

# **Media, Practice and Theory**

Tracking emergent thresholds of experience

Edited by

**Nicole De Brabandere**

McGill University

**Series in Art**



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For Rakesh and Avni



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# Introduction

Nicole De Brabandere

*McGill University*

This volume gathers contributions from artist and media researchers investigating the co-compositional dynamics of media and bodies. Some of the media in discussion include animation, VR, installation practices, interview, curation, archiving, photography and multi-media assemblages. Amidst this diverse set of media—and the techniques, durations and practices that accompany them—the fact of having a body is an important starting point.<sup>1</sup> Having a body is the means by which a media practice conjures meaning that is thinkable, feelable and livable. Here, the body is conceived, not as a given threshold separating the self from another, but as something that acquires relevance by the way it is co-constituted within a media ecology. This co-constitutive dynamism is punctuated by events of emergent thought, sensation and perceptibility and can occur either within an artistic/multi-media practice or within contexts of media spectatorship and criticism.

As bodies and media are posed in their mutual co-constitution, they gesture towards a holding together that complicates dominant registers of intelligibility premised on the discreteness or separability of objects. What is foregrounded are situations of paradox or contradiction characterized by the coming together of differences such as media and representation, movement and stasis, the material and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, analysis and intuition, the abstract and the concrete. The paradoxical becomes propositional (and relevant for a media research practice) as it holds open the potential for its own variation.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the irreconcilability of its terms becomes intensely heterogeneous. Paradox within media assemblages thus forwards a means of thinking and experimenting with how interest and importance emerge multiply

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Spinoza, Isabelle Stengers (2010) reiterates the problematic of “what a body can do” to implicate minor aspects of experience within a concept of corporeality.

<sup>2</sup> For José Gil the paradoxical body creates space through movement, even as it is imbricated in objective space. Such movement coincides with affects that render space “dense or rarified, invigorating or suffocating” (2006, p.22).

within situated media practices in ways that are livable, and both critical of and in excess of, given terms.

As this volume gathers contributions that center the body from a number of different media-based, disciplinary and processual vantages, it forwards a kind of toolkit for enlarging both critical and pragmatic media research. In some contributions, media research techniques make time and space for, non-linear and transversal modes of inquiry, where articulation is both discursive and non-discursive, conceptual and materially situated. Other contributions deploy primarily discursive strategies to relate how spectatorship can become a means of intervening into and repositioning dominant theoretical frameworks, while imbuing critique with intense sentience and affect. Many of the contributions feature a combination of these two approaches, sometimes playing one off the other, giving rise to a dramaturgy where discursive and non-discursive critical gestures are staged in a mutually generative unfolding.

In all cases, the co-presence of media and bodies makes an opening to tend to the role of affect, or the intense quality of experience as it shapes sentience and inhabited tendencies of perception in non-deterministic ways.<sup>3</sup> Since affect is not extractable but occurs with and alongside the felt thought of this emergent perceptibility, chapters grapple with concepts, phrasing, as well as modes of organizing discursive and media-based forms at the threshold of what can be squarely accounted for or stated with given terminologies or conventions. This process constitutes a means of doing media research by drawing new lines of separation (or continuity) across concepts, bodies, objects, practices, materials and technologies that may or may not manifest in discursive form. Interest and affinity within diverse media assemblages, drive the possibility for knowledges that cannot be accounted for by empirical means alone and in fact, become the driving force for developing techniques

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Massumi distinguishes affect and emotion, where emotion is designated by terms such as “happy” and “sad”, contrary to affect, which is an intensity that is felt but that does not have a pre-determined emotive status or obvious causality. Massumi suggests that “the affective is marked by a gap between content and effect” (1995, p. 84). This means that affect (and the bodies that are affected by an affective event) are not determined by that event but are “attuned to, certain regions of tendency, futurity and potential”. This preserves their differential relation to events that may be experienced collectively (2015, p.108). Marie-Louise Angerer (2019, p. 40) similarly situates affect within non-linear durations or within interstices that conjure “a dimension of abstracted physicality”.

that further condition or prime new practices and modes of intelligibility.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, this process often calls for grappling with terms that propose instances of cohesion that are marked with abstract and generative intensity. Some of the terms that the authors and artists of this volume use to describe such instances include in-betweenness, togetherness, co-composition, contactilization, seamfulness, partialness, difference, the unspoken, and texture. This set of terms offers distinctly transversal affordances that enable specifying how pragmatic constraints co-compose, and how practice enters into theory, and vice-versa, within situated media research. Here, practice and theory act as constraints, as problematics and as propositions that are co-composed in a dynamic negotiation, where one informs and transforms the scope and relevance of the other. Research becomes think-able as a contemporary worlding of discourse, media and bodies that gives contour to emergent and speculative futures.<sup>5</sup>

While themes of the body and process figure in all the chapters, additional terms of continuity (and distinctness) between the chapters hinge on the *how* of doing research as a situated and analytical assemblage.<sup>6</sup> When the *how* of research is not given but problematized, discursive and experiential knowledges are unmoored from given modalities in favor of pragmatic engagements that operationalize critique as a means of sustaining affectively driven, interest-based inquiry. Whether coming from a disciplinary, inter-disciplinary or practice-based research orientation, tending to the *how* of research makes

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<sup>4</sup> The transversality that I describe here jibes with what Rosi Braidotti calls “Transposition” (2016), a notion taken up by Michael Schwab (2018) to gather contributions in a volume of the same name from artist-researchers who describe the incipient and heterogeneous correspondences between different media and modes of practice that exceed representation.

<sup>5</sup> This speculative futurity is in contrast to normative articulations that reproduce heteronormative and progress-oriented becoming and allows for affective, non-chronological and indeterminate forces. See (Springgay and Truman, “Counterfuturisms and speculative temporalities: Walking research-creation in school,” 2019, pp. 548-549).

<sup>6</sup> In the last decade, several theorists have underscored the importance of unpacking the *how* of practices as a means of both critical and world-making engagement. Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson (2017) proposes the *how* as a means of understanding indigenous political resurgence as a decolonial practice “rooted in uniquely Indigenous theorizing, writing, organizing, and thinking”. Science and technology studies scholar Michelle Murphy (2017) develops the *how* as a means of privileging experimentation in “technoscience dreaming”, or a means of bringing speculative futures into the present. Deborah Levitt (2018) considers the *how* as a means of accounting for the dynamic co-composition of human and non-human animacies in the context of animation, virtual avatars and A.I.

think-able the way affect, perception and articulation are co-emergent with the researcher and the research outcomes.

The contributions of this volume can be roughly divided into three groups, each emphasizing different registers of engagement with the how of research, and its implications for tracking and articulating corporeal generativities within media assemblages. The first part, *Theory and Practice*, (Ch. 1, Ch. 2, Ch. 3) comprises contributions that explicitly position the specific media practices in which they are engaged alongside critical hermeneutics and discourse. In these contributions theory is not reducible to practice, and vice-versa. Each is developed with recourse to the other, in a way that privileges the conditions for specifying both. In this generative back-and-forth, spacetimes of critical inquiry emerge with and alongside a diversity of practices, which themselves can become a means of either substantiating or refuting theoretical claims. Within these examples, experiential accounts are also operationalized as a means of holding different modes of inquiry together based on the importance of their lived effects and affects, rather than given assumptions. This means that different modes of research inform one another, but in ways that exceed causality or that cannot be fully anticipated, preserving criticality as a livable activation of interest and relational potential.

