climate change altered the iron compounds; therefore, the colours and materiality of the rocks began to vary over time. Ochres turn from yellow to red due to atmospheric factors such as wind sifting, solar heat, and rain pressure; the sun causes water to evaporate and gradually the colour turns red. This way, the yellow and red tones alter over time, building up sediments that have become valuable resources for earth pigments.

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I caress the soft, yellow surfaces with my palms; the orange enchants me, and I suddenly fall in love with the red, with which I have never had a close relationship. Immediately, I am fascinated by the revealed layers – thin and fragile, the others massive and unmovable. The surface, warmed by the autumn sun, is pleasant to the touch; the earth seems soft, soaked in the mountain moisture. Here and there, the forests are full of iron-tipped streams of young limonite, where the stagnant water glistens under the feet of those who pass by.

The top of the slope shows a lighter, whitish shade typical of limestone, with a heavy purple, almost violet-coloured, monolithic mass above. Black shiny hematite fragments lie in the outcrops on the sloping planes. I recognise them

immediately; their weight feels pleasant in the palm of my hand, the metallic sheen of the black surface reveals the ferrous nature of the rock.

The Greeks believed that red ochre was bleeding earth because of the mineral haematite (gr. *haima* + *lithos* = blood stone), which has a purplish-red colour when ground to powder. Pliny the Elder identified haematite as a remedy for bleeding-related disorders; a mixture of red wine and haematite powder was used to treat snake bites.[8]

Haematite is also frequently mentioned in medieval treatises on semi-precious and precious stones, known as lapidaries, which interweave astrological, mystical, and alchemical narratives. In his poetic treatise on precious stones *Liber Lapidum*, the British bishop Marbodius described haematite as one of the minerals used to treat human ailments: A mixture of red dust and honey was used as a remedy for poor eyesight.[9]

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How would a person who does not distinguish colours see these layers of the landscape? Would (s)he see them as dull, low-toned layers of earth? During my master's studies, I met a person with a mild form of protanomaly (impaired red vision). He found it hard to recognise the colour red; his eyes could not distinguish the wild strawberries hiding in the grass, so his handfuls were empty - then he confessed that he found red greener. However, he was more sensitive to tone and therefore developed the skills of the sgraffito technique.

Sensitivity to colour distinction is crucial for a painter who can identify and name different hues. Umberto Eco, in his essay "How Culture Conditions the Colours We See," insightfully notes that "The fact that a painter (think of Paul Klee)

8 Pliny, the Elder, *Natural History*, vol. 6, National Library of Medicine, accessed January 5, 2023, https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-57011150RX6-mvpart.
9 Don Emerson, "Haematite: The Bloodstone," *Preview*, no. 191 (December 2017): 43-53, https://doi.org/10.1071/PVv2017n191p43.

can recognize and name more colours, the fact that verbal language itself is able not only to designate hundreds of nuances, but also describe unheard-of-tints by examples, periphrases and poetic ingenuity - all this represents a series of cases of elaborated codes."[10] This way, the gesture of naming expands colour as a linguistic and/or cultural construct. Therefore, parallels, paraphrases, and poetic variations come in handy. In the textile tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, there are colour names such as *green seawater, wild boar's fur*, or *beetroot dew*.[11] In English, they become even more abstract: *amaranth* (the colour of a cherry red, a dusty grape or a rich plum), *fuchsia* (a vibrant blueish pink), *celadon* (the colour of forest fog), *buff* (tanned ox-hide colour), *fallow* (faded caramel brown, with a tinge of dead leaves or grass), *mole* (deep grey, tending to cold), *obsidian* (black or very dark bronze, sometimes with a golden or iridescent shimmer).[12]

Therefore, the name of a colour can often dissolve its nuances, which can only be perceived visually. The Greeks, interestingly, did not have the word to name the colour blue.[13] One of the few references can be traced to the word *glaucus* (meaning greenish, light-green, and greyish blue), which was associated with the myth about the fisherman Glaucus, who ate a magic herb, leaped into the sea, and became immortal. It could imply that they had no perception of blue (yet think of the many shades of the Mediterranean sky!), but if one considers colour as a cultural/linguistic construct, it becomes coherent because of the rarity of blue in nature. In contrast, the name of red was highly nuanced: *flammeus* (the red of fire), *sanguineus* (the red of blood), *aureus* (the red of gold),

10 Umberto Eco, "How Culture Conditions the Colours We See," in *The Communication Theory Reader*, ed. Paul Cobley (New York: Routledge, 1996), 170.
11 The descriptions of colours are translated by the author. Gražina Marija Martinaitienė, *Audiniai Ir Jų Spalvos Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės Istoriniuose Šaltiniuose* (Vilnius: Nacionalinis muziejus Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės valdovų rūmai, 2013).
12 Kassia St. Clair, *The Secret Lives of Color* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017).
13 Eco, 149-50.

croceus (the red of saffron), and many more.[14] But evidently the role of red in ancient cultures was much more deeply rooted in the material world.

I face the challenge of colour naming every time I arrange the rocks and earths I have collected and brought with me to the studio. In the cold light of day, the shadow side of the stone often looks warmer than the lit side. When the stone is split open, the core sometimes appears deep brown, contrasting gently with the yellowish crust of the surface – a reference to the manganese (Mn) that has accumulated inside the stone. The challenge becomes even more difficult when the extracted pigments are placed side by side: The limitations of colour as a linguistic construct becomes obvious. Here, this yellow is warmer than the one next to it, which tends slightly towards green; as the colour spectrum shifts to the left, the yellow warms up and moves towards the soft browns. However, it eventually became clear that at least some of the individual pigments did not fit into verbal expressions.

In my practice, the gesture of naming a colour has a certain fluidity; the title often occurs from material engagements. At times, the name refers to their geological origins; *Triassic red* or *Neogenic violet* extracted from sediments which formed during these periods. *Gloomy river green* does not refer to a specific shade, but to the natural setting where it was collected. *Cloud grey* became an embodiment of the humid summer day when the dust finally was washed away after a long heat wave; then, the earth smelled like rain. *Road purple* is an immaterial pigment existing only in my memory: It was lost during an intense journey to Morocco. In many cases the name never appears; rather, the experience of collecting stays embedded in the tiny particles of colour.

The word “colour” is rooted in Old Latin word *occulere*, “to cover, conceal,” which suggests an interesting notion about colour as a surface or a shell, concealing an object’s true nature. Johannes

14 Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: The Invention of Colour* (London: Viking, 2001), 263.

Itten distinguishes two dimensions of colour perception: as chromatic reality and as chromatic experience.[15] In the former, the pigment exists as a colour, with an identity independent of visual conditions; this is mediated into generalised schemes of the colour wheel, which was based on colour field studies. The second, which concerns perception, is obviously conditional; it depends on the colour relation, surface, light, and contrast. Itten points out the psychological dimension of colour perception, which also involves personality traits. Here it is useful to have a trained eye, sensitive to even the slightest colour nuances. However, without embarking on the psychology of colour, it is more interesting to consider the dichotomy of colour perception – the tension between objective and subjective experiences.

Would a painter, looking at the colour scale of several hundred pigments in test tubes, be able to distinguish between a *warm yellowish green* and a *slightly colder yellowish green*? Would the recognition of these colour nuances be conditioned by the kind of skills Giorgio Morandi developed when he painted hundreds of still-lifes composed of dusty bottles and devoted his life to exploring the different shades of grey in these objects? To name a colour, one must sharpen one’s gaze even more, to use the instruments of visual perception – to play with the subtleties of colour, to puzzle them out in search of descriptions that cannot be fitted into words.

On Pigment Ontology

Back in the studio, I arrange rock specimens gathered from distinct landscapes, and a glance at the mirror standing in the corner offers a space for reflection. Each extracted pigment is a character with its own story, embedded in tiny particles of matter. After spending a great deal of time archiving and sorting out the specimens, looking for

15 Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color: The Subjective Experience and Objective Rationale of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993).

relationships between colour and origin, (hi)stories emerge. While I am immersed in the slowness of the studio,[16] the pigment slowly begins to reveal itself. Before I crush the stone, I feel its weight and texture in my palm, I can smell its dusty surface. I observe how it merges with the binder into alchemical dyads[17] - how it changes colour and graininess when diluted in linseed oil, gum arabic, or hide glue; how it is absorbed by paper or a chalk-painted wall.

My fingernails turn dark green from *terra verde* extracted from the glauconitic sand discovered last autumn while wandering through the slopes of the river. Slowly, I mix it with a binder, watching how the heavy, fatty earth unexpectedly becomes transparent when laid on paper. The colour reveals itself, and all I can do is observe and take notes. But is it enough? Is my gaze enriched by the knowledge of what the pigment is made of and how it was formed on the slopes of the river in the Early Cretaceous period? Understanding the geological context helps to expose the pigment, clarifies the features of its physical manifestation, but it does not exhaust the question of what the pigment is. I patiently wander, capture landscapes, collect materials and extract the pigments; in the process, each one of them acquires historicity. The personal approach becomes intertwined with cultural contexts: In the creative process, the materials begin to talk to each other. I try to listen to their dialogue from a distance.

An inner need to grasp the essence of a pigment led me to a river of ontology, which I began to wade through in search of answers. Painter Mark Titmarsh notes that "ontological thinking involves returning to first principles and considering things, beings as such, in their very state of being."[18] While thinking about what that means, I am drawn in by the need to go back to the foundations

16 James Elkins, *What Painting Is* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), xix.
17 Elkins, 50.
18 Mark Titmarsh, *Expanded Painting: Ontological Aesthetics and the Essence of Colour* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 95.

Terra verde pigments extracted from glauconitic sands, gathered in Lithuania, 2022.

- like an archaeologist digging up the strata of meaning. But the answer to this question does not succumb to the reductions of cognition, because here the will of the subject becomes the axis of meaning, which limits the understanding of nonhuman objects. The question is whether empirical knowledge determines what a pigment is. Does colour theory help reveal the nature of colour, or does it focus only on the visual appearance of the object? I wonder whether the ability of a physicist to explain the phenomenon of colour as a specific wavelength provides him with a deeper comprehension of colour. Or can the privileged ability of a painter to poetically name colours and to describe the differences between different shades of *umbra* provide access to deeper meanings of the materials?

Drifting away from the Cartesian duality of mind and matter, and separation between natural sciences, a hierarchical approach starts to dissolve in the discourse of contemporaneity. Harman argues that objects, it is argued, are not (or can only in a limited way be) fully comprehensible to human

beings but have a meaningful foundation beyond human perception. Subjectivity obscures the silent object – the human inner dialogue (language) becomes a disturbance and oversimplifies the phenomenon by superficially describing its properties, which are always relative.[19] The conception of flat ontology may appear as an inviting scheme which, in theory, bends the hierarchy; it offers a revised understanding of agency – the capacity to act independently. Latour notes that

A nonanthropomorphic character is a character all the same. It has agency. It moves. It undergoes trials. It elicits reactions. It becomes describable. This, however, does not mean that we are "projecting" anthropomorphic features on what should remain an object: it simply means that the shape, that is, the morphism, of the human character is just as open to inquiry, to shape changing, as that of a nonhuman.[20]

Then, it is a question of autonomy and boundaries which we drew trying to separate the natural world into its constituent parts by trying to explain it through empirical data. From a traditional perspective of Western thought, one cannot escape from a certain futility in trying to empathise with a rock or a pigment, mostly because of our differences as species, as opposites (organic and inorganic bodies), and this notion having been formed through centuries of division between human and nature in the natural sciences. The reductive view towards the rocks as "just" material "…erased the divinity of nature by turning perception towards the purely phenomenological (constrained by a reductionist approach)."[21]

A certain tension then appears: the supposition that the rock (or a pigment) is fundamentally different from us (therefore, its core meaning is

19 Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican Books, 2018), 37.
20 Bruno Latour, "How Better to Register the Agency of Things," *The Tanner Lecture on Human Values*, Yale University, March 6, 2014, https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/l/Latour%20manuscript.pdf.
21 Paul Prudence, *Figured Stones: Exploring the Lithic Imaginary* (Xylem Books, 2022), 122.

inaccessible to us) and the supposition that it can be accessed through material engagements, which involves fundamentally rethinking our similarities rather than differences. There is a large amount of iron (Fe) flowing through our veins, which is the main element determining the colour of ochre.[22] We have kidney stones growing in our bodies when there is a surplus of calcium, oxalate, or uric acid, which causes these materials to crystalise into solid structures. The observation of our bodies as vehicles capable of growing "living rocks" contracts the distance between our differences, and we seem closer to them, bearing in mind the common ability to grow, crystalise, and sediment. The human body is mostly composed of cosmic dust which emerged when high- and low-mass stars were dying.[23] All these cases raise compelling thought about our position in the scale of deep time and relation to otherness.

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A personal experience that often opens new niches for reflection is a crucial moment, which can alter the perspective. After returning from an expedition to Draa valley in Morocco, I was confronted by an unexpected situation, in which the subject of loss and ownership became motifs for further ponderings. During the journey, I gathered materials with a vivid image of myself ecstatically arranging and contemplating the rocks, drawing maps, extracting pigments, and organising them in glass vials. As I touch the materials, I immerse myself again in the moment: in valleys and on roadsides. In the deep beds of dried-up rivers and places only accessible on foot. Through paths covered in pink dust, through whose ravines the Imazighen travel with their belongings. At that moment, I seemed to discover a part of myself, and slowly I began to fill up – as if I was meeting strangers with whom I thought I had spoken once before, distant dream companions.

22 M. Elias et al., "The Colour of Ochres Explained by Their Composition," *Materials Science and Engineering*: B 127, no. 1 (February 2006): 70–80.
23 Sloan Digital Sky Survey, "The Elements of Life Mapped Across the Milky Way," January 5, 2017, https://press.sdss.org/the-elements-of-life-mapped-across-the-milky-way-by-sdssapogee/.

But by chance I lost my carefully gathered collection, and perhaps not without a reason.

I realised that everything seems to be based on my intention as a compiler of an archive, one who collects the materials with an almost obsessive intent. The ambition to *possess* these colours, to capture and admire them, may have been the obstacle over which I painfully stumbled. The experience of loss made me rethink my personal approach towards materials, which could partly be linked to the problem of ownership. Bjornerud writes about her expedition to pegmatite mines in Colorado where she and her colleagues were looking for gem pockets. She vividly recalls her experience of discovering a perfect tourmaline crystal:

In an instant, we were all seized with a visceral greed, a need to take as many of these treasures as we could. We had come with our rock hammers, but the pick ends were blunt, designed for breaking rocks, not extracting delicate crystals. I managed to tap out a few small deep-pink tourmalines, and then spotted a prize: a perfect watermelon-colored crystal […] I was determined to have it. I began pounding away, thinking ahead how I would display this trophy at home when, in one errant blow, I smashed it.[24]

Paul Prudence poetically defines this obsessive need to collect rocks as *Lithophilia.* He tells a story about a Chinese emperor Huizong, who had an impressive collection of biomorphic Lingbi stones.[25] Huizong, while meticulously perfecting his gardens, arranging, and inscribing the stones with the stories, didn't notice the invading Jurchen nomads. These invaders used his precious stones for catapults to bombard the empire, turning his own obsession against him; therefore, his meticulously created universe became lost.

Reflecting on these experiences, including my personal one, it became quite clear that the

24 Marcia Bjornerud, *Timefulness: How Thinking Like a Geologist Can Help Save the World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 127-8.
25 Prudence, 79-80.

universal obsession for owning materials is a small-scale event which is parallel to larger processes of extractivism. Clearly, a personal experience resonates more strongly than one observed from a distance. It raises questions about our own relationship to material world and attachment to the world of "things" and our dependence. Enchanted by the beauty of geological formations, it is inherent in our human nature to desire these treasures for or own possession. On the other hand, the occurrence of such events can teach us about appreciation for deep time, and knowledge about the complicated processes which took place throughout hundreds of millions of years.

The Substance Trap

Entangled in the trap of Aristotelian thought, I naively hoped to find answers to the intuitive questions about the mysteries of the pigments' being, which became easier to formulate after turning to the myriad of texts on the study of the subject of substance. As is often the case, the process raised more questions than it answered, and suddenly I found myself trapped in a web of meanings which I had woven (un)intentionally.

Aristotle categorises substances by arranging them into a structure. The concept of secondary substance involves the set of intrinsic properties of objects as well as their generalisation.[26] Where would a pigment fit on the shelf of substances? If it is treated as a secondary substance to which properties such as colour, intensity, translucency, and weight can be attributed, it lacks the aura of individuality. Most of the pigment treatises have a content with a clear structure - pigments are grouped by colour or alphabet (principle of a dictionary).[27] Thus, we begin to drown in generic nouns that emphasise a pigment's essential feature

26 Hugh Tredennick and H. P. Cooke, *Aristotle: Categories. On Interpretation. Prior Analytics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 19-23.
27 Nicholas Eastaugh, ed., *The Pigment Compendium: A Dictionary of Historical Pigments* (Amsterdam; Boston: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2004).

- its colour. But can a pigment be(come) a primary substance? The hierarchical organisation makes it a challenge to consider the individuality of the pigment, which is a condition of primary substances. Is the Stone of Jacob, on which he laid his head and dreamed a prophetic dream,[28] a purer substance than a nameless stone discovered while wandering on a riverbank? Does the religious significance mark it with a metaphysical aura?

What happens when a pigment takes on a unique character - when it is added to the story of the collection and the personal significance it implies? In that case, it seems that its position in the hierarchy of substances depends on the point of view. From a personal perspective, a pigment can become very precious because of the meanings it holds; these accumulate in the process of extraction, which consists of the stories of its discovery, origins, and practice. In this way, each of the pigments becomes an object of personal value, a substance of the landscape and its experience.

This (nameless) stone, having become a pigment, undergoes a substantial change; I transform it not only in a physical, material sense (as I break it down into many particles, the whole of which is considered a pigment), but I am also abandoning its stoniness. But its stony nature is still encoded in the particles; chemical tests make it clear from what material it was made, what its iron content is and the degree of oxidation that defines the colour of ochre. Ingold makes a distinction between *materials* and *materiality*, which rests on the notion that "an object [is] formed through the imposition of *mental* realities upon *material* ones."[29] Therefore, by undergoing a physical transformation, it becomes marked by the mental projections of an artist, but materiality is present behind the visible even though it has already lost its original shape; this is the case with earth and mineral

28 Genesis 28:11 (*The Holy Bible: New International Version*) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978).
29 Tim Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (June 2007): 1-16, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1380203807002127.

pigments. Interestingly, the word "material" is rooted in the Latin *mater*, which refers to the noun *mother* (a source or origin) and only later to "substance of which something is made." It could bridge these seemingly opposite realms of the same object. Essentially, mental realities emerge when an artist embeds the material with meanings.

The idea of the elevation of substance goes back to the practices of alchemists; for centuries, alchemists have been immersed in the processes of purifying the quintessence. Their experiments with various distillation techniques have been catalysed by the idea that inferior, impure materials can be elevated to pure substance through *chrysopoeia* (the process of transmuting base metals into gold). The goal of an alchemist was to purify one of the elements (mostly based on the Aristotelian theory of the four elements) while eliminating its other properties.[30] An alchemist and a painter were engaged in processes that were materially and conceptually related. Each of them struggled with the matter, which results only through careful, consistent work, often accompanied by the inevitable disappointments that are followed by the experience of catharsis. Perhaps through such practices, encrypted with a personal philosophy of poetic language, alchemist and painter may have a better chance of accessing the meanings of materials.

