**DIY Methods** – Plain Text Zines

A Mostly Screen-Free, Zine-Full, Remote-

Participation Conference on Experimental Methods

for Research and Research Exchange

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#DIYMethods23

diymethods.net

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Editor’s note: This is a compilation of the plain-text versions of zines from DIY Methods 2023. Participants were asked to submit plain-text versions of their own work, with image descriptions where needed. To respect the work of participants, only minor changes have been made to their plain-text zines, as we believe that participants best know how to translate their work for their readers. As such, you will find a variety of different transcription and image description style within these pages.

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# 

# WELCOME TO DIY METHODS 2023

Anne Pasek, Sarah Rayner

Thank you for joining in this experimental conference exploring unconventional methods for research and research-exchange. Our theme, DIY Methods, points to the ways researchers often approach their methods as sites of invention, intervention, and repair. Borrowing from the spirit and circuits of exchange in earlier DIY cultures, it takes the form of a zine ring distributed via postal mail.

We hope that you are inspired and captivated by the works that follow. As this year’s theme was “knowledge as a gift and research as care work”, we hope that this package is received just as such---as a culmination of the care, time, and energy given by you and your fellow participants with the shared goal of circulating knowledge.

If you’re interested on reading more about DIY Methods, we wrote a white paper on key details and lessons learned from our first conference in 2022. This can be found at https://emmlab.info/Resources\_page/Publications.

Print copies of the zines have been mailed out to conference participants and made publicly available digitally at [https://lowcarbonmethods/diymethods202](https://lowcarbonmethods/diymethods2022)3. A screen-reader friendly version is also archived there. These proceedings will soon also be uploaded to H-Commons, where they will get a DOI assigned (which means easier citing)!

In lieu of the traditional discussion following in-person conference presentations, our conversation will be in the hands of participants, cued by whichever way authors prompt contact within their zines. Connect with us and others online using #DIYMethods23.

<3 the conference organizers:

Anne Pasek & Sarah Rayner

# Academic Soulmates: The Zine

Morgan Bimm

[The cover of the zine is a black and white photo of the Prince Edward viaduct, connecting Bloor Street and the Danforth in Toronto. The title is laid over some white text boxes to make it stand out, with the author’s name underneath.]

*Chaotically Yours: An Introduction*

[The introduction stretches across two pages. The background is a photograph of a stand of birch trees, shot from below and colourized to be a light minty green. On the right-hand page is a screenshot of a text conversation with the time stamp 23:59, or 11:59 PM. The messages received read *sent* and *chaotically, Schwartz and Bimm*.]

Absolutely nothing about this zine on academic friendships and collaboration went to plan, which is maybe not surprising given that most of my collaborations and co-writing ventures start with some variation of: "Wouldn't it be funny if... ?"

Wouldn't it be funny if we planned a teaching and learning symposium in under a month. Wouldn't it be funny if we took all the rage and care and love of COVID lockdown and channelled that into Zoom performance art. Wouldn't it be funny if we interviewed the guitarist of one of our favourite bands for an academic article. Wouldn't it be funny if we gave Carly Rae Jepsen a copy of the chapter we wrote about her at the concert meet-and-greet. Wouldn't it be funny if we somehow ended up working in the same department some day.

The person who is always ready to commit to the bit with me, Andi Schwartz, was meant to co-author this zine with me. She emailed in our last minute abstract at the stroke of almost-midnight as I checked final edits in the back of a cab on the way home from the airport. Nothing about our collaboration style is particularly chill or well-planned, which is maybe why this one blew up in our faces a little bit.

While Andi is four time zones away at yet another conference, I'm writing this one solo. But I still want to take the opportunity to reflect on the lessons that our history of co-writing and collaboration has taught me. In a roundabout way, this zine has become an archive of the one time we couldn't quite pull it off as we envisioned.

I've worked on collaborative projects with folks other than Andi over the years, of course. But ours always seem to hatch the wildest schemes and come with the best stories. When Andi moved across the city and then I moved across the country, the projects we dreamed up together and (usually) executed with a foolhardy mix of persistence, manic productivity, and the most chaotic Google Docs known to mankind kept us connected. For the nearly six years we've been friends, the professional and the personal have mixed in some weird and truly wonderful ways.

And the further along I am in my academic career (who let me have one of those?!), the more I  realize just how rare this kind of collaborative track record is. How strange it is to try and explain it in any kind of real way.

This unpolished project is a collection of thoughts, prompts, reflections, and humblebrags that I hope encourage other co-authors and academic soulmates to reflect on their own shared practice. My hunch is we don't stumble into these things out of sheer luck, but there's also not much work out there yet about the delicate ecosystem of academic friendships. How do we navigate all these big feelings of imposterhood and ambition and inertia and guilt and glee to make it work with our person, once we find them?

And — particularly pressing in this moment — what happens the odd time it doesn't?

Chaotically yours,

Morgan

*I Really, Really, Really, Really, Really, Really Like You: On Co-Writing*

[This piece stretches across two pages. There is a small, cartoon-like drawing of Carly Rae Jepsen as she appears on the cover of her 2015 album EMOTION, positioned so it looks like she’s perched on the title of the piece. On two corners, a smattering of star-shaped confetti stretches across the page.]

I didn't know that I was allowed to be angry about revisions until the first time I co-wrote. Andi and I were sitting at the perpetually wobbly IKEA table in my old Toronto living room and going over the notes on our very first co-authored chapter, on Carly Rae Jepsen and Canadian nationalism.

"Wow, fuck you [redacted editor's name]."

Of course we weren't actually angry at the editors, and of course all of those notes we received and ultimately responded to made our chapter infinitely stronger. We were PhD students — we needed all the constructive criticism we could get. But that moment, and the permission to feel, granted by Andi's exclamation, is something I've thought about a million times in the five years and countless collaborations since.

So much of academia is about performing gratitude. Gratitude for making ends meet through grad school, for article acceptances, for your supervisor's time, for getting invited to lecture or passing the defence or being asked to interview. Gratitude for literally any gig at all in this hellacious job market.

Just as co-authorship uncovers the mess of writing, it opens up spaces (and, in the best collaborative relationships, permission) for ugly feelings of our own. Sharing your grief, anger, frustration, indignation, and rage with someone can be almost comedically cathartic. Rather than getting waylaid by those revisions, we ended up laughing at our exasperation, making a fresh cup of tea, and getting on with it knowing we weren't alone.

Andi and I are infinitely lucky in that we were trained to write in, quite literally, the exact same way. Both grads of the same journalism school, both suckers for a Google Doc and incapable of texting in anything other than near-perfect CP style... our professional training has cut out a lot of the logistical speed bumps that I think a lot of co-authors face.

And while I don't think we've ever articulated it in as many words, what's left over is plenty of room to scheme and feel and conspire and pivot and fuck up and try again and generally be our whole selves in our collaborations.

It's an ease that hasn't been present in all of my collaborative relationships, but (I think!) is always possible. I have to believe that the reason we \*~work~\* is a combination of luck, perseverance, and generosity. And, in my experience, if any or all of those things is missing in collaboration, it's far too easy to find those ugly feelings directed at your collaborator(s) rather than a common enemy, like [redacted editor's name]'s insistence on less run-on sentences.

*QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CO-AUTHOR/YOURSELF*

Why do we want to do this particular project? Why now? Why does this CFP/special issue/conference/format feel like the right home for it?

What did we learn about ourselves and our co-writing style last time we worked together? Was there anything we want to avoid repeating? Do we want to try anything new and different this time?

Where is this work going to happen? Who is going to be responsible for what? When does XYZ need to happen by?

How can we have fun with this? Or, at the very least, can we make a plan to deal with the less-fun parts of this process in a way that we agree upon in advance?

How are we going to celebrate? Where are we going to scream about/share/promote this once it's done and out in the world?

If this whole thing catches on fire, do we care more about the friendship than the project?

[A mostly-empty page with a block quote in the top right-hand corner. There is some gold disc-shaped confetti in the top left corner. The bottom third of the page is a muted Google Maps screenshot showing the driving distance between Toronto, Ontario and Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The time marked is 17 hours and 46 minutes. An image of a staple remover is superimposed over the screenshot.]

*“What if we consider collaboration as a method — not just a strategy for making do in a context where we can’t do it alone, but an approach that generates its own unique values?”* — Schaffer et al., *DIY Methods 2022*

[The bottom third of the page is an image of pink tulle. The same gold disc-shaped confetti anchors this page to the one opposite, and an image of the Temperance card from the Rider-Waite-Smith deck rests on top of the tulle. The card depicts a winged figure wearing a white gown and standing on a riverbed pouring water from one yellow-gold cup into another. In the distance is a small hill with a city on it.]

The Temperance card in the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot is a figure with one foot on land and one in the water, doing some casual transmutation (and a helluva party trick) as she pours water between two chalices. It's meant to symbolize balance, patience, & purpose. But all I see when I look at this card is someone doing three things at once and still somehow missing out on the cool looking path and glowing, Oz-like city behind them.

I was not a grad student who could afford to jump into the river with both feet. Entirely unfunded and financially independent of my family since I was 17, I averaged about three side gigs at any one time to make things work on top of TAing and writing my dissertation. I turned selling soap, making lattés, pulling pints, and transcribing other people's research interviews into rent; none of those things ever made it onto the CV that ended up landing me a "real" job. The hardest part about getting that "real" job has been the weird grief at letting go of all of those mismatched identities and jobs that structured my 20s, and the biggest realization since has been just how much class has shaped my experience of academia. How rarely we name money and privilege as structuring logics that determine not just if we survive it — but if we even want to.

The friends I met along the way, the ones who held me down and talked me through and showed up for me consistently, were the ones who understood what it was like to be doing the seemingly impossible. Who felt similarly lonely because maybe we were the first person we knew to attend grad school, and the only person we knew without a SSHRC. I'm grateful to have had a mentor who confided in me that her treat to herself upon getting a big promotion was new stick-and-poke tattoo supplies. And I remain *entirely* uninterested in an academy where we don't make space to celebrate those of us doing these things in the punkest, scrappiest, most fly-by-the-seat-of-our-pants way.

That there is room for all of us in academia is a myth, and the sooner we stop telling that story the better. The only reason I am still here is because of the friends I made along the way.

[This is a two page spread. The background is a photograph from a free show that the band Charly Bliss played at the Horseshoe Tavern in Toronto in November of 2018. The photo has been colourized so that it is mostly pinks and purples, and while we can’t see any of the musicians’ faces, we can make out lead singer Eva Hendrick’s Doc Martens and the yellow guitar of one of her bandmates. The paragraphs are arranged in the middle of the page so they span the full spread.]

Getting wine drunk at department parties as method. Complaining about Tinder dates as method. Sending a CFP and a text that says “I thought of you” as method. Going to shows together as method. Comparing notes in the merch line as method. Falling down in the pit at Emo Nite as method. Visiting the dog park as method. Ordering that one pizza with tomatoes and hot peppers as method. “Should we selfie about it?” as method.

Screaming together about impending deadlines as method. Sharing comps lists and defence prep questions and job materials as method. Zooming through a year and a half of COVID-19 lockdowns as method. Sending a job posting and an email that says “Please apply to this one because I wish I cou﻿ld” as method. Making time on the other side of the world to meet up for a drink as method.

Falling apart in one another’s kitchens after therapy as method. Publishing separate pieces in the same literary zine as method. Accidentally showing up in the same outfit as method. “I started a new Google Doc” as method. Full and new moon tarot as method. Taking too long to text back as method. Talking about our moms as method. [Two dancing girls emoji] as method. Ugly laughing as method. Uglier crying as method.

Friendship as method.

*Friendship Hire*

[This piece stretches across two pages. The top third of the page is an image of some corrugated tin, colourized to be a light minty green. On the left-hand page is an image of a beaded friendship bracelet, the kind with alphabet beads. It spells out: RIDE OR DIE. There is also a smattering of metallic star stickers and star-shaped confetti.]

In a 2016 piece for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Hannah McGregor described how the same conventions that encourage “unattached” early career scholars to relocate for academic positions also reinforce the primacy of romantic couplehood — often at the expense of other, equally vibrant relationships. Relocating for the tenure track, McGregor noted, often means coming face-to-face with the reality that “powerful forms of [non-romantic\*] love, friendship, commitment, and community don’t (for better or for worse) count.”

But what if non-romantic\* partnerships did count? What might academia look like if we valued collaboration as a method for research and survival? How might we subvert disciplinary norms that privilege single-author publications and individual ambition by highlighting those collaborative relationships that — rather than hold us back or bog down our CVs, as we’re so often told — help us to thrive?

So much has been written about the invisible labour performed by generations of academics' wives — the typists and copyeditors and co-authors whose names never made it beyond the acknowledgements (and even then included only if they're lucky). What are the affective pitfalls of conflating love and labour? How many of us never would have made it this far without the eyes and ears of our colleagues, besties, academic soulmates, and pals?

Spousal hires are making a gradual comeback, according to yet another piece from the *Chronicle*. "The premise is simple," reports David D. Perlmutter. "A lot of academics are married to or partnered with other academics, so the hiring of one creates a chance to hire two." It's disguised fairly well by some hefty capitalist logic here, and definitely rests upon more than a few hetero-nightmarish assumptions, but the prospect of relocating with someone who represents a support system — represents *home* — has always seemed incredibly nice.

(If intrinsically not applicable to me, a queer, single 30-year-old whose only dependent is her cat and whose experience of dating fellow academics has been deeply underwhelming.)

Through my usual combo of luck and YOLO-ing a little too close to the sun, however, I find myself staring down an academic year where my newest colleague is one of my very closest friends and collaborators. Andi and I spent all winter trading pep talks as we navigated job apps and interview processes. Our mantra during those cold and uncertain months? *Why not us.*

We've jokingly dubbed it “the friendship hire,” even though we were hired completely independent of one another and probably owe it mostly to the fact that we are both graduates of one of Canada's largest and strongest gender studies doctoral programs.

But still.

McGregor is hardly the first queer, feminist thinker to point out the ways in which the structures and shapes of institutions from the family to the university leave out non-romantic\* attachments. We have language like chosen family and femmeship to describe the ways that care has been queered, and long histories that show us that these are not new ways of coping with a world built for two. Nor is the practice of working closely with one's friends in any way revolutionary, particularly in queer and feminist academic circles. The field is still small enough that it often feels like a web of overlapping nodes, and many feminist scholars understand their collaborative relationships as praxis.

So why *not* us? What if we all endeavoured to bring our friends with us, the same way that partners and traditional families have been finding ways to navigate the Tetris of the academic job hunt and hiring processes for years? What would it mean to reject outright the academic fetishization of relocation in favour of community? What if, rather than dismissing these things as utopic or whimsical, we recognized that our best work happens when we don't feel alone? Or even — just dream with me for a minute and trust the process — that academics deserve to be happy regardless of any attendant boost to research output or impact factors?

The friendship hire! It's not perfect, but it's worth a try.

\*While this is definitely the most economic way of describing the type of friendship/ collaborator relationship I'm getting at here, obviously romance and friendship are not mutually exclusive properties — nor should they be! Everybody romance your friends!

[There is a mostly empty page for notes. Opposite that is the bio of the author, superimposed over an image of the Prince Edward viaduct, connecting Bloor Street and the Danforth in Toronto. The photo has been colourized purple.]

Morgan Bimm (she/her) is an Assistant Professor at St. Francis Xavier University. She loves living next to the ocean and misses dive bars, sweaty Toronto concerts, and all of the people she left behind. She lives with a cat named Nora and her own constant anxieties about academia, the TT, and making it all work. You can find her on the internet.

*Works Cited and Image Credits*

[The background of this page is the same corrugated tin texture overlaid with a fabric printed with a grid pattern. Both images have been made transparent and layered so that they look mostly abstract. Over top of this is a white text box with the works cited.]

McGregor, Hannah. “The Loneliness of the Spinster.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 2016. <https://www.hannahmcgregor.com/blog/blog-post-title-two-yfx8s>.

Perlmutter, David D. "Admin 101: Laying  the Groundwork for a Spousal Hire." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 2022. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/admin-101-the-art-of-the-spousal-partner-hire>.

Schaffer, Guy, Jen Cardinal, Brandon Costelloe-Kuehn, Sarah Moesch, and Chris Tozzi. “Precarious Methods: Contingency, Research, and Burnout.” *DIY Methods*. 2002.

"Temperance Tarot Card Meanings." *Biddy Tarot.* <https://www.biddytarot.com/tarot-card-meanings/major-arcana/temperance/>.

*IMAGE CREDITS:*

Prince Edward viaduct — City of Toronto archives

CRJ illustration — Carly Rae Jepsen

Temperance card — Rider-Waite-Smith tarot

Charly Bliss gig — One In Ten Words blog

Friendship bracelet — Little Words Project

[This page is empty except for the text of the land acknowledgement.]

This zine was written and compiled on unceded Indigenous lands in Mi’kma’ki (Antigonish, Nova Scotia). The valuing and protection of so much Indigenous thinking and teaching happens in spite of the settler colonial violence enacted by institutions including the university, and no conversation about alternative research methods is complete without acknowledging our complicity in these histories. The writing, printing, and production of zines for this conference is happening across Turtle Island and around the world, and fellow interlocutors and readers can learn more at <https://native-land.ca/>.

DIY Methods 2023

# Braiding Clouds

Daniel Evans

I had never written a skybox shader. That was the starting point, really.

I had never written a skybox shader, so attempting to re-create several years of work by a dedicated VFX team at a major game studio was the obvious first step.

I’ve been working with the Unity engine to build digital artworks since 2018. In that time, I’ve always relied on the default procedural skybox shader, perhaps swapping it out for the “high quality” one if I wanted the sun disk to look nicer without adding post-processing. I’m not the only one, either – it’s something I notice in many works that otherwise lavish a great deal of attention on everything else. Not that there’s anything wrong with that – if it works, why mess with it? It just feels like a missed opportunity to exercise authorial control over something that can easily take up half of the screen.

Backing up.

My work explores user data: its mechanisms of collection, its implications under surveillance capitalism, and, conversely, its generative potential through the languages of data visualization and procedural content generation. Working digitally, this means creating environments that allow forms of user data to manifest in a metaphorical way, and be experienced phenomenologically.

Where surprise, delight, and labour of care enters into the creative process is, for me, in the creation of tools (the legacy of both John Cage and the Fluxus movement is at play with my use of procedural generation here). Rather than creating a fixed artistic output, I am creating a structure or possibility space for artistic output to emerge, driven by some form of input data.

Most of the time, this proceeds from a conceptual impetus and is shaped by metaphor. Can I return location tracking data from an abstract ream of numbers into a form that can give us a sense of movement and exploration, something that invites us both to contemplate the patterns and rhythms of our day-to-day lives while overwhelming us with the magnitude and minute detail of all-encompassing corporate surveillance? Can I prod at the gap between the emotional resonance of our personal photographs and the dispassionate and often woefully inadequate image tagging attempts of cloud-based storage providers? What tools do I need to build to do these things procedurally?

This document is part of a body of work I have been tentatively calling Cloud Computing. This work has been/still is emerging organically from technical research on rendering clouds and other atmospheric phenomena in a skybox shader. Rather than a linear flow, it has become a form of methodological braiding, where technical problem solving, aesthetic refinement, and conceptual exploration are intimately interconnected and not cleanly separable, informing each other in surprising ways. The images in this document are direct outputs of this investigation, included along with the functions used to generate them.

So how do clouds work, physically? What approaches are used to model this behavior digitally for realtime applications? Where do these approaches come from, and what do they do, algorithmically and metaphorically? What histories and literacies do they draw on, and how are these implicated in the output? What conceptual engagement does this engender?

There are two primary ways of rendering clouds: flat, where the cloud is a simple two dimensional texture displayed on a distant plane hanging in space, or mapped around the inside of a dome, and volumetric, where the cloud is a three dimensional volume of varying density that scatters, absorbs, or transmits light differently at every point. The former case is trivial, while the latter is a well researched area of computer graphics that adopts simplifications of the mathematical models used in meteorology (Hillare 2016, Wrennige et al. 2013, Bruneton and Neyret 2008, Kirk et al 2004).

Some of the most comprehensive and intelligible work on volumetric cloud rendering in recent years comes from the games industry, such as Rockstar’s work on Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018) and Guerilla Games’ Horizon Zero Dawn (2017) and Horizon Forbidden West (2022) (Schneider 2015, 2017, 2022,  Bauer 2019). Their approaches work in realtime and are data-driven, and adopting a similar approach made it possible to consider the sky as another data visualization space.

Both studios also explicitly invoke the American landscape painting tradition, with the work of painters such as Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Edwin Church, and the photographer Ansel Adams included in their technical presentations as art direction goals and examples of prior aesthetic translations of observed atmospheric phenomena. This tradition, however, is also entangled with the rhetoric of American Exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, and colonial violence (Keck 2013, Elston 2012, Boime 1991). What might this suggest for the metaphorical use of a cloudscape as a data visualization space?

Of course, “the cloud” is already a metaphor in our contemporary digital landscape – the concept of ephemeral, non-local, decentralized information access that obfuscates the highly consolidated, physically based, publicly funded-yet-privately-owned nature of our digital infrastructures. Following the strands of the braid this far, using cloud rendering to poetically visualize cloud infrastructure seems almost too obvious. But what are the possibilities for reflection and critical engagement when a ubiquitous visual metaphor is informed by material conditions? This begs a closer investigation of the material conditions of data centres.

As Tung-Hui Hu has noted, this infrastructure is grafted on top of pre-existing networks and structures of control – in North America, the foundation of early internet distribution was the excess transmission capacity of railway signalling networks. Though the tracks themselves may be torn up and eroded, our cloud infrastructure traces the seams of 19th century colonial expansion, along with its attendant violence and ecological devastation (Hu 15).

Data centres use an efficiency metric called Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE). This is a simple ratio of the total energy consumed by the data centre, divided by the amount of energy consumed by the computing equipment alone. Google boasts of a trailing PUE of 1.1 for its data centres, in contrast to a worldwide average of 1.57 (Google 2023). Yet the company’s ISO/IEC 27001 certificate shows that less than a third of the company’s cloud services are handled by its own facilities. The vast majority of services are contracted out to third party providers, operating at much lower levels of efficiency (ISO 2022).

The shader code that forms the third strand of this braid has 4 variables that make sense to vary over space: coverage (how much of the sky contains clouds), type (what vertical profile do the clouds have), density (the density of water vapor per volume), and absorption (how much light is absorbed by the clouds, indicating atmospheric particulates and impending precipitation). These are passed to the cloud shader as a top-down two dimensional texture that acts as a map of the cloudscape. The images in this document are experiments in mapping cloud infrastructure and statistics to these parameters, layered with varying amounts of noise and other aesthetic tweaks.

 Using cable infrastructure to define coverage, the presence and size of data centres to define type, and the fractional component of PUE (i.e. the energy used by the data centre for non-computing functions such as cooling) as the absorption value, the effect in full colour is ominous – thin stratus bands bridging towering piles of dark storm clouds. Water vapour by default has an absorption infinitesimally close to zero. A value of 0.1 (the fractional part of Google PUE) approximates the onset of rain, while 0.57 (data centre average) approaches the darkest of storm clouds.

This braiding is an ongoing process. Closing with the image of an oncoming storm,  I welcome discussion on any of the strands or their connections. I particularly invite conversations on the implication of cloud service providers and data centre infrastructure in ongoing colonial violence.

Daniel Evans, 2023

dee@ualberta.ca

[Image Descriptions]

Cover: The page is split into three horizontal bands. The centre band is white, while the upper and lower bands display an early afternoon sky full of puffy white cumulus clouds. The text “Braiding Clouds” straddles the boundaries between the bands.

Page 1: A sphere of fluffy white clouds of varying height and density floats against a dark void. Gaps in the coverage allow the background to peek through.

Pages 2 - 3: A view looking upwards at the sky through a veil of ragged wispy stratocumulus clouds. The sun is almost directly overhead, scattering brilliantly through the edges of the clouds.

Pages 4 - 5: A view looking directly up at the sky, visible through a gap in the cloud cover. The edges of the clouds are lit up by the sun, but their bellies are dark, swollen with rain.

Pages 6 - 7: An ethereal view of a cloudscape from inside the cloud layer, near the top edge. Nearby cloud forms break down into wisps of vapor and digital static, while faraway they coalesce to the point of looking almost solid.

Pages 8 - 9: A hemispherical shell of cumulus clouds, lit from behind. The near side of the hemisphere has been scooped away, revealing incandescent light filtering through from behind.

Pages 10 - 11: An early afternoon sky with wide banks of stratus and stratocumulus clouds washing over one another like waves.

Pages 12 - 13: A roiling bank of cumulus clouds against a black sky. The clouds appear illuminated from within, giving them a surreal appearance like sculptures of blown glass.

Pages 14 - 15: A cloudscape at sunset. A mix of stratocumulus and cumulus clouds in isolated puffs are lit from below and to the side, scattering the last sunlight along their edges .

Page 16: A sphere of densely packed, unnaturally compressed cloud forms floats against a dark void. The centre of the sphere has been scooped away, revealing a dark cavity within. The whole is reminiscent of a vast eye watching from above.

//The following HLSL code lives in a .cginc file included in either a skybox shader

//or a compute shader that populates a buffer for post-process overlay

//The main function is SculptCloud, a raymarch loop taking a camera ray (origin, direction),

//sun direction, and screen-space UV coordinate as arguments

#if !defined(VOLUMETRIC\_CLOUDS\_INCLUDED)

#define VOLUMETRIC\_CLOUDS\_INCLUDED

#define HIGH\_Q\_PHASE

#define BOUNDING\_SPHERE

#define RENDER\_OUTSIDE\_VOLUME

// --------------------------------------------------

// constants

// --------------------------------------------------

static const float PHASE\_SCATTER = rcp(4 \* UNITY\_PI); //normalization for scattering

static const int MIN\_STEPS = 64; //minimum number of raymarch steps

static const int MAX\_STEPS = 128; //maximum number of raymarch steps

static const float planet\_radius = 6.371e5; //r(earth) is 6.371e6

static const float lowerBound = 1500; //lower bound of the cloud layer in meters

static const float upperBound = 4000; //upper bound of the cloud layer in meters

// --------------------------------------------------

// variables

// --------------------------------------------------

//\_Absorption is absorption coefficient - effectively zero for water vapor

//\_InScatter is inscattering coefficient - in the range 0.05 - 0.12 per Hillare 16

//\_ScatterBias is directional bias (g) for phase function - 0.8 per Bauer 19

fixed \_CloudCoverage, \_CloudFalloff, \_CoverageScale,  \_CloudShape, \_CloudScale,

\_CloudDetailScale,\_CloudDensity, \_Absorption, \_InScatter, \_ScatterBias;

float3 \_WindDir //direction of the wind

float \_WindSpeed //speed of the wind

float4 \_MultiScatterWeights //weight of each octave of mutiscattering solution - (1, 0.67, 0.5, 0.33)

// --------------------------------------------------

// samplers

// --------------------------------------------------

sampler3D \_LowFreqNoises; //3D composite noise texture

sampler2D \_CloudTopShape; //2D gradient over height

sampler2D \_CloudBottomShape; //2D gradient over height

sampler2D \_CoverageMap; //top down map of cloud coverage

// --------------------------------------------------

// bounding volume functions

// --------------------------------------------------

//Get the normalized distance of a point between inner and outer boundaries

float GetHeightAtPoint(float3 pos)

{

float innerShell = planet\_radius + lowerBound;

float outerShell = planet\_radius + upperBound;

float3 centre = \_WorldSpaceCameraPos.xyz;

centre.y = -planet\_radius;

float distance\_to\_centre = length(pos - centre);

return invLerp(innerShell, outerShell, distance\_to\_centre);

}

//Calculate intersection points of a line and a sphere

float2 DistanceToSphere(float3 ro, float3 rd, float a)

{

//construct the centre point of the bounding spheres

float3 c = float3(ro.x, -planet\_radius, ro.z);

//construct a line from the centre of the sphere to the ray origin

float3 q = (ro - c);

//define the radius of the sphere

float r = planet\_radius + a;

//simplified quadratic solve for normalized vectors

float B = dot(rd, q);

float C = dot(q, q) - r \* r;

float disc = B \* B - C;

if(disc < 0) return -1;

float d = sqrt(disc);

float t1 = -B + d;

float t2 = -B - d;

float2 t = float2(t1, t2);

return t;

}

//Calculate the distance to intersect the inner and outer bounding spheres

void CalculateBoundingVolume(float3 ro, float3 rd, inout float tmin, inout float tmax)

{

//check distance to outer bounding sphere

float2 th = DistanceToSphere(ro, rd, upperBound);

//if both of the values are negative, the ray does not intersect the sphere

if(th.x < 0 && th.y < 0) return;

//check distance to inner bounding sphere

float2 tl = DistanceToSphere(ro, rd, lowerBound);

//set min to closest non-zero point on inner sphere

//set max to closest non-zero point on outer sphere

tmin = max(tl.x, tl.y);

tmax = max(th.x, th.y);

//test to see if we are outside either of the boundaries

int inner\_boundary\_test = step(lowerBound, ro.y) + step(ro.y, -(planet\_radius + lowerBound));

int outer\_boundary\_test = step(lowerBound, ro.y) + step(ro.y, -(planet\_radius + upperBound));

//if we are inside the shell or looking through it

if((tl.x < 0 && tl.y < 0) || inner\_boundary\_test > 0)

{

tmin = max(0, min(th.x, th.y));

}

//if we are outside of the shell entirely

if(outer\_boundary\_test > 0)

{

tmax = min(tmax, abs(ro.y+planet\_radius));

}

}

// --------------------------------------------------

// sculpting functions

// --------------------------------------------------

//Calculate vertical density profile from height and coverage map

float GetShape(float h, float2 coverage)

{

//sample our top gradient

float shape\_top = tex2Dlod(\_CloudTopShape, float4(coverage.x, h, 0, 0));

//sample our bottom gradient

float shape\_bottom = tex2Dlod(\_CloudBottomShape, float4(coverage.y, h, 0, 0));

//multiply top and bottom gradients

return shape\_top \* shape\_bottom;

}

//Calculate distribution of clouds in the sky from the coverage map

float4 GetCoverage(float3 pos)

{

//sample the coverage map

float4 n = tex2Dlod(\_CoverageMap, float4(pos.xz \* \_CoverageScale, 0, 0));

//remap coverage signal – allows coverage to change over time

float s = 2 \* \_CloudCoverage - 1;

float u = \_CloudFalloff - s;

float v = -\_CloudFalloff - s;

float cloudCoverage = smoothstep(v, u, n.x);

n.x = cloudCoverage;

return n;

}

//Calculate cloud density at a single sample point

float SampleCloudDensity(float3 pos, inout float4 cloud\_test, int mip, int LOD)

{

//get vertical position in cloud volume

float height = GetHeightAtPoint(pos);

//get coverage before distorting position by wind

float4 cloud\_coverage = GetCoverage(pos);

//get shape before distorting by wind

float shape = GetShape(height, float2(cloud\_coverage.z, \_CloudDensity));

//see if we’re in a region with coverage

cloud\_test = float4(cloud\_coverage.x \* shape, 0, cloud\_coverage.z, height);

//early out if we’re not in a region with coverage

if(cloud\_test.x == 0 || LOD >= 2) return cloud\_test.x;

//wind settings

//skew tops of clouds in wind direction

float cloud\_top\_offset = 500;

float3 flow\_dir = height \* windDir \* cloud\_top\_offset;

//animate clouds

flow\_dir += (windDir + float3(0, 0.1, 0)) \* \_Time.y \* windSpeed;

//define base shape with low frequency noise

float4 low\_freq\_noises = tex3Dlod(\_LowFreqNoises, float4((pos - flow\_dir) \* \_CloudScale, mip));

float low\_freq\_fbm = low\_freq\_noises.g \* 0.625 + low\_freq\_noises.b \* 0.25 + low\_freq\_noises.a \* 0.125;

float base\_cloud = invLerp(low\_freq\_fbm - 1, 1, low\_freq\_noises.r);

//subtract inverse coverage map from noise composite

float base\_cloud\_with\_coverage = saturate(base\_cloud - (1.0 - cloud\_test.x));

float final\_cloud = base\_cloud\_with\_coverage;

//cloud\_test.x = base\_cloud\_with\_coverage;

//only do detail work if we need to

if(LOD == 0)

{

//sample high frequency noise

float3 high\_freq\_noises = tex3Dlod(\_LowFreqNoises, float4((pos - flow\_dir \* 1.2) \* \_CloudScale \* \_CloudDetailScale , mip)).yzw;

//build high frequency fbm

float high\_freq\_fbm = (high\_freq\_noises.r \* 0.625) + (high\_freq\_noises.g) \* 0.25 + (high\_freq\_noises.b \* 0.125);

//transition from wispy noise to billowy noise over height

float wispy\_noise = high\_freq\_fbm + high\_freq\_fbm \* low\_freq\_fbm;

float billow\_noise = 1 - high\_freq\_fbm;

float noise\_height\_blend = invLerp(0.2 + 0.2 \* (1 - \_CloudDensity), 0.3 + 0.3 \* (1 - \_CloudDensity), height);

float high\_freq\_noise\_mod = lerp(wispy\_noise, billow\_noise, noise\_height\_blend);

//erode base cloud shape by detail noise

float erosion\_strength = lerp(0.45, 0, base\_cloud\_with\_coverage);

final\_cloud = invLerp(high\_freq\_noise\_mod \* erosion\_strength, 1, base\_cloud\_with\_coverage);

}

final\_cloud = pow(final\_cloud, 0.5) \* height;

return final\_cloud;

}

// --------------------------------------------------

// atmospheric scattering and lighting functions

// --------------------------------------------------

//Calculate the volume of cloud that light passes through to reach the sample point

float CalculateDensityIntegral(float3 pos, float3 sunDir, float summed\_density, float den, int mip, int LOD)

{

//multi-tap solution calculating a proper integral using the trapezoid approximation

float denSum = 0.0;

float4 den\_test = 0.0;

float last\_sample = den;

float last\_step = 0.0;

//use lower mip on denser volumes for better performance

int mip\_light = mip + step(0.3, summed\_density) + step(0.6, summed\_density);

for(int j = 3; j < 12; j ++)

{

float step\_size = exp2(j);

float this\_sample = SampleCloudDensity(pos + step\_size \* sunDir, den\_test, mip\_light, LOD);

denSum += (last\_sample + this\_sample) \* (step\_size - last\_step) \* 0.5;

last\_sample = this\_sample;

last\_step = step\_size;

}

return denSum;

}

//Calculate Henyey-Greenstein phase function for directional scattering

float HenyeyGreenstein(float cosTheta, float g)

{

//Calculate the phase function using the Henyey-Greenstein equation

float phase\_num = (1 - g \* g);

float phase\_denom = (1 + g \* g - 2 \* g \* cosTheta);

float phase\_sqr = rsqrt(phase\_denom);

return phase\_num \* phase\_sqr \* phase\_sqr \* phase\_sqr \* PHASE\_SCATTER;

}

//Calculate total light energy at a point

float GetLightEnergy(float3 pos, float density\_integral, float density\_sample, float4 phase, float4 cloud\_test, float dt)

{

//vary inscattering by cloud shape

float scatter = \_InScatter \* (1 + cloud\_test.z);

//calculate sigma e value

float extinction = (\_Absorption + scatter);

//beer’s law

float4 attenuation = exp(-density\_integral \* extinction \* \_MultiScatterWeights);

//phase function

float4 attenuation\_phase = attenuation \* phase;

//multiscatter approximation based on Wrennige 13

//accumulate inscatter over distance

attenuation\_phase \*= scatter \* dt \* density\_sample;

//octave weights

attenuation\_phase \*= \_MultiScatterWeights;

return (attenuation\_phase.x  + attenuation\_phase.y + attenuation\_phase.z + attenuation\_phase.w);

}

// --------------------------------------------------

//main raymarch loop

float4 SculptCloud(float3 ro, float3 rd, float3 sunDir, float2 uv)

{

//calculate raymarch bounds

float tmin = -1;

float tmax = -1;

CalculateBoundingVolume(ro, rd, tmin, tmax);

//early out if we don't intersect the cloud volume

if(tmin < 0) return 0;

//cap max distance to avoid long rays

//since we're blending with the skybox colour over distance,

//we cap our max ray length at a point where any cutoff is masked by the blend

tmax = min(tmax, exp2(16));

//set max steps for march

int min\_steps = MIN\_STEPS;

int max\_steps = MAX\_STEPS;

//set max steps by viewing angle

int iter = lerp(max\_steps, min\_steps, abs(rd.y));

//set max density by viewing angle

float max\_den = lerp(0.95, 1.001, abs(rd.y));

//step size parameters

float dt\_base = min(tmax - tmin, 16384.0) \* rcp(iter);

float dt = dt\_base;

//calculate HG phase function

float cosTheta = dot(sunDir, rd);

float g = \_ScatterBias;

float4 phase =

float4(HenyeyGreenstein(cosTheta, g),

HenyeyGreenstein(cosTheta, g \* 0.5),

HenyeyGreenstein(cosTheta, g \* 0.25),

HenyeyGreenstein(cosTheta, g \* 0.125));

//set mip level for sampling

int base\_mip = 0;

int mip = base\_mip + tmin \* exp2(-14);

//generate noise to break up banding

float n = hash(uv) \* 0.5 + 0.5;

//set start distance for the march

//adding noise is a HUGE improvement to break banding, but gets noisy inside cloud

float t = tmin + n \* dt\_base \* 2.0;

//store accumulated density

float4 sum = 0;

//store low res map values

float4 cloud\_test = 0.0;

bool inCloud = false;

//damping value over height for ambient light

float ambient\_damping = \_CloudCoverage - \_CloudFalloff \* 0.5;

ambient\_damping = 0.5 + 0.5 \* ambient\_damping;

//Guerrilla approach

//note that this approach does not correctly compute extinction along the view ray

for(int i = 0; i < iter; i++)

{

//early exit for optimization

if(t > tmax || sum.a > max\_den) break;

//adjust detail step size based on distance

dt = 3 + 61 \* saturate(t \* exp2(-14));

//march ray

float3 pos = ro + t \* rd;

//do a full sample of the test returns a positive value

if (cloud\_test.x > 0)

{

//full sample

float den = SampleCloudDensity(pos, cloud\_test, mip, LOD);

//only do lighting calculations if we’re in a cloud volume

if( den > 0.0)

{

//if we’re hitting a cloud for the first time, back out a bit and march with smaller steps to get as close to the edge as possible

if(inCloud == false)

{

t -= dt\_base \* den;

inCloud = true;

continue;

}

//calculate the volume of cloud the light passes through

float denSum = CalculateDensityIntegral(pos, sunDir, sum.w, den, mip, LOD);

//attenuate light

float light\_energy = GetLightEnergy(pos, denSum, den, phase, cloud\_test, dt);

//calculate ambient intensity

float ambient\_falloff = (1 - ambient\_damping) + ambient\_damping \* cloud\_test.w;

float ambient\_intensity = sqrt(1 - cloud\_test)  \* ambient\_falloff;

//calculate distance for atmospheric blend

float distance\_blend = t;

//store intensity and blend factors

float4 col = float4(light\_energy, ambient\_intensity, distance\_blend, den);

//attenuate by absorption, since we're not factoring it into falloff over distance

col.xy \*= (1 - \_Absorption);

col.xyz \*= col.w;

sum += col \* (1 - sum.w);

t += dt;

}

else

{

t += dt\_base;

inCloud = false;

}

}

else

{

SampleCloudDensity(pos, cloud\_test, mip, 2);

t += cloud\_test.x > 0 ? dt\_base : 2 \* dt\_base;

}

}

sum.w = invLerp(0, max\_den, sum.w);

return sum;

}

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# Collapsing

Ben Dalton

[Editor’s note: This zine is cut-and-paste style, with text cut from multiple sources. Citations are included after each borrowed piece.]

Cover:

collapsing

{content warning sticker:} "Do not pick"

"without the enthusiastic consent of the entire table. Review your safety mechanics before playing this scene." [1, p. 71]

[Image description: photo of a behemoth of a digger, gradually undermining the earth on which a number of tiny protesters can be seen standing near the edge. "Bagger an der Kante: At dusk, the brown coal excavator digs at the edge of the pit in Lützerath." With thanks to photographer Tim Wagner."]

[2]

"These days, I can only write in fragments." [3, p. 13]

"I am not angry because the submarine was badly-made. I am angry because I live in a vastly larger pressure vessel being managed and maintained by the exact same people." [4]

"Planetary geopolitics inside a morsel–a strange topology, an implosion/explosion of no small matter." [5, p. 117]

"Maybe it is because I know that in order to live, I give away something finite in service of a system that takes pleasure in maiming before it kills."  [3, p. 13]

"the cat's fate is entangled" [6, p. 170]

"Inside the nucleus of the atom is an implosion of violent legacies, sedimenting historicities of colonialism, racism, extractivist capitalism, militarism, neocolonialism, and also the seeds of their downfall and possibilities for living and dying otherwise." [7, p. 543]

"I slow it down a little here and there when I attend the meeting, or do the food run, or help my neighbour when she is sick. I hope she will help me when I am sick." [3, p. 13]

"—I invite you to participate with me in a mini-montage/diffraction experiment," [8, p. 38]

"I will place before us some fragments, in the style of Benjamin's \_Arcades Project\_" [8, p. 38]

"But also it's-not-time as in not time as I'd ever known it before, raised as I was to understand time in terms of linear progression, history and a stable sense of the future—" [9, p. 3]

[Image description: a child's drawing of a face crying, smiling, and with a nose bleed, cut into a paper mask]

"If a particular ideas isn't clear, give it a placeholder name like you would a character in a play or a novel that seems impossible to understand or has a name that seems impossible to pronounce, and carry this character along in its bracketed form while paying attention to the story line despite this uncomfortable piece." [10, p. 453]

[Image description: sketch of a cat, from 15th century France]

[quoted in 11]

"Dudz wonders how war

can be civil," [12, p. 101]

"while Jack

contemplates the quantum

physics of fighting

if on a molecular level

every woman here is

inside the ring of her

blood cell waiting

for the bell," [12, p. 101]

"Sheree's methods turn the catastrophic into the beautiful, and the innocuous into the fierce." [13, p. 155]

"She collects a lot of magazines and brochures for collage" [13, p. 155]

"Höch consistently undermines the viewer's initial perception that these hybrid creatures are real and whole by pointedly calling attention to their fragmentary and constructed nature." [14, p. 71]

"—only poems here and there on scraps of paper that I never remember to keep. The strange thing about watching power break down is wondering what they will write about it." [3, p. 102]

I was trying to make a zine about

collapsing

as a method,

and then my dad fell and fractured his hip,

stuff (my old toys, photos of me, &c.) which might collapse, and I have been tidying this so he can return home safely.

I also felt like I was collapsing. My partner's breast cancer treatment recovery, my

parenting,

austerity cuts, climate crisis, strikes, …

my friend's heart attack and coma recovery,

nose bleeds and tears under the weight of sorting

![a photo of a hand holding a tissue red with fresh blood of a nose bleed]

""\_…faut se débrouiller\_": one has to cut through the fog, work one's way out of the general collapse—" [15, p. 935]

"I don't know yet that this memory is done

with me." [9, p. 9-10]

[Image description: background to the page is a photo of the kitchen shelves of a small flat, full to near breaking point with useful items and memorabilia (including a packet of Cheese Moments)]

"And always the words 'not yet', whispered over and over like a dull, stultifying heartbeat." [9, p. 3]

"But let's be clear: this "burnout" that secure scholars are feeling is phantom pain where their colleagues should be." [16, para. 4]

"Thousands of tonnes of rock have broken off the summit"

"and tumbled into a valley"

"melting snow and thawing permafrost." [17, para. 1]

"The quick collapse of higher education may not have come to pass, but the hollowing-out has accelerated," [16, para. 3]

"collapsing of standards and accountability in our outsourced and deregulated services." [18, Sec. 4]

"So part of me wants to collapse into the fatalism" [19, para. 44]

"Some days, when I am feeling especially hateful, I'll look up at the sky and wish for the bubble to burst. Because at least if there's a formally declared crisis, we're all screaming." [19, para. 44]

"But I had taken in so much dust that every time I tried to open my mouth, no sound came out" [20, para. 9]

"The climate crisis is about time. If you leave out the aspect of time, then it is just one topic among other topics. If you take away the countdown, then a collapsing glacier, a forest fire or a record heatwave is nothing more than three independent news events – a series of isolated natural disasters. If you fail to include the aspect of time, the climate crisis is not a crisis." [21, Sec. 5.8]

"It's-not-time as in you'll have to stop soon … but not yet. no explanation or deadline offered, just the perpetual wait for something to finally shift." [9, p. 3]

![still from a video of a person on a scooter motorcycle watching an SUV car try to drive up a steep road awash with storm water]

[22]

"you seem more frightened of the changes that can prevent catastrophic climate change than the catastrophic climate change itself." [23, Cha. 1]

"(This is not a book about despair.)" [3, p. iii]

"you are suffering from the effects of intentional systemic understaffing." [16, para. 4]

[Image description: photo of a precarious pile of papers]

[Image description: still from a video of a person on a scooter turning around as an SUV is caught in a sudden torrent of storm water]

[22]

"I realised there was a crack in my astronaut helmet. COVID leaked in." [24, para. 5]

"We are ships in the night and my ship has broken down. I am only new to this." [25, para. 5]

"And the damage was done there and then but it would take the following months to see what state it had left me in." [24, para. 5]

"I wish to mark it here only by saying that so many people died needlessly. If we could comprehend it, we'd spend most days wailing. Many do. I don't believe writing has the power to do anything grand enough to help us. I would just like a space to set down my despair." [3, p. iii]

[Image description: still from a video of a person on a scooter escaping away as an SUV is washed out of view down a steep road in a violent flood of storm water]

[22]

"I was the aftermath of something bad: a slow-motion landslide, earthquake or storm." [24, para. 5]

"Climate collapse"

"threatens every fragment habitat already pushed to the limits of what it can survive." [26, para. 27]

"E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," ends on a characteristic double chord of terror and promise: the machinery collapses, the crystalline society is shattered with it, but outside there are free people—how civilized, we don't know, but outside and free." [27, Cha. 11]

"she was drawing the pine tree that used to grow in her front yard. Both the tree and the house had burned to the ground three weeks before that drawing class," [26, para. 7]

"Somedays, if bitterness were a whetstone, I could be sharp as grief." [28, p. 13]

"They crack through pavements. They tell us about stretches of ancient time and contemporary layerings of time, collapsed together in landscapes." [29, p. 8]

"cut together-apart, differentiate-entangle." [5, p. 111]

"This is how she told the story to those who had not witnessed it. There came a time when capital began to eat itself; they told everyone there was no longer enough to go around." [3, p. 48]

"but if you are a Stone   you are a chip off the mountain

and you join   an avalanche   of wrong-walking women

shaven heads   like tumbling rocks   you keep them close

they are   rosary" [12, p. 37]

[Image description: background to the page is a still from a video captures the moment thousands of tonnes of rock explodes into the valley after sheering off the high side of a snow-topped mountain. there are clouds of dust billowing.]

[30]

[Image description: a still from a videocall, we can see the bottom half of a face and their shoulders, there are subtitles that read:]

[31, 7:47]

"I know that we're all zoomed out in so many ways, the possibilities for being in touch in some ways have been extended, and in other ways, we're in touch in ways that feel flattened, and did not give us a certain kind of tactility or other kinds of sensuality and ways of making sense that we might be used to" [31, 7:47]

"When you're in conversation with someone, and you don't know how it's going to end … it's a very delicate and tender and fragile space," [32, Sec. 3]

"In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: Matter is condensations of responses, of response-ability." [33, p. 161]

"Like many social network sites, Twitter flattens multiple audiences into one – a phenomenon known as 'context collapse'." [34, p. 9]

"with montage and fragmentary writing, diffractively reading insights through one another, allowing the reader to explore various crystalline structures that solidify, if only momentarily in the breaking of continuity." [8, p. 22]

":boom: Just launched!" [35]

"Edward Coulston statue just got taken down in Bristol

#blacklivesmatter :fists:" [36]

[Image description: the 'like' icon from Twitter]

"your pain is our commodity!" [37]

"Thames Water is collapsing. Tell the government to take it into public ownership PERMANENTLY" [35]

"Sing our petition :point\_down:" [35]

"the airbnb collapse is so awesome and i hope every property owner has to sell at a gutwrenching loss to someone who might actually live in the fuckin place" [38]

"\*\*•2.5M\*\* Views" [38]

"Collapse of the iron market-hall of Paris in 1842.

<Hº,7>" [39, p. 844]

"been having a series of vivid disaster scene dreams recently in which I am powerless: people on a bridge washed away in sudden storm flood;" [40]

![pen sketch of a small bird with something in its beak. Philagrus Sparrow-weaver Birds]

"looking up the street to see our terrace houses \*\*collapse\*\* one after each other; &c." [40]

"you don't deserve any post-apocalypse until you eat your now-apocalypse first" [41]

"this genuinely makes me very sad, i know at the end of the day it's just an app, but as a chonically ill girly twitter was the last place i was able to freely discuss issues i face / build a sense of "friends/community" that could relate to; and it was taken away just like that" [42]

[Image description: the 'retweet' icon from Twitter]

"the pattern of my daily life was destroyed. I stand … before ruins." [14, p. 138]

"Entanglements are relations of obligation—being bound to the other—enfolded traces of othering." [43, p. 265]

":retweet: You Retweeted"

"if a person creates data, they should/do own that data. So if making profit is on the table, you'd have to start with logistics for how to pay all the people in crisis…" [44]

"The "core" of its artificial intelligence, Loris said comes from the insights "drawn from analyzing nearly 200 million messages" at Crisis Text Line." [32, Sec. 2]

"Durch Eilboten" [14, p. 30]

"what insurers really want is our data, which we were strongly against. They weren't alone - many groups wanted to \_buy\_ our data outright." [45, Sec. 4]

"Out of the love I got for"

"this community of computer scientists, data/tech policy analysts, academics, I feel the need to be harsh and keep it real about the moral collapse of AI Ethics." [46, para. 1]

"with love and rage, towards a less fucked up world," [47, p. 24]

"an assemblage of fragments seems quite apt, and speaks not only of the ruins but also of innumerable possibilities for re-membering the past and conceptualizing history anew." [8, p. 38]

"\*\*1\*\* Bookmark"

[Image description: comic book illustration of a fruit half collage superimposed onto a shoulders and neck]

[13, p. 155]

[Image description: comic book illustration of hands making a montage, surrounded by pencils, fragments, glue stick and scissors.]

[13, p. 155]

[Image description: background to the page is a montage by Hannah Höch layering an automobile, fragments of machinery and text, with illustrations of insects.]