In the second part, *Transversal Articulations* (Ch. 4, Ch. 5, Ch. 6) the research milieu is forwarded as both multi-media assemblage and investigative framework. Contributions in this group co-compose non-discursive and discursive media, where intelligibility is informed by a strong sense of how the co-presence of different media within a presentational format enlists diverse temporalities, opacities and registers of articulation. In bearing witnesses to these convergent differences, we are invited to apprehend media iterations in ways that insist on their own indeterminacy but that nonetheless iterate specific terms of novelty or generativity. Here, novelty is forwarded, not in counter-distinction to the always out-of-date, but as a non-linear potential that can draw from and lend new relevance to past iterations at any instant, suspending the difference between artist and spectator. Here newness is in-time with inhabitable co-presences that move both within specific iterations and across them, alongside established media forms and concepts, as well as those that are in-the-making.

The third part, *Speculative Discourse* (Ch. 7, Ch. 8, Ch. 9) consists of contributions where practices are primarily situated within theoretical discourse but engage the situated generativity of how media objects and spectatorship co-compose. This is a process that makes room for the emergent thought and sentience that occurs between witnessing a media object and articulating its specific generativities. In these contributions, discourse and critique become implicated in the making of a sensorium,

where critique is explicitly informed by felt absences and intensities. While the mode of articulation within these contributions remains primarily textual, its analytic formulations and affective evocations congeal important continuities with non-discursive modes of media research, positioning media criticism as a media practice in its own right.

In this volume, the term tracking is forwarded as a means of holding together these heterogeneous research approaches since it entails detailing the specific and situated dynamism of inhabiting media ecologies. To elaborate, as thought is figured in its co-emergence with situated media, what arises is a strong sense of transversality that does not undermine critical differences, but points to their embeddedness in the simultaneously irreducible. Such irreducibility lends a consistency to the research practice that foregrounds the processual in a way that is at once tentative and informing. Put otherwise, the long-term engagement with the specificity of a research process gathers and accumulates registers of interest, desire, sentience and intelligibility, preserving radical openness while deepening the research in a way that is coincident with the making of inhabited tendencies. While articulating this co-emergence as an analytic strategy relies on abstraction to map relevant differences, such differences are never separable from how they mark intensive openings for further iteration. This enlarges the field upon which media practice develops as a means of worldmaking and livable futurity.

### **Archival Generativity**

Another important framing for this volume is the way media research manifests as an archival practice. Each contribution proposes an archive that is markedly unique. This is in part due to the fact that contributors come from research communities spanning European and North American contexts, as well as from fine arts and humanities-based disciplinary backgrounds. At the same time, the archives presented are very much in adherence to the specific constraints, particularities and affordances of the research practice in question. The most radical examples feature a marked horizontality between pragmatic and hermeneutic referentiality, where references operate variously as substantiation and proposition, as theoretical premise and as the substance of material and media-based experimentation. As a corollary, the archive operates within the research ecology in heterogeneous ways, cuing formal, gestural or affective urgencies. Below, I briefly describe how each contribution develops and deploys the archive to highlight the way it diversely co-evolves with specific research processes, questions and results.

In the work of Petra Köhle and Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin, the archive is explicitly engaged as a proposition to develop a research practice that is

premised on how the archive both manifests particular histories and proposes relational and speculative possibility. The duo conducted extensive research into historical correspondences around the transfer of gifts from league of nations member states to the Palais des Nations around the time of its formation in order to analyze political philosophies of the gift, and its embeddedness within international hierarchies. Through this archival research, the gift is problematized to enable a speculative worlding of nations as a concept and as a situated assemblage that operates through pragmatic constraints and protocols. Köhle and Vermot-Petit-Outhenin expand this pragmatic generativity towards developing performative modes of scripting that engage the otherwise undocumented and unspoken histories associated with the archive, and which constitutes a major part of their artistic and creative practice.

The archive is operative in Kai Ziegner's chapter as a means of making time and space for seemingly mundane events and exchanges, but that when put together, provide a complex picture of how state violence enters in various and unexpected ways into everyday life. The dissolution of former East Germany corresponds with Ziegner's own personal timeline from childhood into adulthood, allowing him to pose his own personal history, tendencies and concerns as an uncertain archive of violent events, where causality is neither conclusive nor complete. In turn, the violence that the author sets out to document is unmoored from any particular object and without a singular or causal explanation, surfacing instead as a gradual assemblage or texture of encounters, memories, situations, comprising documentary as well as fictional narrative techniques.

Sarah Burger both mobilizes and problematizes the archive through her mediation on the bicycle helmet. Burger employs an associative discursive strategy as well as practices of mould-making and digital image manipulation to render a non-hierarchical archival assemblage comprising neo-lithic, romantic, technological, material and industrialized animacies. With the aim of seeking a returning "gaze", or a transformative and magical "third space" that exceeds the original and the copy, Burger undermines Western paradigms of thought in favor of a rationality that has always been paradoxical and inseparable from the magical. The intense and generative non-linearity that results from this convergence between the rational and the magical, leads Burger to problematize the *how* of referentiality such that references are posed in loose correspondence (and generative proximity) with her text, rather than a linear or causal index, as convention would dictate.

For Amélie Brisson-Darveau, theories of corporeality and movement practice offer a means of approaching the material and affective textures of an installation setting, which in turn, propose a diversity of ways of practicing

and thinking with the archive. One important example from her text is the way corporeal movement can comprise the movement of shadow, which when staged in a particular way can exert a non-linear and multi-directional intensity. This pertains to conceptualizing the installation setting as well as a reading of early American horror films as an aesthetic and formal proposition that exceeds cinematic narrative. In her words, this kind of convergence makes “the relationship between the theoretical and practical dimensions of the project permeable.”

Olivia McGilchrist likewise proposes a hybrid research archive, where the causality between referentiality and research outcomes remains undetermined, though rich with generative correspondences. McGilchrist’s work bridges Caribbean studies, post-colonial theory and critical race studies and the situated media practice of developing experiences in Virtual Reality (VR). For McGilchrist, the transposition of a physical body into a virtual wording becomes an opening to trouble racialized identity categories and modes of recognition and to examine how they are implicated in notions such as empathy, opacity and embodiment. With and alongside this critical lens, VR is proposed as a means of problematizing identity in an experiential way, whether by being virtually submerged by a tidal wave or the intensive layering of coastal imagery, to name a few.

Hybridity as an explicitly generative gathering with both theoretical and pragmatic implications is foundational for Lindsey French and Elke Mark, as well as for Treva Legassie, Matthew-Robin Nye, and Karen Wong. In these contributions, hybridity manifests as a dynamic archival practice that is elaborated through hyphenated terminologies that are both conceptually-driven and materially concrete or situated. French and Mark forward the co-compositional gathering of “contact” and “tactility” through the term “Contactilisation”. The central positioning of these two terms is the means by which the authors develop research practices that combine performance-based and empirical research approaches, wresting empirical knowledge from its embeddedness in paradigms of binarization that separate research subjects and objects, while proposing emergent performative and world-making potentials.

Legassie, Robin-Nye and wong similarly begin with the hyphenated term “Research-Creation” to unpack the generative holding together of research and creation as they inform ecologically-situated curatorial practices. This gives rise to several other terms that emphasize the relevance of the undetermined or yet-to-come, including “pollination” and “haecceities”. Here, terminological correspondences operate to simultaneously cohere and expand the research archive in a way that gives consistency to a research process that is both within and without the institution. What is fascinating here is that this

terminological gathering is not premised on referential meaning alone but comprises their compositional effects and affects as they are operative within discursive and more-than-discursive ecologies. This includes curatorial practice, which is reproduced (and transformed) by the way it in-folds new relational potentials or speculative futures that are both described by and in excess of its terms.