In the Shadow of Painting

It is always exciting to engage in conversations that raise questions about the origins of a subject or phenomenon. I asked a few colleagues of mine what painting is,[31] and suddenly I started to doubt the shallowness of my question. Presumably, every painter could give a range of subjective insights, determined by his or her experience and approach. From the mastery of technique - the preparation of the canvas, application of paint - to the complex study of the motif, the nuances of colour,

30 Lawrence Principe, The Secrets of Alchemy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 37-38.
31 This section was partly written in dialogue with James Elkins (*What Painting Is*).

composition, and intrinsic value. All these elements become important criteria, but this formulation does not answer the question of what painting is; rather, it defines its conditions. Most of these criteria describe formal features, but it can be argued (and this is always intriguing) that they also belong to a deeper realm, to a feeling that does not lend itself to verbal structures, such as the study of a motif or the creation of an atmosphere.

When seen in the context of painting, the pigment functions as an element that carries historical and cultural weight, with meanings hidden beyond the surface of the paint. The process of immersion in a dialogue with these elements could be defined as "cultural engagement with matter."[32] These are the symbolisms of the colour, discourse, and the ways in which both are used; symbolic presence in a particular place in the painting has significance (think of the celestial *ultramarine*, which until Titian was used exclusively in a highly sacred context). But this schematisation reduces the pigment to a cold, alien body and emphasises the futility of man's efforts to know it. What (and how) can pigment tell us by itself, not framed in viscous theories, not linked to painting, and not contextualised? I search for an explanation, but I am left perplexed. I look silently at the row of yellowish chunks of ochre.

In the Lithuanian language, the word *tapyba* (painting) could be linked to the word *tapsmas* (becoming). The ontology of painting could be approached through this linguistic relation; if one considers painting as an act of becoming, it makes sense to regard it as a transformation of raw materials into pure essences. Titmarsh notes that "paint separated off from painting, is paint released into an unusual state of becoming. It is paint becoming something else, yet to be named, a process in some sense unnameable."[33] Material is the fundament which is moulded to embody ideas; although

32 Titmarsh, 92.
33 Titmarsh, 45.

it is not entirely definable, it seems that it comes closer to the explanation of what painting is.

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Alchemists and artists were both concerned with a common eternal alchemical problem about the extraction of quintessence. Obsessed by the constant struggle with materials and the uncertainty of how things will turn out, they strove to create the conditions in which the unknown could emerge. Through metaphors, the methods and experiences are cyphered into allegories and personal symbolism in a way that only a highly intelligent mind can access this knowledge, thus leading to obscurity and mysticism, which emerges through interpretations and attachments of religious or mythological concepts. In his treatise on painting, Cennini poetically writes about such measurements as "less than half a bean" or "a nutshell,"[34] which may appear vague in terms of specifying exact amounts of certain ingredients: What kind of a bean or a nut does he have in mind? A modern paint maker, whose laboratory equipment is meticulously marked with milligrams, would be furious, and a new-age practitioner would attach his own esoteric meanings. Meanwhile, modernist painters such as Alberto Burri or Antoni Tàpies never left any treatises on their painting techniques, which were highly complex and were developed through years of wrestling with their material(s). Essentially, they focused on transformations from rawness to purification, but these processes were (intentionally) often silent about the practices of the studio.

A few years ago in Madrid, walking through the labyrinths of the Museo del Prado, I was looking closely at the brightly glowing *vermilion* robes of the figures in the eighteenth-century Flemish paintings. The red appeared so aching that it seemed to make my eyes sting. The shimmering linseed oil binder made it even more intense. All I could think

34 Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *Il Libro Dell'Arte: The Craftsman's Handbook*, trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2016), 7-9.

about at the time was how those velvety drapes had been painted and what the history of the pigment in the paint was. Was it a purified cinnabar mineral, which, when ground, intensified the red? Or was it an alchemical substance formed by the sacred union of mercury and sulphur? The symbolism of the colour did not excite me, and I began to think about what the pigment was made of and how it was prepared. My mind wanders to the complex sequence of actions, the vaults of the boisterous alchemist's workshops, the roosters laying eggs and the toads hatching them, the basilisks emerging which are later burned, and the ashes that are mixed with the powdered dried blood of a red-haired man.[35]

Reflecting on the sequence of steps before painting, it becomes obvious that a pigment exists before paint: It is first extracted, crushed, mixed with a binder, and only then does it take the form of paint. However, the pigment has receded into (or rather, has been relegated to) into the shadow of painting. By remaining pure and not bound to the discipline of painting, is the pigment not an independent substance that can tell us more rather than being tied to form? In painting, the pigment's significance and historical context is muted; it becomes a nameless entity whose particles disperse with the touch of a brush. The pigment's colour qualities are revealed through its use in technique; the colour has a special ability to vary depending on the binder, the proportion of the ingredients, and the presence of impurities. However, I believe that it would be unjust to reduce the pigment to colour alone or to such properties as translucency or opacity.

I believe that the materiality of painting is its fundamental condition. Painting cannot exist without a material body, while paint is directly dependent on the substance of colour. The harmony or opposition of materials tells a story that remains beneath the

35 Theophilus, *On Divers Arts: The Foremost Medieval Treatise on Painting, Glassmaking and Metalwork*, trans. John G. Hawthorne and Cyril Stanley Smith (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2020), 119-20.

surface, which at times conditions the longevity of the painting. The comfortable situation created by the processes of industrialisation has immersed the painter in an amnesic state – it has become convenient not to worry about complex techniques, the rarity of materials, and geographical barriers. A pigment brings with it a history even before it takes form, before it is subjugated to the purpose of depicting. In painting, the pigment's significance and geological context begins to fade, but its colour qualities are preserved through its use in technique. The technical parameters describe the evolution of painting from prehistoric cave paintings, church frescoes, and icon paintings to the monumental formats of Anselm Kiefer or the objects by Anish Kapoor painted in *vantablack*. The set of tools used by the painter defines the expression, and while they may mutate in the entanglement of interdisciplinarity, the fundamental conditions are still the same.

The aluminium tube, invented in 1841, became a symbol of detachment from the weight of materials, marking the beginning of *plein-air*, practiced by the Impressionists. Interestingly, this is often seen as a positive liberation from the materiality of tools; their spectrum narrowed down, and the tube became a container for the reduced history of paint. The material nature of painting began to sink into oblivion, its abandonment began with the negation of tradition, culminating in the practices of the conceptualists and minimalists. The fetish of reductive ideas, forms, and surface colours has cut painting off from its material roots. With the loss of the physical body, it was absorbed by other media. The availability of materials, the convenience, and the modernisation of the paint industry supplied a pretext for no longer worrying about the material origins of painting. Although this is not a firm diagnosis of the death of painting, as A. Danto has recognised,[36] it has clearly become disconnected from the material

36 Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-116.

tradition, which has begun to sink into oblivion.

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Pigments and earths are storytellers; I am merely an observer, a cautious listener, who engages with them materially, trying to entangle them into a web of meanings. In between the tiny particles of dust and layers of sediment, their stories rest. It is a matter of reinterpretation, a mastery of knowing the right time and place to leave a poetic stroke. I try to grasp them in a mist, which conceives a space for the mind to wander off into the realm of vanished meanings.

Research on Devonian ochres, 2023.

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“Stray Cats” is a personal text that intertwines the author’s engagement with Viennese stray cats with an autotheoretical approach to straying as a methodology. By positioning stray cats as the starting point for a stray vignette, the text contests a prevalent perception of strays as lacking societal approval. Instead, it promotes and adopts straying as a cognitive journey connected to stray cats, psychogeographical explorations, and the author’s own knotty network of stray thoughts.

Straying, Stray Cats, Human-Animal Studies, Animal Geographies, Artistic Research,

STRAY CATS

Katharina Swoboda

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All over the globe – except, presumably, Antarctica – domestic cats without owners wander the world. In which nooks and crannies, I wonder, do these cats (*Felis catus*) hide in my city? I feel connected to these beasts, living as they do in privileged low-density grounds not of their own choosing, possibly fed. The trade-off? Their neutering. I, on the contrary, gave birth to a daughter.

Culturally, stray animals[1] often illustrate an in-between state; they simultaneously belong to the city and do not belong to it. Not easily placed into conceptual boxes, their ambiguity is potentially viewed as “unclean.”[2] Without being able to definitively classify them, research on stray cats presents a vocabulary along the lines of “wildness,” or, seen from a different angle, degrees of human “socialisation.” Socialisation in cats is not a matter of solid labels but a fluid state of being, “where the different degrees of socialisation flow into each other and create many in-between areas where cats can reside.”[3] According to a 2008 estimate, up to

1 The grouping of “animals” and “humans” as broad categories is deeply flawed, because neither all animals nor all humans are equal. Lacking an adequate and easy-to-read alternative, I continue the flawed generalizations here.

2 Paul Shepard, T*he Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1997), 60.

3 Alley Cat Allies, “The Cat Socialization Continuum: A

480,000 million unowned cats worldwide slide across this domestic-stray-feral continuum.[4]

My background in contemporary dance has given me a profound familiarity with movement. Is straying dependent on a body? Conventional walking promotes a body with some conventional ability. Straying rests on other structures, notably some sort of connection to a system or structure that is worth straying away from. Birth families potentially present such structures, where straying away preconditions one's sanity. From my family's perspective, I am the error, but taking the stray's subjectivity, I am the curious researcher and seeker. The eighth-century description of *striunen*, the predecessor to the German word *streunen*, calls it a "roaming around, sniffing, curiously or suspiciously searching for something."[5] Being active and curious contrasts with prevailing associations of straying – as erring, misplacement, and deviation.

According to Barbara Creed, who echoes a general sentiment, straying is a condition one is forced into; it is defined by a marginalised existence on the fringes of society.[6] Precarity and vulnerability are prerequisites for being called a stray. The conceptual lenses of mishap and abandonment present the glaring spotlights that blind the traces of the curious and positively engaged among contemporary beings labelled strays. Being immersed in nature/culture (re)constitutions and (re)negotiations, I draw inspiration from homeless animals, and especially stray cats – for instance, their acknowledged ability to intelligently navigate their surroundings, as well as their connections to human culture. Let us approach strays and straying with curiosity instead of pity.

Guide to Interactions Between Cats and Humans," 2020, https://www.alleycat.org/resources/cat-socialization-continuum-guide.
4 CAROCat, "Statistics on Cats," accessed May 17, 2022, https://carocat.eu/statistics-on-cats-and-dogs.
5 DWDS, Das Digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, "Streunen," accessed March 15, 2022, https://www.dwds.de/wb/streunen.
6 Barbara Creed, *Stray: Human-Animal Ethics in the Anthropocene* (Sidney: Power Publications 2017).

Creed herself strayed when she took the poignant phrase, "I stray in order to be" (p. 8), from the English translation of Julia Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (1980), referring to it without context. In the French passage, Kristeva invokes a linguistically complex mental state of delusion: "Où je me perds pour être"[7]; that could be translated to "in which I lose myself in order to be" or, in the published English translation, "in which I stray in order to be,"[8] In Creed's abbreviated recitation, straying develops into a condition of existence – rather than dissolving in psychological turmoil – that may or may not lead to some existential insight. In contrast, and additionally, I propose straying as a conscious action that is neither existential nor essentialist. Straying becomes a way of bringing about encounters, of exploring new territories – and being brave and feminist in the process.

Put yourself in the city. Run after your child inside it. My experience in the city transforms when my three-year-old daughter and I go about the urban landscape. Each dog of a certain size is subject to my snappy remarks, and I lift my daughter up when I do not like the canine's expression. I am in a constant balancing act of connecting and protecting, of providing a sense of security while at the same time instructing her in self-protection. Close to our home, an automobile in a turning lane crosses a streetcar track. Drivers check the pedestrian crossing but sometimes do not take into account the sneaky streetcar that is rapidly approaching. The almost familiar sounds of cars and streetcars colliding are uniquely piercing and cringeworthy. Street crashes contain their unique sonic notes, a sound I have not found anywhere else. It is a different sound from what I know from the movies in Dolby Surround, the unique, so far unreplicated noise of real-life car crashes –

7 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Édition du Seuil 1980), 19.
8 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press 1982), 12.

machine against machine. I want to protect my child.

Mit einer Idee schwanger gehen[9] / Conceive an idea

For Kristeva the female reproductive body is abject because the transformation of pregnancy disfigures the body. But does it? Why? Did my body not do this? My body did not change all that much. I could not fathom that a baby was curled inside my belly. When she was taken out, she could have arrived from another star. I would not have known.

Someone who wrote intensely about pregnancy and motherhood is the poet Maggie Nelson. Her writing in *The Argonauts* (2015) pushes me to disclose my own traumas.[10] To whom, I am not sure. Myself? To her? Nelsons's prose is dense, her life full. Reading and absorbing, I feel as if I have not been present in my own life. She describes her birthing, full of nuances and details, of magic and disgust. Yes, I gave birth too, but all I really remember is how insanely uncomfortable the douche was. I am ashamed of admitting to having taken epidural anaesthesia since I was unable to endure the pain for long. It appears though that they overdosed me, since I did not feel contractions when the doctor and midwife instructed me to push. I pressed, I pushed, I used all my strength; the doctor used a vacuum that left a red wound on my daughter's head, but still, she could not get out. A C-section followed. I was not scared, I was high. After the birth, I was dizzy from the amnesia. A nurse asked if I wanted to rest, and I said yes. I was sure that my baby would be cared for. I trusted. I was *so* trusting. Later, I learned that the father had not taken her into his arms. She was washed and then placed in a crib. She lay there alone, wide awake, for forty-five minutes while I rested until, finally, the midwife took me from the recovery room.

9 Translated literally, "Go get pregnant with ideas."
10 Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015). Maggie Nelson is an American poet and writer; *The Argonauts* is described as a prime example of autotheory by Lauren Fournier in her book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2022).

Still today, I feel bad for that three-quarters of an hour I dozed away but my baby remained wide awake. I crave those lost minutes again and again.

I could blame medication. But I owe my life to medication and the pharmaceutical complex. Before medication – or rather, before the *correct* medication – my body assaulted me relentlessly with feelings, with emotions, with conditions that I could not handle. I wrote beautiful prose then that was dark, mysterious, and profoundly sad. After the medication kicked in, I destroyed it. Books upon books upon books – I threw those thoughts away. I am positive there were some valuable remarks amid the sad mess. Yet I was not prepared to search for them, not wanting to cross my depression's traces.

My attention to well-nourished Viennese animals possibly exaggerates the positive aspects of straying that are enhanced by a privileged situation. Fast and dirty internet research of "stray cats" produces either images of idyllic cityscapes with cats as city pets (Istanbul) or images of suffering cats with missing limbs and eye infections (generic). The captions of the latter bulk inform about parasite infections and abject misery.

These images are employed by animal welfare organisations seeking money to support their neutering campaigns. To convince donors, these organisations aim to evoke pity and sympathy for the cause, often employing affective and emotional figures. A problematic strategy when, coincidently, their marketing strategies also frame the targeted cities and citizens as indifferent towards the strays' suffering or even as violent. A certain type of media portrayal of, including fundraising appeals for, neutering interventions by Western welfare associations in Southeastern Europe seamlessly aligns with existing cultural prejudices in that region.[11]

11 In Romania, often described by media as a stray dog dystopia, the misery derives directly from Nicolae Ceausescu's housing schemes, whereby people were relocated to small flats without any extra space, and, with the growing cost of dog food, many people let their pets go.

Since stray cats cannot be socialised beyond a certain age, they are only managed by killing or neutering. Euthanasia evokes people's resistance, so neutering is the preferred option. The practices, mostly trap-neuter-return (TNR), set up situations for contact between human society and cats. Cats are caught, neutered by vets, and returned to their original location. Body invasive as it is,[12] generally, this method is considered to be the most humane form of animal management.

Management is necessary, stakeholders are assured, because a high population density of stray cats in cities results in territorial disputes, which makes the cats' life conditions even more challenging.

In Vienna, local campaigns for neutering highlight the excessive, quasi "monstrous" reproduction of cats. The "Cat Pyramid" illustrates how a pair of unneutered cats can create 12,680 kittens over five years.[13] The number is pure math since not every queen would give birth to the maximum number of kittens, and not all kittens would survive. It does, however, support the political effort effectively.

A study by the Vienna Veterinary Medicine University, commissioned by the animal welfare organisation *Four Paws*, attributes to sexually intact cats a higher risk of adverse health effects.[14] Specifically, sexually intact female cats show elevated cortisol levels and exhibit "more agonistic behaviour in the feeding context."[15] In addition, citing other research, the study states that reproduction by stray female cats promotes

12 Eva Meijer, "Stray Agency and Interspecies Care: The Amsterdam Stray Cats and Their Humans," in *Animals in Our Midst: The Challenges of Co-existing with Animals in the Anthropocene*, edited by Bernice Bovenkerk and Jozef Keulartz (2021), 293, http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63523-7.
13 Tierschutzombudsstelle Wien [Animal Protection Ombudsman Office Vienna], "Das Streunerkatzenprojekt der Stadt Wien," March 2022, https://www.tieranwalt.at/fxdata/tieranwalt/prod/media/TOW_Streunerkatzenprojekt-Wien.pdf.
14 Elisabeth M. Gilhofer et al., "Welfare of Feral Cats and Potential Influencing Factors," *Journal of Veterinary Behavior 30* (2019): 119, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2018.12.012.
15 Gilhofer et al., 121.

infectious diseases and nutritional deficiencies. With this reasoning, spayed female cats are superior to sexually intact ones. And unlike in rural areas of Austria, there is little resistance to the rigorous spay/neuter regime we see in the capital. Today, Vienna is the only city worldwide that organises and pays for cats to be neutered.

I am always amazed that the city's neutering campaign does not address additional problems, such as parasites, zoonoses (diseases that jump from an animal to a human), or possible threats to biodiversity, but focuses solely on the cat's sexuality.

The scale of the potential ecological harm posed by free-roaming cats became evident in 2012 when researchers at the University of Georgia used animal-borne imagery, dubbed "KittyCams," to monitor the nocturnal activities of owned outdoor cats.[16] The footage revealed that cats were much bigger predators than previously assumed. Subsequent studies worldwide utilised animal-borne imagery to determine the cats' prey and possible ecological impact and damage. Cats are the perfect predators, it seems. The degree of danger varies according to geographic location. In areas such as New Zealand and Australia, the native fauna has not adapted to the feline predators that came with European ships. First shipped to check on other "pests" such as rodents, the cats became pests themselves. Feral cats seriously threaten Australasia's fauna, and they have eradicated over two dozen species since their arrival there. Today, the Department of Conservation in New Zealand states that domestic cats are "one of the most significant anthropogenic threats to biodiversity." Management measures include poisoning, trapping, and shooting.[17]

16 Sonia M. Hernandez et al., "The Use of Point-of-View Cameras (Kittycams) to Quantify Predation by Colony Cats (Felis catus) on Wildlife," *Wildlife Research* 45 (2018): 357, https://doi.org/10.1071/WR17155.
17 Department of Conservation, NZ, "Feral cats," accessed May 13, 2022, https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/our-purpose-and-outcomes.

In Europe, the situation seems less severe. Since the European wild cat (*Felis silvestris*) is native, prey species had time to adapt to feline hazards.[18] Many birds learn to fly and possibly escape feline predators. The problem is the concentration of cats in small urban spaces. This feline density makes them a serious danger to birds and other species.[19] To indulge the cats otherwise, in play instead of the hunt, the Wiener Umweltanwaltschaft [Vienna Environmental Advocate] recommends special measures for owned outdoor cats, such as high animal protein food. Other suggestions include games simulating hunting activities, claiming that five to ten minutes of play significantly reduces the prey count.[20] Saving biodiversity through play sounds like a well-desired utopian goal.