[Hannah Höch's half of the collaborative photomontage collage 'DADA Cordial' c.1919 (with Raoul Hausmann), quoted in 14, p. 30]

"crystals are condensations of history, the frozen traces of forces acting through time." [8, p. 13]

"As the order of the outside world was collapsing," [14, p. 138]

"'I ask all who are still at liberty, to take this message seriously and flee the republic as soon as possible.'" [Final social media post from a local LGBT group in Chechnya, 2017 quoted in 12, p. 108]

"I also struggle every day with broader dynamics in which tech, data, ethics, and mental health are entangled." [45, Sec. 6]

"Like broadcast television, social media collapse diverse social contexts into one, making it difficult for people to engage in the complex negotiations needed to vary identity presentation, manage impressions, and save face." [34, p. 10]

"The public and all-inclusive nature of television has a tendency to collapse formerly distinct situations into one." [48, p. 92]

"The men who break

into the bar are men

she has known

all her life." [12, p. 104]

"I will delete every tweet

   but it won't matter" [12, p. 112]

"I will be screen shot

   before I am shot" [12, p. 112]

"One of the most important technical lessons of my ethics of computer science class last fall was"

"how to safely become an anonymous source for journalists when you think your employer is doing something shady!!" [49]

"A programmer leaning over a keyboard with her head in her hand as two men high-five in the background." [50, p. 224]

"Whistled At" [51, p. 144]

"she may smile visibly (so that the whistler knows his message has been"

"received), and at the same time look straight ahead so as not to allow for the collapse of separateness and the formation of an engagement." [51, p. 145]

"men explode when you least expect it" [12, p. 35]

"is that the boy

who sat behind her

in school, on the bus,

who walks beside her

each night —

are these the men

who are always behind her?" [12, p. 104]

"Dudizile shrugs

picks up her pint

slowly sips

wipes her lips

on her sleeve

whispers to the glass

& sets it free." [12, p. 104]

"Valentine cracks open a grin

picks up the bottle    considers

glass:   atoms coming together

in short order   inside the bottle

is a bar" [12, p. 101]

"when the

bottle breaks the world pours

out & the flood rises" [12, p. 101]

"Time ~~is/had been~~ crossed out. Time drawn out like taffy, twisted like hot metal, cooled, hardened, and splintered." [5, p. 106]

"\_knows that the bonds in glass are their

weakest point\_" [12, p. 105]

"\_that when glass breaks it makes the sound of ideas

unravelling, children laughing\_" [12, p. 105]

[Image description: background to the page is an old photo capturing the moment before a horse and rider hit the ground, suspended moments from impact after a bad jump]

[52]

"it is not the case"

"that the cat is \_partly\_ alive and \_partly\_ dead (a kitty in a coma), or"

"that the cat is in a state of being \_neither\_ alive \_nor\_ dead (perhaps in the sense of a vampire cat living among other "undead" creatures)." [53, pp. 169-170]

"The central quandary of the cat experiment is this: if we look inside the box after one hour, we won't find the cat in a superimposed state of dead \_and\_ alive; rather, it will be \_either\_ dead \_or\_ alive." [53, p. 169]

"Schrödinger's hope was that if he dramatized this situation by replacing the common exemplar of a microscopic particle with a cat, he could call attention to the peculiar nature of entangled states. What can it mean for a cat to be in a superimposed state of dead and alive?" [53, p. 169]

"You may be wondering what, exactly, a superposition or entangled state is. And so do physicists. The cat paradox is Schrödinger's rhetorical device" [53, p. 169]

"he is inviting us to grapple with the notion of the wave function or quantum state of a system." [10, p. 276]

"When we observe a system, it ceases to be in a superposition. But how is the indeterminacy resolved? By what mechanism does the system go from a superposition of eigenstates to a definite value measured for the corresponding property?" [10, p. 280]

"This fact has spawned innumerable creative interpretations of quantum physics," [53, p. 169]

"the ground falls out from under us…" [10, p. 249]

"It seems as if the wave function has somehow "collapsed" from a superposition (or entanglement)" [10, p. 280]

"For example, it has been proposed that the mind is responsible for the collapse of the wave function. Such accounts" [10, p. 331]

"including the shockingly anthropocentric hypothesis that human consciousness collapses the superposition into one definite state or another," [53, p. 169]

"would place the human at the center of all that is." [10, p. 331]

[Image description: illustration of a skeleton wearing regal cloth and crown, holding a banner and a sword aloft, sat on a giant barrel of whisky, people below fight, some are watching a gallows hanging in the distance]

[book index illustration, quoted in 47, p. 23]

"I argue that the correct way to understand what this superposition (or "blurring") stands for is to understand that \_the cat's fate is entangled with the radioactive source\_—and not merely epistemically, as Schrödinger and others suggest, but \_ontically\_;" [53, p. 170]

"the semantic and ontological indeterminacy is resolvable only through the existence of a specific material arrangement that gives meaning to particular concepts to the exclusion of others" [53, p. 170]

"the wave function is not collapsed in the sense of physically destroying the superposition or entanglement so much as establishing or extending it in such a way as to account for the observed phenomenon. Hence, what we find is that there is an important sense in which measurements create and further extend entanglements" [10, p. 344]

"\_In reality the full quantum behavior is still present, but it can only be seen by performing a different measurement.\_" [Greenstein and Zajonc 1997, quoted in 10, p. 349]

"only part of the world can be made intelligible to itself at a time, because the other part of the world has to be the part that it makes a difference to." [10, p. 351]

"\_It's all a matter of where we place the cut.\_" [10, p. 348]

"All I'm saying is that if I was a billionaire I'd use all my financial power to bring back Cheese Moments and also Brannigans beef and mustard crisps." [54]

"\_what is at stake is accountability to marks on bodies in their specificity by attending to how different cuts produce differences that matter\_" [10, p. 348]

"There is no "collapse"—"

"—that transforms a superposition or entanglement that exists before the measurement into a definite state upon measurement. Rather, \_what is at issue is the proper accounting of agential cuts\_" [10, p. 345]

"Entanglement are not a name for the interconnectedness of all being as one, but rather specific material relations of the ongoing differentiating of the world." [8, p. 48]

[Image description: background to the page is a photo of three protesters coating a small private jet plane on the runway with bright orange paint from a fire extinguisher, rendering it unable to fly and pollute. they are wearing bright orange high-vis.]

[photo by Jonas Gehring, quoted in 55]

"quantum physics requires us to take account of the fact that we are part of the nature which we seek to understand." [10, p. 352]

"Proximity, difference which is non-indifference, is responsibility." [Emmanuel Levinas, 1985, quoted in 10, p. 391]

"Even as we paint the new seedlings in the scorched earth, put our bodies in front of the pipeline construction, dig firebreaks around our homes," [26, para. 35]

"agentive participants such as floods, mosquitoes, melting ice caps, drought, together with water availability, market forces, colonialism, militarism, and so on, in their inseparability, are also part of the field of revolutionary possibilities in their ongoing reconfiguring." [8, p. 88]

"As they walked, glimpses of transformed holding centres and former prison sites convinced her that embers were a construction material. Rea began to believe, seriously, that destruction could not last forever. They decided to walk for as long as their bodies allowed, exploring the state's ruins." [3, p. 53]

"—which is not ot say that humans cannot become extinct, or that the existence of humans is a precondition for the world worlding itself," [8, p. 88]

"Failure is built into the very notion of 'recovery'" [9, p. 18]

"I want to collapse – and reinstate –, only this can make – mean nothing at all. \_Don't labour under the illusion that you will get to keep anything\_." [3, p. 107]

"If you are playing a game with character sheets, look at yours now. On it, find an item, trait, scar, ability, adjective, or stat. Cross it out. It is no longer yours." [1. p. 57]

"world building is a key part of the organising process. You imagine the world you wish to see and then work towards it." [56, p. 79]

"Has it fallen to ruin? Is there a garden? Are there children living there?" [1. p. 55]

"The real is not constituted by a collapse of the existing set of possibilities; it is not a singular selection among present alternative possibilities" [10, p. 436]

"Quantum "entanglements are not intertwinings of separate entities, but rather irreducible relations of responsibility. There is no fixed dividing line between 'self' and 'other', 'past' and 'present' and 'future', 'here' and 'now', 'cause' and 'effect' …"" [8, p. 48]

"they wrote about rebellion and uprisings, but not the human excrement the women cleaned from the streets in the coming days." [3, p. 95]

"who dealt with the mess (the piss, shit and bricks) of HISTORY, or who rebuilt entire towns and cities," [3, p. 95]

"The possibilities for countering an economy of disposability include composting ideas, turning them over, reading against the grain, reading through, aerating the encrusted soil to stimulate new growth." [8, p. 65]

"It would be easier if I were a composer or a painter and could layer different moments and affects on top of each other such that they appeared simultaneously or at least danced with and around each other more freely." [9, p. 8]

"You are planting something in the earth. Your shovel cuts the soil. What are you burying? Is it something you are hiding? Is it something meant to grow?" [1. p. 66]

"Matter is a matter of some intimacy, of cohabiting, of touching, of being in touch, of responses to yearnings" [8, p. 62]

"In other words, don't give up." [10, p. 453]

[Image description: background to the page is a still from a video of the toppling of slaver Edward Colston's statue in Bristol, UK, while a crowd celebrate, there is a placard visible in the foreground, saying:]

[36]

"INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE" [36]

"in the midst of this sinking city with the chant: "Tremate, tremate, le streghe sono tornate!"" [13, p. 142]

"In combining public-facing and interpersonal interaction, the networked audience creates new opportunities for connection, as well as new tensions and conflicts." [34, p. 17]

"It occurs to me that if rhythm is relation, then maybe holding others in their different rhythms is intimacy." [9, p. 40]

"self-presentation is \_collaborative\_." [34, p. 10]

"Generated,"

"by the collapse into each other of the technical, organic, mythic, textual, and political," [57, p. 112]

"negotiating power differentials and disagreements." [34, p. 10]

"I slice diagonally across the musical phrases that make up their lives. Always out of time. Offering nothing but a choppy syncopation to dinner table conversations," [9, p. 39]

"This new intimacy collapsed expectation. It allowed for a flexibility that responded to moments as they unfolded." [3, p. 52]

potential collapse, nose bleeds and tears under the weight of sorting a lifetime of our memories,

the shelves bowing under the weight of all those years of lovingly kept and never quite getting round to sorting things out.

And yet the weight of these selves are built of vital memories and belongings, of thoughtfulness sedimented. To collapse together is a method of assemblage and juxtaposition, reading disparate fragments through each other, sticking together.

"Last spring was another piece of the fall and winter before, a progression from all the pain and sadness of that time, ruminated over. But somehow this summer which is almost upon me feels like a part of my future. Like a brand new time," [28, p. 14]

"friends sat around the kitchen table." [58, p. 1]

"Reconfigurings don't erase marks on bodies—the sedimenting material effects of these very reconfigurings—memories/re-member-ings—are written into the flesh of the world. Our debt to those who are already dead and those not yet born cannot be disentangled from who we are." [43 p. 266]

"everyone—

—forgets most of their life," [9, p. 7]

"an attempt to record a memory that rejects the form of linear narrative." [9, p. 8]

"\_imploded/exploded in on itself: each moment made up of a superposition, a combination, of all moments\_" [5, p. 112]

"The world 'holds' the memory of all traces; or rather, the world is its memory" [43 p. 261]

"The entanglements we are a part of reconfigure our beings, our psyches, our imaginations, our institutions, our societies;" [10, p. 383]

"But there is a responsibility if you are in the media to explain why there are no jobs." [59 , Sec. 3]

"there is no plausible explanation for the economic collapse that involves immigrants and refugees. They did not cause the collapse." [59 , Sec. 3]

"how do we collectively respond to mental health crises that are amplified by decisions made by for-profit entities?" [45, Sec. 6]

"Joining anti-raid networks, lying down in front of charter flights, offering to house those with insecure immigration status are all first steps." [56, p. 132]

"We want to burn in bright colours and go pop," [60]

"to kiss people in new places –" [60]

"EXQUISITELY" [60]

"– and DARE to tear things apart." [60]

"to be giddy, impulsive and silly," [60]

"in describing the sources of fun available to sales-girls," [61, p. 109]

"customers who are treated respectfully during the performance are often ridiculed, gossiped about, caricatured, cursed, and criticized when the performers are backstage;" [61, p. 108]

"Backstage familiarity is suppressed lest the interplay of poses collapse" [61, p. 107]

"till the guests had gone" [61, p. 109]

"during"

"British rule in India:"

"the dancing girls"

"would give an imitation of the bored guests who had just left, and the uncomfortable tension of the last hour would be dispelled in bursts of happy laughter." [61, p. 109]

![background of the page is a photo of a young person stretching out to climb from one large slab of fallen rock to another. behind them is the wrinkles of sediment in a large standing stone, and behind that the layered leaves of a forest]

Back cover

Ben Dalton

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noii.net/collapsing

"this SUV/off-road car just getting washed away backwards down the hill by the force of a climate-crisis-scale flood, and the scooter stylishly manoeuvring out the way, is some sort of horrifying poem of a video that has been haunting me all day." [62]

[Image description: another sketch of a cat, from 15th century France]

[quoted in 11]

[Image description: background of the page is a photo of a small bright blue pool crammed with large carp in many bright colour patterns, torn on one edge to reveal a few of the figures walking towards the coal excavator on the front cover]

[63]

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# Curating-with: Artistic Tools and Methods

Michelle Kasperzak

What are the outcomes when methods from contemporary art and curating are used to engage in processes of everyday life?  
  
The central case study at the heart of this zine focuses on the residents of Palmeira (commonly known as Malvinas) during a period of major change. Malvinas is located in the town of Câmara de Lobos, Madiera, Portugal. As the instigator of the project in Malvinas and the curator of the events which unfolded, I documented the process of engaging and earning the trust of the residents and those involved in their lives.

The nature of curatorial practice is generally to shape, thematize, and theoretically frame a group of objects or experiences -- often for consumption within the white cube by specific elite audiences. Socially-engaged curating, or what I started calling "curating-with" (as a nod to Joan Tronto's “caring-with” (Tronto, 2015)) takes the shaping and thematizing work and adds on extra dimensions based on interactions which happen while participating in the fabric of everyday life. I wanted to find out: Which methods become part of the curatorial role when participating in the everyday life of a community, what of the outcomes of these interactions are shown or not shown, and who are those displays for?

This zine will focus on the answers to these questions and look at one thread in the fieldwork in particular which focused on finding and working with one of the remaining master boatbuilders who lives in the area. I aim to provide some insight into how curators work in socially-engaged ways and the various methods they employ, including "friendship as methodology" (Pullen-Legassie), "expanded curating" (Aquino) and handing over legacies (Mckee). It's also a micro-portrait of a particular moment in time in a particular housing complex in the town of Câmara de Lobos, Madeira. The Madeiran archipelago, known for its namesake fortified wine, boasts a number of unique features: microclimates, an ancient irrigation system (the *levadas*), and delicious bananas deemed too small to be permitted for export by the European Union. Madeira is one of the European Union's official Outermost Regions and lies geographically closer to Africa than to Europe. In this snapshot in time, Madeira is the context, and the curatorial and artistic work is the action.

*What are we talking about when we talk about curating?*

The figure of the curator is most commonly associated with caring for collections of artworks and objects in a museum, however, the field has expanded to encompass far more than this traditional role. Curators also work with living artists and manage commissions or arrange loans to facilitate temporary exhibitions of existing artworks; some curators focus on designing educational programmes which complement a temporary or permanent exhibition; curators might also manage and advise on the acquisition of new works for private collections.

For decades, curators have worked with artists to make museums and their collections more accessible to a wider public. Generally, this can be advanced with a combination of education, outreach, and interpretive programs. Independent curators, galleries, and festivals are not generally limited by premises or large, expensive collections and may therefore be more free to pursue community involvement in other ways. Some of these methods may include pop-up galleries, location-based projects, and work with and for particular communities.

Parallel to these developments, there has been much meditation over the definitions being worked with: what is curating, what is curatorial? The field (and the terms used to describe it) expands to encompass all of the various possibilities. For example, we can refer to the philosophical positioning of curating suggested by philosopher Jean-Paul Martinon, wherein curating and the curatorial are separated into two realms: "curating" as constitutive activity and "the curatorial" as disruptive activity. The curatorial is described as:

"...a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, a process of renewing one's own subjectivity, a tactical move for reinventing life, a sensual practice of creating signification, a political tool outside of politics, a procedure to maintain a community together, a conspiracy against policies, the act of keeping a question alive, the energy of retaining a sense of fun, the device that helps to revisit history, the measures to create affects, the work of revealing ghosts, a plan to remain out-of-joint with time, an evolving method of keeping bodies and objects together, a sharing of understanding, an invitation for reflexivity, a choreographic mode of operation, a way of fighting against corporate culture, etc." (Martinon, 2013, p. 4)

Martinon further suggests that "...instead of recoiling in horror at the loss of centrality of 'art practice' with regards to curating, curators and academics involved in curatorial studies might, on the contrary, revel in the idea of a practice that destabilizes all systemic endeavours. Curating is about the exigency of fragmentation, the imperative of the smithereens." (Martinon, 2017, p. 228).

This expansion of the term and what is considered curatorial is reflected in statements from working curators, who frequently frame the parameters of their own practice as much about making meaning as making exhibitions (Much to some curators' chagrin: witness curator Jens Hoffmann's "Plea for Exhibitions", portrayed as a dying art form in its purest sense (Hoffmann, 2010)). Whomever its proponents and detractors, what theorist Hal Foster described as a shift from artist as producer to artist as ethnographer (Foster, 1996, p. 172) has rippled out across the art world and emerges with regularity in the practice and words of curators themselves. For example, curator Treva Pullen-Legassie describes ethnography as being key to her research phase for a project, while being sensitive not to dictate too many strict parameters when sharing her findings with the artists she is commissioning. Pullen-Legassie also places strong emphasis on the "friendship as methodology" outlook which places value on the "head start" obtained when working with artists and other collaborators with whom one has a degree of familiarity established already (T. Pullen-Legassie, personal communication, February 25, 2019). Curator Övül Ö. Durmusoglu defines her curatorial practice as "building unexpected bonds between different circles of thought, generating sensible environments of thinking and feeling together." (Durmusoglu, 2017). Educator and curator Rita Aquino has described a notion of "expanded curating" within which participatory art functions as a possible field of dissent, and curatorial action is viewed as a much more engaged activity taking place out in the world rather than within the walls of an institution (Aquino, 2016, p. 100).

In sum, curatorship has expanded vastly beyond commissioning and managing objects and grown to incorporate a diverse range of dialogic events and intangible gestures, with social relations often at the heart of this expanded work.

*Curating-with*

While there has been a general shift towards understanding curating and the curatorial as socially-oriented and open to a multiplicity of applications both within and outside art institutions, a subset of curators (and artists) define themselves as working explicitly in community-oriented or socially-engaged ways. This type of work has its own dialogue and methods, and a flexible range of terms are used to describe it: community-engaged, socially-engaged, activist, etc.

If one's tendency is towards more socially-engaged curating it necessarily changes the objectives of a project and how it is evaluated afterwards. Art theorist Claire Bishop has identified a "disposition towards the ethical" (Bishop, 2012, p. 23) and notes a reluctance among many leaders in the field to judge works aesthetically or for their value as art objects, instead preferring to judge the depth of their community engagement and the agency afforded to the participants. Bishop also points out another split: despite the aforementioned "disposition towards the ethical", the social achievements of socially-engaged art practices are rarely compared to non-art social innovations, but remain as an "emblematic ideal", deriving importance from straddling the boundary between contemporary art and social innovation: "The aspiration is always to move beyond art, but never to the point of comparison with comparable projects in the social domain." (Bishop, 2012, p. 19). Bishop precisely sketches out the difficult terrain for artists and curators working in this area: move beyond art, but avoid comparison with non-art social innovation projects; tout your community credibility, especially if your results are aesthetically lacking. It is a terrain of effectively moving beyond art but bending the evaluation criteria to suit the context.

Despite these difficulties, some earnest efforts indeed remain to produce work which engages, is interesting, and sometimes even beautiful, and getting there involves particular practical steps and methods. Interviews with working curators highlight several important practical matters for what I started calling *curating-with*, such as developing the strategic approach and background logistics for handing over the (actual or metaphoric) space gradually to participants (F. Mckee, personal communication, September 20, 2018). This sets *curating-with* apart from more mainstream curatorial activity, where the gatekeepers of credibility are often peers and the idea of ceding intellectual property or space to other parties seems absurd. When discussing the question of what should be shown, working curators indicated that everything should be recorded, but perhaps this is only needed to show to funders or for internal reports (F. Mckee, personal communication, September 20, 2018) or that this could form the basis of another kind of documentation that does not necessarily have to culminate in an exhibition (A. Firth-Eagland, personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Fundamentally, curators working in a socially-engaged manner prize the legacy they can leave and the care they can take in their processes of engagement with a community, and they build these concerns into the structures of projects, by considering the cultural composition of their creative team and how that relates to the site in question, for example (T. Pullen-Legassie, personal communication, February 25, 2019). As for other benefits for the community, Francis Mckee, Director of the Glasgow Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), suggests that one possibility is that by exposing community participants to the working artists and curators on the project, they are also pointing to other ways of being and working they might not have considered, something he has seen in action through his methods of mixing communities in the common spaces of the CCA and working with schools (F. Mckee, personal communication, September 20, 2018). These remarks support a seemingly common sense idea that for a project to be of actual benefit to a community, or to have any kind of meaningful legacy, the project structures and the social mixing must be considered well in advance.

*Methods in Malvinas*

The fieldwork in Malvinas was conducted through the Santa Cecilia Center, a local social support center. In 2018, work began by introducing artists to the neighbourhood and, supported by the staff team of social workers, conducting workshops with the residents, particularly a consistent group of youth who were regular visitors to the Center. Workshops and excursions took various forms and employed a wide range of media. At around the same time, after years of promises (even the parish priest had lost faith that renovations would happen), 5 million Euros of construction work to repair the buildings and public areas was underway, to extend the life of these buildings.

The construction work became a powerful metaphor. I approached this work coming from social innovation discourse, and it became clear over time that the curatorial work of the project did not fall into the category of social innovation as I had originally assumed, but could better be classified as s*ocially-minded acts of maintenance and repair*. Much like the process of repair to the buildings in Malvinas, so this project intervenes for a time in the social fabric, bringing new experiences and perspectives to share, part of ongoing work in the neighbourhood.

The way that this project has deployed multiple forms of media and meetings – painting, VR, social events, workshops – seems to be a very broad array of tactics. But in order to find out what would work to become a shared story, many approaches needed to be tried. Perhaps this method could be called the *lucky dip method* since it consisted of a wide variety of different, opportunistically selected approaches. Some of the media used to approach residents to learn more about their hopes and ideas for the future of their neighbourhood worked well: a mural painting workshop was a fun and stimulating day resulting in a newly-painted staircase, and an immersive filmmaking workshop was also engaging and resulted in a short 360° film about tourism encroaching on the area. There were also several partial successes. For example, a visit to the Madeira Interactive Technologies Institute was appealing at times, but the youth also found it hard to relate their creativity to the various computer-controlled shop equipment, according to their chaperones. As a curatorial strategy, it was important to use the lucky dip method by planning several actions -- from painting workshops to app creation, from VR demos to boat trips -- with the youth and see what resonated.

*Bailinha*

In addition to working with the youth, part of the process of integrating into the neighbourhood was embarking on a search for Bailinha, the master boatbuilder who is one of the few remaining masters of this art in Câmara de Lobos. António Baía Reis, who was first introduced to Malvinas on a walkshop that I conducted for a small group of scholars in 2017, used his background in immersive journalism to tell the story of Bailinha.

Baía Reis' work developed during an initial research sprint with myself and fellow academic Justin Pickard. We noted that: “inspired by a list of provocative prompts on “experimental” ethnography from media anthropologist Gabriele de Seta (2017)—variously relaxing, reworking, or breaching the conventions of ethnography as method and genre—saw an opportunity for some wider methodological experimentation.” (Kasprzak & Pickard, 2019). Inspired also on Pink and Morgan's thoughts on short-term ethnography and ways we could use “interventional as well as observational methods”(Pink & Morgan, 2013, p. 352), we co-developed threads in the story of Malvinas that we would work on together. “theoretical turns toward practice, practical activity (what people are actually doing as the move through the world) and the nonrepresentational (the unspoken, unsaid, not seen, but sensory, tacit and known elements of everyday life).“ The work Baía Reis decided to undertake centered in Malvinas took the form of an informal demo of VR work to youth from the neighbourhood, a workshop in immersive filmmaking for local students and community members, and two 360° immersive documentary films. The centerpiece film, *Bailinha: O Mestre Calafate*, focused on Bailinha, who had led the team that built a replica of Christopher Colombus' Santa Maria, which sails twice a day and became a major tourist attraction. Despite Bailinha's skills and success, he had a difficult relationship with the city, and at the time of Baía Reis' engagement, Bailinha was being forcibly evicted from his studio to make space for a hotel to be built. The film had its premiere at the Museu de Imprensa Madeira (MIM) in Câmara de Lobos, with chartered transportation bringing in the residents of Malvinas, as well as being open to the general public. As to the question asked at the beginning about what is shown and for whom, bringing in the residents for this moment of pride for Bailinha was key. The general public was welcome but the impact was most felt in celebrating, as a community, Bailinha as an important figure.

To return to the idea that the overall project is less about social innovation and more about socially-minded acts of maintenance and repair, it is worth remembering Martinon's comments about today's working conditions being in the "smithereens": and how for us to function as a society, we must continue to try to reunite where schisms exist, and compel the smithereens to cohere, even temporarily. Or as STS scholar Shannon Mattern puts it: "Agreements about what things deserve repair — and what "good repair" entails — are always contingent and contextual. If we wish to better support the critical work performed by the world's maintainers, we must recognize that maintenance encompasses a world of standards, tools, practices, and wisdom. Sometimes it deploys machine learning; other times, a mop." (Mattern, 2018). As both the buildings and the social structures in Malvinas are in a recurring state of maintenance and repair, the art interventions in the neighbourhood present less as interventions and more as part of the weaving of the social fabric conducted not just by artists but by all the participants, especially those less-visibly working in the background.

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Colophon

Text by Michelle Kasprzak. Adapted from her doctoral dissertation “Curating-With: Artistic Methodologies for Social Innovation and Community-focused Acts of Care, Maintenance, and Repair”, defended in 2020 at the University of Porto, Portugal.

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# Drawing Meaning

Sienna Ruiz, Dionisia Ruiz

Cover:

The title of the zine, “Drawing Meaning: the potential for drawing as ethnographic analysis” is hand-written in purple marker, with “Drawing Meaning” written larger on the top of the page and visually converging where both words include “-ing”. In the background are pieces of yellow and purple papers and doodles of connected squares, stars and a sun pasted onto the page. There is also a curved second-half of the alphabet in a child’s handwriting in the background.

Page 1:

The quote from Lynda Barry is hand-written and pasted and says: “There was a time when drawing and writing were not separated for you. In fact, our ability to write could only come from our willingness and inclination to draw. In the beginning of our writing and reading lives we DREW the letters of our name” - Lynda Barry

Below the quote is the name “Dionisia Ruiz” written in a child’s handwriting and missing the “o” in the name.

Page 2:

In our childhood, we - Sienna and Dio - did not distinguish between text and image. Just as Lynda Barry describes above, Wwords flowed into images flowed into life. As sisters, we developed a shared visual language born from shared experience, from codes written onto walls and secretly passed notes. Now, some traces of this language are still present, but each fragment is stranded from the other.

Sienna does ethnography and Dio does visual art.

Sienna writes. Dio draws.

With this zine, we aim

to stumble our way back to the union drawings and words,

to challenge how ethnographers engage with visual methods,

and, ultimately, to re-conceptualize *what research can be.”*

Image description: The text, like all text in the zine, is hand-written in all capital letters in purple marker. In the background are doodles of a shark waves, a superman style “s” and words and lines that cannot be fully seen.

Page 3:

The stakes for these aims rose as Sienna reflected on what is lost in the continuous cycle of reading text to produce text in qualitative research. The data I interact with all translate research encounters into the written word. Analysis means retreating further into discourse and disciplinary insularity. Embodied engagement with data is limited to sitting and staring at the computer. Digitally reading and writing facilitate the ultimate product of research - the published article - but what can happen when we interact with data in radically different ways?

Image description: Around the text are doodles of a flower, a cat, looping lines, a small airplane and cityscape, an alligator eating chips, a little stick figure, and zig-zag lines.

Page 4

In contrast, Dio learned that *artistic* research can be subjective and embodies. It allows for obsession, for covering a studio wall in printed images of an object of interest, for repeating and reprising the same subject within work. In my own practice, I became interested in the subconscious through a personal fascination with my own dreams. Writing down my dreams happened easily and uninterrupted; I wanted to find this freedom in the rest of my writing practice, so I experimented with making writing automatic and subconscious. I turned the paper and wrote upside down, with my eyes closed, with both hands writing at the same time, with my non-dominant hand. It was like re-learning to write and therefore to think; the results were unforced, lyrical, concise - the pages visually interesting. Still there was a gap in my arts education: artists were hardly encouraged to team up with each other, much less with people in other fields.

Image description: The doodles on this page include abstract shaded in shapes like triangles and squares, a bumpy alligator, poppy-like flowers, a pencil, dots, a shadowed hand reaching towards the top of a person’s head, and stars.

Page 5-6:

Image description: Collage of papers including a child’s handwriting of the name “Dionisia Ruiz” being re-written, a drawing of a persons face, abstract lines and shaded shapes, the wordes “drawing=dreaming,” paper cutouts of a pencil, red dots, the number 7 circled and crossed out in red pen, and the number 10 circled in red pen. In the top right is a text box with a child’s handwriting that says “If I drew right side up, it would be good. She has…” and the rest of the box is on the bottom of the page and says “wacko hair.”

Page 7:

To experiment with visual research methods and challenge disciplinary boundaries, Sienna and Dio began to work together and made zines based on the Photographing Health by Adolescents in the MidwEst study.\* Since Dio makes zines using analog cut-and-paste methods, for the first time Sienna handled a physical print out of data.[1](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YMQozY5tEXBywlJtT3cCY8M-AtpKBW7xCmYl_5fdECk/edit#bookmark=id.q7fg67ojtfg) Collaging with the text, Sienna reconstructed by hand the children’s quotes with all of their pauses, repetitions, and “ums”. By engaging physically with the words, she gained a new appreciation for how the participants communicated their experiences.

\*led by Jean Hunleth and Eric Wiedenmann

Image description: The background has collaged doodles of a dog, flowers, hands reaching towards stars, squares in dotted lines, and abstract looping lines.

Page 8:

In another zine on children’s caregiving,[2](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YMQozY5tEXBywlJtT3cCY8M-AtpKBW7xCmYl_5fdECk/edit#bookmark=id.r70mcu7ytf38) Dio illustrated the pages with drawings of quilts, which, as an object or symbol were not suggested in any of the participant quotes. Rather, Dio drew them because of an interest in them as artistic objects and their symbolic connection to children and care. The authorship team initially questioned the relevance of quilt imagery. But, after further discussion connecting the idea of quilting to the data, the team began to relate the data to ideas of patchwork theories of ethnography and care[3](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YMQozY5tEXBywlJtT3cCY8M-AtpKBW7xCmYl_5fdECk/edit#bookmark=id.wo55dvlfvurn), and asked for more explicit quilt motifs.

Simply including an artist in the process of analysis clearly challenged the research team and introduced new pathways toward meaning-making with data.

Image description: There is a doodle in the background of abstract lines and large, star-like shapes all connected together and falling towards the right corner of the page.

Page 9:

Within ethnographic work, drawing largely serves to *represent* concepts in either the data collection or publication process*.* In fact, throughout ethnography’s history, drawing has been used to, ostensibly, depict the world “as it is”, by recreating certain environments or interactions in fieldnotes,5 illustrating the contours of a fieldsite,6 or categorizing things from kinship networks to geographic borders.7 If drawing is discussed in the context of analysis, it might appear in the form of a diagram, limited to boxes, circles, and arrows that form a “drawn ordering” of data that can “organiz[e] thoughts…and guide the reshaping of arguments.”8

But instead of depicting the world “as it is”...

Image description: In the background are doodles of swirls, squiggly lines and leaves On a rectangle on the right side of the page are squiggly lines printed out and a child’s recreation of the lines below them.

Page 10:

what if drawing can help depict the world as it *could be* by facilitating unseen theoretical connections, expressing the researcher’s own subjectivity? What if drawing could be “a process of unlearning”?9 Kashanipour explains:

“The moment we draw lines, we free the subject and object from the names we use to refer to them. Through the act of drawing, we break with what we have learned through language. We break open the drawing subject from the plaster of terms. Due to its inherent quality, drawing can create alienation from the self-evident. This alienation, in turn, prepares fieldworkers to see in a (de)constructive way—to see transformation processes that take place before our eyes and of which we are a part.”[9](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YMQozY5tEXBywlJtT3cCY8M-AtpKBW7xCmYl_5fdECk/edit#bookmark=id.810awrtw4pg9)

Image description: There are doodles of abstract flowing lines in the background as well as a colored in piece of graph paper and children’s hand-writing in the corner with incomplete words.

Page 11 - 12:

Image description: This spread includes a collage with two different drawings of bears, one omre simple in marker on the left top corner and one more detailed bear wearing a suit, a hat, and a name badge. There is also a children’s drawing of a UPS truck, colored in pieces of graph paper, a doodle of a stick figure on fire standing in front of a laptop, and the top half of a figure in a hoodie writing with their head rested on their hand. Across both pages are cut out text from an early report card of Sienna’s that reads: “I enjoyed having Sienna in our class this year. Her eagerness to learn and sense of excitement was a bright source of inspiration for many of her peers. Sienna has become a great team play as she is always seeking consensus…”after this the words are less legible as they are pasted as if they are falling into a puddle of words in the bottom right corner of the page.

Page 13:

The act of drawing can be seen as a “movement” that is “truly generative of the object rather than merely revelatory of an object that is already present, in an ideal, conceptual or virtual form.”10

Drawing *anything,* in *any way*, can allow us to see the world, and our place in it as a drawer, in a different light. Drawing shifts from product to process, one that doesn’t prioritize skill or accuracy. Drawing is freed from being something artists do, to becoming something that everyone can and should do.

With this in mind, we call for researchers to discard the realistic and diagrammatic in favor of the doodle, the drawing in the margin of a page, the crumpled up paper in the trash can.

Image description: The doodles in the background are many abstract straight and swirly lines. There are two floating eyes on the page, a stick figure of a girl with curly hair, and three robots cut out of paper.

Page 14:

Specifically, we argue that

DRAWING IS A WRITING EXERCISE

one that can reveal subconscious connections on behalf of the researcher and lead to new theoretical insights. By drawing the gestural and transitory, rather than the static and representative, we “break the tyranny of the eye as figurative overseer.”[11](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YMQozY5tEXBywlJtT3cCY8M-AtpKBW7xCmYl_5fdECk/edit#bookmark=id.mwcbptshljg2) Drawing can thus destabilize the researcher, the research, and the research presentation

Image description: In the center of the page there is a drawing of scissors surrounded by abstract drawings of a sun, zig-zag lines, and connected triangles.

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In order to write differently, radically, stories, we need to come to writing radically differently. We can see more clearly the potential for art as an analytical aid to transform and deconstruct the boundaries between disciplines, between researchers and participants, and between data and the self that interprets it. We need to create art that does not just complement or simply aid in writing but serves as an essential means through which we formulate the words that describe our research.

We need to begin, again, to draw language.

Image description: In the background there is a piece of graph paper decorated with intertwining abstract shapes that are colored in in blue and green, a sketch of a flower, and abstract shapes that all fit into each other like puzzle pieces.

Page 16:

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD AND INTO YOUR HAND:

1. Put a pen to paper and draw anything for 2.5 minutes, without thinking. No words, draw for the entire time.

2. Think of a particular research project you are currently working on. To play with Douglas-Jones’ instruction of “writing everything”[9](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YMQozY5tEXBywlJtT3cCY8M-AtpKBW7xCmYl_5fdECk/edit#bookmark=id.5yo0oaj40u6i) related to one’s ethnographic project, we will ask you to “draw everything” that comes to mind in the moment when you think of your research as well as anything else. Instead of striving for realism, follow where your mind takes you in the moment you begin to draw. Draw continuously for five minutes.

What did you include, what didn’t you? Why?

3. On a blank page, draw a self-portrait of yourself as a researcher. Avoid stick figures, Draw to the edge of the page - settings, memories, your values…

4. Draw out a research encounter you remember, but re-imagine its ending. What does this reveal about the potentialities or limitations of research - of your inherent biases, of your research interactions, of the structural and institutional contexts that shape your research?

5. Interview yourself. Write out the questions with your dominant hand and write the answers with your non-dominant hand. The interview can be about anything.

Page 18:

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Page 19:

Image description: There is a collage of papers including children’s handwriting of Dionisia practicing cursive alphabets and a children’s drawing made by Sienna of a figure with her arms out wie and her name written above it. Between these papers are doodles of abstract shapes, a house with no window, a dragon-like creature, a multi-colored shooting star, three panels of a comic with a stick figure waking up, and a drawing of Sienna with glasses and crazy hair and the words “Me Now” with an arrow pointing at the figure.

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Dionisia Ruiz is an artist and zinester based in Oakland obsessed with paper media, printmaking, comics, etc. etc. Email me to be penpals, trade zines, or commission me! [dionisia8315@gmail.com](mailto:Dionisia8315@gmail.com)

# Early Internet Memories: How to resist the temptation to scrape big data to write internet histories (For Researchers)

Katie Mackinnon

Welcome to the Archive Promenade

Hello internet history researchers! Do you research content moderation? Fan

communities? Platform ecosystems or user generated content?

Web archives and platform archives might be right for you, especially if you are

interested in older materials or web infrastructures.

As you might know, there are many tools that have been developed to scrape the types

of posts you might interested in aggregating and researching.

But have you considered the types of attachments people have to the information you

may be collecting?

People post things online often with specific audiences in mind, especially in online

communities that form around specific topics or themes. Internet materials are shaped

by the people who are present or participating in each space. Rather than scraping the

data to perform an analysis and anonymizing the users whose materials are excavated

through this approach, consider the benefits of an archive promenade.

An archive promenade is a collaborative and participatory approach to co-construct

histories of the internet. It is an approach that engages with not only informed consent

but also the right to be forgotten.

CARE ETHICS SCAFFOLDING

 What is your stake in this research?

 Who are you bound to?

 Where are the human subjects located?

 How will you engage these people or communities?

 How will they benefit from the research?

 What steps are you taking to ensure that this is not an extractive or helicopter

relationship?

 How are you engaging with the limits of data?

 How has the platform impacted the creation, form and preservation of the data?

 Are you aware of and working against the traps and temptations of data? (ie:

over investing in digital personas, failing to recognize human subjects as holding

autonomy and authority of data, accepting their right to opt out and refuse to be

coded)

 Have you considered participatory approaches to researching internet histories?

 To try an archive promenade, rotate and see the other page

 Make sure you record the interview

 Consider the following questions:

 Who is the archive for?

 Who does it serve?

 What does the archive contain?

 What are the gaps and silences?

 How did the participants feel about their digital traces? Do they want it archived?

Do they want to keep it? What are the limits that they ask for?

 How do we as researchers or archivists represent refusals?

 What story is being told and who is telling it?

To analyze your data, return here:

 Look for clusters of themes, similarities and differences across the interviews and

promenades

 Embrace the challenges in depicting effective responses to discovering digital

traces

 Remember to highlight key moments of observation and reflection

 Consider what these promenades have to say about the early web

 Consider the ways in which the participants responses differ from your own

assumptions

*Memory and Internet History*

While historical research is comfortable working with primary sources from the

deceased and works well to reconstruct narratives and imaginaries, historical internet

research must adapt to engaging with the liveliness of the research subjects. Despite

the experiential and conceptual distance between contemporary internet research and

web materials from the 1990s, there are overwhelmingly strong connections that put

people at risk of harm through engagement with decades-old material. A feminist ethics

of care for archived web data might thus insist on new ways of engagement with the

creators of materials held in web archives. Bringing participants into the research about

their own digital traces is more than just obtaining informed consent; it also creates

opportunities to design methodologies that involve participants’ eagerness and

excitement over revisiting, remembering and unearthing their digital traces, and

significantly, exploring opportunities for reclamation

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*SIDE TWO*

Welcome to the archive promenade

Have you ever wondered what happens to your data when a platform dies or is no

longer popular? Have you ever tried to find an old account? Have you ever deleted a

profile and regretted it?

Social media platforms - even ones that existed before Facebook - have profited from

your participation, your lurking, your scrolling, your clicking, your anger, your obsession,

your passion, your excitement for decades.

Reclaiming your digital traces means locating and attributing meaning to the things that

you&#39;ve done online throughout your life. No one knows the value of your own

experiences more than you.

Consider an Archive Promenade, where together we can stroll through your digital past

to find the things you&#39;re interested in finding and talk about the context and the

memories behind this data.

Archive Promenade Checklist

What aspects of internet history interest you?

 Do you miss the way platforms used to look?

 Do you miss how you could customize how a platform looked?

 Do you miss the friends that you had on this platform?

 Do you miss the way you used to move through this platform?

 Do you miss the way you used to engage with this platform?

 Do you miss the way you felt when you would use this platform?

 Do you consider yourself someone who grew up online?

 Do you have a mix of fun and painful memories of being online as a kid?

 Do you think that there are gaps in your memory of growing up online?

Please list all the websites that you’re interested in looking into:

 Which ones stand out in this list?

 Which ones feel like home?

 Which platforms were the ones where you had the most fun?

 Why do you think that is?

 What types of stuff would you do on this platform?

 Who were the people that you interacted with and why?

 What is your best memory and what is your worst?

 Go to this website: https://web.archive.org/

 Enter the URL of a platform you&#39;re interested in looking at (for example:

https://GeoCities.com)

 Click through the archive pages across the years that you would have been there

 Look for your username or account

As we stroll, think about whether this looks the same as in your memory:

 How do you remember navigating through this website?

 What buttons did you click the most?

 Did this ever change while you were an active participant?

When we find things that you made or were part of, discuss what you remember about

it.

*Memory and Internet History*

Typically, when a website or platform “dies,” or “sunsets,” decisions about data are

made by employees of the company on an ad-hoc basis. Proprietary data — that which

is produced on a platform and held by the company — is at the discretion of the

company, not the people who produced it. More often, options that a platform provides

to users to determine their privacy or deletion do not remove all digital traces from the

internal database. While some data is deleted on a regular basis, other data can remain

online for a very long time.

Sometimes, this data is collected by the Internet Archive, an online digital library. Once

archived, it becomes part of our collective cultural heritage. But there is no consensus

or standards for how this data should be treated.

Users should be invited to consider how they would want their platform data to be

collected, stored, preserved, deployed or destroyed, and in which contexts. What should

become of our data?

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# How to Get Into Fights With Data Centers:

# Or, a Modest Proposal for Reframing the Climate Politics of ICT

Anne Pasek

Also: how to use ping and traceroute to find the location of data centers, and how to look for DRAMA, CONFLICT, and OPPORTUNITIES TO ORGANIZE WITH OTHERS wherever you find them

===

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A brief note to the reader: This zine is an attempt to package up some long-running academic ideas of mine into a more accessible format, sparking a conversation and teaching a few new skills. If you want to geek out further, I encourage you to follow the links, many of which point to open-access (which is to say free) academic articles. My goal for now, however, is ease up on some of the jargon and hedging that you find in that genre of writing. I hope that, whoever you might be, you’ll find this zine easy to read, useful to your thinking, and respectful of your intelligence. You can let me know how I did (if you’d like) at [annepasek@trentu.ca](mailto:annepasek@trentu.ca).

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*What is the carbon footprint of our digital lives?*

I made this zine because I keep getting asked this question. There’s a growing number of people and organizations who are anxious about climate change, aware that digital stuff plays a role in that, sincerely want to do something about this in their personal or professional lives. Sometimes it’s artists wondering if their creative practices online might be producing outsized harms. Sometimes it’s small organizations looking to find internal policies for email or file storage that can strike a balance between utility and ecological sufficiency. At other times, it’s colleagues of mine in academia, looking to embrace lower-carbon ways of working, connecting, and archiving, all with an eye to the steadily rising amount of digital stuff in the cloud and CO2 in the air.

It's encouraging to see so many people pose this question. I’m part of a community that studies the energy and carbon impacts of digital networks, and it used to feel like our biggest challenge was just getting people to understand that online files and services aren’t the immaterial stuff of sleek corporate infographics or the whole metaphor of ‘the cloud.’ That cloud, we’d endless reply, is just someone else’s computer. Most likely, it’s a computer stuck in an enormous data center somewhere sort of rural, where it consumes impressive amounts of electricity (to power the facility) and water (to cool down all those hot servers).

[Image of the Dalles data center. It’s boring looking! A non descript warehouse thing.]

To give an example, take Google’s data center in Dalles, Oregon. It cost more than $1.8 billion to build and is several football fields wide. The facility uses more than 350 million [gallons of water](https://www.oregonlive.com/silicon-forest/2022/12/googles-water-use-is-soaring-in-the-dalles-records-show-with-two-more-data-centers-to-come.html) (almost a third of the total water use for the city) and more than 310 million [kWh of electricity](https://www.oregonlive.com/silicon-forest/2011/09/google_divulges_data_center_power_usage.html) (more than 2/3rds of the electrical demand for the whole utility district). That’s a lot—especially considering Google’s often better than a lot of its peers on sustainability stuff. Worryingly, Google has strived, through non-disclosure agreements and legal battles, [to keep past and potential future water rates secret](https://fortune.com/longform/google-data-center-the-dalles-oregon-water-dispute/).

So how bad is the problem, really? Estimates put the ICT sector somewhere between [2-4](https://arxiv.org/abs/2102.02622)% of all the carbon emissions produced each year across the planet (not including crypto). That’s not insignificant, but it’s also not apocalyptic. I like to tell people that it’s a ‘medium sized problem.’ However, there are bigger concerns and uncertainties about the future trajectory of the sector. Researchers disagree about whether or not the carbon emissions of digital systems are [growing just a little](https://www.ericsson.com/en/reports-and-papers/industrylab/reports/a-quick-guide-to-your-digital-carbon-footprint) or are set to [explode](https://theshiftproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Lean-ICT-Report_The-Shift-Project_2019.pdf) in future years. (Personally, I think the extreme estimates on either end are dubious). But whatever way you look at it, if the sector wants to keep pace with the wider climate commitments of the Paris Agreement, it will need to reverse course and reduce emissions. That requires changing norms and habits—probably both for consumers and industry players.

This circles back to the question of digital carbon footprints. It’s normal for us to want to think through sustainability problems with the assistance of a little quantification. There’s even a growing number of online calculators to help you assess exactly how bad your own digital emissions might be. If you’re sending an email, watching a video, or archiving your data in a cloud back up, you can find a carbon number for your actions.

The trouble is, I think that this is often the wrong question to ask—at least in terms of the carbon costs of discrete consumer action.

A nerdy network aside: Why am I so skeptical about these tools? In part because *calculators use a lot of assumptions that make their outputs look way more precise than they actually are*. All the footprinters you can find online have to make approximations about the carbon intensity of electricity, the kind of devices you’re using, the efficiency of the wider network, and the path your data takes across it. All these factors fluctuate over time and place, so what these tools can calculate is really just an estimate from a model—not a ‘true’ answer.

But more importantly, *these answers give us the wrong impression about how to actually reduce emissions*. We’re used to thinking about carbon footprints in a certain way: one where the connections between our consumer habits and environmental impacts are pretty direct. We all know the script: if we want to make the number go down, we need to consume less.

This makes sense for stuff like car travel or beef, but it doesn’t hold true in the same way for network data. This is because, for information to travel across our networks, much of the equipment that makes up that network needs to be always on, always available. Its electrical draw is fixed—it consumes the same amount regardless of how much data is moving through the figurative tubes. When you use a calculator to estimate the carbon footprint of streaming, sending, or storing something, it takes a guess at a commensurate share of all that energy consumed by the networks entangled in that action. However, this doesn’t mean that swearing off Netflix will actually result in a commensurate reduction in the network’s electrical use or its resulting climate impacts. The network is going to stay on; the data centre hosting that video will still draw the same amount of power.

This is really frustrating! It means that our first impulse, to focus on our own actions and to ask how we can better align them with our ethics, isn’t a terribly useful starting point for learning how digital networks actually work or how to change them. In fact, I worry that it risks teaching the wrong lessons, leaving us with an inflated sense of our individual importance and agency. It’s kind of the same mistake that we’ve made with [plastic recycling](https://discardstudies.com/2012/09/20/recycling-as-a-crisis-of-meaning/): we can be overinvested in the morality of individual actions, completely missing how larger industrial factors have a far bigger impact.

But wait, surely consumer demand counts for something! You could argue that withdrawing your participation from digital businesses that have an outsized impact on the climate has still got to be at least a little helpful. Even if it doesn’t lessen the immediate carbon intensity of our digital systems, maybe it’ll reduce the market signals for these kinds of businesses, such that they’ll slow or reduce their operations. Voting with your dollar counts, right?

Well sure, but just like voting in general, you’ll only win things if you have real numbers behind your cause. A coordinated boycott is likely necessary to have much of an impact. [Greenpeace](https://www.greenpeace.org/international/publication/6826/clicking-clean-2017/) sort of gestured at the possibility of one a while ago, but no one ultimately ever hit the ‘boycott’ switch (and in fact their campaign focused almost as much on consumer loyalty and appreciation as it did on environmental concerns). Boycotts could be a tactic worth trying again in the future, but we’d definitely need lots of friends and allies to pull it off.

*What’s a better question?*

These days whenever I’m asked what the climate impact of X network thing might be, I pivot and instead try to start a conversation about how we can stop the next data center from being built.

(Think of those ‘one less car’ stickers you see on commuter bikes, but with a digital twist.)

I like this frame because it

1. Makes it a collective, rather than individual, concern (*goodbye and good riddance, green saviour complex*);
2. Keeps our focus on the infrastructure rather than the content (*and so maybe helps avoid some unhelpful moralism about what kinds of content are ecologically and morally justified)*;
3. Encourages us to think about sufficiency and degrowth (*which is to say, we aren’t against digital networks in the general, just against their unthinking expansion*);
4. Encourages us to keep the relative scale of things in mind, rather than just our personal actions (*i.e. ChatGPT emits way way way way way way way more than your cat photos ever will*);
5. Centers our attention on particular places and communities where specific and disproportionate impacts will be felt (*rather than only the global abstract of the climate—though I care a lot about that too*);
6. Opens the door to exciting coalitions (*see the box above about the need to make friends in order to win things).*

Of course, this perspective also leaves some stuff out. This might include:

- improvements we could make to network and software efficiency,

- potentially quite helpful green power purchases by big tech giants, or

- environmentally beneficial uses of big chunky data sets and machine learning tools.

I have my suspicions about the sufficiency of these strategies without a bigger picture focus on degrowth, however. What’s more important, though, is that these areas are mostly matters of internal corporate policy and expertise rather than broad civic engagement. If you, as an individual or non-tech organization, are looking for a place to dig in, I’d like to suggest that the best place to do so is around resisting data center expansions.

*But why data centers?*

Great question. Data center construction has been booming for the past decade or so, with demand predicted to [grow a continuing 10% per year](https://www.datacenterknowledge.com/dcim/catching-data-center-construction-constraints) through 2030. Right now, there are active plans in the works to build at least [300 more hyperscale facilities](https://www.datacenterfrontier.com/cloud/article/11427486/after-record-growth-in-2021-data-centers-are-building-bigger-for-2022). If all those data centers get built, that will lock in many cities’ worth of water and electricity consumption (even if they are ultra efficient state of the art ecological angel facilities).

This is on top of all the data centers we’ve already got kicking around—and they’re growing too. By some estimates, there are [8,000](https://www.usitc.gov/publications/332/executive_briefings/ebot_data_centers_around_the_world.pdf) or so in the world today, and many of these are slated for further expansions. It’s common for tech companies to build these sites with growth in mind, adding additional buildings and servers over time as demand continues.

Why are data centers booming? It’s true that the pandemic did hike the use of network services while many of us stayed at home (and in some cases, continue to do so today). However, the relationship between supply and demand with data centers is much weirder than this story might imply. Instead, as [Mél Hogan](https://www.academia.edu/39043972/The_Data_Center_Industrial_Complex_forthcoming_2021_) argues, there’s something of a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sector: tech executives work hard to continually produce increasing amounts of cheap data storage, believing that this excess capacity is necessary to meet the needs of emerging business cases for cheap data storage. Sure enough, those often business cases often follow, but it’s not clear that they would have created that demand without the supply already being promised at bargain prices. It’s a chicken and egg thing—or, as Mél puts it, a “solution in search of a problem.”

We see that ‘solution’ evidenced today in the rise of many varied data- and compute-intensive applications. Things like ChatGPT, companies that act as ‘prospectors’ running analytics on massive health datasets, or general web3/crypto weirdness all wouldn’t be possible without the guarantee of cheap data storage. We live in a digital world increasingly defined by this presumption. It all adds up to far greater climate impacts than personal consumer habits alone.

Who does this boom benefit? Those aforementioned tech executives, to be sure, along with the holders of stock options and judiciously invested venture capital. But, when it comes to the communities that have to live with all this digital infrastructure, the picture is much murkier. It’s often the case that different counties are enticed to compete with one another to offer more and more lucrative tax incentives to companies that might build a data center in their city. This results is a bit of a [race to the bottom](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/technology/cloud-computing-brings-sprawling-centers-but-few-jobs-to-small-towns.html), where property tax revenues from these facilities can run rather gaunt. Employment benefits are also minimal; after the construction work of a new facility is done, data centers don’t hire many local people. What’s more, for the many ‘internet landlords’ leasing server space to tech companies that don’t build own their facilities (which is to say, most of them), [tax breaks and loop holes](https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127221124943) let them avoid hundreds of millions of dollars each year in income tax. Taken together, data centers often look like they take more than they give.

