

“Not Far From Where We Began” ... Was sind Gedanken wenn sie sich nicht formulieren lassen? Τι είναι οι σκέψεις αν δε μπορούν να λεκτικοποιηθούν; Koje su misli, ako oni ne mogu biti formulirani? Cad iad smaointe nuair nach féidir iad a chur le chéile? Formule edilemeyen dusunceleriniz nele-rdir? Quelles sont les pensées si elles ne peuvent être formulées? Wat zijn gedachten als ze niet kunnen worden geformuleerd?

—Lucie Berjoan, Ivan Cheng, Callum Copley, Rogier Delfos, Ioanna Gerakidi, François Girard-Meunier, Rosie Haward, Özgür Kar, Asja Novak, Stefanie Rau, Aidan Wall and Tom Clark, 2017

“One theoretical ramification of the de-prioritization of the present we can mention straightaway, but will need to return to later, is that it is no longer necessary to explain the movement of the past and the future on the basis of the present. We are instead in a situation where human experience is only a part of—or even subordinated to—more complex formations constructed historically and with a view to what can be obtained in the future. The past and the future are equally important in the organization of the system and this overshadows the present as the leading configuration of time.”—Suhail Malik, 2016

From the Editor.

A critical practice that is concerned with proximity, one generative and many, cannot hope to represent but can only participate in laying out coordinates; cannot hope to generate a common, collective space but to deform it. A critical practice that is concerned with proximity cannot hope to conceptualise content, but rather to exchange meaning, re-evaluate its

EPIGRAPH:
THE TEST DRIVE (2005)
Avital Ronell

affect. (I feel very far from where we began.)

Abruptly, a point was raised regarding the distancing effect of time-limitations and enforced word counts, and how these restrictions might lead to a text being produced that the author might otherwise not be happy about publishing—I'd not expected this and it stuck with me.

The idea had been to work through the roles involved with editing, but to do this in a way that might also unpick the editor as a singular figure, one who quietly authorises and smooths out meaning and contradictions. I wanted a theme through which that figure might be deflected, while keeping some of what I'd been thinking about generally—how can we be together under different scalings?—and also specifically regarding the editor. The editor, a figure who is close to text, who the text passes through and who, as a commissioner, is tasked with bringing things together. The theme was proximity.

The exquisite discipline and daring askesis of certain types of non-Western practice challenge the limits of what we understand by testing. By slackening the finish line and undermining the ideology of sanctioned results in favour of another logic of rigor, a number of Zen and yogic teachings at once suspend and resurrect the constitution of the test. Zen does not merely erase testing but holds it in reserve, situating it otherwise. Vast and imposing, Eastern relations to something like testing reconfigure yet steadfastly enforce the warrior poses that pervade Western registers of testing. The value of contest also shifts. In Tai Chi one learns to step aside when a hostile energy is on the loose: one is taught to let the menacing lunge collapse against the stubborn velocities of its own intentions. The engagement with opposing forces (which can no longer be conceived as opposing since, by a slight shift in energy and position, the commensurate reach is broken, the flow diverted)—indeed, the very concept of testing limits—undergoes fateful innovation. All the same, Eastern practices, including those associated with the martial arts, hold back from completely writing off the test; they do not simply oppose the West-test. In a sense, the test becomes even more pervasive because it can at no point be satisfied by a conclusive answer or a definitive response to the probe that has been put out. The difficult boundaries of the Zen trial, the characteristics of which can be at once asserted and equally disputed, are especially evident in the case of koans—the problems or inner challenges with which Zen masters traditionally have confronted their pupils. The Occident has put up other fronts, obeying quickening velocities: If such acts as going after the grail or attempting to reach a metaphysically-laden Castle can be viewed as exemplifying narratives of the Western test drive, then the Eastern “test” (this quality has not yet been established) is, by comparison, shatterably slow-going.

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PIGEONS

Lucie Berjoan

1.

I worked for some time in a giant Starbucks, the one in Rembrandtplein that was designed by some famous Dutch designer and was what they called a concept store, the first one in Europe. It was a real pain in the ass. There was this one old American guy who would come in often, nearly every day, who really grated on my nerves. He was the type of customer who would saunter up and say "I'll have my regular!" with a twinkly eye and the exact change already picked out of his linty pocket and into his dried out hand, ready to dump on the counter. He would sit for hours reading through all the newspapers stacked next to the brown armchair. The automatic doors often remained open from the steady stream of people, so it was inevitable that along with the tourists would often come a pigeon or two. They would wander around the massive cafe nibbling on the muffin crumbs, bobbing around, dodging clumsy feet. They'd go mostly undetected, until someone would come up and saying, "did you know there's a pigeon in here?" at which point we'd be forced to acknowledge it and make some effort to appear as though we were dealing with it. No one ever really wanted to be in charge of herding the flighty thing out. I remember one day in particular, the same pigeon kept wandering in and we could just not, no matter what we did, convince the brazen bird to leave. I was ducked down under the counter restocking endless napkin dispensers, when I heard a shuffling and a collective, dramatic gasp. The pigeon had finally been caught underneath a large paper bag and swiftly, before anyone could move a muscle, the old American guy, who had been inching forward, greedily eyeing the final capture, stamped his foot down on the bag. Hard. We all stared, not quite knowing what to say, while a flustered British woman at the register demanded a refund of her money, having suddenly lost her appetite. My colleague, Jenny, a quiet, sardonic young woman from Canada who had been assisting with the capture and removal, scooped up the bag with the small weight of the bird in it and rushed it outside and around the corner. My manager had pulled the old guy aside and was patiently explaining to him why everyone was reacting so strongly. He was gesturing emphatically and seemed confused. When Jenny came back, she told me that the pigeon had tumbled out of the bag, stunned but overall unharmed, and wandered off towards the center of the city.

2.

Outside of my bedroom window, in the small alley where my building converges with the one beside and behind it, there is a ledge of about two square meters covered in pigeon shit, dead leaves, and old razors and shampoo bottles that were knocked out of my neighbors' bathroom window. Brown streaks of condensation drippings stain the wall like tears beneath the tinted glass. It is a weird little nowhere land, accessible only from above or through windows, like the bottom of an empty well. While my neighbors were doing construction, large men would go out there, breathing smoke and yelling back to the guys inside. It sort of felt like men were crawling out of the drains to call their girlfriends on their lunch breaks. I couldn't fuck my girlfriend or myself without fixing a blanket over the window. The filtered light made the whole room feel like a cave. Shortly after the construction ended, two pigeons dragged some sticks around, ending up, eventually, in the corner, or rather, one pigeon did while the other, a soot-colored female, stood to the side, staring blankly at the wall. They would take turns, alternating between work and blank stares, until one morning I watched the black feathered one convulsing over their dirty stick pile while he stood, a couple inches away, cooing softly. *Am I about to watch two pigeons fuck?* But they didn't, at least not then, but at some point they must have, because two perfect eggs appeared and they alternated keeping them warm, as pigeons do, until one morning there appeared a pink and gray, atrocious looking baby. Then they'd switch off between sitting on the baby, keeping watch and gathering food, but their isolated alley was safe from predators and the baby grew into an even uglier creature, next to the other perfect egg that never hatched and only got tie-dyed with various shit splatters. A couple of weeks later I looked out to see the baby, still, in the corner of the littered alley. I noticed flies humming around its head, crawling over its lifeless body. The parents never returned and the little body disappeared after a couple weeks, covered in leaves and snow and rubbish.

HYPATIA VOURLLOUMIS

in response to questions
by Tom Clark

Looking up the word “proximity” in the Chambers Dictionary I read its definition as “immediate nearness in time, place, relationship, etc.,” yet something feels lacking here. I sense that it’s because the presence of an inexorable space necessary to and always in-between those entities that experience ‘immediate nearness’ escapes this definition. Immediate nearness is not the same as becoming one with the proximate, and so where does the one end and the other begin? I search for and look at a word, a word discernible as such because of where it begins and ends. I read its definition, which attempts to proximate the word with other words; these words lead to other words in a performance of “non-masterable dissemination”¹ as Derrida would say. This is to say that proximity is interesting to me insofar that it depends on a certain excess to the sensible.