While Jonah Jeng and Friederike Sigler's contributions belong more squarely within the domains of cinema studies and art history respectively, the archives they engage coincide with a critical discussion of the media they present in its material specificity and affective generativity. Jeng develops the notion of "seamfulness" through Lana and Lilly Wachowski's film *Speed Racer* (2008) to make conceptual time and space for how the specific affordances and visibilities of CGI animation can make think-able the labour that produces it. This is in contrast to photorealist examples where the aim is to make such labor invisible, feeding into an attention economy that bypasses labour's corporeal temporality and situated materialism. Jeng's close attention to the felt visibility of the film's productive labour makes it think-able as a kind of archive in its own right, where heterogenous modes of appearance, are gathered to expand on and multiply an uncertain object.

Friederike Sigler's engagement with the multi-media installations of Flaccid Knob constitutes authorial voice as an archival practice that holds meaning and affect in intimate and generative tension. Sigler enacts a bio-political repositioning of the abject, from a reaction of disgust towards a discreet object, towards an opening to specify the critical generativity of care and co-presence. Sigler achieves this by employing methods of critical discourse alongside highly specific descriptions of witnessing the multi-media installations. These installations include video screenings of Flaccid Knob's performances and built structures that visitors can enter into. In Sigler's description, we discover that these structures seem to be part of the sets used in the videos, albeit partial and inexact variations of them. For Sigler, this inexact transfer of objects across media imparts a sense of spatial destabilization (something reinforced by the material uncertainty figured by a prevalence of substances like slime and goo in Flaccid Knob's work) which she expands on and elaborates through her at once evocative critical discussion.

Though diverse in practice, discipline and media, what we witness in all of the contributions is how the archive does more than forward or substantiate particular research claims. Instead, it conjures relevance that stirs at the thresholds of given practices, techniques, media and modes of intelligibility. The archive operates multi-modally, informing situated constraints and outcomes in the midst of taking shape. Amidst such a research milieu the archive becomes increasingly heterogeneous (in that it can be approached

and mobilized in various and unexpected ways) informed by factors such as inhabited memories, materiality, techniques and technologies. As archives are figured in their co-compositional generativity, they are revealed as a situated potential where both discipline and the binary separation of subjects and objects, can be actively and critically wrestled with, sidestepped, or upended. This offers a reading of the archive as technology, and as media, with explicit influence on the scope and dynamism of research practice, as it evokes emergent spacetimes of meaning, interest and importance.

### **Technology, Practice and Transversal Historiographies**

To help contextualize the specific generativity of the contributions, here I propose a brief historiography of concepts that both describe and operationalize the transversal effects and affects of interdisciplinary media research. Though Western media research paradigms have tended to pit media objects as discrete entities, binarily opposed to the media analyst or researcher, non-binaristic media research practices were introduced by artists and philosophers in the last century, including Paul Valéry (1998) Paul Klee (1953), Suzanne Langer (1951) and Gilbert Simondon (1969). What distinguished the contributions of these thinkers was their focus on tending to the virtual dynamism of specific media forms, techniques and technologies, as both a critical and analytic strategy. The theorization they present thus centers the body as it becomes intelligible in instances of co-composition that exceed parameters set by empirical registers of physicality. Examples include the static form of the undulating line that *seems* to move (Langer, 1951); the flat plane whose overlapping shapes appear to recede and project forward (Klee 1953); how rendering different kinds of surfaces within a single scene in the context of sight drawing can merge different registers of recognition (Valéry 1998); the rhythmic and durational generativities that occur alongside and in excess of machinic function (Simondon, 1969). Marcel Duchamp's (1983) concept of the "infrathin" also articulates instances when material forms become intense as they embody the felt inseparability of objects (or the passage between them in time) as in the case between bodies and chairs as figured in example "*the warmth of a seat which has just been left*".<sup>7</sup>

Such generativities cannot be experienced second-hand but are inextractible from how they open up or give germ to new areas of interest and speculation. The above-mentioned examples—the virtual movement in the

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<sup>7</sup> See Marcel Duchamp (1983, p. 45). Erin Manning (2013, p. 339) develops the similar concept, the "infra-dimensional" to account for the architectural bodying that takes shape in dance where tendencies shift away from displacement and "toward an infra-dimensionalising of the very idea of ground itself".

familiar form of the drawn line, the affective dynamism conjured by simple geometric forms on a picture plane, the ineffable sense of temperature on the familiar surface of a chair—thus achieve rhetorical importance as they exceed the discursive registers with which their generativity is explained. In other words, the inseparability of form and affect within these examples insists on the threshold where novelty is not reducible to a given format or mode of articulation. Whatever the explanation of virtual effects and affects provided, it cannot stand alone but requires experimentation that renders and makes felt its corporeal and irreducible situatedness. As discourse gives way to corporeal generativities that exceed the textual, and vice-versa, it marks and preserves an “interstice”.

Both Jean-Luc Godard and Gilles Deleuze discuss the interstice by way of the cinematic image, which is constituted by a holding together of movements both within and between shots and gives rise to a temporal sense that exceeds real-time capture.<sup>8</sup> For Godard, the interstice is a “a method of constitution of series, by finding 'theorems' at the edges of 'problems'” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 180). Deleuze elaborates that such theorems always require new modes of reconciliation, according to the transformation of the whole, since “the whole becomes the constitutive part between-two images (Deleuze, 1989, 180). But this notion of the interstice can be extended to understand research in terms of how situated differences matter for how one might inhabit a media ecology, or further, how one might generate new worlding possibilities (or concepts and practices that characterize the negotiation of an incipient whole or totality) as a research process in its own right. This altogether sidesteps reductionist models that equate objects with their copy as, for example, in standard paradigms of lens-based and data capture. The potency of the interstice in destabilizing such paradigms is evidenced by the diversity of ways that contemporary media researchers have interrogated (and pragmatically rerouted) the premise of their ontological, technological, material and durational status through performative engagement.<sup>9</sup> When

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<sup>8</sup> See Alana Thain's *Bodies in Suspense* (2019) and Toni Pape's *Figures of Time: Affect and the Television of Preemption* (2019) for in-depth readings of durational affects that occur through the interstice within cinema and T.V. based examples.

<sup>9</sup> Media researchers who engage lens-based media as ecological worlding include Emma Cocker, Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Mobeus-Greil (2019) in *Choreo-graphic Figures: Scoring Aesthetic Encounters*; Natasha Myers in *Becoming Sensor in an Oak Savannah*, with Ayelen Liberona (2015-present), and Allison Cameron (2017); Johanna Zylinska in works such as *WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DIGITAL* (2009) and *iEarth*(2014). Also see video's by Hito Steyerl that engage the image as part of a surveillance ecology in *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013) and within histories of image philosophy in *Adorno's Grey* (2013). See *Drawing Light: at the*

embedded within a performative practice, lens-based capture is forwarded as an interstice, as it destabilizes and complicates the temporality of the instant by rallying diverse and situated practices.