These are a few of many reasons why I think we should all try to get into at least one fight with a data center. It will be salutary for our sense of scale, our climate feelings, and our ability to build coalitions and organize across various local and regional political concerns. If we can stop the next data center from being built (or endlessly expanded), and if we can create a wider movement contesting the social and ecological licence of these facilities, we can directly impact the climate trajectory of the tech sector overall. And, even if we fail, raising a fuss increases the likelihood of winning better economic concessions and legal regulations for these things down the road.

*But which data centers?*

My first answer here would be to look into the data centers near where you live and work. If there’s a facility in your community (or plans to build one soon), it will likely impact you and your neighbours in some way. Data centers can affect your local [water table](https://www.datacenterfrontier.com/special-reports/article/11428474/tackling-data-center-water-usage-challenges-amid-historic-droughts-wildfires) (especially if you live somewhere prone to drought), [electrical prices](https://denisnaughten.ie/2022/03/28/data-centres-pushing-up-electricity-costs-for-families-naughten/), and the likelihood of [black outs](https://www.zdnet.com/article/massive-data-centre-demands-could-lead-to-power-blackouts-warns-irelands-utilities-regulator/). They can also cause deeply unpleasant (and unending) [noise pollution](https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/chicago-residents-complain-of-noise-from-digital-realty-data-center/) to people and animals that live close to these sites. As someone living in the wake of these structures, and (likely) as a political constituent of the region, you’ve got stakes and sway in that fight.

What if your local area is data center free? Well, you’ve still got plenty of relationships with data centers, stretching out to plenty of regions, you could tap into. The cloud, as you’ll recall, is just someone else’s computer. Let’s explore where those computers are by tracing your data back to its resting place.

*Finding Where Your Data Lives*[FUN ACTIVITY/TECH DIGRESSION STARTS HERE]

STEP 1: PICK A TARGET

Pick something online that’s meaningful to you—that thing that you’d otherwise be wanting to calculate with a carbon footprinting tool and wring your hands over. Maybe it’s your go-to website for passing the time, an online project you built, your meme stash, a web3 hate-watch, or your favorite multiplayer game. Anything with a URL or IP address will work.

What’s an IP address? It’s a set of 4 numbers that works like a ZIP/postal code for the vast mail system of the Internet. IP is short for Internet Protocol, which are a bunch of rules written in the early days of the Internet to ensure that your requests and replies across the internet all eventually go where they should, even if they take different paths across the middle of the network.

STEP 2: PING TO GET YOUR IP

If you don’t already have an IP address, we’ll start with a simple ping command. This is a way to sort of ‘knock on the door’ of a website, get that IP address, and see if someone’s home. To do so, we’ll use a terminal program (if you’ve never touched one before, prepare to feel like a very cool hacker type).

[Image of the characters from 90s movie Hackers, with the note ‘you in a hot second’]

NB: I’m going to use Castlefield Gallery’s website as my example here because I first developed this activity for a workshop they hosted. By doing so I don’t mean to imply that they’re outrageous climate villains or even worth extra scrutiny. To the contrary, their digital set up is pretty bog standard. Feel free to follow along, taking them as a demo, or jump right in with your own site of interest.

* Open your terminal program

*For Windows Users*

* Click on the search bar in your lower lefthand tool bar, type in CMD, then hit enter

*For Mac Users*

* Open Terminal by navigating to Applications/Utilities

* Type ping castlefieldgallery.co.uk (or a different website you’re interested in examining) and hit enter.
* Look for a set of 4 numbers punctuated by periods (51.89.229.122 is Castlefield’s) in the output. This is the IP address. You now have their digital postal address!

[Image: a screenshot of the cmd program ping run]

STEP 3: GEOLOCATING IP ADDRESSES

Unlike the postal system, however, IP addresses don’t point to an obvious physical place where you can dump your physical mail. There’s plenty of reasons why the folks setting up a website or network service do not want it to be thus. However, there’s also a trail of domain registration info that we can poke at to get some clues of where in the world this data might be hosted. To do so, we’ll turn to a few free look up services.

* Go to <https://www.ipaddress.com/ip-lookup>, <https://www.ip2location.com/demo/>, or  <https://www.maxmind.com/en/geoip-demo>. Enter the IP into their search field.

[Image: a screenshot of a shootup from IPaddress.com]

* Find the latitude and longitude (51°30′31″ N 0°5′34″ W is Castlefield’s) and enter it into GoogleMaps (or other mapping program).
* This will likely probably plunk you in the middle of somewhere without an obvious data center in view. So, with your map zoomed around these general coordinates, search for ‘data centre,’ ‘cloud,’ or ‘web hosting’ until you find a business that looks like a plausible match.

*NB:* Be skeptical of addresses located right in the middle of expensive city real estate. Unless there’s an IXP or submarine cable landing station nearby, chances are the IP address website has given you the location of the corporate offices of company that registered the website, not necessarily the location hosting its content. Sometimes, to offer a bit of privacy, IP look up tools will also simply point to the address of the closest city centre. If you’re not finding anything, or if you’re only finding financial centre boutique businesses, check your look up tool of choice for ISP (internet service provider) names. Pick up the trail on GoogleMaps with that info.

For instance, in the case of Castlefield Gallery, the geographic coordinates plunked me right in the middle of the Thames in a very posh part of London. The chances of a data center being built here are slim—I’ll need to widen my search. Looking back at my IP location lookup site, I can see that something called OVH is listed in the fields for both Castlefield’s ISP and domain. Using this as my search term points me to OVH’s London headquarters in a swanky skyscraper. The company probably used this address to register their domain info, but it’s again pretty unlikely that they’ve stuffed all their servers into a pricy and fairly vertical office.

[Image: a googlemaps street view screenshot of a slick looking downtown high rise.]

So, let’s keep looking. Zooming out of the London city center reveals another hit for OVH further down the Thames in a slightly more inglorious borough called Erith. This site is located on a one way street next to a busy traffic artery and a set of factories and distribution centers. This is much more like it! Seen on Street View, it’s an obvious match: there’s a telecommunications tower out front chock full of antennas, next to a bunch of modified shipping containers stacked on top of each other (almost surely full of server racks). Other tells include security gates, two massive power boxes with electrocution warnings, and a ‘thieves beware’ sign explaining how clever forensic devices in the cables, metals, and equipment on the site will thwart efforts to steal and sell any stolen goodies. Oh yes—we’ve got a data center on our hands. A quick search across OVH’s own website confirms that they have only one data center location in the UK, and it’s in Erith. We’ve found our match.

[Image: a googlemaps street view screenshot of a fenced industrial zone.]

*Troubleshooting With Traceroute*

Of course, this might not be so simple. Maybe your IP geolocation data is absolutely in the middle of nowhere, or it’s proving tricky to make the jump from the offices of the folks who registered the IP address to the digital warehouse where the digital stuff actually is. We have another trick up our sleeve: we can run a traceroute.

This is a diagnostic tool used by clever IT people (and malicious hackers) looking to trace the route data takes across the network to get from point A or point B. Internet traffic can change its paths dynamically as stuff goes offline or comes back up after maintenance, so you may not get the same results from one day to the next. In general, though, you can often find some useful hints about the sea of routers and exchange points your data moves across, all of which can help you zero in on where your target must be located, relative to the rest of your traceroute.

STEP 1: RUN YOUR TRACEROUTE COMMAND

Traceroute works by sending a message to each router in the path to reaching your destination, and then getting those routers to send little messages back to your computer identifying who they are. If all works well, you’ll end up with a list of all the steps (called ‘hops’), how long it took each of them to respond, and their IP addresses. It’s this latter information that we’re interested in, since we already have some tools to translate those IP addresses into approximate geographic coordinates. Taken altogether, this can draw a map of how your data actually moves across the planet (and thus where it ultimately comes from).

To initiate a traceroute, open up your terminal program, just like we did with ping. Then, type the following:

*For Windows Users*

* tracert [your IP address] (then hit enter)

*For Mac Users*

* traceroute [your IP address] (then hit enter)

STEP 2: INTERPRETING THE RESULT

Reading the output of a traceroute takes a bit of practice. Your computer will output a series of lines showing hop numbers, times, and IP/domain information.

[Image: A screenshot of my tracert run in cmd]

Each hop represents a location in the network that your request passes through. The first few lines are always going to be your local network with a lot of private IP addresses (and so, not terribly insightful).

Next you’ll probably hit an internet exchange point (IXP)—think of this as a bit of an on-ramp to the glorious information superhighway. These sometimes have names of cities in the information that comes before the IP addresses (or at least, abbreviations thereof. ‘Toro’ can mean Toronto, and so on).

The exciting stuff comes next: lots of seemingly random IP addresses. Try piecing together the geographic path of your data by looking up the locations of each IP address using the same tools as before. You might write down the cities in a list, or try putting down pins on a map. In this way, even if you can’t determine the location of the final IP, the path leading up to it can offer useful clues.

*NB:* “\* / Request times out” means that the router refused to send a message back to your computer. It happens sometimes! A lot of components in the Internet are configured to ignore traceroute prompts because they want to avoid those malicious hackers/keep traffic down. “Nothing personal,” I’m sure they’d say.

*NB:* If your traceroute won’t start, or if it looks to start from a location very far away from you, try disabling your VPN and/or any ad blockers that aren’t specific to an internet browser program. (This gets me pretty much every time).

*NB:* Running a traceroute can take a bit of time. If you want to abandon ship, or if you think things might be stalled, just hit ctrl c simultaneously to stop.

*Once you’ve found your data centre:*

Congrats on using neat network tools to find your digital whale! But now that you know where and what it is, it’s time to learn a little more about the local political story of your leviathan.

SOME TIPS FOR GETTING THE GOSSIP:

* Try visiting it via Google Street View (potentially comparing image captures from different years).
  1. Does it announce what it is, or try to blend in with its surroundings inconspicuously?
  2. Has the site changed much over the years?
  3. How heavily secured does it seem to be?
  4. Does it follow along/terminate in a path for goods and information built in a prior era (a colonial port, rail network, or pipeline)? Or is it built smack in the middle of nowhere?
* Read its reviews in Googlemaps. Do people complain about the noise/security?
* Search for it (or for data centers in the region) in the news (<https://news.google.com>). Experiment with adding keywords like ‘energy,’ ‘consultation,’ or ‘policy’ if you get too many hits.
* On the basis of all this, ask yourself some questions:
  1. What potential land use, energy, or water conflicts might exist because of the data centre?
  2. How clean do you think its electrical use might be? How vast?
  3. Why was it built where it was?
  4. Who benefits from the data center being here? Who loses?

[Image: a set googlemaps reviews. 5 stars for ‘always being on top of forklift drivers’ + ‘not allowed to take pictures so here are some stars’]

To go back to our example of Castlefield Gallery, this digital sleuthing reveals that security on site is a little tight, and also that it’s undergone a recent expansion (all the containers out front appeared sometime after 2016). Snooping around news sites and press releases helps explain why: OVH expanded its Erith site post-Brexit, anticipating that there would be demand for more national data services in a Britian that was no longer a part of the EU (thus EU data privacy laws). So, all these boxes of servers and electrical transformers, in part, owe their existence to the Leave campaign.

[Image: a screenshot from an article in ComputerWeekly, describing OVH’s ‘post-brexit commitment’ to the UK]

This is all interesting (or, at least, it is to nerds like me), but maybe not a boiling political fight. Sometimes, however, you do find exactly that.

*What do data center conflicts look like?*

Let’s look at Netflix. If you live in the Eastern United States, a good part of your streaming content probably sits in the data centers Netflix leases from Amazon in Ashburn, Virginia. Following the IP (99.82.178.222) takes you to a mega complex on Gloucester Parkway. It’s about the size of a small neighbourhood, and is stuffed full of cooling vents and electrical equipment.

Zoom out and you’ll find lots of similar complexes in the area. North Virginia is called ‘data center alley’ because there’s so many of these things lying about. The expansive growth of data centers here looks like “[suburban sprawl on steroids](https://www.virginiamercury.com/2022/12/09/virginia-has-a-data-center-problem/),” resulting in deforestation, rainwater runoff problems, and worsening air quality. It’s also gotten to the point where these facilities are bumping up against residential areas, where the loud and constant noise of all those cooling fans are causing [headaches and sleeping issues](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/02/10/data-centers-northern-virginia-internet/) for some. They’re also poised to strain the electrical grid with all their AC requirements during this year’s summer months. In response state regulators have toyed with [issuing special exemptions](https://www.virginiamercury.com/2023/01/31/va-regulators-propose-easing-emission-limits-for-data-centers-over-power-transmission-concerns/) to let data centers run diesel generators to boost their power intake (but also the air pollution and climate impacts of these facilities). Data centers don’t make for good neighbors.

To be fair, sometimes the press also has positive things to say about tech development and climate change. Data center companies are [leading a wave of green power purchasing agreements](https://think.ing.com/articles/american-big-tech-goes-green-and-drives-ppa-market/), helping to bring new renewable energy sources onto the grid. (I’m particularly enthused about efforts like Google’s [24/7 Carbon-Free Energy](https://www.google.com/about/datacenters/cleanenergy/) plan, which is pushing grid operators to get way more granular about the challenges and potential solutions of a future where we have more renewable power on our grids, and thus a lot more dynamic shifts between supply and demand to balance out).

These are laudable goals; however, green power isn’t always an unqualified good. [Julia Velkova](https://rustlab.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/across_layers/#abstract-velkova2), for instance, has been tracking how one particular case of Google’s renewable power purchasing efforts has become embroiled in [land use conflicts with Sami](https://ejatlas.org/conflict/large-scale-wind-farm-in-sami-reindeer-pastures) people in Sweden, who stand to lose access to traditional grazing lands with the construction of a wind power park. They’re calling it "[green colonialism](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/sweden-locals-protest-wind-energy-construction-due-to-concerns-over-impacts-on-sami-reindeer-grazing-lands/)."

It’s also the case that the simple math of data center growth and green power ambitions may not always be reconcilable. Ireland, a major tax loophole jurisdiction and thus home to many of Europe’s data centers, is an instructive example. A wave of newly planned data centers are set to far outpace electrical supplies in the country. If all proposed data centers were actually built, the sector could consume up to [70% of Ireland’s entire electrical capacity](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/data-centres-could-use-70-of-ireland-s-electricity-by-2030-committee-to-hear-1.4685589) by 2030. It’s hard to imagine that demand being met entirely by new renewable energy developed on this timeline. If it were, all those solar and wind parks would still need to go somewhere, likely stirring up further [community and land use conflicts](https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/climate-change-and-data-centres-5392847-Mar2021/). More fundamentally, though, if we’re only adding new green capacity to our grid to meet new demand, we will continue to fail to make a dent on our wider decarbonization goals. We need more than just a green licence for new growth, we need to slash the carbon-intensity of the grid as it stands.

Elsewhere, fights with data centers might look more like conflicts about the kinds of landscapes and livelihoods that we value as a culture. In the Netherlands there has been an upwelling of resistance against data center expansion, all of which eventually culminated in a [nation-wide moratorium](https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/dutch-government-halts-hyperscale-data-centers-pending-new-rules/) on new data center construction and a change of federal power. Opposition here was initially derived in part from [contested water rights](https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/drought-stricken-holland-discovers-microsoft-data-center-slurped-84m-liters-of-drinking-water-last-year/) during a drought and concerns around [democratic deficits in infrastructural permitting](https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221145928). More boisterously, these efforts were joined by a rural farmer movement united in their dislike of how data centers have encroached into rural landscapes. As one leader puts it, “It is [a waste of fertile soil](https://www.wired.com/story/microsoft-netherlands-hyperscale-data-centers/) to put the data centers boxes here.” Together this was enough to win elections.

*So How Do We Get Into Fights with Data Centers?*

As these examples show, struggles to halt data center expansions can take many forms. Sometimes, like the Dutch, you might take control of the government. In other instances, more modest goals could be the priority: organizing neighbours, getting media coverage, and pushing for increased regulatory scrutiny.

If there’s already a movement forming around opposition to your data center of interest, plug in. Join groups, show up to meetings, or offer your solidarity and support from afar. If there isn’t yet a group, trying organizing one. Start a Facebook group, write a letter to the editor of a local paper, start a conversation on a city subreddit, chat up your contacts in the area, and maybe build towards getting a resolution passed by a local civic association, labor union, or city council.

With enough people, you can explore more creative tactics. This might involve spectacular (and thus media-friendly) protests like Extinction Rebellion Ireland’s amazing [vampire-themed demonstration](https://climatecampireland.ie/2023/05/19/vampire-themed-data-centres-protest-and-walking-tour-from-amazon-to-misery-hill-this-sunday/) against Meta’s data centers. In other contexts, you might work on a project of citizen science data acquisition, like [researchers at Cornell](https://rc.infosci.cornell.edu/2022/03/10/bitcoin-mining-in-upstate-ny/) who are experimenting with tactics like duck decoy drones to collect data about the thermal impacts of bitcoin mines in the Finger Lakes. Even more inventively, you could explore tactics like working to [cut off water](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/12/utah-lawmaker-nsa-data-centre-water-supply) rights to existing data centres (like, say, those run by the NSA) or [building charmingly low-tech alternatives](https://computingwithinlimits.org/2021/papers/limits21-abbing.pdf) to the hyperscale cloud.

Anti-data center efforts can also learn a lot from previous movements fighting to curtail unwanted developments of all kinds. The [history of pipeline opposition](https://grist.org/fix/advocacy/how-activists-shut-down-key-pipeline-projects-new-york/) is one illuminating and obvious example. These activists demonstrate how researching key permitting procedures, environmental impact requirements, and [key political actors](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102914) in development decisions are all essential steps, as are forming wider coalitions of different groups to stand with you. At times, these might make for strange bedfellows. For folks fighting fossil fuel infrastructures, this has meant a mix of NIMBYs, frontline environmental justice communities, anxious climate weirdoes like me, local businesses, and tourists. Not everyone will be there for the same reason, and not everyone will necessarily even believe that climate change is a serious issue. (In the case of the Dutch protesters, for instance, many farmers were initially mobilized *against* climate regulations on their farms).

That said, we don’t yet know what the full span of data center opposition politics will or should look like. As [Julia Rone](https://intellectdiscover.com/content/journals/10.1386/jem_00086_1) argues, in order for local victories to scale up to wider changes, there will need to be more transnational conversations about organizers’ strategies and experiences. The hazard, of course, is that a data center project might be shoo-ed away from one municipality, only to take up shop in another, perhaps more distant location. Stopping a project here doesn’t mean that it won’t be built elsewhere. This means that a final (and probably quite essential) way you can get into fights with data centers is to help with the work of archiving and sharing many different local efforts. This zine aims to be a small contribution to this end.

*But what could we win?*

The prizes here will look as different as the coalitions that gather around them.

To folks like me, two major reasons to grapple with data centre expansions include wider climate trajectories and political suspicions about the world endless data storage is slowly building. Setting limits on digital infrastructure—or even beginning with the assumption that what we currently have might already be sufficient—could help foster a culture of technical maintenance and repair over and above an emphasis on innovation (regardless of the social or climate costs). It would be great to learn how to be better stewards of what we’ve already built instead of playing regulatory catch up with the infrastructural and digital monsters that lurk on the horizon. Plus, again and with emphasis, this climate change thing is pretty bad. We should do something about it.

To those living in the shadow of data centers, however, I suspect the rewards will be a little more immediate and tangible: being able to open your window without being overwhelmed by whining fan sounds, lessening the load on your groundwater during a drought, keeping farmland fertile, reducing the risk of black outs and rate hikes, and ensuring that the businesses that do set up shop in your city actually pay their fair share of taxes.

Regardless of the outcome, I strongly suspect that this path will also bring its share of rewards through the very process of struggle. These are in part analytic. By being clear about the need to reduce sectoral emissions, rather than just increase efficiency, we can avoid slights of hand that obscure fundamental differences in scale or emphasize the wrong sorts of metrics. Staying grounded in the infrastructural side of things also ensures that we can hold the climate story in hand along with a range of other social and economic impacts, keeping local concerns in tandem with global perils. We need both to really turn the corner on this one.

But, to return to the anxious folks asking me questions about their carbon footprints at the start of this zine, I think there are serious emotional dividends to be won in the work ahead if we focus on stopping the next data centre from being built. Instead of feeling guilty about the climate impacts of our own online habits, or scowling at crypto or machine learning bros who are seemingly oblivious to their own, we could put that energy towards concrete and bounded targets: stuff we could actually win. It feels good to organize under a framework that doesn’t require you to meet impossible ethical standards, to only ever *do less*. Instead, you could find ways to *do more*, applying yourself to a constructive project. Plus, this way you don’t have to convert everyone you meet to your exact point of view. You can, instead, find friends where you will, develop the skills you’re interested in fostering, and be a part of building something bigger than yourself.

So, please take me quite sincerely when I say: Happy fighting out there. Good luck.

# Hacking Oral History: Anti-Ableist Methodology

Moira Armstrong

Introduction

“I signed up to this [interview] because basically everything has changed. So the first lockdown was while I was in my final year at university and I had been struggling immensely because my illness. I had reached a point where I was trying to conceal from my lecturers that I was attending all my lectures from home against the wishes of the college because it was so difficult to get to university and then have the energy to study. The lockdown came in. That saved my degree. And that meant that everyone was working from home, so it didn't matter. It meant that I had time to experiment with medications to find one that worked. It meant that all our final assessments were open book and I had had neurological and memory problems so suddenly I did well in my exams. It let me graduate and kind of put my life back together as a person struggling with chronic illness. Obviously, that's not to say that everything has been good. But for me, it was actually a pretty helpful thing because I'm just not sure how I would have gotten things back on track and graduated and gotten a job if I hadn't had all those months where I didn't have to leave the house.”

- Queer Pandemic interview with James, a 26-year-old white British trans queer man living in Manchester1

Queer Pandemic is an oral history project that’s been collecting the stories of queer people in the United Kingdom in the era of COVID-19 since the fall of 2020. It is co-led by Kent State University, Goldsmiths, University of London, and Queer Britain, the national queer history museum of the UK. Many of the volunteer interviewers were students and volunteers from Kent State and Goldsmiths, and the interviews are archived in Queer Britain’s digital archive, Virtually Queer.

Queer Pandemic oral histories are video-based and conducted over Zoom using an interview guide, which covers four broad topics:

● biographical information

● life during the pandemic

● experiences as an LGBTQ+ person

● the government's response to COVID-19

My name is Moira Armstrong, and I’ve been the research assistant for the Queer Pandemic project since the spring of 2021. As a disabled person and someone who is part of disabled communities, I knew that there were many stories out there like James’s. Stories about how cripistemologies—disabled ways of knowing, borne from experiences with one’s disabled body/mind, holding space for the fluidity and crisis points inherent in disabled experiences2—were suddenly valued when the pandemic hit. Stories about how aspects of the early pandemic response, like working from home and mask requirements in public spaces, made disabled people’s lives better, not worse. And, unfortunately, stories about how disabled people suspected that these benefits wouldn’t last, and when they were proven right, adapted to the “new normal” that put their lives at risk.

Footnote:

1 James Bates, Queer Pandemic Interview, 2022.

As part of my work with the project, as well as my dissertation for the MA Gender, Sexuality, and Culture program at Birkbeck, University of London, I worked on collecting more of these stories by making the project more accessible and interviewing more disabled narrators. In this zine, I’ll be discussing several aspects of this work: the inherent ableism in oral history as a research method, how to hack oral history for accessibility using love, crip universal design, and narrator leadership, and the use of queer crip oral histories for public history, memorialization, and grief.

*This zine is designed in tribute to GEMMA, a social group for queer disabled women in the United Kingdom that was founded in 1976. GEMMA distributed a physical newsletter to its members for over thirty years. Their issues were typewritten, using special characters and formatting that technology at the time allowed, and then printed on single-sided, brightly-colored A4 paper and stapled into packets to be distributed, creating visually interesting but easy to read documents. They also had wide margins that members often marked with notes.*

Footnote:

2 Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, ‘Cripistemologies: Introduction’, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 8.2 (2014), 130.

Oral History: An Ableist Research Method

1. Oral history is inherently audist.

“Audism: the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.”

- Tom Humphries3

Oral histories, as the name suggests, typically take the form of a recorded conversation between an interviewer and a narrator. This form prioritizes spoken language and excludes Deaf and hard of hearing people, as well as other people who use visual or other non-verbal communication, making oral histories culpable in audism. This audism continues into research outputs, which often focus on sound. The oral historian listening to recorded oral histories is considered a crucial step in research.4 Many practitioners also set research questions that explicitly focus on the sound of the recordings. For example, Amila Akdag Salah et. al explore how the sound of breathing in oral histories could indicate trauma or depression,5 and Jennifer Hyland Wang analyzes whether the sound of a woman’s voice in an oral history interview could indicate her hesitancy to speak honestly.6 While these are interesting questions to investigate, their answers are limited because they can only incorporate analysis of people who communicate orally.

Footnote:

3 H-Dirksen L. Bauman, “Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression,” *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 239–46, https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enh025.

4 Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, “Oral History: The Sound of Memory,” in *History Beyond the Text* (Routledge, 2008), 105.

2. Oral history prioritizes in-person interaction.

“Oral history involves face-to-face interaction.”7

“Ideally, interviews should take place face-to-face in order to make interviewees more familiar with their interviewers and to allow interviewers to monitor the interviewees’ reactions.” 8

“The interview should be conducted, whenever possible, in a quiet location with minimal background noises and possible distractions.”9

“Try to pick a room which is not on a busy road.”10

Footnote:

5 Almila Akdag Salah et al., “The Sound of Silence: Breathing Analysis for Finding Traces of Trauma and Depression in Oral History Archives,” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 36, no. Supplement\_2 (October 1, 2021): ii2–8, https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqaa056.

6 Jennifer Hyland Wang, “Did They Say What They Thought? Gender, Sound, and Oral History in a Wisconsin Women’s Radio Program,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 63–74,

https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2019.1564998.

7 Donna M. DeBlasio et al., *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History* (Ohio University Press, 2009), 50.

8 Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 98. 9 “Best Practices,” *Oral History Association*, accessed July 12, 2023, https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/.

10 “Interviewing,” *Oral History Society* (blog), September 5, 2020, https://www.ohs.org.uk/for-beginners/interviewing/.

As these excerpts from handbooks and best practices on oral history show, it is assumed that oral history interviews take place in person, except for in emergency situations like COVID-19. This emphasis on in-person interviews is problematic. COVID-19 is not considered an active emergency by most nondisabled people as I am writing this zine in July 2023, but for many disabled people, meeting up in person to record an oral history interview would be a great risk. Even outside of a pandemic scenario, disabled people, especially those with compromised immune systems, might want to limit their in-person interactions to protect their health. Selecting an in-person location can also be fraught; some guides recommend filming oral histories in studios for better quality control or in a location related to the interview topic for visual interest,11 but these locations may not be accessible for disabled narrators.

3. Oral history can be a physically and emotionally exhausting process.

*Interviewer*: This concludes the interview unless there are any other things that you would like to talk about that I didn’t ask about…

*Adam*: No, I'm exhausted. Thank you though.

*Interviewer*: Yes, yeah. I know this—this—this is a lot.

- Queer Pandemic interview with Adam, a 36-year-old white British gay queer man living in London12

Footnote:

11 Ritchie, 142-143.

12 Adam Zmith, Queer Pandemic Interview, 2021.

Oral history interviews are intense. They ask narrators to delve deep into their memories and recall difficult events. They also take up a great deal of time. Most guidelines state that an interview should continue as long as the narrator has more to say. While breaks are recommended for interviews lasting over two hours,13these guidelines do not take into account that many disabled people will need to take breaks even in shorter interviews, or may need to schedule several sessions over multiple days. The physical and emotional intensity of speaking at length is harder on a disabled body/mind than a nondisabled body/mind, and largely, oral history trainings do not address these differences.

4. Resources about doing oral history do not mention disability.

“Consult with local disability organizations if you plan to involve disabled people as interviewers or interviewees. You may also need to budget for specialist equipment.”14

This paragraph from the Oral History Society website is a good example of the way most guides to oral history approach disability. It is usually mentioned briefly, often in discussions around ethics, as disabled people are considered a vulnerable group and projects involving vulnerable groups may be subject to different ethical standards. However, a paragraph like this is not true engagement with disability. It does not provide information about how oral history projects might need to adapt to include disabled people, or even list types of specialist equipment that might be needed or disability organizations that could help oral historians. It passes on the responsibility and does not take the importance of accessibility seriously.

Footnote:

13 Ritchie, 77.

14 “For Community Groups,” September 25, 2020,

https://www.ohs.org.uk/for-community-groups/.

This is not to say that oral history can’t adapt to include disabled people. The Disability Visibility Project (DVP), an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture” run by prominent disability activist Alice Wong,15is an excellent example of how oral historians can increase their project’s accessibility. The DVP encourages disabled people to archive oral histories with the Library of Congress through StoryCorps as part of achieving their goals, either in StoryCorps booths or at home with the StoryCorps app, and recommends several ways for people who use visual or non-verbal communication to participate. For example, participants can bring a sign language interpreter or facilitator, and the DVP can help cover the cost. Participants can also write down their stories and share them with the DVP, who will then record audio versions.16

Footnote:

15 “About,” Disability Visibility Project, June 3, 2014,

https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/about/.

16 “Note on Accessibility,” Disability Visibility Project, July 20, 2016, https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/how-to-participate/note-on-accessibility/.

Unfortunately, it is not the norm for oral history projects to dedicate this level of forethought and finances to accessibility. However, the DVP demonstrates that it is possible, and it was their example, centered around three elements, that helped shape how I approached making Queer Pandemic more accessible.

1. Love.

“When I think about access, I think about love. I think that crip solidarity, and solidarity between crips and non(yet)-crips is a powerful act of love and I-got-your-back. It’s in big things, but it’s also in the little things we do moment by moment to ensure that we all—in all our individual bodies—get to be present fiercely as we make change.”

- *Care Work* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha17

Not all accessibility comes from a place of love, but the most effective and impactful versions do. This kind of access is determined to include disabled people because they are valued by the people behind the project, not because they are pitied or seen as inspirations. The DVP is coming from a place of love because it is an organization based in the crip community that prioritizes disabled voices and stories, with the overarching goal to amplify and archive those voices. I was able to bring that outlook to Queer Pandemic because I am similarly a part of crip community and I believe that disabled perspectives are important to include in the record of the pandemic. To borrow Piepzna-Samarasinha’s phrase, it takes “a giant paradigm shift”18to start thinking about disability in this way, especially for those who are not disabled, but it is an important step that more oral history projects and practitioners need to embrace.

Footnote:

17 Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 65-66.

include in the record of the pandemic. To borrow Piepzna-Samarasinha’s phrase, it takes “a giant paradigm shift”18to start thinking about disability in this way, especially for those who are not disabled, but it is an important step that more oral history projects and practitioners need to embrace.

2. Crip universal design.

One persistent problem with accessibility efforts is the checklist phenomenon. The organizers of a project or event find one of the many available accessibility checklists, check off each item, then claim to have done the work. They don’t ask for disabled input, consider that their audience might have access needs that weren’t on the checklist, or address conflicting access needs. Writing about this problem, Sarah Makoda Currie suggests that instead of thinking about accessibility as a checklist, organizers should think about it as “a crip facilitation style based in holding intentional, accessible space.”19

This doesn’t mean that there isn’t a place for checklists. The idea of universal design, in which organizers try to make a project or event accessible to as many people as possible from the outset, is still valuable, particularly to demonstrate that the organizers value accessibility. However, accessibility ultimately needs to be an ongoing conversation rather than a one-time checkbox.

Footnote:

18 Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 66.

19 Sarah Makoda Currie, ‘Universal Design in Apocalypse Time: A Short History of Accessible Teaching Exnovation’, *The Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, 6.1–2 (2022), 210.

The DVP provides contact information for their organization as well as StoryCorps, allowing potential participants to continue the conversation that was started on their “Note on Accessibility” page.20 Similarly, when working with disabled narrators for Queer Pandemic, I provided a list of the steps we had already taken toward accessibility, like providing a list of questions in advance and using Zoom with automated captions available, along with a list potential accommodations, including conducting the interview in the Zoom chat and providing live captioning or BSL interpretation, but I also let narrators know that we could discuss accessibility further over email or on a video or phone call.

3. Narrator leadership.

*Interviewer*: Okay. And what is your age?

*Kush*: Next question!

*Interviewer*: You can skip that. It's your interview, you don't have to tell me anything!

- Queer Pandemic interview with Kush, a 44-year-old Indian gay man living in London21

This is a lighthearted example, but it points to something important. Decisions about accessibility always need to be made by the narrator. While the oral history practitioner can adopt a paradigm of accessibility motivated by love, start with a baseline of universal design, and contribute to and even lead conversations about accessibility, the decisions come down to the narrators. The DVP handles this by providing a list of options rather than prescribing one catch-all “solution” to the problems presented by traditional oral history, and I did the same.

Footnote:

“Note on Accessibility.”

21 Kush Varia, Queer Pandemic Interview, 2021.

*All three of these elements are necessary for true individualized accessibility.*

The uses of oral history are well-established in existing scholarly literature. In particular, oral histories have become a cornerstone of public history, from use in media like documentaries, television shows, and podcasts to inclusion in museum exhibits.22 This is important when taken in conjunction with accessibility—the “public” in public history, whether taken theoretically or practically, has historically been hostile to disabled people.23 Public history spaces have frequently left disability out of the stories they tell24 and neglected to ensure their own accessibility,25 particularly during the later stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the majority of public institutions dropped their COVID precautions, making their spaces unsafe for disabled people.

Footnote:

22 Jill Liddington and Graham Smith, “Crossing Cultures: Oral History and Public History,” 2023.

23 Ruth Butler and Sophia Bowlby, ‘Bodies and Spaces: An Exploration of Disabled People’s Experiences of Public Space’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 15.4 (1997), 411 <https://doi.org/10.1068/d150411>; Craig Calhoun, ‘Civil Society and the Public Sphere’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. by Michael Edwards (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 311. 24 Katherine Ott, ‘Disability and the Practice of Public History: An Introduction’, *The Public Historian*, 27.2 (2005), 12 <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2005.27.2.9>.

As part of my work for Queer Pandemic, I planned a virtual event that showcased both the Queer Pandemic project and the Queer Britain museum as a whole, highlighting the disabled stories that are part of both. My work on this event continued to incorporate the lessons about accessibility that I learned from working on the project itself—the ableism embedded in the oral history format and the three lessons about implementing accessibility are just as important when using oral histories as when conducting them. Working on this event also taught me that public history using oral histories can also be hacked toward additional anti-ableist ends: COVID memorialization and crip grief.

● COVID Memorialization

“When we say the pandemic is over, we are actually seeking permission to act like it never happened—to let ourselves off the hook from having to make sense of it or take seriously its continuing effects.”

- John Mooallem, *New York Times* Magazine26

Footnote:

25 Alima Bucciantini, ‘Getting in the Door Is the Battle’, *American Association for State and Local History*, <https://aaslh.org/getting-in-the-door/> [accessed 27 February 2023].

26 Jon Mooallem, ‘Three Years Into Covid, We Still Don’t Know How to Talk About It’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 22 February 2023,

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/22/magazine/covid-pandemic-oral -history.html> [accessed 27 February 2023].

Over time, the memorialization of significant historical events has become more democratized, acknowledging the impacts on everyday people and marginalized groups, as well as the political elements of the events being memorialized.27 However, COVID-19 has not received a collective, effective memorial that meets these criteria.28I believe that this is because there is no will to remember the pandemic. The will to remember is defined by Pierre Nora in relation to sites of memory. He writes that sites of memory, such as memorials, are intended “block the work of forgetting,” and only sites related to events that are considered worth remembering become sites of memory.29 However, most people are resistant to remembering COVID-19, despite the ways that memorialization could help the public foster solidarity,30facilitate healing,31 and “deal with the traumas COVID-19 has brought and will continue to bring.”32 This lack of will to remember COVID is an ableist impulse—as Mia Mingus puts it, the world would prefer to “look away from the mass illness and death that surrounds us,” ignoring the plight of disabled people.33

Footnote:

27 Carole Blair and Neil Michel, ‘The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration’, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 10.4 (2007), 596.

28 Christina Simko, ‘Mourning and Memory in the Age of COVID-19’, *Sociologica*, 15.1 (2021), 110 <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11736>; Jeffrey A. Bennett, ‘Mourning and Memorializing in the COVID-19 Era’, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 19.1 (2022), 31 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2021.2020862>.

29 Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, 26, 1989, 19 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>. 30 Simko, 111.

31 Blair and Michel, 610.

32 Thomas Houlton, *Monuments as Cultural and Critical Objects: From Mesolithic to Eco-Queer* (London: Routledge, 2021),

https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429197550, 261.

● Crip Grief

The lack of will to remember also indicates the nondisabled world’s uncomfortability with grief. Grief is a central part of disabled life, but is often willfully dismissed by the nondisabled (again, see Mingus’s quote). Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha describes the specific type of grief felt and shared between disabled people as “cripple grief,” elaborating that this emotion is a skill that helps disabled people navigate the chronicity and fluidity of disabled life and, when shared, build a form of intimacy with other disabled people.34 Sage Madens describes that cripple grief can serve as a compass, guiding the daily actions of disabled people, and a portal, as it “makes clear to the griever which relationships, projects, and life goals are most central to our values and desires.”35 Memorials are ultimately expressions of grief,36 and the addition of the concept of cripple grief to the will to remember intensifies the implied ableism that goes along with the lack of a will to remember.

Footnote:

33 Mia Mingus, ‘You Are Not Entitled To Our Deaths: COVID, Abled Supremacy & Interdependence’, *Leaving Evidence*, 2022

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2022/01/16/you-are-not-entitled-to-our-d eaths-covid-abled-supremacy-interdependence/> [accessed 22 December 2022].34 Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *The Future Is Disabled: Prophecies, Love Notes and Mourning Songs* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2022), 99-106. 35 Sage Madens, ‘No End in Sight: Chronically Ill Wisdom on Grief and Loss’ (Mills College, 2022), 35.

36Anna Petersson, “The Production of a Memorial Place: Materialising Expressions of Grief,” in *Deathscapes* (Routledge, 2010).

As I worked on the virtual event for Queer Britain and Queer Pandemic, I ensured that the pandemic was acknowledged as an ongoing, political, impactful force on people’s lives, particularly marginalized people. Though the will to remember is absent on a societal level, I want to block the work of forgetting, and I believe that memorialization, with an intentional attempt to spark grief by sharing emotional stories, will help others come to share that desire.

Blackout Poetry

One other way that Queer Pandemic incorporates oral history in public history is through blackout poetry. At events and the Queer Britain installation, visitors can find printed pages of oral history transcriptions with colored pencils along with this brief explanation of the blackout poetry process:

Blackout or erasure poetry uses words from existing text or documents to create a new, unique poem. The poet—that's you!—blacks out, crosses out, or obscures words on a page. The remaining visible words become the poem.

When you create poetry with a Queer Pandemic oral history transcript, you experience the transcript and the interview in a new way. The

resulting poem becomes a work of art, adding layers of meaning in a creative conversation with the original transcript.

The rest of the pages in this zine are sample poems created by visitors, as well as blank transcript pages, so that you can create your own blackout poetry. If you have a physical copy of this zine, you can use colored pencils or other art supplies like the examples do. If you have a digital copy, you can print out the pages you want to use, or take a screenshot and use a free program like Sketchpad to create your poem. While you can write about anything, I encourage you to use this space to facilitate your own memorialization of the pandemic, as you can see that some visitors did, and/or express grief.

The excerpts included are:

● Asifa, a 37-year-old British Asian Pakistani trans woman living in London, talking about how the pandemic made her think about her legacy

● Holly, a 23-year-old Black British queer and nonbinary person living in Rugby, reflecting on managing emotions during the pandemic

● Ju, a 60-year-old white British gender nonconforming lesbian living in London, discussing the ongoing issue of access in the queer community

In keeping with the theme of this zine, all of these excerpts are from interviews with disabled narrators.

\* If you would like to share your poem with other readers of this zine, I’ve created a public Dropbox folder for that purpose: https://tinyurl.com/ykjvbp5h. If you are from the United Kingdom and would like your poem to become part of the Queer Pandemic collection, you can email a photo or screenshot to queerpandemic@queerbritain.org.uk.

Examples of Visitors’ Poems

[Image description: a transcript page illustrated with thirteen blue legs outlined in orange, and one red leg outlined in orange. The words “I made money out of a feet Party” are circled in black and orange.]

[Image description: a transcript page colored red. The words “personally, day to day, I’m very lucky. Day to day, largely alone and isolated and away from human contact, I’ve been pushing my trans experience less,” are left white, with red

boxes drawn around them.]

[Image description: a transcript page with the words “My family don’t know I’m LGBTQ” circled and connected by black lines.]

Asifa: So I recently came across an article of UK LGBTQ history milestones and these are like milestones that are centuries old. Either, you know the first recorded drag queens or the first recorded out people, legislation, you know, activists, et cetera, et cetera and, um, you know, I think the first entry that I saw was 16 something in this—in this, um, article. 1600s, whatever it was. And then, you know, fast forwarded, like, the more you scroll down, the more recent you get and, you know, to see my name as like a milestone of—of UK queer history really like took me about because, you know, 2014, uh, Asifa Lahore becomes Britain's first out Muslim drag queen, uh, you know you—when you're sort of out there doing your thing, whether it's performing, whether it's activism, whether it's, you know, TV interviews around pushing a boundary or whatever, you don't think that, you know, it will impact the history books, as it were, or—or see, be seen as a milestone, so you know, in this period of reflection where, you know, I've been thinking a lot about my own history, my parents’ history, my grandparents’ history to do with partition of India, um, queer history, you know, been watching Channel 4's “It’s a Sin” and thinking about the AIDS ep—pandemic in the 80s and it's just, I think this era, if you like, is—although it’s been a year in the pandemic, it’s felt more like an era. It's been an era of reflection and to—to know that actually I'm part of this massive, like, history, um, I think it's both humbling, but it also makes me question and challenge it in the sense that, OK, yes, I'm the first publicly out British Muslim drag queen. So what? What now?

Holly: I remind myself the temporality of—of everything. And yeah, I do try and remain thankful as well for—for how myself and my family have come out of the “pandemic”, have come out of post-pandemic and—and, you know, we haven't had any significant losses or continued, like, long COVID and yeah, and like, when I came into the pandemic I was 20 and I'm now 23. So I think just the natural age bit, getting older is like a natural contributor to managing your emotions. As you get older it's—it's easier, kind of, but yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Have your feelings about the pandemic changed over time?

Holly: No. So at the time, I was incredibly angry at the government and officials who were in charge of control, like, their—their job was to see us through this and they were abysmal. And I'm still angry. And I've been talking to a few of the PhD—PhD students about anger. Not just in terms of the pandemic, but also just in terms of our work. With it being so emotional, we do a lot of race, sexuality, gender history, so it's all—it's quite emotional work and I just have not been able to move past the—this—this wall of anger. You know, everyone says that hindsight's a wonderful thing, but I feel like you didn't need hindsight at that—so they didn't need hindsight to know that their choices would have led to that many deaths. So yeah, they haven't really changed. I was angry then when I tuned in every—every day to the news and I'm angry now.

Ju: Well, I think for huge numbers of older and disabled LGBTQI+ people in particular, the disconnection from the community has been absolutely massive and it's not like, well, you know, for years, you know, for 25 years we've been

saying it's not good enough to take a vote on which one film the annual film festival is going to be interpreted. It is not good enough to have just two wheelchair spaces and then either side of the cinema. It's not good enough to do such and such. Prior, you know, issues around pride, which has got less and less accessible for the last 20 years and I think straight people find it really hard to understand that again, certainly in the UK, if you don't go to those spaces, you don't see your friends, you never visit them at home. I mean, London is a big city, so in any case, it can be a long, long way to travel to somebody that you would meet up with in central London. But of course, there are all the issues about, if your neighbors know you're gay, it's dangerous. If visitors are identified as gay, it's dangerous for the visitors. There's always been cases of PAs being assaulted because they're working for gay people, so there's always been—and of course, all the people who live with family or flatmates that don't know they're going, so access to those social spaces is critical and it's already been something that as soon as you're disabled is just cut off. But what should have happened in a better world is that Zoom would have given us opportunities to connect and be—have these wonderful, wonderful spaces.

# Hands-in-the Dirt Knowledge: cultivating environmental publics

Maggie Hansen, Loren Almendarez

Maintenance and stewardship activities are essential for the health and beauty of urban environments. Like other carework, its impact is cumulative, requiring attention and patience, and specific knowledge of local conditions. However, the skills and knowledge of stewardship are not considered an expertise, and often performed by low wage workers or volunteer groups. In the field of landscape architecture, we are trained to imagine, design and oversee the construction of landscape spaces. Our work typically consists of a set of drawings that describe a final (ideal) result. Maintenance and stewardship activities are rarely included in these drawings – if considered, the best practices for maintaining the landscape will be described in text that few will read. Recent discourse has called for landscape architects to embrace maintenance as central to our work – a set of creative and skilled actions that create landscapes. (Raxworthy 2018, Geffel 2020, Terremoto 2021) Yes, maintenance is creative and essential. Maintenance is also a powerful method of research and advocacy for contested and fragile landscapes. This (fan-)zine looks at two place-based stewardship projects as examples of more-than-human participatory action research.

Test Plot is an initiative designed to demonstrate the potential for re-establishing native plant ecology in public space while celebrating the role of human labor in stewarding our environment. Public parks in Los Angeles, like many cities in the US, have suffered from decades of disinvestment and deferred maintenance. As a result, invasive grasses and ornamental exotics have taken over and choke out ecologically beneficial species. After learning that city arborists planned to plant more exotic species on public land in anticipation of increased drought conditions, landscape architecture firm, Terremoto, collaborated with Jen Toy, a USC landscape architecture instructor, to demonstrate an alternative. Partnering with local nonprofits, they were able to secure permission to install “temporary gardens” in Elysian Park. Teams of students and volunteers helped to developed a replicable method for claiming and tending native garden experiments across the city (and beyond). Each experiment celebrates the interconnection of human labor and landscape ecosystems, while building knowledge about techniques for rejuvenating native ecologies on public land.

The method informed the creation of Test Plots on other public landscapes in Los Angeles, and elsewhere. For the first Test Plots, four 30’ diameter circles (the dimensions of a radial sprinkler’s spray) were inscribed by low fencing. Locations were chosen to compare different conditions of sun and shade, flat and steep slopes, and the direction of sun exposure. Each plot was watered and weeded repeatedly to diminish the existing seed bank.

Each plot was then planted with native species appropriate for the site. Volunteers mulch the site to suppress the remaining seed bank. Through weekly site visits, they water, prune, weed, re-plant.

As experiments, each plot is monitored through visual surveys, soil tests, and field notes on the inputs of labor and resources. This data informs future Test Plots and contributes to a growing understanding of local best practices. Test Plot also seeks to document and elevate the human labor of land care, telling the stories of volunteers on the project, and amplifying the importance of land care (Terremoto 2021).

The return of native ecologies brings the return of biodiversity. Through regular tending and monitoring, volunteers and students notice changes in the creatures that visit the Test Plots.

The Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC) is a nonprofit that advocates for the ecological health of the Gowanus watershed. Just as park conservancies use a combination of education and stewardship activities to promote investment and care for public spaces, the GCC advocates for an urban, polluted watershed as a public amenity. This framing of their relationship to the park underscores a reimagining of the industrial canal as an ecologically and culturally rich environment. A wide range of programming connects multiple constituents: current residents and industrial workers, city officials and developers, Federal and local environmental policy makers, and local design firms. The GCC’s work is informed by observations from caring for public spaces within the watershed. Each activity contributes to an understanding of the Canal’s watershed as already diverse, vibrant, resilient, and alive. These small acts of caretaking in public space arm the Conservancy with on the ground knowledge of the people and environment of the neighborhood, and help to shift a public imagination to continue advocating for investment in the area toward more ecological and equitable ends.

In collaboration with Gowanus Dredgers, Conservancy members tour the Canal. From the water they can assess vegetation along the canal’s edge and for monitoring test sites of spartina plantings along the shore edge. The visibility of people using the Canal as a space for boating helps shift perceptions of the waterway, and strengthens the case for remediating the contamination to a higher standard, suitable for recreational use. (US EPA 1986)

Conservancy employees and volunteers care for the neighborhood’s tree pits and bioswales through tree pruning, litter pick up, planting, weeding, and watering. Regular maintenance activities allow the Conservancy to monitor the success of different design and planting strategies. On the ground observation of failing perennials and high water tables is communicated back to partners at the city and informs modifications to existing and future stormwater design.

The Conservancy employs local teenagers as the Green Team, who learn about ecological stewardship. leadership and organizing through paid work. The Green Team helped to connect the Conservancy to residents in the neighborhood’s NYC Housing projects, where organizing around gentrification was focused on social and economic considerations. The Conservancy leadership worked to join the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice, to unite environmental and social organizing. This coalition has succeeded in advocating for increased investment in water infrastructure to address Combined Sewer Overflows, and in greater community oversight of the superfund remediation.

Maintenance is a skill built through repetition and reflection - it is iterative. Designers and gardeners make informed choices about which plants will thrive in a location, based on the conditions of sun hours, typical rain, soil, etc. But there are always unknown factors that will require that we change our designs or change our care, due to nuances of a particular site. Over time, a gardener or landscape steward learns the specific seasonal rhythms of a site and can notice the signs of trouble. At the Gowanus Canal landscape, Conservancy staff designed streetscape plantings using the City’s data on groundwater levels. During a series of stewardship visits to these swales, they noticed higher levels of groundwater. They changed their plantings to account for the water levels. The Test Plot are building knowledge about successful planting strategies for the particular conditions of public lands in Los Angeles. On-the-ground knowledge from caretaking offers important data, as we work to replicate sustainable practices across cityscapes.

The Gowanus Canal Conservancy and Test Plot are informed by Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods. The social and relational nature of their work contributes to building constituencies who are informed and inspired to speak up on environmental issues. They work to engage local residents to inform and shape their work.

However, the observations of each study extend to nonhuman entities as well: invitations for plants and animals to respond to maintenance regimes and to offer feedback. They take seriously the idea that our environments are sustained by human and nonhuman actions of care through interconnected processes between soils, fungi, plants, and creatures (Puig de la Bellacasa (2017). PAR scholar, Michelle Bastian (2017) speculates on the possibility of nonhuman participation in action research, which seeks to acknowledge the agency of nonhuman entities as possible co-designers of experiments. These initiatives suggest such investigations could benefit landscape architecture.

This matters now more than ever. The impacts of climate change and biodiversity are noticeable in our everyday environments: the changes in water levels, the decrease in birds migrating, or out of season flower blossoms. Individual stewardship projects will not address the scale of these global concerns, but they can inspire more people to join the political conversations to shape larger scale change. Within the field of landscape architecture, recognizing the work of maintenance as cooperative research allows our field to learn from our project designs more quickly. Designers have access to conversations about public land use policy and influence over how we care for it. Knowledge gained directly from day-to-day interactions with landscape sites shapes design approaches and can inform public policy about how we build and care for environments into the future.

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Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. 2017. Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Raxworthy, Julian. 2018. Overgrown: Practices between Landscape Architecture and Gardening. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Terremoto. 2021. “Landscape Architecture has a Labor Problem,” Metropolis. April 14, 2021.

The following organizations served as Case Studies:

Gowanus Canal Conservancy, Brooklyn NY:   gowanuscanalconservancy.org

Test Plot, Los Angeles CA:   testplot.info/

CHECK THEM OUT! AMPLIFY THEIR WORK! SUPPORT THEM! JOIN THEM!