1

See Hypatia Vourloumis, *AlterNations: Performing Indonesian Communicability* [thesis] (2007).

And so back to the dictionary and all the other words next to “proximity” which convey its meaning by way of alterity. Further up I see the word “proxemics” and read that it’s the “study of the human use of physical space in non-verbal communication *esp.* the distances people maintain between themselves and others while interacting...” Ok, now this is exciting stuff I think because phonemics—connected to proxemics—is the study of sound in language, the sounds that makes one word different from another. And so here we have it rendered more clearly—that proximity relies paradoxically on difference and distance, that sense relies on nonsense and even more than that, infinite nonsensical combinations of sonic difference.

You ask whether paralinguage points to a proximity with the present in excess of its measurement and definition, and in light of the above, I would say that my study of

paralanguage is interested in precisely the embodiment and expression of the nonsensical that is integral to language. Could this be perhaps a critical strategy of embeddedness? I would say that yes—if it is always understood as embodied, as in Adrian Piper’s notion of an ‘indexical self-referential present.’² There can be no proximity without the experience of and the experiencing of bodies and Piper’s work during that period (1970s) was thinking about how concepts such as ‘race’ become sedimented, determining how bodies were approached or not approached, read and affected at the precise moment of contact. In this sense there is no way out of an indexical present—you read this now in your own indexical present, words put down here from my own indexical present, which is your past—and yet what we bring to our indexical present is ‘self-referential’ because of what we have accumulated over the passing of infinite moments of contact.

2

Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

It is the ‘here and now’ of paralanguage that I am drawn to as a performance theorist because of paralanguage’s undeniable materiality, its affects and effects that escape meaning and knowing. For example, a couple of days ago I watched an interview Diamanda Galas gave in 1992 about her work as a musician and singer and her AIDS activism (I watched it because I was disappointed that I was going to miss her live performance scheduled to take place in a couple of weeks here in Athens). Galas is known for her excessive vocal range and for pushing her voice and body to their limits in her performance art.³ What was most interesting to me was how she

describes using the power of her voice, her screams and howls and growls, her holding a note til her voice breaks down, til breath takes over, as a way to breakout of solitary confinement, of her self and outside of rational expression. It is in these realms where communication recedes and becomes communicability instead, and it is this communicability that enables a proximity unimaginable before the here and now of her scream. At the same time, it is her absolute immersion, her absolute proximity to what her voice can do, that propels her, and us as her audience, to escape the confines of this physical world. There is a fugitivity here to paralanguage, palpable in her performances, an attempt at escape by way of utter immersion, enthrallment, intentness, and holding on so as to let go.

3

You can find the interview here with many moments of her performances: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0gc13WpR-w>.

If paralanguage can never be experienced outside of its here and now, it is the here and now of art in general that I find most compelling to think about in response to your questions. There is a kind of conjuring that must take place in my mind if I am to reflect on art that I am not in physical proximity to. Conjuring becomes an important notion to proximity because it helps reveal the ghost and hauntings that we are all proximate to and yet do not acknowledge (especially when maintaining forms of rational critical distance in knowledge production).

Avery Gordon writes of the ways the sociological imagination is haunted by ghosts who live among us everywhere (now there is a radical work! the proximity of ghosts in sociology): “haunting is quintessentially an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely [...] Ghosts arise or haunting occurs when repression or blockage is not working.”⁴ I feel this is important because, if we were to return to Galas’s haunting screams in the YouTube clip above, we can sense how bound up they were with her fierce anger and mourning over the social violence that was the AIDS crisis of those years. She refuses to repress herself and her nonsensical communicability then ‘speaks’ and ‘touches’ those of us seeking and living in a critical undercommons or what José Muñoz described as ‘brown

commons' which is a commons merging out of terrains of struggle and different yet shared experiences of historical dispossession. This requires a proximity that is about attentiveness, a tuning into, a listening in detail as Alexandra Vazquez says.⁵ To attend to, to tune into, to discern hidden frequencies and ghostly vibrations, to claim important what is usually deemed irrelevant, is always related to a tuning into and an attentiveness to the brokenness that is historical dispossession and thus also related to reparation, not as compensation but as keeping alive, a living with.

4

Originally published in Avery F. Gordon, *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power and People* (Paradigm Press, 2004), 113–132.

5

Alexandra T. Vazquez, *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

To be in proximity is, as Donna Haraway puts it, to “stay with the trouble.” She writes, “we live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response [...] staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.”⁶ This being “truly present,” as a kind of proximity requires a deeper analysis on questions of orientation (see Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*).

6

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

I end here for now by taking up Haraway’s call for a becoming with each other as ‘oddkin’ and a practice of speculative fabulation and art making, a collaborative reformation through the proximity of multi-specied workers: http://www.aganethadyck.ca/drawingwiththebees/content/bimage_large.html

PING

Callum Copley

Peter sipped the tepid coffee from his mug, clicking away, bathed in the amber-tweaked light of his displays. An unseen sunset through half closed blinds emitted a similar glow, as he dragged and dropped, copied and pasted. The usual notifications and alerts blurted intermittently as he worked, until an unfamiliar ping filled the room. Glancing from device to screen to little black box—he couldn't find the source. Jumping between windows and running through tabs there was no obvious origin to the noise. A moment of calm, and again it filled the room, bouncing from the four walls of his tiny studio apartment. He was amply perplexed. Then a knock. A pounding of knuckles. Swivelling in his chair and leaping from it he made for the entrance, past the kitchenette and the recycling boxes piled high with old take away containers. He hadn't ordered any food yet... The fish-eye peephole revealed a man. An almost suave man, with an off-kilter suit and a thinning head of brown hair. Before the buzzer could be rung again, Peter opened the door. The unidentified man began to speak.

“Peter?”

(Saying nothing, Peter released his breath questioningly.)

“Great! Well—”

“Who are you? What is this?”

“I’m here because you purchased these.”

(In the palm of his hand the man displayed a small box.)

“—sorry, what did I buy? I didn’t buy anything.”

(The man leant forward.)

“I think you did, sir. I have it here.”

“I haven’t made any orders. I’m pretty sure.”

“Hmm, In that case I think you must have placed it in your basket. That must be it.”

“Yeah, no, I don’t remember doing that. What is it?”

“These are executive cufflinks, sir. Gunmetal finish. Bullet-back fixings. Incredibly debonair.”

“Cufflinks?”

“Yes sir, the best. A sophisticated statement of taste for the modern man. The perfect expression of masculine elegance.”

“I didn’t order any cufflinks.
I would have remembered.
Now have you finished?”

“Cufflinks might be traditionally
associated with men’s semi-formal
evening wear, the tuxedo for
example, but these versatile little
fasteners can accent a surprising
range of wardrobes items. Now
are you certain that you didn’t
make an order?”

“You will have probably clicked
on these then.”

“*Will I have...?*”

(Readjusting his pose and leaning
even further in, the man broke off.)

“I don’t own a suit, so no.”

“Can I ask you one
serious question?”

“Quickly—”

“Well, all the more reason to get
a suit now, eh? Now you already
have the links.”

(From somewhere, a gentle
chirping began to underscore
the conversation.)

“Did you know men have been
wearing shirt-like items of clothing
since the invention of woven fabric
5,000 years B.C.?”

“I do now. Thanks.”

“What about when you’re at work,
or interviews?”

“I don’t need a suit.”

(Peter began to close the door,
but the man stepped inside.)

“I’m at work right now. In fact,
you’re keeping me, so I must
be going.”

“Hovered!
You will have hovered then...”

“I don’t hover.”

“Think about it—when else can a
man wear a piece of jewelry that’s
both functional and ornamental?”

(The spritely tweeting grew
gradually louder in the back-
ground.)

“Wait. These understated
accessories are the pinnacle
of sophistication and style.
Are you sure you never expressed
an interest in this product?”

“No. Yes. I’m sure.”