The interstice as world-making possibility jibes with Édouard Glissant's description of opacity, which occurs through "échos-monde", or world-echoes, and engenders an iterative seriality. Through the creation and apprehension of "échos-monde" opacity proposes a generative and ethical imperative that "protects diversity" within a broad range of relational ecologies.<sup>10</sup> Glissant states: in the opacity of relation "all the threatened and delicious things [join] one another (without conjoining, that is, without merging)" (1997, p. 62). Échos-monde are thus a means of accounting for emergent differences over series that mark and reconstitute media and bodies in their mutual generativity, but only partially describe their basis in causality. This maintains an eye to the heterogeneous generativities that accompany media iterations while eschewing their reductive characterization. Here, the terms of intelligibility move away from centering given or contained objects, to tracking tendencies of emergent coherence within a creative practice and the speculative possibility of their transformation.

To further explain the generativity of the interstice it is useful to return the form of trajectory as it manifests differences in the way it is drawn as compared to how it is *walked*. One can "take a line for a walk" as Klee famously claims, since the two forms of trajectory can both be experienced as an inhabited form of passage and displacement.<sup>11</sup> But the difference between the two modes is interstitial in that it proposes new openings to think, feel and inhabit trajectory as it is negotiated between drawing and walking, since each presents very different spatial and temporal conditions. Slight changes in material quality, or the dynamism of line weight while drawing, can open to new experimental possibility for walking. Meanwhile, the auditory and

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*thresholds of perception* (2018) an installation/workshop that I developed with Alanna Thain for a discussion about how lens-based practices can coincide with formal, material and conceptual figurations of the weave. See De Brabandere (2022) "Co-composing the Perceptible Across Affective, Painterly and Computational Generativities" (2022) for an account of how the computer vision algorithm of the website [www.ThisPersonDoesNotExist.com](http://www.ThisPersonDoesNotExist.com) proposes radical re-compositions of lens-based visual and technological paradigms.

<sup>10</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 62. I also refer to échos-monde in "Co-composing the Perceptible Across Affective, Painterly and Computational Generativities", *Kunstlicht: Algo-rhythms*, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Klee's proposition is implicit in his description of a drawn line that is "an active line on a walk, moving freely without goal. A walk for a walk's sake" (1953, p. 16).

topographic dynamics of walking can suggest ways to expand a drawing practice to specify new drawing textures, including material qualities or viscosities, as well as durations and rhythms.<sup>12</sup> The interstice thus sustains the possibility of inhabiting, and enlarging emergent points of convergence across different domains of experience. The aim here is not the resolution of difference, but a persistent interrogation of the terms of differentiation (and continuity), which emerge and become explicit over a series of iterations.

While contributions in this volume do describe discrete examples of interstitial generativity, they are not always made explicit. Some contributions employ an implicit rendering of the interstice, which may occur through the juxtaposition of image and text or the pairing of different kinds of textual or discursive modalities. But more important than the explicit identification of the interstice, is the way readers are invited to apprehend the interstice in a speculative manner and before its generative effects have been fully accounted for. This means to develop affinities with the research as an assemblage, as it guides one to apprehend artifacts, effects and affects in their co-constitutive transversality.<sup>13</sup> This is an invitation to conjure research as a means of creating the possibility for its own variation and to tend to the generativity of an increasingly broad range of practices and techniques.

A final concept that I would like to introduce here is the notion of “technicity”. Simondon suggests that the motor of technicity is the discovery of form: “it is not the destruction of potentials; the system continues to live and evolve; it is not degraded by the appearance of structure; it remains

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<sup>12</sup>Also see works by Sedje Hémon, including *Fête*, Oil on Canvas, 93 x 77cm, 1957, which foreground abstraction as a means of articulating intense or “spiritual” convergences between painting and music (featured in the exhibition “Abstracting Parables” 1 Jul – 16 Oct, 2022, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam). Thomas Lamarre (2002) describes a similar transversality in Heian “paperscapes”, which provide an incipient texturing that precedes and co-composes with the poetics, materiality, movement and dimensionality of calligraphic mark-making. In “Experimenting with Affect across Drawing and Choreography” (2016) I engage the weighted line, as a means of experimenting with movement scoring techniques and the intense processual affects of mark-making as they co-emerge within situated material ecologies, which give rise to variations over series. This work also refers to the weighted, calligraphic scores for dance improvisation by Dana Reitz. Other expanded drawing ecologies that I have developed include *Cuing and Aligning with the Audible* (2015) with Graham Flett; *A Collaboration of Intercrossers* (2016) with Amélie Brisson Darveau and Christoph Brunner (for an account of this ecology see De Brabandere, N. (2021) *Textures of Collaboration*) and *Drawing Light: Gesture and Suspense in the Weave*, with Alanna Thain (2018).

<sup>13</sup> Giaco Schiesser (2015) makes the case for the inclusion of these these components within artistic research methodologies and outputs in “What is at Stake – Qu’est ce que l’enjeu? Paradoxes – Problematics – Perspectives in Artistic Research Today”.

tenuous and is capable of self-modification' (Simondon, 1969, p. 163, *my translation*). Erin Manning draws this definition forward into what it means for an experimental research practice, describing technicity as a phase of emergent form that “sets the conditions for successive operations, each of which incorporates the implicit, creating an opening toward an ecology of experimentation” (2013, p. 35).

Within research ecologies that privilege technicity, outcomes are not always complete or translatable, even as they occur with and alongside discreet media-based instances or insights. This non-translatability sustains the way an image or installation that is part of a research practice makes thinkable speculative relationalities that extend beyond what is immediately given or recognizable. What is at play is the strategic gathering of partial and discontinuous elements that present potential tactics for preserving interest, intensity and criticality. Technicity thus enables the possibility of centering research aims around what it means to inhabit research in a way that tends to and radically intervenes into specific corporeal tendencies, as well as existing terms of experimentation. Technicity thus also figures the corporeality of the artist, author or practitioner, as something that is co-emergent with and transformed by the research process. This mutual dynamism requires the welcome inclusion of excess and opacity, such that it enacts an ethical positioning.<sup>14</sup> This begs the question, what kinds of responsibility and scope do such corporealities bear within and outside the institutional settings where research takes place?

### **Institutional Worldings**

This volume unfolds with and alongside the institution, whether in the context of museums and galleries or academia (along with the disciplinary frameworks that are reproduced by the academic institution). By bringing together researchers at the intersection of practice-based research in the arts and fields in the interdisciplinary humanities such as media studies, curatorial studies and art history, this volume seeks to provide entries for understanding the scope of research as a world-making-ambition that is both situated within and in excess of institutional and disciplinary frameworks. This excess is characterized by the way research practices engender obligations and affinities, modes of belonging and marginality, that propose new occasions for thought that are unmoored from given registers of value and recognition. Investigating the potential of such research has been at the forefront of feminist theory, as it offers opportunities to rethink and reroute binary separations along the lines of gender and sexuality,

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<sup>14</sup> Félix Guattari (2000) outlines an “ethico-aesthetics” based on the dynamic co-composition of the physical and the affective in *The Three Ecologies*.

and by extension, those pitting the human against the non-human, the animate and the inanimate. Instead, what is privileged is how research practices actively co-constitute ecological assemblages where knowledge is inseparable from situated meanings, affects and desires. Feminist scholars in the humanities who have led the call for the inclusion of “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 2016) and experimental media practices within a critical context include influential figures such as Isabelle Stengers (2011, 2014), Natalie Loveless (2019), Donna Haraway (2016) and Michelle Murphy (2017).

