

trouble

rupture

politics

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**abstract**

**trouble.rup-  
ture.glitch -  
speculative  
(curatorial)  
movements -  
emerging from  
discomfort.**

Departing from discomfort as epistemology, a way of knowing that emerges from historically othered and marginalized positionalities, dissident to normative scripts of institutional and curatorial practice, this text-body oscillates around the triad of trouble, rupture, and glitch.

Questioning how trouble, rupture, and glitch—as situated movements emerging from discomfort—enact embodied, transformative interruptions as speculative, relational, and fugitive (curatorial) strategies towards an otherwise.

Moving through four essays at the intersections of curatorial studies, Black studies, queer theory, crip theory, postcolonial thought, institutional and infrastructural critique and media studies, this thesis thinks with and through film and moving image

programming, independent and institutional practice. Four interpellations interrupt the essays and open spaces for artistic practices, curatorial gestures and voices intervening into and shifting the flow. A set of relations enacting the inseparability of theory and practice, a gathering of political and curatorial strategies.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's feminist pedagogy of trouble, Russell's "glitch feminism," Sharpe's "wake work," and Olufemi's experiments in "imagining otherwise," the thesis acts as a relational architecture moving from the condition of discomfort through the institutional mechanics of trouble, into breaks and glitches as sites of rupture and refusal, towards the queer futurities of an otherwise as collective practice.

Central to this movement is an epistolary exchange with Zuzka Ernst, a conversation

that unfolds through listening, rupture and relational knowledge production as curatorial practice, from within and against specific institutional realities.

The thesis echoes discourse around restitution and repair in the curatorial as sites where discomfort, and the question of whose discomfort gets centered, surfaces and manifests. It refuses to center damage as its only register and asks about practices and desires of beyond. Trouble, rupture and glitch operate as generative and transformative movements, enabling curatorial and political practices of survival, speculation and fabulation towards an otherwise.

An assembly of motions and voices that listen into the void, rupture linearities, glitch the dominant cycle of cooptation, devote themselves calling for the otherwise and thereby enacting shifts

beyond repair, stretching and reconfiguring spaces and relationalities. **tremblements**—to the fullest.<sup>1</sup>

1. “What I am trying to achieve is to be what I am to the fullest—Black to the fullest, a musician to the fullest, a homosexual to the fullest. It is important that I learn how to be, by that I mean accept everything about me.” Julius Eastman, quoted in: Ellie M. Hisama, “‘Diving into the Earth’: The Musical Worlds of Julius Eastman,” in: *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 279.

# prologue

Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to

theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away.<sup>2</sup>

That inherent desire of needing and wanting “to comprehend-to grasp what was happening around and within me.” The desire “to make the hurt go away” resonates throughout my life.

bell hooks writes about how she came to theory because she was hurting the year I was born. Now, thirty-five years later and five years after her passing, I find myself coming back to her writing in search for consolation.

With time, I come to acknowledge how coincidences, failures, fate and random decisions create a pattern of survival.

Moving, sometimes stumbling, sometimes flying in serpentine lines, I find myself caught up and entangled in endeavors and contexts driven by the desire of lessening the hurt.

Collectively, in life, thought, and practice, as kin. Tumbled by the

frustrations of navigating the nonsense of normatively structured environments; dizzy, clueless, perplexed and exhausted from “banging [my] head against a brick wall.”<sup>3</sup>

Whilst trying to figure out how to deal with it all, how to be. How not to fail to be, or rather how to fail to be.

The internet came with my coming of age and became a dear companion, an extension, a vast space “to comprehend-to grasp what was happening around and within me.”<sup>4</sup> Driven by a gut feeling that there has to be more to it, I started browsing and losing myself.

Mirroring my lostness in the regulated and limited spaces away from keyboard online, trying to find answers far from where they were to be found, yet delving into endless spaces of play and research of question and answer of clandestine knowledge and exchange on pain and

desires. Night-time pleasure dives, anxious and excited, yet always reaching into the void.