Maggie Hansen is a landscape designer and artist who brings multidisciplinary training to the design of public spaces. She earned a BA from the University of Chicago and a M.Arch/MLA from the University of Virginia. Her design experience includes professional practice and community-based design. Maggie is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where she teaches studios and seminars that explore social practice with beginning and advanced students in landscape architecture, architecture, and urban design. Her work draws influence from social impact design, gardening, theater and performance, participatory art, and activist practices. maggiehansen@utexas.edu

Loren Almendarez is a landscape designer who integrates play and landscape education with sustainable design. She earned a BS in mechanical engineering at Texas A&M - Corpus Christi and worked with horticultural maintenance at multiple scales before pursuing a degree in Landscape Architecture. Her work focuses on local native ecologies and community engagement. She has built and maintained native landscapes across Texas, including ecological restoration work for Goliad State Park and the City of Port Aransas, and the installation of STOMA, a land art project at the Berry M. Whitaker Sports Complex supported by the 2020 UT Green Fund Grant. This experience informs her resarch on methods of integrating cultural placemaking and maintenance as tools of design. She is currently the Environmental Educator at the Elisabet Ney Museum where she uses historical and ecological research to care for the blackland prairie garden and provide a hands-on educational experience for volunteers. loren.almendarez@gmail.com

# Manual Labours Manual #5 Second Prototype. Multiplying the Staffroom.

By Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards (Manual Labours)

(Front page)

[IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A full colour front page which includes a collage of a variety of objects related to work, laid out on a pink background. A mug of tea, a high vis vest, a blue care worker lanyard, a mobile phone and headphones, a lighter, a yellow safety helmet, blue surgical gloves, a set of keys and a blue lunchbox. Over the mug of tea is a circular logo of The Global Staffroom which depicts a collaged body sat behind a desk with one arm cleaning. Over the mobile phone there is text that reads, ‘Manual Labours’ Manual #5’ in red writing and ‘second prototype’ in pink writing. In the centre of the page two cream text boxes overlap each other so it is possible to read in bright pink writing ‘Multiplying’ and underneath ‘The Staffroom’. The boxes have a turquoise border.]

TEXT:

Manual Labours Manual #5 Second Prototype.

Multiplying the Staffroom.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A full colour image of a number of printed colourful stacked cushions and cloths on top of a kitchen counter. On top of the image are four speech bubbles containing text. At the top of the page is a cream text box with a turquoise border with bright pink writing that reads, ‘Introduction to Multiplying the Staffroom’.

TEXT:

​​INTRODUCTION TO MULTIPLYING THE STAFFROOM

Paper, scissors, glue, a photocopier close by, these are some of the key tools of collaging that go into the Manual Labours manuals. They are times in our rhythms of working that are playful, physical and also intense, often producing pages and collages over the course of day to then find their way into the next manual or to help facilitate a workshop. The pages are often a cacophony of the different voices that have been part of the research. Some voices wish to be named, some others do not. We fire each other different snippets of conversation to print or drawings that offer a home for some of the points people are making. It is quick, it is responsive. We laugh a lot as different experiments go awry. We both make things differently, our handwriting is not the same, pages evolve with different components and aesthetics, it is a mash up, and sometimes it is a surprise that it works.

In this manual we explain our research methods and demonstrate how we cut and paste our research data to produce manuals that form practical tools for further workshops and conversations with people about their working conditions. The manuals are both reflections on our research and also interventions and practical tools for workplace organising.

When was the last time you took a break from work, while at work? Where do you take your breaks? Do you have access to a staffroom? What do you do during your breaks? Are you still being paid while you’re on a break? Do you connect-up with co-workers? Do you talk to them about your working conditions?

Our research into physical and emotional relationships to work (and post-work imaginaries) is based on a qualitative, feminist, participatory and practice-based methodology. We are influenced by methods of worker inquiry, decolonial pedagogy, militant research, cooperative education. Our practice is rooted in socially-engaged, community-based and participatory arts and we use our experiences as practitioners to research working conditions across different sectors, particularly care, service and cultural work.

The research methods we use to explore experiences of work in these different sectors include interviews and workshops, often over long periods of time with specific groups of workers. We then make performances, scripts, and manuals to help us analyse the materials generated through the workshops and interviews. The manual we are presenting here, as part of DIY Methods, is an example of our manual-making method of analysis. We are drawn to this approach because it allows us to retain some of the messiness of the research process, acknowledging the multiple, often conflictual voices and experiences we are encountering during the research.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A full colour image of a close up of a number of printed colourful stacked cushions and cloths on top of a kitchen counter. On top of the image are two different sized speech bubbles containing text. At the bottom of the page is a small white box with two footnotes written inside.

TEXT:

The material we have used to create this manual comes from 2 workshops with cultural organisations and 9 conversations with cultural workers, hospital workers, care work organisations, trade-unionists and activists about their experiences of rest and care at work. The manual builds on our ongoing research into ‘staffrooms’, specifically a previous manual[1] and podcast series[2]. Following the podcast series in 2020 and having analysed and learnt from the subsequent conversations, we wanted to pursue the call for different care infrastructures that could support the proliferation and politicisation of discussions of care and rest at work.

For this manual we re-read transcripts and notes, pulled out key quotes, made connections between the polyphonic voices and clustered these into ‘problems’ people identified with their experiences of the staffroom and rest and care at work. By doing this, we realised how key it is to multiply the staffroom and have a diversity of different types of staffrooms to be used by workers in different ways and contexts.  We identified a strong chorus of voices, many without one fixed workplace, who’s precarious and shift working conditions prevented any access to a staffroom or time to take a break. Alongside the structural need for paid break times and the provision of space for care at work, voices articulated different types of space they desired for rest and care at work including: an accessible garden, a space for collective organising against work, a space for individual and collective care, a space to support each other’s acts of refusals in which rest is a strike from the institution of work. Other issues that were coming up included how people were experiencing the sticking plaster of wellbeing practices at work, rather than any structural changes; the need for spaces and times when people can drop the performance and emotional labour that many working contexts require; and the issue of where and how staff in working contexts that are open and centring care, can retreat and not care during their breaks. Contemplating these conversations led us to structure this manual into 4 parts that illustrate the problems and proposals for 4 different kinds of ‘staffroom’:  distributed, mobile, covert and permanent.

Footnote:

[1] https://manuallabours.co.uk/todo/manual-labours-manual-5/

[2] https://manuallabours.co.uk/todo/the-global-staffroom/

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A full colour image of a close up of a number of printed colourful stacked cushions and cloths on top of a kitchen counter. On top of the image are two different sized speech bubbles pasted at angles, containing text. At the bottom of the page is a small white box with one footnote written inside.

TEXT:

Cutting and pasting sections of notes and transcripts, pages from previous manuals and magazines, combined with drawn elements, allows us to slow down, digest the research material, move out of the word document and onto the cutting mat. Cutting and pasting in word docs to create narratives is translated to scissors and glue - a messy process, where decisions about where and how to place things becomes an aesthetic and conceptual choice. There is a joy and multiplicity to the layering of collage that allows different aesthetics to clash and encounter, referencing the polyphonic discursive encounters they are trying to digest. What collage also affords is traces of bodies manually working, cutting, glueing and sticking that seeks to accommodate some of the messiness of gathering and translating research into a material production. The manuals are not just documents or illustrations of a research process or manifestation of findings, rather we are thinking through the material in the process of making the manual. Just as a research article presents methods, analysis and findings, our manuals make our workings out visible (budgets, contributors etc) and the analysis, conclusions and proposals take the form of collages. We are also keen for our research to be accessible to those who can’t afford to access academic libraries and articles and so all our manuals are free to download on our website.

Collage and the aesthetics of DIY cut and paste production have long been the hallmark of zine culture and political pamphlets. These methods are often mobilised to rewrite, contest or work against dominant, normalised or recognisable visual or textual culture that is part of a technology of furthering individualised modes of production administered through more formal modes of presentation and design.

Reworking clean and formalised aesthetics of production particularly within printed material, can be seen in the wealth of feminist manuals from the 1970s produced through collage and cut and paste, and photocopied aesthetics that served to rewrite the patriarchal instructive beginnings of the manual form. In Jane Tormey and Gillian Whiteley’s book Art, Politics and the Pamphleteer [3] they argue for the pamphlet collaged quickly and cheaply reproduced as a form of prefigurative politics ushering in a vision of a world yet to come. They argue that collage enables a variety of materials that can allude to different histories, aesthetics, experiences and perspectives to be seen together, thus furthering notions of the polyphony in their production.

Footnote:

[3] Tormey, Jane. Whiteley,Gillian. *Art, Politics and the Pamphleteer.* (London:Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020) 7

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A full colour image of a number of printed colourful stacked cushions and cloths on top of a kitchen counter. On one of the cushions it reads the words, ‘What and who do you depend on?’ Behind the counter you can see a sink and draining board, washing up liquid, hand soap and a number of rolls of paper tissue. On top of the image are two speech bubbles containing text. At an angle is a much smaller white box containing a footnote.

TEXT:

The use of collage is also a process that can, through multiple layering, reveal different tensions, power relations and points of concerns that might contradict or humorously play out the realities of the problems they are reflecting on. Michelle Kempson argues for the importance of the materiality of collage and the clearly handmade production of the collaged zine or pamphlet as part of what Jacques Ranciere describes as an ‘aesthetics of dissent’. Here ‘the materiality of the object becomes a political statement on its own.’[4] Kempson also notes that like our manuals, many zines invite further engagement or discussion and so are participatory in nature. Zines encourage a relationality to the material in which new contributions seek to further complicate and erode the static dichotomy of author and reader.

We would appreciate any feedback or advice on how we can improve our methods. Some of the questions we have include:

* Do these methods manage to communicate a polyphony of voices?
* Does the manual format allow space for multiple interpretations?
* What is lost and gained in this approach?
* What can a visual, low-fi approach to thematic coding, for example, bring to a process of analysis?
* Can different forms of knowledge be produced through this hand-made cutting and pasting and juxtaposing of text and image?

Please do get in touch! [Manual.labours@gmail.com](mailto:Manual.labours@gmail.com)

Footnote:

[4] Kempson, Michelle. (2020) “*Art, Politics and the Pamphleteer”,* inBloomsbury Publishing. eds. Jane Tormey and Gillian Whiteley. 252

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A collaged image similar to the front cover with a pink background has a number of different sized white text boxes with black text stuck on top of the image at different angles. A title box with a turquoise border reads ‘Budget’ in bright pink. Another reads ‘Colophon’.

TEXT:

Budget for Multiplying the Staffroom, Manual Labours Manual #5, 2nd prototype

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Income |  |
| Wellcome/Birkbeck ISSF | 4950 |
| Total | 4950 |
|  |  |
| Expenditure |  |
| Travel to Halifax and Bristol for interviews | 382.51 |
| Fees for interviewees/consultants | 4471.49 |
| Workshop materials | 91 |
| Total | 4950 |

In kind support:

DIY Methods have covered the cost of printing copies of the manual for the DIY Methods ‘conference’ in Sept 2023.

During this period of research Sophie was a salaried academic at Birkbeck, University of London and Jenny Richards has a paid PhD research position. They didn’t receive any extra fees for this work.

Jenny and Sophie allocated 2.5 days each to make this edition of the Manual for DIY Methods.

COLOPHON

Manual Labours Manual #5: The Global Staffroom, Prototypel 2!

By Manual Labours (Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards), 2023

Original design Assistance and Layout by Saria Digregorio

The typeface is Domestic, designed by feminist architecture collective, Edit.

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Available online at www.manuallabours.co.uk

To purchase a hard copy contact manual.labours@gmail.com

All future income from sales of the Manual goes back into the Manual Labours practice-based research.

This Second Prototype follows on from the First Prototype of The Global Staffroom Prototype, available here:<https://manuallabours.co.uk/todo/manual-labours-manual-5/>

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A collaged image similar to the front cover with a pink background has one large sized white text box with black text stuck on top.

TEXT:

The content of this manual has been generated from discussions we had during an online workshop with staff at Glasgow Women’s Library (September 2021), an in-person workshop with staff and tenants of St Margaret’s House, London (November 2021) and a series of online or in person meetings with people working in contexts of healthcare, domiciliary care, pedagogy, trade unionism and transport from August 2022 - April 2023. These were: Equal Care Coop (Halifax, UK), Angry Workers (Bristol, UK), Performing Medicine (London, UK), Maddalena Fragnito (Milan, Italy), Red Learning Co-op (across England), IWGB (London, UK), The Forest Curriculum (Bangkok/Berlin/Santa Barbara), Art on the Underground (London, UK) and Vera Wegman (London, UK).

This Manual is dedicated to all those struggling for more rest at work and fighting to undo the uncaring infrastructures of work.

Special thanks to the DIY Methods team, Glasgow Women’s Library staff and volunteers, St Margaret’s House staff and tenants, and all the people we have met through this phase of the research.

Social Reproductive thanks to: David Eckersley, Barry Sykes, Jen Sykes and Sue Hope

Manual Labours (Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards) is a practice-based research body exploring physical and emotional relationships to work. Since 2013 we have carried out research with workers in different sectors, including UK based call center workers, people working with complaints, commuters and cultural workers. Our methods include workshops, performances, reading groups, film screenings, writing collaging, and artists commissions. Each phase of the research culminates in a published manual, which you can download from our website at [www.manuallabours.co.uk](http://www.manuallabours.co.uk)

This is the second prototype of Manual Labours’ Manual #5, which is printed in three stages. Each stage of this Manual is not seen as a final output or conclusion, but rather as a way to activate further dialogues, invite feedback and bring new perspectives to the material.

If you would like to send us your reflection on the staffroom or contribute to this process get in touch!

manual.labours@gmail.com

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A red A4 sheet with collaged cartoon mouths painted in different colours voice different quotes related to staffroom problems. In the middle of the page is a black and white image of a floor plan of a workplace.

TEXT:

The Distributed Staffroom

Staffroom Problems:

Itinerant workers often have no fixed workplace and so no access to the staffroom. Through our research into care and rest at work we have found that many working in the care sector often move from house to house with no access to a staffroom, often having to take breaks in the car or in-between appointments.

For cleaners, carers and others working shifts, even if there is allocated break times, there is often no shared time or space to meet co-workers. As workers become increasingly fragmented and isolated from one another (an experience particularly felt in homecare work), the chance to meet another worker is rare.

When you don’t have space or time to meet co-workers comradery doesn’t translate and needs to be worked on, people can turn on each other because of understaffing, for example.

For home care workers necessary bodily functions such as using the bathroom are forced to take place in the people's homes that they work in or in cafes between homes.

Cleaners were eating in the cupboards where the chemicals are; they will have like a small kettle there and they would eat the food there, not being allowed to use a big canteen that there is for everybody.

To take a break as a worker without a staffroom you have to pay for it and go out for coffee/lunch.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: The front cover page is used as a background for a collage which includes black and white printed images of a map with a number of points noted on it and an image of a ‘breastfeeding welcome here’ sign reappropriated to say ‘Care Workers Welcome Here.’ 7 white boxes of black text are stuck across the page that share different quotes related to the Distributed Staffroom. Larger font on the page reads ‘Distributed Staffroom’ and ‘Proposals’.

TEXT:

The Distributed Staffroom

Proposal

A distributed staffroom:

Is a staffroom for workers who don’t have a fixed workplace.

Could be a table in a cafe, a bench in a park, a library, an online call, a waiting room, a communal sauna, or a private home in between home-visits where you can take your own food and meet co-workers from different working roles and fields or be alone.

Seeks to build innovative cross worker connections and conversations to bring together different voices and experiences of work in different sectors.

Would include multiple signposted staffrooms to accommodate specific needs of itinerant, freelance and outsourced workers who have multiple work sites, and different shift patterns in how their work is organised.

Is a space to be silent or rage with people who aren’t your colleagues.

Is a weekly online check in for isolated workers.

Is a newsletter for saying things you can’t say in work / at your union.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A light yellow A4 sheet with collaged cartoon mouths painted in different colours voice different quotes related to staffroom problems. In the middle of the page is a black and white image of a floor plan of a workplace.

TEXT:

The Mobile Staffroom

Staffroom Problems   
Outsourced exhausted workers often have no space or support structures to rest, collectivise and organise at work.

We’re trained to think we’re not connected; we are pitted against each other.

Striking workers are often firefighting and too tired to do anything but firefight.

The picket line is like a staff room and often the only place people can meet – it can be energising and a point of connection, but also utterly exhausting.

The strike as like an energy wave – the tension and stress build. There is exhaustion afterwards, especially after victories.

There is a need for organisers to come together to avoid burn out. There is no space for union workers to debrief.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A pink painted background with collaged images stuck on top: a glitter ball in the centre, a tea cup and two hand drawn images. One drawing is of an ambulance re-purposed as a Mobile Staffroom (it has mobile staffroom written on its side). The other drawing is of the inside the back of the Mobile Staffroom van. There is a ramp up to interior and inside there are shelves, seating, cushions. There is a white test box in the middle of the page with reads The Global Staffroom, but the word Global has been crossed out and replaced with the word ‘Mobile’. There are 6 smaller white text boxes overlaying the collaged image at angles down the page.

TEXT:

Proposal

 The Mobile Staffroom works to support workers to expand access to care and rest at work and for better conditions for outsourced and exhausted workers, rather than something that just replenishes workers to be able to go back to work and be more productive. It is a collective resource for workers to support how they can organise collectively against oppressive working conditions.

The Mobile Staffroom could be a van used by workers on picket lines, campaigning and in sites where it is important to be loud and visible around inaccess to care infrastructure in certain sites of work.

The Mobile Staffroom is a space for co-learning and resource to be used by workers for different campaigns.

The Mobile Staffroom is a staffroom focused on how to support worker-led organising for structural change. This can be for workers working across different work sites, employers and fields.

The Mobile Staffroom is space for dancing as a way of resting, hanging out, having food and fun.

The Mobile Staffroom is a space to celebrate the carnival aspect of the picket line and support worker victories and provide aftercare of strike work.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A red A4 sheet with collaged cartoon mouths painted in different colours voice different quotes related to staffroom problems. In the middle of the page is a black and white image of a floor plan of a workplace.

TEXT:

The Covert Staffroom

Staffroom Problems

When your workplace centres around care for others you need a space where you don’t have to do that care work.

There is a colonisation of care work.

Overly social spaces (such as staffrooms) can be particularly difficult for neurodiverse workers or those with social anxieties.

A free, open to all staffroom can be hierarchical, discriminatory and reproduce the same exclusions in the workplace.

I really dislike (the staffroom) because it’s a kind of gentlemen’s club.

I did not want to be with my co-workers, they were nasty people. I just wanted to get away from people.

The staffroom often expects normative forms of behaviour, a continuation of the performance of work/er. It’s exhausting having to act professional. The Staffroom is also a place for ‘correct behaviour’.

A mandatory space for socialising can feel quite oppressive.

Why should we be insistent that the cleaners use the formal canteen when perhaps a chat in the toilet is all they need?

Sleep space in hospitals don’t help the fact that the hours are too long and its understaffed.

There is a lack of confidential spaces or infrastructure for whistleblowing about oppressive working conditions.

The staffroom can be a surveilled space by employers and suppress possibilities for worker organising.

There is a need for privacy for both recharging and organising away from the boss.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A busy collaged image with a text box in the middle which reads The Global Staffroom, but the word Global has been crossed out and replaced with the word ‘Covert’. The background collaged image shows someone showing the inside of their white coat which has pictures of books, headphones, watches and a tea flask. There is also a sign above this which says Toilet. The image is covered with smaller pieces of text on white paper placed at different angles.

TEXT:

Proposal

The Covert Staffroom:

Is a self-organised space devised by workers that need a hidden staffroom which is to be used when they desire.

Is NOT an official staffroom provided by the employer

Operates within workplaces, such as hospitals, schools and factories where there might be a staffroom but it is a site of exclusion and oppression for many workers.

Is hidden from the surveillance of your employer or abusive colleagues.

Could be a toilet cubicle, lift, corridor, set of headphones, a blanket, a secret pocket with tools to switch off or communicate covertly with allies.

Could be space / time to organise in a hidden off space from the communal/official areas.

Would not be mandatory, you could choose whether to go or not- break time is your time, it’s not just an extension of the workplace.

Supports marginalised identities to work against the ableism and racism within existing staffrooms- eg. where neurodivergent people or trans people don’t have to mask

Addresses race barriers by providing protected, separatist spaces from the whiteness and ableism in workplaces and unions.

Could provide a safe space for whistleblowing.

Could be a secret space where you can nap without anxiety.

I was recently working and upset and in the library there is a lift with cubby hole and i just went and sat in there to feel safe, so i have drawn a set of cubicles a bit like toilets but without the toilet as that is the worst place to cry, but the space would be treated like a toilet, so no one would ask you if you why you were going.

Could consist of a staffroom kit, including blanket, book, headphones, flask…

Can but doesn’t have to be an anti-social place.

Is a refuge from a co-opted / hierarchical staffroom.

Accommodates confidential chats.

All the chats about union strikes happen in the kitchen away from the formalised space of gathering; Spaces not designated as staff rooms are often places for organising.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A pale orange A4 sheet with collaged cartoon mouths painted in different colours voice different quotes related to staffroom problems. In the middle of the page is a black and white image of a floor plan of a workplace.

TEXT:  
The Permanent Staffroom

Staffroom Problems

Care work is being colonised, commercialised and outsourced. Short term wellbeing programmes have taken the place of concrete space. Care can become too comfortable; The staffroom has been commercialised or outsourced to be run by profit making companies. How can we imagine against this?

Staff rooms / break spaces are no longer communal spaces. Everyone has their own mini-fridge and kettle by their desk.

How do we avoid getting exhausted and paralysed by anger.

Role of technology can mean we have less time and decreases quality of the time we do have.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A collaged image, in the background there is a bookshelf full of books running down the left hand side of the page. On the right the background is painted purple. In the top right there is the work ‘Proposals’ typed on white paper and stuck over a close-up image of some orange wool. There are two chairs cut out of a magazine and placed in the middle of the page on either side of some text which says The Global Staffroom, but the word Global is crossed out and the word Permanent is put over the top. There are sections of text on white paper on top of the collage.

TEXT:

Proposal

The Permanent Staffroom is:

A designated accessible space where co-workers across the workplace can meet, eat their lunch together, relax and/or organise.

A space to be companionably together, but there’s no pressure to talk.

A permanent space that is protected from the changing organisation of work and for profit incentives.

A space to leave behind ableist and capitalist myth of productivity and professionalism.

A space where the ethics/rules of the space are collectively written.

A space that considers how emotions and care can be manifested spatially. For example, it could be a ‘non-officey’ space (with tables that aren’t office tables and chairs that aren’t office chairs. There could be books, tea, coffee, magazines, nice lighting, relaxing colours, resources and information on how you access work resources and support.

 (Back page)

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: This image is the same as the front page but there are blank white rectangular bits of paper arranged on top of the image at different angles, prompting readers to fill them in with their own ideas. This is the back page of the manual and there is a white text box laid over the top of the image in the top right, and an angle, which invites readers to make their own speculative staffroom.

TEXT:  
The Cut and Paste Staffroom Poster

From research into the ideal staffroom different workers’ desire, we have found that workers’ need multiple forms of staffroom from mobile, to concrete, distributed to covert. How might you cut and paste together your own speculative staffroom from these examples, drawing from your own desires and experiences too? Feel free to collage using your own material and images.

When finished detach and hang in the place you take care of yourself during working hours. If you would like to share - take a photo and send to manual.labours@gmail.com

# MOTHERLODE: A MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE AND CARE AS RESEARCH AND ART

Jessica Marion Barr

with care (and photographs) from Zorianna Zurba

Image description: the title of Ukeles’s text, which reads [typwriter]: “MANIFESTO! MAINTENANCE ART – Proposal for an Exhibition [handwritten] “CARE” © 1969 Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Image description: a photograph of a plate of food: two halves of a bagel smeared with hummus make “eyes” and a dill pickle makes a sad mouth below.

We would like to share some small reflections on the intersections of knowledge and research and care — specifically, mothering (in our case, being single mothers of spirited children while also trying to eke out careers as scholars/instructors/artist-researchers in the academy). This zine is inspired by and riffs on Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s “MANIFESTO! Maintenance Art — Proposal for an exhibition” (subtitled “CARE”), written in 1969 as Ukeles was contending with all of the “maintenance” labour involved in being the mother of a young child and trying to maintain an art practice at the same time.\* Ukuleles transformed and presented her maintenance/care work as art. This reframing was and is a revolutionary act, and a feminist gift to the art world, expanding the field of art praxis, and demanding recognition for the (motherlode of) labour involved in “maintenance.” In an academic context, perhaps in addition to ‘research as care work,’ we could also consider ‘care work as research.’ “Motherlode” refers to a large amount of something, or to a particular vein of precious mineral — we are thinking here of both workload (at precarious teaching-intensive academic jobs and in domestic life) as well as the potentially rich veins of knowledge that might shimmer through as we engage in maintenance and care work.

(\*see https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ukeles-Manifesto-for-Maintenance-Art-1969.pdf

~ Also please note that while this zine focuses on the challenges we face, we also recognize that we, like Ukeles, benefit from various forms of structural/systemic privilege: racial, ability, cisgender, linguistic, educational, class, and more…)

Image description: first page of Ukeles’s typewritten 1969 manifesto: “I. IDEAS:

A: The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct:

The Death Instinct: separation, individuality, Avant-Garde part excellence; to follow one’s own path to death–do your own thing, dynamic change.

The Life Instinct: unification, the eternal return, the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species, survival systems and operations, equilibrium.

B: Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress, advance, excitement, flight or fleeing.

Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.

show your work–show it again

keep the comtemporaryartmuseum groovy

renew the excitement; repeat the flight.

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.

Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

This zine is intended to briefly reflect on these ideas, while also following Ukeles’s lead in presenting moments of our own (motherlode of) maintenance/care work as art/scholarship — a partial and fragmentary “Maintenance Archive.”

Living in different cities, our initial intention was that we would each print, fold, and ‘augment’/illustrate half of the total number of zines with small bits and pieces that represent our domestic life and labour (e.g. small pieces of our children’s artwork, food wrappers, receipts, bottom-of-backpack mystery items, our own handiwork/crafting…). However, as Jessica writes in this zine’s Postscript, that plan was thwarted as if in illustration of the “motherlode” of issues we are living, thinking through, and attempting to communicate here. Thus, Zorianna’s Maintenance Archive appears as photographs and musings that she added to our shared online document. Jessica took care of the physical production of the zines, and added to each zine unique detritus from the mess created by her son in his wild spread around the home. Jessica asks: is my son’s mess — and the neverending care and maintenance work I do for him and our living space — art and research material that I can transform and share with others?

Image description: the hard copies of this zine had bits of child litter pasted in – pieces of granola bar wrappers, fragments of children’s drawings and scribbles, receipts, pieces of fabric, bits of string, silvery and coloured foil from sweet treats, etc.

Emily Mitchell-Eaton (2021): “Academic work and care work are deeply entangled modes of labor.”

Image description: page 2 of Ukeles’s typewritten manifesto:

“C: Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.)

The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs=minimum wages, housewives=no pay.

clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor, wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby’s diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don’t put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills, don’t litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, I’m out of perfume, say it again—he doesn’t understand, seal it again — it leaks, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.

D. Art:

Everything I say is Art is Art. Everything I do is Art is Art. “We have no Art, we try to do everything well.” (Balinese saying)

Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials

—Process art especially claims pure development and change, yet employs almost purely maintenance processes.

E. The exhibition of Maintenance Art, “CARE”, would zero in on pure maintenance, exhibit it as contemporary art, and yield, by utter opposition, clarity of issues.”

J: “...the mind boggles and chafes…” indeed

Z: Breakfast. Snack. Lunch. Snack. Dinner. Snack.

Grocery loading. Gross load….

J: My eyeballs hurt. Making food. Planning ahead. Executive functioning.

Brain fog. No time for brain fog. Keep doing things. Grief. Texting. Why is there food/dirt/laundry/Lego/liquid there? Other people’s homes are cleaner, tidier, more organized. So-and-so’s partner cooks and cleans and gardens and drives the kids everywhere — must be nice.\* That pile of crap beside the stove is a fire hazard.

So much driving. “Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time…”

Image description: piles of folded laundry with a yellow Pikachu t-shirt on top (note: in the hard copies, this page also had an entire toddler’s sock pasted in, which had to be lifted for the reader to read all of the text and see the images)

Z: Cycling clothes. Folded for only a moment. Worn again. Repeated costume changes.

\*See Judy Brady (1971), “I Want a Wife,” www.columbia.edu/~sss31/rainbow/wife.html

Mountz et al. (2015) echo “Martell’s (2014) observation that the ‘slow’ in slow scholarship is not just about time, but about structures of power and inequality. This means that slow scholarship cannot just be about making individual lives better, but must also be about re-making the university. Our call for slow scholarship is therefore about cultivating caring academic cultures and processes. [...] We build on Lawson’s ethics of care — of bringing attention to how we work and interact with one another — as necessary for creating possibilities for a more just university. Care work is work. It is not self-indulgent; it is radical and necessary (Federici, 2012; Ahmed, 2014). Care, moreover, is risky, imposing a burden on those who undertake care work (Tronto, 1989).”

Image description: excerpt from Ukeles’s typewritten manifesto:

“A: Personal Part:

I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother (random order).

I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also (up to now separately) I “do” Art.

Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.

My working will be the work.”

“...zero in on pure maintenance, exhibit it as contemporary art…”

May Chazan (2023) describes “slow scholarship” as “a revolutionary tempo change that encourages building relationships of care against neoliberal academic currents and capitalist, colonial, ableist temporalities of productivity (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2019; see also Cole 2019)...”

J: doing things in impossibly small moments; fragmented focus; being pulled away from tasks and thoughts constantly (or, if not, worries about kid in back of mind always; there is no “turn off your phone”); grading papers at midnight while rubbing sick child’s back; how does anyone do this?

Image description: the hard copies of this zine had bits of child litter pasted in – pieces of granola bar wrappers, fragments of children’s drawings and scribbles, receipts, pieces of fabric, bits of string, silvery and coloured foil from sweet treats, etc.

Jenn Cole (2019): “Performance research methodologies, if they are courageous, offer a place to explore questions without having to produce answers, to revel in and document process. [...] Sustainable scholarship means taking time [...] and knowing that sometimes waiting is the work.”

Z: The slow seeping in of exhaustion. task, task, task, task, task, task, task, task, then all at once a flood. If as Sara Ahmed (2017) writes “we begin to experience gender as a restriction of possibility” (7), then how can we generate possibility from time crunch, sleep deprived…

Image description: photos of a child’s craft table with painting and drawing supplies, and empty snack bowls. Also, crafted artworks taped to a wall reading “I AM LOVED! and “I AM CREATIVE!”

J: Do I get to call this art? Do I get to call this research? Do I get to call this care?

Image description: the hard copies of this zine had bits of child litter pasted in – pieces of granola bar wrappers, fragments of children’s drawings and scribbles, receipts, pieces of fabric, bits of string, silvery and coloured foil from sweet treats, etc.

J: 48 tabs open on home-work computer. 52 tabs open on phone. ?? tabs open on work-work computer. What was I doing? Kid: “Let’s go”

Z: Sacrosanct. Snack, toothbrushing, reading, reading, existential angst, reading. Bedtime routines become bedtime rituals.

Image description: bedside table (vintage wooden crate) with a selection of books including You Know, Sex; Superfudge; and Harry Potter, with a tube of children’s toothpaste atop the pile.

Ahmed (2017 interview): “In the hands of Lorde, caring for one’s self is about how we inhabit our fragile bodies that have capacities that can be exhausted; it is about finding ways to exist in a world that is diminishing. Caring for oneself is also about caring for others, that important work, often painful, that practical and domestic work, of maintaining the conditions for each other’s existence.”

Image description: an under-bed drawer pulled out to reveal a traditional Ukranian woman’s shirt, white with red embroidery/needlework, and red ties.

Z: Tucked away for special occasions. The threads that bind. Red and black; love and sorrow. Our name: sorrow. Our sorrow which we tuck away.

J & Z: Will I have a job next year? Will I lose my home?

Image description: photo of child in a wagon, surrounded by bags of groceries

Image description: screen capture from WhatsApp conversation. Zorianna wrote “What if the writing mimicked exhaustion and our experience? So if rather than a shunk at the start, each page had an imaged or a glued in item or whatever, and either a poetic line, or a kid joke, or a quote 5:53p.m.”

POSTSCRIPT?

Perhaps ironically, our efforts to carve out time to work (together as well as separately) on this piece were repeatedly thwarted by issues that are directly connected to our burdens as single mothers. On the day we had planned to meet (over Zoom as we live in different cities), Zorianna fell ill (with no partner to provide care, and while still planning activities around her son’s birthday) and also had to deal with a leaking washing machine (again, with no partner to do this labour). Jessica’s plans to carve out kid-free work time were interrupted by strep throat (with no partner to provide care), and time-sensitive First Aid training (so that she could have the necessary qualification to volunteer at an overnight camp in order to secure a week of free camp for her son… budgets are tight when we must pay for everything ourselves). Subsequently, several more of Jessica’s work days were interrupted by child illness and disruptions with childcare. So, sadly, our plans to co-write this zine during care-oriented conversational Zoom sessions — which were intended to be a praxis and embodied methodology of care-as-research — did not come to fruition, illustrating all the more clearly the motherlode we carry at all times…

Outtakes:

J: “Ooh, we could talk about feminist slow scholarship\* and radical care\*\*… this new piece ‘Crip Time and Radical Care in/as Artful Politics’ by May Chazan [2023]…”

Z: “Except we can’t be slow when children are vomiting and we are the only adult!”

&

J taking vigorous notes as Z talks through garbled cell phone connection while speed- walking to an appointment:

“Z thoughts: in carework there is messiness; abject (low-level gore); pollutes us and environment (while we are pressured to be ‘neat’)

- Methods have been rhetorically reduced to ‘known’ and given borders

- Invisibility of the abject, of abjection

- Hide our own disgust of disgust while constantly erasing/scouring”

Image description: screen capture from WhatsApp conversation.

“Zorianna: Reading is exuausting so is writing.. So in a way that feels counter

I’m going to add in a few lines that work with images that I’ll email you.

Jessica: Her manifesto is a protest against dude art and also a proposal for an exhibition

Zorianna: If there are ones you don’t like, then we don’t need to use them

Jessica: Okay! Maybe I’ll do a screenshot of this convo?

Zorianna: As Niko might say, ‘Roger that, Poop Squad!’

Jessica: [LOL emoji, sweat-laugh emoji, nauseated green-face emoji, poop emoji]

I’m dripping wet in a bathing suit cuz no air conditioning so S and I were spraying each other with hose”

(\*Mountz et al [2015] https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1058 Confession: Jessica’s attempts to read this article have stretched over many months, possibly a year, and the hard copy she printed out is now lost in the kid-/life-mess in her home, or possibly car… Too slow?)

(\*\*Hobart and Kneese [2020]: “As the traditionally undervalued labor of caring becomes recognized as a key element of individual and community resilience, radical care provides a roadmap for envisioning an otherwise.”)

Items not included in this zine (a non exhaustive list):

\* All manner of children’s bodily fluids and excretions (“Mamaaaaa…

I pooed my pants… again…”)

\* Our own tears

\* So many bits of food on the floor

\* Moldy/soggy remnants of carefully curated and mostly uneaten school lunches

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Your own Maintenance Archive:

Crafted by (and please feel free to reach out to):

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# Providence Chinatown, 1914

Jeffrey Yoo Warren, Dri Chiu Tattersfield

[Editor’s note: this is a participatory, foldable zine. Here text and some images are transcribed, in order.]

*Now available at:* [*https://jywarren.github.io/enfolded-memory-path/*](https://jywarren.github.io/enfolded-memory-path/) *with additional alt image descriptions.*

Summary: Our zine “Providence Chinatown 1914: An enfolded memory path” starts as a large sheet of paper with images from historical photos and maps overlaid with textboxes on both sides. After following cutting and folding instructions, the zine can be constructed to form a 3D model of part of the Providence Chinatown neighborhood in 1914. On the front side, linked by arrows, the textboxes tell a story of walking through the neighborhood. Textboxes on the back side of the zine include some of our personal reflections about making the zine.

The following plaintext version of our zine includes both narrative descriptions of the imagery and the original printed text.

Introduction text: In the Seeing Lost Enclaves project, we have been carefully researching displaced Chinatown communities through archival research, 3D modeling, zinemaking, and other mediums, with a focus on personal (re)connection, community building, and process reflections, through a process called relational reconstruction.

This zine interweaves a speculative story from the displaced historical Chinatown in Providence, RI with the story of this project and what we have learned from experimenting with care-oriented, multimodal research methods. The story unfolds as a path through the Providence Chinatown neighborhood in 1914 based on Jeffrey’s modeling work.

We are excited by zines’ potential to serve as a more accessible, non-digital way to share our Chinatown reconstructions with elders and descendants of these communities. Additionally, we have been reflecting deeply on the idea of our model reconstructions as virtual altars, in conversation with family histories of altar-building for ancestors. Paper plays an important role in ancestor offerings, such as burning paper money. How is folding a zine like constructing an altar? We invite you to explore this prompt at the end of our zine.

With care,

Jeffrey & Dri

unterbahn.com & hellodri.itch.io

Image: You're in a small dormitory room with a wooden floor and plaster walls. Two windows open onto the cobblestone street a floor below.

Text: Look out the window. Dusk illuminates the street below. What do you see?

Prompt: Draw yourself curled up on a chair.

Image: At the back of the room, a narrow staircase leads down to the first floor.

Text: The murmur of voices draws you downstairs. Your aunt leans over the counter, gossiping with a customer. You run your fingers along the narrow shelves as you walk towards the door.

Image: A narrow passage leads between two wooden shelves crowded with shiny porcelain teapots, bowls, vases and, on the top shelf behind glass, boxes with more merchandise.

Prompt: Which item do you linger on?

Text: Outside, the cool air smells like rain. You take a right at the furniture shop, where polished wood gleams.

Image: As you walk out the door onto the cobblestones, there are several doors open in the small wooden buildings across the street, the facades of which are collaged from old newspapers and photos. Warm light spills onto the street from doors and from windows on the second floors. To your right, down the street, a small theater and tailor shop sit across the intersection with a wider street.

Text: You make your way down busy Westminster Street, past several shops and a drugstore. You hear: [circle] A dog barking, children playing, wheels splashing through a puddle.

Image: Turning the corner, you notice more shops on both sides of the street, outside of Chinatown. More tailors, shoe stores, signs for Singer sewing machines, and more. The wide street slopes up towards the distant towers of a cathedral.

Text: You turn left on Burrill Street, passing the tailor and the back entrance of the Empire Theatre, which you have never entered.

Image: Turning again, this time to your right, you find yourself on a narrow bending street sloping uphill for 2 blocks. Lined with low wooden houses and shops to the left, you notice the outlines of a map showing building footprints to your right: "CHINE LAUNDRY", "Tailor", "Chine Tea S", "Chine Gro." and strange symbols X D. ° 3

Text: Finally, you reach the destination you had not realized you were wandering towards: the alley between the theatre and the grocers, a hiding spot you come to often.

Image: At the entrance to a very narrow alley you come across a man in a dark blue linen shirt and pants walking by with a cigarette, the light illuminating his knuckles as he swings his arms. A White man walks a few yards behind him. You pass ahead of them both to step down into the narrow alley between two houses with white clapboard sides.

Image: Passing dark windows, you come up to a very tall blank brick wall, with some wooden shuttered windows high above, and faint outlines of faded painted letters as tall as a child spell out an advertisement for the Empire Theater. The tiny triangular space formed by the oddly intersecting walls is filled with warm light from the back side of the building to your left, which has a grocery storefront almost face-to-face with the brick wall.

Text: (Left) You lean against the wall and listen to the many lives of your neighborhood unfold. You close your eyes for a moment, and then begin walking home. (Right) Pressing your hands against the wall, you find that it is porous. You climb over to the other side.

Image: As you climb over the brick wall you find yourself in a mirror image of the neighborhood you just traversed, a gloomier, but somehow more contemplative version. Arrows guide you back along the inverse of the path you had walked.

# *Reverse side*

While a few storefronts opened onto Burrill Street, their signs inviting you in (“Chong Kee Laundry,” “Oriental Restaurant”), much of the neighborhood sat one row back, in the in-between spaces: a print business, a tea shop, a grocery back by the rear of the Empire Theater’s huge brick walls. This neighborhood was a little out of the way, at the edge of downtown, and it felt a little protected – enclosed by larger buildings and streets. I wonder who felt at home here. Was this narrow alley the enclosed and tidy place I imagine, perhaps with small potted plants, swept daily? – Jeff

I feel my relationship with this place is uncertain, not only as a Korean American living in the neighborhood today, but in ways explored by Jean Wei’s All Purpose God - a bit of the uncertainty of someone seeking reconnection with a now-unfamiliar tradition. Wei tells the story of a diasporic Asian American young person making meanings from the presence of a statue of Tudigong in their household. In my mind, the uncertainty of my relationship with Burrill Street histories is entwined with a desire to show my respect for the place, to honor it. It’s connected with a sense of the place’s need for privacy, contemplation and quiet. – Jeff

Could this little alley have had a special meaning or purpose? I know via Providence Chinatown historian John Eng-Wong that there was an altar in one of the buildings on Burrill Street, and we can see a photo of one on Empire Street in a Providence Journal article covering Lunar New Year celebrations. But the alley also stands out to me for its possibilities – with no historical reference, but in the way that different altars (especially to different deities and in different traditions) find meaningful spaces above a space or on the floor. Though it seems unlikely we’ll ever know for sure if it held such a purpose, I can imagine wanting to tidy it up, as Pei Pei does for M in Jean Wei’s Dragon Whiskers. – Jeff

*Relational reconstruction focuses on the potential for a more multifaceted remembrance and correction, through relationships between the experiences partially represented in the archive, and today’s parallel experiences in minoritized groups. It acknowledges the limitations of the archive as a means of accessing erased moments, experiences, and spaces. In this approach, I seek to correct erasure, but through an imaginative, immersive, social, and creative approach, which encloses a gentle and nourishing space rather than enclosing an artifact of history in a diorama at a museum or on a plaque. This process restructures the archive as a set of selective clues, shaped by the active intent to obscure ancestral knowledges best expressed in ways least likely to be historically preserved – emotional tone, color, sound and smell, private moments and ephemera of personal relationships, hopes, aspirations, things unsaid.*

The soil remembers. The soil was here before the street was paved and the buildings raised; the soil will be here when the street is widened and the buildings knocked down. The soil will remember, beneath the new street: pollen from vegetable gardens, ceramic fragments, ash. What will remember the sounds, the smells, the memories? – Dri

Growing up biracial in Taiwan, I did not understand myself as Asian until I was categorized as such upon moving to the United States. What is my connection to Asian American history? Perhaps there isn’t one, in terms of lineage. I’ll create a connection myself, with my hands, folding – Dri

Back upstairs, you pause at the table by the window. You remember your mother taking you to 土地公 shrines as a child in China, altars to deities of a specific place. You don’t remember the details, but you decide your neighborhood deserves one too. On a piece of paper, you begin to sketch an altar for this place that is your home, all the things it has been, and all the things it will become: [✎]

Image: You re-enter the mirror version of the porcelain shop you started your journey in, and are back at the beginning of our story.

Text: *Inspirations (Dri):* All-Purpose God by Jean Wei, 2019, The Buddhist altars of my grandmother & great-grandmother, Counter-mapping. Inspirations (Jeff): Linda Sue Park, All-Purpose God by Jean Wei, 2019, mchapo archive by Neta Bomani, RI Chinese History Project by Angela Yuanyuan Feng, Julieanne Fontana, John Eng-Wong, Robert Lee, and others. Frank Wong's work as featured in Forever Chinatown, *A Portable Paradise*, by Roger Robinson, Saidiya Hartman, Wing on Wo Project, Imin Yeh.

# Reimagine Futures of Domestic Voice Assistants

Claire Weizenegger

“By creating interactions that encourage consumers to understand the objects that serve them as women, technologists abet the prejudice by which women are considered objects.” Source: Feldman, J. (2016), The Bot Politic, The New Yorker

[Image description: picture of claire weizenegger.]

Hi, I’m Claire! A Swiss interaction design{h}er and researcher based in Seattle.

Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, I am passionate about expanding my thinking about the future of technology, society, and how it shapes our sense of being within the frame of our everyday domestic lives. Drawing inspiration from diverse fields such as philosophy, humanities,  science & technology social studies and design, I strive to expand boundaries

of knowledge. I am interested in design theory, research through design, and speculative design, among other design disciplines. I hold a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Industrial and Product Design from the Lucerne School of Art and a Master Design (MDes) degree from the University of Washington.

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Hey, siri.

Hey, alexa.

Hey, cortana.

[Image description: female body pointing at voice assistant.]

Background:

Smart devices have become ubiquitous, seamlessly integrating into our routines, shaping our realities, and transforming our relationships. The advancements in consumer technology have undoubtedly revolutionized our lives, enabling us to travel, communicate, and even save lives. However, beneath the surface lies a troubling reality—these devices harbor discriminatory tendencies that perpetuate racism, sexism, and inequality.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) algorithms are now employed in various domains, including the hiring process. Unfortunately, these algorithms often favor applicants with continuous work experience, disadvantaging those with gaps in their resumes. Moreover, facial recognition technology, touted as a breakthrough, has been misused to surveil and target people of color during protests, exposing the inherent biases within these systems (Crockford, 2020).

As AI and ML continue to progress, our everyday devices are becoming eerily human-like, boasting lifelike gestures and speech (Kiesler et al., 2008). Among the most prominent examples are smart speakers and voice assistants. These virtual companions, such as Alexa and Siri, have permeated our homes, redefining our interactions with technology by making voice the primary interface.

The personification of technology creates a sense of comfort and trust in these devices. However, it also raises ethical and philosophical dilemmas. By presenting technology as a friend and helper, these devices facilitate the collection of data, which is then sold to third-party vendors, turning them into lucrative sources of marketable information (Woods, 2018).  A critical concern in this domain is the sexist character projected onto technology (Strengers & Kennedy, 2020). While banking and insurance apps often utilize a male voice, the leading virtual assistants for the home are predominantly female. Amazon’s Alexa, named after the ancient library of Alexandria, leaves no room for ambiguity in its femininity. Microsoft’s Cortana takes inspiration from a sensuous, unclothed AI character in a video game franchise. Apple’s Siri, with its Norse name meaning “beautiful woman who leads you to victory,” adds to the trend. Even the gender-neutral named Google Assistant defaults to a female voice. Design scholars argue that the feminization does not only reinforce gender biases it also aims to boost users’ confidence or manipulate them for ulterior motives, compromising personal privacy (Sutton, 2017; Woods, 2018).

As personal assistants become increasingly embedded in our lives, a troubling development emerges—a sense of intimacy with these devices. They fulfill the fantasy of machines performing women’s labor without being burdened by stress, relationships, or bodily limitations. In doing so, these systems exploit and perpetuate stereotypical social relations.

The time has come for us to critically examine the implications of our relationship with smart devices. We must challenge the discriminatory practices deeply rooted in their design and functionality. I believe we have to strive for a future where technology empowers and uplifts away from subservient tasks.

“..the gendered design of most VAs reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and inequality..” (Unesco, 2019)

Let’s reimagine how everyday life with a domestic voice agent could look like.

[Image description: image of domestic voice assistant.]

The Method:

We have to move away from the 24/7 available assistant you boss around at home. Away from social norms and performing subservient tasks. If we want to move on from 21st-century norms, we must move beyond current visions of technology.

Welcome to a project that embraces the intriguing world of Research through Design (RtD). In RtD the creative power of design becomes the gateway to expanding knowledge. Through tools like sketches, prototyping, and more, we venture into uncharted territories, generating fresh insights and testing hypotheses.

In RtD, the design process becomes a dynamic form of inquiry. As a designer, I embark on a reflective and iterative journey, exploring complex problems that require deeper understanding. This approach transcends traditional research methods, capturing

intricate nuances and multifaceted aspects.

Central to RtD principles is the notion of exploring ideas through the act of making. Here, design and research seamlessly blend together, forming a harmonious union. It is through design sketches, captivating design fiction narratives, compelling prototypes, and engaging videos that I unlock the potential to experiment, and effectively communicate ideas.

Join the journey and push current norms of interacting with domestic voice agents while embracing RtD.

The Principles:

1. Thing-centered: A design intervention should limit anthropomorphic characteristics and, thus, emphasize the things' agency. This means the design should strengthen machine-like characteristics and interactions in contrast to human-like gestures (e.g., voice, name, appearance). Eventually, this also limits (false) emotional ties between machines and humans.

2. No conceptualization of an assistant: Building on the first design principles, the second guideline is grounded in the sexist attribute of current interactions. Therefore, a successful design should not represent stereotypical gender roles or portray submissive servant tasks.

3. Establish relationship: The third design principle challenges the alternative forms of interaction models with domestic VAs. It is grounded in the meditation theory (e.g., technology mediates behavior and perception of reality). Ideally, an artifact establishes a relationship between the user and the environment while promoting interactions playfully.

Let’s speculate about futures.

The Needy Artifact

Voice active interface that only works when it has been placed near another product in the apartment. Equipped with sensors that sense electromagnetic fields, the object facilities different conversations depending on the object nearby.

[Image description: Sketch of an electric kettle that is connected to a voice interface on a table.]

Post Human Interface

A posthuman voice interface that enables people to speak to non-human entities and ecological systems, encouraging them to get in touch with their natural surroundings.

[Image description: Sketch with a tangible interface that is connected to a plant.]

The Caregiving Companion

Works in pairs: the other lights up whenever one person is talking. To use it, both people must engage equally - in balance. A proactive therapist voice interface that initiates deep, difficult conversations and works through human touch.

[Image description: Sketch of hand that is holding an interface in the form of an ear in hand, it is connected to another tangible interface.]

Money Talks

Voice interface that counts every word you respond; limit words to raise awareness of your words’ value. A word value calculator would print everything it hears and calculate the value of these words. A printed receipt would show how much value these have. By comparing words with a keyword search on Google and real-time monetize the value of your words according to Google search keywords. People with accents are disadvantaged because the agents do not understand them well. Thus, it would also bring awareness of racial biases.

[Image description: Sketch of tangible interface in form of a box that prints out receipts.]

In Alignment with the Universe

Trained on Philosophy of wuwei, (Chinese: “nonaction”; literally, “no action”) the practice of taking no action that is not in accord with the natural course of the universe. It allocates function/skill to specific time. If you miss the time you have to wait 24hrs until the desired skill can be used.

[Image description: Sketch of tangible interface in form of a box that has a timer on it. ]

The Argue Machine

Voice machine that argues all the time. The object is trained on object-oriented ontology, e.g.,

objects are more than their “actions.” This time-intensive, frustrating device prompts its user experience and reflection on their interaction with other contemporary domestic VAs. It could also work as an object that shows the secret life of another object within the surrounding. How much oxygen does a plant take while gone? How much energy does the kettle use while gone?

[Image description: Sketch of tangible interface in form of a box that displays a visual interface with written type.]

The Honest Guest

Dominant voice interface that is uncomfortably honest and gives tasks instead of a “helper” or “servant” thing. For example, it could remind you of chores at home, taking care of yourself, go out into nature. Perhaps a secret to a happy life cube for the lonely man without a wife–or simply an honest guest. This voice interface challenges the submissive servant characteristics of VAs.

[Image description: Sketch of tangible interface in form of a box that displays a visual interface with written type.]

Try it yourself!

Title: Give your design proposal a funny, descriptive or fancy title

Description: Try to think about one key feature your voice activated smart device should have and describe it.

For example: “This is a voice agent in form of the toaster that tells dark jokes while toasting bread”

Visual: Use any kind of visual material that support your idea best. This can be a sketch, images, or diagrams.

Grab a paper and a pen and let’s go!

[Image description: Image of Voice Assistant.]

# Sliding Data.

 Robin Hershkowitz, Emily Lynell Edwards & Lauren Andrikanich

[Front page with crayon-like abstract art in blue, red, yellow, and beige featuring a hand-drawn image of the 7 subway train]

*Feminist Methodological Pathways*

Welcome! Feminist Methodological pathways is like a Choose Your Own Adventure book, except for using computational data! You’ll find a series of circular & interactive pathways that researchers may encounter when getting to know their data from the present or recent-ish past.

We developed this process on a project studying 2010s Mormon parenting blogs where we had to deal with lots of numbers, stats, and metrics --aka the things in research often used to offer unbiased conclusions and proof.

We are interested in clearing possible new pathways and eliminating the prioritization of normative, linear, standard forms of data analysis.

How to use: read from front to back or bop around. Each panel can be used and reused on its own or in tandem. Cut them out or pin them. Ta-ta for now!

[Abstract, crayon-style drawings in yellow form the backdrop for the text]

*Fool Around with the Data. Part 1*

Where does the data take you?