“I think it’s probably about time
you leave.”

“In a product *similar to this?*”

“I’m afraid not, now—”

“Well, if you would like I can leave
these with you?”

“No, just leave. How did you even
get up to this floor?”

(The chorus of bird song was now
approaching a crescendo.)

“Are you going to get that?”

(The man tilted to the side and
looked directly toward Peter’s
desk at the other end of the flat.
Peter suddenly came to the
realisation that the noise was
a synthetic composition screech-
ing from the speaker of his com-
puter. Peter prodded the unwel-
come guest back into hallway.)

“Would you like to unsubscribe
from future visits?” uttered the
man under his breath, as the door
hit the frame.

THE EXITS ARE SYMMETRICAL
(AND I LET HIM CUM)
Ioanna Gerakidi

The holding environment is fostering your ability to experience the body as the place wherein one securely lives. In this holding environment, you are dependent. You are affected by the possibility of being hurt. Your body position determines your perception.

proximity

we shared a kiss, I said *Bye*, he said *See you*, not soon, not around, just *See you*, before, while crossing the road, I asked him *Are we okay?*, he replied *You are projecting*, I was

I was avoiding any sexual intercourse with him, I was beginning to feel guilty about it as he was obviously trying hard to make me want him

his hand was now erotically touching my neck and then my shoulders, I felt surprisingly aroused, I asked him *Can we have sex today?*, he gently smiled at me and he laughed after, he replied *Of course, what would you think I was going to say, 'no'?*

his bed was right next to the window, there was no curtain, I could see the leftovers of the full moon, his bed sheets were black, absolute black and thick and smooth and I couldn't help but thinking, neither that nor about, just thinking and sex is not about thinking and I wanted him to stop and I didn't want any body near on top or under my body

and I let him cum

and I then said *I don't know how I feel about that* and he said *About the dog position?* I didn't reply, I went downstairs for a smoke

proximity

to holding, breathing, voicing, uttering screams of pleasure or pain, or both. The erotic holds power and love and risk and you have to take that risk, outside nature, against nature. Yet you are free as air. You can wear blue or red or white or you can wear nothing. Your ability to choose is an inability not to choose.

Proximity challenges your orality, makes your mouth wet and your tonality becomes fragmented, blurred and illusionary. I said, *I want to know what triggers your senses when I am singing.* He said, *Resonance. Resonance earned its space under the sun.*

Donald Winnicott wrote about the ambivalence in holding. Holding implies care and tenderness but also the possibility of hurting and being hurt. Preliminary stage. Then, humans invented language or language found humans and softness got detached from opposition. But limitations impose on imagination and opacity turned into a necessary means of communication.

Affect. Obsession. Time is possession.

Yet hyper-nearness is desirable only when temporal.

The satisfaction of examining an object again and again. The haptic quality born through repetition in vocal or somatic physicalities is beyond remedy, except the remedy you find inside yourself. The object is now this text.

and I let him cum and

And as an object this text is intimate but faintly aloof. Transcription turning into composition turning punctuation. Chasms and hiatuses generate proximity through distance. They are presenting without representing, as if they were saying *Take my authority, take my greatness, take my silence, take it all! Only under one condition. Do not be afraid to use it.*

Arthur Frank rebelled, suffered, yelled. He gave volume to voices of resistance, amplified voices. He raised his hands, his hands were praising. His larynx was oscillating. A litany during which he could have said *I am asking you to get lost.*

Chaos metamorphosed into a narrative. The lack of cohesion simulates vertigo and it's not defective.

I let him cum and I then said *I don't know how I feel about that*

Proximity impelled Reflecting to leave its throne. Reflecting obeyed. And critical thinking allowed nearness to the subject and frigidity was demystified. And the past was recalled alive and not erased; it was evoked as wisdom and not as a museum. It could have been the end.

But there is a bond of blood between them.

I let him cum and I then said *I don't know how I feel about that*

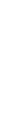
Essence precedes content and content precedes form. The abnegation of inscribed structures emerged as a methodology for espousing the otherness embedded in one's self. The text becomes a self-shaped entity against architectural self-policing.

Proximity.

As responsibility.

I believe that Aeschylus in *Eumenides* says something like *To be irresponsible is a criminal*. *Eumenides* was a work about disgrace, against self-vengeance.

Surprise me.



THE SCAFFOLD BY LACK
OF AN ALTERNATIVE WORD
Rogier Delfos



I can't see where he is any longer, I must have lost him. There were some moments where he came to check how I am doing, which seemed to be a formality. I don't mind. I turn around, and as my eyes adjust to the obscurity of what was behind me, I realise that I am facing a dark wooden structure held together by pieces of metal. It appears to be a staircase, but there are only a few steps, large at the bottom and tapering towards the top. There is no entryway at the top, perhaps it is a scaffold I am looking at? As I place my feet on the first step, I pass by what seems to be an exasperated masculine figure. This guy is too intoxicated to move, so I have to leap over his scratched and dirty legs which are laid bare up onto his muscular thighs by a synthetic pair of synthetic gym shorts. My feet remain on the second step—it is sticky here—and I take a seat on the third. It seems that the structure I am now sitting on was placed here without much consideration. Facing the front, the view is delimited by a wall, which is partly windowed. The view from the top of the steps must be less foreboding than this. From where I am sitting, I can't see anything but smoke and gloom. The windows on the top part of the wall in front of me are shuddering to the rhythm of the bass drum. I turn my head to the left, where I see an open door leading to a space even darker than where I am. I squint my eyes to try to examine it, but I can't make anything out. It is total obsidian. Ignoring the void of darkness on the left, I turn to the right. There is more light on this side, filtered by colours that interchange. It colours the bodies that shudder underneath the luminaires, who blend into and out of solitude just as the windows respond to the kick of the bass drum. They pass by me, swiftly moving from left to right, and from right to left. A red body, a green body and then a blue body that changes into a red body. I can't distinguish one physique from another—am I attracted to all of them? A yellow body moves its silhouette towards the left unifying itself with the darkness. Another silhouette appears in opposite direction and emerges from the dark, gently turning into a purple body. Some of them present a hasty glance in my direction, none of them seem to need rest. I am alone on the scaffold, except for that ragged adonis on the bottom. My eyes are prickling from the smoke, and as I rub them I notice something white emerging from the bottom corner of the wall. It's permeating, welling up slowly, gradually becoming bulkier, breathing irregularly.

It seems to cling to the wall, to the floor and spreads itself relentlessly. It is slowly moving onto the bottom step, covering the athletic chest of the ever-idle beaut that lays below like a blanket, concealing his face, rinsing his thighs. I need to piss. The music oscillates. More bodies, more physiques, and more quick eyes are roaming intervals. Is anyone seeing this white intruder coming from below? It's filling in fast, reaching for all corners, reaching out for me. My new shoes! Imagine all this whiteness permanently staining the grain of the black Italian leather! I quickly shift myself a step higher on the tribune. I am safe for now.

He hasn't been here for a while. Where is he? Actually, I shouldn't mind, and maybe I don't. We disband whenever the occasion calls for it. It is how we get together again, we aim to care for each other without the presumed ownership that love imposes on the other. I look down at my shoes. This damn white scum is leveling up to me again, coming from all sides. I seat myself another step higher on the tribune. This step offers more of an overview, and the quick looks are passing by further dissociated from me. The kick of the bass drum still fills the space ferociously, and the filtered lights reveal a different space everytime I look up. Are we still supposed to sway to this same repetitive tune? This top step offers me a clear view through the window that overlooks the crowd. Animals, copulating, morphing in and out of each other. They have no choice but to do so. The white scum around me is calmly becoming a landscape of steep mountains and deep valleys, coveting all, an impassible pale panorama, ever so reaching for my feet. Now I really need to piss. My only way to dodge this scenery is to the left, into the darkness that beholds the open door, into uncertainty. My body shifts towards that direction and jumps from the fifth step. I land on the sticky, stained floor, one foot removed from unrestricted obscurity. As my eyes get used to the dead of night facing me, outlines of torsos start to unfold, creeping through a slow and proximate choreography. I inhale and my lungs fill with air. A pungent smell, is it urine?