*The oblique romance of Internet-as-utopia, against this backdrop reality, should not be dismissed as naïve. Imbuing digital material with fantasy today is not a retro act of mythologizing; it continues as a survival mechanism.*

*Using the Internet to play, perform, explore still has potential. Giving ourselves this space to experiment perhaps brings us closer to a projection of a “sustainable future.”<sup>5</sup>*

Reaching into the void, browsing, not yet knowing that the void is home, that the in-between is all I will ever know as a starting point. Not yet knowing, how glitching between realities and realms is, can be, most liberating, pleasurable when weaving most unexpected patterns and relationalities.

Looking back, fictions were home, in-between bookcases, in between night and day.

Speculations of what worlds could look like.

Shapeshifting bodies, bodies in drag, performing, masking, code-switching outcasts, othered bodies collectively creating and configuring realities of their own. Movements towards the otherwise.

Stumbling, working my way through practice, and life – I keep coming back to fictions, to the desire of living in other fictions. Imaginaries shaped by the agency of lessening the hurt, of making it go away. I wonder: what shifts do we need to move along with our troubled shapes, to stay with trouble, to break free? What ruptures create the voids that serve as wormholes to other dimensions of being and practicing, studying, rehearsing, prefiguring, surviving together? It still is the gut feeling of knowing deeply within, that there has to

be more to it, that there always has been and will be, and that it is on us to shape, to question, to configure and ever reconfigure that very more.

Weaving see-through strings into violent textures<sup>6</sup>, building worlds yet unknown, surviving by holding space for each other, for the hurt, the despair. Held by desire and curiosity for liberation and repair. Legacy Russell quotes Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival" (1978), referring to those of us living on the shoreline, those of us who never meant to survive.<sup>7</sup>

I wonder what fantastic futures we find, when we lessen the hurt and fearlessly set out into the void.

Precious relations and pieces we think through and are touched by sometimes affirm a presentiment that has already been dwelling, when they hold space for gut feelings, the "others" and your own, when they create

containers for discomforts and gnawing questions, when things that felt like they belong together even if they could never, are assembled, taking you on a wild ride, accompanying you on your insatiable quest "to comprehend-to grasp."<sup>8</sup> Confusing and destabilizing, troubling – only making sense later, or never, when affectively hitting you right into the womb, puzzling or rejecting you. Worlds to decipher, to submit to, to be tangled up in, to be spat out of.

Knowing that there is more to it is rooted in a deep discomfort caused by what things appear to be. Deeply grounded in our guts we know about the wrongness in the mechanics of this world.

Manoeuvring realms and lives trying to abide by complexity. Trying to hold space for concurrence, even if clueless as to how.

As othered bodies in a normative matrix, we

carry projections and meanings we would never have chosen, burdens, traumas and understandings that, when addressed, themselves create discomfort, *thus becoming embodiments of discomfort.*

I wonder can we, and do we even desire to, survive and sustain our presence in these rooms, institutions, houses, structures, remain dissident while present, remain there yet not alone? Shape, subvert without giving in to the racist machinery of destruction and compliance, compliance to the mechanisms of division and separation, playing (b)othered bodies out against each other.

Is "this work for us"?<sup>9</sup>

We shapeshift, so does the violence, causing the hurt.

Legacy Russell suggests to "penetrate... break... puncture... tear" institutions, and to thereby rupture the institution of the body, to suspend

the idea of a body, as violent limitation and essentialism.<sup>10</sup>

What shapes, forms and non-human bodies, what practices and positions, what objects or made-into-object bodies are carriers of discomfort? What shapes do we see when we start to define the configurations of our bodies, our spaces, our works, our practices?