When we started, we had WARC files (literally huh?). It took some time before we learned how to break them down into csv, txt, or even urls. If you don’t have a comp sci background, make the data work for you. Open up the files, get to know them. Click on anything to see what it looks like. Turn the files into something you understand. There’s no rules on how to use the data…well there are rules, but they are socially constructed, so ignoring them is taking a stance! You can always return to pick up more threads.

Return 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

[Hand-drawn image of a computer and mouse with text at the center and a pastel pink heart at the top]

*Text Analysis: Part 2*

We can also think of data as text. There are many paths one can take when doing text analysis. Known by its hotter name “distant reading” which is basically just employing a computational approach to bunches of texts (or cultural data) to identify big (or latent) trends, themes, or patterns. Essentially, the opposite of close reading.

We used an out-of-the-box text visualizer, Voyant, that even my cat could use with enough instruction! Using tools like Voyant you can make word clouds, identify correlations, and produce basic quantitative metrics like word counts. You could also use programming languages like Python or R to perform topic modeling or sentiment analysis. Recommended route for advanced travelers.

Check out Voyant here!

Pair with 1, 4, 6

[Crayon-like yellow and orange boxes hold text with a squiggly line at the bottom of the page pointing to a QR code]

*Network Visualization: Part 3*

[Image of a Gephi rendering of a scatter plot and pink and blue boxes holding text]

Try with 1, 4, 2

If  you  have  data  you’re  probably  looking  at connections   between   things!   People.   Ideas. Locations.  Enter  network  visualization.  Network visualization not only allows you to “see” data differently, but it can help provide you with some statistical info about your data. You can run various metrics and algorithms on your data with the click of a button. And people LOVE numbers. We used Gephi, a free, open-source software (slay), to see how various websites and blogs were connected. Gephi is beautiful and bespoke, it handles csv

files as well as manual data-entry.

*! Gossip about the Data ! : Part 4*

Gossip is not just TMZ and blogs. Gossip is an essential social activity used for centuries to

support communities. Gossip about the data with co- researchers, colleagues. Force your

parents/siblings to listen to you on the phone.  Talk to others in your field. Different insights are valuable and scholars aren’t the only people with expertise. General vibes are a valid research tool.

Mix it up with 6, 2, 1

[Hand-drawn abstract shapes in yellow, red, blue, beige, and pink decorate the page]

*Visualize Visual Data: Part 5*

When working with data, especially about the recent digital past, you’re probably going to be working with traces. The Internet isn’t really forever besties! One way to make sense of the traces of data we have is to produce visual collages of things left behind. With The help of a little Python in a Google Colab Notebook(we promise you can do it with minimal tears) you can take images from web pages and display them in a collage by using this helpful Juxta tutorial inGitHub.

Go back to 1, 4, 6

Making a visual college via a little coding or even printing and hand-making a collage allows us a sense of the digital ecology we’re studying.Getting a sense of the aesthetic or vibe of the people and places you’re studying is important.

(For all your Juxta-related questions)

[Hand-drawn boxes in pastel colors with little stars with a squiggly line pointing at a QR code]

*Untitled, Un-numbered Page*

[Two images depicting Juxta-produced visualizations of many extremely tiny pictures]

*Read the Literature, Read the Room!: Part 6*

Read the room. Read the literature from academia but also on social media, cultural pieces, media pieces, to inform your journey. You might need to come back and leave again and read more.

Jump back to 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

[Center text in pastel blue blob with hand-drawn, cute book-shelves with books and a tiny plant]

*Wrapping Up: Part 7*

There are many ways to work with data. With this Choose Your Own Adventure approach to working with computational data we seek to affirm that working with data should be circular, iterative, and open-ended. Data Is not the end of the story or research process but the beginning. There is value in retreading pathways. When we unite feminist values that privilege multiple perspectives, partiality, and sharing power with some technical methodological tricks new stories are possible.

See fun suggested readings here:

[Crayon-style abstract drawings in blue, red, yellow, and beige with circular pointing arrows and a QR code at the bottom of the page]

# Soft Data and Common Wares

Afroditi Psarra, Audrey Desjardins

‘Soft Data and Common Wares’ is a collaborative studio between the DXARTS Softlab (e-textiles and wearable technology lab run by Afroditi Psarra in DXARTS) and Studio Tilt (interaction design research studio run by Audrey Desjardins in the School of Art + Art History + Design). We are interested in the process of collecting, archiving, and critically transcoding data from the intimate spaces of the home and the body, and the search for meaningful interpretations. Over the past year, we set out to analyze the research conducted by our two labs by reflecting on the use of material experimentations and prototyping as techniques to shape social identities and create intellectual and cultural commons. Our goal is to speculate on the hybridizations of bodies, materials, and world- building narratives, and to disseminate our research through a zine collection.

[image description: Cover image video still from the Ventriloquist Ontology performance]

Image credit: Ventriloquist Ontology by Afroditi Psarra with performer Tingyi Jiang

[image description: Map of key concepts of the Soft Data and Common Wares project created during Summer 2022]

*Gender + Body*

We started this research project by creating a diagram with projects realized in our labs by both ourselves and our students, or in collaboration with the students. We have identified the topic of SO ft dat a and common wares as an umbrella term that we could use to address those projects.

Then, we created connections between the projects both in terms of their themes as well in terms of their language, or their mediums, materials manifestations, and also concepts. After making those connections, we identified different common subtopics that we could address: the gender body angle, the earth, space and body, and then, making visible the invisible infrastructure between data.

These ideas seem to have some connections between them that we hope to probe through this zine.

[image description: Textile version of the Soft Data and Common Wares project laid on the beach]

How do bodies interact with data?

How does the intersection of body, gender and data reveal new ways of thinking about data, body, and gender?

How does this intersection help us see new things around these topics?

[image description: Close-up of the Ventriloquist Ontology performer Tingyi Jiang]

What is a cyborg?

It's basically an organism that has some sort of a cybernetic system embedded into it.

A kind of mixture of flesh with the material nature of data.

A new body that's created between a human body, a female human body, in that case and an AI, and how the AI system can take control of the human body by moving it in involuntary ways. But also how the human body is interpreting the softness of the control of the machine learning system because the system in some cases allows for the human to exaggerate the movement, or to push back.

It reveals the control that the useof data can have over human bodies but it also allows for new viewing of this hybrid barrier as a way of pushing back.

Against the control.

The new world that is created through that control, could be pretty negative, even totalitarian, but I think it also allows you to cultivate some critical thinking about these technologies, both Al and wearables.

This question of control is really interesting to me and I think you were talking a lot about that loss of control that's happening on the performer's body. They can choose to exaggerateit,orthey can push back if they want to, but they are still very much controlled by this algorithmic system.

The second aspect of the project is focused on the training of the language model.

Training the model for the language processing system is a very assertive way,

of reclaiming control. As you control every bit of data that went into fine tuning system.

very visible control

through the ventriloquism

reclaiming on the other side

ABOUT SOFTNESS.

Alternative ways of thinking about technology as not something that is solid and hard but as something that can be malleable. As something that can be personal, customizable.

Something that can reply to the control of algorithmic systems or maybe even skewing them.

khaki cargo pants are seen as something like very muscular.

But at the same time, they are so soft.

the softness of the interface, I think, plays with the idea of gender and how it can be interpreted.

[image description: Racketball Score performance by Heidi Biggs]

Heidi creates a hybrid body with the interface that they're using, which opens up this whole new understandings and new interpretations of their own body.

We're talking about how we could see it connect with the idea of gender and being non-binary.

In Sonic Technologies of a Queer Breakup the softness came from the collective interpretation, as the three of us were going through the data. The multiple steps of the process helped in softening the data to get to levels of interpretation that were meaningful.

So obviously, there's an imbalance, right? It is Brian's data, but Daniela and I (Audrey) are there as collaborators, as advisors, and as interlocutors.

We used Google sheets, with the comment function, to highlight interesting questions. Like, what else happened there? Was there some story behind this or that? So we're flagging things together, collaboratively.

Already, we were adding a layer of interpretation on top of the data transcript.

[image description: Screenshot of an Alexa recording from the project Sonic Technologies of A Queer Breakup by Brian Kinnee, Daniela Rosner, Audrey Desjardins]

Instead of the machine transcript, we had those other layers of sound. The background noises. The tone. All these things and then some.

That already had some more softness to it, right? That layering or that looping or that cutting and that reassembling made it way more messy. It softened some of the edges. It gave us a way to listen differently and to attune ourselves differently.

Some parts of the data that isn't captured in the transcript. A lot of the time, it was recording the background. So you hear these hints of a queer life that's happening in that household, and you don't have it in transcript.

But now that we made it repeat, we accentuated it. It was through these repetitions that we were able to highlight some really important themes.

I think there was a very similar level of interpretation in softness, on the data that I got from the machine learning system in Ventriloquist Ontology, because I had to do several passes.

The repetition of certain things. I felt that the repetition which was happening from a computerized voice made the system more human.

When I saw the performance, there were two or three sentences that kept being repeated and it was actually really helpful for me as an audience because I was like okay, not everything is easy to hear the first time.

What I wanted to repeat was things that would capture your attention and bring you back to the moment. I softened the data of the system.

[image description: GUI screenshot of a piece of AI-generated text from the project Ventriloquist Ontology by Afroditi Psarra]

There was a very similar level of interpretation in softness of the data that I got from the machine learning system in Ventriloquist Ontology, because I had to do several passes of the NLP training. And I had to add more texts to the dataset, or manually remove things to soften it; to create more of the language that I wanted the model to have.

This process was a way of skewing; working on the bias. Fine-tuning things so that we can have the desirable effect in the end, which is to bring more attention to what is being said, to the interpretation of gender from the algorithm. And to bring more attention to how the general public or the person that's reading about the project understands the creation of them through these systems.

Projects featured + Credits

Ventriloquist Ontology (2021-22)

By Afroditi Psarra

The project 'Ventriloquist Ontology' explores the limits of control and points of hybridization between the human and the machine through the relationship of a performer and a wearable entity. This ventriloquist modular soft entity speaks through text generated using a GPT-2 language model, trained on a dataset of texts around biopolitics, alga-governance, the surveillanced body, and queer theory.

This project was at the Instruments Inventors Initiative (iii) in The Hague, NL. iii's residency program is made possible through the support of Creative Industries Fund NL and the Creative Europe program of the European Union. Additional support was provided by DXARTS, University of Washington.

Ventriloquist Ontology was presented at iii in The Hague on September 2021, at the DXARTS concert in Seattle on February 2022, at the AEF

(Athens and Epidavrous Festival) x CTM (Club Transmediale) festival in Athens, Greece and ISEA (International Symposium of Electronic Art) 2022 in Barcelona, Spain on June 2022.

In September 2022 a video version of the piece formed part of PCAI's (Polygreen Contemporary Art Initiative) "Sheltered Gardens" exhibition in Athens, Greece and virtually. The video version is a limited edition of 5 copies, and one was purchased by PCAI, and now forms part of their video art collection.

Research assistants:

Sadaf Sadri (GPT-2), James Wenlock (Python, BLE, SuperCollider)

Performers:

Tingyi Jiang, Carolina Marin

Videographers:

Tanja Busking, Francesco Enriquez

Racketball Score (2019)

By Heidi Biggs

This sound performance titled Racquetball Score explores gender non-binary-ness through soundscapes strategically sourced through a game of racquetball using live feedback and embedded piezo mies.

Racquetball Score was presented at the Design Trouble Symposium on April 4th, 2019, and the 'On the Boards' Performance Lab on April 24, 2019.

Sonic Technologies of A Queer Breakup (2022)

By Brian Kinnee, Daniela Rosner, Audrey Desjardins

Drawing on the experience of queer breakup, this design inquiry and first-person research explores data from two concurrent relationships in separate households both using Alexa. We examine issues of temporality, glitch, and shared accountability. We also ask critical questions with audio experiments, including: How do voice assistants differentiate between queer voices? How should we converse with voice assistants about queerness? And are voice assistants "queer enough"?

This project was published at ACM DIS 2022 and was supported by NSF Grant 1947696.

Soft Data and Common Wares Afroditi Psarra and Audrey Desjardins

Zine #1

Seattle 2023

*Earth + Space + Body*

How do data establish links between elements of different scales, in terms of space, and time, between earth, space and body?

We as humans only live at our certain pace and time scale and the earth obviously is at a different scale completely.

How does data bridge the gap between these different perceptions or feelings of time and space?

I think space also is, you know, domestic space.

The data that the body generates in that space.

The body is data.

What was interesting with THE HIGH WATER PANTS project is that it took predictions: scientific data about water levels rise, or sea levels rise over time, over the next 50 years and it tried to physicalize what someone could feel when they were riding their bikes with those pants on.

Creating such a tangible experience was a way to bring it into the the material world.

[image description: High Water Pants bicycle wearable tech by Heidi Biggs]

In a way, sensing the invisible things that exist around us that we could otherwise not be able to sense, but are very much part of the world that we inhabit.

Similar to the electromagnetic fields that surround us, like radio waves, telecommunication networks, all the stuff that are basically invisible to the human eye, but they're always there.

data becomes this kind of invisible mesh that allows for experiences or speculations.

A mesh that can generate critical thinking. I think that data are there in this infrastructure, connecting things, connecting people and places and spaces in a planetary scale to create exchanges of information, right?

The amount of energy that these data centers are using. Broadcast is trying to remind people that the data isn't only contained within the device or within their home, that it has a planetary reach.

It's actually very close to radio tuning in the action.

It starts to trace the distance and location through imaginative sounds.

The sounds felt so different when it was in my home versus when it was in the lab or in the studio.

[image description: Broadcast prototype by Audrey Desjardins]

With the Desktop Odometer, it's like going all around the planet and coming back.

oh my god, this is how many miles you went today just by staying at home and surfing the internet?

Radio technology is very similar to the Internet, in that it has this planetary scale, but the Internet is a sort of infrastructure that can fail at any moment.

In FRACTAL ANTENNAE and EMBODIED RF ECOLOGIES through the wearable EMF and RF receivers, you get to hear the different signals that float in the space that you position your body.

through an embodied experience you can understand those are being decoded in real time.

Some of these noises sound more natural, some sound totally artificial, others even sound extra terrestrial, and all of these sounds are forms of data.

On the radio spectrum, you have phenomena that are beyond the human skin.

It's insane to think that every single bit of the immaterial space of the airwaves has been fragmented. Sold many times to corporations, governments, military, communications research, and then there's a very limited amount that is accessible to the general public.

In the TRANSMISSION ECOLOGIES radio show, different artists explore this sonic ecology of transmission and networks by experimenting with that space.By curating a kind of repository of hidden sounds that are basically data transitions that exist everywhere.

Imagination is the entry point for this reclaiming of spaces and data.

For people to imagine data in a new light. To realize that data can be something else and not just numbers.

That doesn't only serve those large corporations which currently use it.

The challenge or the danger of it is that, of course, we are imposing our own values or ideas as humans on to what data really want or what they're after.

Some of the DATA EPICS stories I think will feel quite timeless. They are talking about data or they're using data in a very abstract way.

When we started the project, the authors thought: 'this is super fascinating... Also really hard. I've never written from a non human perspective and so they were up for the challenge, but I think they realize like, oh, I don't know if I know how to write.

[image description: Print booklets of the Data Epics project by Audrey Desjardins]

Listening Space engages with the embodied experience of holding an antenna, positioning yourself into the right angle and knowing where the NOAA satellite signal is going to come from and how you have to move choreographing your body in space in order to receive the transmitting weather data.

[image description: Listening Space performance by Afroditi Psarra and Audrey Briot]

The first motivation was exploration and experimentation in the transcription of the recorded data. By transcoding the sounds of satellite passes into a piece of fabric, was for us a way of archiving the information of such events.

The possibility of creating these textile archives of snapshots of the weather at different times and different places in this specific time of the Anthropocene, and of the climate crisis was particularly important to us.

Choosing the medium of a textile to archive this was a very conscious and intentional decision because of the really big lifespan of the medium.

Textiles are artifacts that are very deeply entangled with human nature and our bodies. We see their softness as a way of sensing the data that can really allow for that human level of connection with this infrastructure.

[image description: Knit tapestry of a weather satellite image from the Listening Space project by Afroditi Psarra and Audrey Briot]

What if this physicalization becomes part of things you use on a daily basis?

[image description: Listening Cups prototype by Audrey Desjardins and Timea Tihanyi]

When people come over and I served tea in it or water and I tell them like, this is data, they're like, wait, what? and they play with it and try to make sense of it.

The story of data collection and the story of data physicalization are now merged. It's really hard to distinguish them.

Projects featured + Credits

High Water Pants (2018-19)

By Heidi Biggs

The High Water Pants were designed to speculatively explore the intersections of everyday cyclists and climate change. The pants work by actuating and dynamically shortening within areas predicted by NOAA to be impacted by sea-level rise in the future which were translated into geofences. The pants leverage cyclists' embodied knowledge of Seattle's geography and climate into ways to notice and speculate about their futures with higher sea levels.

This project was published at ACM CHI 2020 and ACM DIS 2020 and in Arcade Magazine Issue 37.2, 2019. It was exhibited at the Textile Intersections Conference Exhibition, 2019, and at the MFA & MDes Thesis Show, Henry Art Gallery, 2019.

Broadcast (2019-21)

By Audrey Desjardins

Broadcast conceptualizes places and spaces that data venture to on their journey to and from homes. We argue that more abundant, playful, and imaginary encounters with home data might offer a site for reclaiming data for home dwellers. Broadcast uses sound as an analogy to interpret and imagine data's travel.

This project was published at ACM CHI 2023 and exhibited at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery in Fall 2021. The project was supported by a Mozilla Research Grant 2018H2.

Collaborators:

Miki Bin, Ruby Peven, Justin Petelka, Abhyudaya Gupta, Aman Mohammed, Tom Liu, Trevor White, Min Jung Koo

Desktop Odometer (2019-20)

By Jeremy Viny

A device that shows users the distance they travel when browsing the web, by tracking the total miles between their current location and the server from where they are requesting information. This new ability to 'see' how far information has to physically travel gives users an opportunity to grapple with and reflect on the physicality of the Internet's infrastructure, which otherwise may remain opaque.

Desktop Odometer was published at ACM DIS 2021.

Fractal Antennae (2017-18)

By Afroditi Psarra

The miniaturization of electronic devices has led to the development of what is known as fractal antennas

- miniaturized antennas that use an iterative function system to create a fractal element at a reduced size. The intention behind this art and science research project is to experiment with different conductive materials and techniques, from laser cutting to embroidery to create fractal antennas that can be later used as a hacking mechanism to sniff into hidden electromagnetic fields.

It was exhibited in 2017 at the Tribe Against Machine exhibition at the Red Room in TAF Taipei, Taiwan, and in 2018 at the exhibition Attempts, Failures, Trials & Errors at Salon de Proiecte, Bucharest & Kibla Multimedia Centre, Maribor,

Slovenia, and the eTextile Spring Break at The Wassaic Project in NY. It also led to a series of workshops on Wearable Fractal Antennas that took place around the US, Mexico, Taiwan, and Slovenia.

Embodied RF Ecologies (2019)

By Afroditi Psarra

Following the quest to embody the invisible transmissions that surround us, this wearable explores the use of an IC mixer circuit to down convert the emissions from the NOAA weather satellite and make them audible. By continuing the research into textile antennas and fractal geometry as a means to detect radio-frequency (RF) transmissions, this project aims

to speculate about the body as an agent of power in a post-capitalist world, and to re-interpret transmission technologies through handmade crafting techniques.

This project was exhibited in 2019 at the Art & Math show at Granoff Center in Providence, RI, at the eTextile Spring Break at The Wassaic Project in NY, and at the Signal To Noise exhibition at Piksel Studio 207 in Bergen, Norway. In 2020 it was published as a swatch in "HFF 2020" edited by Shih Wei-Chieh, and in 2021 it was exhibited at the National Taiwanese Craft Research and Development Institute (NTCRI), Taipei, Taiwan.

Transmission Ecologies (2020-2023)

By Afroditi Psarra

The ongoing Transmission Ecologies series at Movement Radio Athens by Onassis Stegi, explores the turbulent world of radio signals which propagate around us. Every month a guest sound artist broadcasts their radio experiments using EMFs, interference patterns from devices, HAM, RF field recordings, satellite signals, space astronomy research, etc, to formulate their interpretations, compositions, and translations of the invisible and unheard layer of telecommunication technologies.

Guest artists include: Kristen Roos, Sasha Engelmann, Victor Mazon Gardoqui, Adriana Knauf, Kate Donovan, Martin Howse, Constanza Pina, Shortwave Collective, Jeff Kolar, and many more...

Listening Space (2019-22)

By Afroditi Psarra and Audrey Briot

Listening Space is an ongoing artistic research project that uses NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) weather satellite data as a raw material for poetic exploration and citizen science. Using wearable hand-crafted antennas and software-defined radio, satellite signals are intercepted, decoded and then knitted into textiles. The ecologies of transmission that comprise the Radio Spectrum, are the ultimate expression of the so-called Anthropocene, as they permit the operation of human life as we know it (telecommunications, environmental monitoring, radio astronomy, FM/AM radio etc) and shape our understanding of the planet. By investigating the energies that have been harvested by humanity to knit this complex layer, the project aims to create poetic connotations between textiles-as a means of data detection, collection and archiving, and bodies as agents of power to re-interpret current technologies through handmade crafting techniques. Listening Space attempts to enhance the human capability to sense and to embody the dialogues intercepted between earth and its satellites.

The project was initiated during the eTextile Spring Break 2019 residency at Wassaic in upstate NY, and it won the Bergstrom Art and Science Award on the same year.

It was exhibited in 2019 at the ISWC19 Design Exhibition in London, in 2020 it was presented at OurNetworks and ISEA2020 through online performances, in 2021 at the ArtSpaceship V-Art Space Art virtual exhibition, CADAF (Crypto and Digital Art Fair), at the Lux Aeterna exhibition at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery in Seattle, at the MAKE ME A SIGNAL - Prelude to a RADIOTOPIA streaming event at STWST48x7 in association with Ars Electronica, and in 2022 at the Weather Engines show at the National Observatory of Athens and the Onassis Cultural Center in Greece. In fall 2023 it will form part of the exhibition Maquinas del Tiempo in Laboral, Gijon, Spain.

Data Epics (2019-22)

By Audrey Desjardins

In the Data Epics, fiction writers use data from home Internet of Things devices to create short stories for their home dwellers to read. The project investigates how home dwellers might encounter and make sense of their home IoT data and these short stories capitalize on the ways people understand complex situations and concepts through narrative structures.

This project was published at ACM CHI 2021 and ACM DIS 2023. The project was shortlisted on the IxDA 2023 Interaction Awards and Runner Up in the Speculative Design category of Core77 2023 Design Awards. The project was supported by NSF Grant 1947696.

Collaborators:

Heidi Biggs, Gabrielle Benabdallah, Stephanie Tang Waldrop, Elva Chen, Auden Finch, Jackson Jiang, Maya Kaneko, Sai Kukkadapu, Hannah Liao, Riley Mehl, Aivy Phan, Yuna Shin, Chandler Simon, Janey Yee.

ListeningCups (2018-19)

By Audrey Desjardins and Timea Tihanyi

A set of 3D printed porcelain cups embedded with datasets of everyday ambient sounds. During a one? week pilot project, a ceramic artist and an interaction design researcher collaborated to explore meaning making around everyday data (sound in our case).

Listening Cups was published at ACM DIS 2019 and exhibited at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery in Fall 2021.

Soft Data and Common Wares Afroditi Psarra and Audrey Desjardins

Zine #2

Seattle 2023

*Invisible Data Infrastructure*

How do our projects materialize or speculate about data infrastructures?

And what can we learn from this?

data centers undersea cables radio information click farms

It's fascinating to know that we live with all of these waves, data, sensors and data collecting devices. It remains invisible to our everyday life.

Data centers have a huge impact on climate change with the amount of energy that they're consuming. The other kind of invisible infrastructure is the

human infrastructure: that labor behind a lot of AI.

Our collaborative project Voices and Voids was trying to reveal this labor, the workers who are behind those systems.

To collect data from them, reclaim it and transcribe it in order to create experiences for others.

[image description: Screenshot of the vignette 'From your device' hypertext, taken from the website of the Voices and Voids project by Audrey Desjardins, Afroditi Psarra, and Bonnie Whiting]

We employed Mechanical Turk workers to do work for us and having their contribution was essential to the project.

We asked them to sell us their archive of voice assistant data. That was the starting point of many ways of transcoding and reworking all of this data to create different

experiences.

We think very often about these big monolithic structures for the data center.

But now, all of a sudden, the physical infrastructure where the labor is happening is completely distributed.

It's in a very private space. The home.

this infra structure has tentacles into private spaces

one worker shared with us that they basically had to say vowels again and again and again to train the voice assistant. What does AAA sounds like?

The archives were revealing moments of boredom. But also sexual desire moments, anger, and very emotional moments, personal moments.

Set An Alarm was very interesting because it reveals the biases behind systems like Alexa or Google Assistant. The history of the relationship of master and slave is present, obligating someone else to act. In Set An Alarm, by reversing these roles, we perform what the voices ask.

[image description: Video still of the vignette 'Set An Alarm' web performance, taken from the website of the Voices and Voids project by Audrey Desjardins, Afroditi Psarra, and Bonnie Whiting]

The social structures that are in the private space of home are rarely called infrastructures, but they are domestic patterns of gendered roles.

What would happen if we imagined domestic IoT devices and data not for that home, nor for that nuclear family, nor for that detached house.

There was an opening that happened when we started to go really, really narrow.

[image description: Booklets with notes from the Alternative Avenues for Home IoT project by Audrey Desjardins]

Data is not neutral.

It's always interpreted.

The data is not necessarily soft. It is very specific numbers of women who have been sexually harassed around that area with specific dates.

But the output of the data was quite soft as an interface. As a physicalization it was a quilt which was very contradictory to what the data really was.

With the intimate nature of the interface, it becomes a very, very, very intense experience.

[image description: Heat Quilt crochet prototype by Zoe Kaputa]

How does soft data allow ways to encounter data at the human level?

With Soft Fading you are trying to capture sunlight. You can choose to leave it in one spot for two months or you can choose to move it.

Purposefully choosing how, and where data collection is going to happen is really important in that project.

There isn't a lot of infrastructure. It asks: can we collect data without infrastructure? Without connecting to Wi-Fi? Without connecting to internet?

There are many options with the data traces:

Keep it as a memento.

Try to use it. Build a scarf or quilt out of it at all.

[image description: Soft Fading textile prototype by Audrey Desjardins]

You're gonna try to display it and then it'll slowly all fade away.

Projects featured + Credits

Voices and Voids (2021-22)

By Afroditi Psarra, Audrey Desjardins and Bonnie Whiting

We see an opportunity to reclaim, examine, and ultimately transcode this data through an interdisciplinary performance project, by developing embodied experiments using a combination of design, data-driven art, cyber crafts, found-object and traditional percussion instruments, spoken word, and movement. Initially conceived as a live performance and installation event, our changed environment during the COVID-19 pandemic inspired us to pivot to the medium of net art.

Voices and Voids was presented at ISEA 2021 and was published at ACM C&C 2021.

The project was supported by the College of Arts and Sciences - University of Washington through a Faculty Fellows in the Arts.

Artists in residence:

Danny Clay, Laura Devendorf, Kate Sicchio, Jordan Wirfs Brock, Yiheng Yvonne Wu

Collaborators:

Esteban Yosef Agosin, Gabrielle Benabdallah, Darcy Copeland, Jonathan Rodriguez, James Wenlock, Cameron Fraser, Amanda Yeh

Alternative Avenues for Home IoT (2019)

By Audrey Desjardins

This is a co-speculative research-through-design study that investigates alternative visions of the Internet of Things for the home (IoT). We worked with 16 people living in non-stereotypical homes to develop situated and personal concepts attuned to their home. As a prompt for co-speculation and discussion, we created handmade booklets where we took turns overlaying sketched design concepts on top of photos taken with participants in their homes.

Alternative Avenues was published at ACM CHI 2019 and ACM DIS 2019.

Collaborators:

Jeremy Viny, Cayla Key, Nouela Johnston, Heidi Biggs, Kelsey Aschenbeck, loan Butiu.

Heat Quilt (2021)

By Zoe Kaputa

This project is a crochet quilt representing a data heat map, which is a data visualization technique that separates data in subsections using two variables then displays them in a grid. Rather than displaying data by color or shade, Heat Quilt uses heat to represent quantities of data. The project is aimed to display data related to sexual violence in the city of Seattle along with examining our current state of data visualization and representation to find a more embodied and appreciative form of interacting with data.

Soft Fading (2019-21)

By Audrey Desjardins

Soft Fading is an analog device that slowly collects sunlight data on a cylinder of revolving turmeric dyed fabric. We created Soft Fading to offer a subtle and diffuse way of noticing data, or of being with data. We argue that, in everyday life, data do not need to be constantly engaged with. In fact, many people just notice, perhaps from the corner of their eye, elements of data enmeshed within their daily life.

This project was published at ACM CHI 2023 and exhibited at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery in Fall 2021. The project was supported by a Mozilla Research Grant 2018H2.

Collaborators:

Jena McWhirter, Eve Peng, Chandler Simon, Jeremy Viny

Soft Data and Common Wares Afroditi Psarra and Audrey Desjardins

Zine #3

Seattle 2023

Soft Data and Common Wares is supported by a Collaborative Studio Grant from the Simpson Center for the Humanities and a Kreilsheimer and Jones Large Grant at the University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

# SOLASTALGIC ENERGYSCAPES: Industrial Ghosts of the Ohio River Valley

Kat Finneran

Front cover: Photo of a power plant on abstract background art

Image 1: Ohio River Valley Coal community Transitions. Case Study Map  In this map of West Virginia, Northern Appalachia regions are marked in green. These include: (right) Pennsylvania, (top-right) Ohio, Carrol, (top-middle) Tuscarawas, (top-left) Holmes; (middle-left) Conshocton; (middle-right) Harrison, Jefferson; (bottom-left) Muskingum; (bottom-middle) Guernsey; (bottom-right) Belmont.

North-Central Appalachia regions are marked in light purple. These include (right-middle) Ohio; Marshall; (bottom-right) Monroe; (bottom-center) Noble. State boundary runs from Monroe (bottom) to Ohio (top). This is also the course of the Ohio river.

Location of the Central Ohio Coal Company lis marked by an orange star in Guernsey. B&N Coal Inc is marked by a red star in Noble. AEP Conesville Power plant is marked by a pink star in Coshocton. RE Burger Power plant is marked by a yellow star in Belmont.

The regions of Coshocton, Noble, and Belmont are bordered in red to represent Case Study Community County Outline. Marshall and is demarcated by a dotted line border to represent Adjacent Impacted State boundary.

Image 2: Tabular representation of the case study. Column 1 (left) Case Study County: Noble; Belmont Marshall; Coshocton. Column 2 County Foci: Cladwell; Shadyside Moundsville; Conesville Coshocton. Column 3 Coal Facility: Central Ohio Coal Company, B&N Coal Inc; RE Burger Power Plant; AEP Conesville Power Plant. Column 4 Operation Timeline: 1946-2001, 1962-present; 1944-2001; 1957-2020.

Cover Art

Text and collage by Kat Finneran

Photo of power plant by Will Sharp

Background print art by Dr. Becky Mansfield

Page 2

*(Text on a blurred background image of a power plant)*

*Solastalgia*

A means to better understand the existential psychological impact of  the increasing occurrence of environmental change. Solastalgia  mediates the relationship between ecosystem health, human health  and control, resulting in a constriction of possibilities and quiescence  to the logic of capitalism. It is the lived experience of a physical  desolation of place, or simply, that *feeling of homesickness one  gets when they are still at home*.1

\*\*\*

When Glenn Albrecht coined the term Solastalgia he argued that we need  new words for a new world. As old languages meet the collapse of our  climate, we are so often unable to find the right ones to describe what lies  around us and within us.1 Time and place become strangers as history  repeats and folds in on itself in real time, resulting in a normalization of crisis  that has dulled the senses in response to acute stressors like natural  disasters. Collapse, it seems, is neither behind us nor ahead of us. Rather it  is always-already here, persistently haunting us with both real and  alternative histories. Yet, Western culture runs on forgetting. We are locked  out of our memories by an epistemology of energy that has ensnared our  sense of self within the idealization of work and production efficiency. There  is no time to witness, to reflect or to grieve our losses for there is still so  much work to do and we are always-already behind.

Through this restless hyper-separation, environmental externalization and  illusions of safety and boundaries, we have long been able to keep our  ghosts and the grief they channel buried deep. However, what happens  when we run out of room in the soil to bury the bodies, or when soil erosion,  advanced by climate change, begins releasing ghosts, old and new? How  much longer will the gospel of labor be able to prevent us from noticing the  evidence of accumulated taking, the consequences of it? There are many  places on this Earth that have long been constructed as sites of acceptance  for a steady stream of industries of last resort. Places where the  contradictions of transnational extractive capitalism have been pushed to a  breaking point. Places brimming with industrial ghosts. Places like the Ohio  River Valley.

Page 3

Stretching from western Pennsylvania to southern Illinois, the political  ecology of the Ohio River is about as well known for its richness of  cultural and natural resources as it is for the extraction and destruction of  them. An old marriage between the Rust Belt and Appalachia, it is a  landscape that has long been defined by intensification. A spectrum of  industries from chemical, electric power, coke, steel iron and more have  flocked to the river basin to take advantage of the commercial  opportunities available through proximity to such a colossal, combined  source of energy and transportation. Today, the valley still acts as this  bridge between mineral superpowers, even though the players and game  continue to change. The discovery of the Marcellus and Utica shale  formations has introduced unprecedented levels of hydraulic fracturing.  This has caused a boom in natural gas and petrochemical production  which has effectively hammered the final nail in the coffin of coal  production in the region.

While this may be one of the last shifts away from coal, it is certainly not  the first. The industry has been experiencing a slow and steady death in  the region for decades. Mines have closed from exhaustion, jobs have  been lost to automation and longwall mining, and contracts have moved  out west where coal is not nearly as sulfuric. More recently, a wave of  closures have come in the form of the retirement of coal fired power  plants and subsequently the transportation sector that connected them to  the mines. These plants are some of the last remaining vestiges of the  coal industry and their closures will prove fatal to a way of life that has  been, for better or worse, a core ingredient in the fossil fueled glue that  held countless communities together for over two centuries.

In the valley, children are leaving and not coming back, and the  population is some of the oldest in the country. Schools, hospitals, and a  whole web of social service safety nets are shutting down.  Simultaneously, multiple crises of care continue to unfold in the form of  declining youth mental health as well as a massive wave of deaths of  despair and industry related disablement. Moreover, with an older  population that is increasingly facing rates of respiratory illness that are  much higher than the national average, the COVID-19 pandemic has  been particularly devastating. A time bomb of chemical exposure also  haunts the human and non-human bodies of the entire regional  watershed. The river is full of DuPont PFOAs, the streams are laden with  acid mine runoff, the liners on coal ash ponds are unstable, and the  topsoil is littered with mercury, lead and more from coal plant emissions.  The fracking boom continues to inch towards a major disruption of Ohio’s  water resources and the petrochemical and plastics industry is actively  regenerating, yet again, the false promise of jobs and economic  development.

Page 4

There is a sense of terminality in the region that persists. One that is being  fought by economic developers with deep-rooted grand delusions of  liberatory industries coming in to rescue the economy at the expense of  the ecosystem. It is also being fought by the environmental left with a  different type of toxicity via an at times cruel sense of optimism that seeks  to save, heal, cure and protect the valley that we love, but at any cost.6 Both sets of rhetoric, however conflicting at the outset, often just end up  reinforcing neo-extractive development strategies. At one end you have  developers missing the forest for the trees and at the other you have  environmentalists missing the trees for the forest. At all ends of the  conversation though there is a refusal to see death, to actually sit with it,  and a belief that anything short of rescue is a fundamental failure. With that then, how can we really deal with those important questions around  vulnerability, risk and fragility when terminality tends to obfuscate impulses  to act, to cure, to save?6

Death does not always imply an end to life, a knowledge that I believe  boom and bust communities have embedded in their bones. The mines  have been closing for centuries, the schools have been closing for  decades, and the hearths are filled with family photos that are missing  grandfathers, uncles and fathers lost to coal in one way or another. Today  it is the power plants that are retiring, tomorrow it is the gas wells going  dry, but still the souls of these communities linger like ghosts with  unfinished business in the uncanny, strip-mined foothills of the Ohio River  Valley. Communities whose relationship to collective agency has always already been predicated precisely on both this shared sense of terminality  and the simultaneous refusal to see it as a condition of futurelessness.6 This too is a quality of the culture of coal. It’s not just a job it’s a way of  limbo between nostalgia and anticipation that still manages to function as  a both a solastalgic energyscape and a place of possibility and temporary  reprieve amidst collapse.

*“Poems of lamentation allow the melancholic loss  that never truly disappears to be given voice. Like a  slow solemn musical refrain played again and again*

*that as we work for change our struggle is also a  struggle of memory against forgetting.”*

bell hooks, *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place 5*

Page 5

My hope for this zine, was to curate a first-hand reflection of the liminal  and ghostly character of the ongoing transition away from coal that I had  witnessed throughout my time interviewing community members in the valley starting at the height of the pandemic in 2020. What you’ll find in the  following pages of this work consists largely of quotes derived from those  conversations. Interviews were conducted in Noble County over the 2001  closure of Central Ohio Coal (a surface mining operation), in Belmont  County over the 2008 closure of the R.E. Burger Power Plant, in  Coshocton County amidst the ongoing closure of the AEP Conesville  Power Plant and then finally in the Little Cities of Black Diamonds, a pre electrification coal micro-region in southern Perry County that transitioned  away from coal much earlier than the rest of Appalachian Ohio. Many of  the folks talked to were miners and plant workers. Some are social  workers and county political leaders. There are administrators to schools  that have now been closed and there are daughters of coal miners that  have since passed. There are economic developers, historians, gossips,  folklorists, and ‘movers and shakers.’ Nevertheless, while the people  attached to these quotes possessed a diversity of identities and opinions  on coal and the transition away from it, there was always a common thread  of grief and unknowability that was woven throughout every conversation.

*“The willful crip rejoinder to 'it gets better’*

*is 'it's always something.”*

*Lisa Johnson 7*

This unknowability was something that I slowly, but surely embraced in how I found myself relating to these spaces. Going into the project I had to manage my expectations and take into consideration the critiques of how Appalachia is often talked about. One of the main cautions I received from the left was to avoid focusing on the ‘deindustrialized decay’ of it all. A reaction that I think in large part is understandable considering the

negative impact of JD Vance’s Hillbilly Elegy.8

Yet, as the project progressed, I increasingly found myself sitting with this growing pile of stories that were inherently ones of survival amidst loss, abandonment, and grief. I started off being so worried about upsetting folks by hyper- focusing on the death of coal that I wound up frustrating them by tip toeing around it. So, I stopped. I came to understand that decay and growth are not mutually exclusive temporalities but, are instead co-constructive.

Yes, it is important to include encouraging stories about communities that have struggled with this industry so as not drown them in despair. No, I do not mean to encourage a fatalistic mindset to the onslaught of corporate harm that seems to never sleep in the valley. However, as simple as it sounds, it is also important to just let people be sad sometimes.

Page 6

The region has earned a bit of nuance here. It should be given the space without shame to grieve an industry that, however harmful, also catalyzed the in-migration of largely disadvantaged folks from all over the world to find common cause along this river. There is something particularly painful here for these communities in knowing that the loss of their livelihoods and

subsequent kinship networks are being celebrated as collateral to an environmental win. In many ways, it adds a whole new dimension to the reality of being a so-called sacrifice zone.

Communities are brought together not just via a mission for health (be that environmental or economic) but also through a respect for death. Regional analysis of places that are on decline have long been criticized as a type of ‘corpse watching. A morbid display of community loss that desensitizes the reader to extractive violence and perpetuates stereotypes in ways that translate to policies that only lead to further investment in fossil capital. However, Sarah Ensor in her essay Terminal Regions: Queer Ecocriticism at the End offers a different and less reductive perspective:

“Corpse watching can be the occasion for intimacy, can bring people together into paradigms of relation where saving is not on the table and yet meaningful futures and ethical patterns of investment are constantly being built. Regionalism urges us to acknowledge that saving is not the only way to make things better, or to make life -however long it lasts - livable, viable and meaningful. A non-salvific model of care, for a set of practices that manages to understand stewardship outside the rhetoric of saving, and to cultivate forms of communal and planetary investment that exist outside of -and persist beyond- the temporality of crisis in which the environmental movement so deeply invests.”

So, I offer this zine up, as a form of gentle acknowledgment that coal is dead and dying in the Ohio River Valley. That I see the violence that the booms and busts of extractive capitalism have wrought on my beloved state and its inhabitants. I hold, in traditional open casket form, both a call to witness and finally accept that coal was never going to be king forever as well as a caution to not be too hasty to crown another. To accept this ending for what it is, rather than continue to exist in fear of loss or in opposition to transition.This is an invitation to stop for just a moment and to watch this corpse be lowered back into the earth from whence it came.

(A thick maroon line demarcates the next section)

For the sake of privacy (& research restrictions) interviewees are mostly left anonymous. See below for guidelines on how to locate quotes.

Quote Code: (B Int. 7) = ’Belmont Interviewee 7’

(Downward Arrow from B) County Interviewee is from

(Downward Arrow from 7) This is the 7th person interviewed in that county

Interviews with regional experts were given the designation MISC and then a corresponding number.

Interviews from the Little Cities of Black Diamonds are listed by name.

  Page 7

(Blurred background image of mining area)

“Coal built this town …

“Many individuals had opportunities to go to work for a relative who could get  them into an aspect of the coal mine. Trucking, mining, hauling, recovery, you  know, reclamation. There was just so many different parts to that world that if

you could just get your foot in the door, you were good for 40 years, and I  don't think anybody ever gave a second thought. It was a great way to make a  living, raise your family.” (N Int. 1)

“Coal was going to be king forever, and there was no need for an exit strategy.  There was no need for a backup plan because there was no end for coal, and  you know, let's be honest, the cities were using electricity like it was going out

of style. So, there was no lack of consumerism, they just kept turning lights on.  As this started to go through not just Ohio, but Kentucky, West Virginia,  Virginia, and Tennessee. Community after community after community was left  with their, you know, we spent 40-50 years mining. 60 years mining. That's all  our families have ever done.” (N Int. 1)

“I mean very close to

Jesus/Coal Company.

Coal Company/Jesus.”

(N Int. 1)

“History as deep as the mines and as vast as the nations!”

“I'll repeat the story till the day I die. We all knew a month in advance how  close the Big Muskie Bucket was getting to operating across the county  line. Everybody knew that other counties and other school districts were  getting mining taxes for their schools. We were just waiting for the day  that the mining operation cross the county line and came into the Noble  local - the Shenandoah school district.” (N Int. 1)

“Coal wasn’t just a job; it was a way of life.” (B int. 1)

The People, Places and Events, that Built a Nation

“You kind of find that there was more of a sense of purpose, or a medial  sense of purpose, because it wasn't exactly a high IQ job. I'm not tumbling  numbers in the stock market. I’m not doing an open-heart chest surgery.  There's a very medial quality to hauling coal - doesn't take a lot of brains just  takes, you know, a lot of grind, a lot of effort. But you missed that because  you felt like you're contributing to kind of a bigger picture. You’re not just  keeping the lights on, the heat. You're keeping everything on for not just your  community, but for Columbus and whoever else they're distributing to, so you  know it's a different feeling man.” (C Int. 12)

Coal Heritage Resource Rich

Page 8

(Background image of a power plants emitting smoke)

… coal broke this town.”

“We’ve not only allowed them to control our narrative, corporate  ventriloquism is probably the best definition because I can remember  being in college in the 90’s and I had a marketing class. In a book I  remember reading about steps that you take, and I wasn’t a marketing  major, but I took the class. It was like ‘you need to go in and sponsor  things like ballfields and this community type of stuff because when  something bad happens you can be like yeah, I know we polluted the  creek, but they sponsored Johnny’s uniforms.’ Its almost like they get  permission to abuse us because they’ve thrown pennies at us.” (M Int. 5)

“Control what they learn, and you control what they think. It's an intentionally bad education, it's an intentionally bad environment.” (B Int 7)

Do coal companies weaponize hiring and layoffs to sway elections?

“I think its kind of like they starve us and blame us for dying.” (M Int. 5)

“The coal industry or the gas industry, whatever it is, there’s always this idea of boom and bust. If I am looking at it from a community, 30,000 feet kind of perspective, it always puts our community in a state of fight or flight. Ya know, that constant feeling of ‘if you have it, you have to keep it.’ You have to take whatever they give you and be happy for what you get.” (M Int. 5) “We’re always kind of in starvation mode. So that’s what it feels like in West Virginia. It feels like here, you either starve or, its feast or famine.” (M Int. 5)

“We’ve not only allowed them to control our narrative, corporate ventriloquism is probably the best definition because I can remember being in college in the 90’s and I had a marketing class. In a book I remember reading about steps that you take, and I wasn’t a marketing major, but I took the class. It was like ‘you need to go in and sponsor things like ballfields and this community type of stuff because when something bad happens you can be like yeah, I know we polluted the creek, but they sponsored Johnny’s uniforms.’ Its almost like they get permission to abuse us because they’ve thrown pennies at us.” (M Int. 5)

“It’s the most polluting resource we have and there’s a premium 17 in getting rid of it.” (MISC Int. 5)

Page 9

(Text on a background image of an lung X-ray scan)

For several decades, the Ohio River was polluted with hundreds of thousands of pounds of PFOAs by the DuPont chemical company from an outflow pipe at its Parkersburg, West Virginia, facility. The Ohio River has consistently led the nation in toxic pollutants.

“The “cause disability, then criticize disability” angle hits a (still pinched) nerve with me because it was exactly the excuse a couple of opportunistic doctors used to taunt and abuse me. I’d never seen them before, but they were convinced I was a homeless woman they knew who had a severe disability and didn’t deserve help. Next time I nearly die, I’ll be sure to do my hair, put on my nicer nightgown, brush my dentures, and fall on a clean surface, not the driveway (the gravel embedded in my knees was ever so funny to them.) It reminds me of the high point of immigration, when people had dragged themselves off the overcrowded, no washing facilities, bucket toilet that can’t be emptied holds of ships only to be mocked for being dirty and smelly. Har de har har, do whatever you want with them! In the words of D.R. Baer, “they don’t suffer, they don’t even speak English.” (B Int. 7)

   Page 10

(Text on a background image of an lung X-ray scan)

“We're given credit as these people that are so pro-energy and pro-oil and pro coal.

Well, what was our other choice!? We don't have one!

We don't have a baseball team to stimulate our economy. We're not pro-oil and gas for any other reason, other than that's all we've gotto help us.

And I don't feel like that handicap has ever really taken into consideration of that being our only option to stimulate our economy.

We don't have the population for 75% of other options that would help stimulate our economy. So, we use what we got, and we go to work, and we dig what we got.”

(N Int. 7)

The opioid epidemic has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans over the past two decades.

Purdue Pharma targeted Appalachia because that region had higher-than-average workplace injuries due to coal mining, logging, and farming.

More than 76,000 miners have died of black lung since 1968

   Page 11

(Text on a background image of a house)

“Where's all the particulate stuff from that gonna go?

“Oh, it blows away in the wind!” There's no such place as away. You're relocating the problem.

Come on.” (B Int. 7)

(transparent box on the left)

“It’s never been stable. You kind of had to take it when you could. You had to work as much overtime because you might be laid off the next year. So, it was always this constant instability and when you build a life like that as a human that’s not healthy. To constantly feel like ok this might be our last run.” (M Int. 5)

(transparent box at the bottom)

“There’s a lot of downsides to having a coal burning plant. I guarantee that if you live in Conesville, and you have the soot and the black and everything in your attic, and who knows what breathing all that in over the years. I don’t know. I’m not a medical... I’m not gonna go down a path that I don’t know. But I’m sure there’s a lot of people that have negative sides to having coal trucks run up and down their road and their streets delivering coal and tearing up their streets. There’s a lot of downsides to having a power plant. You probably don’t wanna build your house under three smokestacks that big. But at the end of the day, it was the life and blood of the community, or a big piece of it.” (C Int 3)

    Page 12

(Text on background image of houses with coal power plants emitting smoke in the background)

“I don’t know if you’ve ever been to Steubenville or not, but there’s a coke plant across the river in Follansbee, West Virginia. If you go on vacation or you come back from somewhere, you land in Pittsburgh International, and you’re driving home, doesn’t matter if it’s in the winter, summer, spring; you start coming through Steubenville, you’ll smell that coke burning. For the longest time, I always thought that was the most miserable stench ever. But the old timers would say, “There will come a time when you’ll come to appreciate that smell.” Because it meant jobs. It meant industry. It meant a vibrant community. It’s not as much in operations as what it was. Though there’s still that odor at times. (B Int 5).”

(text on grey background on the right)

when industries leave a poor town, increases in arrests are common in order to subsidize the prevention of government insolvency

(text on green background at the bottom)

“There was just a moment last year where I was sitting out here and I was thinking that the media just wants to play it as, you know, it's gone, it's lost, it's a dying art, whatever, it's fine, but they don't really think of a human aspect of it, from a personal level, and that's a shame.”

Page 13 and 14

(Inverted image of a polluted coal power plants spread across both pages)

A just transition away from fossil fuels needs to be green, but it must also be red

“So, everybody lined up on the morning.

I still kick myself because I can't stand for a long time and wait for something to happen, but the news was covering it. Well, unfortunately for us they didn't have any cameras actually on the smokestack. They were just talking to everybody. Good, ole WTRF. Dag Nabbit, Brenda! Get some coverage of live events! But I realized they weren't gonna cut away in time. So, I bolted out to the front porch because I knew they were starting. 10, 9, 8, even this fat old rheumatic body can make it to the front porch in 10 seconds and I felt it, I felt the shock wave, the primary. It was actually far enough. It's about 2.5 miles, 3 miles from home. So, you could actually feel that slight break between the primary and secondary waves and the distant boom coming through. I thought they’ll be sad about that, already been gone. Yeah. “It blows away in the wind” \*laughs\* Now it did!.” (B Int 7)

“It's gonna be weird when the stacks and everything come down because really you could see there's so many different points around here and you could be up to 30 or 40 miles away and at certain points when you see those stacks, you know where home is. Even my three year old son, he sees those stacks, he's like, “oh, that's home!” That kind of hits close a little bit because, you just, it is home, and I think that’s what we all look forward to in our daily lives ...is getting home."(C Int 11)

“Now in the last few months because of where they’re tearing down, like I said, they got some flood lights out there which kind of adds a little bit to it, but there for a while it was dark ... as pitch dark as you could get and I mean, it was a strange feeling of like this giant ... you know this giant is sitting there, but it's so quiet. It's ... its God, it is so weird. It's just the weirdest thing, cuz you're so used to hearing it running, operating the pile drivers out there, moving the coal around. There's none of that now. I mean, it's so quiet, it’s almost a scary feeling, in a way.” (C Int 11)

Page 15

(Text on a background art made of images of coal fields, power plants and tomb stones)

Paradise Lost

“We the township nudged folks in different positions that once that plant was done it needs to come down. Whether you have kids going in there or whatever, a lot of bad things can happen. It’s so funny, you use the analogy like a funeral, because that’s basically what it was.” (B Int 5)

You lose your family to this industry, so you end up finding family in the other workers, but in the end,

you lose them too.

“Coal isn’t the valley’s greatest export, our children are.” (B Int. 1) .