“I WANT THE WITCH TO
FIND ME EAT ME!”

An interview with Caspar
Heinemann by Tom Clark

Caspar Heinemann is an artist, writer and poet.

At the age of 17 Caspar had to decide whether to go to art school or go and live on a farm and study permaculture. Art school narrowly won, but Caspar's teenage bookshelf was still all green anarchism and rewilding, and this kind of holistic, ecological framework has remained a part of their cosmology and grammar. Recounting a studio visit with the writer and curator Naomi Pearce a couple of years ago, Caspar described a moment where the two seemingly separate interests folded back into one another. "At one point Naomi said: 'You love nature!'—I started saying something critical, 'Nature is a problematic term,' etc etc, and she cut me off and was like 'No, but you just *love* nature!'" These points "where we let down our critical defences, where we stop feeling like we have to prove that we know the discourse, and trust in our inexplicable affinities, in this case the thing that we can no longer call nature," guide Caspar's work and offer a direction for this exploration of proximity.

Preparing for this interview, I'd looked to both the resiliently constructed, apparently fragile assemblies of gestures, materials and references to mystic or anarchist ecologies in Caspar's sculptures and writing, and their dissertation "on flowers, taxonomy, queer ecopoetics, opulence, excess, death, CA Conrad, John Wieners, cum, Derek Jarman, language," titled *Fucking Pansies*, and recently posted online. Discounting the centrality of networks of communication in contemporary experiences of proximity and solidarity, we discussed a nearness that comes with various kinds of trust, but also with a feeling through the constraints of the structures that support it.

TC I should begin by asking if proximity, as critical practice and a lens, has any resonance with your work?

CH Something I think of immediately is proximity to subject matter, where the question of experiential proximity to a subject is seen as providing deeper insight, and where it is seen as diminishing the objectivity, and therefore, the ‘criticality’ of the research. I’ve been thinking a lot about a 2012 Adrian Rifkin lecture, *The Aesthetics of Being a Maoist*. He talks about being in London in 1972, torn between attending a Gay Liberation Front meeting or a *Capital* reading group, using this as a jumping off point to discuss the political antagonisms of the time and how that choice dictated or indicated some split in subject formation, as moment where the person becomes a “work of art in the sense as the bearer of overdetermined contradictions.” For me, this is something about scale, how coordinates on a map are marking a unique and specific point, without which it is impossible to get a sense of the general topography—or perhaps, get a sense of a general *subject*. Doing this has to do with the relationship between subject (as in topic) and subject (as in individual), and the linguistic game of discussing both at the same time. A practice that feels valuable to me in this sense, is folding the map incorrectly, often in a hurry, so that points that are not supposed to come into contact are brought together in ways that—I hope—can transcend mapping (representation and abstraction), potentially saying something about the nature of the map itself, in the world.

TC Is this something you were doing in *Fucking Pansies*, by bringing plants into a double proximity with violence and sexuality?

CH Flowers and plants perform a dual function in my thesis. The whole thing rests on this very literal, ontological examination of what a flower physically is and its function in reproduction, but also how it becomes a stand in for these abstract concepts of nature, ef/femininity, queer sexualities and genders. In a utopian sense I would love to live in a state of visceral mindfulness where my encounter with a flower is unmediated by its cultural connotations, but unfortunately I’m too cerebral and neurotic for that in this lifetime, so the next best thing is some agency within the narrative, writing more hospital metaphors to live in than the ones handed down to me by white capitalist hetero-patriarchy.

TC Does this situate your work at a distance from or in contact with critical approaches to subjecthood and ‘nature,’ for instance, or intersect with other critical strategies such as Post Humanism, or ecosophy?

CH I don’t think I feel the need to situate what I’m doing as anything other than a practice of critique since I work with a pretty expanded notion of what that means. Writing my thesis, I was definitely motivated by a fairly antagonistic relationship to a lot of the existing relevant material: the gender essentialism of eco-feminism, the white male universalising of object-oriented ontology, queer theory’s lack of specificity, environmentalist appeals to purity, the myopia of the ‘hard sciences.’ Which isn’t to say that I escaped all, or even any, of those traps. I suppose by definition it’s impossible to fall into every trap, but I think I’m interested in consciously playing with all of them, trying to make evident the contradictions. Or you could say it’s not impossible to fall into every trap if you’re very good at escaping traps but very bad at avoiding them. To quote from one of the CAConrad poems I use in the essay: “what camouflage will you wear to

hide in the gingerbread house?’ he asks / ‘none. I want the witch to find me EAT ME!’”

TC Scaling out for a minute, and without wanting to essentialise this as a site, how important are or were Tumblr and other online platforms to your work?

CH Online platforms don’t feel very consciously relevant to my work at this point, although they’re obviously totally present and embedded, inasmuch as they were very central to my thinking for a long time. Something I still feel inspired by, despite and because of its status as universally mocked and dismissed, is the DIY, vernacular theory of Tumblr. Although a lot of what is generated is very politically suspect, and I think the puritanical morality aspect is extremely harmful, I have a respect and affinity for the fearlessness and lack of reverence in the approach.

TC Asking these questions, I’m curious as to how these kind of practices might momentarily assemble as, or cohere among, differently organized structures—particularly ones that make explicit claims on proximity. Would it be better to think about this through what you have pointed to in the vertical associations that come with binary or horizontal logics?

CH Discovering Greta Gaard’s concept of vertical associations definitely felt like an important moment for me. Gaard asks us to think not only in terms of the dualisms traditionally associated with conversations around gender, race, and nature, but the ‘vertical’ associations, “between reason and heterosexuality, for example, or between reason and whiteness as defined in opposition to emotions and non-white persons...” It felt like it put words to some-

thing I had already felt to be intuitively true. It feels relevant to artistic and poetic practices in that it provides an account for the ways in which something like a flower is implicated in these questions of race, gender, and sexuality. This is something that artists and poets often know to be true, but I think it is often interesting to make these things explicit. Something I’m into formally is some kind of absurd didacticism, and it feels related to that impulse I explored in my thesis, to say for example that queers are literally pansies, which is of course not true and entirely true.

TC Finally, working through this idea of proximity as an ambivalent, existential nearness, I was struck by the sense of ‘manyness’ in your work, of things being more than one thing or the other at once. Thinking about how this might help gain some purchase on what proximity means critically, could you say these associative logics are connected to some sort of re-definition of what might be meant by solidarity?

CH I think for me there’s a link between my use of ‘solidarity’ and my use of ‘nature,’ as words that I don’t feel willing to give up despite their contested status. I feel that their historical contradictions and difficulties are still generative, or that we don’t solve the problems by giving up the words, we just deprive ourselves of potentially useful language. In her book *Dreaming the Dark*, the pagan anarchist-feminist writer Starhawk has a whole section about how powerful things will necessarily appear embarrassing under current conditions. I definitely agree that if something is embarrassing—especially in an art context—there’s probably something important going on there. Formally, thinking through things from the perspective of literature and poetry has been helpful for me here, in refusing to draw a hard line between critical and creative writing practices, working

with a belief that a word can be as strongly contextualised by the surrounding words as by historical connotations and etymology. There's a Kanye West interview where he is asked about the differences between how he approaches fashion and how he approaches music and he answers, "Everything in the world is exactly the same," which resonates with me as a methodology, but also inasmuch as I feel like all my conclusions are something like "Everything in the world is exactly the same...also literally nothing in the world is the same as anything else." This feels crucial to me. My thinking involves a lot of what feels at the time like apophenia, and it's often only when I go back afterwards, sometimes years later, that it 'makes sense' in any way I could verbalise. I've been learning to trust in this in a way that doesn't feel like a disavowal of the intellect but more like a faith that the 'intellect' works in ways beyond my current conscious understanding and comprehension, which I see as related to a trust in bodily and affective knowledge, which is of course also to say proximity.