Unfortunately, playing with your cats will not significantly change anything positively for Austrian biodiversity so long as Austrians keep destroying living spaces for birds and pouring concrete over the landscape. Blaming cats for local environmental loss is a twisted human method of scapegoating.

Eva Persy, serving as the ombudswoman for Animals in Vienna, embodies a blend of relentless drive and purpose in the face of fatigue and exhaustion. Purple shadows sag under her eyes, smearing into the ashen colour of her face. Nevertheless, she embodies the beauty of someone who cares about the world around her. Most of her work in the office involves people and their interactions. These humans obviously tire her. Often, she says, humans engage with domesticated animals for purely selfish reasons and without considering the animal's perspective. Stray cats, especially among those less connected to human society, become a space for projection. Humans might feel possessive of "their" strays and start fighting over who is allowed to feed them. But caring for a cat's needs requires different motives than self-indulged instant gratification. An occasional can of cat food is not caring, it is complicating things.

A feeding place must be cared for on a regular basis and kept clean. Water and food need to be fresh. Cats should be fed at twilight, and any leftovers removed so as not to attract rats. If not, neighbours often complain that stray cats pollute the area. But it is not the cat's fault; the humans neglect these feeding places.

Pauline Bruckner is a now retired security guard and private investigator. These days, she holds the title of Vienna's premier cat catcher. She often spends her nights capturing strays, ensuring they get to the vet for neutering. One evening, Bruckner took me along on her mission: the junk-filled backyard of a former diner, scattered with half-empty food boxes. On the fence, there was a handwritten sign in capital letters, penned with a blue marker on cardboard: "Hands off." The elderly woman who regularly feeds the cats did not want anyone interfering with her activities. Although the stray cats reside on private property that is not hers, the elderly woman has claimed the area. The woman's excessive feeding complicates Pauline's task, because a well-fed cat is less likely to be enticed into a trap by food. Bruckner has experimented with various delicacies to engage a cat's specific tastes – cooked chicken breast, liver, and tuna. She has aimed at moulding a smell too tempting to resist, a sense of promise that overrides the satiation of a full belly.

The trap Bruckner uses appears simple: a wooden board attached to a string that threads through an open car window. If a cat enters, Bruckner releases the hatch. Once secured, she covers the trap with a dark cloth. Unlike domesticated

18 Georg Ehring and Lars Lachmann, "NABU: In Deutschland stirbt keine Vogelart wegen Katzen aus," *Deutschlandfunk*, February 7, 2013, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/nabu-in-deutschland-stirbt-keine-vogelart-wegen-katzen-aus-100.html.

19 Wiener Umwelt Anwaltschaft [Vienna Environmental Advocacy], "Hauskatze auf der Jagd: Empfehlungen zum Schutz der Wildtiere," 2018, https://wua-wien.at/tierschutz/amphibien2/2288-hauskatze-auf-der-jagd-empehlungen.

20 Martina Cecchetti et al., "Provision of High Meat Content Food and Object Play Reduce Predation of Wild Animals by Domestic Cats Felis catus," *Current Biology* 31 (2021): 1107–11, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2020.12.044.

cats, I learned, feral ones tend to stay quiet inside a covered cage. While waiting in Bruckner's well-driven and comfy car, I learned many more things about ferals and the cat catcher's job.

Would she consider being the protagonist in a short documentary? She gave it some thought and agreed, but with a stipulation: the filming should coincide with her arrival at a recently identified, promising location. She aspired to showcase her expertise in the field, being recognised as Vienna's very best catcher. But that night, we kept waiting. The sole unneutered cat remaining on site refused to be ensnared. As all cats do, she had magical eyes in the reflection of the streetlights.

A journalist once asked Bruckner about the difference between her past work as a private detective and her volunteer work with cats. "I have more compassion for the animals than the people,"[21] Bruckner answered. I understand. While the Office of the Animal Ombudswoman deals with people on the phone, Bruckner deals with them in person. She does the field work. She communicates with various people, trying to persuade them to cooperate, asking them where the cats are and when they are fed, asking them not to feed them. She is educating these people. Most accept neutering when they understand that the cats will not die as a result but will possibly live a better, healthier life.

I feel compassion for estranged people who rely on city animals, such as pigeons and cats, to fulfil their need for connection. Fahim Amir even identifies political resistance in people who stubbornly continue to feed pigeons despite the city's policy captured on plenty of billboards: "Feed pigeons, feed rats." I want to see cats the way Amir understands animals in general: not as victims but as actors with their own agency in today's late

21 Karin Cerny, "Wo die wilden Katzen wohnen," *Der Standard*, March 10, 2021, https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000124801937/wo-die-wilden-katzen-wohnen.

capitalist world.[22] He dissects pseudo-romanticism and pseudo-nostalgia based on an imaginary past of interspecies harmonies. Animal-human relationships have always been complicated and have never been to the advantage of the animals. Even so, as Donna Haraway and Vinciane Despret have shown, some species are interested in cooperating with us.[23]

Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969), the Belgian-French traveller drawn to the esoteric, recounts in one of her works how she conjured a human companion in her imagination. She brought this figment to life so vividly that it became challenging to dispel the image she had crafted. I imagine a stray cat, her gaze focused sternly on my eyes. She is black, and sometimes she changes into a tabby orange. She sees me through a mossy filter – feline colour vision tends towards a greenish world. The circumference of vision and the plane of focus deviate from mine. Because of her night vision, she would recognise my exact outline at twilight and in darkness, when I could only recognise the cats' funky eyes. We live in different worlds. Hers full of smells, mine full of thoughts and feelings I was not able to medicate or mediate away. The cat and I meet in a place I once elatedly called, quoting Haraway, a "zone of encounter,"[24] adapting a positivist attitude towards interspecies encounters. Straying is a way of elegant survival.

"Cats are cool, detached, unreliable [...] cats are hard to understand, they are erratic, as women are,"[25] the co-creator of the Catwoman character in Batman films says. The hypersexualised Catwoman is one of the most prevalent cultural stereotypes of cat-women. Meanwhile, the archetypical anti-

22 Fahim Amir, *Schwein und Zeit: Tiere, Politik, Revolte* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 2018), 16.
23 Vinciane Despret, Donna Haraway, Karin Harrasser, Katrin Solhdju, "Stay Where the Trouble Is", *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* 3(4), 2011: 92-102, https://dx.doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/2532.
24 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 218.
25 Akanksha Singh, "The Ancient Roots of Catwoman," *BBC*, February 28, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20220225-the-batman-the-ancient-roots-of-catwoman.

sexy antagonist is the cat lady, a "spinster" who lives without husband but with at least one cat. This character builds on Western histories of female domesticity and feline companionship. Maybe if I stop travelling so much, I will adopt one and become a cat lady myself.

The cultural link between felines and femininity in the West is accentuated by the fact that variations of feline terms – such as "pussy," "pussycat," and "kitty" – are associated with female sexual organs. From contemporary cat figures to ancient goddesses, cats have long been emblematic of feminine qualities. In Egypt, the goddess Bastet was often depicted with a feline head atop a human female body. Further north, the goddess Freyja's chariot was drawn by cats. The Greek goddess Artemis, later known as the Roman Diana, was also connected with cats. However, cats' stature drastically declined in the Middle Ages. Christianity's and monotheism's suspicion of the female form and its associations cast a shadow on cats, branding them companions of Satan. This demonisation led to horrific acts, like the burning of cats.

I learned from a Netflix documentary that a cat's purr matches the frequencies of crying babies.[26] A possible reason why humans feel drawn to cats.

By following animals and moving through built up areas, I become a part-time flâneuse. The term "flâneur" unlocks the floodgates to historiographies of wandering male writers and philosophers, all relying on the privileged male position. Flâneurs were subjects observing the city. "Women," to name and reproduce flawed binarities, were objectified. The herstories of female city experiences differ radically from those of Western white males. At the beginning of the twentieth century, lingering women were suspected of being prostitutes. Recent research on female flânerie has revealed intriguing

26 Andy Mitchell, dir., Inside the Mind of a Cat (documentary, Netflix, 2022), 67 min.

figures when compared to male flânerie.[27] But, "if female flâneuring is the focus," theorist Maren Lickhart ponders, "it's questionable whether it needs the foil of the male flâneur."[28] According to this logic, the historiographies of the female flâneuse do not share the history of the prototype flâneurs, such as Benjamin, Baudelaire, and Balzac.

For these men, wandering and getting lost and immersed is a conscious choice. They do not go where they do not want to go. There is no necessity but their curiosity, no bodily hunger but that of their mind. Similarly, in the *dérive* (drift), a psychogeographical technique popularized by Situationist Guy Debord, ambulating is encouraged.[29] Here, movement brings you out of an "ordinary" frame of mind. Straying, in contrast, is ordinary. It is movement without choice.

A stray does not choose to stray – with the exception of those domestic cats that decide not to return "home."

I am wary of comparing human experiences of homelessness, of being a refugee and such, to stray animals. Human experience on the fringes of human society differs fundamentally from the animal experience on the fringes of human society. For a human being, losing a home results in the loss of access to basic care systems, jobs, and the social net. Homelessness is potentially more traumatic than the loss of a human roof to an animal. We assume domesticity for domesticated pets as a given, but our homes are not their innate homes.

27 Georgiana Banita, "Hochprozentig weiblich: Flanerie und Alkohol," in *Die Lust zu Gehen: Weibliche Flanerie in Literatur und Film*, eds. Georgiana Banita, Judith Ellenbürger, and Jörn Glasenapp (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2017), 42. For an introduction to female flânerie, see Lauren Elkin's *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), ebook.
28 Maren Lickhart, "Weibliche Strassenerfahrungen bei Irmgard Keun und Klaus Mann: Entgrenzung und Ekstase in der Großstadt," in *Die Lust zu Gehen: Weibliche Flanerie in Literatur und Film*, eds. Georgiana Banita, Judith Ellenbürger, and Jörn Glasenapp (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2017), 15-40 (my translation).
29 Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive" [1956], *Situationist International Online*, accessed May 25, 2022, https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html

After Russia's attack on Ukraine, a flood of images emerged that showed Ukrainian refugees with their pets in tow. Instead of producing images of masses of migrants, as in other wars, the European media outlets told individualised stories. Showing people and their kindness towards animals made these people even more human and worthy of the spectator's compassion. But, as with all war images, these images had been curated. For example, according to one article, Ukraine's media portrayal of people with their dogs may have been based on the Soviet narrative of the dog as a trusted companion.[30] No image is safe from being tampered with by social narratives.

I feel protective of stray thoughts. I want to collect them and bind them into a beautiful floral bouquet that I hang on my door. So, before you enter me, you see them. To engage with you, I would need to invent you. There is no one in the vicinity of my vagina, my pussy. I write pussy as a reference to and reverence for the feminist musical group Pussy Riot. There is hope. It is hopeful to see that some species can survive in a world that humans strive to destroy. I do not feel naked in the eyes of the cat[31] I just invented. I do not think she is very interested.

A cinematic tableau depicting a street café in Paris. In *Le Bonheur* (France, 1965), director Agnes Varda shows the protagonists talking at a table, but the camera does not stay with the characters. It strays instead, the visual focus shifting to the extras in the background. The actors are still performing at their table but are not visible to the audience. While in general, all cinematic elements serve the narrative, including characters, set design, framing, and lighting, the movements of the stray camera produce visual suspense and friction within the storyline. I like Varda's conscious drifting, but whenever I met my friend Greta in a café, her gaze always drifted somewhere else. I was disturbed by this, and politely asked what she was looking at. She said, "I am a filmmaker. I like to observe people." Indeed, I thought, but not those in front of you.

30 Matthias Dusini, "Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben?", Falter 15 (12 April 2022), https://www.falter.at/zeitung/20220412/hunde-wollt-ihr-ewig-leben. There was also a mention of Laika, the first animal in space. As a former stray, Laika became the center of an influential Soviet propaganda narrative.

31 In his essay, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow) (2008)," Jacques Derrida discusses instances of standing naked before his cat, which makes him feel embarrassed. He attributes this discomfort to an anthropocentric worldview that holds that only humans can experience or trigger shame. Derrida argues against this perspective, claiming it undermines the complexity of animal experiences and unfairly degrades them as less than human subjectivity. Jacques Derrida, The Animal That Therefore I Am, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 1-51.

Use words that are already plump and healthy, no time to ripen extravagant words. I am scared that you will miss all the excellent words I found for you in the dictionary. I wanted to create a streamlined article. With every paragraph in proper order, in precise words. I imagined my essay as an intellectual highway, straight to the point. The complete contrast of stray movements, fighting the concept's arbitrariness and caprice.

During the preventive quarantine at the beginning of the pandemic, while shopping for groceries, you received an official message on your phone. This message mandated you to return to your flat.

We stray on different planes. Longing is possibly a feeling that leads me astray. Without longing, I would stay put, concentrate on my life. Encouraged to stay close to home, the short radius of the immediate neighbourhood was enhanced in meaning. Freedom of movement became precious, and my surroundings were experienced more deeply. Because we were so stuck inside it, some quarantine experiences made the radius shrink to one's indoors. I learned then that it is possible to stray inside. Sex is possible outside and inside, and so is straying.

Architect and city planner Le Corbusier lamented that "the old cities" were built along animal

trails, resulting in a messy structure.[32] The animals created paths by meandering and zig-zagging to find food and water, and people built their houses and dwellings along these animal routes. The modern and, most importantly, hygienic city, in contrast, cuts that meandering and creates the sane, straight line. Today, we know that straight-lined cities get very dirty as well. Roaming animals mark and create territories by expelling their bodily fluids. Humans mark territories by littering.[33] And although human senses cannot perceive the odorous spraying of the cats' territories, I can speculate about their habitats. I wonder about the cat's paths in the city - the mapping of the imagined cat ways becomes a post-humanist drawing.

I stray outdoors - houses, rivers, woods, and power plants. I stray indoors - schools, prisons, and libraries. Ladders allow the exploration of different levels of the bookshelves. The upper shelves are not reachable from the floor, and I remember that straying does not happen on a horizontal plane alone. Straying includes jumping, sliding, and traversing all dimensions in the three-dimensional world, whereas walking keeps you on one plane. Discipline is choreography. Straying is improvisation. Archiving and cataloguing build methodical structures. Meandering and lingering generate unique patterns. Messy modes of movement enable the discovery of unexpected and enchanted encounters.

Straying is not associative because the body must always traverse the space without skipping space. There are no cosmic wormholes that gobble up bodies and spit them out again at

32 Le Corbusier, The City of Tomorrow and its Planning, trans. Frederick Etchells (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès & Cie, 1925; New York: Dover Publications, 2013 [1929]); Catherine Ingraham, "The Burdens of Linearity: Donkey Urbanism," in Architecture Theory since 1968, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 642-57.
33 Michel Serres, Malfeasance: Appropriation Through Pollution?, trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford University Press, 2010).

another place. Thoughts can jump in the time-space continuum, but bodies are bound to another dimension. The cat jumps and moves through the air and lands softly. Do cats always land on their feet? Whereas art is often about cutting out the unnecessary, walking does not pose the question of what is an accessory and what is essential.

Straying involves all one's senses. There is a scent in the air. I smell a vanilla-y body product I used in my teens. I am transported via a time-machined inner feeling mediated by permeable skin.

English etymology provides another angle: to stray is akin to *street* and *extravagant*. A definition of "stray" on the Merriam-Webster site is unwanted. Examples given of the unwanted: stray light. You have no idea, dear Merriam-Webster, how beautiful stray light fluctuates through optics. Astronomers observing distant galaxies are not fond of stray light diffusions in their telescopes. But broken in camera lenses, stray lights enchant the cinematic image, created in postproduction or with special, possibly old lenses diffracting the light resourcefully. Diffraction is today's antidote to humanist self-reflection.[34] Stray light is beautiful, enhancing dreamy sets and scenery, a love scene, heroine kisses hero. I see a never-written love story. I aim to diffract myself, but I am already distracted.

I imagine myself scattering in front of you. I plop my liver at your feet, and my heart pumps on the floor. Your heart, in contrast, resembles the lead singer in Green Day's music video *Stray Heart*. And I love that heart. It is the perfect stray object. A cunning, smoking heart leaves the breast that holds it in place; he runs and has fun. The guy, the lead singer, stands at the door of a beautiful woman he is in love with. She looks at his heart and knows he is not truthful. Because she stares

34 As a tool of thinking, diffraction was introduced by Donna Haraway and later adopted by Karen Barad. Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart", Parallax 20(3): 168-187, https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623.

into his chest, and there is a hole - no heart. The hole is beautifully rendered, a perfect vantage point for other perspectives. She sees right through his chest to what is behind, perspectives his body no longer conceals. The heart is cunning. This is a smoking, definitively male figure who is having fun on his adventure while his owner looks miserable. I strive for this kind of stray. Free. Absolutely free to have fun. I love your free heart. This is your beautiful, capable heart. Mine is fleshy, somewhere on the floor.

Cats delight in meat.

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THICK TIME, THIN PLACES

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Visuo-spatial or time-space synaesthetes visualise and position abstract units of time as mappings in the virtual space of their mind, effectively sensing time in space. In *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi identifies a "liminal nonplace" that "lies at the border of what we think of as internal, personal space and external, public space."[1] Rather than *nonplace*, a more apt description might be a *thin place*, where two dimensions touch and bleed freely into one another.[2] This paper explores the correspondence between the mental, inner spaces of time-space synaesthetes and the physical spaces in the "real" world around them, examining the ways in which these different dimensions overlap, inhabit one another, and ultimately collapse into the unified and unique experience of human perception. The journey starts from my own experience, describing my personal spatial configurations for time and memory and how I rely on these to situate myself and navigate a path through life. Along the way I connect with other stories - including from friends and family, the Indigenous Australian concept of the Dreaming, the Irish topographic and toponymic tradition of *dinnseanchas*, Minkowski and Einstein's theory of spacetime, Wolfgang Tillman's *Time Mirrored*, and Tim Robinson's "deep mapping" - to illustrate how lived experience takes place in a space that is simultaneously tangible and intangible, flowing freely between inner and outer worlds and combining multiple senses, tenses, and dimensions.

1 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (London: Duke University Press, 2002), 186.
2 Laura Béres, "A Thin Place: Narratives of Space and Place, Celtic Spirituality and Meaning," *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work* 31, no. 4 (October 2012): 394-413.

time, memory, synaesthesia, spacetime, decoloniality, indigenous knowledge.

I. Threads of Time

Solstice I

I am sitting at the top of the stairs in the house where I grew up (Figure A). I am around ten years old and it is the start of the school holidays, just after the summer solstice. The long evening sunlight stretches inside, hazily illuminating the lace curtains hanging in the window and thickening the air, revealing floating motes of dust. I feel a heightened sense of attunement to my surroundings: the natural environment outside the open window, the tremor of the leaves, and the soft sough of the wind. The neighbours' garden across the way is verdant, abundant, and shimmering with life. I am suddenly overcome by a presentiment of nostalgia: I sense the fleeting nature of this moment, and realise that one day it might no longer be possible to return to this scene.

The nature of time

Time, "the original shape-shifter,"[1] remains one

1 Kerri ní Dochairtaigh, *Thin Places*

Figure A: View of an upstairs window inside the house where I grew up, looking to the garden beyond. Photo by the author.

of the most taken-for-granted and least understood features of our lives.[2] Omnipresent, it permeates every aspect of human existence, yet it is visible to us only in its traces. Pondering the elusiveness of time, the fourth-century theologian and philosopher Augustine of Hippo confessed, "I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled."[3] More than a millennia and a half later, in his book *The Order of Time* (2018), theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli admits "we still don't know how time actually works. The nature of time is perhaps the greatest remaining mystery. Curious threads connect it to those other great open mysteries: the nature of the mind, the origin of the universe, the fate of black

(Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2021), 4.