“Here lies the debris of capitalist waste, the unspectacular afterlives of discarded things” 10

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“The brotherhood was a big part of it, you know I think that's been the hardest thing for me to transition from over the last year and a half has been being by myself being so quiet. Sure, I talk to people because we're selling insurance, but you’re talking to them about business. It's not the come in at first thing in the morning, having a cup of coffee and bullshitting over the radio, you know, you’re talking about what your kids did last night or what your plans are for the weekend. So, you lose out on all that fun stuff, what comes to the conversation that trying to keep up with these people I work with you know forever its just doesn't happen. It’s become a very, very lonely Transition.” (C Int 12)

the transition away from coal and into isolation

“Covid made it more difficult because you never got to say goodbye to anybody.” (C Int.13)

“Survival. It’s almost survival. It’s so hard to put things into perspective right now because you also have COVID-19 on top of everything. Right? Our plant closed in 2020. Was it in the spring? Yeah, at the same time, we had a pandemic. So, it’s hard for me to even separate what we’re going through right now because both things are huge. I don’t know that we’ve had a chance to handle IT yet because we’re handling a health crisis on top of it. That’s maybe overshadowing some of the effects of it at this point.” (C Int 3)

“I related it to a slow goodbye, it was just sad, it was very, very sad. We didn't get to do a celebration; we didn't get to include the community because we definitely weren't planning on having the community involved in it because we've got a lot of retirees.” (C Int. 17)

“The plant closure was horrible, no question of it, but this Covid in our area... it's just, it's hard right now. As I speak to you, I have a friend in Riverside who's fighting for his life that I worked at the power plant with for 30 some years. I took him out when he retired. I took him to his car that day and had a little cry myself, watching him leave. Today, it is Covid that's about to take his life and Covid is probably today more battle for us than anything I know.” (C Int. 1)

Background art: Running Mountains 2022, Klaire Smith

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(Text on a background image of an coal field with heavy machinery)

The ‘Just Enough’ Transition

“As far as a transition period. What are we going to transform ourselves into? Never a thought, and that goes back to that original question, the coal culture of a whole entire region. Never ever believed coal wouldn't be king.” (N Int 1)

“I think that they, one thing they think is that the people aren't as intelligent as a lot of people are so they can push policies down that don't amount to anything and they're not really helping them. I think that’s just the way it is.” (N Int. 6)

“Its hard to say that to people in some towns, I’m sorry but you don’t even come up to snuff for salvation. It’s like not having enough of the vaccine to go around and you say to people who are probably so old and close to death anyway “I’m sorry, but we gotta use this on people who have a future.” (MISC Int. 5)

“I’m just trying to figure out how we’re going to get jobs here, you know what I mean. Everyone just leaves! It’s like all the smart people leave, and I don’t know how to fix it with tourism.” (N Int. 8)

There’s a lot of money in poverty if you aren’t poor.

Image: A collage made of excerpts from job advertisements in Ohio

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(Text on a background image of coal field)

“We're not going to have complete control over what happens when hundreds of people start showing up in a town of 500 or 600 people, you lose control really quick but if we can keep our sense of who we are and tell our story and keep our authenticity and be about the Wayne Forest and about the diverse ecology around us and about the history of the community. If we can keep those things elevated to the point that that's who we are, we'll be a lot better off in 15 years.” - John Winnenberg (Sunday Creek Associates)

“Even when you think about the Green New Deal and people use the phrase ‘Just Transition’, frankly it just functions more as a concept or even a sentiment than it does as a plan that a county commissioner can implement or a community can adopt. How do we take a sentiment and bring it down to a level that is actionable?” (MISC Int. 5)

“We've seen an increase in rent, since fracking itself started and what used to rent for $400 to $500 could be anywhere from $1200 or $2100 a month.” (B Int. 4)

“The problem is when you’re in some of these small towns and the mine or the power plant is the primary employer, the employees in that plant may only represent maybe 10% or 20% of all the people in town. So just solving the problem for them, even if you do does not necessarily solve the problem for the town. In fact, it almost certainly does not. It’s whole communities that are at stake here and that are affected by these closures. So, I work pretty hard to try to keep the, not that I don’t want them to focus on the workers or on a particular piece of property, but I don’t want them to focus ONLY on that.” (MISC Int. 5)

Everybody wants to be a hillbilly, but

nobody wants to drink the water

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On the 1944 Powhattan Mine Disaster, 66 miners lost:

“They got talking specifically about 1944 and the heartbreaking deal that  they knew those guys were sitting there and they knew, they realized it was  an accident. Somebody closed the door, the hard and fast rule in coal  mining is that you shut off the doors. Well, somebody had managed to shift  the ventilation pattern to keep smoke away from where the guys were. The  details on the fire are in the books, so I'm not gonna repeat all those, but  they realized when the fire kicked back, and they tried to get around  through B north and realized they couldn't - they knew they were dying.  What does a man do when he's sitting in the dark, his wife and kids at  home, and somebody's got a notebook and some pencils and everybody's  carrying some stuff with them to make notes related to the job, whatever,  what do they do?

Well, they write goodbye letters. It wasn't just “goodbye, honey. I love you” though. That was the striking part of it. And some of 'em were kind of funny because it's - George Emery's wife and Ralph McClosky’s wife, can't think of George's wife's name and they used to wait on her at the bank all the time. But Sophie McCloskey I remember cause she was so sweet. She made an impression on everybody, Sophie and Mrs. Emory insisted that the paper print their husband's last letters just to show us - that this is what these men are made of. “Okay, honey. It's whatever time I don't think I'm gonna get outta here. First of all, I love you and the kids.” the routine first paragraph.

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(Text on a background image workers standing in a yard)

The second one is *“I want you to move in with my parents or your parents  they both got room and it’ll save money. So, we don't know when the  state money's coming in. You can sell the furniture if you want to, you  probably won't really want to keep it anyway.”* They just bought new  furniture. *“Make sure Norman gets to the doctor about his leg.”* I talked to  Norman years later, he said, “Yeah I fell off my bike and messed my leg  up and he wanted to make sure it healed alright.” But the letter said  something like, *“I don't want him to be stuck working as a coal miner. If he  doesn't really want to do the job, get him a good education by doing this,  this, and this. You can sell the car if you don't wanna learn to drive. Right  now, that ought to get you a good bit of money. Don't get married again  unless he doesn't work for the coal mine because your pension would  stop, take the money.”* He said, *“What else you do about it is your  business.”*

What else she did about it turned out to be nothing. She never did  remarry. She never even went looking for a boyfriend. She said “I was  never gonna find one like that again.” But I mean, that was the kind of  detail. My neighbor had his dad’s. Mel had Myron's last letter and I never did get up the nerve to ask him. I mean, he had the original, I  never, never got up the nerve to hold the thing in my hands. I don't know  if I could have or not, especially when I was a little kid. But that's what got  me thinking. That happened?! Why didn’t I know about it? And of course,  that was about 30 seconds before the whole Tony Boyle mess erupted.  Tony Boyle … boy, I bet that's an interesting conversation he's having  with Bob Murray about now, cuz I'm pretty sure they're iplace and I just hope it's not too toasty. \*laugh\* (B Int. 7)

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(Text on a background image workers standing in a yard)

“I could name you over 200 guys that I worked with there. I can't remember all the names, but that's all I could conjure up last night was over 200 people and I know there's so many more than that. There's so many more, but I just can't remember 'em all anymore. I can remember faces, but I just wish I could remember the names that went with them now because a lot of 'em, even though you might have only seen 'em for a couple months or a couple weeks they were still a big part of being there and watching out for each other. To me, that's big.” (C Int 11)

“Like I said it would have been an older population of men, for the most part that were losing their jobs. It had been

something that their family would have done, their dad did, and the only life they knew.” (N Int 3)

“By the 1990’s the UMWA basically saw their interests, or decided, I think incorrectly by the way, that their interests were aligned with those of the industry and they both became part of this thing called ‘coal.’ So, people talk about ‘is this good for coal?’ or ‘is this bad for coal?’ as though the interests of mine owners and politicians and families of miners were all aligned. Which is a notion that would strike the Mother Jones of the world as inherently absurd.” (MISC Int. 5)

“We would laugh when we would meet with the company on different issues. We would remind them regularly, they thought that plant was theirs, it wasn’t. It was ours. They just received a revenue, but it was ours. It truly was like a home. That is another family for those that worked there, especially for smaller plants. Which the Burger was a small plant, so when that finally went down, it was difficult.” (B Int 5)

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“You always had somebody to talk to on the radio and even with the road guys coming in, you had either them coming in every couple hours so it’s kind of fresh blood for the conversation. It's kind of a really nice communal aspect to it that, like I said, you don’t see anymore.” (C Int 12)

“It's a dying town, it's a dying community. It's very unfortunate because they really are good, salt of the earth people here. You're talking about the foothill Appalachians, and they really look out for each other. So, it's been disheartening, to say the least, to see that go but it's not the first hit that

we’ve taken.” (C Int 12)

“There was some anticipation of it, at any time, this could close. There had been a generation of one or two or three had went through with their grandpas, dads, and offspring working there. So, it was only a matter of time. But it was still devastating. It had a devastating effect on the community. There’s no doubt.” (C Int 3)

“I would guess it's going to be me running into the guys I used to work with, talking about the old days. I talked to guys now I worked with and we're like, man, we had it good. We didn’t know how good we had it.” (C Int 8)

“I try to play the video tape ahead though. It's like when the coal economy and the coal barons came to town They built towns fast. There were all these new buildings, and there's all this hope, people got jobs. You know, people came from Europe here and started their life in America, but, over time, the story of labor and capital is not always a happy story.” - John Winnenberg

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(Text bubbles on an illustrated background of a river, fields, hills, and a blue sky)

Text bubble 1 (top-right): “Your world is ending, everything shifts, everything changes. It's not even inflexibility, it's just the inability to comprehend the past because nobody's teaching history, social history, especially or industrial history in the sense of what changed when.” (B Int 7)

Text bubble 2 (middle-right): “I wish somebody would just talk about the goddamn region the way it is and acknowledge the economic and demographic realities of it and quit reducing it to a drama of morals.” (MISC Int. 5)

Text bubble 3 (middle-right): Where the Ohio Valley is at right now

is where the rest of the country could potentially be in 20 years. Appalachia often gets thought of as being left behind, in the past. Yet, in a lot of ways, it really represents the future.

Background art: Down River 2023, Klaire Smith

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Text bubble 1 (top-right): “We’re forever reinventing. That’s how Wheeling survived when the coal mines first shut down. What are we gonna do? Most of the valley's history is a series of ‘oh crap’ moments that had to transform.” (B int 7)

Text bubble 2 (middle-right): “Don't throw away knowledge. There's a saying on the railroad, the rule book was written in blood. You gotta think about that. All that stuff was learned, things will change. There are techniques that change there's equipment that changes. The basics don’t.” (B Int 7)

Text bubble 3 (middle-right): “I think the real challenge for all of us right now is to really keep our authentic assets to the front; our history, our struggle as a

place and a community.” (John Winnenberg)

Text bubble 4 (bottom-center): “The risk of loving and not having that love returned, the vulnerability of physically being subject to potential attack, and the uncertainty of what could happen when we relinquish control: that is the caring work of decolonizing extinction.” (Juno Salazar Parreñas)9

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Image 1: Photo of a fabric patch with an embroidered image of a power plant among green trees with a blue sky and rising sun in the background. Muskingum Valley Council is embroidered on top of the patch. Conesville Power Plant 1957-2020. Gone but not Forgotten is embroidered at the bottom of the patch

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About the Author

I explore energy geographies through an eco-crip theoretical  and methodological lens, focusing on embodied experiences of  energy and alternative epistemologies of social movements  inside communities at different intersections of the energy commodity chain. Growing up in an oil community, I was surrounded by the ways in which this complex substance has become intimately entangled in our lives through systemic and everyday material and discursive encounters. I have come to utilize the energy humanities to critically engage my own petro subjectivity as a means to challenge the logic of oil and deindustrialize my sense of self.2 From the carbon trapped in our atmosphere, to the politicians captured by fossil capital, to the petro-plastics nested in our blood, our fossil fueled present continues to reshape us in every conceivable way. Yet, as it  reshapes, it also buries damaged bodies, polluted ecosystems, extractive histories, and alternative futures. My work largely deals with digging up these graves and considering the impact of how the violence surrounding them have become so profoundly decontextualized.

Image: Illustration of a power plant at the end of the page

Back cover

(Same background art as the front cover)

# $W#@R!NG !$ C@R!NG

A GUIDE TO METHODOLOGICAL PROFANITY

Stephen Paur

University of Arizona

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“At some time or other, all of us are polite to people we do not like simply because we do not want to live in an overly contentious world. On the other hand, however, civility also reaffirms established social boundaries. And when there are huge inequities in the social order, polite custom ratifies them in everyday life.”

—Kenneth Cmiel, “The Politics of Civility”

A GODDAMN INTRODUCTION

The word “zine” refers not just to a genre or medium of publication, but to an attitude, an aesthetic: irreverent, ironic, profane, insubordinate, uncivil — even, in some cases, outright seditious.

These affective associations have historical precedents. Such attitudes are closely tied to the purpose and context of many underground, alternative publishing ventures. In the Soviet Union, “samizdat” was a form of dissident DIY publishing activity whose purpose was to circumvent state repression and censorship by disseminating banned, “subversive” content. At other times and in other places, DIY publishing was similarly a platform for subjugated voices and perspectives to challenge official norms and narratives. As the Westport Library points out:

"Though the women-fronted punk rock movement of the early ’90s [aka riot grrrl] is often thought of as the time when zine culture thrived, the reality is that zines have long been a way for marginalized communities to record their stories, spread information, and organize. From the wood-printed abolitionist pamphlets created by the American Anti-Slavery Society in the 1830s to La Catrina satirical cavalera cartoons made and distributed by José Guadalupe Posada in the 1900s to the handouts the Black Panther Party disseminated in the ’60s, zine culture as we know it today was created by, and built to fit, the political and social needs of communities of color."

Given such purposes and contexts, zine culture often represents a defiant rebuke of respectability politics, refusing to sanitize style or substance in the interest of mainstream acceptance or assimilation. As Kenneth Cmiel writes in “The Politics of Civility”:

"For [sixties] radicals, the hard words were part of their sense that polite society had its priorities backward. There was something grotesquely misguided about a middle-class decorum that masked the profound inequalities of America. The true obscenities, they argued, were the Vietnam War and racial hatred. In fact, some thought, the very idea of obscenity had to be rethought."

Non-mainstream, DIY publishing is, then, almost by definition, distinguished by its unwillingness to conform to dominant sensibilities and exclusionary conceptions of civility and appropriateness. Crucially, this non-conformist, confrontational stance is not about being different and provocative simply for the sake of being different and provocative. On the contrary, profanity, obscenity, impropriety, and/or “incivility” are often self-conscious strategies for resisting oppressive norms and agitating for emancipatory political, cultural, and economic change. It’s this profound need and/or desire for alternative forms of being and interacting that accounts for the existence of alternative platforms for communicating.

Indeed, as Nancy Fraser writes in “Rethinking the Public Sphere”:

"In stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles. The result is the development of powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday contexts and in official public spheres." (120)

To contest their marginalization, non-dominant groups often form “subaltern counterpublics,” a term Fraser uses to capture the “parallel discursive arenas [like zines!] where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (122).

With all that in mind, this zine takes the form of a how-to guide to tapping the subversive, mutinous, and/or caring potential of “dirty words” (swearing, profanity, vulgarity, obscenity) in academic contexts, and especially in those genres where academic knowledge is most commonly produced, revised, and disseminated, including but not limited to emails, blog posts, surveys, interviews, working papers, conference presentations, public lectures, books, and articles.

Basically, the zine argues in favor of greater use of (and tolerance for) profanity in academic research writing. When used strategically and humanely, “profane” research methodologies can serve important social and political uses, functioning variously as:

(1) a means of self-defense and self-empowerment (i.e., an emotional outlet and coping mechanism for those subjected to exploitation, discrimination, dispossession, harassment, abuse, etc.);

(2) a way to embrace a more inviting, colloquial, accessible — and pleasurable! — academic style (along with paywalls, an alienating prose style keeps academic knowledge production from being the social gift it should be by shutting out non-academic readers who have a real stake in the research but no patience for staleness or obscurantism); and

(3) a way to contest dominant norms and expectations that use the profanity taboo to police the (often racist, sexist, ableist, and classist) borders between un/intelligence, un/professionalism, in/civility, and ir/rationality.

As Kathleen Blake Yancey observes: “Writing has never been accorded the cultural respect or the support that reading has enjoyed, in part because through reading, society could control its citizens, whereas through writing, citizens might exercise their own control” (2). How much control do scholars really have, though, when certain words and phrases — those considered profane, uncivil, unprofessional, infantile, unserious, irrational, or even just (God help us) “too informal” — remain, tacitly or not, “off-limits” in traditional scholarly venues?

This zine aims to chart a path toward reclaiming more control over the style and sensibility of academic research by opening up new communicative tactics and strategies for scholars who hope to see their research come closer to fulfilling its socially useful, politically engaged potential.

“If you want to use these sentence-enhancers, there is a methodology for doing so,” writes James White. This zine develops that methodology. It also features a collection of samples of “caring swearing” that have already appeared in scholarly venues, to serve as both a model and impetus for the zine’s readers.

So: let’s fucking get on with it!

FUCK SHIT UP

How to Use Profanity Strategically and Humanely

in Academic Writing

Let’s not make this too goddamn complicated. It’s a simple four-step process:

(1) ASSESS the situation:

What reasons do I have for wanting to swear in this context?

What do I hope to accomplish?

Who are my readers?

What expectations do readers have for the use (or not) of profanity in this situation?

What is to be gained — and risked — by either adhering to or defying these expectations?

How much power and authority do I have relative to my readers?

Would profanity in this context be perceived as an abuse of power and authority? Or would it help me challenge abuses of power and authority?

Would profanity in this context increase my precariousness or vulnerability? Or would it help me challenge my precariousness and vulnerability?

(2) DECIDE, based on your assessment, whether (and how) the situation would benefit from a sprinkling — or, perhaps, a truckload — of goddamn motherfucking profanity.

(3) CONTRIBUTE the amount and type of profanity deemed appropriate and/or necessary.

(4) REFLECT on how it went:

After the dust settles, find a quiet place to gather your thoughts. Start by determining whether or not you still have friends and a job. If so, congrats! Your use of profanity must not have been a total failure. To fully process what worked well and not so well, ask yourself:

How did readers respond?

Did they respond how I expected them to? (If not, why not?)

Were their responses fair and reasonable, or should they go fuck themselves?

What, specifically, did my use of profanity seem to achieve?

How will I approach similar situations in the future?

Will I do anything differently next time?

The FUQing FAQs

Q1: Few things distinguish the practice of academic research writing like its (at least nominal) commitment to rationality and civility. Nuance, objectivity, level-headedness, respectful disagreement — we academics tend to pride ourselves on our commitment to ideas, observations, and dispassionate data analysis. The prolonged peer review process contrasts starkly with the impulsive, the petty, the mean-spirited — modes of discourse that are rampant in venues with little or no editorial oversight, such as Twitter. Are you saying academic venues should be more like Twitter? Won’t a wider embrace of profanity in academic research writing lead to an increase in lax standards and a decline in the overall quality and credibility of scholarly discourse, ultimately precipitating the end of the world as we know it?

Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. First, there’s nothing inherently uncredible or low-quality about profanity itself. In fact, many readers consider it a sign of no-bullshit authenticity to swear liberally. To such readers, profanity enhances credibility, rather than jeopardizing it.

Other readers might have a knee-jerk reaction against anything different from what they learned in eighth-grade English class about decontextualized writing “rules.” In reality, however, these “rules” are not universal or transhistorical, not set in stone. The rules are more like conventions — socially negotiated conventions. And these conventions (like language itself) are always evolving (Lippi-Green). Writers are always retrofitting language to suit new circumstances, to adapt to new needs, desires, problems, and questions. Whether or not any particular instance of writing is “good” or not is always a contingent question. It always depends on whether the piece of writing achieves its goals. To evaluate a piece of writing, “Is this effective?” is usually a more useful question than “Is this good?”

This is not to say that the ends always justify the means. If the means cause harm to people, in some way or another, then it’s right to challenge them. But the flipside is also true: if the means aren’t hurting anybody, then who fucking gives a shit? (Of course, profane methodologies might cause real harm to oppressive systems and structures that use the profanity taboo to regulate populations and reinforce hierarchies, but that’s a different story.)

Second, it’s worth keeping in mind that what counts as profanity in the first place is rarely a settled question. In many cases, the profanity taboo distracts from actually harmful profanity. For instance, according to novelist Shanthi Sekaran, “the language surrounding immigration — ‘ICE,’ ‘illegal alien’ — is more profane than any of Molly Bloom’s dirty talk” in James Joyce’s Ulysses.

Indeed, many times the swear words themselves aren’t really the problem. To complain about them is simply a form of misdirection. Readers who are actually upset (for one reason or another) about the content of the argument or analysis, or about the values or worldview of the author, are likely to seek (consciously or not) to discredit what they don’t like about the content or worldview by pointing to the writer’s perceived stylistic and/or methodological deficiencies.

Q2: I think you’re looking at this the wrong way. Instead of viewing the profanity taboo as an obstacle, you should see it as an opportunity. Constraints and limitations can spur creativity. For instance, Wes Anderson’s animated movie, Fantastic Mr. Fox, was intended for a wide audience, including kids, and so traditional profanity was off-limits. Instead, the stop-motion animal puppets often use the word “cuss” as a substitute for more familiar swear words, to hilarious effect. Similarly, in Steven Soderbergh’s Ocean’s Twelve, there’s an early scene where Don Cheadle’s character lets all kinds of expletives fly. As he does, a phone rings in a way that creates well-timed diegetic bleeps (also strategic: to avoid an R rating). And, as Michael Denning points out: “In the early ‘80s [in the US], on television, they weren’t allowed to swear, and so there were characters who invented these extraordinary kind of fake swears, fake curse words, that actually were, in their own ways, a richer and more imaginative vocabulary than if they had actually used the ones that were banned on television.”

Excellent point, although I don’t think it’s an either/or issue — like, either the profanity taboo is a bad thing or a good thing. It can certainly have generative effects like the ones you describe. But that doesn’t mean it can’t, at the same time, have undesirable effects, too.

Q3: Can you say more about those undesirable effects? You claim the profanity taboo can be used “to police the (often racist, sexist, ableist, and classist) borders between un/intelligence, un/professionalism, in/civility, and ir/rationality.” How exactly does this happen in practice?

How someone speaks and writes is, of course, conditioned by a million different things: where they grew up, where their parents grew up, where they went to school, what their friends are like, what sorts of media they’ve been exposed to, what languages they speak, and so on. Historically, literacy tests and fluency tests have been used to discriminate against anyone who speaks or writes the “wrong” way simply by virtue of having had their language habits conditioned differently than the language habits of dominant, “middle-class mainstream” groups (Gee). This doesn’t mean there’s anything inherently exclusionary about mainstream language habits. It just means that mainstream values and habits — because of the structural advantages enjoyed (statistically) by the groups most comfortable with these values and habits — are the ones that tend to get generalized or standardized in a way that stigmatizes, sidelines, or otherwise disadvantages anyone with different values and habits.

In practice, however, it can be easy to overlook the structural explanations for differently valued language practices. Instead, readers who’ve internalized the dominant norms often appeal to supposedly objective criteria by which to distinguish “good writing” from “bad writing,” “correct” from “incorrect,” “formal” from “informal,” “concise” from “self-indulgent,” “serious” from “frivolous,” “objective” from “biased,” “rational” from “emotional,” without necessarily realizing that, in many cases (if not all), what writers are really being faulted for is not communicative incompetence but social and/or ideological difference (deriving from social and material positioning) (see Vershawn Ashanti Young’s “Should Writers Use They Own English?”).

Playing the "respectability politics" game often means that, to have your concerns or demands taken seriously, you have to embody the dominant group's values. For many, doing that can feel like selling out. Take the women's suffrage movement in the US. Women were portrayed as "bullying" and "unreasonable" simply for deviating from dominant values dictating what "reasonable" discourse even means in the first place. Yet, challenging conventional ideas about the bounds of rationality and civility proved instrumental in getting the 19th Amendment passed.

Lots of times, of course, potential sympathizers are turned off by moral stridency, and so you do have to be strategically inscrutable and cool-headed even when you don't want to be. Other times, however, stridency is what's needed to get attention and raise awareness. Were a lot of people turned off by the suffragists' approach? Sure. Why wouldn't they be? If people weren't turned off, it would be a sign that the movement didn't actually pose a threat to the dominant (exclusionary) social order.

Plus, sometimes moral outrage is preferable to temperate argument, because at least with the outrage, you know where someone stands. Temperate argument (sometimes, not always) can be a way for someone to hide their agenda under a cloak of ostensible "objectivity” or “neutrality.” As Patricia Roberts-Miller writes:

"Making neutrality a virtue, especially as long as neutrality is implicitly or explicitly defined as not being impassioned, means that people who have suffered grave injustice must either adopt the tone [of muted outrage] . . . or be excluded from the community of discourse. By adopting a rational tone, though, one necessarily diminishes the gravity of the injustices — as Arendt says [in On Violence], there are moments when outrage is a very rational response . . . this sense that passions like outrage are forbidden in “neutral” discourse hinders the ability of discourse to uncover injustice because people are likely to be outraged by injustice." (Deliberate Conflict 29-30)

Imagine a scenario in which Person A pours boiling water on Person B. Person B screams and swears in response. Person A then says to Person B, “Jesus Christ, calm down — I’ll listen to your argument about why I should stop dousing you with boiling water only if you can present that argument in a rational, cool-headed way.” To which Person B responds, quite rationally: “FUCK YOU MOTHERFUCKER!!!” (See also Audre Lorde’s “The Uses of Anger,” or Patricia Williams’ “The Death of the Profane.”)

It’s also worth remembering that some people are more likely to get away with making stylistic mistakes — typographical, grammatical, citational, etc. — than others. Bruce Horner (drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and David Bartholomae) puts it like this:

"For Bourdieu, the value of the symbolic capital of an utterance is contingent on a host of material social conditions, rather than being fixed by its linguistic form. “Social acceptability,” as he warns, “is not reducible to mere grammaticality.” Or, as Bartholomae has put it, “[basic writers] are not the only ones who make mistakes . . . Mainstream freshmen, senior English majors, graduate students, our colleagues may all produce work that is naive, wrong, or off the track. The issue, then, is not who misses the mark but whose misses matter and why.” And so, Bartholomae advises, to understand the significance of “error,” we need to “return attention to institutional processes of selection and exclusion”" (751-2).

Now, as someone with a creative writing background, I’d be the last to suggest that style doesn’t matter, or that a wide range of styles shouldn’t be taught or learned, or that style and substance can be cleanly separated. The point is simply to keep in mind that one reason so many readers have such strong attachments to style, such vehement stylistic preferences, might have something to do with the way those stylistic preferences map onto other social and material attachments. As a consequence, stylistic features — including the presence or absence of profanity — can unwittingly become a proxy for non-stylistic features (class, race, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, age, ability, religion, nationality, etc.), and a pretext for penalty, rejection, exclusion, and the enforcement of double standards (during the peer review process, the hiring process, the admission process, the grant application process, etc.).

In order for any conversation or argument, academic or not, to proceed according to norms or rules that are truly fair, there is often “a need to argue about how we should argue, what we will count as relevant evidence, [and] what constitutes disruptive behavior or unfair moves” in the first place (Roberts-Miller, Demagoguery and Democracy 15).

Q4: Isn’t swearing offensive to a lot of people? You say it could make academic research writing more inviting, but I worry it could actually make it less inviting to readers who are turned off by profanity — often with good reason. After all, the line between profanity, obscenity, and vulgarity, on one hand, and hate speech, fighting words, racial epithets, and other forms of degrading and dehumanizing language, on the other hand, is often quite blurry. I think a lot of people shy away from profanity simply because they don’t want to seem insensitive or oblivious. Isn’t it reasonable to want to be tactful and considerate? To want to avoid being seen as the kind of obnoxious troll who gets pleasure out of insulting or antagonizing people, who enjoys the idea that their words might create a “clear and present danger”?

You raise some essential points here. The desire to be tactful and considerate is absolutely reasonable! The idea of “profane methodologies” should not be considered a license for writers to just do whatever the hell they want, to avoid extending an olive branch or giving someone the benefit of the doubt, or to be hostile, insulting, in-your-face, or incendiary simply for the sake of being hostile, insulting, in-your-face, or incendiary. As I suggested earlier, profanity is not a universally good thing. There are lots of different kinds of profanity, and lots of different ways to use each kind. Some uses can help bring about positive social change. Other uses are an obstacle to positive social change. (It’s certainly possible to use one type of profanity to object to another type of profanity.)

This is why it’s crucial to be attentive to the power relations that obtain in a particular situation, to ask why profanity might help challenge unequal power relations, and to let these motivations and aims guide how you use profanity in that situation. It’s also important to remain open to adjusting your approach if readers tell you it didn’t have the effects you hoped it would.

Ultimately, my argument is about creating new possibilities for creative academic expression, rather than continuing to assent to conventions and expectations that unfairly restrict and discipline scholars’ communicative capacities. To highlight the importance of accounting for the motivations and context, as well as the real effects on readers, I would insist on the following distinction, which I think is, in most cases, a pretty obvious one:

“caring swearing” — If you engage in this, it’s because you genuinely care about the well-being of other people, and about the tactical deployment of specific rhetorical strategies whose purpose is to defend, amuse, console, advocate, resist, repair, transform, call to account, or otherwise offend the delicate bourgeois sensibilities of the Establishment.

“dehumanizing slurs” — If you knowingly engage in this, it’s probably because you’re a fucking douchebag.

Q5: My question is about the dangers of co-optation and faux-subversion. I’m thinking, for instance, of the box of cherry Pop-Tarts in my kitchen pantry. On the back, the box reads: “There’s a word for people who eat untoasted Pop-Tarts: RENEGADES.” This is just one of the many examples of how the appearance of subversion and disruption — a resistant style purged of all resistant content — is easily co-opted by powerful interests, re-deployed to serve the imperatives of dominant political, economic, and cultural orders (in this case, corporate capitalism). Do you worry about this happening with your “profane methodologies”?

Yes. This is always a possibility. To guard against this, it’s crucial not to reduce substance to style, or to neglect questions such as: “Why is this style, tone, or attitude valued, and by whom? Whose interests are served, in this context, by profanity and/or by the profanity taboo?” (For an extended inquiry into related questions, see Dick Hebdige’s Subculture: The Meaning of Style.)

Q6a: This question has two parts. Part 1 goes like this: Is the “profanity taboo” you refer to even a real thing? I think I could probably get away with swearing more in academic contexts — I just choose not to. It’s not really my style.

That’s totally fine! The point is just to be reflective and strategic about whichever stylistic stance you decide to take, and to be patient, generous, and empathetic with those who opt for a different approach. This zine does assume that the profanity taboo is a real thing, though, even if the taboo isn’t so much “you can’t use profanity in scholarly venues” as “you shouldn’t use profanity in scholarly venues.” It’s more of an unspoken norm than a hard-and-fast rule. Of course, there are always exceptions, and some scholarly gatekeepers are more supportive of unconventional styles and methodological experimentation than others.

Q6b: Okay, thanks. But this brings me to Part 2: Isn’t the phrase “profanity taboo” premised on an outdated way of thinking about how power works? Didn’t Michel Foucault persuasively show more than 50 years ago that power is no longer primarily repressive as much as productive, operating by means of various disciplinary techniques and population management strategies? In The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, for instance, he writes:

"Since the classical age the West has undergone a very profound transformation of these mechanisms of power. “Deduction” has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on gathering forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (136).

What if profane methodologies are just the latest way to incite more people into “saying what they really think” in public venues so that they can be subjected even more effectively to various forms of scrutiny, surveillance, judgment, management, and control?

There is, for sure, always a risk that, in trying to solve one problem, we create new ones. In this case, it would certainly be a problem if what I’ve been calling “profane methodologies” becomes normative or compulsory in a way that runs counter to its emancipatory aims. This is why it’s important to remember that profane methodologies are not about profanity for its own sake. After all, language itself — repressed or not, taboo or not — does not by itself constitute oppression (see Cloud). To change how we talk does not, on its own, change the material conditions of our existence.

Language can be a way to conceal, legitimize, and challenge various forms of oppression, and the language practices of marginalized groups are often denigrated for no other reason than the fact that language is a convenient lever of othering, an easy way to sort and label people for the purposes of devaluing or subordinating them. But it’s not, ultimately, the liberation of language that profane methodologies are all about, but the liberation of people. Profane methodologies are, in other words, all about marshaling the full range of linguistic resources — profane or otherwise — and putting them in the service of collective projects oriented toward reducing suffering, exploitation, and oppression, and enabling freer, more just, equitable, and democratic forms of life.

EXAMPLES OF “CARING SWEARING”

Figure 1. Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò

Source: “Debating Eco-socialist Futures.” Haymarket Books podcast, 2022.

Purpose: to emphasize the urgency of climate justice issues

“Global distribution of temperature increase is not uniform, so major regions of the African continent could expect to warm at 1.5x the global average rate — up to that. That is interacting with a context, as mentioned before, in which already a quarter of the available arable land on the continent is owned under large-scale land acquisition. Already hundreds of thousands of hectares per year of the Sahel are getting desertified, so there's a contraction in how much arable land there even is.

“And we’re also dealing with a situation in which we’re trying to go off of fossil fuels and try to move to renewable sources of energy, but there are many African nations, including some of the most populated ones, like Nigeria and Angola, which derive upwards of 40 percent of government revenue off of petroleum, because up until now that was cool, globally speaking. So, whether it’s food security, energy security, or the basic pretense of a state system, we’re talking about functionally a political collapse of the African continent before the end of the century. Just to keep it really real.

“That’s not even talking yet about what that exodus is going to mean when they meet a militarized, hyper-technological surveillance system everywhere they try to go in order to survive. This is the current trajectory of politics, and I feel like a fucking crazy person because, you know, as far as I can tell, this has made no impact whatsoever on global conversation on the pace of net zero goals, etc., etc.”

Figure 2. Anne Lamott

Source: “Shitty First Drafts.” Writing about Writing: A College Reader, 2nd ed., edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs. Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2014, pp. 527-531.

Purpose: to reassure inexperienced writers who doubt their abilities

Figure 3. Kieran Healy

Source:  “Fuck Nuance.” Sociological Theory, vol. 35, no. 2, 2017, pp. 118-127.

Purpose:  to spice up the argument with a clever marriage of style and substance

Figure 4. You!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Feedback? Please reach out!

[Redacted]

This zine was formatted using Google Docs and Adobe Photoshop, with images from Adobe Stock. The typefaces are Architects Daughter, Prompt, and Vollkorn.

2023

# Carrier Bag

Lea Cooper

The zine is a container, made of a single sheet of stiff white A3 paper and folded into a nearly square, with small pockets, a third of the height of each page, on the interior pages. Itís bound with a small strip of risoprinted paper, with the same pattern as decorates the pockets ñ either red or blue illustrations of a pile of carrier bags which are almost abstracted enough to appear more like a texture than distinct objects. The front cover of the zine is a blue and red risoprinted illustration of a carrier bag with no text, but a clear visual reference to the supermarket Tescoís logo. The back

Cover reads:

Write me back.

Ljc72@kent.ac.uk

17b Alexandra St, Kirkcaldy, Fife, KY11HG

www.zinejam.com

1. First Pocket

1.1 Insert

A small paper inset reads:

In 2021 I made a Mad Tarot zine, using collage to create tarot cards which offered an alternative way of exploring my experiences of madness and mental health services without ìtelling my storyî through a verbal, linear, Recovery Narrative. The major arcana of the tarot deck tells a story, after all, of The Fool's progress. But drawing the cards from a deck potentially offers a different route into this story and storytelling.

It ís important not to pretend like creative ideas happen in isolation, so I also want to acknowledge the wide variety of ways people are using tarot, including the Asian American Literary Journalís special issue Open in Emergency which included a tarot deck that exemplifies the ways tarot can be used to unpack archetypes, public discourses, and lived experience.

And thereís another aspect of tarot thatís important here to creative methods, which is the sense that creating your own cards is another route into knowing and understanding the cards and their meanings.

1.2 The Zine Maker Tarot Card

In the pocket is also a tarot card. The card is printed in purple and neon orange riso. It shows a figure, in profile, sitting up in their bed. They look like they are rising towards something just in front of them, out of sight. Both their hands are raised, and thereís a subtle glow of light emitting from whatever it is.

The guide at the back of the zine offers these readings of the card:

The Zine Maker

Upright: Bed ñ (Re)Production ñ Binding

Reversed: Responsibility ñ Profit ñ Seamlessness

2. The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction

In the second pocket is the first of four mini-zines that are contained within the zine, folded out of single sheets of A4 paper to create a small A7 zine with 8 pages. They are all risoprinted in blue and red.

Cover

The front cover is an illustration of a young Ursula K Le Guin. She is looking out of the page, resting her head on one hand and with the other she is writing the title, which swirls around her in large blue cursive: ëthe carrier bag theory of fictioní.

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I am doing a PhD working with the zines at Wellcome Collection, London, UK. I go to training sessions and workshops on doing a PhD where I am reminded that a good thesis tells a story, produces a narrative of research that is coherent, linear, comprehensible. In the context of working with an archive, academics often engage in processes of ìnarrativizingî (Steedman, 2001, 68 in Ahmed, 2019, 14), It is not just archives we narrativise; medical humanities scholar Claire Charlotte McKechnie describes the processes and practices of analysing and interpreting illness experiences in the medical humanities as ëthe stories around stories that we formí (McKechnie, 2014, 122). However, the objects of my thesis (the zines in Wellcome around health & illness) resist a

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straightforward narrative, because of the ways they are episodic, messy, neuroqueer, illegible, ambivalent, ambiguous & excessive. If we are not concerned with reading for narrative, which is reading ëfor the direction of it's pointí (Ahmed, 2010), & if we do not want to write narratives of these zines, what alternatives are open to us?

In Ursula K. Le Guinís 1986 essay ëThe Carrier Bag Theory of Fictioní (2019), the science fiction author proposes that whilst stories so often take the shape of a spear or an arrow, a straight line heading dynamically to a final point, this is not necessarily the proper or best shape. Instead Le Guin proposes a carrier bag, in which she gathers the discrete and diverse elements of her stories and, in

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assembling them together, allows them to tell stories through their proximity with each other. This is a method of writing that perhaps also meets the needs of my research.

It is a method of writing grounded in queer histories and queer approaches to archives. In their book-essay-manifesto A Nazi Word for A Nazi Thing (2020), feminist film scholar, activist and author So Mayer describes their use of lesbian writers Nicola Griffithís and Kelley Eskridgeís term QUILTBAG (queer, intersex, lesbian, trans, bisexual and gay):

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QUILTBAG recalls the AIDS Memorial Quilt, one of the best-known acts of queer resistance, one that was crafty, angry, social and widespread. And I also use QUILTBAG in homage to Ursula K Le Guinís essay on ëthe carrier bag theory of fiction', another narrative disruption wherein she calls attention to the non-linear and associative, to the connective, capacious and chaotic ñ to the kinds of echoes and recursions, folds and detours that describe feminist and queers historiesí (27)

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Le Guin suggests that stories shaped like spears serve heroes. Who does the structure of an academic thesis serve, and who is better served by a ìcarrier bagî?

How to create a thesis as vessel? If the carrier bag is our methodology, what methods does it invite?

Speaking of young womenís perzines, Poletti describes how: ëthe perzine does not attempt the imaginative or representational structuring of mess, but instead positions itself as a document of the bedroom which seeks to explore the intimacy, possibilities and multiplicities of the piling, stream or smatteringí (2008, 10)]. Can zines be the bag in which we gather, assemble, constellate?

Pg 6

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Back Cover

The back cover is another illustration of a carrier bag, this time one with alternating blue and white vertical stripes ñ familiar in the UK as the sort you would get at a market or in a newsagents.

3. (An)Archive Tarot Card

Turning the page of the container zine, in the next pocket is a tarot card printed in purple and neon orange. In the centre is the grand staircase in Wellcome Collectionís Rare Materials Reading Room. Below it is a strip of geological texture, a pile of fossils, and above a sky with clouds and a bright sun. Through the windows either side of the staircase, smoke and fire is visible.

The guide at the back of the zine offers these readings of the card.

(An)Archive

Upright: Within ñ Preservation - Access

Reversed: Outwith ñ Destruction ñ Inaccess

4 . Thanks I Hate It

In the fourth pocket is the second mini-zine. This has been photocopied in black and white.

Front Cover

The front cover of this zine is a paragraph of text, but it has nearly all been redacted in thick black marker. The remaining text reads ëthanksí in the top left and ë(I hate it)í in the bottom right.

Pg 1

I want to talk about ambivalence, as in two feelings in contrast or conflict with each other, that youíre feeling at the same time, as in an affective double-bind, a state of simultaneous but seemingly conflicting feelings or beliefs ñ an attraction and aversion, goodness and badness, often not as straightforward as direct opposites, ambivalence can be, for example, the tension between anger and sadness. Ambivalence can sometimes be treated as a ìbadî feeling, as a negative affect in and of itself. But itís not. Ambivalence is uncomfortable, awkward, and so we can avoid it, procrastinate, or try and resolve it ñ hardening into one position or the other. But I believe that discomfort, awkwardness, is generative, productive, important, that ambivalence tells us twice the amount of things that a single straightforward position might.

Pg 2

tells us twice the amount of things that a single straightforward position might.

I am trying to find an approach which honours ambivalence, which honours the deep ambivalence I feel towards research, towards medical humanities, particularly as a psychiatric survivor. In this zine I want to feel out what I mean when I talk about what zines and zine methods might offer if we want to hold ambivalence, rather than resolve it, in research.

Anna Poletti, an English Language and Culture scholar, has brought zines into their field of contemporary life writing. They examine three aesthetics/traces of practices common across the perzines they read: visible hand editing of printed texts; poorly reproduced photocopier images; and the manipulation of images when photocopying. Poletti feels the ambivalence of zines makers towards their readers. They consider ambivalence as inherent to the process of trying to represent the experience of being-in-the-world because of the tensions of disclosing personal or

(the text on this page falls off the side of the page)

Pg 4, 5, 6, 7

All these pages are made semi-illegible by the way the page has been moved about on the scanner bed. The starts and ends of sentences are just about visible, but quickly blur, blend and swirl.

Back Cover

In an echo of the front cover, the back cover is a paragraph of text that has been redacted in thick black marker. In the top left corner it reads ëburn after readingí and in the bottom right it reads ëgo on. I double dare ya.í

5. The Postbag Tarot Card

Turning the page, the next pocket has a tarot card depicting the torso of a person carrying a Royal Mail postbag. In the background a network of fungal mycelium branch out. Parts of the person dissolve into the texture of the mycelium.

The guide at the back of the zine offers these readings of the card:

The PostBag

Upright: Connection ñ Collection ñ Labour

Reversed: Distance ñ Delay ñ Silence

6. This is a Gift It Comes With A Price

Front Cover

The front cover of this minizine replicates a messagenger conversation. The first message reads: ëdo you ever wake up in a cold sweat at night worrying about your responsibilities to zines/zine makers?í The reply, in red, read ëWow. No. Iím spared thatí. The reply to this, from the original messenger, reads: ë Oki cool cool cool.í And then: ëmaybe I just need to get some perspectiveí.

Pg 1

What do I owe other zine makers, and how might a carrier bag methodology help me meet those obligations?

DIY scholar Kirsty Fife (2019) has written about the ethics of institutions collecting zines because zines are made with this sense of an intentionally limited distribution, to be shared and circulated within particular communities and contexts, and also because institutions, archives, artificially preserve zines beyond their creators' imagined lifespan.

The Zine Librarianís Code of Ethics is a collaborative document compiled by a group of zine librarians across occupied turtle island. It is a discussion of some of the questions and tensions of zine librarianship. It touches on researcher use of zines in archives or library collections, but only really in terms of asking

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permission. And researchers have ended up in hot water before for not asking permission in zine research ñ a cursory google will bring up the cautionary tale of Teal Triggsí book Fanzines.

But instead of thinking in terms of permission I want to consider the ethics of zine research in terms of consent - an acknowledgement of the intimacy & reciprocity of zines. The questions contained in this zine were prompted by reading zines around consent, sex, relationships, kink and BDSM, including Cindy Crabbís zine Learning Good Consent.

How might consent be a pleasurable part of the research process? Learning good consent encourages integrating consent questions into sex, and making this part of the fun, how can this be the case for research too?

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How might we learn better consent together? When my own zine was collected by Wellcome in 2016, I never imagined it could be used for other people's academic research. In my participatory arts work, I always ask: do we want our zines to be visible to researchers? These conversations are always productive. In engaging with consent, when people are creating and sharing their experiences, does it give them a better idea of what it means to share, more autonomy, more control. How can researchers, librarians, archivists and creators work together to create informed consent?

Pg 4

What happens when people say no? If you ask for consent you open yourself up to people saying no, how do you handle that personally and professionally. What happens when people say no further down the line, or change their minds?

What happens when we get it wrong? I think itís interesting that there is a section of Learning Good Consent that explores what to do if youíve been responsible for non-consensual encounters and how you can bring that up in new relationships and address your behaviour. When we get it wrong how we can respond to that? What do we do?

Pg 5

Can zines themselves offer consent? Wellcomeís collection of zines is in some ways ìlivingî, because many of the people whoís zines are in it are actively still involved in zines and vocal and contactable, and Iím friends or peers with lots of them, and also my zines are in the collection and Iím researching the collection. But I decided that I didnít want to use interviews or anything that directly engaged with zine makers themselves in my methods, I want to interrogate the researchersí encounter with zines in the archive or library. One of the things about zines which I emphasise in my research is that they arenít necessarily made with the aim of like ìCommunicating Lived Experienceî. So my question here is:

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What ways do I think zines can offer consent embedded within them, or in their form, and how might this relate to research into other media, creative expressions or narratives (particularly around health/illness). Is the only way to get consent to speak to the zine maker themselves and ask? And whatís the difference when we imagine an encounter with them as being consensual vs. non-consensual?

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Crabb, C. Learning Good Consent. Zine.

The Zine Librarian's Code of Ethics, Zine.

7. The (Ivory) Tower Tarot Card

This tarot card depicts a large tower block ñ part of Thomas and Guyís hospital in London. In the background, branches of a tree with fruit bearing indescipherable words. Lightning snakes down from the sky to hit the tower, which is outlined in bright orange.

The guide at the back of the zine offerings these readings of the card:

The (Ivory) Tower

Upright: Tearing ñ Cracking ñ Ripping

Reversed: Sticking ñ Pasting ñ Remaking

8. The Future User

Front Cover

The front cover of this mini zine is an astronaut in a space suit standing ontop of the moon, in blue. Over the moon in red it reads ëthe future userí.

Pg 1

In their introduction to the zine What Does a COVID-19 Doula Do? (2020), which was produced by the What Would a HIV Doula Do? collective, Alexandra Juhasz reflects on bringing together and curating the show Metanoia: Transformation through AIDS Archives and Activism. They invite a step into the future: ëimagine a show like ours, in the future. An archival show of the representational life and objects of COVID, thirty years from nowí (7). They suggest that the zine calls ëfor a future that will learn from all we did in this shared presentí (ibid). The assembling of an archive becomes a work of speculative fiction, a practice of speculative futuring, which seems intimately tied to zines entwined history with science fiction (and to Ursula K Le Guin's own storytelling).

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There are lots of great pieces of research around zines that use interviews with zine makers, but in my research I decided not to do that. When I engage with the zines at Wellcome Collection in this research, I am engaging in a kind of imagining of a future archive. In consciously choosing to engage with the zines themselves, rather than zine makers, I am performing some kind of speculative future use of the zines. In much of my work within and outwith this PhD I imagine myself as an ancestor to some future user. What will happen in this future when zine makers arenít around to talk back to researchers, and how might this future imagining inform how we use historical documents in the present?

Pg 3

Might it make us reconsider our relationships to, responsibilities to, other objects or narratives, in the medical humanities and beyond?

The Wellcome Collection collects and preserves zines for an imagined future user, that is why they arenít on the open shelves, facing the assault of present use. Wellcomeís librarians describe collecting zines for posterity, for ìall future peopleî, but this is not the remit of Wellcome Collection, really. Wellcome Library is a research library and though they have taken some care to expand the category of research in words, the practices and policies and procedures for accessing the zines (as they stand) invite particular users (and dissuade others).

Pg 4

Borrowing from Sara Ahmedís (2019) approach to use: the way Wellcome Collection is set up creates an intended use/intended user, and also other unsanctioned, unintended, queer, crip or otherwise deviant uses. Sometimes, when I imagine a future user, I donít imagine this changing, in fact given some of the current trajectories I imagine things being somehow worse. And so much of my work as an ancestor becomes protective or preventative. I am deeply mistrustful of my academic descendents in this collection, partly because I see how present day researchers write about my own Mad, crip ancestors in the archives. I feel a tension, a desire to both prepare zines for their future use in research and to deny them to future researchers. This creates a tension within my research, one that I am not seeking to resolve.

Pg 5

On crip ancestry, Stacey Park Milbern describes: ëPeople sometimes assume ancestorship is reserved for those of biological relation, but a queered or cripped understanding of ancestorship holds that, such as in flesh, our deepest relationships are with people we choose to be connected to and honorí. (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018)

Wellcome Collectionís imagined future user is not the only timeline, not the only lineage, I can place myself in. I can choose to imagine crip futures, and consider what they might inherit from me, from this research, from this present.

Pg 6

Works Cited:

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What Would a HIV Doula Do? 2020. What Does a COVID-19 Doula Do? Zine.

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Back Cover

The back cover of this zine mirrors the front cover, but in reverse. The moon and astronaut are in red, and the text ëthe future userí is in blue. It is upside down.

# the tracking line(s)

Melanie Dennis Unrau

[cover page]

[image description: a drawing of a scow (flat-bottomed boat used for shipping goods during the fur trade) travelling against the current of a river, being steered by one voyageur in the boat and towed by seven other voyageurs who are tethered to the boat and walking along the shore. The image reaches outside its frame in places. A pair of flying geese are oversized and completely outside the frame. The image is signed “S.C.E.”]

the tracking line(s)

[a zine of hand-traced text and images; all text is traced except for Sources & Notes, Methods Statement, and bibliography; all text and images are printed in black ink]

[inside cover page]

the tracking line(s)

[page 1]

[image description: an archival photograph of eight men on the shore of the Athabasca River, wearing harnesses and tracking a boat (that is, towing the boat using physical labour). Some of the trackers are hunched forward nearly to the ground; others are leaning sideways. Four additional men can be seen in the boat.]

[page 2]

The Athabaska Trail (1913)

Prior to the advent of the internal combustion engine along northern rivers, south-bound cargoes of furs were “tracked” upstream by brigades of large canoes and heavy bateaux—sometimes for many hundreds of miles. Crews of men harnessed to heavy “tracking” lines, hundreds of feet in length, fought their way grimly along the shore, often through tangle of overhanging brush, knee deep mud and waist deep water. The ceaseless torture of myriads of flies from daylight till dark, the harassing and heavy work which only the strongest men could long endure, made “tracking” one of the most brutal forms of labor.

In the late fall of 1913, the writer and a crew of [redacted] and [redacted] tracked the first important shipment of samples of bituminous sand1 from McMurray up the rapids and fast water of Athabaska river to Athabaska Landing, a distance of nearly 250 miles. For twenty-three days, from daylight till dark, in snow and rain, the heavily loaded scow was hauled upstream. The following lines reflect, in part, the mental reaction,—a longing for rest—and warmth—and shelter.

1Ten tons.

36

[image description: one heavy, black arrow points from the first paragraph on this page to the image on page 3; a second arrow points from the second paragraph toward the image on page 1; a third arrow points from the second paragraph to the caption at the bottom of page 3.]

[page 3]

[image description: A drawing depicting two teams of trackers towing scows through rapids on the Athabasca River. Only the first boat can be seen; its freight (furs?) is in bundles. A polesman at the front of the boat is pushing the scow away from rocks with a long pole, and a steersman at the back of the scow is steering the boat with a long rudder. The trackers strain against the line and cross rocky and wet terrain. These trackers are larger and stronger-looking than the trackers on page 1. The sky is dark, and it is raining or snowing. The image is signed “Ells.” Two of the arrows from page 2 extend onto this page, pointing to the image and the caption.]

[image caption: “For twenty-three days through snow and rain . . .”]

[page 4]

[This page is made of two sheets of tracing paper, layered on top of one another.]

[top layer:] In the late fall of 1913, the writer tracked the first important shipment of samples of bituminous sand1 from McMurray up the rapids and fast water of Athabasca river to Athabaska Landing, a distance of nearly 250 miles.

1Ten tons.

[bottom layer:] REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT McDONELL 133

SESSIONAL PAPER No. 28

Mr. T. C. Ellis, of the Department of Mines, passed through here on route to Ottawa in September with a quantity of both asphalt and oil sands to be tested in Ottawa.