From another angle, practice-based research has gained in popularity as it has coincided with the adoption of 3rd cycle or PhD programs (which have been variously labeled artistic research, practice-based or practice-led research, research-creation and research-as-creation)<sup>15</sup> and has been implemented in dozens of academic institutions across the U.K., Europe and North America over the past few decades. The aim of many of these programs is to make space for and situate individual or collective arts practices as research. Several handbooks have been published to help understand how such PhD programs should be organized (including evaluation recommendations and best practices) and position their specificity in relation to other academic disciplines. Many of these publications have expanded the contexts with which to articulate value within experimental aesthetic practices beyond the gallery and the art historical cannon.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Institutions in continental Europe and Scandinavia tend to refer to Artistic Research, while institutions in the U.K. tend to refer to practice-based or practice-led research. Research-Creation is widely used in the Canadian context. Olivia Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2015) refer to “research-as-practice” to forward a research context that need not reproduce discursive conventions present in the broader humanities.

<sup>16</sup> There are an increasing number of handbooks and articles in recent years, which describe and intervene into the institutional settings and constraints where practice-based research in the arts takes place. Due to the interdisciplinary negotiations that ensue from the problematics and opportunities raised by artistic research within emergent and more conventional research contexts, these handbooks forward very different concerns and approaches. The audiences for these volumes can include researchers in the field of media studies and aesthetic philosophy, as well as arts-based practitioners, looking to understand and contextualize generativities within arts-based research practices. Such examples often include case studies from individual practitioners, whose results are aesthetically and theoretically rich but not necessarily (or only partially) reproducible outside of the situated research context. Alternatively, they can present a guide for evaluators and administrators within academic and funding institutions to help grapple with research processes that may not easily be described by conventional research terms and methods. This is complicated by the fact that depending on the national and institutional context, conventions vary. Below is a list that I have compiled that is suggestive of the scope, diversity and complexity of the

While the formal inclusion or practice-based research in the arts has made research funding accessible to a wider range of researchers, a side-effect is the imperative to position aesthetic research practices with and for institutional frameworks and registers of valuation, which implicates audiences, techniques and media in ways that give particular contour and dimension to the research process. While we may (and should) adopt a critical stance regarding how paradigms of recognizability operate within an institutional framework to reproduce hierarchy and exclusion, there is an opportunity here to rethink what recognition can do as part of an inclusive practice. What if given terms of recognition can be confronted by “bursting the seams” or by gathering cause for interest and concern through the specificity of practices that stir or reconfigure given thresholds of recognition?<sup>17</sup> If the privileged mode of research is one that occupies its own thresholds of intelligibility, or envisions itself as operative within the interstice, does this mean that it is always and already oriented towards creating new modes, measures and desires for inclusivity? Amidst the generative tensions posed by the somewhat uneasy inclusion of practice-based research within institutional accreditation and funding paradigms is the opportunity to take seriously the experiential and media-based dynamics of situated research processes and how they might transform institutional paradigms.<sup>18</sup> What if practice is not posed as an

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topic: Borgdorff, H. (2013) *Artistic Practices and Epistemic Things in Experimental Systems: Future Knowledge in Artistic Research*; Borgdorff, H., Peters, P. and Trevor Pinch (eds.) (2017) *Dialogues Between Artistic Research and Science and Technology Studies*; Bruneau, J., Scholts, N., Georgelou, K., Doruff, S., Rosie, H. and Marijke Hoogenboom (eds.) (2021) *Fieldings: Propositions for 3rd Cycle Education In the Performing Arts*; Cotter, L. (ed.) (2019) *Reclaiming Artistic Research*; Dombois, E., Ute Meta Bauer, Claudia Mareis and Michael Schwab (eds.): *Intellectual Birdhouse. Artistic Practice as Research*; Leavy, P. (ed.) (2019) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*; Lilja, E. (2015) *Art, Research, Empowerment: The Artist as Researcher*; Chapman, O and Kim Sawchuk (2015) “Creation-as-Research: Critical Making in Complex Environments”; Loveless, N. (2019) *How to make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*; McNiff (ed.) (2013) *Art as Research: Opportunities and Challenges*; Schwab, M. (ed.) (2008) *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*.

<sup>17</sup> This is how Chapman and Sawcheck (2012) describe their hope for how research-as-creation can inform and transform the institution, based on a private correspondence with Nathalie Loveless.

<sup>18</sup> Giaco Schiesser, who developed a first-of-its-kind PhD group at the Zurich University of the Arts (four of the contributors of this volume were members, myself included) was designed to amplify the situated emergence of research processes. This occurred through periodic group discussions that would collectively establish the research scope and methods of group activities, based on the research interests of individual members. Evaluations were not only centered on the artifacts of the research process but the manifestation and articulation of its effects and affects. This allowed for a processual

intervention or counter-point to scientific, theoretical, philosophical or scholarly research but is rather figured as something that proposes new entries for approaching research that can be adopted across disciplines?

Isabelle Stengers (2010) elaborates such a potential through an understanding of how aesthetic practices are fundamentally ethico-aesthetic, which means that they unfold by tending to diverging and minoritarian (or emergent and as yet undetermined) obligations. Such practices must in turn accommodate the non-translatability between media and discursive practices while preserving interest in articulating the necessarily incomplete and propositional quality of how practices are shaped affectively, and thus co-emergent with an irreducible sense of situated corporeality. To make situated practices recognizable as research, as an ethico-aesthetic positioning, then demands modes of articulation that figure non-translatability as an ethical spacetime of negotiation, hesitation and reinvention. Put otherwise, as practice-based aesthetic research processes involve corporeal affects, they engender a certain ethical responsibility or obligation to the minor and emergent qualities of a research process, as well as to findings and desires that may contradict pre-established research goals (troubling the terms of institutional accountability).

Sarah Ahmed (2017) situates the potential for feminist practices, which are at once intersectional (thus comprising a confrontation against injustice in many forms and support for diverse groups including gender and racial minorities) and in-the-making, within the institutional context of *doing* diversity work. By engaging this institutional context, Ahmed pinpoints practices that reproduce power and exclusivity for some while excluding others, along lines of race, disability and gender. But rather than accept critique of injustice as an endpoint, Ahmed understands feminism as a gathering that is always in movement and transformation, amidst parts that must be “kept still, given a place” (2017, p.3). The generative dynamism between movement and stasis takes on various forms in Ahmed’s work and is mobilized towards both establishing feminist communities and dismantling exclusionary systems and structures.

In the chapter “Brick Walls” from her book *Living a Feminist Life* Ahmed demonstrates how a writing practice centered on its own processual generativity can stage an encounter between feminist transformation and institutional injustice, which actively conceals its own reproduction. By articulating institutional reproducibility through metaphors that describe material and immaterial effects and affects, the institution is figured (and

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horizontality between different modes of research, including textual, material or media based and more readily transversal media research approach. See Schiesser (2015) for further insight about designing 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle arts-based research programs.

destabilized) as a processual potentiality that can be effectively and practically reworked and redirected towards becoming a more inclusive environment.<sup>19</sup>

While the research presented in this volume runs with and alongside institutional frameworks, it maintains the potential to radically intervene into normative registers of inclusion and exclusion within them.<sup>20</sup> Contributions heighten this potential by engaging minor registers of intelligibility, including silenced or unspoken histories of violence and state power, human-non-human co-compositions, the interstitial generativities of media processes that are figured in their transversality. By engaging the minor quality of movements within media objects or between and across them, contributions conjure and stage emergent bodies, making time and space for that which is typically excluded or silenced by normative paradigms. Furthermore, as contributions engage the problem of generativity within situated media practices in different ways, they invoke shared resonances while signaling important differences. This constitutes a worlding that allows for rethinking the basis for and validity of existing paradigms while creating openings to establish heterogeneous and collaborative new versions of the body and the institution. As each contribution is figured within and across specific media settings, this worlding is both immediately graspable and rich in unspoken potentials that are felt affectively if not yet formulated as concrete directions for further research (or that remain insistent and generative in their quality of being not-yet).