YOU'VE BEEN NOTIFIED
François Girard-Meunier

It has now been a few hours that I've been lying in my bed. I am still not sleeping. I impulsively grab my phone, which I also use as an alarm clock, and click on its unlock button to see the current time. 3:00 AM. Six notifications: all from the same group conversation. [•(1)]

The subtle and pervasive expectation of constant connection makes the employer's demand for total availability from their employee possible to a new extent. In such a scenario, the worker becomes unable to properly use the allotted free time out of the workspace without being either mentally or physically reminded of his or her own condition as labourer. Or, even worse, he or she has to perform labour free-of-charge, leading to his or her exhaustion and depression or burnout. When did the desire for persistent digital availability become so invasive?

In that sense, one would think positively of the arrival of a right trying to fix the situation of abusive demands for connectivity. On January 1, 2017, French workers were given the “right to disconnect” through the *El Khomri Law*, a controversial work reform law passed in August 2016.¹ Developing the concept of a right to disconnect set a precedent now perceived as detrimental. Therefore the emergence of a right that absolves, discharges, or repairs a situation towards a natural order of things. Never natural or inane but the constructed outcome of human deliberation—produced rights are the result of certain conditions and states of mind in specific times and need to be applied indiscriminately in order to be effective. Enforce-

1

But this special addition proved to be the only *seemingly progressive* measure within the reform whose main focus had more to do with offering additional flexibility to employers at the expense of previous social gains held by workers. See Jon Henley and Phillip Inman, “The El Khomri Law—Why have France’s labour reforms proved so contentious?,” *The Guardian*, May 2016, accessed 19 May 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/26/why-france-labour-reforms-proved-so-contentious/>, and Nicolas Boring, “France: Controversial Labor Law Reform Adopted,” *The Library of Congress*, October 2016, accessed 19 May 2017, available at: <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/france-controversial-labor-law-reform-adopted/>.

ment should not be a matter of wealth or privilege. In the case of the connected labourer, becoming unavailable as a result of ‘reclaiming his or her right’ will most likely result in his or her own displacement, at the benefit of competing workers choosing to ignore their rights by staying available. A perceived lack of dedication (from a managerial perspective) stays not without consequences: a reduced amount of hours, a missed promotion, or other measures of subjection resulting in the worker’s harm are possible repercussions.²

2

Evgeny Morozov, “So you want to switch off digitally?,” *The Guardian*, February 2017, accessed 19 May 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/19/right-to-disconnect-digital-gig-economy-evgeny-morozov/>.

As usual, I click on ‘view.’ But is it important? I hope it’s not, I’d rather sleep. I was curious, even though it’s only the group conversation from the restaurant I work at. I read the discussion: it revolves around newly ordered toilet paper which is not thick enough. I’m provided with a bunch of pictures of lower grade toilet paper rolls over a background of black ceramic tiles. “This is bad,” a co-worker argues. Another one declares, “we should seek better quality next time.”
[✓ Seen 03:07 AM]

Digital technologies developed by start-up firms from Silicon Valley, while seducing users with seemingly liberating aspects, adopt more and more pervasive functions that imprison them *by design* into communication patterns difficult to opt out of.³ For example, the ‘seen’ indicator on several online messag-

3

This is the force behind start-up’s growing interest towards the ‘science’ of behavioural design, a field whose aim is, through predictions on human behaviour, the enforcement of certain types of action by its users through psychological tricking. For more see: “How Uber Uses Psychological Tricks to Push Its Drivers’ Buttons,” *The New York Times*, April 2017, accessed 19 May 2017, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/02/technology/uber-drivers-psychological-tricks.html?_r=0.

ing services now make it impossible to ignore message requests without consequences. *Pretending to have forgotten*, a strategy previously used to avoid having to deal with supplementary, unsolicited work, becomes implausible without having to assume collateral costs in terms of social transactions. The requirement to be involved within and to nurture digital correspondences asks for a new specific type of labour which could be called communication management, a labour performed through maintaining an online presence. The cultural worker and the self-employed might already be used to dealing with constant message requests from various network platforms, which demands a sustained courtesy and enthusiasm. Hence the “I hope this message finds you well” formula, described by Martha Rosler, as an apparently courteous formulation that is in fact stripped of any meaning through its generic use.⁴

4

Martha Rosler, “Why Are People Being So Nice?,” *e-flux Journal* #77, November 2016.

Typing words seems an innocent action. But I’m reminded that this is not the case—words have weight. I calm my game, I refrain from action. I could have replied, that’s the thing. [•••]

The right to disconnect raises questions regarding a hypothetical dichotomy between a private life and a *punch-in-punch-out, monday-to-friday* work life. But thinking about a private life freed from the influence of labour activities is a recent idea. This separation was irrelevant when thinking of labour as the activities necessary in the pursuit of biological life (Hannah Arendt’s *Animal Laborans*). It didn’t mean that free time did not exist, just that it was not thought of as such. The fractioning and abstracting of labour activities—the result of the metamorphosis of agrarian societies into industrial ones—modified human relations to labour. Now describable as remunerated workforce for the production of goods, the worker’s time becomes the traded commodity.

Before industrial times, leisure was a privilege that only the elite could afford. The remedy to boredom, or the fear of having nothing with which to occupy the free time, leisure

was the case of the courts of monarchs. But free time and the ability to experience leisure remains, even in recent times, a privilege. While the Western male worker has the luxury of having his labour considered separate from his private life, other forms of labour have historically been denied that privilege due to their very nature, *i.e.* care work related to household activities or raising a family, unfree (*i.e.* slavery) or *barely* unfree labour, instances of emotional labour...

If thinking about rights whose function is the preservation of our ability to dissociate private life from work life raises issues of privilege, it does not, on the other hand, undermine the urgency to reclaim this space which can only emphasise more strongly that all kind of labour activities have to be recognised as such, paid or not. In this instance, the right to be disconnected, although problematic in its application, displays the benign forms in which capital can deploy technological advancements for its own agency—*subjection through availability*. But it also resonates with the (evermore) transactional aspects of our online behaviour through digital platforms.⁵

5

Ibid. 4. See also: <http://wagesforfacebook.com>.

I don't quite remember why I initially looked at my phone, but I can barely get the image of that toilet paper out of my mind. I become frustrated by this whole situation. That conversation is pointless... Why was I looking at my phone?... It's now 3:00 AM, and I'm reminded, once again, that I'm still a waiter in a restaurant... [°Mark as Unread]

03:42 AM—INTERIOR/BEDROOM
Özgür Kar

Our protagonist sitting on his queen-sized bed. The sheets are messy and the room is small. Empty instant noodle cups, next to an empty coke bottle, standing on his bedstand. Hundreds of joint roaches in a big ashtray and a freshly rolled hash joint waiting to be smoked. Windows are open to let the smoke out and the sound of the rain in. He can hear the sound of club-goers, but he couldn't care less. He closes his eyes and starts thinking about all the THC relaxing his muscles, running through his body and brain. He hopes to have this moment forever. A video he watched earlier comes to his mind and makes him giggle. A video about a cat that hates bananas. He remembers the song in the video. A song probably made by an app that pitches and tunes your voice recording. He whispers the song. The sound of the raindrops is getting louder. He turns his head and looks at the freshly rolled joint on his bedstand. He recently bought pink rolling papers. A perfectly rolled thin and pink joint waves at him, so he grabs it.

Lighter sparks and the play button is pressed, while the sound of raindrops intensifies.

“you bitch! come here bitch!
I'll fuck you up bitch!
come here!

worldstar!
worldstar!
get me in the camera boy! worldstar!
worldstar hiphop!

Don't cover your face bitch!
woop! ahahah

worldstar!
worldstar!
let go of my hair!
let go of my hair bitch!

punch her!
worldstar!

hey, don't do that! leave them alone!
let them fight!
let her have it!

bitch, get the fuck out of here!

don't cover your face bitch!
let go of my hair!

ah! ah!
no! no! no!
bitch!
let go of my hair bitch!

fuck you whore!
you asked for it!

worldstar!
worldstar!

what did you say? you stupid bitch!
let go of my hair!

punch her!
worldstar!"