[page 5]

[This page is made of three sheets of tracing paper, layered on top of one another.]

[top layer:] 40 Summer Stories

144 Resistance Stories

What rightful place does this story occupy? What would happen if it did not matter?

our task is not simply to tell better stories about the North but rather to intervene in the structures of dispossession and domination that are made sensible, legible, and possible by the stories we tell.

[middle layer image: a map of the Athabasca River between Athabasca Landing and McMurray, depicting a series of rapids leading up to McMurray: Grand Rapid, Brûle Rapid, Boiler, Middle, Long Crooked, Stony, Little Cascade, Big Cascade, Mountain, and Moberly. Two illustrations depict voyageurs steering scows along the river and through rapids.]

[bottom layer:] first important shipment [barely legible]

[page 6]

[image description: archival photograph of two scows on the Athabasca River. One is empty; two men stand on the second; three other men stand on the shore.]

[page 7]

[This page is made of two sheets of tracing paper, layered on top of one another.]

[top layer (text is sideways):]

14

And when we would go to town by boat, some of them they got no kicker. They have to paddle. Up stream. Some of them they pulled it with a rope, they tied it in the boat and pulled it like this and pulled it with a rope. Pull it like this, from the shore. That’s the way they would do it. Well, people had a hard time. That’s a long time ago. [laughs] Those are the stories I give you. Yeah, it wasn’t very easy. Well, you can’t make it in one day like this, if you paddle from here. Swift water, really swift water. No, you couldn’t make it in one day. Well, people would stop any place where it’s nice to camp, they stop there. That’s the way it happened.

ALICE BOUCHER

[bottom layer:] In the late fall of 1913, [redacted] a crew of [redacted] and [redacted] tracked [redacted] bituminous sand1 from McMurray up the rapids and fast water of Athabaska river to Athabaska Landing, a distance of nearly 250 miles.

1Ten tons.

[page 8]

[The words of this found-text poem are staggered across the page (where they appear in the source text).]

ample good November 4th, (1913) My dear Corporal, I am not going to write a letter, but merely deeply to let you know officially that are young ‘Bacon-face’ and his associates great on the tracking line altogether worthy best good happy Yours very truly, fitting Strong

[page 9]

[The words of this found-text poem are staggered across the page (where they appear in the source text).]

I was wrong November 4th, (1913) My dear Corporal, I I am deeply regret oppressive obnoxious As you are doubtless already aware, astray quite appalling, and Yours very truly might find a watery grave, or come to some other fitting end. somewhat twisted

[page 10]

[The words of this concrete, found-text poem move in horizontal steps across the page, to imitate both the steps taken by the trackers and the flow of the river. Some text is cut off and/or overlaps. The lines can be read in any order. Hereafter I will call this “tracking format”]

- 10 -

It is not my intention to emphasize the difficulties encountere

over a period of many years in a fly-infested country, on many

streams, in timbered or burned over areas, and on almost limitless

muskeg.

[page 11]

[tracking format]

- 10 -

- 8 -

having secured a somewhat primitive

I and my crew of three white

one of whom spoke or understood English) and nine tons of equipment an

30-foot scow my crew augmented by a dozen [redacted] (only

men and an (alleged) [redacted] pilot

samples

[page 12]

[The lines of this concrete, found-text poem run along the top and bottom of the page (they lay flat like the tracking line in this part of the story).]

- 10 -

- 11 -

line was laid out along the shore the tracking crew refused to move.

But when the 500-foot, 7/8-in manilla tracking

[page 13]

[tracking format]

- 11 -

At this critical juncture (for practically the entire population of

McMurray was looking on) Constable (afterwards Assistant Commis-

sioner) La Nauze, RCMP, rushed down the river bank, seized the

leading harness on the tracking line, and shouted to the trackers in

their own tongue. Thereupon each man donned his harness; slowly

the scow gathered headway.

[page 14]

[This concrete, found-text poem uses letters and words to depict a scene with insects buzzing in the air, overhanging brush, water, mud, boulders, etc., and the trackers trudging through the middle of the page.]

- 11 -

The ceaseless torture of myriads of flies from daylight until dark

of overhanging brush through a tangle a tangle tangle

Harnessed to the heavy tracking line, men fought their way

grimly along

or waist deep in water

strewn rough

the often ankle deep in MUD

beaches boulder- or

[page 15]

[tracking format]

Breakfast was eaten by firelight; we pulled on the line until

dark and then, lacking tents, slept under the dripping trees.

[page 16]

[tracking format]

during this period three men were incapacitated either by hernia,

appendicitis, or pneumonia and placed in the “sick bay” on the

bottom of the leaky scow.

[this line cut off:] line Thereafter I took a place on the tracking

[page 17]

[tracking format]

- 12 -

On three occasions during the the journey my [redacted] “colleagues”

dropped their their tracking harnesses, threw their blankets ashore and

disappeared into the bush.

[page 18]

[This poem is made of two sheets of tracing paper, layered on top of one another.]

[top layer (in cursive writing):]

Patrol to Chipewyan

Oct 13th Monday; Snowing + blowing all

day + night Passed Pt Brulé

[redacted] came and said he was ‘starving’ but

refused a job on scows

CD La Nauze [unknown acronym]

RNWMP

21/7/13

Ft. McMurray

Alta

[bottom layer, in tracking format]

“colleagues”

“deserters”

the missing trackers Fortunately

they had not called my bluff!

[page 19]

[tracking format]

\* - 12 -

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Twenty-three days after leaving McMurray\* and two hours

after dark we saw the faint glimmer \* \* \* \* of lights at Athabasca Landing \*

and soon after we beached our battered and leaking scow.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

It had days twenty-three the of seventeen snowed or rained throughout

\* \* \* \* \*

[page 20]

[tracking format]

- 12 -

- 13 -

For purposes of comparison with present-day labour conditions it

may be noted that, as late as 1913, established custom required

that trackers be paid $45 for the trip regardless of the time occupied

and that they find their way back to McMurray as best they could and

without further remuneration.

My salary at the time was $1800.

[page 21]

[tracking format]

- 13 -

It was also an immutable custom that

they be provided with moccasins and tobacco and I had therefore laid

in a gunny sack full of each at a cost of $38.00.

However, on reaching Ottawa

Department of Government declined to remunerate me for the

cost of the mocassins and tobacco (The — — dirty swine.

an indulgent and grateful

[The words “an immutable custom” are underlined, and “(The — — dirty swine” appear in cursive handwriting.]

[page 22]

[tracking format]

- 13 -

(It may be noted

that the tobacco consisted of plugs which were rather badly mildewed).

[page 23]

[tracking format]

- 13 -

long discussed around northern campfires)

( a trip which was

[page 24]

[image description: an archival photograph of a scow with a tent shelter in the Athabasca River. Two men stand on the scow. Two canoes can be seen on the shore.]

[page 25]

SOURCES & NOTES

“the tracking line(s)” is not paginated. Numbers on individual pages are from the source texts. You can count the pages to follow this list.

Front cover: S.C. Ells, Northland Trails (Toronto: Burns & MacEachern, 1956), 38; S.C. Ells, Recollections of the Development of the Athabasca Oil Sands (Ottawa: Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, 1962), 12.

Inside cover: Ells, Recollections, 12.

page 1: "Getting Asphalt from Fort McMurray Tar Sands, Alberta," 1914. Courtesy of Glenbow Library and Archives Collection, University of Calgary, CU1154016, public domain. The subtitle in the archival record reads, “First shipment. Taken on scow that was tracked up the Athabasca River for 240 miles. Sidney Ells and party hauled the barge.” I believe this photo was taken by S.C. Ells in 1913.

page 2: Ells, Northland Trails, 36.

page 3: Ells, Northland Trails, 37.

page 4: Ells, Northland Trails, 36; “Annual Report of Superintendent A.E.C. McDonell, Commanding ‘N’ Division, Athabaska Landing,” Report of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police 1913 (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1913), 133.

page 5: Emilie Cameron, Far Off Metal River (Vancouver: UBC P, 2015), 40, 144; Robert Kunz, map illustrating “The Last of the Brigades” by Guy Blanchet, 1938, Northern Treasury: Selections from The Beaver, ed. Clifford Wilson (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, [1955]), 74; Ells, Northland Trails, 36.

page 6: S.C. Ells, “Loading Bituminous Sand at Murphy Claim, Athabasca River, Alta,” 1913, Canada Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys, Library and Archives Canada, PA-013556, public domain.

page 7: Alice Boucher, in Craig Campbell, Alice Boucher, Mike Evans, Emma Faichney, Howard LaCorde, and Zachary Powder, mihkwâkamiwi sîpîsis: Stories and Pictures from Metis Elders in Fort McKay (Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 2005), 14 (Elder Alice Boucher’s story appears alongside Ells’s 1913 photograph of trackers [see page 1 of this zine].); Ells, Northland Trails, 36.

pages 8 & 9: S.C. Ells, Letter to Corporal Lanauze [sic], 4 Nov. 1913. National Archive, Ottawa, Sidney Clarke Ells fonds, R4495-0-7-E, vol. 1.

pages 10-17; 19-20; 22-23: Ells, Recollections, 8-13.

page 18: Charles “Denny” La Nauze, Diary + notebook, 1912-1914. Glenbow Library and Archives Collection, University of Calgary, Denny La Nauze fonds, M-9581-1; Ells, Recollections, 12.

page 21: Ells, Recollections, 13; Ells’s added annotations on a copy of his Recollections, n.d., National Archive, Ottawa, Sidney Clarke Ells fonds, R4495-0-7-E, vol. 12-2.

page 24: S.C. Ells, “Scows of Bituminous Sand Leaving Murphy Claim, Athabasca River, Alta,” 1913, Canada Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys, Library and Archives Canada, PA-013552, public domain.

[page 26]

METHODS STATEMENT

This zine is part of a larger, ongoing research-creation project with the working title “The Goose,” a collection of poems written using found text and images from S.C. Ells’s Northland Trails (1956). Sidney Clarke Ells (1878-1971) was a Canadian Department of Mines expert who worked on the tar sands from 1913 to 1945. He was fiercely proud of his role in founding the tar-sands industry, but his collection of poems, short stories, and essays about the Athabasca region includes little mention of his work. Throughout “The Goose,” I use conceptual, concrete, found-text, procedural, and constraint-based poetry methodologies, as well as low-tech hand-tracing and layering techniques, to write poetry as literary criticism, teasing out repressed content about Ells’s role in turning the Northland he claimed to love into an extractive zone.

The poems in “the tracking line(s)” pick up on Ells’s two-page preface to the poem “The Athbaska Trail.” The preface, titled “The Athabaska Trail (1913),” makes the most direct reference to Ells’s oil work in Northland Trails. It tells a story Ells liked to recount as a founding narrative of the tar sands industry. Drawing on historical research and archival materials, and using tracing, concrete-poetry, and close- and slow-reading techniques to engage with the longer version in Ells’s memoir, I experiment with ways of telling this story that subvert its framing as a heroic colonial narrative. In my planned book, “the tracking lines(s)” will continue with a sequence of poems that attend to embodied and submerged perspectives on tracking in the poem “The Athabaska Trail.”

My focus is on the trackers in Ells’s tale, Indigenous labourers who are unnamed in the published versions of the story but who are depicted in the photograph on page 1 of this zine. Their perspectives are “submerged” in Ells’s story (Gómez-Barris 1) — sidelined but perceptible in the accounts not only of the incredibly hard work they did for low pay and in terrible working conditions (some of which Ells himself created) but also of their resistance and refusals that undermine Ells’s assessment of the significance of the work they performed ambivalently.

I began my research for this zine hoping to find counternarratives about the “first important shipment” described in Ells’s story. Maybe I will find those yet, but it seems likely that what I will continue to find instead is that this story was not very important to the people who lived and witnessed it. Its mobilization as a founding story draws attention not only to the stubborn determination of industry founders and innovators but also to the persistent extractive settler-colonial logics and land relations of an industry that has proven harmful to the Athabasca region and to planetary life.

I made this work-in-progress zine while managing health issues, family tensions, a tumble down the stairs, and many doubts and questions about how to approach Ells’s story and this project as a settler literary scholar committed to anticolonial climate-justice work. I still have more research, learning, and writing to do. Please send me your thoughts on “the tracking line(s)” at melanie.unrau@uregina.ca.

- Melanie Dennis Unrau

[inside back cover]

Some things I read (or revisited) while working on this zine:

Alook, Angele, Emily Eaton, David Gray-Donald, Joël Laforest, Crystal Lameman, and Bronwen Tucker. The End of this World: Climate Justice in So-Called Canada. Between the Lines, 2023.

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- the DIY Methods zine makers (can’t wait to see your projects!)

- The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada)

- The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity

- The University of Regina

- Kendrick Quality Printing, Winnipeg

Please send comments, questions, etc. to melanie.unrau@uregina.ca.

[back cover]

Published on Treaty 1 territory in Winnipeg

by Melanie Dennis Unrau

for the DIY Methods Conference 2023

# Tools for Resisting Toxic Air: Methods from South Louisiana

wet lands collective, Jen Liu, Sheila Tahir, Alahna Moore, Shreyas Vasudevan, Josie Ygnatowiz

[image description: the cover background is a light blue background with an petrochemical plant stretching across the bottom with dots and various chemical structures floating in the top.]

We are a motely krewe of activists, anarchists, academics, artists. The nonprofit industrial complex’s begrudging accomplices.

Accept this zine as a humble offering of methods employed by communities we ally with to resist the industries that pollute them/us/everyone.

South Louisiana is more than just a place where disasters unfold or gumbo is sold. There are stories that need to be told, histories to remember.

Systems to destroy.

New plantations to burn.

The Mississippi River is an ouroboros, of capitalist desire, of a spiritual connection to land, of memory and loss, of resilience and resistance.

[image description: illustration of swamp with cattails, crane, oak trees, and Spanish moss surrounding the text. Above is an illustration of an alligator biting its own tail with ‘wet lands collective’ underneath]

Table of Contents

Greetings from south Louisiana 2

From Plantation country to caner alley 3

What’s in the air 6

Finding the source 9

Submitting public records requests 14

Collecting your own data 16

Community activism 18

In the event of a chemical emergency 20

[image description: above table of contents is an illustration of a cypress tree]

Greetings from South Louisiana

Louisiana, named after a French emperor known as the “Sun King.” How this specter of colonization has never dimmed! An inheritance of extraction, environmental racism, and genocide. Sitting at the intersection of so many global flows, past and present: the Transatlantic slave trade, fossil fuel production & exploration, vulnerability to climate change, land loss. Catastrophes wrought by the very capitalist industries that continue to extract and exploit from the land, leaving our lungs to hold polluted air, with Black and brown communities bearing the most burden.

These violences have migrated across time – but so have the methods used to resist them, to survive them, and to thrive despite them. When faced with damning odds, the people of Louisiana serve as shining exemplar of how to smile through the floods, through the tears that rip communities asunder, through thick smog, and rare autoimmune disease…

What follows in our brief interpretation of different forms of this resistance, from sharing information, to community organizing, and disaster preparation.

[image description: background is close up of map of Louisiana]

This land is and will always be the homelands of Indigenous tribes such as the Ishak/Atakapa, Chitimacha, Coushatta, Natchez, Caddo, Tunica-Biloxi, Houma, and Choctaw. Before French and then later Spanish and American colonists came, people were able to in cooperation with an ecology that is more water than land. Rich marshland leading to swamps filled with hardwood cypress trees and canebrake, an alluvial floodplain dotted with bayous for fishing and trapping game.

The might Mississippi River, second largest on the North American continent, drains into the vast Gulf of Mexico. This landscape has doomed Louisiana in many ways, for it has the resource curse, and this is what has always made it attractive to the exploitative industries of capital. After Indigenous people were forced to assimilate or relocate deeper south to more remote bayous and swamps, plantations were built along the banks of the river. The nutrient rich soil and easy access to this inexhaustible water source was perfect for growing indigo and later the more profitable sugarcane. But the most profitable resource of all was the countless African people who were stolen and forcibly enslaved, whose stolen labor was used to harvest these crops.

This colonial, capitalist logic has never left Louisiana, even after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. This economy of extraction, relying initially on slavery and then the violently repressive Jim Crow system that came in its wake, has created a poisonous system of exploitation that continues to pervade every local institution in Louisiana and now permeates our air in the form of toxic chemicals.

Curving like a snake, the sinuous route the Mississippi River takes from Baton Rouge to New Orleans has been dubbed “Cancer Alley” due to its prevalence along with a range of other health concerns amongst the residents who live in the river parishes along its way. The plantations that once dotted its banks have been sold to and replaced by petrochemical companies, and fenceline communities live in the shadow of these hulking, smoking buildings of steel and concrete.

Hundreds of oil and gas pipelines thread through the swamps and bayous, the broken capillaries of capitalism, while hundreds of petrochemical companies spew their toxic gasses into the air. This slew of international and transnational conglomerates along this 85-mile stretch of river poison and pollute the land, water, and air amongst communities that are largely comprised of Black, working-class descendants from former enslaved individuals in the region. Black lives are disavowed and seen as disposable in the relentless pursuit of economic profit.

[image description: illustrated map showing land parcels of plantations along the Mississippi River. Source: Norman’s Chart of the Lower Mississippi River]

Another parallel between these plantations and petrochemical companies is the power they hold and the fear this incites. Similar to the power structures of enslavement, they created false narratives of economic progress. Techno-rational apparatuses, such as the law and scientific "facts," are used to validate their wrongs and create a hierarchy of knowledges. Local, state, and federal government bend to the whims of these out-of-state, often out-of-country, interests.¹ The state offers tax exemptions and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality easily gives out permits that allow corporations to leach profit from the land at the expense of Black communities, some whom descend directly from enslaved individuals who worked the same land. Research lead by community activists in Cancer Alley has shown that many plants and facilities are built on top of enslaved people's cemeteries and burial sites.²

A neocolonial relationship exists here. Companies site the dirtiest, most dangerous refining jobs in LA, largely in Black communities, exposing these communities to copious amounts of cancer-causing toxins and putting them at risk of explosions and chemical leaks while the companies, many of whom are out-of-country, reap billions of dollars in profits.

Footnotes:

1. See former St. John Parish Council President's corruption case: https://caselaw.findlaw.com/court/us-5th-circuit/1096533.html
2. Forensic Architecture's Environmental Racism in Death Alley Report: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/environmental-racism-in-death-alley-louisiana

[image description: map of Mississippi river with blue text that names the various chemicals that are produced at petrochemical facilities along the River where former plantations were sited. Source: Petrochemical America]

What’s in the Air?

With petrochemical industries comes air pollution. Emissions from manufacturing plastics, synthetic materials, and chemicals can release pollutants into the air, while flaring, the intentional burning of excess gases, can release carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. These facilities also require massive amounts of energy to operate. This energy often comes from fossil fuel sources, which can also be a source air pollution. Altogether, petrochemicals make the air in south Louisiana some of the worst in the nation.

Air pollution is everywhere; it cannot be restricted by transnational boundaries. This summer we saw many Americans inundated with particulate matter (PM2.5/PM10) pollution from Canadian wildfires. In such instances, local governments and media have acted to provide information to the affected populations, yet air (and therefore air pollution) is inescapable, and people are often not given information or resources on how to take action to protect their health.

While all pollution is harmful, it is not all the same. Particulate matter (PM) data is one form of data you can access. It is one of the six most common "criteria pollutants" along with ozone, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and lead. Criteria pollutants are federally regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Clear Air Act established in 1970 and monitored daily by the national Air Quality System.

Still, many of us are subjected to various other air pollutants, especially if we live near industrial facilities or industrial materials are regularly transported through our communities. These are called "hazardous air pollutants" or "toxic air pollutants" (HAPS/TAPS). Under the 1990 Clear Air Act amendments, the American congress expanded the list of chemical compounds to monitor 188 additional pollutants. Since the EPA does not have the infrastructure to monitor all of these pollutants, they rely on individual facilities such as refineries, petrochemical facilities, and construction sites to self-report how much chemical compounds they have on site, how much they release into the air and any accidental spills or leaks.

These pollutants can be incredibly toxic. While particulate matter is harmful for respiratory health, HAPs can cause nervous system damage, cancer, organ failure, skin conditions, endocrine disruption, pregnancy issues, autoimmune diseases, and death.

According to The Coalition to Prevent Chemical Disasters, the United States is averaging an accidental release of toxic chemicals every 2 days¹. As seen in the February 2023 fiery train incident in East Palestine, OH, which released 1.1 million pounds of vinyl chloride and a November 2022 derailment in St. James Parish, which spilled 20,000 gallons of hydrochloric acid, communities across the country are at risk of toxic air exposure every day.

However, due to the immense profits these industries garner, with the ability to hire lobbyists to strong arm governments into regulatory capture, finding information on whether you are exposed to air pollutants is quite difficult, and enforcing regulation is even harder.

So what can we do about it?

Finding the Source

To understand if you are affected by toxic industrial pollution, it is first important to understand what emission sources are in your region. It is also important to know if you live by a facility with a Title V air permit. Facilities that emit over 100 tons of HAPs per year or 100,000 tons of greenhouse gases a year are required to have a Title V air permit and to submit a compliance report twice a year that lists the amount of each pollutant emitted into the environment.

EPA Echo

You can start your research by identifying industrial pollution sources in your area with the Environmental ProtectionAgency (EPA) Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) website: echo.epa.gov

[image description: screenshot of ECHO home page]

[image description: Screenshot of ECHO EPA Facility Search Results with right-side menu to narrow by categories.

Here you can enter your location to find facilities permitted to release air and water pollutants. Refining your search on the right-side menu will allow you to narrow by various categories, most notably:

• Major Source - Permits that allow releases of over 100 tons/year of any pollutant

• Toxic Release Inventory Reports - Certain facilities are required to submit ‘TRI’ reports on a yearly basis on the quantity and specifics of toxic chemicals released into the environment

Detailed Facility Report

[image description: Screenshot of ECHO EPA Detailed Facility Report]

Facilities that fall in these categories are of concern for anyone wishing to understand what hazardous or toxic substances are being released by industrial sources in their area. Once you click on the results, you will come to a ‘Detailed Facility Report’ that provides an overview of violations at the facility that have been reported, enforcement actions taken by state or federal agencies, and the TRI if the facility is required to provide one. Keep in mind enforcement agencies largely rely on data that is self-reported by the company itself. Just because there are no glaring violations or enforcement actions shown on this website does not mean that emissions from this source are not harmful to your community or even that the facility is operating within the terms of its permit.

EPA’s AirData Air Quality Monitoring App

[image description: Screenshot of the EPA’s AirData Air Quality Monitoring App]

It can also be useful to access data from existing federal or state run air monitors near you. You can see this information using the EPA’s AirData Air Quality Monitoring App: https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/interactive-map-air-quality-monitors

However these monitors only collect information on the 6 Criteria Pollutants. The EPA currently has only 26 sites nationally that monitor Hazardous Air Pollutants called the National Air Toxics Trends Station (NATTS) Network, none of which are in Louisiana. The only information available on HAPs in our air, such as benzene, ethylene oxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), neoprene, chloroprene and other toxic industrial emissions, comes from the self-reporting of the industries themselves.

EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening Tool

[image description: Screenshot of the EPA’s EJ Screen Tool]

The EPA’s EJ Screen tool allows you to see how your area ranks nationwide in air quality, cancer risk from air pollution, socio-economic indicators, and other variables. This information may be helpful when compiling reports on how compounding factors may be impacting where you live: https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen

If browsing through the sections of the website that pertain to public documents, permits, air/water enforcement does not lead you to the information you need, submit a public records request to the state environmental agency directly.

Submitting public records requests

The process of submitting public records requests varies by state but generally find your state environmental agency’s website & look for a section called ‘public records.' Below we demonstrate what this looks like for our state agency, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) States like Louisiana, with strong public information laws, will likely have a straightforward process to obtain documents. In case your state does not, submit an email to your agency’s public records department using this as a template on what to include in your request:

[image description: Screenshot of the LDEQ’s Electronic Data Management System (EDMS)]

Agency Interest (AI) Number: This refers to the number given to each facility requesting a permit to pollute. This number is used to categorize all documents and communication between the state agency and the company. If you do not know, include the full site name and location for which you are requesting documents for.

Document IDs: Each document pertaining to a specific facility is also given a document ID. It is fine to not include this, but be sure to specify what exactly you are looking for in your public request. In your request, clearly define what information you are looking for, but also be broad. A broad request will allow you to receive all relevant documents, including communication between agency staff and the company, as well as official documents such as forms, letters, and permits.

Other Notes: If you are looking for information regarding industrial accidents, or enforcement, include a time frame as to when the relevant information would have been filed by the state agency. Bureaucracy is slow. Continue following up on your request until you have received a response from the agency. If the agency for some reason says it cannot provide you with the necessary information, make sure they submit this in writing.

Collecting your own data

Loose laws and loose enforcement means that publicly available information might not align with your experience living near a facility or polluted area. There are a few options if you want to do independent monitoring.

Internet of Things (IoT) enabled PM2 air quality monitors. In recent years, PM2 air monitors have become more accessible, with the ability to see data via a web browser. The Purple Air Monitor is a popular device that has a crowdsourced map with live data from all the sensors around the country. The AirGradient is a device that can sense CO2, temperature, and humidity in addition to PM2. It is also open source and open hardware, meaning that changes can be made to the code or components.

While IoT monitors can provide convenient real-time monitoring, these tools often require a strong Internet connection to function. Many areas closest to petrochemical facilities may not have adequate broadband to bring these sensors online. One group helping to install these monitors in communities impacted by petrochemical industries had to also budget in hotspots devices that can provide Internet service to a location. Additionally, while these sensors are considered to be affordable in comparison to industrial sensors, they can still cost anywhere between $90-$300.

There are also a number of DIY sensors that you can build or assemble if you have the skills (or are curious to learn!). Building your own tools is empowering, though sourcing and assembling these devices can be time-consuming and be expensive. Here are some examples:

DIY Air Quality Monitor with Arduino: howtomechatronics.com/projects/diy-air-quality-monitor-pm2-5-co2-voc-ozone-temp-hum-arduino-meter/

Anotter-Sensor-Hub: github.com/Jana-Marie/anotter-sensor-hub

Bucket Air Sampling tool: For under $200, you can collect EPA approved air samples, however, sample analysis requires laboratory access. Learn more at [publiclab.org/wiki/bucket-monitor](http://publiclab.org/wiki/bucket-monitor)

These sensors can provide ways of understanding your local air quality conditions and starting conversations with your community; however, this data (especially from sensors that you build yourself) can often be dismissed by policymakers and regulators. In the next section we discuss other ways of documenting what is happening in your community.

[image description: rectangle with three different air quality monitors: the Purple air quality monitor, the Air Gradient, and a DIY Air Quality Monitor]

Community Activism

Nationally and around the world, impacted communities are rising up to demand more information and regulations around air quality. Community activism in Louisiana has pushed Senator Cleo Fields to bring Senate Bill 35 to the Louisiana senate for the third year in a row. This a bill that would require industrial facilities in Louisiana to monitor and make their data publicly available. While the bill passed through the Environmental Quality committee, the bill was ultimately rejected due to lobbyists convincing senators that the monitors would be too expensive and the data would be misinterpreted by the public, causing "unnecessary fear."

In Cancer Alley, the Concerned Citizens of St. John Parish community organization partnered with Louisiana State University to conduct an independent air study on cancer-causing chloroprene emissions from the nearby Denka facility in 2021. While the results were hindered by Hurricane Ida, the results showed high levels of chloroprene and aided community pressure on the EPA to regulate Denka. In February 2023, the EPA did file a Clean Air Act Section 303 imminent and substantial endangerment lawsuit against the facility to immediately reduce chloroprene emissions. While they dropped the lawsuit this month, community documentation and citizen data is critical for challenging company and regulatory agencies' narratives. It is only with the presence of an organized community armed with its own information that these state-corporate alliances can be held accountable.

Footnote:

1. louisianacancer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/LSU\_Chloroprene-Monitoring-Report\_2022\_FINAL-3.pdf

Community Documentation

Document what is visible to you - whether it’s suspected pollution in the water, indication of damage from corrosive air pollution on property, chemical odors, flaring at oil and gas facilities, etc. Take pictures and videos.

Share information on group chats with concerned community members, Facebook or other social media groups, and to local press is a great place to start.

Write your local officials and regulatory agencies, demand space at local government meetings to discuss these issues, and constantly document your efforts and the responses of your government.

Report Environmental Violations to the EPA: <https://echo.epa.gov/report-environmental-violations>

File an Environmental Citizen Complaint with local environmental quality department

[image description: image of a facility fire with a cloud of smoke rising above houses near the facility. Picture is taken by Kamea Ozane, an activist based in Sulphur, LA]

In the Case of a Chemical Emergency

As we fight to hold companies and governments accountable for their impacts, we are still at risk for potential spills and leaks. Decades of deregulation has made railways carrying hazardous materials prone to accidents while the increase of hurricanes and floodwaters can cause damage to petrochemical facilities. A recent analysis by the *Times-Picayune* and *The Advocate* showed that more than 740 sites that house toxic chemicals in southeast Louisiana are at risk from severe weather.¹ Here are some ways to protect yourself and others in the case of a chemical emergency:

Subscribe to local text alerts and calls to hear orders on what to do from emergency officials. If you are in Orleans Parish, this would be NOLA Ready.

If evacuation is too dangerous, shelter in place and seal off your space from outdoor air. This includes closing house vent and turning off air conditioning. Seal doors, windows, and gaps with duct tape, wax paper, plastic sheeting, towels, or aluminum foil.

In case of evacuation, find a government designated public shelter by texting SHELTER + your ZIP code to 43362 to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: shelter 12345).

Footnote:

1 -<https://www.nola.com/news/environment/740-toxic-sites-in-louisiana-in-path-of-hurricanes-floods/article_58ad5e72-070a-11ee-8be8-8f5990f737a8.html>

Supplies in case of a chemical event

In south Louisiana, many of us are familiar with preparing for a disaster. In the case of a chemical event, many items may overlap with what you have for hurricane season. Here are some things that may be helpful to have on hand, whether in your home or in a go-bag.

[image description: The following items are placed in front of a light blue circle: Diving goggles, respirator or N95 mask, Tyvek or hazmat suit, water supply, light source]

Building your own DIY air filter for particulate matter

[image description: a hand drawn step by step guide for building a DIY air filter.

Depending on filter size and sourcing materials, cost runs between $50 – 100

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) found these designs to reduce particulate matter (aerosol used in test) by 73% [2/3/23]

Replace filters every 6 months for best results

You will need:

Duct tape

Box Fan

Merv – 13 Filters

Cardboard Box

And probably scissors

Method 1: The Cube [4 Filters and 1 fan]

1. Cut cardboard square for bottom
2. Assemble 4 MERV-13 filters and tape together (Tape along sides and bottom)
3. Place box fan on top, facing upward (and tape it to the filters)

Note: Make sure air flow goes into sides and out of top

1. Cut cardboard cover for top of fan and tape together (image that shows particulate matter flowing in to the air filter and from the top comes cleaner air)

Method 2: Triangle (2 filters and 1 fan)

1. Cut 2 equal sized cardboard triangles
2. Tape 2 filters to each side, use cardboard as top and bottom plates
3. Attach box fan to front with tape
4. Add cardboard cover to front of fan

Method 3: Ford’s “Scrappy Filtration” [1 filter and 1 fan]

1. Measure the height of filter and fan stacked and cut cardboard holder accordingly. Add some legs
2. Place filter in holder first, then fan on top
3. Cardboard cover taped to top.

Reminder: these only filter particulate matter (like PM 2.5 PM10, etc.); they are not effective against volatile compounds (VOC), CO2, Radon or other toxins. ]

[image description: illustration of a swamp with cypress trees and Spanish moss and water. Chemical structures are floating in the background]

Where there is power, there is resistance. And there has always been resistance in Louisiana. From the maroon colonies that existed in the swamps, a mélange of the Indigenous and the self-liberated who defended themselves against colonists and opted out of this racist and extractive economy, to the largest slave rebellion in United States history the 1811 uprising, to the Freetowns that sprung up during and after the times of enslavement, to the civil rights movement and to the environmental justice movement of today, Louisiana is home to many grassroots struggles against oppressive forces.

We continue the struggle to demand accountability and justice for the polluted air inundating our beloved communities. We hope this brief collection of tools and information aids in your fight against toxic air in your community

This zine put together by:

Jen Liu

Sheila Tahir

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Shreyas Vasudevan

Josie Ygnatowiz

[image description: illustration of swamp with cattails, crane, oak trees, and Spanish moss surrounding the text. Above is an illustration of an alligator biting its own tail with ‘wet lands collective’ underneath]

[image description: the cover background is a light blue background with an petrochemical plant stretching across the bottom with dots and various chemical structures floating in the top

# Using counterfactual scenarios to envision low-flying academia

By: Aksel Biørn-Hansen, Elina Eriksson, Minna Laurell-Thorslund, and Daniel Pargman.

Contents:

Academia today

Gratefulness

Counterfactual scenario

Steps of the method

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*We did it!*

50 percent reduction of our emissions from flying.

[Image description: birthday card design with balloons, big, colorful fonts and confetti.]

## *Academia today*

We have managed to reduce our emissions from flying! Congratulations! Many of our old ways have had to go. Today, we have a low-flying academia, where things look quite differently....

*Slow travel is the norm*

We travel for longer periods of time, mostly by land and sea. We work and have meetings while travelling to local hubs, regional events and biannual or triannual conferences. Flying has become a rare and expensive mode of transport.

[Image description: a train from the outside, two people sitting and reading a book each next to the window, blue train, open windows.]

*Equity measures*

We have become selective about who get’s to travel, favouring young researchers and marginalised groups through skewed carbon budgets. Guests to our institutions come mostly from the global south. Researchers in the global south are actively involved in field work.

*Less need to travel*

Online conferencing and asynchronous communication has been widely adopted and researcher have extended international collaboration on a distance as well as local and regional engagements. There are fewer international students on campus and much more hybrid delivery of higher education.

[Image description: computer laptop with ongoing video call with many participants.]

Academic excellence reconsidered

Academia has shifted away from the publish or perish paradigm1. Wellbeing has taken priority and the measure of academic excellence is pinned to the carbon footprint of our research. Funding has been cut to too energy intense research.

## *Gratefulness*

The journey to a low-flying academia has been challenging, yet there are many things we are grateful for today…

*Autonomy and impact*

We are grateful for the freedom to express and discuss our beliefs, hypotheses and results, as well as the prestige we enjoy as academics to teach and contribute with knowledge that can be directed into improving society for the better.

*Caring colleagues*

We are grateful for being surrounded by great colleagues and friends from near and far who care and respect each other, who have fun and are curious about the world.

[Image description: three people bent over a raised flowerbed, working together with, striped clothes.]

*Time to explore*

We are grateful for the mandate and time we have for lifelong learning, with flexible working hours, being able to bike to work, free time to think and access to a wealth of knowledge and tools to do so.

## *Counterfactual scenario*

[Image description: text, “Hey, wait a moment!” in large, red letters.]

This is a counterfactual scenario. By speculatively altering an event in the past, we can assume different possible courses of events leading up to alternative presents that “could have been”. This allows us to explore more alternative states of affairs without considering lock-in effects and the constraints posed by historical path-dependence (Bendor et al 2021). Such explorations show potential for narrowing the gap between “what must be done” and “what feels possible”, in a safe space (Eriksson and Pargman, 2018),  thereby enabling action.

[Image description: illustration of a backcasting in the past, a pastcasting. Horizontal line with two points distributed equally along the line. The point on the left says “point of divergence” and the point on the right says “now”. Diagonal lines, forming triangles, extend from each point toward a dotted vertical line to the right of both points. The diagonal lines from the point that says “now” is short, closest to the vertical line, forming a small triangle. The diagonal lines from the point that says “point of divergence” are long, furthest away, forming a large triangle. The “point of divergence” thus creates a larger window of possible futures.

## *The Method*

Let us tell you how it is done. It involves four steps, starting with a point of divergence (1) in the past which you then expand towards an alternative present (4), envisioning how the world looks like and how we got there.

[Image description: line chart, x-axis with two extremes,with the left side titled “2008” and on the right side titled “now”. Curved line extending from the leftmost extreme (“2008”) ending in a point above the rightmost extreme titled “now”. Four notes on the chart: Close to the leftmost extreme - 1. Point of divergence; in the middle of the two extremes, between the horizontal x-axis and the curved line - 2. headlines show the world changed; close to the end of the curved line - 3. what are we grateful for, and 4. what do we envision.]

## *Steps of the method*

### What if…

… the financial crisis of 2008 was actually an oil crisis?

Our society is fundamentally dependent on oil. It is the largest and most important energy source and together with coal and gas, it stands for 85% of the total energy consumption on the planet. Oil is not renewable. Almost all machinery runs on oil. We have locked ourselves into an oil dependency. The years before the financial crisis of 2008, the oil prices rose dramatically.

Imagine now that the financial crisis in 2007-2008 (Wikipedia, 2023) was not a financial crisis, but an oil crisis that changed our world fundamentally from the ground up. This crisis made the entire world “wake up” to the unsustainability of our oil dependence, and triggered everyone at all levels of society to start working toward minimising their use of oil and other fossil fuels. In this alternative 2022,  fossil fuels are old news,  we only use half as much oil globally, and academics fly half as much.

### *Headline posters*

In the period between the oil crisis (2008) and the alternative present (2022), drastic changes happened throughout society globally. The following headlines could be seen in media outlets:

[Image descriptions: three headline posters, big titles and images.]

*The Traveller.*

Electric flights few and expensive. Who are they for? Interrail to Africa. New Tunnel built by 2025. Personal flight quotas. How do they work?

*UniTeacher Magazine.*

Distance education at record 40% of global higer-ed. University of peking reaches climate targets ahead of time. Researchers protest unequal flight allowances.

*The news*

Plastic quotas. Healthcare a priority sector. “Safe care impossible without plastics”. Government decision. Public institutions to be sanctioned for not hitting climate targets. Local coworking spaces on the rise.

### ***Gratefulness (What are we grateful for)***

Before we start envisioning what academia would look like, now that we are in a present where we only use half the oil, we want to remember things we are grateful for in our academic practice, and what we want to keep. See section “Gratefulness” above.

[Image description: screenshot of survey, invitation to share what you are grateful for as an academic today, in 2022]

### *Alternative present*

Together we will now explore and envision what our academic practices look like when we only use half the oil. See page 2.

[Image description: screenshot of online documents used by participants to envision what academia looks like in the alternative present.]

## *Being the new paradigm within the old*

[Image description: black background. yellow, starshaped graphics extend from center of page, expanding in all directions, text in the middle (see below).]

Russian dolls. This method was originally developed in another research project, Beyond the Event Horizon (KTH, 2023), a collaborative action research project (Fazey et al, 2018), together with the Transition Network Sweden (The transition network, 2023). One central tenet in that project was to not only collaboratively develop a workshop method, but to also give it back to the community - so the workshop materials developed in the project are Creative Commons licensed, and we encourage people to take it and remake it.

As such, the method presented in this zine is not only about the future paradigm (low carbon academia), it is also a method that could be used in the future paradigm (a low carbon method), but it is also our enactment, *us striving to be the future paradigm (Fazey et al, 2020).* A russian doll, inside a russian doll, inside a russian doll. Through this, we not only want to share the method (and please use it) but also share a glimpse of the change of us (Pargman and Eriksson, 2023).

## *Invitation*

What do you want to explore?

[Image description: large text centered in the middle, “what do you want to explore”, many smaller snippets of text surrounding the title with the following question “what if…?”.

## *Notes at the end*

This zine was written and created by Aksel Biørn-Hansen, Elina Eriksson, Minna Laurell Thorslund and Daniel Pargman.

Images, sketches and graphic materials all created by us, expect the four photographs on page 2 and 3 which were gathered from various magazines and free sources online.

### *Begin here*

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# Visiting with places of resource extraction in Quebec and Labrador: a photo storybook

Isabella Huberman

[Front cover image: a worn brown leather pocket-sized photo album cover. The word “Photographs” is written in cursive across the centre]

p.3 Last summer I drove from Montreal to Happy Valley-Goose Bay with my mom. On Google Maps this route is 1,776 kilometers long. Fifteen days to walk, four days to bike, 22 hours to drive. We spent four nights on the road, stopping along the way. First, from Montreal to Forestville, where the region known as the Côte-Nord, the North Shore of the St-Lawrence River, starts. At this latitude the river begins to widen, opening into the sea. Highway 138 goes eastwards along the North Shore to the Gulf of the St-Lawrence where it ends on the sandy shores of Kegashka. We took the 138 to Baie-Comeau, where you leave the coast to go inland on Route 389, towards the centre of the province and the Manicouagan crater, known as l’oeil du Québec, the Eye of Quebec, which became a hydro reservoir when the Manic-5 mega dam was built. We were on our way to see Manic-5. And beyond that, on the other side of the Labrador border, Churchill Falls, and if we could, Muskrat Falls, our destination. This was a hydro road trip.

[image: view out of the passenger seat of a vehicle, showing the car’s side mirror and a large road sign with the names of the hydro dams and mining town along Route 389]

p.4 [facing image: a hand drawn map of Quebec and Labrador, with a blue line showing the route taken on the drive between Montreal and Happy Valley-Goose Bay]

p. 5 Out the car window, I can’t stop taking pictures of hydro towers and power lines. Each one seems different. I have to take photos of them all. From my spot in the passenger seat, I film the wires, as they droop and arc in the sky. Other times, we pull over, and I snap pictures standing as close to the towers as we can get. The pictures can’t capture the relentless buzzing of the wires.

p. 6 [facing image: a cluster of hydro towers stand in a grassy field. The hydro wires cross through a blue sky with clouds]

p. 7 I had spent the previous two years working on a postdoc project, dedicated to studying Indigenous film, literature and theories that engage with hydro development in Manitoba and Quebec. I conducted my research mainly through analysis of texts and artworks, and through conversations with colleagues and artists with lived experience from hydro-impacted communities. These two years coincided with the global pandemic, when travel wasn’t possible. It felt weird to write about these places and not have seen them. Increasingly, it felt weird to produce any kind of knowledge about hydro, sites of hydro flooding and affected communities, and not have been to the impacted places.

p. 8 [facing image: a winding road through pine trees and Canadian shield. The back of a transport truck is up ahead on the road]

p. 9 The road to Labrador travels through several large-scale resource extraction projects. Resource extraction sites punctuate miles and miles of black spruce. Before you get to Manic-5, you pass Manic-2 (there is also a 1 and a 3 but no Manic-4). The road to Labrador exists because of these projects.

p.10 [facing image: a winding road through pine trees. The spill gates of a hydro dam are seen up ahead in the distance]

p. 11 I grew up in Montreal. Though I consider myself a Quebecker, I am not Québécoise. My Anglophone family arrived there. My Ontarian mother came for work. My father is a lifelong “Mun-trealer.” My father’s family fled the Pale of Russia in the first part of the 20th century to settle in Montreal. I was raised with this history and the stories my Jewish grandfather told of his early days in Montreal as a young man in the 1930s. He lived to be over 100 and he still had a head for numbers: he could recite the telephone numbers of long-dead cousins; he could tell you what a smoked meat sandwich cost in the 1950s; and the departure time for the Friday evening train to the Laurentians (the “snow train” which had its heyday in the 1940s and was shut down by the 1970s). A Russian-Jewish immigrant, a traveling salesman in the cloth trade, he lived through the years of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, somehow adjacent to it.

p. 12 It’s a road trip, so we play music. In anticipation of our arrival at Manic-5, I’ve become obsessed with Georges Dor’s ballad “La Manic,” a song the Québécois crooner wrote in the mid 1960s. It’s the love song of a homesick worker building Manic-5 to his paramour back in Montreal. When Leonard Cohen sang it in Quebec City on his 2012 tour, the crowd cried and yelled “merci.”

Si tu savais comme on s’ennuie

À la Manic

Tu m’écrirais bien plus souvent

À la Manicouagan

Si t’as pas grand’chose à me dire

Écris cent fois les mots «Je t’aime»

If you knew how lonely one gets/At La Manic/You’d write to me much more often/At La Manicouagan/If you don’t have much to tell me/Write the words “I love you” a hundred times.

p. 13 Manic-5 is impossible to miss. We drive around a bend in the road and there it is, its many arched buttresses spreading out in front of us. We are spending the night at the “Motel de l’Énergie” so we can visit the on-site museum that commemorates the building of the dam and take one of the free guided tours of the generating station offered by Hydro-Québec. We find ourselves part of a large group, we trundle around in hard hats and bounce on the seats of the yellow school bus that takes us through the site. No phones or photos allowed, except in designated places. Like in front of the huge letters that say “Manic-5,” perfect for photo-ops. At the souvenir shop, I buy a tee-shirt with a cartoon image of the dam. Our guide, a young man in his 20s, talks about being the third generation in his family to work at Manic-5: his grandfather had been a construction worker who built it, his father, an engineer who maintained it, and now he, as a tour guide, tells the story to tourists like us. My mom has asked for an English audio headset and follows the tour at a slightly different beat. In the guide’s telling, it’s the story of a great project, that spearheaded Quebec’s economic independence and symbolized the Maîtres Chez Nous (Masters in our own house) slogan. It’s odd to be the only anglophones on the tour. I feel we are listening-in. Our guide’s story is a celebration of 20th century modernity, of engineering prowess born and raised in Quebec, and of the water resource that led to Quebec’s emancipation. It’s at the end of the visit that the guide mentions the Innu whose lands were flooded by the reservoir and whose river, the Manicouagan, was diverted.

p. 14 [facing image: a large mega dam with multiple arched concrete buttresses is spread across a road. The road winds up to the dam, seeming to disappear into it]

p. 15 Breakfast at the Motel de l’Énergie is black coffee, fried eggs, hash browns and bacon. A packed lunch is white bread, Kraft slices, and ham. A change, for my southerner-from-the-city tastes, accustomed to sourdough and leafy greens. I eat everything up.

p. 16 [facing image: an overhead view of a cafeteria breakfast tray, showing eggs, hashbrowns, bacon and toast. A fork and knife sit to the left side of the tray]

p. 17 The road is paved up until Manic-5, making it an attractive drive for tourists coming for their guided visit. 20 kilometers beyond the dam, it turns to gravel, the dusty kind that coats the shrubs and spindly black spruce on the side of the road. Crossing through the Caniapiscau region, this place feels powerful to me. I have learned, in my research, about the Caniapiscau reservoir, where in the 1980s, 12,000 caribou drowned on their migration route when Hydro-Québec opened the sluice gates of the reservoir. Quebec’s premier at the time called it an “act of God” and blamed the drownings on heavy rains. The bodies of the caribou had to be removed from the river so they wouldn’t rot there. They were taken inland by helicopters to decompose. Later, they were airlifted south to Montreal to be used in pet food.

p. 18 [facing image: a landscape showing black spruce trees that are blackened from a forest fire. The spindly trees grow out of muskeg]

p. 19 My mom is an anthropologist. Every night in our motel room, she takes out her notebook and diligently describes the day’s activities: who we met, the conversations we had, what we saw. I think this skill must be ingrained in her from her training. A lifetime of fieldwork. Trying to write at the end of the day exhausts me. I lie on the bedspread and stare at the ceiling.

p. 20 [facing image: view of a mega dam, spread across the road. Hydro wires cross through the sky and a construction trailer sits at the base of the dam]

p. 21 The road flattens out as we approach the Mont-Wright mine and the town of Fermont. In my excitement over hydro structures and hydro stories, I’d forgotten we would be passing one of the largest open-pit iron ore mines in the world, 24 kilometers wide. On this stretch of road, we don’t see any other cars. The road here is criss-crossed by cargo trains carrying pellets of iron ore down to the St-Lawrence, to the seaport at Port Cartier, where they are shipped all over the world. I’m surprised to see the wagons are open and particles of iron-ore fly off the top. When we stop to pee on the side of the road, I see the ground is sprinkled with particles. They’re soot-coloured and they shimmer.

 p. 22 [facing image: a freight train with many cars crosses a landscape. In the foreground lies a marsh with a pond]

p. 23 After Fermont, we’re in Labrador, called “The Big Land” by Labradorians. Hours after passing Labrador City, we stop at Churchill Falls, a company-run town whose motto is “The Power of Community.” If you don’t work for Nalcor, you can’t live here. Just before the town, we get out where the road crosses the Churchill River. The air is thick with mosquitos. We hike in to see the famous falls that power the Churchill generating station. Around a bend in the trail, the falls come into view. There’s a lookout and I take a photo of a plaque that reads “Hamilton Falls. Height 245 feet. First visited by John McLean, a factor for the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1839.” There is no mention of the Innu whose territory this is. The falls are a trickle. A field of boulders lies where they once roared. All that remains is a wide gash through the taiga forest. This is where a river used to run.

In the town of Churchill Falls, we try to get a spot on the guided visit of the underground generating station, but there’s only one tour each evening with room for four people and that night it’s full. Instead, we go to the restaurant in the community centre where we talk to the waitress and a man who works contracts fixing things in power stations. He doesn’t have use of one of his legs. He tells us he fell 43 feet down a shaft of a dam in Arizona and was paralyzed for three years. We tell him we’re on our way to see Muskrat Falls and he says the only positive of Muskrat Falls is that Keeyask in Manitoba and Site C in BC are “as fucked up.” After this I start to take fieldnotes.

p. 24 [facing image:  an expansive landscape shows a large area of black spruce forest. A wide canyon of rocks crosses through the forest. There is a small streak of water running through the middle of the canyon]

p. 25 Out the window, I keep filming transmission lines, until my phone tells me it’s running out of space. The final stretch of road from Churchill Falls to Happy-Valley-Goose Bay follows the course of what’s left of the Churchill River, as it runs east towards the ocean. The road is a hydro highway, following miles and miles of transmission lines. We listen to “Women Sing (Tom) Waits” and drive in silence.

p. 26 [facing image:  a large hydro tower rises in the foreground. Wires connect it to a second tower in the distance. The towers sit in a northern marshland]

p. 27 In the end, we can’t get anywhere near Muskrat Falls. Unlike Manic-5, the dam spread across the road, with the museum, guided visit and souvenir shop, or Churchill Falls, with its manicured town, Muskrat Falls is hidden far from the road. It’s about 20 kilometers outside Happy Valley-Goose Bay, but there are no signs pointing the way. I’ve been reading a book about how this project of the new millennium has led to a decade long saga, multibillion dollars of debt, environmental controversy, strong Indigenous resistance. I learn from the book how the Muskrat Falls project was pushed forward by Newfoundland politicians partly as a way to right past wrongs of the 1960s when the province lost the majority of the revenue from Churchill Falls to Hydro-Québec. Hydro-Québec holds the rights to the transmission lines crossing Quebec and re-sells the power at a profit. We follow the map in my book to try to find an access road. The closest thing we see is a Nalcor sign for the “Labrador Mashalling Yard,” a large gravel pit on the side of the road. We turn around and drive further out, climbing the river valley. From high up on the road, we can spot the spillway gates in the distance. We pull over and peek through the brush.

p. 28 [facing image:  in the foreground, the leaves of bushes take up the right and left sides of the image. In the centre, in the distance, lie a large body of water and trees. In the far background, the spillway gates of the Muskrat Falls dam are faintly visible]

p. 29 Later, at home, I Google “Labrador, The Big Land.” Multiple recent articles come up describing Labrador as “one of the last, unspoiled places left on earth” (Newfoundland tourism), “one of the great untamed wilderness areas of the world” (Globe and Mail).

p. 30 [facing image:  a collection of documents and souvenirs from the road trip: a road map of Quebec and of Route 389, a magnet from Manic-5, a magnet from the town of Fermont; a motel receipt]

p.31 Let’s talk methods!

What does a road trip have to do with methods? My training is in literary studies, specifically, as a settler scholar in Indigenous literary studies. Scholars in the discipline talk about “visiting” as a methodology for studying Indigenous narrative arts (Cariou 2021) and encourage the practice of “relational accountability” (Wilson 2001). This means being called into an ongoing process of accountability to an artist, their work, their community. These methods have urged me to shift how I do research in literature. They have led me to look outside the text (hello world!) to value lived experiences and conversations, which in turn inform my understanding of the works I study. For this project, travelling to sites of large-scale resource extraction was a way of visiting with the places that I have been writing about since my postdoctoral research, places that form the context in the films and literature I continue to study in my ongoing research. What I would like to think is that visiting with places of environmental destruction might be a way of enacting accountability to and relationship-building with the places I read and write about. What I do know is that visiting with these places affected me (hello feelings). Maybe I will read and write about them differently now.