2 Barbara Adam, "Perceptions of Time," in *Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, ed. Tim Ingold (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), 503.

3 St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), Bk. XI, 14.

holes, the very functioning of life on Earth."[4]

An ambiguous relationship

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall was fascinated by the multifaceted, ambiguous relationship between time and humankind, observing how we variously "speak of it as being saved, spent, wasted, lost, made up, crawling, killed, and running out."[5] This ambiguity is something I can personally relate to – grappling with purely linear concepts of time, I often find myself resisting the strictures of set timetables or deadlines. According to a theory put forward by Hall, this might suggest an understanding of time that is polychronic rather than monochronic.

Hall associated monochronic or M-time – "doing one thing at a time" – with Northern European and North American cultures, and defined it as a conceptualisation of time that is linear and ordered, divisible, rigidly compartmentalised into schedules that are fixed and inflexible. He contrasted this with polychronic or P-time – "doing many things at once" – which he claimed was the typical understanding of time in Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Latin American cultures. More fluid and malleable than M-time, "P-time stresses involvement of people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules. Appointments are not taken as seriously and, as a consequence, are frequently broken [...] For polychronic people, time is seldom experienced as "wasted," and is apt to be considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road."[6]

Time as lived experience

Hall was keen to point out that rather than being natural or inherent, any conceptualisation of time is "arbitrary and imposed, that is, learned."[7] Sociologist Barbara Adam likewise stresses that how we perceive and conceptualise our experience

4 Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time*, trans. Erica Segre and Simon Carnell (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 2.

5 Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York,: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), 45.

6 Hall, 43.

7 Hall, 45.

of time “varies with cultures, historical periods and contexts, with members of societies and with a person’s age, gender, and position in the social structure. The meanings and values attributed to time, in other words, are fundamentally context-dependent.”[8] Adam’s research has exposed how dominant Western theories about time are premised on “positivist belief in an uncontaminated, objective reality” and thus fail to recognise the inherent subjectivity of time as experience.[9]

Architect Jeremy Till shares Adam’s view, arguing that “One’s experience of the world is radically affected by different modalities of time. In this light, time (in all its guises) is apprehended not as an abstraction to be intellectually ordered, but as a phenomenological immediacy to be engaged with at a human and social level.”[10] Till uses the term *thick time* to describe the coexistence of multiple temporal modalities where none predominates over the others. Thick time is multidimensional, an expanded present “that gathers the past and holds the future pregnantly, but not in an easy linear manner.”[11]

Knots in time

Another architect, Lina Bo Bardi, always maintained that “Linear time is a western invention; time is not linear, it is a marvellous entanglement, where at any moment points can be chosen and solutions invented without beginning or end.”[12] Bo Bardi’s reference to “points” correlates with Hall’s explanation of polychronic time, and her idea of time as a tangle brings to mind something I once read describing an indigenous Australian belief that “You can’t pull time apart or separate it.”[13] In the Aboriginal Australian concept of the Dreaming, there

8 Adam, 503.
9 Adam, 504.
10 Jeremy Till, “Thick Time: Architecture and the Traces of Time,” in *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*, eds. Iain Borden and Jane Rendell (London: Routledge, 2000), 290.
11 Till, 291.
12 Marcelo C. Ferraz, ed., Lina Bo Bardi (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo Bardi e Pietro M. Bardi, 1993), 333.
13 Aleksandar Janca and Clothilde Bullen, “The Aboriginal Concept of Time and Its Mental Health Implications,” supplement, *Australasian Psychiatry* 11, no. 1 (2003): S41.

is no distinction between past, present, and future. Cultural theorist and philosopher Erin Manning writes that “the Dreamings are like knots where the actual meets the virtual in a cycle of continuous regeneration […] these knots of experience are always shapeshifting across spacetime.”[14]

Enter spacetime

On 21st September 1908, Hermann Minkowski, a mathematician and former teacher of Albert Einstein, delivered an address at the 80th Assembly of German Natural Scientists and Physicians in Cologne, in which he introduced his theory of spacetime:

> The views of space and time which I wish to lay before you have sprung from the soil of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. They are radical. Henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality.[15]

In 1915, Einstein expanded on both Minkowski’s theory and his own earlier-proposed special theory of relativity, publishing *The Foundation of the General Theory of Relativity*. In it, he theorised that not only was spacetime a four-dimensional fabric, but that some of the most violent and energetic processes in the universe, events such as exploding stars and merging black holes, would create ripples in this fabric known as gravitational waves. A century later, Einstein’s theory was proven correct when researchers from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) in 2015 made the first direct observation of gravitational waves, detecting faint ripples in spacetime caused by the collision of two black holes 1.3 billion years ago.[16]

14 Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 467.
15 Hermann Minkowski, “Space and Time,” in *The Principle of Relativity: A Collection of Original Memoirs on the Special and General Theory of Relativity*, ed. H. A. Lorentz, A. Einstein, H. Minkowski, and H. Weyl, trans. W. Perrett and G. B. Jeffery (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1952): 75.
16 Caltech, “2017 Nobel Prize in Physics Awarded to LIGO Founders,” press release, accessed September 11, 2023, https://www.ligo.caltech.edu/page/press-release-2017-nobel-prize#cit.

The Dreaming Track in the Sky

Indigenous Australians had already been aware of the reality of spacetime for tens of millennia prior to Minkowski and Einstein's discoveries. In their cultures, time has always been thick and multidimensional, "a pond you can swim through – up, down, around."[17] I am particularly fond of this metaphor – the way it invites you to dive right in actively encourages a deeper understanding of time as a fully immersive, spatial experience.

Researchers in cultural astronomy like astrophysicists Duane Hamacher, Kirsten Banks, and Krystal De Napoli have found many examples of discoveries attributed to modern Western science that had already been made by Aboriginal Australian peoples thousands of years ago. Their deep-time astronomical knowledge has developed over more than 65,000 years through detailed observation of the night skies. As oral traditions passed down from generation to generation, this knowledge represents a central component of Aboriginal Australian culture and cosmology and is woven into the stories of the Dreaming.[18]

For example, in Wardaman traditions, the planets are ancestor spirits who walk along the Dreaming Track in the Sky, a celestial route familiar to Western astronomers as the ecliptic path of the sun. Wardaman Dreaming stories observe and clearly articulate the phenomenon known as retrograde motion, an optical illusion that causes the apparent backward motion of a planet, explaining it as the planet-ancestors slowing down and changing direction as they move both forwards and backwards on their cosmic journey.[19] Differentiating between planets and stars

17 Janca and Bullen, 41.
18 Duane Hamacher and Krystal De Napoli, "The Rapidly Growing World of Indigenous Astronomy," Free Astronomy Public Lectures, Swinburne University of Technology, Centre for Astrophysics & Supercomputing, June 1, 2018, audio-recording 1:08:54, https://australian-podcasts.com/podcast/free-astronomy-public-lectures/the-rapidly-growing-world-of-indigenous-astronomy-.
19 Duane Hamacher, "Aboriginal Traditions Describe the Complex Motions of Planets, the 'Wandering Stars' of the Sky," *The Conversation*, August 15, 2008, https://theconversation.com/aboriginal-traditions-describe-the-complex-

and noting their changing positions relative to each other allows Aboriginal cultures to devise complex seasonal calendars.[20] These are sometimes recorded in the landscape: or example, the Wurdi Youang stone arrangement built by the Wathaurong people indicates the positions of the setting sun at the solstices and equinoxes to mark the cycle of the year.[21]

II. Time-space synaesthesia

A further entanglement

Nancy Munn, a cultural anthropologist recognised for her ground-breaking, cross-cultural research into time and space, proceeds to tie yet another thread into Bo Bardi's marvellous entanglement, Manning's Dreaming knot, and Einstein and Minkowski's fabric of spacetime, claiming that "In a lived world, spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be disentangled, and the two commingle in various ways."[22] Many people seem to sense some sort of implicit or explicit association between time and space, evidenced in everyday expressions commonly found across cultures, such as "back in the 90s," or "in the months ahead."[23] Certain individuals, however, experience this "commingling" to a much greater extent, demonstrating a conscious awareness of mappings between time and space caused by a condition known as time-space synaesthesia.[24]

A union of the senses

The term synaesthesia derives etymologically from New Latin, *syn* (joined) + *aesthesia*, from Greek *aisthesis* (sensation), and thus literally

motions-of-planets-the-wandering-stars-of-the-sky-97938.
20 Raymond Haynes, Roslynn D. Haynes, David Malin, and Richard McGee, *Explorers of the Southern Sky: A History of Australian Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.
21 Reg Abrahams, Duane W. Hamacher, Cilla Norris, and Ray P. Norris, "Wurdi Youang: An Australian Aboriginal Stone Arrangement With Possible Solar Indications," *Rock Art Research* 30, no. 1, (2013): 64.
22 Nancy Munn, "The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 94.
23 Julia Simner, Neil Mayo, and Mary-Jane Spiller," A Foundation for Savantism? Visuo-Spatial Synaesthetes Present with Cognitive Benefits," *Cortex* 45, no. 10 (November-December 2009): 1247.
24 Simner, Mayo, and Spiller, 1246.

refers to a union of the senses. It describes a perceptual phenomenon believed to be caused by hyperconnectivity within the brain,[25] which results in cross-activation and "cross-talk" between different brain regions and leads to unusual ways of sensing and experiencing the world.[26] Julia Simner, a professor of neuropsychology specialising in multisensory research, writes that synaesthesia "is characterised by the pairing of particular triggering stimuli (or 'inducers') with particular resultant experiences (or 'concurrents')."[27] These pairings can manifest in many forms, for example experiencing music (inducer) as colour (concurrent), or tasting words (concurrent) in poetry (inducer). In the case of time-space synaesthesia, time is the triggering stimulus, with space being the resultant synaesthetic experience. Estimates of the prevalence of time-space synaesthesia in the general population vary from an overly conservative 2.2 percent to as much as 29 percent,[28] but whatever the actual percentage, it is a demographic of which I make up part.

Sensing time in space

Like all individuals with time-space synaesthesia (also referred to as visuo-spatial synaesthesia), I experience units of time as forms or regions with a spatial layout. For as long as I can remember, I have perceived the months of the year arranged in a circle that I move through in an anti-clockwise direction (Figure B). January is at the top, with July and August at the bottom. The pace at which I progress through the different months is not constant, but varies depending on their position in the circle and relative to each other. There is a moment of stasis around January and February, when the movement slows right down. This marks a turning

Figure B: Sketch of my synaesthetic calendar, 2023. Image by the author.

25 Romke Rouw and H. Steven Scholte, "Increased Structural Connectivity in Grapheme-Color Synaesthesia," *Nature Neuroscience* 10, no. 6 (June 2007): 792.
26 Julia Simner, "Defining Synaesthesia," *British Journal of Psychology*, 103 (2012): 9.
27 Simner, Mayo, and Spiller, 1246.
28 Andrew M. Havlik, Duncan A. Carmichael, and Julia Simner, "Do Sequence-Space Synaesthetes Have Better Spatial Imagery Skills? Yes, but There Are Individual Differences," *Cognitive Processing* 16 (2015): 245.

point – I feel myself suspended, the same kind of weightless inertia experienced at the highest point of a rollercoaster, right before gravity kicks in. Then, as the gravitational potential energy is transformed into kinetic, I descend quickly through the flush of spring and freefall quite effortlessly towards summer, my birthday marking the summer solstice as I arrive to the lowest part of my mental calendar but the high point of my year. There is another lull and slight deceleration as the circle flattens out and I coast along during the long days of the summer holidays. In September, with the start of the academic year – which as opposed to January represents for me the true beginning of a new cycle – I start to ascend again, slowly, as the days darken, trudging uphill to reach the shortest day on the winter solstice, heralding Christmas and the subsequent start of a new Gregorian calendar year.

Synaesthetic spatial configurations for time and calendar forms have been recorded as far back as the early nineteenth century. Although the positioning or form of the mappings is uniquely personal and differs from synaesthete to synaesthete, one characteristic feature used to diagnose time-space synaesthesia that differentiates it from other forms of strong mental imagery is that these arrangements remain highly consistent over time.[29]

One of the earliest written descriptions of synaesthetic calendars, published by polymath Francis Galton[30] in his 1883 book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, reveals both similarities and differences when compared to my own:

The months of the year are usually perceived as ovals, and they as often follow one another in a reverse direction to those of the figures on the clock, as in the same direction. It is a common peculiarity that the months do not occupy equal spaces, but those that are most important to the child extend more widely than the rest.

29 Simner, Mayo, and Spiller, 1247.
30 Galton also holds the rather dubious honour of being recognised as the founder of eugenics.

There are many varieties as to the topmost month; it is by no means always January.[31]

A visuo-spatial continuum

While I often say that I "envisage" my calendar array, I realise that this is perhaps not the most accurate word to use, because it places undue emphasis on visualisation. Visuo-spatial synaesthesia is a continuum,[32] and while some time-space synaesthetes can describe very definite visual features, for me it is more of a spatialisation, since while I am aware of the months and their positions, I find it difficult to provide a visual description of the actual months themselves – for me, they have no particular shape or colour, but rather represent regions in space that are definite, constant, and unchanging.

I do, however, sense areas of the circle as being darker or lighter – the half of the circle between October and February is perceptibly and noticeably darker than the section between March and September, more or less aligned with the spring and autumn equinoxes in the northern hemisphere, presumably a subconscious interiorisation of the shorter and darker days outside.

The summer months have always been brighter in my mind and in my memory, so it makes sense that the winter months would naturally be darker by comparison. When I was 14 years old, I suffered for the first time from seasonal affective disorder or SAD, a type of depression influenced by seasonal patterns, where symptoms are usually more apparent and severe during the winter months. Since then, the difference in brightness between the two halves of the year on my synaesthetic calendar has become more pronounced, and while SAD has never

affected me again to the same extent, there are

31 Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1883), 124.
32 Clare N. Jonas and Mark C. Price, "Not dAll Synesthetes Are Alike: Spatial vs. Visual Dimensions of Sequence-Space Synaesthesia," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, no. 776 (October 2014), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01171.

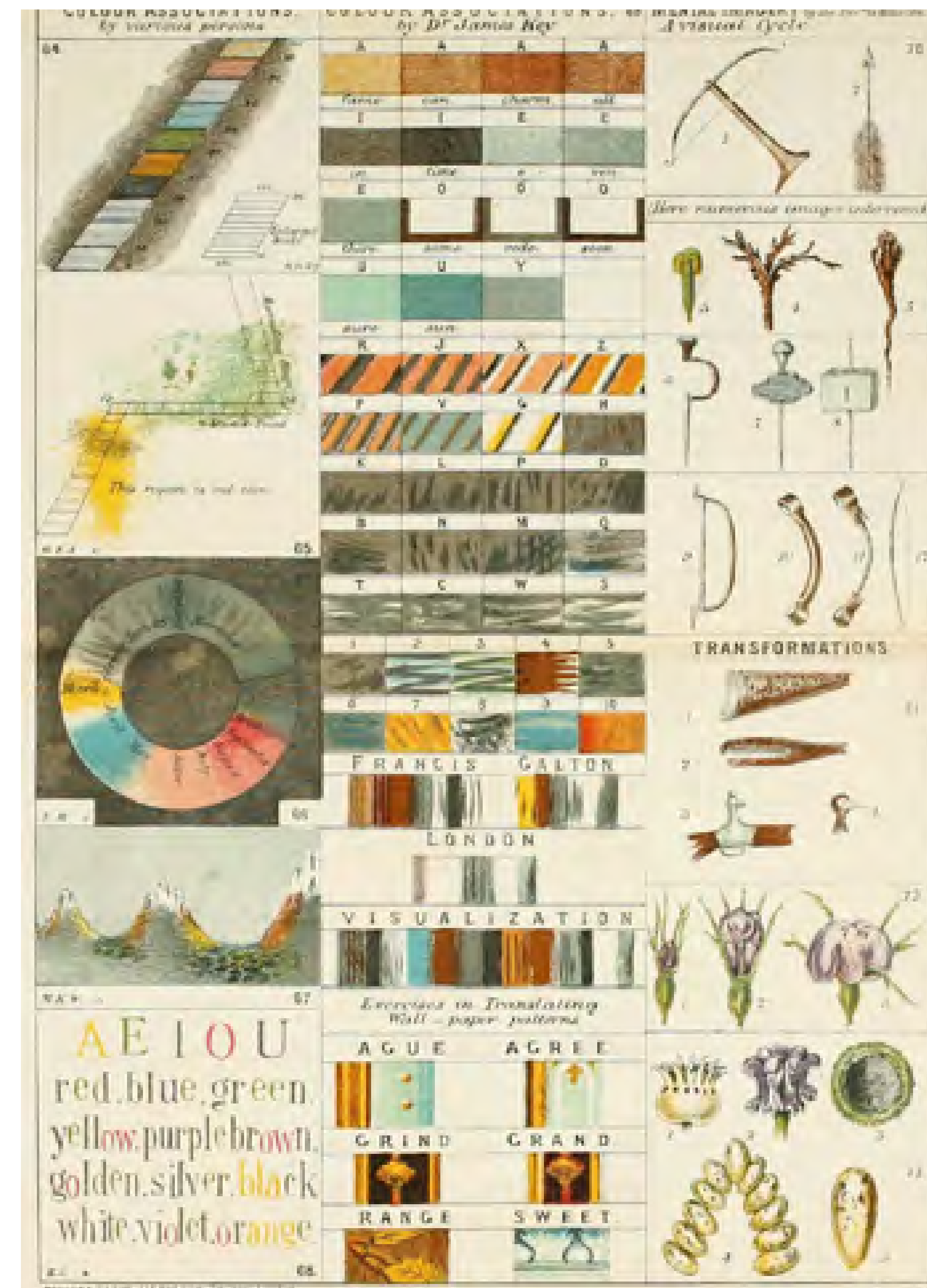

Figure C: Plate IV from Galton's book, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development.* Licence: Public domain.

still years when I experience less intense bouts.

Pause

Upon reaching the final pages of Galton's book, I am struck by a very beautiful hand-illustrated plate (Figure C). Galton writes, "Figs. 66, 67. These two are selected out of a large collection of coloured Forms in which the months of the year are visualised. They will illustrate the gorgeousness of the mental imagery of some favoured persons."[33] The configuration of Figure 66 (Figure D) is strikingly similar to my own calendar: the months are arranged anti-clockwise in a circle, with January at the top left, and from here all of the months are found in

33 Galton, 146.

more or less the same positions as I perceive them, albeit shifted slightly further anti-clockwise. Even more surprisingly, even though unlike me this synaesthete associates certain months with a specific colour – March is yellow; April and May are light blue; June and July salmon pink; with August, September, and October all a reddish hue – the half of the calendar between the end of October and the start of March is noticeably darker, coloured a murky grey. This gives me pause – it is quite a strange sensation to discover that this person, described by Galton only as "the wife of an able London physician," living in a different country a full century before I was born, experienced the months of the year in a very similar way to how I do. I feel a strange affinity with this mystery woman, as if we somehow share a common connection that allows us to navigate our inner and outer spacetimes.