The video ends with a girl's body lying on the pavement. The last frame stays on the screen for a few seconds. He takes another drag from the joint. Reaches for his phone in between the pillows and texts his boyfriend a peach and an aubergine emoji. Delivered. Another one with a kissing face. Delivered. Now another drag from the joint. Hold it in. Hold it in. Release, and play the next video.

On the screen, a loading circle. A punch. A body dropping on the floor. Blood gushing out of a mouth.

"pussy!
what's wrong with you bro!
let's get it! yeah. fuck that coward shit!
yo, don't do that, don't be a pussy bro!

worldstar!

don't ever text my fucking girl again bro!

who?

you bitch boy! don't ever text my girl again bro!
ever dawg!
look at that fucking camera bro!
and say I'm sorry!

I'm sorry man

c'mon get closer bro! get closer to the camera!

I didn't do nothing bro

get closer! say you sorry to the camera bro

I'm sorry bro

say I'm sorry Kiki!

I'm sorry Kiki

I'll never text you again!

I'll never text you again.
I never fucked with your girl bro

fuck that shit bro

worldstar!
worldstar!"

Another drag from the joint. He looks at the paused last frame of the video while holding the drag in. Nike sneakers in the frame, a guy's face on the floor, a little bit of blood. A few other feet in the corner of the frame. The guy on the floor looking up at the guy that punched him. Scared eyes, looking up. The other guy's fist is in the top of the frame.

Our protagonist pulls the white sheets in between his hairy legs. Takes another drag from the joint and gets closer to the screen. Closer and closer, until the only thing he sees is the pixelated video. Releases the smoke from the his joint at the screen. Looks carefully at the fist at the top of the screen. Realises that he's actually never been in a fight, but the idea of being closer to that guy's fist makes him extremely excited. He presses play, and leans even closer towards the screen.

“punch him! punch him bro!
worldstar!
worldstar!
worldstar!”

finish bro! finish him!
haha bitch boy!
worldstar!
worldstar!
worldstar!

knock-out bro! knock-out!
worldstar!”

GIDDY TWINS
Rosie Haward

ST. TERESA
BERNINI

Carved. Heavy folds of marble draped over her unseen limbs. The cherubic, sculpted little body airless in comparison. Slight draughts would suck his garment even closer to his curves, as he waits to push the arrow in deep. Red wet spreading across stiff folds. But she's white still, radiant even, for marble; open mouthed and caught between the throes of one kind and another.

From afar she's like a tissue that got stuck in the wash. Golden rays touch the tattered edges.

Hordes pass her open mouth, raincoat-clad arms jostling for the best view of the frozen ecstasy on her careful face. Awe rises up from tilted heads, gazing at her prone, overcome. Sweeping the floor.

Dancing light moves reliably over her each day, but it never lifts her into movement. Hovering on the cloud rocks, tensed foot slipping off. Raised arms and tired legs tread below, counting on her reputation to flood through the seconds, up the walls and into the faraway crevices of steeples.

Weighted down by starched cloth, body lost. Tingling rushing over skin, probably. But the almost-movement suggests a drift over the heads of the crowds. Hinting at the before and after. That delicate hand about to expose the skin above her breast. All pale, still.

ANNA
POSSESSION (subway scene)

A slight lean forward from the start; it drives her through the three minutes as she rises with the escalator, heavy breathing quickening into laughter. Red, yellow, blue, one after the other in blocks of colour, then tripping forward, never looking down.

Bums on velvet seats, arms planted by their sides they watch her. Her deep-water blue, high-necked dress, breasts loose underneath. Gathered sleeves tight at the wrist, full skirt twisting as she writhes, bag clutched at her pelvis with both hands gripping on. Shrieks echoing as damp patches glisten in the round glow of overhead lights.

It swings, eventually, the shopping bag. Beige string criss-crosses bulging, milk splattering across the walls as she whacks it back and forth. No one else to get caught in the streaks of wet-white and sticky yolks.

Unfolding limbs, her breathing violent in its journey out, wrenching her neck back and sending her head circling. Features obscured by hair, she's barefoot and staggering towards the concrete walls, dropping to the ground.

Eventually milky fluids also splutter over her thick lower lip, trickle from under her dress, and the hair covering her ears is damp now, reddish strings running through. Trains speed close by. An in-between place to conserve whatever runneth over, whatever's left after all the monster fucking now in puddles on the tunnel floor. Gestation over. Left for purposeful feet to slip in, moving liquids on their soles, travelling patterns through the city, onto carpets, into wardrobes.

But her body's making tracks, streaks in the fluid as the tunnel flips on its foundations, walls disoriented as little ladders creep up the shine in her moon glimmer tights.

FOUR AND A HALF THOUGHTS
TAKING 'FACELESS BIGOTED
HORDES' AS A THROUGH LINE
Aidan Wall

(one)

That faceless bigoted hordes consumed with “uncucking” themselves and their fellow countrymen are rampantly self-mythologising online is pretty awful.¹ Some people in the academia-slash-art sphere I associate with are using these bigots’ self-mythologising as material, and worse still, some of the responses to these bigots seem to only amplify and further mythologise the cruel and baseless things that the so-called ‘alt-right’ are doing. Casually using the terminology of ‘alt-right’ itself is arguably a mythologising gesture. It is an indeterminate term that certain figures are jumping on and claiming authority to speak about without addressing the dangerous and potentially violent outcomes of reifying the fantasies that these various racists, sexists, and homophobes partake in.

I saw an art world affiliated writer speak at a conference in Amsterdam. They spoke of the “meme magic” that supposedly got Trump into office.² The crux of their talk was that memes would get Bernie elected if the left only weaponised them as effectively as the ‘alt-right’ has. What’s the opposite of problematising something? I don’t think it’s controversial to suggest that a speaker owes more of a responsibility to their material when they’re presenting it at a conference for undergraduate students than when they’re posting it online for likes. Irony is great and all, but those who rely on it as the basis for their ideology need to continually—or perhaps, for the first time—question both its effectiveness and its limitations as an educational device.

Angela Nagle suggests that the terminology of “alt-light” should be used to distinguish teenage trolls who make memes in their bedrooms from other groupings in the far right that are mobilised and dangerous.³ “Neo-Nazis don’t love me, they kind of hate me, actually,” white supremacist and self-proclaimed ‘alt-right’ figure Richard Spencer said, before explaining the frog pin on his dull blazer and getting punched right in the face.⁴ Matt Furie is the original author of the anthropomorphised comic book frog Pepe, which became a viral meme and was then appropriated as a hate symbol by bedroom bigots. In May 2017, Furie symbolically killed Pepe in a single page comic, a gesture that has probably delighted those who are already making plans to drag the frog’s corpse from conference to conference, sloppily dissecting it in exchange for praise as if it were a secondary school science project.⁵

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(two)

Gamergate describes an online campaign of targeted harassment directed towards women associated with the video game industry. Adrienne Shaw and Bonnie Ruberg, in the introduction to their book *Queer Game Studies*, describe Gamergate as a phenomenon that brought together “various actors who felt attacked by calls to make games more inclusive.”⁶ It began in 2014 and focuses on preserving video game culture as a privileged space solely for straight white men. “Opposition to political correctness has proved itself a highly effective form of crypto-politics,” writes Moira Weigel. “It transforms the political landscape by acting as if it is not political at all.”⁷ Although Gamergate posited itself as being concerned about unethical games journalism,⁸ in reality, it arose as a response to the video game industry’s glacial efforts to make space for, represent, employ, involve, and offer larger platforms to women and members of queer and minority groups. In the wake of Donald Trump’s election, there have been a number of articles linking the rise of Trump and the ‘alt-right’ to Gamergate.⁹ Sociologist and game critic Katherine Cross suggests that game critics identified Gamergate as a far right movement from early on in its inception.¹⁰ Matt Lees states that “[t]he similarities between Gamergate and the far-right online movement, the ‘alt-right,’ are huge, startling and in no way a coincidence.”¹¹

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(three)