This is an invitation to reconsider research as a gesture, as an opening to thought that is both specific and poetic, iterative and speculative. Such research practices can locate meanings that are simultaneously at the center and at the margins of particular objects, within the givenness of forms and their gesturing towards an uncertain unfolding of time, intensity and potential. Through the figure of the interstice, we see that the urgency and importance of discreet media articulations are often characterized by an indistinction between given and marginal modes of intelligibility. Here authors and spectators conjoin in non-linear co-compositions, in rhythmic iterations that ready the potential for new and heterogeneous versions of research. It follows that such research holds open the possibility to engender new modes of accompaniment, obligations

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<sup>19</sup> In 2019 I adapted Ahmed's metaphorical writing technique to a classroom setting for the course "Ecology and Existence" with Alanna Thain at McGill University, where students could begin to articulate and share systemic institutional hierarchies along the lines of gender, race and disability from multiple affective, experiential and descriptive vantages.

<sup>20</sup> In the introduction to the publication *Fieldings* (2021) Sher Doruff also describes the potentially radically transformative coupling of practice-based research strategies, collaborations and communities and established institutional frameworks.

and modes of relationality that are in excess of the institution that supports it, and the given subjects and modes of representation it reproduces. While such media research does not guarantee a critical stance towards injustice, it is the means by which such an imperative can forge alliances that ally the specificity of media and material-based agencies towards relational urgencies that are felt in their situated intensity.

### **Contributions**

I now turn to individual contributions, to elaborate how this volume positions research as a site of generativity with and across different media and disciplinary modes of practice. While the chapters present specific contexts, practices, concepts and terminologies, meaning emerges differentially between and across them through their assembly within a single volume. As the contributions field different research modes and conventions—or different approaches to positing, explaining, articulating, testing, apprehending, theorizing, substantiating and disseminating—they betray how research operates in accordance with particular techniques, disciplines and institutions, as well as the thresholds where they can be troubled and redirected. The relevance of each chapter is thus compounded as a generative proposition, where as an assemblage, it maps divergent and convergent insights, terminologies, media, technologies and practices that jostle in speculative and pragmatic possibility. Identifying such similarities (and points of contrast) enlarges the space for double-takes, for re-readings, and for experimental openings. In summarizing each chapter, I aim to highlight aspects of its formal and conceptual specificity, while tacitly signaling potentially generative points of continuity and contrast between them.

#### **“Seeing and Touching the Shadow: Texturing the Installation” (Ch.1)**

Amélie Brisson-Darveau describes the generativity of an installation that she staged as a series of five “essays”. Each essay comprises material assemblages composed of textile elements particular to the stage (costumes, puppets, props), and structures inspired by those used in film production, including a lighting system. While these assemblages stand alone as discreet and specific objects, they are also propositional in that they gesture towards and insist on their own partiality. As spectators are invited to participate in generative play with the various elements of the installation, the participation and experience of spectators become part of the speculative and pragmatic content of the work.

As spectators are invited to consider the terms of their co-composition within the installation context a field of indistinction is sustained between maker and spectator, objects and shadows, gravity and weightlessness, movement and stasis. This relational dynamism, as felt in time and space,

makes palpable the potential for variation within the scene as a kind of “texture,” which comprises the corporeal. For Brisson-Darveau, the concept of texture is critical as it affords meanings that are simultaneously material and conceptual and foregrounds the apprehension of materials alongside “their immaterialities”. Brisson-Darveau proposes a richness of material and immaterial textures through contexts of material making that include weaving, knitting, 3D modelling, laser cutting, molding, cinematography and puppetry but without prescribing terms of production, assembly or technique typically associated with them.

The implication is that as the artifacts of these material and technical engagements are presented within the spacetime of the installation setting, the product of technological making becomes fragmented and newly available to inform practices, as well as tendencies of apprehension that exceed a contained corporeal. Instead, the installation's textures impart a corporeality in flux that is spaced and timed in the present, as well as across the temporalities of multiple, otherwise discontinuous technological practices. This engenders and invites the possibility of a futurity that is at once aesthetic and speculative and that maintains a transversal ethics by proposing a making process that is in excess of its own object.

### **“Virtual ISLANDS: Proposing VR Tidalectics” (Ch. 2)**

Olivia Mc Gilchrist forwards the VR work *Virtual ISLANDS*, of which she is the core creator, as “allied with the portrayal of hybrid identities through careful consideration of which stories and experiences are made available for VR viewers”. As such, she considers how VR can propose an alternative to technofuturism and a postcolonial stance within VR-making practice that aims to “decenter the technology’s whiteness” as well as “colonial legacies of whiteness and anti-black racism present across cultural spaces, which includes VR design and creation”.

Mc Gilchrist begins with a specifically Caribbean context, framing the VR project with notions forwarded by Caribbean thinkers such as Kamau Brathwaite's (1999) “Tidalectics” and Édouard Glissant's (1997) “Poetics of Relation”, the affordances of her own white privilege as a white Euro-Caribbean, and a VR production process that began in the Caribbean cultural context. For Mc Gilchrist, tidalectics operationalizes the metaphoric fluidity of water as a consistency that can hold together contradiction, as well as suspend what Lisa Nakamura calls “toxic embodiment”, a corporeal relationality conditioned by white privilege that structurally reproduces racial inequality along class lines. *Virtual ISLANDS* adopts “island tidalectics” (Llenin-Figueroa, 2012) in VR as a research-creation method, where 3D visualizations of insularity and the fluidity of water propose a cyclical, non-

linear engagement with 3D technologies. Mc Gilchrist asks: “Can I evoke a Caribbean tidalectics—where water is a site of history and memory—through a virtual watery space—where a virtual body comes in and out of sight in VR?”

In *Virtual ISLANDS*, an insular, watery spacetime is featured in three distinct VR iterations. The first manifests as the constant and progressive layering of digital images appears to produce a substantive thickening that churns with fleshy, breathy consistency. The second follows the figure of a guide within an abstracted Caribbean island space that questions the location, duration and object of intelligibility as the guide variably appears and disappears by becoming particulate through digital effects. The third enacts a virtual submersion of the user’s avatar in a tidal wave, in a sudden rush of material transition into the watery. Each distinct instance of figural submersion (and emergence) proposes a corporeal in co-composition with a specific environment and history that at once adheres to and suspends the context of place, whether Caribbean or VR, by orchestrating an affectively-driven, speculative corporeality in time. This series of partial and inconsistent figurations thus make time and space to consider the generativity of submersion as it is specifically afforded in VR, and how this creates the felt potential for an ethical worlding.”

### **“Con-Tactilisation: Touch as a form of multisensory, reciprocal, and co-constitutive perception” (Ch. 3)**

Elke Mark and Lindsey French engage micro-phenomenological openings in the study of sensory perception, which are further developed within the context of arts-based experimentation and performance. Through what they term “Con-Tactilisation” the authors develop a discourse and set of tactics for understanding perceptibility as a co-constitutive process. Drawing from Richard Kearney’s concept of “con-tact” the authors consider touch, not as a passive experience but embedded in a tactfulness that is unbounded from a single sensory register. Con-tactilisation is aimed at differentiating “pre-reflexive” qualities of sensing through multi-modal forms of accompaniment (how, for example, prompts that compel close attention to non-conscious hand-gestures afford greater sensitivity in describing the experience of smell).