Figure D: Detail of Fig. 66 from Galton's Plate IV

Mental arrays

If I hear a popular song released any time in the past few decades, I will usually be able to recall with an uncanny degree of accuracy the year in which it was released. The same goes for films, family history, personal memories, and world events. Anecdotal reports suggest that an above-average memory for dates and events in visuo-spatial synaesthetes appears to be quite common. This led a group of scientists at the University of Edinburgh and the University of East London to test whether time-space synaesthetes do actually present cognitive benefits with regard to memory recall. Their hypothesis predicted that "synaesthetes will have superior performance in these tasks because their time-space arrays afford them an additional dimension (space) by which to encode or retrieve temporal information."[34]

The results showed that synaesthetes did indeed show superior abilities in recalling temporal information, consistently out-performing non-synaesthete controls in accurately recalling dates

34 Simner, Mayo, and Spiller, 1251.

of world events, films, and music. These abilities were not limited to simple date recall, since they were also able to recall on average almost twice as many autobiographical memories as non-synaesthetes.[35]

The phenomenology of this remarkable ability in time-space synaesthetes appears to be rooted in the spatialisation of temporal data – whether events, dates, or memories – which enables us to quickly retrieve them by determining their relative position to one another in our mental array. Simner notes that

When presented with a time period (e.g., a month of the year) time-space synaesthetes report that the associated spatial location is immediately brought to mind, and that they have a sophisticated ability to mentally manipulate the properties of this spatial representation. Specifically, synaesthetes claim to be able to manipulate the viewing-angle and size of their arrays, by taking multiple perspectives (or sometimes mentally re-orienting the array), or by "zooming in" on certain portions.[36]

For me at least, this ability has further applications: whenever I need to ground myself in a particular moment, I have a habit of zooming out, recalling and retrieving the location of a memory or momentous event. I calculate how far I am from that point by simultaneously checking where I was and what I was doing the same distance of time in the "opposite" direction, as a way to determine the relative position of the "now" where I find myself. I am always situated some*where*, some*now*, but it is a position that I sense as much within the wider universe as inside my mind, and I cannot differentiate where one ends and the other begins

Involuntary projections

It is important to point out that the array inside my mind is not a "Memory Palace" in the strict sense of a method of loci. I don't construct an imaginary version of an actual building or a familiar setting

35 Simner, Mayo, and Spiller, 1255.
36 Simner, Mayo, and Spiller, 1250.

within which I assign images to set loci, locations that must always be visited in a particular sequence in order to retrieve different memories which are stored in each room. Time-space synaesthesia is not a conscious trick or mnemonic device employed to enhance memory recall through the creation of mental associations. Thus another characteristic that distinguishes the mental arrays of visuo-spatial synaesthetes from other types of mental imagery and visualisations is the fact that they are involuntary rather than conscious projections.

III. Thin places

A yellow car

I am sitting in the back seat of my parents' car, an old yellow Ford Escort (Figure E) with a habit of breaking down in the most awkward places at the most inopportune moments. It is 1983, and we are driving along the Meadow Road to my aunt's house. I am looking out the window at the sky (Figure F) when the row of purple sycamores planted along the edge of the football field suddenly flashes into view, forcing my eyes to adjust from their lazy gaze to dart between staccato bursts of leaves that punctuate a now-overexposed sky behind them. In a town where tree-lined roads are few and far between, the combination of the height and reach of those trees and the scintillating rhythm of shadow and light effects created by the movement of the car passing beneath them allows me to recognise where I am, and from that deduce where we are headed. Those trees were my first route markers, positioning devices that helped me begin to understand the spatiality of the world I found myself in; that car journey constituted an awakening of spatial awareness.

Revelations in motion

According to map-maker and author Tim Robinson, "Sometimes, changes in the relative position or apparent size of objects, caused by our own motion, reveal that motion to us at an unaccustomed level

Figure E: The yellow Ford Escort owned by my parents in the early 1980s. Family photo.

of consciousness, and bring the bare fact of motion, of position itself, into the light of attention."[37] Robinson wrote this while analysing a similar moment of cognisance of the "delicate and precise awareness of one's spatial relationships to the world,"[38] namely Marcel Proust's recollection of the "special pleasure" he experienced on catching sight of the twin steeples of Martinville and that of Vieuxvicq, a triangulation in which they were "constantly changing their position with the movement of the carriage and the windings of the road"; Proust recalled, "In noticing and

37 Tim Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara & Other Writings*, (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1996): 104.
38 Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara*, 105.

igure F: Blurry shot from the back seat of our yellow car in motion, early 1980s. Family photo.

registering the shape of their spires, their shifting lines, the sunny warmth of their surfaces, I felt that I was not penetrating to the core of my impression, that something more lay behind that mobility, that luminosity, something which they seemed at once to contain and to conceal."[39]

That something more, suggests Robinson, is the dawning realisation that "We are spatial entities [...] Our physical existence is at all times wrapped in the web of directions and distances that constitutes our space."[40]

Solstice II

It is an afternoon in June 1983 or 1984, one week before the summer solstice. It is my birthday, and I am skipping excitedly down a tree-lined

39 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, Volume 1, Swann's Way, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 254.
40 Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara*, 105.

Figure G: Poorly-exposed photograph of the lime trees on our avenue, early 1980s. Family photo.

avenue (Figure G) with my cousin, coming home from the nursery school at the opposite end. I'm clutching a bag of sweets, swinging it in time with my steps, one of those cone-shaped plastic bags of marshmallows, pointed at the bottom end and twisted into a handle at the top, a present from the teachers. It is sunny, and the trees are scattering dappled shade, their leaves rustling softly in the breeze. I don't recall noticing any of the houses, cars, or people that we pass, but I am distinctly aware of the trees arching high above me in a moiré-patterned vault of green and gold. My memory soaks up the light, the sounds, the warmth of the sun, the smell of the lime blossom, the pollen and feathery wishes[41] floating on the air. These trees personify the avenue, my sense of home sheltered in their quiet, reassuring presence.

Of trees and planters

I was fortunate to grow up on one of the few tree-

41 A wish is a colloquial name for the silky pappus-clad, wind-dispersed seeds of thistles, dandelions and similar flowers, derived from the wish supposedly granted you upon catching one.

Figure H: Playing in our garden with the avenue of lime trees in the background, mid-1980s. Family photo.

lined streets in our town (Figure H). This avenue originally led up to a "big house," a term used by Irish people - "with a slight inflection - that of hostility, irony?"[42] - to describe a mansion of the landed gentry. Before the much more modest houses of my parents and our neighbours were built along one side of the avenue in the early 1980s, it was known locally as Lovers' Lane, a place where courting couples would dander[43] on romantic strolls.

The English writer and horticulturist John Evelyn is credited as being the first person to use the term *avenue*, describing it in his 1664 book *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees* as "the principal *Walk* to the *Front* of the *House,*"[44] since avenues have historically been planted on the estates of the aristocracy to formally mark this particular route. According to Sarah M. Couch, an architect and specialist in the conservation of historic parks and gardens, they represent "a highly visible expression of man's imposition of order over nature: an avenue could be seen as a symbol of control over the landscape and its inhabitants; an expression of ownership and power."[45]

This was certainly the case with our avenue: the big house that it originally led to, Ashgrove, was built as the seat of the Carlile family, who arrived in the area from Scotland in 1611 at the beginning of the Plantation of Ulster,[46] the most ambitious settler colonial project ever undertaken in Europe. The British Crown, with the aim of subjugating and consolidating control over what until then had been the most Gaelic and least anglicised province of Ireland, forcibly confiscated land from the indigenous population and granted it to "loyal" planters from England and Scotland "who would bring civility, order and the Protestant faith."[47] Viewing Ireland "as a country whose resources were there to be exploited for the economic benefit of Britain,"[48] these planters set about altering the environment to achieve their aim, dramatically transforming not only the physical but also the demographic, political, religious, social, and cultural landscape.

Taming the wilderness

A familiar colonial narrative often employed to justify imperialism and the subjugation of indigenous populations - not only in Ireland, but also in the Americas, the Caribbean, Australia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian sub-continent - is the discourse of improvement. This constructs a dichotomy wherein the native landscape and people are characterised as wild and uncultivated, in contrast to the productive and civilising influence of the colonisers. By way of

42 Elizabeth Bowen, "The Big House," *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature*, no. 9 (2017): 86.
43 A dander is a gentle meandering walk with no particular haste or purpose, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/dander.
44 John Evelyn, *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees* (London, 1664), xcix.

45 Sarah M. Couch, "The Practice of Avenue Planting in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Garden History* 20, no. 2 (1992): 173.
46 Nicholas Carlisle, *Collections for a History of the Ancient Family of Carlisle* (London: W. Nicol, 1822), 201.
47 Jonathan Bardon, *The Plantation of Ulster: War and Conflict in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012), Chapter 1.
48 Joanna Brück, "Landscape Politics and Colonial Identities: Sir Richard Colt Hoare's Tour of Ireland, 1806," *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 7, no. 2 (June 2007): 228.

this narrative, explains archaeologist Joanna Brück, "the properties of the landscape become assimilated to the characteristics of its inhabitants."[49] In the colonial imagination, the savage nature of the landscape not only reflects the barbarous culture of its people, but the reverse is equally true.[50]

The elements of the Irish landscape that British colonialists most associated with the "wilde and barbarous"[51] natives were the country's woods and bogs, denounced in the 1601 Calendar of State Papers as "a great hindrance to us and a help to the rebel."[52] According to geographer and historian Eileen McCracken, they posed "a serious obstacle to the Tudor conquest and colonization of Ireland. The Irish had resisted the invaders from the shelter of the bogs and woods whenever possible."[53] This gave rise to a common English saying at the time: "The Irish will never be tamed while the leaves are on the trees."[54] The forests, along with those they harboured, became targets for eradication.

Ten thousand years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, the island of Ireland was almost entirely covered in forest. Today, it has the lowest tree cover of any country in the European Union: a paltry 11 percent, compared to the European average of 33.5 percent. Less than 2 percent is native woodland, the rest mainly consisting of commercial conifer plantations.[55] While deforestation had already been ongoing since the first Mesolithic farmers began clearing woodland for agriculture and grazing 7,000 years ago, it accelerated dramatically during the

49 Brück, 230.
50 Stiofán Ó Cadhla, *Civilizing Ireland: Ordnance Survey 1824-1842: Ethnography, Cartography, Translation* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 111.
51 William Camden, *Britain, or A Chorographicall Description of the Most Flourishing Kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: George Latham, 1637), 105.
52 *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI., Mary, and Elizabeth, 1601-3* (London: Longman, H.M.S.O, 1912), 253.
53 Eileen McCracken, "The Woodlands of Ireland Circa 1600," Irish Historical *Studies* 11, no. 44 (September 1959): 287.
54 William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, New Impressions*, vol. I (London: Longmans, 1913), 333.
55 Richard Nairn, "A Brief History of Ireland's Native Woodlands," *Coillte Nature*, October 19, 2020, https://www.coillte.ie/a-brief-history-of-irelands-native-woodlands/.

colonial period, as English and Scottish planters "spread across Ireland throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, felling woodland at an incredible rate."[56] This systematic clearance can in part be attributed to military-strategic aims of eradicating the last refuges of the rebellious natives, but profit was also a motive – as McCracken states, "[t]he planters wanted to make money as quickly as possible and one of the easiest ways was to utilize the timber on their estates."[57]

Of planters and trees

The devastating environmental effects of colonial exploitation reshaped the Irish landscape, but while the planters were content to plunder native woodlands, they "nonetheless valued biodiversity in their gardens."[58] Samuel Lewis reported in his 1837 *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* that since the "ancient forests have long since been cleared away," the only trees to be found "are in the neighbourhood of the mansions of the nobility and gentry."[59] Brück describes how the Anglo-Irish aristocracy planted trees around their estates to "relieve the eye from the dreariness and desolation of so much of the Irish countryside, providing an oasis of civilization and a little piece of Britain in this foreign country."[60] Having been extirpated from most of the landscape, trees now paradoxically came to symbolise the very plantations that caused their decimation. As a French visitor to Ireland in the late 1880s remarked, "The tree has become a lordly ensign. Wherever one sees it one may be certain the landlord's mansion is not far."[61]

A colonial inheritance

56 Eoin Neeson, "Woodland in History and Culture," in *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History, eds. John Wilson Foster and Helena C.G. Chesney* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997), 141.
57 McCracken, 289.
58 Keith Pluymers, "Taming the Wilderness in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Ireland and Virginia," *Environmental History* 16, no. 4 (October 2011): 613.
59 Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London: S. Lewis and Co., 1837), 522.
60 Brück, 230.
61 Philippe Daryl, *Ireland's Disease; Notes and Impressions. The Author's English Version* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1888), 52-53.

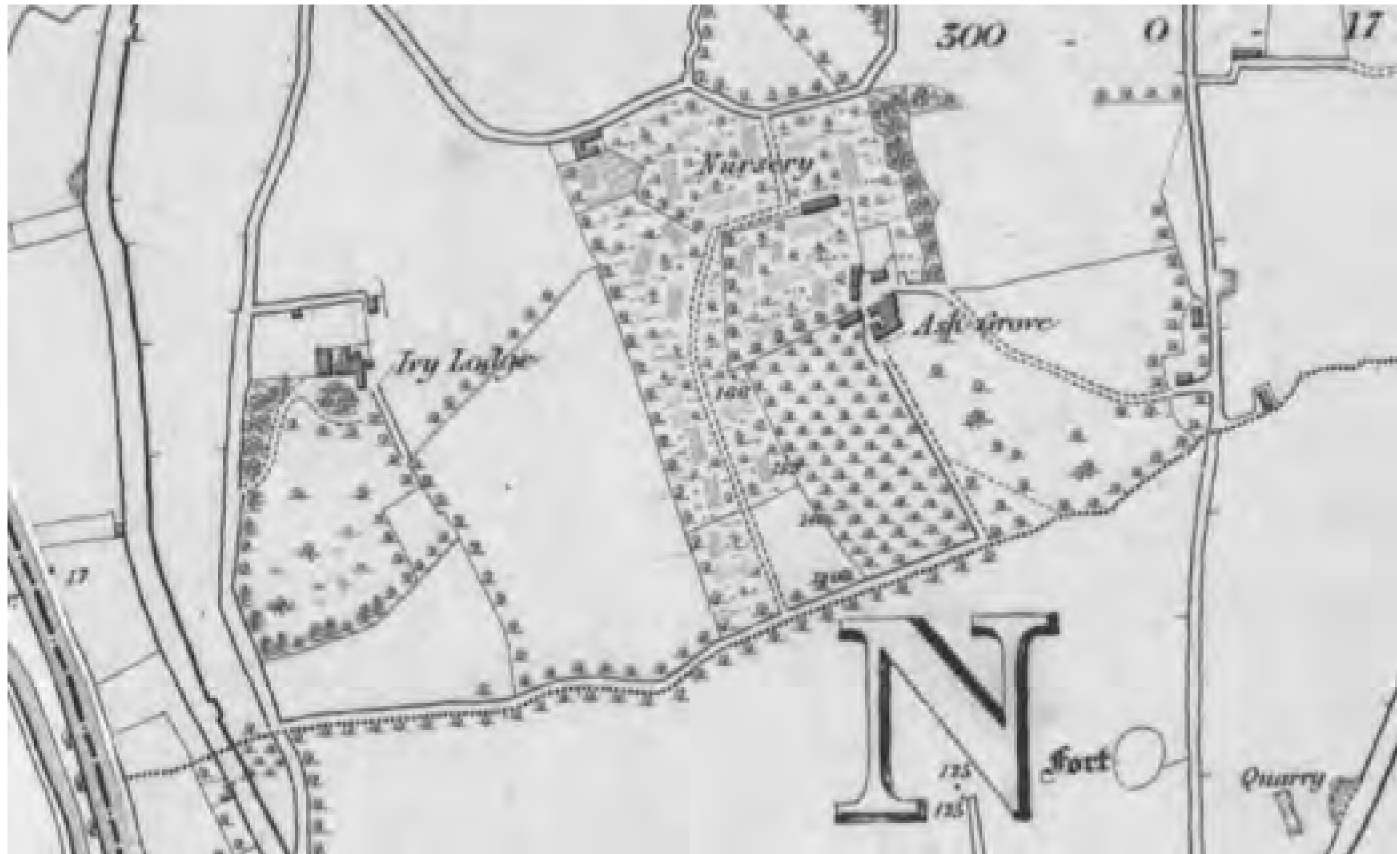

Figure I: Ordnance Survey map from 1832-1846, showing a row of trees planted on either side of the avenue that runs from southwest to northeast on the main approach to Ashgrove estate (here labelled Ash Grove); while the grounds of the estate abound with trees and even contain a plant nursery, trees are noticeably absent from the surrounding landscape. © Ordnance Survey Ireland / PRONI Historical Maps.

The trees on our avenue stand as testaments to this artificially planted colonial legacy. Exactly when they were laid out by the Carliles is uncertain, but a double row of trees can already be seen on the Ordnance Survey map of the area drawn between 1832 and 1846 (Figure I), so the surviving trees would appear to be at least 177 years of age, but are most likely older.

By the time my father set foot on the avenue in February 1982 to view a housing development he had seen advertised in the local paper, the Carliles and their big house had disappeared, and the trees on the south side of Lovers' Lane had already been cut down to make way for the new houses. In order to secure the last of these on a corner plot, my father quickly engaged a solicitor, arranged a mortgage, and put down a deposit to buy the house before my mother - at that moment pregnant and confined to her bed - had even had a chance to see it.

Invisible ashes

As a child I was fascinated by nature - from books I taught myself the names of the wild birds, animals,

and plants I would spot around our local area. For a long time I wondered why our avenue - which illustrated field guides helped me to identify was lined by lime trees - appeared to be named after a grove of ash trees that were nowhere to be found. Even when I learned that the avenue took its name from the big house it once led to, explorations of the surrounding grounds revealed only a few solitary oaks, with not a single ash in sight.

According to one Nicholas Carlisle[62] writing in 1822, the Carlile family's residence was originally known as Drumcashilone, "the name of the Townland upon which the Mansion is built, but, within the last fifty years, the Father of the present Proprietor changed its name to 'Ashgrove.'"[63] Researchers Anna Pilz and Andrew Tierney confirm that from around the mid-seventeenth century, the planting of trees on the estates of the gentry "was accompanied by a new fashion for renaming country houses after trees, part of the process of further Anglicizing the native landscape."[64] Hugh Carlile's decision to rename Drumcashilone to Ashgrove was therefore not an isolated incident, neither was it an innocuous act; rather, it reflected a long-established and deliberate policy of anglicisation and erasure. "This was a process that had been going on piecemeal since the earliest days of the English colonization of Ireland, but now it was being implemented systematically," writes Tim Robinson, that aforementioned triangulator of Proust; "As a result, over most of Ireland the placenames have lost their subtlety of sound […] and have been rendered meaningless, thereby shedding their load of historical, mythical and descriptive content."[65]

Ironically enough, Robinson was an Englishman, one who lived the last four decades of his life on the Atlantic coast of Ireland, where

62 The Carlile family name seemed to have many spellings, Carlisle and Carlyle being two variations.
63 Carlisle, 201.
64 Anna Pilz and Andrew Tierney, "Trees, Big House Culture, and the Irish Literary Revival," *New Hibernia Review/ Iris Éireannach Nua* 19, no. 2 (Samhreadh/Summer 2015): 67.
65 Tim Robinson, "An Interview with Tim Robinson," by Brian Dillon, *Field Day Review* 3 (2007): 38.

in his own words he set himself the task

to restore the musical and memorious Gaelic placenames that had been traduced by the phonologically dim and semantically null anglicized forms given on the official Ordnance Survey maps. This project I thought of as political, in that it aimed to undo some of the damage of colonialism […] But inevitably it was also a rescue-archaeology of a shallowly buried sacred landscape.[66]

Landscape as memory

The term townland[67] mentioned by Nicholas Carlisle represents the most basic unit of land division in Ireland. Townlands are ancient demarcations of place that usually take their names from identifiable natural or manmade features of the landscapes they mark, but they also often reference local genealogy and mythology. As such, these names "symbolize generations of memories rooted in places, a narrative of the intimate and mingled nature of that remembering,"[68] all of which is alluded to in the Irish word for both topography and placelore, *dinnseanchas*.