In an article from September 2016, *The Daily Beast* reported that the *then* gaming-and-tech darling Palmer Luckey, founder of Virtual Reality headset company Oculus Rift, had been funding an anti-Hillary Clinton “shitposting” operation in the lead up to the US presidential elections.¹² Following this news, Luckey—who had been the face of the company up until that point—disappeared from the public eye, until it was revealed in late March 2017 that he was leaving Facebook, the company which had purchased Oculus Rift for \$2,000,000,000.¹³ A few weeks later, a story broke which linked Luckey to a shell company that had donated \$100,000 to Trump’s inaugural celebrations. The company that donated the money bore the name *Wings of Time*, a reference to Luckey’s favourite video game *Chrono Trigger*.¹⁴

(four)

An extract from Robert Yang’s “*Take ecstasy with me*”: a manifesto for Gay VR

“The power of a weird utopian call to Gay VR [Virtual Reality] is also in how it is nothing and anything. It is a horizon that we will never quite reach, but the general trajectory will help us see each other and come together. The apparent impossibility of the demand is crucial—if we consider why Gay VR seems impossible, then we can better understand the forces arrayed against VR artists. It’s important to note that we resist along these utopian lines in gamer culture already: for instance, the fact that every single character in popular video game *Overwatch* is super duper gay.

When we ship Hanzo [and] McCree together (“McHanzo”) as a double hungry-vers-bottom couple that can’t stop groping each other, it is not ‘pragmatic’ and does not directly repeal anti-trans bathroom laws—but it does help us ponder what is stopping the industry from creating entirely gay character casts (answer: fear of right-wing gamers) and it does help us imagine worlds where men can be cute and tender with each other. Saying “everyone in *Overwatch* is gay” isn’t just fun and horny, but it’s also a crucial political strategy that re-frames what *Overwatch* means and who controls cultures.”¹⁵

(and a half)

*I ran out of space,
but I wanted to problematise
the loving and faceless relationship
I had with my dear friend Joseph
when I first moved away from home in my early
twenties to study in Germany.
I wanted to write of how our nights together
talking shite and laughing online
under two headsets (physical)
separated by 1374 kilometres (physical)
were perforated by many short visits
into different virtual spaces
that we experienced behind four arms (digital),
four arms (physical),
two guns (digital),
and two screens (physical).
I wanted to write about digital comradery,
and how escapist platforms
breed intimate relationships.
I wanted to think about how one
might easily fall into
a radical politics based on hatred
rather than one based on empathy
if the love they experienced for their friends
(faceless and otherwise)
was filtered solely through a privileged platform,
like an online video game such
as Counter Strike: Global Offensive.*

SIX THOUSAND WOMEN AT
ZRINJEVAC SQUARE. THOUGHTS
ON PROXIMITY, MOTHERHOOD
AND NATIONALISM

Asja Novak

In the context of knowledge production, illusion of distance is always hierarchical: it always includes the conception of a certain set of ideas as a neutral referent against which the other is measured. It affords full subjectivity only to the researcher, whilst reducing the researched subject to nothing more than an object. Proximity then, conceived of as an antonym to this ‘critical distance’—a critical awareness of the mutual constitution of the subject and object of research—is a necessary condition for the flattening out of the hierarchical power structures that have dominated the western paradigm of scientific knowledge for too long. Dialogue, as bell hooks explains in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, “implies talk between two subjects, not the speech subject and object, it is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination.”¹ In other words, dialogue is a form of exchange predicated on absence of a hierarchizing distance, a form of research predicated on proximity.

1

bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminism, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press 1989), 131.

“A gledaj, ovoga, ono kaj je njoj jako teško palo je bila—ko i svakome drugome—kad je u nekim, u nekim stvarima postala ovisna o tuđoj pomoći, ne. To da te neko pere, to da ti neko oblači gače ili pomaže u tome, ili spavačicu oblači, ili te po štengama vleče, to—to ju—to—to nikome nije lako prekosati. [...]

Misliš da se osjećala na teret dedi i baki? I teti Dragici?

Ma nebi rekla tolko na teret. Pitanje ponosa, samopoštovanja. Ne želiš, ovoga, da se nebreš oprati.

Neki ljudi se nikad nebreju oprati.

But look, um, what she found really difficult—like anyone else—when she, when with some things she really became dependent on someone else’s help, you know. Having someone wash you, put on your underwear or help you put it on, or put on your night gown, or drag you up the stairs, that—she—that—no one finds that easy to process. [...]

Do you think she felt like she was a burden to grandpa and grandma? And auntie Dragica?

I wouldn’t say so much a burden. A question of pride, self-respect. You don’t want, like, not to be able to wash yourself.

Some people can never wash themselves.”

What does it mean, however, to think relationality in the context of considering the life of a mother, whose personhood already is perceived and defined in the eyes of patriarchal power as only existing in relation to that to which it is other or of use: her husband or her child? What are the consequences, in such a situation, of transplanting an epistemological framework based around proximity to a political context which is qualitatively different from that in which the framework is articulated? Proximity can also signify an involuntary nearness to structures of violence, and I find myself wondering whether the patriarchal imperative to motherhood can be understood within the framework of such a forced proximity to an other, which takes away the autonomy of the subject. I think of the psychoanalysts of the former century who, “inspired by [...] the Freudian interpretation of the Oedipal complex,” tried to explain that “a girl, upon discovery of anatomical difference, realises that she has already been castrated,” and that “the only way for future return to wholeness is through motherhood: child as substitute limb.”² It makes me think that in the context of a patriarchal system in which women are only afforded space for ‘self-actualisation’ through the reproductive act of conceiving and bearing, and the reproductive labour of rearing a child, by writing about my mother within a theoretical framework of proximity and relationality, I could be doing the work of denying her autonomy in a potentially analogous way to that of the patriarchal state.

2

Ksenija Vidmar Horvat, *Imaginarna Majka, rod i nacionalizam u kulturi 20. stoljeća* (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta 2013), 15 [author’s translation].

“...i da je to pravo neotuđivo,
nepromjenjivo, i tak
dalje. Ali sad se krenulo,
ovoga, do Uskrsa se skuplja
po trgovima i svugde...

Peticija za referendum?

Peticija, da, ‘pravo na život.’

Vidla sam to, vidla sam, na
vijestima, da je bilo šest hiljada
ljudi na Zrinjevcu, na noćnom
prosvjedu osmog marta.
Protiv toga.

*...and that that right is unalien-
able, unchangeable, and
so on. But now they’ve started,
until Easter they’ll be collecting,
in public squares and
everywhere...*

A petition for a referendum?

A petition, yes, ‘right to life.’

*I’ve seen that, I saw on the
news that there was six
thousand people at Zrinjevac,
at the night protest on the
eighth of March. Against it.”*

These questions become increasingly important if one considers the very real material consequences of the discursive move to define a woman in relation to another, and the role that state power plays in perpetuating such a definition. This is manifested through increased policing of women's reproductive rights through anti-abortion rhetoric and legislation in the interest of a solidification or growth of the national body. To what extent can a feminist insistence on relational constitution of a woman's subjectivity, despite emerging from radically opposing points of entry and intention, nevertheless be read as conceptually analogous to the ways in which ideas of proximity are utilized for nationalist agendas? In the case of my own mother—whose entry into motherhood, as well as my thinking about it, are set against the background of an increase in right-wing and fascistic sentiments of national vulnerability—these policies emerged as a response to the necessity for a renewed sense of national unity after the disintegration of the formerly federal socialist Yugoslavia, and in the midst of the large waves of migration in recent years, both from the inside out—Croatian state losing a large part of its population body to economic emigration— and outside in—rhetoric of fear concerning the large numbers of refugees passing through Croatia as part of the now closed 'Balkan route'). More so than at other times and locations, these are the contexts in which the imperative to bear children becomes a matter of national security. An emergent tension between different iterations and implications of relationality and proximity becomes apparent, as does the necessity—especially if they are being transplanted across a distances—for these ambivalences to be addressed responsibly.