What is particularly generative about their contribution is that it reframes sensory experimentation from something that obscures the unequal power relationship between expert observers and text subjects, in the service of empirical objectivity, to a situated and critical practice of collaboration and emergent sociability. On the one hand, this makes sensible the generativity of the experimental context beyond the scope of its planned for results. On the other, it allows for expanding the techniques and tactics of sensory experiment into registers of explicitly performative and speculative world-making, and

more specifically, the phenomenon of human and non-human “mutual sensitization”.

Rather than aim to circumvent inherent hierarchies in the process of distinguishing sensory intelligibility, Mark and French forward a series of situations of relational emergence (which exceed normative means of prescribing and extracting value), while maintaining an eye on the systemic inequalities and uneven distributions of power that inform them. In the mutuality of con-tact, the authors affirm: “[e]xchange and reciprocity is not necessarily (or even usually) equitable. Every encounter requires a negotiation of consent, power dynamics, and risk, and we do not come to these encounters on equal footing.” The authors turn to environmental studies to engage sites of human and non-human contact to negotiate such inherent inequalities, whether in the form of touch, pollination or a mosquito bite, and the way they are constitutive of overlapping political, imperial, affective and historical dimensions. Within their sensory practice, con-tact is thus developed as “a guide for empathic and shared futuring” and “an impulse to carry the experience forward into community with others”. In this sense, con-tactilisation builds “coalitions in support of our shared and reverberating future”.

#### **“A matter with(out) delay: Interferences of a gift” (Ch. 4)**

Petra Köhle and Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin suggest how archival history can become a speculative and performative proposition. The duo follows the eight-year-long history of the plans to transfer a gift from five Latin American states to the Palais des Nations, which housed the League of Nations. The League was founded after the First World War, and eventually became the European headquarters of the successor organization, the UN. The gift, which would have been a bronze inscription with quotations from Simón Bolívar, the Venezuelan politician who contributed significantly to the independence of Latin America from Spanish colonial power and conceived the first precursor to the League of Nations. Although the gift was initially accepted by the League, the plate was never installed.

Through the careful examination of archival materials and conversations with historians Köhle and Vermot-Petit-Outhenin develop a script that interrogates the meaning and potential of this gift that was not given but that conjures a complex negotiation of “interferences”. These interferences address the problem of the situated relationalities of archives and their intersection with political history and gift giving as an aesthetic potential, or one with the possibility to suspend intelligible modes of transfer in favour of conjuring new modes of speaking and thinking in and through the gift that “withdraws from the principle of reciprocity”.

The script that they develop conjures historical presence, through almost ritualistic fidelity to the material evidence, the anatomy of the archival form, its organization as a part within a totality, to its enumerated, hand-inscribed and missing information. But perhaps even more generative than this staging of archival information is the attention to the situated quality of information—the contours of penned marks, the colour of aged paper that presents information as a topography, one that patches to the glow of scanned copies on the computer screen. This material performativity of the archive renders the script a score that can be inhabited and performed. The archive thus becomes a situated proposition— a speculative dramaturgy of logistical socialities that can trouble and remake relational possibility.

### **“A History of Violence” (Ch. 5)**

Kai Ziegner presents excerpts of an experimental, multi-faceted book that he developed, which co-composes photographic and text-based entries. The book operates as an assemblage, documenting histories of violence stemming from the dissolution of the former East Germany, as they permeate personal and everyday encounters. For Ziegner, the book is an “object of deployment”, as well as a “means of communication and labour, that enables a deeper understanding of severe social change, and which helps to establish a dialogue across different generations of those affected”.

The author’s personal investment in research as a means of dialogue and accompaniment is carried out literally in the fact that he travelled to all 21 places associated with violent events (both obscure to the state authorities and orchestrated by them) to photograph each site in color and b/w medium format film. But these concept-based photographs, which are both documentary and staged, do not stand alone as documents of violent events, since on their own they appear to be snapshots of mundane buildings and places. Only the highly staged images of weapons placed amidst them offer recognizably violent associations. But the modest portrayals of places and events are strategic in that they track and provide vantages for Ziegner’s multivalent engagements with current and remembered histories within the scope of the project. This includes the unfolding of the research process, as well as personal memories and affects with violent implications that maintain an indetermined correspondence with the social history in question.

The result is a polyphonic composition that provides a multitude of moments, voices, observations and vantage points, which wrests the timeline of violent events from state versions of them. In the process, memory is troubled as a stable mooring of history and identity, emerging instead as something to be reckoned with, and that finds itself as it occurs in the midst of transformation and remaking. What is fascinating about the artist’s approach

is how the research process and format (as experimental media assemblage) insists on the indeterminacy between images and events, documents and histories. Such a research artifact suspends and reorganizes the difference between “victims and perpetrators”, just as Kai Ziegner variously identifies with both in multiple ways within the framework of an intriguing narrative.

**“There are no negative forms, Or: How I lost my interest in copies” (Ch. 6)**

Sarah Burger begins with the statement: *“All that follows here is caused by the observation of bicycle helmets, their resemblance to crafted masks from various historic cultures and heads of insects. From there on the fixed idea to make a mold and cast it.”* In Burger’s engagement with the bicycle helmet, it is revealed as a form that holds together myriad contradictions. Such contradictions include the stylistic evocation of the technological amidst the profanity of cheap plastic and foam parts, which are themselves “treasure chambers” in that they conceal the capital gained through the economic disparity between “Wewest” consumers and “Nonwest” producers; the “visually fast” uniformity of packs of cyclists, alongside the specificity with which bicycle helmets (and other athletic gear) adhere to specific bodies, entrapping hair and sweat; the coincidence of high-performance imaginaries given by merely “ornamental plastic geometries”; and finally the way the helmet operates as a protective shell that conjures a metamorphosis, binding the skeletal and the exoskeletal, inside and outside. Through this series of contradictions (and others) Burger demonstrates how functionality persistently incorporates the magical.

The text itself makes think-able its own situatedness as an assemblage, aligning associative, anecdotal and experiential registers of intelligibility, where differences function to make think-able the degree to which the magical is already integrated into paradigms of Western reason, as figured within art historical images, concepts of animacy and dissection, to name a few. What emerges is not a singular line of argumentation so much as an elaborated gesture that follows material traces, traces of movement, and traces of tenderness, in the pursuit of learning/remembers “how to dream together”. For Burger, this is the making of a “third” that exceeds the hierarchy of looking at a passive object, in that it entails “compassion” and “transformation”.

Burger develops a means of articulating the *how* of this material transformation by engaging in a material practice with a bicycle helmet, first by casting the helmet in alginate, then silicone, and finally through the affective/associative materiality of digital manipulation. While the author relates that attempts at casting helmets using different materials failed (in that the casting material failed to set) this failure was generative in enlarging the difference between object and copy, or the space-time of the in-between. Here, the difference

between original and copy was populated with durations, affects and movements that later informed a practice of digitally manipulating the helmet image, in a kind of “algorithmic kneading” that exceeded recognition. Across these three examples, we come to realize the generativity of Burger’s practice in rerouting Western rationality and its insistence on the singular, the symmetrical and the matter-of-fact. Magic occurs as divergent practices gather non-linear insistence, multiply and transversally across practices, memories, histories and technologies.