Why a photo storybook?  This zine is told as mother-daughter road trip. It is personal and situated. Through my studies in literary analysis, I have learned that “we do not read from so-called neutral, omniscient perspectives from which we can understand everything; instead, we read from particular positions that can include both insights and blind spots” (McCall et al., 2017: 4). I wanted to write this methods zine as a story that would allude to the insights and limitations of the storyteller (me!) while on this trip. I only started taking fieldnotes partway through (as a literary studies person, fieldnotes weren’t in my methods toolkit).

p. 32 I wrote this mostly from memory, so there are things I no doubt forgot. That’s also why it’s presented like a pocket photo album you might put together after a trip, a kind of visual scrapbook of souvenirs that (hopefully) takes the reader (you!) along on the voyage. I am not well-versed in drawing, but in the spirit of DIY wanted to make the illustrations myself. So I traced over my trip photos. The drawings are composites of several layers of images: using a lightbox, I would trace over a photo, then take a picture of the tracing superimposed on the original photo. Following the lines with my pen, filling in the shadows, going over and over the image by hand, I found myself visiting once again with these places.

While on the trip, I thought that my primary method was being in places (“visiting with”). But in crafting this zine, I came to realize that there were many other pieces to the methods puzzle. Methods for visiting with places of environmental destruction can be:

- road trips

- conversations with strangers

- conversations with one’s mother

- getting lost

- improvising along the way

- taking guided tours

- taking a hike

- taking notes

- photo-taking

- reading books

- reading maps

- scrapbooking

- tracing

- and certainly others

p.33 References and Inspiration

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p. 34 Contact and Thank Yous

Do you read/write/think about or work/live/travel in places transformed by resource extraction? Send me a note! Let’s make a zine and start a movement!

isabella.huberman@ubc.ca

With many thanks to Sarah Rayner and Anne Pasek at the Low-Carbon Research Methods Group, Sally Cole (hi mum!), Josh Eisen and Melanie Dennis Unrau, for the conversations and keen editorial eye.

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p. 35

[Back cover image: a worn brown leather pocket-sized photo album cover. The word “Photographs” is written in cursive across the centre]

# “What a fucking collage!” Zinemaking as a collaborative research practice

Willow Ross

Cover page:

[Image description: A cover-photo collage of a person diving into a dumpster, two Australian white Ibis outside a bin, a heart carved into the blue metal side of a dumpster, and a gloved hand holding up a dumpstered biscuit. All of these images are glued onto a black and white background of a parking lot with a tree surrounded by discarded food.]

This meta-zine created for DIY Methods 2023

Self-published by bin chicken ink

Page one: ‘This zine was made on stolen land’

[Page description: The colour scheme of the page is light blue and pink against a white background; it is clear that text and images have been collaged digitally, unlike the cover page.]

This digital meta-zine was put together by Willow Ross. Willow is a researcher of waste worlds based at the University of Melbourne, and lives on unceded Wurundjeri Country. She is passionate about urban wilds, decolonisation, and what people do with rubbish.

Special thanks to the dumpster gods, critters, and contributors to our zine ‘what a fucking waste!’. This zine would not exist without them.

Near the Birrarung, on Wurundjeri Country, in Naarm – known otherwise as Melbourne. This meta-zine was put together for the 2023 DIY Methods Conference as a reflection on the process of collaborative zinemaking with friends, organisers, and fellow bin divers.

I also want to pay respects to the custodians of the many Countries that everyone participating in DIY Methods is reliant on — including the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation and their Countries, where the research in this zine happened. There, near the banks of the Merri, we gathered to make the zine that made this zine possible. Also near those banks, in 1835, the Wurundjeri people met with the murderer John Batman, who attempted to extort their land with a false Treaty. That treaty was eventually nullified but the lands were—and are—still stolen.

Almost two hundred years later, no Treaty has been signed. There’s an uncomfortable parallel here, with settlers writing up documents on the banks of the Merri, and I don’t want to banish this discomfort. As Tuck and Yang (in ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’, 2012) remind us, decolonisation is not a metaphor. It is literally about giving land back. Acknowledging land or — as it is known here — Country is not the end of the work – not really even the start.

So, where can we start? One way might be to recognise that this work never happens alone. We can work to collaborate – work to be accomplices, not just allies (Accomplices Not Allies, Indigenous Action Media 2014). This calls for us to experiment with collaborative research practices, methods that make genuine grassroots collaboration possible.

Earlier this year, a group of us gathered to make a zine about dumpster diving. We were a self- described group of ferals – dumpster divers, queers, housing activists, anarchists. Some of us knew each other. Some had just met. This was part of a Masters research project designed by me, Willow, on experiences of dumpster diving.

Together, we created a zine: ‘what a fucking waste! stories from the dumpster’. The “meta-zine” you are reading now is a digital reflection on what it took to make that zine — and how collaborative research methods like zinemaking can destabilise traditional power structures. To view the original zine in full, visit the web link on the final page.

[Image description: An Aboriginal flag in red, yellow and black sits at the top of the page. Toward the bottom is a photo of the cover page of the zine, as described above, in the process of being made with pots of ink and pieces of collaging around it.]

Page two: Contributors

[A change in visual style indicates that this page is from the original zine, made by the collective of dumpster diver collaborators described above. Cut-outs from magazines, photos of dumpsters, and bits of food in beige form a collaged background to the following texts].

This zine was made by and belongs to all of us – a collaborative effort. First names only have been listed to protect privacy of collaborators and as part of the research methods.  
  
WHO ARE WE?

This zine was made by a group of dirty-living queers, dumpster divers, mutual aiders and activists on stolen land in Naarm, Melbourne.

With thanks to Alys, Elk, Gali, Hari, Jordan, Lauren, Bec, Lil, Richard, Rhys, Emori, Patches, Sab, Somer, Oli and the two Willows. We made this zine to introduce people to dumpstering, to share skills, and as part of research by one of us about the sensory experiences and ecologies of the dumpster.

BACKGROUND

This zine was collectively created as part of a Masters project undertaken by Willow Ross, called ‘Breaking bread with bin chickens’.

Some of the text here is in quotes – these quotes are from interviews that were part of this Masters project. Everything here is our collective words and thoughts.

For more on this project, contact Willow at willow.ross@student.unimelb.edu.au

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This zine was collaged, cut, pasted, and dreamed up on stolen Wurundjeri Country, part of Kulin Nation land in the south-east of so-called australia. this land is stolen land. when we rescue food from the bins of this continent, it is food that has been grown, processed or thrown away on land that has never been ceded. land with a long history of sustainable food production, interrupted 250 years ago by British invasion.

we pay our respects to the Wurundjeri, whose murnong patches flowered and continue to flower along the Merri Merri creek near where this zine was made, and to their Elders who pass down knowledge about plants, place and resistance. We say that this is stolen land; that sovereignty was never ceded; that no legitimate treaty has ever been signed; and we continue to fight for land back. Always was, always will be.

[image of Aboriginal flag rendered in typed text using brackets, dashes and an o symbol]

Page three: Why collaborative zinemaking?

[Page description: The visual style of digital collage and pink and blue boxes against a white background suggests that we are back to the commentary on the original zine.]

I chose to talk about the Outrage page first because of the story behind it.

To make the original zine, my collaborators and I had been going on ‘dive-along’ trips, chatting as we squelched through food waste, and recording solo excursions. After this, we came together for a series zinemaking workshops to process our data and share stories, photos, and souvenirs.

As Harrison and Ogden (in ‘Crafting’, 2021) point out, hands-on craft practices create a ‘pleasurable, disinhibiting and democratic’ setting for collaboration. It encourages discussion, debate.

Other geographers have tapped into this disinhibiting setting for their research. In *The Mouse Exchange*, Emma Roe and Sara Peres invited participants to be part of a creative, collaborative practice reflecting on the origins of laboratory mice by making a felt mouse. These curiosity and craft-driven practices open collective reflection. But often, this is more about data collection – for me, I wanted to bring collaborators into the actual process of data analysis.

[Image description: A photo in the upper right middle of the page shows one of the felt mice created for *The Mouse Exchange,* sitting in a tray of shredded paper with a green background]

In our second session, one of these discussions quickly spiralled into a rework of the entire zine. Bec, one of our zinemaking collective, disagreed with the original title we came up with (‘dumpstering is so fucking cool’) because it over-romanticised dumpstering. We all agreed—it was a misstep—trying to be too edgy and ignoring class, precarity, exposure. So we changed our title.

This led to another collaborator suggesting we add a page, to cover those elements of exposure and injustice & add a new theme. This eventually became the Outrage page: the first page, up the front of the zine, which tied together the anger identified by all of us in our interviews, at the cruelty and waste of the food system and the way that supermarkets reinforce poverty.

‘Outrage’ shows how zinemaking can empower participants to make their own analyses of the data and contest existing ones; to ‘cut and paste’ the conclusions of collaborative geographical research *as enthusiastic equals.*

[Image description: Two photos show the storyboarding process of the original collaborative zine. The first shows a mind map drawn in sharpie, with the original title crossed out and a new one added. The second shows two A4 pages divided up into the 16 sections of the zine.]

Page four: Outrage

[Page description: the analogue collage style shows that we are back in the original zine. A title ‘Outrage’ is spelled out with colourful, individual letters cut from magazines. Against a background of grey, photos show excessive dumpster finds like bins full of Coke cans, bottled water, and milk plus handwritten words ‘Built-in’, ‘Excessiveness’, and ‘Wastefulness’.]

THE SYSTEM IS BROKEN

Our food system relies on waste. No, really. The average supermarket throws away tonnes of perfectly edible food every year, because keeping bruised, weird-shaped, slightly expired, damaged or excess food around would affect their bottom line.

Supermarkets are all lights, sterile, economical and warehousy, like a factory. The experience of shopping is purposefully manufactured and (especially in poor neighbourhoods) the food itself is often lacking in nutrition. Choice architecture pushes us to walk past the junk food on our way to the milk. Sales heavily discount ultra-processed foods. Nothing in there exists to feed us – it exists to generate profit.

THERE’S ENOUGH ALREADY

Globally, the food producers of the world already grow enough to comfortably feed everybody. But that food doesn’t get to all of those mouths.

Because our food system is built around getting people to buy things, rather than offering healthy, nutritious, culturally appropriate food at a fair price (or for free), people miss out. We have so much ***stuff*** but so many people go underfed – and we use so much packaging and supplies and energy and CO2 just to *sell it better*.

TODDLER TANTRUMS

“the ways that people treat food when it becomes garbage”

When a system is intentionally bad because it doesn't want any other way to be better, it's enraging. And that's how we see the broader system – kind of like a capitalist toddler tantrum. If they can’t have it, nobody can. So we take it.

“Kind of that capitalist attitude the kids who are like, if I can't play with my toys then no one gets to.”

“I walk into a supermarket and I’m like: Good God I would rather dumpster dive.”  
  
Page five: Collaging

[Page description: Blue and pink colour scheme again indicates we are back to commentary. A photo in the top right corner of the page shows a pair of white hands wearing a studded leather bracelet pasting magazine cut-outs onto a page of the zine.]

Collaging:

A recipe for dumpster ink:

- take any fruit or veg from the bin containing colour compounds (e.g. red cabbage, onion skins, avocado pips, beetroot, blueberries, turmeric)

- chop and pulverise the veg into small coin-sized pieces and place in boiling water

- boil for 15-30 mins depending on hardness

- strain hot water into a sterilised jar and add a few drops of gum arabic, or other thickener

As facilitator of the first zinemaking session, I quickly noticed that people were hesitant to offer their ideas. And I didn’t know what to do either. We needed a structure, a storyboard for our ideas. But we were all feeling something that most people in a collaborative research setting or first-time activist meeting can relate to: we were shy.

Quietly panicking, I grabbed the nearest available thing and held them up: scissors. Why don’t we start with collaging? I pointed to the stack of dumpster photos and vintage magazines at the back of the room.

Then ***something happened.*** After our initial roadblock, people were talking, sharing ideas, themes were starting to come together. As we cut and pasted, collaging opened up conversation and put people at ease. In the next session, collaging happened first and talk—to my relief—followed.

Example – The Gross. I love this page of the zine because it reflects the visceral, sticky sides of dumpstering. It was one of the first pages we made, agreeing on it before we even knew the zine structure but after we started collaging.

After a false start, we were led by our materials. You can see all of these materials represented here: old magazines, interview transcripts and photos, key ideas from the interviews, even inks made from dumpster dived foods.

This zinemaking moment was a space for us to carefully and democratically make meaning out of our materials, to reflect and to collage, cut, and paste our responses from what was there.

This collaging approach continued through the whole zine. Mirroring our approach of collaging ideas, opinions and analysis as a group, we brought together sketches, magazine text, photos from dumpstering trips, and interview extracts.

[Image description: two photos, the first of a pot of red cabbage boiling on the stove to make ink, the other showing this ink being used to write ‘The Gross’ on a piece of blank paper.]

Page six: The Gross

[Page description: Bold, dripping curved letters in a grey-purple ink reach from the top of the page, leaking down into a collage of tepid, off-looking magazine cut-outs of meals: cheesy cauliflower and asparagus, stewed tomatoes and photos of the inside of dumpsters. A small ‘the’ cut-out comes before the ink letters, spelling out ‘The Gross’’.]

Some of our time spent in or around the bin can get pretty disgusting. But that’s part of it! So we’re getting into all the squelchy detail here.

[collaged] ‘Imagine thick slices of an unusual cream’

[collaged] ‘contaminating your nose’

TEXTURES

* The feeling of soft vegetables when you forget gloves
* Rotten fruit skins
* Soft bin grime
* Sticky hands after a dive
* Blood in meat bags
* Puffed up packaging feels nice but weird

RATS, MICE, RODENTS

There’s nothing worse than opening a bin to find rats looking back. But we have to be considerate of our bin-diving comrades. Rats, mice, rodents – just give them a moment and they’ll make themselves scarce.

Beware – one of our friends picked up a heavy bag of promising goods which turned out to be dead, poisoned rats. You’ll see rats traps everywhere. Always wear gloves!

*Hot Tip - Clean your hands on white bread! There’s always plenty around.*

[Image description: at the bottom of the page, someone has sketched a picture of a rat, with ‘rattus rattus’ written underneath. Next to this, an imagine of someone grinning, inside a dumpster, cleaning her hands with white bread. Collaged magazine bits read ‘Odour’ and ‘Do we sign our death warrant?’]

Pages seven and eight: The Skills

[Page description: A double-page spread shows a pair of gloved hands holding strawberries and spilling them onto the page. The hands are a photo, but the strawberries continue beyond the edges of the picture, falling down the centre of the double spread in a diagonal pattern. Below them, ‘The Skills’ is written in blue and pink colour. Three lines of yellow radiate from the top left of the double spread, widening out as they reach the bottom. In each, a piece of text is written: “do it yourself”, “ask a friend”, “preparations improve results”.]  
  
Take a tip from me: the helpful but not 100% necessary list of dumpstering skills

[collaged] ‘No tricks, no fuss, no problem’

Dumpster diving is easy. But skills in dumpstering are things you build up over time. Below, we put together a list of our most common ‘I wish I knew this at the start’ things.

[collaged] ‘What is it? What does it mean to you? We answer your most commonly-asked questions’

The-helpful-but-not-100%-necessary-list-of-dumpstering-skills

* Dive with a friend
* Scout out locations in your neighbourhood at night; check behind popular supermarkets and grocers. Servos, bakeries, warehouses, pet shops are fair game
* Persistence is key; dumpstering is like digging for gold
* Get practice at conversing with managers/security etc. You can de-escalate a situation by offering to clean up your mess, put things back, or getting their pity
* Ferment! Be agent 007 of funky foods. You can turn nearly-off cabbage, onion, carrot, cucumber, beans and more into pickles. Invite your friends, make it a party
* Innovate ways to open skips/dumpsters – sometimes you don’t need a key. Tools, timing, and local tips all help
* Have courage in the face of the gross (see previous page)

Page nine: The Rush

[Page description: pink and blue and we’re back in the zine commentary. A collage of photos from dumpster action, including the hands and white bread seen on the Gross page, is visible behind the text on the page.]

The Rush

The Rush was the first page of text that we added to the zine. But it was also one of the last ones we finished.

The process of making this page taught us about what Gemma Sou and Marie Hall (2023, Comics and zines for creative research) call the ‘participatory, slowed-down practice of research engagement’. This side of zinemaking, and other creative methods, places value on doing things over and over, revisiting ideas, and making research with multiple voices.

For example, while other pages were mostly designed by a particular member of the group, The Rush was first put together by Harri, but then edited by Lauren, Oli, and me. Harri introduced the idea of the ‘dumpster gods’ but Lauren took it and ran, bringing in dumpsters as alive, animate things and suggesting an accompanying podcast.

Photo elicitation and interview work

By our third workshop, The Rush had been through about four drafts. In the final session, everyone went through our transcripts looking for our ‘rushes’ — those moments of endorphin highs in the dumpster, of great finds.

We also went through the photos everyone had brought — of previous dumpstering finds, bin treasures, slabs of alcohol or crates of sweet foods. We put all these together and these became the final touches for our reflections on the rush.

Collectively combing through interviews and photos felt so material and intimate. We could invite people into our experiences. Zinemaking allowed us to invite readers to access places and moments in a way that other mediums don’t — zines can be more direct, confronting, casual, challenging, messy (Sou and Hall, 2023). This was an act of careful community-making, tied to our plan for the zine to travel beyond our networks.

Text box: How to do interviews with dumpster divers?

My research investigates embodied experiences of dumpster diving. To immerse myself in these worlds, I asked collaborators to take me on “dive-along” tours, showing me their dumpster diving routine. This involves lots of movement: planning, putting on gear, deciding where to go, getting to the dumpster, climbing in, pulling out goods, packing them and taking them home to be redistributed. Go-along interviews, where researchers move with collaborators, are well-suited to studying these mobile practices. I went on 11 dive-alongs with 15 divers, where senses and encounters informed the way we moved and spoke – and produced rich, sensory data for our zine.

Page ten: The Rush 2

[Page description: On the other side of the double spread, back to the original zine. A huge volume of treats, photographed by dumpster divers, are spread across the page.Maltesers, Coke, MnMs, Milo make up the background. Text is spread across the page.]

*Really, really good finds*

Sometimes, you get ***the rush.*** It’s hard to describe. You can’t get it at the supermarket. You gotta get in the bin, you gotta find it. But we can tell you about it here.

It’s the moment where you find those ingredients you’ve been hoping for all week. When you find that bunch of carrots you wanted. Or your nose gets a whiff of basil. Or you find an entire slab of Peroni Reds or MnMs or chocolate mud cakes. It’s the rush. You just never know what you’re going to dig out. These are the moments when we get the rush, a hit of dopamine from pulling what you need out of the chaos of discard.

“25kg of flour”

“5kg of honey”

“An airfryer”

“Fancy German kranskies”

THE DUMPSTER GODS [a cut-out of a hand with inscrutable symbols on it next to this]

Do all dumpster divers pray to the dumpster gods? We believe they do. But some of us deeply believe that dumpster diving is a mystical experience. The gods are part of the ecology.

What to do?

1. Give back to the dumpster gods.
2. Give thanks.
3. Be grateful for your finds.
4. Be mindful of the dumpsters – each has a spirit.
5. Be faithful. Don’t shop at the supermarkets too much.

Followers of the dumpster gods also really recommend this podcast: *‘The Kind Nudibranch and the Garbage Witch Explore the World and Share It With You’.*

SPONTANEOUS ENCOUNTERS

These are the moment you run into your friends, make new friends, get a gift from a supportive worker, or meet some curious nonhumans. Some divers find furniture. Others find community in the bin – a few of us met at a northside dumpster back in early 2023.

The community and the rush of dumpstering are good examples of why some solutions or actions some things are more of a hack than a solution. Dumpstering hacks open our food system, gets us fed, makes community, and fuels us to keep working the big problems.

Page eleven: Gifting

[Page description: Back to the commentary, with blue and pink squares in each corner of the page]

Gifting

As well as an exercise in collaboration, we wanted our zine to be a gift – to the communities, mutual aid networks, and activist groups we are part of. This reflected the gifts that flow regularly through the waste streams of dumpster diving networks.

This was an important balance of the collaboration – not just for everyone to be part of the analysis, but also to make something that was valuable for all of us.

We wanted **‘what a fucking waste’** to tell our stories of the dumpster and also to pass on basic how-to for anyone wanting to skill up or go diving for the first time.

[image description: a photo of a white metal dumpster with a black lid propped open. On the side of the dumpster, red text reads ‘NO STEP’ and ‘CAUTION: PINCH POINT’.

Group therapy and staff interactions

These items on the opposite page — *gloves, tools, head torches, boots, keys* — are often passed around dumpstering networks as gifts, acquired for free or with money. They represent the mutual aid, reciprocal culture that almost always typifies our communities.

The other side of the page also offered us a chance to let off some collective steam. Run ins with aggressive staff are all too common in dumpster diving experiences. In fact, this downside came up in every one of our interviews together. Our discussion of what to do doubled up as advice and outlet for frustration — another gift of the zinemaking process.

Our conversations, shared in zine form, become gifts for ourselves and the community.

[Image description: Two hands hold pencils and draw on coloured pages, one light blue and the other yellow. On the yellow page, you can see the title ‘The Skills’ in playful lettering. In the background, a pizza box and other zine makers cutting out shapes.]

Page twelve: What to do with angry staff/the gear

[Page description: Another page from the original zine, this is split into two parts on a bright yellow background. In the top half, there is short section on dealing with angry store workers and security. In the bottom half, there is a list of various tools for divers.]

STAFF TIPS

* De-escalate. Use your skills to defuse the situation by offering to leave, clean up after yourself, or explain what you’re doing. Be calm and friendly. Correct myths about diving.
* Film. If you think things are heading south, film them. This usually makes people moderate their actions and act more calm.
* Tell them more about dumpstering. Staff might actually be interested in dumpstering too. Supermarket workers are underpaid too, and might be curious about how you get by. Share tips and facts with curious passers-by, share this zine.
* Avoid getting trapped! Watch out for bins in cages or narrow laneways with only one exit. If staff show up this can be risky. Make a plan to leave fast beforehand!
* Establish a conversation. Try open a conversation with staff around dumpstering. Managers can be inflexible, but workers might tell you when their manager clocks off & how to avoid lights, cameras, etc.

[Image description: Newspaper comic cut-outs of angry figures who look like schoolteachers, shouting and whirling sticks comically. A cut out below them shows a male model with a speech bubble coming out: ‘Well I’m glad you’re so concerned – I won’t have to worry!’]

GEAR

* Gloves (if you want to get fancy)
* Light/torch
* Sanitiser
* Keys to bin locks (or spanner for lock bits)
* Closed-toe shoes
* Clothes to get dirty
* Denim
* Boots

[Image description: Magazine collage with text reading ‘boots’, ‘the dirty work’ and a picture of grass-seed-proof socks. Plus sketches in red of gloves, keys, and a spanner.]

Page thirteen: Doing-more-than-human research

[Page description: A pink box sits in the top third of the page, with a smaller blue rectangle sits in the bottom right corner. We’re back to commentary.]

As well as a collaborative guide, this zinemaking experiment is part of a WIP – which is my Masters research project. My project goes diving for more-than-human worlds in the dumpsters of Naarm, which some know as Melbourne.

For this reason, the ‘Critters’ page was really important for me as part of my research into dumpster places.

[image description: the inside of a dumpster is illuminated by a single ray of light, showing cabbage leaves, apples, and carrots framed by pitch darkness]

By more-than-human, I want to point to the ways that places and practices always involve more than just us. In fact, even ‘us’ is a difficult line to draw as thousands of microbes and mutualists make up the ecologies of our bodies (Lorimer 2016, Gut Buddies). My goal is to pay more attention to the birds, rodents, marsupials, fungi, bacteria and materials that are active agents in dumpster worlds — participants in the world-making activity of waste (Hird 2016, ‘The Phenomenon of Waste-World Making).

Doing this work involves multisensory experiences of dumpster diving – how it looks, smells, feels, and tastes – and how these human experiences might bump up against nonhuman dumpster critters.

This was a place where collaborative research was a huge strength – we brought in our photos, stories and experiences with dumpster critters. This meant that even people who had no direct encounters with nonhumans could engage with or add to stories.

And we left this process open to the zine’s audience too – with blank boxes asking readers to reflect on their own more-than-human dumpstering experiences. This research process is ongoing — and I can’t wait to hear back from readers. Send me your critter stories at [willow.ross@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:willow.ross@student.unimelb.edu.au) or write them in this zine.

[Image description: A flock of binchickens (Australian white Ibis) perch in front of supermarket dumpsters on a wet day. One of them has taken flight as hovers in the air on its broad, white-grey wings. The dumpsters are old, rusty and full of damp food.]

Page fourteen: Critters

[Page description: Back to the original zine. A background of photos of dumpster parking lots, including the binchicken photo described on the previous page].

*OUR MASCOTS*

* Bin chicken
* Rats
* Seagulls
* Bugs (maggots)
* Alley cats
* Pigeons

Who (else) lives off the bin?

It would be unfair of us to make this zine and not talk about the other kinds of dumpster divers.

So many other urban critters live rich and storied lives in and around the bin. And we run into them all the time. Sometimes they even rock up to our mutual aid markets. These are their stories…

“Binchickens – our mascot. Each day, they perch on bins, disrupt picnics, and forage in nearby brownfields. I’ve heard from a friend, also a participant in my research project, that the largest flock of binchickens in Victoria live around the back of the Coles at Healesville Walk”

“Yeah like when I bring home bread or we have extra rice or carby things, my partner will go and put them out for the birds… he’ll put out a little blanket in the backyard and lay it out for them.”

“What would you call it, like professional respect. Like ‘Oh yes, fellow dumpster diver, I see, good luck I will leave you to it. I see this one is taken’. You know that kind of mutual understanding I would hope—we're of a kind, birds of a feather.”

“It’s bin chicken paradise.”

“A pigeon has wandered in and is currently cleaning up the breadcrumbs and grains of rice on the floor. A crowd of adoring anarchist queers gather around: “do you think it knows it’s at a market?” “she’s doing mutual aid!” “I’ve heard he cleans up every week”

“I mean I've always been quite friendly with all those kind of creepy crawlies, I’m not really scared of rats or mice or anything like that. I only really counted them as like quite positive things, and yeah we just kind of like try not to scare them and just get them out of there.”

[Image description: A pigeon struts in front of the background of dumpster parking lots next to a pile of pecked-out loaves of bread. Two phrases cut from magazine pages, ‘sophisticated creatures’ and ‘in search of excellence’, sit on either side of the pigeon.]

Page fifteen: Critters 2

[Page description: The original zine continues with another page on critters. The background is collaged from photos of carparks, dumpstered food, and banners advocating dumpster diving.]

HELPING US FIND GOOD, SAFE FOOD

Bin critters help us all the time – even if we don’t realise it. You can work with non-humans to make your dumpstering easier, better, and more caring. These are just some examples:

* Bugs – we maggots, fruit flies and worms tell you which meat, fruit and veg is truly past its prime. Lots of us around a bin? You’re probably going to have a bad time.
* Mould/fungi – we might not look like your average dumpster diver, but they’re everywhere. Citrus mould is a common sight in the bin and helps us differentiate the newer fruits from the old ones. Same with cheeses and breads, and even yoghurt. Look out for us!
* Bacteria – we’re here and we’re queer. we come in all shapes and sizes and can be found on pretty much everything. you don’t always have to worry about us – just make sure you wash us off things first. But if you’re a meat-eater, we can help you out. Look for blue/grey discolourations or excess air in meat packages – that’s us.
* Mammals, rodents, birds – helpful? If you’re lucky. We’re your fellow dumpster divers. We take food from the bin and share it amongst ourselves, teaching each other the best methods for diving – just like this zine. If you see a lot of us, you can bet that the bin is active and pretty messy. Look at for nests, rat traps, and of course binchicken shit. Please remember to share and leave the bin open, if you can.

When we go diving, we try to have **care for the non-human critters we run into**. We have a level of respect for critters that are doing what we’re doing. Some things you can do is try not to scare them, gently remove and look after any animals stuck in the bin, and maybe put out some food for the creatures living around the bin.

Who (and what) is dumpster diving in your home town? Fill in the gaps with your own examples of waste critters living in your city.

I have noticed…  
  
I share my waste with…

“That cat was hanging out, near those bins, and there was something so perfect for that cat inside that bin that it would really like to eat—and it couldn’t! Equal parts because we threw it away—but also because it doesn’t have opposable thumbs and couldn’t open it.”

[Image description: The pigeon cut-out appears again, this time walking past the word ‘birds’ and collaged magazine text reading ‘A handsome, fascinating hottie’]

Page sixteen: Putting care first

[Page description: Pink and blue signal we are back in the commentary. The page is split in two sections, marked out with titles ‘Putting care first’ and ‘Mutual aid is a verb!’.]

Putting care first:

The next two pages of the zine, The Highs, bring care into the foreground of our collaboration.

For a lot of us, care and mutual aid are at the core of dumpstering practice — when introducing people to the basics of dumpster diving, we wanted this to be front and centre.

We all feed into networks of care by dumpster diving. Food rescued as part of the research ended up in sharehouses, friends’ homes, communal fridges and pantries, Food Not Bombs kitchens, pet bowls, bird feed, really free markets, organising meetings, festival and activist parties. Outside of interviews, all of us continue to distribute dived food into our networks.

A name for this kind of work could be ‘shadow care infrastructures’; a term coined by a group of Australian geographers to describe those flickering and irregular practices through which marginalised people make the conditions for our survival (Power, Wiesel, Mitchell & Mee, Shadow care infrastructures, 2022). I like how this idea, originating on stolen land where state welfare has continually been a source of harm, scrambles the idea of welfare to include a pluriverse of caring practices that are often invisible to outsiders.

[Image description: An image sits in the middle of the page showing two pairs of hands crafting a double-page spread of the zine, cutting and pasting hearts onto a page. A flyer is attached to the side advertising the ‘Really Really Free Market’, a mutual aid event.]

Mutual aid is a verb!

But the way we self-conceptualise this work is different to how academic geographers might see it. For us, the key term is mutual aid: this is the focus of ‘The Highs’.

Dumpstering and mutual aid go together in a lot of ways. Many of us are regular participants in Food Not Bombs, Really Really Free Market, and other mutual aid projects. Mutual aid is about messing up the relationship between giver and receiver until it’s ambiguous. In practice, it’s more about a flow of care in multiple directions.

In a lot of ways, this mirrored our goal of using zinemaking to blur the lines of researcher and participant until we became collaborators.

Pages seventeen and eighteen: The highs

[Page description: A raucously colourful chaos of collage in blue, yellow and green with photos of lavish arrays of dumpstered foods. Quotes are scattered across the page.]

So there are lows, but there are plenty more highs to dumpster diving. We can’t even begin to describe them all, but these are some of our favourites. Some things you might expect or be inspired by…

Good finds

Nice workers & their care & friendliness

Social diving with friends

Giving to others & sharing

*Dumpster meals*

Skill learning

Feeding pets

Rescuing heaps of food

*Cake drop-offs*

The model of mutual aid is to blur the lines between giver and receiver. At different times, all of us are in need of things and able to offer things.

*PLUS… MUTUAL AID*

* Such a big part of dumpstering
* The reason many of us do it
* Social connection
* Really Really Free Market
* Food pantries
* Catalyst Social Centre
* Squats + sharehouses
* Food Not Bombs
* Feeding organising meetings

“Mutual aid is a verb!”

“the more small simple things that draw people together and that make them realise big things about the broader system.”

“Like, seven or eight slabs of different types of drinks, like wines and ciders.”

“She’s a freegan dog”

Page nineteen and twenty: The lows

[Another double-spread of quotes and chaotic collage, this time less colourful but with a playful, magazine punk feel. In the corner text reads ‘Bin Slut’ and ‘Ablaze with Colour’.]

Dumpster diving isn’t all sunshine and rainbows…

To give an honest reflection of our experiences, here are some of the lows of dumpstering. If you’re looking for tips to get past them, see the ‘What To Do With Angry Workers’ and ‘Skills’ pages.

* Confrontations with supermarket workers
* Being harassed by cops
* Waiting hours for loading trucks to leave
* Risky meat
* *The gross dumpsters*
* Off fish
* Supermarket workers sabotaging food with bleach, oil, or cleaning products
* Supermarket workers mixing raw meat & veg
* New locks on bins
* Too much junk food, not enough fresh stuff
* Social disapproval from friends & family (easily overcome!)
* Surprisingly spoiled food that you only discover at home
* Seeing all the packaging waste that comes out of supermarkets

“I opened the dumpster for a friend and was just like… someone had laid a turd there on the top. Like a full turd, and it’s human and it’s fresh.”

“I used to freak out, go home and be like that’s it for dumpster diving. But now it’s like, the truckies don’t mind. Usually the workers don’t mind.”

“So it was one of those cage gated bin areas—he tried to like, lock me in there and said he was going to call the cops. But I got out, I like just sort of ran out. But O thought that I was still in the bin when he looked and was freaking out. It was pretty funny. And scary.”

“And he was like because we’re police and they like pulled badges out and they stuck the sirens on top of the vehicle on, and he was like “and we caught someone racking bread from here earlier” and like pointed to the bin.”

“Like, once I got there the guy came out and asked me to get out of bin—which I did, and then I grabbed my box of stuff that I had dug pretty fuckin deep for and was unwilling to let go. And they said that I wasn't gonna be able to take it.”

“She responds angrily, and threatens to call the police. We try to de-escalate and leave quickly.”

Pages twenty-one and twenty-two: Closing the book(let)

[Page description: A double-spread marked by a long pink rectangle, and a series of smaller blue squares in the bottom right corner of the page. A large bold title at the top].

Closing the book(let)

[Image description: A hand stacks cut-outs of food recipe pictures from an old magazine.]

Here, we come to the end of our zine and the end of this meta-zine. So what can zinemaking, as a research method, do?

As we’ve seen, practice-driven methods can create disinhibiting, democratic spaces for research. But in my experience with zinemaking, they can do a lot more. They can *collage*.

As we made ‘what a fucking waste’, zinemaking seemed to parallel collaging as a creative practice. What does it mean to collage? To glue, *together*, to cut and paste, to hold together, and add ideas. Zinemaking, for us, collaged social relations, as we glued ourselves together: it also cut and rearranged our analysis of dumpstering and food justice, created new configurations of care and information-sharing, and shaped the findings embodied in the zine.

[Image description: Two pairs of scissors rest on top of an old activist zine next to some markers and a set of stamps.]

For us, making the zine was an act of collage, an act of care, and an act of collaboration. The zine itself, plugging into networks and shadow infrastructures of care, offers the possibility of a gift. This takes work — distributing it in our networks, printing copies, making it publicly available and telling people about it — but this work is possible.

At the end, what did we make? A gift first to dumpster divers, then to researchers and conference attendees disseminating knowledge of methods.

*As we experiment with more collaborative methods in geography, zinemaking can help us collage existing relations of power, offering us outlines of more grassroots, radical collaborations. So it’s tempting to ask: why not try DIY?*

To echo the final page of our zine: see you in the bin — or at the zinemaking workshop.

[Image description: A photo of the banner from the ‘Really Really Free Market’, hanging behind a stack of dumpstered groceries including milk, sausages, bread, oats and cream.]

Page twenty-three (back cover): Closing the lid

[Page description: The final page of the zine. The background is made again from black and white, collaged photos of dumpsters and parking lots. At the top of the page, a cartoon dumpster and its cloud of smell are emblazoned with the title ‘Closing the lid’.’]

*AH… BINSPIRATION..*

Ok, so now you’re ready to dive. Or maybe you already have, and you wanted to revisit this or hear some new stories. Whatever your reason, thanks for reading.

[Image description: Various comic strip cut-outs show someone pushing a door closed, pasted on top of a dumpster to make it look like they are closing the lid.

[Collaged text] ‘You’re in safe hands when you go diving’

SOME FINAL TIPS

Share skills – be a mentor. There’s always someone who wants to learn to dumpster dive. If you’re that person, ask your friends!

Share key copies – some people have keys to bins. What else can we say? Share copies.

Share this zine! Photocopy, print, download, whatever you need to do! This zine is self-published and open to anyone. Please distribute freely – just don’t make money off it.

Clean up your mess – when you finish diving, put everything back and don’t leave any mess behind. Treat it like your own pantry. It kind of is?

Close the lid – and put the lock back when you’re done. It’s that simple – it keeps the security off our backs and keeps things clean.

*view and download this zine online at:* [issuu.com/binchickenink/docs/whatafknwaste](https://issuu.com/binchickenink/docs/whatafknwaste)

# will not stay silent

### ilayda üstel

ilayda üstel (she/they) is a PhD candidate and a Graduate Teaching Associate in the Comparative Studies department at the Ohio State University. They received their Master of Arts degree in Comparative Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam. ilayda is interested in exploring alternative forms of collective acts of resistance, interruption, and occupation, politics of space and place, how alternatives to 'public' space are formed and function, embodiment and vulnerability through an experimental, creative, transdisciplinary and multimedia approach. ilayda's work aims to act as a multimodal interruption/disruption of the privileged and mainstream forms and methods, and contribute to the discourses of collective resistance, as well as the ongoing resistance itself.

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Interruption

According to Deleuze, the key thing to elude control might be to create vacuoles of noncommunication and circuit breakers. Interruption in the form of disruption, failure (to function within the confines of a society or system), glitch (or malfunction), and/or inoperativity, implies and carries within it the potentiality of creating new autonomous spaces[1] that would situate resistive action within the protological field, and the possibility of transformation.

Interruption also creates “a fissure within which new possibilities of being and becoming manifest.”[2] An interruption of the rhythm (caesura as a counter-rhythmic rupture, as Benjamin calls it), as an absence and a suspension, on the one hand reveals the workings of the usual, and on the other hand, becomes a possibility of a different order(ing) as it provides a space for developing tactics of resistance and imagining alternative futures.

In their book Life After New Media, Sarah Kember and Juanna Zylinska propose to understand photography as an active practice of cutting. According to them, the act of cutting encourages seeing things otherwise, and transforms the familiar into unfamiliar/abstraction. The dialectical relationship between flux and stasis, or duration and the cut, according to them, is what gives shape to the world: A creative in-cision is also a de-cision. It can be seen as a temporary suspension of the method of knowing (that is, carving, according to them) the world

Thinking of interrupting and cutting as tactics allow for a resistance from within and against the protocol, through using, misusing and repurposing the tools that are available, rewriting and redirecting the paths created by those in power, and interrupting and subverting the means for suppression.

According to Alexander Galloway, because social power is so diffused, revolutionary resistance no longer requires a single spatiality. Rita Raley explains that power will not and cannot reconstitute either on-site or in the hands of a limited few, which means that we need to have a “plurality of resistances,” a “being against,” always and everywhere that creates a “multiplicity of discontinuous sites of enunciation” instead of a single, spectacular disruption.[3] As such, we see interruption taking many different forms (disruption, failure, glitch, inoperativity, and/or refusal to participate) and happening on various sites continuously, at times creating hypertrophy, penetrating, breaking, puncturing, tearing the material of the institution, and working toward “fantastic failure” (in Legacy Russell’s terms).

Interruption blocks, but it also prompts and incites movement. It opens up new paths, allowing us to seize on new directions. However, while it has the potentiality of leading to provocation and re-ordering, its material effects and outcomes cannot be predicted, calculated or controlled before it occurs. Therefore, uncertainty and indeterminacy, and consequently, failure, are essential parts of interruption.

I approach and frame collective acts of resistance as interruptions of space, the everyday, and the dominant discourse that not only aim to dismantle and disintegrate the existing state of things and power structures, but also to encourage new paths to form, new relationalities to take place and alternative ways of living to be imagined through (temporary) moments of suspension and cutting. While a physical protest in a traditional sense interrupts the everyday flow through occupation and transformation of public space (“non-places”), it allows for a temporary suspension of the status quo that enables the emergence of a space in which an alternative ordering can be practiced. I think about collective acts of resistance through their function of interrupting dominant discourses, the everyday, existing spaces, laying bare the workings of these spaces and therefore allowing for imagining otherwise.

Sound

Historically in Western culture, sight has been regarded as the highest sense and thought of in connection with philosophy, knowledge, and truth. The bias in cognition the ocularcentric code of culture induces is still prevalent today,[4] despite the sonic (or auditory) turn that changed methodological approaches across the humanities and social sciences. In an attempt to challenge the dominance of a vision-centric analysis, this exploration centralizes a practice of critical listening, and close reads an experience of ear witnessing[5] the Istanbul Pride Parade.

In collective political actions, sound is used by the protesters as a central means of communication, as well as a means of space-making and occupation through its function of intervening in the everyday flow of city life and urban soundscapes.

Paying attention to the soundscapes of protests necessitates approaching sound through a socio-political frame that explores the relationalities of conflict, oppression, and resistance within the broader power structures & dynamics of “public” space.

Sounds are themselves contexts where cultural codes and historical links are reproduced, and social boundaries of cooperation strengthened.[6] While sound mobilizes people and implies a performed social harmony within a protest, the way sounds are organized is also linked to the ways people are organized, and how the protest works as an interruption.

The use of restricted sounds in the everyday life (like the use of a language, specific kinds of music, the sounds considered as “noise,” and even collective silence) block the everyday flow, and disturb & challenge the order. Accordingly, the function of sound in protests can be thought of in connection to the familiar imagery of bodies of protesters gathered in a public (non-)place, occupying and blocking the flow of non-protesters. However, unlike physical bodies, sound travels between and across bodies, space and time, and disseminates beyond the boundaries of the physical and the visible. Through sound, protesters not only announce their presence, but they announce their territorial occupation.[7]

In an effort to listen deeper and explore what is beyond slogans, which have been mostly focused on as they communicate and disseminate ideas and demands in a structured and compact way, I try to center the hum or the rustle[8] of the sound of the protesters and give space to the non-verbal sounds, or noise.

Hegarty terms “noise” as sound “perceived negatively,”[9] and therefore should be filtered out. Consequently, noise is defined by exclusion, it is the excluded element in every form of representation and communication, and therefore critiques the supposed harmony of assembly by account of those who it excludes.[10] In the streets, it declares bodily (collective) existence and unity that is not based on harmony, but it precedes all separations, and is based on the material reality of acting together, created not only by but also between protester bodies, and rejects exclusion. Both the exclusion and the organization of noise are an exercise of power and therefore are political. They reflect the manufacture[11] and ordering of society. Therefore, producing noise (collectively) is “a revolt against the control of noise as a sign of dominance; therefore it symbolizes the anti-structure, a destructive symbol of the uncontrolled masses”.[12] Always experienced as destruction, disorder and pollution, noise disturbs, and interrupts.

“Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise.” – quote by Jacques Attali from his book Noise: The Political Economy of Music

Context

A short video uploaded on YouTube on the day of the 2021 Istanbul Pride march compiles short clips taken (of the march, police violence, and short interviews with protesters) during the march.[13] The video starts with protesters walking towards the camera, and we hear a very strong high-pitched vibrating sound, first made by one person, then joined by several others.

Zılgıt is a form of ululation, typically performed by women in the Southeastern Anatolia region of Turkey. It is usually performed at wedding ceremonies, as a cry of joy, and funerals, as a cry of grief. It is performed at the moments of heightened emotions as part of the rituals, and on occasions during which women’s expression of their extreme emotions are allowed. Zılgıt is a performance. It is performed publicly. However, it is not a sound one can hear every day.

Istanbul Pride march has been banned since 2015 by the Governor's Office, and yet every year protesters come together to at least make a press statement before the police attacks. With the recent hateful and provocative comments made by the president and government officials, banning the sales of pride flags, using the LGBTQI+ communities as a pretext to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, it became clear that the government is targeting LGBTQI+ groups, and exacerbating their vulnerable situation.

On June 26, 2021, the police arrived 3 hours before the time the march was scheduled to begin, and they dispersed even the smallest groups who had rainbow flags, banners or anything to indicate they were going to participate in the march on them, making it impossible for the protesters to form a large crowd. 2021 Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week theme, “Streets,” was a way of acknowledging the hardships these communities face on the streets, as well as to claim their right to be in the streets free from harassment and danger. In the announcement Istanbul Pride published on their social media platforms they state, “The streets can be the starting points or means for resistance and struggle, can at times become places where we are subjected to harassment, violence, exclusion, and hate speech…Despite the system that tries to limit us to the ghetto, we want the whole city, all the streets, and even the countryside!”[14]

[Image description: Four young people carrying a rainbow flag, a traditional pride flag, a transgender pride flag, and a progress pride flag during the Istanbul Pride march.]

By producing a very strong high-pitched sound that brings the feminine, unintelligibility, and the marginalized into the “public” space they are banned from, protesters lay claim to the streets through occupying and disrupting them on many levels.

Method

This project is a critical examination of the dominant and mainstream ways of knowledge production within academia that speak to a specific audience, and what counts as knowledge and research. The academic writing style that has become the default privileges an authoritative speaking position that situates the author in a dominant relationship with the “subjects,” who are excluded from the academic space. As I simultaneously belong to these communities and think about resistance in my academic work, instead of reproducing the problematic power structures by writing about women and LGBTQIA+ communities in Turkey for an academic audience, I created a poem that centers my experiences placed in conversation with theory and the broader social and historical context.

My method is partially informed by the idea of performative writing, which, according to Della Pollock, is both a technique and a technology to write in excess of norms in scholarly representation.[15] This style has the ability to deconstruct the borders between “science and literature, fact and fiction, between Subject of Reason and its racialized, gendered, classified and sexualized Others,”[16] and consequently opens writing to “incursion permeation, and multiplicity”[17] of the borders that traditional writing continues to reinforce. This mode of writing privileges affect as a reaction to dominant ideologies and systems that privilege reason and discredit expressions of emotion, and creates a disturbance that is not in the traditional sense that connotes something negative, but as a necessary intervention that defamiliarizes and creates “successful” discomfort.

zılgıt

is a long wavering ululation

it is a musical exclamation

it is a cry of joy

a cry of grief, despair

and a cry of rage

used by women to express intense emotion

and now, it is a call to action

1.

it is the loudest sound I have ever heard my grandmother make

it is a talent

reserved for the old wise women, I thought

and I would be able to do it, too, when I grow old

and tough, just like her

it belonged to weddings

and funerals

for which women were allowed their voices,

coded in Kurdish rituals

and given a controlled space

for expressing emotions

contained, controlled, and coded:

harmless

this is a “harmless” performance—

weddings and funerals turn into festivals

its performative overtness is deafening: overwhelmingly loud and incredibly silent at the same time

2.

It’s the repetition of a single meaningless syllable

or the vibrations formed by the women’s tongue beating the roof of their mouths repeatedly and untiringly

it’s beyond speech

— it requires much more

The physical resistance of female tongues to meaning

it’s circumstantial: legible only under certain circumstances,

unintelligible under others, and subversive under some.

is a sound out of context

still a sound?

a sound spilling over its boundaries, intervening, blocking, and distorting that which has been allowed to hang in the air, to expand and take up the space,

a sound that is unwanted, that is disturbing the status quo

transforms into “noise” although it sounds the same, feels different.

Getting to decide what is noise and what is not is an exercise of power.

There is resistance in noise.[18]

and today in the streets of Istiklal, female and queer tongues

are beating and firing,

countering the inaudibility imposed on them,

disrupting the heterosexist space

in the ephemeral suspension of the dominant social order,[19]

imagining

auditory potentials – sonic warfare!

Huelsenbeck, the prince of Dada, wrote, “Every movement naturally produces noise.”[20]

And the queer movement produces the loudest

Naturally primal and excessive

3.

it’s a battle cry now

as bodies are being dispersed, grabbed, beaten, bruised, dragged

they’re vibrating at a shared frequency

bodies separated, but still united through sound

chanting slogans, clapping, blowing whistles, and crying zılgıt.

echoing and occupying the physical space illegally,

the public space they are banned from

claiming the city

it’s Rancière's “wrench of equality,”

“jammed (objectively and subjectively) into the gears of domination”[21]

zılgıt is an interjection

a cry, a shout, a scream.

As it interrupts, it disappears, and while things may not return to normal afterward, the initial sonic disturbance ends.

non-linguistic

and not transcribable,

it evades capture by pen and paper

and tear gas,

and rubber bullets,

and the hegemony of the visual

when, for the invisible, visibility isn’t an option

vocal expression moves through the space

rupturing, but also connecting as it travels

it brings forth “a political subjectivity based on both intention and affect”[22]

born of intense emotion,

zılgıt changes those who hear it in a much different way than

(always privileged and amplified)

“rational” argument

The mode of affection is vibrational[23]

Zılgıt is disruptive in waves:

with every sound wave, disturbs and interrupts the domination of heterosexuality, reason, and racism.

a kind of sonic agency with a potential of intensifying emancipatory practices, that transgresses boundaries and fills the space with no warning, vibrates those it touches.

Zılgıt is affective in vibrations:

conducive to empathy and compassion.[24]

Through practices of making noise and listening,

Is a politics of queer vibrational affection possible?

Footnotes/Endnotes:

[1] In her book Tactical Media, Rita Raley writes about the temporary disturbances and interruptions, “there is a certain power in the spontaneous eruption, the momentary evasion of protological control structures, the creation of temporary autonomous zones, that surely play their part in making possible the opening for political transformations” (27).

[2] Legacy Russell, Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto (Verso Books, 2020), 11.

[3] Rita Raley, Tactical Media (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 24-5.

[4] Juhani Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses (Wiley, 2012).

[5] Duygu Erbil, "Earwitnessing the Assembly: Listening to the Voice of the People

in the Gezi Park Protests," Soapbox Journal 1. (Autumn 2019). In her article, Erbil understands "earwitnessing" as the practice of "attuning to the demonstrations' sonics and noise to hear the voice of the people" (158).

[6] Meri Kytö and Sirin Özgün, "Sonic Resistance: Gezi Park Protests and the

Political Soundscape of Istanbul", in Invisible Landscapes: Popular Music and

Spatiality, ed. Giacomo Botta (Münster and New York: Waxmann, 2016), 78.

[7] Aylin Kuryel, "Sloganın Sesi," Cogito: Sesli Düşünmek, no. 109 (Spring 2023): 75.

[8] Ash, "The Sound of Placards."

[9] Paul Hegarty, Noise/Music:AHistory (New York: Continuum, 2007), 3.

[10] Sean Cubitt, Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies (Duke University Press, 2017), 1-12.

[11] Jacques Attali, Noise: The Political Economy of Music (University of Minnesota

Press, 2009), 4.

[12] Kytö and Özgün, "Sonic Resistance," 78.

[13] medyascope. "İstanbul Onur Yürüyüşü: 'Buradayız ayol, ne yalnızız ne yanlış"."

June 26, 2021, 2:46, https://youtu.be/ooYn3KR\_y6I.

[14] İstanbul LGBTI+ Onur Haftası (@istanbulpride), "Announcing the 29th Istanbul

LGBTI+ Pride Week Theme: STREETS," Twitter, April 26, 2021, 11:39 a.m., https://twitter.com/istanbulpride/status/1386706510378639367?s=20.

[15] Della Pollack, "Performing Writing", in The Ends of Performance (New York: New York UP, 1998).

[16] Jackie Orr, “Re/Sounding Race, Re/Signifying Ethnography: Sampling Oaktown Rap,” in Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies, ed. Gabriel Brahm and Mark Driscoll (Boulder: Westview, 1995), 193.

[17] Pollack, "Performing Writing,” 96.

[18] Greg Hainge, Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[19] Rita Stephan, M. Charrad, and Nisrine Chaer, “19. Sensing Queer Activism in Beirut: Protest Soundscapes as Political Dissent,” in Women Rising: In and beyond the Arab Spring (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 181.

[20] Richard Huelsenbeck, “En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism,” trans. Ralph Manheim, 1920, 26.

[21] Jacques Ranciere, “Democracies against Democracy,” in Democracy, in What State? (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 79.

[22] Laura Kunreuther, “Sounds of Democracy: Performance, Protest, and Political Subjectivity,” Cultural Anthropology 33, no. 1 (2018): pp. 1-31, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.01.

[23] Steve Goodman, “The Ontology of Vibrational Force,” in The Sound Studies Reader, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 70-73, 71.

[24] Brandon LaBelle, Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018), 4.