Much as the ritualised memory of the Dreaming stories of Aboriginal Australians keeps alive the spirit of place, the oral tradition of *dinnseanchas*[69] acts as custodian of the "sacred landscape" evoked by Robinson. *An Foclóir Beag,* The Little Dictionary translates *dinnseanchas* as "Lore about places, how they got their name, great events that happened there, etc."[70] The Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill elaborates

In *dinnsheanchas*, the land of Ireland is translated into story: each place has history that is being continuously told […] The landscape itself, in

66 Tim Robinson, *My Time in Space*, (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2001), 95.
67 From the Irish baile fearainn, meaning land, territory or quarter.
68 Bryonie Reid, "'That Quintessential Repository of Collective Memory': Identity, Locality and the Townland in Northern Ireland," in *Senses of Place, Senses of Time*, eds. Brian Graham and G. J. Ashworth (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 55.
69 Also spelled dinnsheanchas
70 https://www.teanglann.ie/en/fb/dinnseanchas.

other words, contains memory, and can point to the existence of a world beyond this one […] there is also an access to other times: there is a sense in which *dinnsheanchas* also mediates between past and present, and allows us glimpses into other moments in historical time.[71]

Other realms

Both *dinnseanchas* and the Dreaming take for granted the existence of realms other than the physical one we inhabit in our everyday lives. Indeed, the scientists operating the largest particle physics laboratory in the world suggest that it is entirely possible other dimensions exist, "but are somehow hidden from our senses."[72] Indigenous Australian cultures believe that the ancestral spirits of the Dreaming "still abound but are usually no longer visible, having withdrawn from human view into another space/time realm," having gone into the ground.[73] This is strikingly similar to the Celtic legend of the *Aos Sí*, a mythical race of supernatural beings descended from the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, the people of the goddess Danu. They were the inhabitants of the island of Ireland prior to the arrival of the Milesians, supposed ancestors of the present Irish population, with whom they came to an agreement that saw the *Tuatha Dé Danann* migrate underground to the Otherworld, a parallel universe separated from ours "by no barrier save concealment (*díchelt*)."[74] Just as in the Dreaming, "in the Otherworld all of time exists simultaneously in an eternal present."[75]

Thin places

"There are places," writes Kerri ní Dochairtaigh, "which are so thin that you meet yourself

71 Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, *Selected Essays*, ed. Oona Frawley (Dublin: New Island, 2005), 159-60.
72 "Do We Really Only Live in Three Dimensions?" CERN, February 17, 2012, https://cmsexperiment.web.cern.ch/index.php/physics/do-we-really-live-only-three-dimensions.
73 Dianne Johnson, *Night Skies of Aboriginal Australia: A Noctuary* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2014), 22.
74 John Carey, "Time, Space, and the Otherworld," Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium, Vol. 7 (1987): 7.
75 Carey, "Time, Space, and the Otherworld," 8.

in the still point. Like the lifting of the silky veil on Samhain, you are held in the space in between. No matter the past, the present or what is yet to come."[76]

A thin place is a tear in the spacetime continuum, where two dimensions touch and bleed freely into one another, a point where it is possible to pass from one world to another. Thin places are thresholds – they can represent physical locations, but they can also be moments in the cycle of the year, like the feast of Samhain, an event in the Celtic calendar that marks the end of the lighter half of the year and the beginning of the darker half. Celebrated between 31st October and 1st November, it is a time when the boundaries of this world and the Otherworld are stretched so thin that the spirits can walk amongst us. Celtic folklore has a fascination with thresholds, recognising the advantage of inhabiting liminal spaces, of having a foot in more than one realm.

IV. Thick time

Concentric collapse

The area where I grew up is dominated by Slieve Gullion, an extinct volcano situated in the centre of a circle of smaller mountains, known as the Ring of Gullion, or *Fáinne Cnoc Shliabh gCuillinn* (Figure J). This remarkable landform is known as a ring dyke, and was formed hundreds of millions of years ago by a series of particularly violent volcanic eruptions in which the caldera of the volcano collapsed concentrically. The Ring of Gullion was the very first geological formation of this type to be mapped.[77] At the summit is a crater or tarn lake and two ancient burial cairns (Figure K), the southernmost of which is the highest surviving passage tomb in Ireland, dating from between 4000 B.C. and 2500 B.C.[78] Passage tombs

76 Ní Dochairtaigh, xvi.
77 Sadhbh Baxter, *A Geological Field Guide to Cooley, Gullion, Mourne & Slieve Croob* (Dublin: Geological Survey of Ireland, 2008): 44.
78 "Winter Solstice – Setting Sun Illuminates Slieve Gullion Passage Tomb," *Ring of Gullion*, December 25,

Figure J: Photo of my mother taken close to the summit of Slieve Gullion, with the mountains of the Ring of Gullion visible in the background as a circle of dark hills, early 1980s. Family photo.

Figure K: My father and I on the summit of Slieve Gullion in 1981, standing beside the southern cairn with the crater or tarn lake in the near distance and the Ring of Gullion just about visible in the background. Family photo.

are found all over the island and are held to be especially thin places, believed to be entrances to the Otherworld.[79] It is easy to understand why – the Neolithic astronomers who built the cairn on Slieve Gullion aligned it so that on the winter solstice, the setting sun shines through the passage to illuminate the chamber at the centre of the tomb, a phenomenon also witnessed with the rising

2012, https://ringofgullion.org/news/winter-solstice-setting-sun-illuminates-slieve-gullion-passage-tomb/.
79 John Carey, "The Location of the Otherworld in Irish Tradition," in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*, ed. J. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000), 118.

sun at the much more well-known tomb at Newgrange.

Intimate relay

Slieve Gullion has been described as "perhaps the most mystic of our Irish mountains,"[80] providing the setting for some of the most famous Celtic legends. According to myth, the mountain's name comes from *Sliabh Cuilinn*, Culann's Mountain, referring to the metalsmith whose ferocious guard dog was killed by the legendary hero Sétanta, son of the sun god Lú, while Sétanta was still only a boy. This event led to him receiving his unusual adult name, *Cú Chulainn,* the Hound of Culann. Others maintain that Slieve Gullion is an anglicisation of *Sliabh gCuillinn*, meaning "mountain of the steep slope,"[81] referring to the mountain's geological feature of a crag and tail formed by glacial erosion.

This blurring of topography, toponymy, mythology, and geology is typical of *dinnseanchas* and reflects how the real and imagined, the tangible and the intangible, the natural and the supernatural become inseparable, interlaced in an intimate relay where it is impossible to tell which came first, where legend ends, and where landscape begins.

Time mirrored

In the spring of 2017, almost a year after the Brexit referendum, I visited the Wolfgang Tillmans exhibition at the Tate Modern in London. A work entitled *Time Mirrored*, a series of short reflections on time that juxtaposed historical events and periods in relation both to each other and to the present day, sparked a flash of recognition.

1969 was 24 years away from 1945

24 years back from now is 1992

80 T. G. F. Paterson, *Country Cracks; Old Tales from the County of Armagh* (Dundalk: W. Tempest, Dundalgan, 1939), 44.
81 "Slieve Gullion," Northern Ireland Place-name Project, accessed 3 April 2023, https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9b31e0501b744154b4584b1dce1f859b/page/Place-Name-Info/?data_id=dataSource_1-PlaceNames_Gazeteer_No_Global_IDs_3734%3A23950.

1991 was the year the Cold War ended after 44 years

44 years ago was the year 1972

Surprised to see someone else employing what to me is a very familiar methodology, I sought out more information on the artist's thought process. On the Tate website Tillmans explains, "I've written about time and the relative distances of time spans in order to remind myself of how much today is actually the history of tomorrow," [82] presenting examples to describe how the same time span can feel longer or shorter depending on the events that occurred between then and now, and how certain years appear closer or further away depending on their significance to one's personal life.

According to the Tate Modern's press release, *Time Mirrored* "represents Tillmans's interest in connecting the time in which we live to a broader historical context […] Events perceived as having happened over a vast gulf of time between us and the past, become tangible when 'mathematically mirrored' and connected to more recent periods of time in our living memory."[83]

During an earlier solo exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 2010, Tillmans described an approach to his art that reveals strong polychronic tendencies: "I try to approximate the way I see the world, not in a linear order but as a multitude of parallel experiences. Multiple singularities, simultaneously accessible as they share the same space."[84]

Triangulation, trilateration, parallax

I wonder if Tillmans might be a time-space synaesthete, given how his practice of situating the current moment or placing a past event by projecting an equal distance both backwards and forwards

82 "Studying Truth with Wolfgang Tillmans," Tate Modern Museum, accessed April 10, 2023, http://tate-tillmans.s3-website.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/.
83 "Wolfgang Tillmanns: 2017," Tate Modern, press release, accessed 10 April 2023, https://artblart.com/tag/wolfgang-tillmans-truth-study-center/.
84 "Wolfgang Tillmans, Truth Study Center, Tate 2017," Tate Modern, April 2018, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/tillmans-truth-study-center-tate-t15603.

in time uncannily parallels how I navigate the spacetime of my memory. It is a method comparable to triangulation, the technique of determining the location of a point from two known points on a baseline, although technically my method is closer to trilateration, since it depends on distances rather than angles. A third and perhaps more accurate analogy might be that of parallax, whereby a position can be determined through a change in viewpoint due to the motion of the observer (in my case through time as well as space, albeit both in the mind). In fact, the human brain utilises a combination of parallax - viewing from two or more successive vantage points - and stereopsis - viewing from two vantage points simultaneously - to perceive depth and gauge distances in the external world around us.[85] In a sense, my spacetime parallax constitutes an interiorisation of a normally exterior function for positioning and perception.

Another yellow car

Four full decades after our yellow car drove under a row of purple sycamores to evoke my epiphany of spatial awareness, I find myself sitting in an Art Deco cinema unexpectedly reliving almost the same moment inside another yellow car. The film *An Cailín Ciúin* (The Quiet Girl) is an adaptation of Claire Keegan's 2010 novella *Foster*. Set in Ireland in 1981, one of the earliest scenes faithfully depicts the opening pages of the book, when the narrator describes the view from the back seat of the car bringing her to stay with relatives in the countryside: "looking up through the rear window. In places there's a bare, blue sky. In places the blue sky is chalked over with clouds, but mostly it is a heady mixture of sky and trees scratched over by ESB wires."[86]

Immediately after the film ends, my friends and I discuss how accurately it managed to capture the minutiae of an 1980s Irish childhood, down to the

85 Barbara Gillam, "Stereopsis and Motion Parallax," *Perception*, 36, no. 7 (2007): 953.
86 Claire Keegan, *Foster* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 3.

Kimberley biscuit placed gingerly on the kitchen table. Discussing nostalgia, I am surprised to hear that the scene that resonated the most was the one in the car. Further research revealed my friends and I were not the only ones with whom it struck a chord - many critics and reviewers have singled out this particular scene for its dreamlike quality, remarking on how it captures "the kind of stray, ephemeral details that burn into a child's memory."[87]

Director Colm Bairéad explains, "I knew that in the car, the camera would never leave the backseat. That's kind of the key to why the film works: It inhabits this young girl's point of view and it never leaves her orbit."[88] Through the addition of movement and time, Bairéad's film transposes the child's-eye perspective captured so believably in Keegan's writing into the fourth dimension. I realise it is this instance of parallax triggering an associated remembrance of a previous sensation, one that consciousness cannot fully grasp, that causes this scene to resonate so deeply.

Phantom touch

Every so often - it happens only a few times a year - I suddenly experience a very powerful sensation of touching or holding something in my hands that triggers a memory or recognition. Ironically, while my hands seem to remember the sensation - the shape, weight, firmness, texture, pliability, sometimes even temperature - my brain can never quite seem to put an idiomatic finger on exactly what the memory that I feel in my hands is, so I can never identify it by registering an image or a name. This phantom touch eludes every other sense, and even the tactile memory recedes and disappears as fleetingly as it arrived. I rack my brain, yet it is always too late to reconcile this sensation to the corresponding

87 Sean Burns, "'The Quiet Girl' Is a Deceptively Simple Story about Unexpected Kindness," review of *The Quiet Girl*, dir. Colm Bairéad, WBUR, February 28, 2023, https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/02/28/the-quiet-girl-colm-bairead-film-review.
88 Colm *Bairéad*, "Irish Oscar Entry 'The Quiet Girl' Has a Secret Weapon: Silence," interview by Steve Pond, *The Wrap*, December 7, 2022, https://www.thewrap.com/the-quiet-girl-director-colm-bairead-interview/.

memory, but the sensation and recognition is so powerful, no matter how brief, that I am sure that my touch is actually triggered – it is somehow as if both imagined and yet not just in my imagination.

An impossible visualisation

The sensation is similar when I sit down to draw my internal spatial array for anything more complicated than the months of the year. I realise something quite unexpected – it is extremely difficult to transcribe the multidimensional space of my mind onto the page in front of me. As I try to visualise it more clearly in my mind's eye, it keeps moving in and out of focus. Yet at the same time, the overall layout of the array does not change – the different points and events are in exactly the same positions relative to one another. If I could somehow take a screen shot inside my mind, that might help me to freeze my point of view and allow me to visually represent these spatialisations. But even closing my eyes and concentrating as hard as I can to force it into a one-, two-, or three-dimensional graphical form, one that my pen can record on the paper, brings me nothing but frustration coupled with a sore head.

I empathise with Augustine's inability to describe time: I never imagined it would be so difficult to convey or map my mental array. As soon as I try to concentrate on it, it stubbornly disappears from view, as if it submerges or fades back into the mist, the ether, or a protean pool of amniotic fluid. It is the same sense of elusion felt when trying to recall a dream, or when re-experiencing the familiar impossibility of carrying something across the threshold from a dream to the waking world.

Relative point of view

Reflecting on this, I come to the conclusion that the reason for this inability to represent my mental array is that it constitutes a spatial experience rather than a purely visual one. It's not so much that I conjure these units of time,

Figure L: Photo taken looking from our garden to the Western end of the avenue in springtime, early 2000s. Photo by the author.

Figure M: Photo taken of the same view in April 2023. Photo by the author.

these palimpsests of past events and memories as visions in what is commonly referred to as my mind's eye, but rather that they exist independently as entities, and I am positioned in relation to them in the space of my mind, and this mindspace is both multisensory and multidimensional – my point of view will always be relative to all of them and they will always be relative to one another.

This offers the best explanation I can think of as to why I can so easily sense and understand positions, relations, distances, but drawing them proves so elusive. They do not lend themselves to a frustratingly flat, one-dimensional view that does not change in relation to my position or point of view – they form an array that I can move around, look through, zoom in to and out from, move through, much like in the flyover mode of a 3D CAD program. They are not projections on a screen or surface, but a thick spacetime whose multidimensions I am fully immersed in.

The unobservable fourth dimension

Researching further helps me to understand and accept the impossibility of trying to properly convey my own personal spacetime. The scientists at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, more commonly known as CERN, confirm that "In everyday life, we inhabit a space of three dimensions," those spatial dimensions being height, width, and depth. "Less obviously," they continue, "we can consider time as an additional, fourth dimension, as Einstein famously revealed."[89] The problem is, much like the Celtic Otherworld or the sky-world of Aboriginal cosmology, we cannot directly observe this fourth temporal dimension, although we can speculate on it without actually perceiving it. Einstein himself made it quite clear in an 1929 interview that "No man can visualize the fourth dimension, except mathematically."[90] John D. Norton, Professor of the history and philosophy of science at the University of Pittsburgh and an expert on relativity and quantum theory, confirms that "There is no easy way to draw a picture of a four dimensional spacetime. Visualizing it can be very hard […] It is just another sort of space that happens to transcend simple visualization."[91]

An entangling crisis unfolds

Exactly two decades ago, when I had already left home for university, my family moved out of the house on the avenue, two decades after we first moved in. The photo in Figure L was taken one spring in the early 2000s, shortly before we left. Since it was taken, much has changed: the tall lime trees at this end of the avenue have been felled, and the garden of the bungalow opposite, for years lovingly tended by our former neighbours, has been flattened by the new occupant, who tarmacked over the entire surface, ripped out the hedge along with the snowdrops and bluebells it once sheltered, enclosing his barren yard with a wall topped with spikes (Figure M). From the sublime to the ridiculous, from a corner of paradise to a prison car park. While I mourn the lost verdure of our neighbours' garden and the refuge it provided for so many bird, insect, plant, and animal species, the sight of the avenue denuded of its trees cuts even more deeply, a bleak scene no longer recognisable as the setting of my childhood.

Faced with this environmental destruction on my doorstep, a microcosm of the wider biodiversity crisis unfolding before all our eyes, I remember Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker writing about how "climate change can become palpable in the everyday."[92] In order to draw attention to the many interconnected temporalities – circadian, arboreal, geological, cosmic – and cumulative

89 "Do We Really Only Live in Three Dimensions?"
90 Colm Bairéad, "Irish Oscar Entry 'The Quiet Girl' Has a Secret Weapon: Silence," interview by Steve Pond, *The Wrap*, December 7, 2022, https://www.thewrap.com/the-quiet-girl-director-colmbairead-interview/.
91 John D. Norton, "Spacetime," University of Pittsburgh Department of History and Philosophy of Science, accessed 14 April 2023, https://sites.pitt.edu/~jdnorton/teaching/HPS_0410/chapters/spacetime/index.html.
92 Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker, "Weathering: Climate Change and the 'Thick Time' of Transcorporeality," Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy 29, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 562.

actions responsible for the climate crisis, they propose a non-linear transcorporeality of thick time stretching between present, future, and past. Positioning ourselves "right in the thick of things,"[93] they argue, allows us to understand how embodied human experience is inseparable from nature and our environment, and that the disentanglement of climate change and anthropogenic influences is impossible. Thick time "denies the myth that human bodies are discrete in time and space, somehow outside of the natural milieu that sustains them and indeed transits through them."[94]

Solstice III

It is another evening in summer, my fifth birthday party. The game of pass-the-parcel has been rigged to ensure that the last and best parcel, containing a one-pound coin, lands on my lap. Still too young to appreciate the concept of money, I can't understand why I didn't win sweets like everybody else, on my birthday of all days. Furious and upset, I run outside to the bottom of the garden where I sit and sulk in self-pity. I stubbornly reject the advances of anyone who attempts to coax me back to my own party, until eventually my mother's youngest brother gives it a try. Almost four decades after this, he will fight a short battle with a rare and particularly aggressive cancer and I will cut short a trip to the Arctic Circle to attend his funeral in the shadow of Slieve Gullion, but today he is in his early twenties, youthful and handsome. Looking back at photos, he could be an American television star. He is one of the youngest adults at the party, the cool uncle, so I listen as he explains that with the money I have just won, that boring old coin, I can buy more sweets than all of the rest of the prizes combined. This convinces me. He takes my hand, and together we go back inside.