### **“Sideline Photorealism: Speed Racer and the Articulation of Digital Visual Effects Labor” (Ch. 7)**

Jonah Jeng offers a detailed and insightful problematization of photorealism through his engagement with Lana and Lilly Wachowski’s blockbuster film *Speed Racer* (2008). Jeng forwards the notion of seamfulness in contrast with the visual seamlessness of a photorealist aesthetic, which “effaces the means and temporality of its own construction”. Meanwhile, seamfulness foregrounds the work of digital VFX artists through “a collision of “animation” with “live-action” which results in the appearance of a kind of “constructedness” that is only achievable through “the specific affordances of digital VFX technology” something that “paradoxically reinjects a sense of temporality and digital VFX labour”. Jeng’s notion of seamfulness is thus suggestive of something that points to more than a media aesthetic—as it holds together paradoxical elements it incites tensions that allow for “thematizing the temporal, affective and generative dynamism of labour.”

Throughout the chapter, Jeng identifies an “insistent aesthetic of ‘bothness’ in which live-action and animation, photorealism and the fine-grained manipulation of the image are held in tension.” This bothness occurs through (and gives rise to) ostentatious layering within the image, removing cuts between takes that upend a live-action correspondence with cause and effect, layering different and exaggerated movement registers including that of the camera, the movement of race cars and the movement of one animated image layer against another. In this disjunctive aesthetics alongside a narrative about “appearances-versus-reality,” the material reality of labour “is gestured toward in the space between disjunctive image components.”

Jeng suggests that what is generated by this togetherness is more than self-reflexive and signals an affective opening to the material reality of labour, even as the inclusion of specific tasks in VFX labour are absent in the film. Instead, a sense of labour emerges as the author describes concrete examples in the film where the specificity of working with VFX informs new senses of continuity (and non-continuity) in time. For instance, as logics of editing that correspond with a seamless, the linear flow of events are upended and

replaced with durations that exceed lens-based recognition (when, for example, the camera seems to pass through a solid object and, despite what appears to be continuous forward camera movement, completes a 180-degree rotation in the world of the film, now facing "behind" but without the classical use of hard cuts). This unlikely re-figuring of seamlessness between bodies, materials and perspectives presents the image as a technical assemblage that involves tendencies of cinematic apprehension as much as the specific affordances of a given technology such as CGI. As seamfulness and seamlessness are posed differentially in heterogeneous iterations throughout the film, they underscore its situated generativity both in the making of the film itself and in the context of spectatorship.

### **“Powers of Abjection and Factories of Strong Emotions: On Flaccid Knob’s Videos” (Ch. 8)**

Friederike Sigler considers the video installations by the Berlin artist duo Flaccid Knob, a collaboration between Nadja Kurz and Per Warberg. The videos feature performances of the duo within quotidian environments that are at once familiar and excessive, featuring a staged and artificial production quality, slimy materials, colours that “stand out from all directions” and absurd scenarios that converge with and undermine neo-liberal expectations of individual autonomy and productivity. For Sigler, Flaccid Knob reveals “the mechanisms of biopolitics in 21st century neoliberalism by working with the corporeality of bodies that do not subordinate but refuse the neoliberal dictate. Because what happens almost consistently in all the videos is that the bodies break out of these structures, even overflow, and in doing so make visible precisely what the biopolitical authority is supposed to make impossible for them: their materiality.” Sigler contends that as these works operationalize material excess and artifice, alongside video-based performances that destabilize the status of video as documentary evidence, they propose a live-able afterlife for the abject. This occurs as the abject is repositioned from objectifying alignment with specific, determined bodies, to a mode of care and co-presence where bodies are co-extensive with human and non-human materials and practices.

Sigler arrives at this critical insight (and proposition) through close description of three works by the duo, each of which situates videos of their performances within different installation contexts, alongside readings of Michel Foucault’s “techniques of the self” and Julia Kristeva’s notion of the “abject”. Sigler relates that Foucault’s “techniques of the self” refers to the self-optimization of individuals on the level of everyday practices towards greater workforce performativity, something that simultaneously constitutes the individual and conceals the power structures inherent to this process. When

read through Kristeva's notion of the abject, which is characterized by "immanent resistance" (because it cannot be located in discreet objects of disgust such as excrement, blood or the feminine, as it has historically been theorized) Sigler identifies an alternate technicity with which to understand the self and productivity.

A key contribution of Sigler's chapter is how her repositioning of the abject offers a critical notion of the self that exceeds the binaristic formulations of "self" and "other" while operationalizing situated generativities of the "in-between". Here the abject is not used to distinguish and stigmatize certain bodies but becomes a means of overcoming normative impulses in favour of more-than-human techniques (or technicities) of love and care. We witness this carry over into the writing of Sigler's chapter, where discourse is foregrounded as a generative practice in its own right as it carefully interweaves and inflects theoretical and close descriptions of experiential meanings. The performativity of her discourse doubles the critical positioning offered by her text as it makes apprehensible a situated thinking practice that exceeds categorical or disciplinary registers of meaning creation.

#### **"A Latento for Curation as Research-Creation" (Ch. 9)**

The *Curatorial Research-Creation Collective* (Treva Legassie, Matthew-Robin Nye, Karen Wong) propose the term *latento* to engage the specifically Canadian context of "Research-Creation". The *latento*, which is "the antonym of a manifesto, an assertion of that which is clearly evident" (Raqs Media Collective, *Fragments from a Communist Latento*, 2010), aims to elaborate that which is "latent" or "hidden". As a discursive modality, the *latento* gives consistency to the authors' elaboration of the latent potential within institutional knowledge structures, including research and curatorial practice, by way of the hyphen.

The collective suggests that curation *as* research-creation be approached as a conceptual and pragmatic holding together, that foregrounds the generative potential in the spacetime between words, as well as the latent values within a creative or exhibitionary/presentational context. The authors describe how the hyphenated term "research-creation" has characterized research processes that are situated in media creation within academic institutions, and which, until the past few decades (or more recently), have been excluded from the institution. The collective elaborates the relevance of research-creation as a conceptual and pragmatic holding together, that articulates the generative potential in the relation between words, as well as the sometimes-latent values within an artistic or curatorial context.

Throughout their text, the collective engages in a rhythmic performativity that negotiates the latent within diverse curatorial ecologies while repeatedly circling back to concepts posed by the influential research-creation thinker and practitioner Erin Manning, the Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) and curator of *Imaginary Homelands* Emilie Chhangur. Some of these concepts include the “minor gesture” and “haecceities” or qualities that are “yet-to-come into their full presence but that, even without form, carry an affective tonality” (Manning 2020, p. 48). Further terms include “in-reach”, which “sits in contradistinction to outreach and describes projects that “change institutional practices from *within* by introducing different social economies, cultural protocols, and perspectives” (Chhangur, 2021, p. 31).

As the text progressively in-folds such terminologically (and institutionally redistributive notions), it proposes a discursive consistency that opens to speculative possibility, more than it does a singular line of argumentation. This interweaving enlarges and assigns value to practices that are in excess of the institution, aligning them with processes and ecologies of gardening, germination and “wilding”. The authors foreground that what research-creation shares with these processes is their generativity in opacity—how the earthworm, though largely unseen, is a critical part of the sociability of a garden ecology. The relevance of the unseen similarly pertains to gestures within a curatorial context that are in excess of received modes of value recognition but that are nonetheless critical to its generative dynamism. The mediation of the latent that the chapter performs similarly becomes an affective, durational and speculative germ from which to infold values that traverse divergent registers of experience, that are at once opaque and emergent, articulable and in excess of given terms.

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