NEIGHBOURHOODS
Stefanie Rau

As I am sitting here in my room, in front of the computer, connected and in conversation, yet alone, I am thinking that the people closest to me—the most proximate in a physical sense—are probably my neighbours. Sitting possibly two, maybe even only one meter to my left and to my right behind the walls that prevent me from knowing for sure. I don't see or hear them, yet I know we are close. Despite this spatial closeness, I actually only see them maybe once a month, accidentally, in the hallway or in the elevator. The proximity that I am now considering is determined by the architectural structure we inhabit. A structure that hosts around two hundred other people—mostly students—all living in almost identical apartments with only the most basic equipment provided. Through holes in the walls, the windows let me see my neighbours living across the street. They are more visible than the neighbours next door: Smoking on the balcony after lunch, doing yoga in the morning or having friends over for dinner—I notice their habits. I can see them, but I am still separated by the distance of the street and I probably wouldn't even recognize them if I would happen to see them *on* the street.

What we share is a similar address, the codified coordinates stating our location and therefore proving our spatial proximity. But there are more holes in the walls. Not the ones illuminating the place with sunlight through windows that I can decide to open or close, but holes through which cables connect my room to a globalising network that transforms my private space into the public sphere. Here, the neighbourhoods within the networks that I inhabit—and that seem to be liberating and oppressing me at the same time—relate to my actions in the protocols that are attached to another address, which identifies me within the multilayered structures I access through the simplified interface of my computer. Structures that are based on mathematical, calculated neighbourhoods of construct-

ed proximities and are measured by my habitual repetitions. These do not get observed through a window, but are monitored on the platforms that I participate in voluntarily. I find myself within multiple, fluctuating, instantly adapting neighbourhoods that follow the principles of homophily, of assumptions that I like what is most *like* me. The virtual closeness is determined by potentialities and not by physical conditions like the wall that I can knock against when I hear the loud music of the people living next door.

“(...) neighborhoods based on strong likes and dislikes assumes that neighborhoods are forms of voluntary segregation that YOU reside with people ‘like YOU,’ whose actions preempt and shape YOUR own” ... “YOU reveal YOUs, where these YOUs are closely lumped together, and YOUs are defined-whether or not users speak-through YOUR affiliations.”¹

1

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same. Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 120.

TO: LIBERTY//IN RESIDENCE
Ivan Cheng

hello, so I'm now getting on the bus to Frankfurt for this book fair I mentioned. the city is celebrating king's day, or at least, it's a site for celebrating king's day. I left too much time to get to the bus stop thinking that it would really suck to be wheeling my case of books and editions through puking orange riots, but it was very moderate, I'm almost ashamed to tell you I went to a starbucks. really uncertain about whether this is racial profiling—this bus driver is refusing access to a guy because he doesn't have the right type of id to go to Germany. mm, your mum was the kind face we had at the door on the night; did anyone comment on the systems of access we set up for our performance? was our open gatekeeper policy such that despite the difficulty of access to the site at BROADWATERS everyone just felt welcome? this, combined with the clear invocation that our performance took place on stolen land, and the inherent privilege of watching a fake email posing as performance on italian poured plastic chairs on a lawn that looks right onto Sydney Harbour...

preparing for the book fair has been a little more involved than I originally hoped or expected, picking up things and preparing things, but nothing too arduous either, whatever, it was okay with jet lag. sometimes I wish my capacity to do more than one thing at once could really open up, that I would be less slovenly and not fuck things up with certain expectations of my capacity, like, you don't even want to know all these other things that I feel like slamming my head into a shoebox for.

what can I say about compliments—they're also fleeting. I meant what I said, I did think you were great, and I'm glad you remembered the directions to really spit down the documenting camera, so many people on the night only saw the veil of hair in the wind, and now they see you, eyes locked. but beside this, are we really only as good as a last review? in respect to these economies I say I'm always trying to react or respond to, of you performing without payment, and of your hosting the perfor-

mance in your building's backyard, I will try to apply myself further to some constructive thoughts for you though, which might be more explicit or vague, I dunno, I'm learning too. (~ : not entirely sure if this is the 'trade,' or if such an exchange of 'fairness' is one I want to operate under, but until I have a clear reason not to, will try in earnest. I also know this is not what you're asking for, but maybe it's what I'm aggressively giving.

the way we worked, coming together after my sister's wedding for a few days, and my general anxiety at asking for any additional effort beyond the minimum, meant that the performance relied heavily on the open space of leaving or entrusting the tasks I set, and the information in that. as such, the received thing itself was so strongly implicating of you—you could say that I functioned as an app with a welcoming spiel that a friend designed, and you filled in the content with your appearance and a degree of your self.

as an exercise in my app developing headquarters: are there better questions than what made it successful? instead of asking for a row of five stars in review, a constellation like I'm always pleading for. what does the app look like to those watching it function, the way it looks from the outside. what was it that was actually in the text (the program, of course, being an index/bibliography); is what happened the extent of the material? coming back to the notion of access, could we have done more to be clear, despite sympathetic friends enjoying some of the alienating formal methods and opacity of content, the way it was inscribed with private jokes? should I ask for different performers to fill the slots, and what procedure / instruction would you ask for from me in the future? I'll admit to some discomfort about how this metaphor continues to function—that

every few years the composed equation of the 'app' / performance ages into an obsolete space, but given how I'm currently experiencing returning to work from the last few years (which I think I've spent much of 2017 doing), perhaps it's quite an appropriate way to think about the necessity and function of my role in making work and the other systems around it.

my first impulse is to say that one of formal devices in making it 'strong,' 'striking' to an audience, is the relatively slow space that was set up. the comfort of the audience also seemed important, and the stillness deployed also helped hold it all. nothing too distracting from the text, which dealt in a slight shock factor and humour which I think helped carry the onslaught of different references and ideas that were hopefully an invitation to read, to create a desire to be inside this discursive conversation and think in the same way. designed to rock the baby along and make it a generally enticing package. reproductive dreams.

You performed with commitment and focus, and yes, in that, a particular quality of yourself became revealed to the audience. but in my writing the text for you, writing the texts for all of you, it was not my intention to rely heavily on the 'intensity' of delivery, either. what rings in my head is your mention of the anger in you, which was being used in conveying it. I wonder if there's more for you in the text than what you termed as 'anger.' I wrote with resonance with how I've been feeling, and also in how I saw you feeling from a distance. I hope I didn't go too far, but also wanted to write with compassion or kindness and a gentle touch. the tenderness indeed, of writing to a dear friend who is in Peru, disconnected from access, physically distant.

I was trying to write my certain vulnerability across yours, but mostly speak to a more universal 'contemporary condition' blah blah blah, a certain neoliberal attempt and difficult relation to consumption. more intimately, in the process of writing, and in knowing you would host me, was trying to think through my own relationships to hosting, in inviting people to work in my space here in Amsterdam, and also to kind of grapple with some of my disappointment that we weren't able to work together on the set / costume. the casing, the disguise for the app. We have spoken for a while about attempting collaboration, years, and this attempt from distance was not so lucky ; I was definitely dwelling on my shortcomings in effectively communicating or inspiring work

in many contexts (like my space), and a general angst about not really feeling at all understood in the things I was trying to do, or having collaborators to run the length with me. I also have been engaging with a huge range of people who have been having trouble with life things lately, different depression and anxiety related things, and not feeling totally great myself, kind of burnt out and without the same kind of drive I remember.

So I guess, as always, I was trying to inscribe the broader situation into my understanding of the project and the way I would read it. The role you played was one that I'm still not sure I totally understood, but I know that I care for you a lot as a friend, that it felt like a nice thing to do together, and upon returning to Sydney would be glad to, as you suggested, work together at BROADWATERS again.

COLOPHON

NOT FAR FROM WHERE WE BEGAN

This publication was produced in a three-day editing workshop with the students of the Critical Studies department at the Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam. The bound texts were written beforehand, responding to a prompt on the theme of “proximity” sent by Tom Clark. The loose-leaf text, an “editorial,” was written and edited during the workshop and reflects on the process over those three days.

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