93 Neimanis and Walker, 569.
94 Neimanis and Walker, 563.

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The national boundary line that separates Italy and Switzerland is today highly dematerialised and mostly invisible. Yet it continues to exist as a "borderscape," reproduced by a series of crossing practices such as cross-border work and migration, and by their associated imaginaries. Based on oral history, photography, and performative walks, this essay gives a first-person account of how this border is kept alive or contested by those practices that routinely cross it. The starting point is the story of women workers employed in a manufacturing factory in the border area who used to go to the border woods to harvest flowers. Moving between border factories, workers' parking lots, migratory trajectories, and smuggling routes, the essay tests on the ground the notion of a borderscape at the interception of experiences and representations.

Borderscape; Switzerland and Italy; Photography; Cross-border work; Migration trajectories; Imagination.

THRESHOLDS AND TRESPASSES. AN EMBODIED EXPLORATION OF BORDERS' IMAGINARIES

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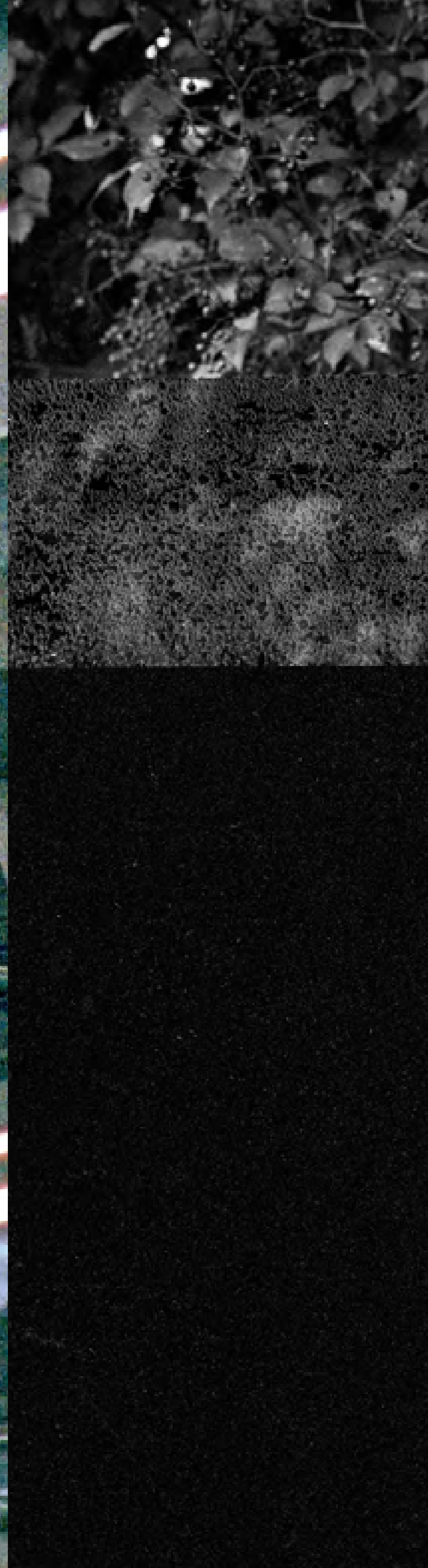
I checked the point on the map, and I know where I need to go. I reach that point, and yet I need to check again on my phone where that line is: the national border that separates Switzerland and Italy. There is nothing visible on the ground. I move on, and the landscape seems more tidy, more precise, more Swiss. This is a stereotype we often have in Italy, that the Swiss people are more precise. After all, they are famous clockmakers.[1] Maybe that is why I expect the landscape to be neater as well, and that is how it looks to me. I may be subject to what Luca Gaeta calls the "pregiudizio del noi" [the us bias].[2] We all have some prejudices when we approach the study of a border because it is impossible to strip away our own provenance, which often places us on one side or the other of the line. In my case, I study the Swiss-Italian border as an Italian, and I am

1 In Italian the idiom "preciso come un orologio svizzero" [as accurate as a Swiss watch] is used to refer to something or someone extremely precise.

2 Luca Gaeta, "Questioni Di Metodo Nello Studio Del Confine," *Territorio* 79 (2016): 79-88. According to Gaeta, this provenance needs to be critically acknowledged. Hence from the outset, I make clear that I move from a specific positionality, that of an Italian scholar.



aware that some biases are inevitably present in me.

I go back. I cross again and I am once more in Italy. Just a tiny movement, one step, across that line that is only visible on the maps on my phone. I follow the map, moving to another point of the border. There is something more there, a boundary stone that marks it. It is called "cippo confinale" [boundary stone], in legislative terms. The stone bears the date 1921 and the initial letter of the two countries, each on one of its opposite sides of the border. As I stop to have a closer look, it occurs to me that stones have always been used to mark borders. Their use to mark off boundaries and limits is somehow archetypal. They perform the function of markers, tangible signs delimiting specific areas. Francesco Careri, for example, has written on the use of menhirs to sign sacred places or to demarcate boundaries and properties in Sardinia.[3] And more, the very Roman god of borders *Terminus* was personified in a stone, rather than an icon, as explained by Gianluca De Sanctis.[4]

As I move along the border, I am astonished by the banality of the places that I meet on that significant administrative division. Such a lack of recognizability is not what I had expected. No barbed wires around, no walls. Only at some specific points do I encounter the remnants of old metallic mesh. These are probably traces of the so-called *ramina*, a wire mesh built by Italy at the end of the nineteenth century mostly as a fiscal barrier to prevent the smuggling of goods, but which has never stopped smuggling completely, just as it has not fully prevented the passage of people.[5]

The apparent absence of the border contrasts with the map where it is marked as a thick line, well-defined, and clear. It is precisely through

3 Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Camminare Come Pratica Estetica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 28-35.
4 Gianluca De Sanctis, *La Logica Del Confine: Per Un'antropologia Dello Spazio Nel Mondo Romano* (Rome: Carocci, 2015), chapter 2.
5 Guido Codoni, *Storie Di Ramina. Vicende, Scoperte e Incontri Camminando Lungo Il Confine Tra Mendrisotto e Italia* (Pregassona-Lugano: Fontana Edizioni, 2018).

cartographic drawings that national boundaries came to exist. Maps were the instrument of political geography discourse to identify borders. Map-making was a form of knowledge that for a long time mostly belonged to the militaries, and many scholars in border studies spoke of maps as hegemonic tools used to control and possess land.[6] This is the main reason I decided not to include a map of the places I talk about in this essay.[7] Maps show borders as something apparently fixed and impermeable. This is rarely the reality, because borders exist in dynamic ways, traversed by flows passing through their holes, and more – borders are always in motion themselves, as recently elaborated by Thomas Nail in his theory of the border.[8] Even the border between two nations like Switzerland and Italy is in motion, despite being a border where apparently nothing happens, an ancient and uncontested border, a "boring" one.[9]

In a military survey of the entire Italian border completed during the 1920s by the Italian military, the author Colonel Vittorio Adami described the part of the border that touches Switzerland as an "irregular" and "illogical" line, which does not follow the "geographical border."[10] Colonel Adami's study was commissioned by the Italian General Superintendent of State and is made up of cartograph-

6 Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borders," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 211-42. In the literature of border studies there are plenty of records on the criticality of maps. Among the most recent ones in the area of art research, see for example Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro, "Re-Imagining the Border: Border Art as a Space of Critical Imagination and Creative Resistance,"*Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 79-94.
7 I am aware that the reader may expect to see a map that shows the precise location of the places mentioned in this article. Yet precisely because maps are historically the tool through which borders are constructed, I made the choice of not using a map, to encourage an understanding of space that differs from the traditional representation of borders on political maps.
8 Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190618643.001.0001.
9 In the idea of a "boring" border I take up the words used by the geographer Anke Strüver in her study of the Dutch-German borderscape. See Anke Strüver, *Stories of the "Boring Border": The Dutch-German Borderscape in People's Minds* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2005).
10 Paraphrasing Adami; Vittorio Adami, "Confine Italo - Svizzero. Volume II – Parte I. Narrazione," in *Storia Documentata Dei Confini el Regno d'Italia* (Rome: Provveditorato Generale dello Stato, 1927), 25.

ic drawings and textual descriptions of the boundary-line sediment, with a detailed identification of boundary stones.[11] According to Colonel Adami, based on certain geographic and cultural characteristics, Canton Ticino should have been part of Italy and the border should have passed further north, but historical events meant that this was not the case. His reasoning was based on the fact that in between the regions of Lombardy in Italy and Ticino in Switzerland, there are many common characteristics. The two regions share the same language, Italian; the same religion, Catholicism; and the same geography, flatland, but still they are divided by the border. Ticino is indeed the last flatland area to the south of Switzerland right before the beginning of the Alps, those mountains that would make a kind of a "natural" border, and yet they do not.

A certain geopolitical discourse of the past has carried forward the idea of the existence of natural boundaries provided by specific geographical elements such as mountains, mostly for reasons instrumental to political interests.[12] Even mountains, as much as they can be a topographic division of a territory at a certain scale, have jagged and irregular shapes, and offer different peaks that can act as divisions. To find in them a single line that defines a boundary, a line without thickness and stretching endlessly into the sky as a border is supposed to, is an entirely human construct.

During these visits, I collect photographs of the invisible boundary line one after the other: trees, a bridge, a panoramic point on Lake Lugano, and then more trees. I am aware that the meaning of photographs is always contextual.[13] In this case,

11 During Fascism, the Italian borders were entirely inspected and re-marked, probably following diffused rhetoric focused on the "protection" of the national territory. Elisa Pasqual, Marco Ferrari, and Andrea Bagnato, *A Moving Border: Alpine Cartographies of Climate Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
12 Thus I put the term "natural" in quotation marks. On the discursive construction of the idea of natural borders, see for example Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
13 Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Thinking Photography. Communications and*

I feel even more that these photographs only start to make sense when I am telling a viewer that these depict precisely the border itself, in its invisible being. While they do not show directly what they represent, they allude to the abstract nature of cartographies and contradict the reality of maps, exposing the invisibility of the border. The same happens with photographs of aftermaths of events, that is, photographs made in places where something happened, but nothing of that past event is visible. The photos are traces that point to the event itself. They show something that happened but is not visible but still is indexically present in the images.[14] By indexicality, I refer to the capability of a sign to point at some object in the context of production in which it comes about. As aptly stated by Hilde van Gelder, the indexical image "is both a trace of and a pointer toward the reality depicted."[15]

What clearly is not shown in these photographs are the dynamics of crossing that originate from the border and that keep it alive, while also contesting some of its features. A border, wrote Luca Gaeta, "si conserva insieme alla pratica di cui è confine, altrimenti cessa di essere tale" [is preserved together with the practice of which it is the border, otherwise, it ceases to be].[16] It is the horizon of the multiple routine practices of individuals, as well as of multiple collective practices. On this border some historical practices of crossing concern labour. In the second half of the eighteenth century, with the approval of protective labour laws in Switzerland aimed at limiting child labour and establishing regulations on maximum working hours per day, companies from the inner area of Switzerland started to delocalise

Culture, ed.Victor Burgin (London: Palgrave, 1982), 84-109.
14 Here and in the use of the concept of "aftermath photography" I follow Donna West Brett in her study of photography in the German landscape after 1945. See Donna West Brett, *Photography and Place. Seeing and Not Seeing Germany after 1945* (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2016).
15 Hilde van Gelder, *Ground Sea. Photography and the Right to Be Reborn* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021), 268.
16 Luca Gaeta, *La Civiltà Dei Confini. Pratiche Quotidiane e Forme Di Cittadinanza* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), 105 (my translation).

into Italy to avoid the regulations.[17] When the same regulations came into place in Italy, industries started to settle in the Ticino border region and employ Italian workers, who could be hired with a lower wage in comparison to the Swiss inhabitants of the area. An economic differential existed between Italy and Switzerland, so that in Switzerland there was a higher cost of living.

The English language uses the composition of the three words “cross-border workers” to denote such workers. The Italian language uses only one word, *frontalieri*. This word, which may be translated as “frontier-ers”, displays an embodied dimension of the border in the workers themselves. The workers periodically commuting across the border become some sort of actant of the border itself. The border produces specific spatial practices, which in turn reproduce it. Bodies moving from one side of the line to the other incorporate it and move it.

This historical dynamic is still relevant today. The exchange is favourable for both parties: Factories can take on workers who accept a lower wage, and workers can find working opportunities that would not exist on the Italian side. Yet, there are also contradictions, because the value of labour is perceived to be constantly going down, triggering conflicts between Swiss inhabitants and Italian border-crossers, who are said to be stealing jobs and lowering the cost of labour for everyone, a phenomenon called “wage dumping.”[18] At the same time, Italian workers do not feel welcome.

Among the first historical factories were those for tobacco and then textile manufacturing. It

17 I am following here a study by historian Paolo Barcella on the birth of cross-border work between Switzerland and Italy. Such protective labour laws were first established in Canton Glarus in 1846 and later extended to the whole Swiss territory in 1877. See Paolo Barcella, *I Frontalieri in Europa. Un Quadro Storico* (Milan: Biblion Edizioni, 2019).

18 In August 2015, following a European parliamentary question on “social dumping,” Marianne Thyssen stated that “The term is generally used to point to unfair competition due to the application of different wages and social protection rules to different categories of workers” (Parliamentary questions, 27 May 2015, E-008441-15). See EurWORK, “Social Dumping,” May 19, 2016, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/it/node/86806.

reminds me of what came about with globalisation on a larger scale, or in other much more iconic borders such as that between Mexico and the United States, with the *maquiladoras*, assembly plants of mostly US companies employing Mexican women, companies that exist thanks to special tax exemptions. These kinds of factories are shown in the Swiss artist Ursula Biemann’s video work *Performing the Border* (1991).

I focus my research on the shirt factory *Realini* because it is one of the very few old textile manufacturing factories still functioning today in the Swiss-Italian border area, although the owners have changed over time. Those textile companies have mostly moved from manufacturing to logistics, but there are many other companies in other sectors that are active and largely survive cross-border workers. *Frontalieri* now account for 30 percent of the workers in Ticino.[19] The *Realini* shirt factory opened in the 1920s. Its workers were mainly Italian women. Every day they would reach the border on foot, cross into Switzerland, work there, and get back at the end of the day. While many people commute for job reasons, in crossing that line, those women were subject to a change of citizenship. They did not have the right to vote in the country of their workplace, a technical but substantial detail in considering the status of citizenship from a normative point of view.

I meet someone who knew the former owner. “Yes,” she says, confirming my question, he decided to open the factory in the Ticino region because of the possibility of employing Italian labour.[20] He also hired workers coming from inner Switzerland, who mostly had German surnames. Those workers were destined for the offices, the intellectual part

19 The data mentioned comes from Ustat (Ticino Statistics Office) reports of 2020, publicly available on their website. See Ustat, “11 Mobilità e Trasporti,” 2020, https://www3.ti.ch/DFE/DR/USTAT/index.php?fuseaction=temi.tema&proId=49&p1=50. Other contextual information comes from interviews with local trade unionists from the Italian trade union CGIL and the Swiss trade union UNiA, which I carried out between 2020 and 2021 as part of my PhD research (Politecnico di Milano and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2018-2022).

20 This conversation took place during my fieldwork in the border area in July 2020. The conversations reported later are mostly from the same period.

of the factory. I am given some old photographs, probably dating from the 1920s and 1940s. One of these pictures of the factory shows a building with a high inner space, a large central void and a balcony that runs all around the perimeter of the building on the second floor, allowing those up to look down into the workspace, where female workers sewed men's shirts (Fig. 11).

As I research this factory, I come across this audio interview of some women who used to work there in the 1940s.[21] Among other things, they tell an insignificant episode, part of that everyday history that mostly remains unwritten. In the border woods where I paid my first visits to this invisible line, they used to collect lilies of the valley in April and May at the end of their work shift. These white flowers grow from a rhizome; with the light of the sun, they bend and become invisible. So the women went in the night or in the early morning when the white flowers would come out and become clearly visible against the backdrop of dark grass. After the harvest, the flowers would travel to inner Switzerland, where they were sent to be sold for the feast of May First. This way, the women workers of the shirt factory supplemented their salaries.

What surprises me is that nobody mentions the existence of the border there in the woods. The border is completely absent from their narration; its presence seems to be meaningless. Perhaps it only strikes me because I have been studying the geography of that line for months. Yet this absent border created the condition for the existence of the factory where they work and for their daily movements.

I visit one of these contemporary factories in the area. There are still many, even if very few now have to do with the actual production of

21 Audio interview by Silvia Lesina Martinelli, I *Boschi Di Stabio*, vol. 34, interviste audio e video sulla Stabio di una volta, 2015, Museo della Memoria della Svizzera, https://museodellamemoria.ch/interviste/i-boschi-e-i-mughetti. Similar information was also shared during informal conversations with people I met in the border area during my fieldwork in July 2020.

physical artefacts, since many mostly take care of the logistics of moving goods. It was difficult to obtain permission to take photographs. Mostly, I do not have the authorisation to use these photographs, because of privacy agreements (Fig. 8). I manage to enter the old shirt factory building. I am not sure what I am looking for, but I want to visit it and see its environment. In a corridor, I encounter a statue of a sower-man created in the 1940s. An inscription on the base shows the Latin proverb "qui operator terram suam / satiabitur panibus" and its Italian translation "chi lavora sulla sua terra / sarà saziato di pane," [those who work on their land / will be satiated with bread].[22] I find it peculiar that it is there, where workers mostly used to come from another land.

The new factories' facilities are efficient and hyper-organised spaces of production. Metallic surfaces, shining lights, and fabrics surround me. Logistics spaces and warehouses are organised with a precise and logical division, where operations are almost completely automated. I walk through some of these spaces. Workers also prepare indications on the production of goods to be made elsewhere, in factories delocalised elsewhere.

The women workers of the past used to walk to the border. Contemporary workers no longer commute on foot; they use cars. At five o'clock in the morning, the border area is filled with cars queuing. Red lights come on when the cars stop; then they turn off when the cars get going. Stillness, movement, stillness: I observe this row of red glows one very early morning, before dawn even breaks, from the balcony of my rented accommodation on the road leading to the border. I am not used to these early hours. I feel dazed. That long strip of lights seems so strange on the road of such a small town. Here the border seems to create a centrality, as if it were a big city.

Many workers leave their cars in parking lots

22 Literally, "will be satiated with bread."

on the Italian side from which depart shuttles that will take them to the factory area. In the production area of the border region, there is no space to park, no space to stop. I also tried to stop when I drove across the border into the industrial area later in the morning, but I found no way to do so. There is no parking for those who do not live there, so I temporarily left my car in a random spot to get a rapid coffee. As I drink it, I cast a few quick checking glances at the neighbouring parking lot, fearing that my short, illegal stay will be fined. I chat with some workers at the cafe. In the border dynamics, their daily life and working life are completely separate, I am told. Switzerland is where the *frontalieri* work, Italy where they live, with periodic movements from one side to the other, between two different economic and spatial systems linked in an osmotic equilibrium.

In the parking lots that provide a platform for such movements, there seems to be a dislocation of the invisible border. In those places of transit, where cars sit waiting for the workers to come back at the end of their shifts, there have also been other forms of stillness, other transits on hold. These are connected to the so-called migration "crisis" in the area at the border between Como and Chiasso.[23] In 2016, there was a massive arrival of migrants, or "people on the move," to use a more appropriate expression suggested by Amnesty International.[24] They were blocked there due to European regulations (the Dublin agreements) stating that a person irregularly entering Europe can only apply for asylum in the first country of entrance in the union.[25] In this normative framework, those

23 The notion of crisis, when linked to migrations, has often been criticized, which is why I use quotation marks here. According to Federica Mazzara, migrations are not crises because they are not special events, they are cyclical dynamics that repeat themselves. See Federica Mazzara, "Subverting the Narrative of Lampedusa Borderscape," *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 7, no. 2 (2016): 135–47, https://doi.org/10.1386/cjmc.7.2.135_1. I use this term to point to how these specific events are referred to in the local media of the Swiss-Italian border area.

24 I follow Hilde van Gelder on the use of the expression proposed by Amnesty International. See van Gelder, 206.

25 Dublin III EU-regulation of June 26, 2013. The country of the first entrance into Europe must handle the request for political asylum for those entering the

who tried to enter Switzerland but had already been registered in the European database through their fingerprints in Italy were pushed back to the latter and remained stranded in the border town of Como. Through such operations, the body became an instrument of biopolitical control.[26] The peak of arrivals continued until 2019, then decreased dramatically, and then resumed.

Thus, some of these car parks became temporary homes for people on the move. One was used to create a camp filled with containers, managed by the Red Cross. Another parking structure especially used by *frontalieri* was occupied by activists and migrants with tents placed on its ground level.[27] I visit it on a Sunday afternoon. It is pretty empty. A visible trace of these events remains on a wall protected by two high metal fences, put up by the municipality after clearing the area to prevent the new settlement of people on the move.[28] The trace consists of handwriting on the rough concrete parking lot wall (Fig. 14). I get closer and look, trying to decipher the overlaying signs. I do not know what they mean. I take a photograph of those signs, creating a trace of a trace. Several months later, I show that picture to an Arabic-speaking student at the university. He tells me that there is something in the writing that has to do with God, perhaps a verse from the Koran, but he does not completely understand. It makes him feel that in that situation someone still had hope for the future, he tells me.[29]

As I arrange my notes and the photographs

union illegally, independently of the asylum seekers' will to travel to a specific European country. See Aandine Scherrer, ed., *Dublin Regulation on International Protection Applications. European Implementation Assessment*, European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020.

26 To get registered in the European database EURODAC, irregular people on the move are photographed and their fingerprints are collected within 48 hours of arrival in a European country. Thus, their identification passes through the body.

27 The sites mentioned correspond to the car park in Via Regina Teodolinda and the multi-story parking silo val Mulini in Como, Italy.

28 "Como, in Val Mulini Recinzioni Anti Migranti." *La Provincia di Como*, December 15, 2017. https://www.laprovinciadicomo.it/stories/como-citta/como-in-val-mulini-recinzioni-anti-migranti_1264629_11/.

29 Conversation with Yousef Ali Abuzeid in November 2022 at Politecnico di Milano.

collected so far, I remember when I spoke to a Swiss worker from the industrial area during one of my first visits. She was one of the few Swiss workers in an environment mostly peopled by Italian border commuters. I asked her if she ever crosses into Italy. She said she does so to go to restaurants or meet her colleagues. The border also provides opportunities for meetings. Like a dual element, the border unites and separates.[30] She also says she crosses into Italy when she wants to go to the sea further south, since there is no sea in Switzerland. I also keep on moving from south to north, from north to south, and back, around the border landscape. I am aware that mine is a privileged position, that of a white female with a European passport who can easily pass across that line.[31] In all those times that I crossed the border, no one has ever asked to check my documents.

At times, my motion seems meaningless. At other times, I feel like I am starting to get to know some of the dynamics of the places. Then the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic limits me because that simple act of crossing becomes impossible. The border is sealed due to health prevention measures. Unable to go out of my house, I start browsing for online videos and images connected to the border (Fig. 4). Then, once the strictest pandemic measures are lifted, I can only stay in the Italian area and cannot cross the border. I get in touch with a migrant centre in the Italian border city of Como. It is non-governmental centre, opened and managed by a priest together with a group of volunteers and activists.[32] Don Giusto decided there needed to be some welcoming places during the "crisis" of 2016.

I go to dinner at the centre several times. Dinner, the priest explained to me, is the time for people at the centre to get together. I can ask questions if I want, he adds, not as a researcher interviewing with a notepad and a pencil, but rather as a person talking to others. The men have dinner in a common room, while the women eat in another space, where they can accommodate their children's needs. In all my visits to the centre, I never come to meet any of the women. The volunteers told me that many women on the move are victims of trafficking or other forms of violence; hence they are very cautious of the people they come across, even the centre activists themselves.

I chat with those I meet in the common room. I do not take any photographs. I feel that the gesture would be an invasion of their space. I am afraid that a dynamic of Othering would be established, as described by those who discussed the camera as a hegemonic tool.[33] I am thinking, for instance, of Susan Sontag who spoke of the camera as a "predatory weapon" and of photographs as "trophies" that demonstrate the ability and quickness of the shooter.[34] To avoid falling into that trap would require spending more time in the place than is at my disposal.

I take some walks that retrace the crossing itineraries linked to various border stories that I have collected through research and encounters. I establish the starting point, the endpoint, and the in between. I remind myself to pay attention to the edges, the limits, and the signs that I may encounter. There is something performative in them. These times, I take my camera with me. On one such walk, I go back to the border woods. I know that there, as some people I met in Como told me, some people move with the light of dawn, trying to cross while remaining invisible. Someone

30 Gaeta, *La Civiltà Dei Confini. Pratiche Quotidiane e Forme Di Cittadinanza.*

31 On "white privilege," see Alessandra Ferrini's reflections on entering Italian colonial archives as a person who identifies as white. Alessandra Ferrini, "(Re) Entering the Archive: Critical Reflections on Archives and Whiteness," *From the European South* 6 (2020): 137-46.

32 The centre is embedded in the Parrocchia di Rebbio in the border Italian town of Como. I spent some time there during fieldwork carried out in July 2020. I was also in contact with the *Osservatorio Giuridico per i Migranti*, an association that safeguards the rights of migrants in the area.

33 The literature on the camera as a hegemonic tool of representation to "capture" others is vast. For example, Vilém Flusser compared photographers to hunters. See Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 33.

34 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 14.

told me about waking up at dawn and walking for five hours to get to a train station further into Switzerland and less close to the border, where perhaps there are fewer checks on documents.

I know I am running out of time. I walk different paths. I walk in the night, but not alone. I ask someone to accompany me (Fig. 3). I follow the temporality of the border, because precisely in those hours of darkness many of the movements that I am aware of seem to take place. I take some silent night photos, where not much can be seen, but where the dark light seems somehow more appropriate, compared to the full and clear day. While considering the potentiality of photographs to give a glimpse of what is not visible, Hilde van Gelder stated that some photographs can suggest that hidden temporality which Javier Marías described as the "dark back of time."[35] That is, a time that has been but that is no more. Through such photographs, "a time might be felt that once existed in all its full potentiality, as if the photograph somehow is still pregnant with the unrealized possibilities of that temporality or, at least, bears its traces."[36]

Some paths have been shaped by the crossing of people who use these woods to run or simply walk. I know there are some old smuggling routes that people walked to take goods into and out of the two countries by hiding them under their dresses or carrying them in handmade rucksacks. They also embodied the border. I check some of these paths, moving to other places around the border landscape. One evening I am back again in the woods where flowers used to be picked by the women working in the shirt factory of the border area. In the light of the barely visible, I spot some glares at the edge between the trees and the road. Compelled by a sudden fear, I get closer to check what these are. A group of fireflies lingers in the grass, close to the ground (Fig. 2). These are small luminescent insects that appear at the

35 Van Gelder, 7.
36 Van Gelder, 77.

margins of greenery in countryside areas at dusk, at that moment when the light is going down because the sun has set, but you can still perceive the contours of things with your eyes. I had never seen live fireflies before, but I had read about them.

In 1975, Pier Pasolini, in a renowned article published in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, wrote about their disappearance in the post-war Italian panorama while considering the ongoing change of landscape due to the ongoing industrialisation that was transforming Italy.[37] While fireflies were disappearing, not only was the physical landscape changing, but also the society. The peasant-artisan class was also vanishing in an increasingly industrialised reality. In his text, the disappearance of fireflies is a metaphor for the disappearance of certain values in the society of consumption, within a larger reflection on the persistence of fascism in the post-war panorama. His writing, unlike a previous youthful text of 1941 in which he mentioned to a friend with enthusiastic astonishment a first encounter with fireflies, is steeped in pessimism.[38]

Years later, Georges Didi-Huberman wrote a response to Pasolini's thoughts, discussing fireflies as lights of survival, alluding to forms of resistance whose traces may remain in the registered lights of photographs. Fireflies become a metaphor for images that allow us to imagine "in spite of all," helping us to rethink our model of hope.[39] Fireflies, notes Didi-Huberman, moving slowly and emitting a faint light, draw a constellation, as "the Past meets the Present to form a glimmer, a flash, a constellation in which some form for

37 Pier Paolo Pasolini, "'Il Vuoto Del Potere' Ovvero 'l'articolo Delle Lucciole,'" *Corriere Della Sera*, February 1, 1975, https://www.corriere.it/speciali/pasolini/potere.html.
38 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies*, trans. Lia Swope Mitchell (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 5.
39 Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies*. The expression "in spite of all" refers to another text by Didi-Huberman, namely Georges Didi-Huberman, Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

our very Future suddenly breaks free."[40] The word "constellation" may recall Walter Benjamin who, in the prologue to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, stated that ideas are to objects as constellations to stars.[41] Constellations are not objective but are human constructs that interpret physical elements that exist as separate points. In the context of artistic practices, the concept of the constellation also recalls the assemblage of different materials – such as photographs and words – single elements that take on a new meaning through their relationship, making figurative constructs that interpret what is visible there in otherwise seemingly unrelated elements.[42]

Here, with these words, I try to recreate some meaning from this assemblage of photographs, traces of the complexity of the border landscape and its dynamic existence, between visibility and invisibility, as well as of forms of resistance to borders' binary divisions (Fig. 4). Some meanings seem to remain concealed in the images. In the end, I am left with a firefly image, in the literal sense of a survival image, an image charged with symbolic and synthetic meaning: it is one of the very few surviving frames of a documentary film of 1928 now entirely lost, which the author himself tried in vain to find until his death.[43] The documentary, titled *Dalla montagna al piano* [From the mountain to the plain] and shot by Armin Berner, was dedicated to women's labour in Canton Ticino and was filmed right before the economic divisions of the border were so clearly crystallised. The frame shows women picking lilies of the valley.

At the feet of a group of women, you can see

40 Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies*, 30.
41 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009).
42 On the use of the term constellation in artistic practices, I refer here to Jean-Christophe Royoux's writings on the work of the Swiss and Italian artist Marco Poloni. Jean-Christophe Royoux, "Constellations. Manières de Faire Des Mondes," in *Day after Day: Kunsthalle Fribourg: Fri-Art: 2003-2007* (Fribourg: Kunsthalle Fribourg, 2007), 28-43.
43 The image is reproduced in Guido Codoni, *Storie Di Ramina. Vicende, Scoperte e Incontri Camminando Lungo Il Confine Tra Mendrisotto e Italia* (Pregassona-Lugano: Fontana Edizioni, 2018), 47. The documentary was produced for the Swiss Exhibition for Women's Work organized by the Federation of Swiss Women's Associations in Bern, called SAFFA Schweizerische Ausstellung für Frauenarbeit.

those flowers typical of pre-Alpine areas, which belong to both sides of the border, that are now slowly disappearing due to the urbanisation of the area. It became illegal to collect these flowers because of a law put in place to protect them, but some women remembered they would still go. "Andavamo di sfroso" [we went as smugglers], they say in the audio interview.[44] The words "di sfroso" [as smugglers] are specific terms of this border area, one of many such dialect words that remain difficult to translate. They point to the petty trade around borders, that set of everyday activities resistant to the border. In April 2021, I pay one more visit to the area. I meet a lady in the border trees, now blossoming with white flowers. She gives me a bunch of lilies of the valley as a present. I dry the flowers and keep them.

Once home, I look back at this embodied exploration of the borderscape, whose objective was to provide an alternative representation to the stereotyped and state-centric view of the border as a static line. I feel it has brought out some places that are strongly connoted in the borderscape, on a physical as well as a symbolic and imaginative level: the border factories, sites where the border is produced and reproduced; the places of reception for people on the move, often sites of stasis because of the border filtering functions; the parking lots and stations, sites of junction of trajectories of crossing; and then some liminal spaces, natural areas where freedom of movement seems to be possible, such as the border woods of the flower harvesting.

When I talk about the symbolic and imaginative level, I am referring to what Henri Lefebvre defines in *The Production of Space* as "space of representation," a lived space with which the inhabitants associate specific symbols and mental representations.[45] For example, here emerges a space of representation related to the border

44 Lesina Martinelli, xx.
45 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

woods, which is dual. On the one hand, the woods can be associated with a slightly romantic and nostalgic vision of space, linked to the forests' past use for smuggling or agricultural work, now rarely present. In such visions some of the functions of the border seem to be challenged or even to disappear, as in the narration of the flower picking and its associated images.

On the other hand, there is a surveillance vision associated with the woods, which also translates into a specific visuality, such as that of the drones used to patrol the border. Through thermal cameras capable of identifying the presence of bodies according to the temperature difference, drones produce specific patrolling images shot from above. Some inhabitants I met in the woods told me about hearing the sounds of drones flying over their homes at night, when they were probably checking for unauthorised border-crossers. I have decided not to replicate here this visuality of control, while collecting border photographs that are often visually banal and weak. But, even if the border is not clearly visible in such photographs, it is still associated with them, just like its dynamics may be invisible in space, but are always acting.

In both cases, the woods appear as a space for the "out of laws," who may move in it almost like contemporary Robin Hood, but the perception one has of this space of representation greatly depends on their positionality in the borderscape and the rights of inclusion they do or do not have in it: inhabitants, people on the move, and workers, all have different ones. While the discursive representation of this travelogue explores in practical terms an embodied way of researching a border area, it also helps to identify where to act on it. In these key points of the borderscape, design disciplines could intervene to make it a more inclusive space for all types of border dwellers. It is also an action in itself, a borderscape-*ing* that contributes to re-shaping the border.[46]

46 Brambilla.

This article is the result of four-years' Ph.D. research on forms of representation of the Swiss-Italian border area between Lombardy and Ticino. The research employed different methods, while moving along the border between different disciplines, namely Urban Studies, Art History, and Practice-Based Artistic Research. Its aim was to investigate non-hegemonic forms of representation of this borderscape, moving away from the normative point of view of nation-states. In order not to interrupt the narrative flow of the text, which takes the form of a travelogue, I present the research working methods in this ending note.

I focused on spatial practices of border crossing related to cross-border work and migrations, and their visibility or invisibility. First, I studied the literature of border studies around the notion

of a “borderscape,” and then the historical and geographical literature connected to the Swiss-Italian area. A careful analysis of information published in local newspapers was a fundamental step forward.[47] From these local sources, I gained an overview of the area, which guided the following research on the ground. I proceeded with fieldwork activities as much as possible in the frame of the COVID-19 pandemic. During several visits to the border area, I carried out a series of structured interviews with actors who have an institutional or active role in this borderscape, such as trade unionists who deal with cross-border workers and activists on migration issues in the border city of Como.[48] Numerous informal conversations with local residents, workers, and asylum seekers further enriched my knowledge. I scribbled these conversations, together with personal impressions, in a day-to-day notebook.

I then visited specific places in the borderscape following a method that I call “performative travels,” namely because these visits took place according to defined parameters to retrace certain investigated border-crossing practices. With that information, I moved along chosen itineraries defined according to specific temporalities, such as of the night. During these performative travels, I took photographs, thus creating visual representations of the borderscape. I used different analogue cameras that imposed a form of slow and reflective praxis, in medium format and in 35mm for moving situations, both in colour and black and white. I later incorporated in the research other visual materials, such as historical photographs or screen images from videos on the web, which helped bring forward a reflection on other representations besides mine of the borderscape.

47 Key sources have been the online newspaper *Corriere del Ticino, Tio.ch, Ticinonews.ch, La Provincia di Como, Il Giorno-Como.*
48 For example, trade unionists from the Italian CGIL trade union and the Swiss UNiA, and Italian volunteers and workers from Osservatorio Giuridico per i Migranti in Como and the association Como Senza Frontiere.

The underlying idea of these methods has always been to work on an understanding of the borderscape that combines representation and experience, imaginaries and sceneries, with attention to the socio-political reality of the area, as suggested by the borderscape notion.[49] I considered the inhabitants, the places, and the imaginaries associated with them, together with my direct and embodied experience, while collecting visual fragments. The article summarises this process, bringing together a selection of materials from a larger pool. As a travelogue, the article synthesises of both a physical and a speculative movement within the horizon of the border.

A more comprehensive exploration of the themes addressed in this article will be presented in the upcoming book Between the Visible and the Invisible. Photography and Spaces of Imagination in the Swiss-Italian Borderscape *(provisional title), scheduled for publication in 2024 by Brill.*

49 Chiara Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept,” *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 14-34.

VISUALS

1 Panorama on Lake Lugano from the Italian side. The Swiss-Italian border cuts through the lake. Lanzo d'Intelvi, November 2019. Nicoletta Grillo.

2 Fireflies in the woods on a road that leads to the Swiss-Italian border. Bizzarone, May 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

3 Walking along the path that connects the Italian village of Erbonne and the Swiss village of Scudellate, which is often associated with smuggling in the local memory. Scudellate, July 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

4 Photograph of a detail of a screen showing an image of a protest against the closure of the border organised by people on the move in Como in 2016. The image was saved on the author's computer in March 2020, probably from the ANSA news agency, which later disappeared from the web. The colours have been inverted to make faces less recognisable. Nicoletta Grillo.

5 Driving towards the Swiss-Italian border. Probably Bizzarone, July 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

6 Remains of the *ramina*, the wire fence that once closed the border. Uggiate Trevano, January 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

7 Detail of an archival image showing a women shirtmakers' strike of 1941 in Mendrisio to ask for a collective labour contract. Scanned from Guido Codoni, *Storie Di Ramina. Vicende, Scoperte e Incontri Camminando Lungo Il Confine Tra Mendrisotto e Italia* (Pregassona-Lugano: Fontana Edizioni, 2018), 24, reproduced with the permission of the publishing house. Unknown photographer.

8 Inside a contemporary factory in the border area (the photograph has been significantly cropped to make the place anonymous; due to privacy agreements it cannot be published or shown). Mendrisio, July 2021. Nicoletta Grillo.

9 Portrait of A., a former smuggler encountered in the border area (the photograph has been cut to make his face unrecognisable). Italy, July 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

10 Woods on the Swiss-Italian border. Bizzarone, July 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

11 Archival image of *Camiceria Realini* shirt factory. Stabio, Switzerland, unknown date (ca. 1940s). Scanned by the author from a physical print provided by a local resident. Unknown photographer.

12 An owl from the collection of the ethnographic museum of Val Bregaglia. Ciäsa Granda, Stampa, August 2019. Nicoletta Grillo.

13 Photograph of a detail of a historical poster of the Swiss airline. May 2021. Nicoletta Grillo.

14 Writing on the wall of a parking building formerly occupied by people on the move. Autosilo Valmulini, Como, July 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

14 The beginning of the industrial area of Stabio next to the border. Stabio, July 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

15 Inside Maxim brothel at the Como/Chiasso border. Chiasso, September 2020. Nicoletta Grillo.

16 Frame from a 35 mm documentary on women labor in Ticino *Dalla Montagna al Piano* (1928), by Armin Berner. Unknown frame minute. Scanned from Guido Codoni, *Storie Di Ramina. Vicende, Scoperte e Incontri Camminando Lungo Il Confine Tra Mendrisotto e Italia* (Pregassona-Lugano: Fontana Edizioni, 2018), 47, reproduced with the permission of the publishing house. Armin Berner.

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