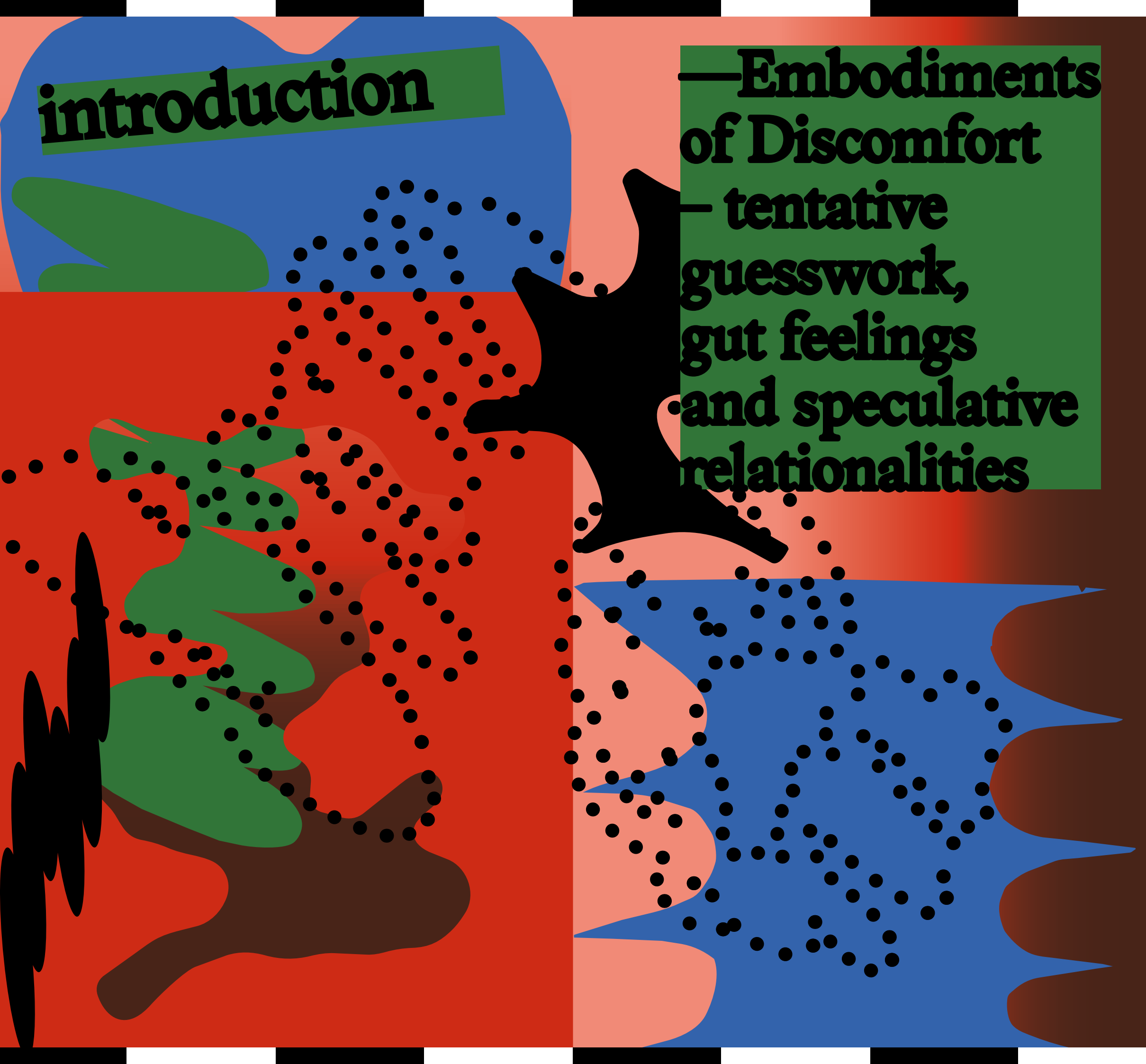
*We can posit the effects of 'not fitting' as a form of queer discomfort, but a discomfort which is generative, rather than simply constraining or negative. To feel uncomfortable is precisely to be affected by that which persists in the shaping of bodies and lives. Discomfort is hence not about assimilation or resistance, but about inhabiting norms differently.<sup>11</sup>*

Inhabiting norms differently, moving on trembling grounds.

2. bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.
3. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), 136.
4. hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," 59.
5. Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso, 2020), 27.
6. Nora Sternfeld refers to Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak and Maria do Mar Castelo Vareta in: *Kuratieren als anti-rassistische Praxis*, eds. Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, and Nora Sternfeld (De Gruyter, 2017), 34.
7. Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 18.
8. hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," 59.
9. Desai. 'This Work Isn't For Us.'
10. Russell. *Glitch Feminism*, 27.
11. Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 155.

**introduction**

**—Embodiments  
of Discomfort  
— tentative  
guesswork,  
gut feelings  
and speculative  
relationalities**



Oscillating around the triad of trouble. rupture. glitch. as dissident (curatorial) movements embracing multiplicity, vastness, interruption, non-performance, resistance and recalibration in order to resist and shift practices, discourse, realities and epistemologies, I start what feels closest yet most vulnerable—to engage in discomfort, being troubled, staying with trouble, with ruptures and voids—glitching, stumbling, falling, failing and resisting. What movements, choreographies and manoeuvres emerge from and around discomfort?

Sara Ahmed writes of discomfort as a form of non-fitting, a sense of out-of-placeness, caused by the non-extension of normative scripts, spaces and surfaces to othered bodies. A non-fitting that does not allow sinking or blending into an environment. She importantly points out how the comfort of

some depends on the labour and concealment and thereby the discomfort of others. She refers to the non-fitting as an opening up of possibilities that can be difficult and exciting and speaks of the gap between the script and the body as a space that may involve discomfort but carries the possibilities of reworking the script. She posits the effects of non-fitting as a form of queer discomfort, one that is generative, allows to inhabit norms differently and calls to “embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us.”<sup>12</sup>

Acknowledging not only the limited scripts for living and loving, but extending the question to practice and labour—that are technically very much part of living and loving but deserve to be examined in relation to that

articulated uncertainty as much as the excitement in the face of the generative quality of discomfort—it allows us to decipher the grammar of violence and its institutionalization.<sup>13</sup>

Industries and their institutions operate along normative scripts with othered bodies and practices surfacing at the moment of not-fitting, not-sinking.<sup>14</sup> What if we consider these gaps, these moments and states of interruption of the normative as ruptures glitching the protocols in place and troubling the conduct of ‘normativity’?

Reflecting on whose discomfort is centered in debates around restitution, repair and institutional violence, it is predominantly the discomfort of those surprised by the ‘sudden’ rupture through the surfacing of the other. A surfacing triggered by the refusal of labour, may it be the labour of concealment, the

emotional labour of appealing or the actual labour of keeping the normative scripts and protocols going.<sup>15</sup>

Sara Ahmed allows us to center a form of discomfort, that she describes as queer discomfort, one that is experienced by othered bodies, that in the moment of rejecting normative scripts and protocols suddenly becomes visible, becomes surface.<sup>16</sup> A becoming surface that reverberates in Jemma Desai’s carefully constructed seminal body of research titled *this work isn’t for us*.<sup>17</sup>

A text-body holding the tension between the violence of policy and data and the embodied experience of curators, film and “cultural workers embodied in difference.”<sup>18</sup> A document of lived experience and sharpest analysis, tracing survival, compliance and dissidence, it assembles multi-vocality and situates trouble. The

work marks her own dissidence, addresses the very ruptures and the in-between spaces, holding space for spectres, emotions, trauma and doubt, holding and carving out language, room for the effects of happy talk<sup>19</sup> and performance of progression.<sup>20</sup> After more than a decade of working within and around institutions, diversity policies and initiatives addressing inequalities and access, Desai dismantles the violence and deeply questions the frameworks, narratives and performativities around them.

As Desai shares her expansive body of research on diversity work in institutions and articulates “this work isn’t for us,” she becomes dissident to her practice, to the endeavor to enhance, to change, to better the institution.<sup>21</sup> Pointing out the hypocrisy of a performed will to change, to open, to diversify, for the sake of capitalizing and cosmetics.

A transformism,<sup>22</sup> which has many amongst us busy when articulating over and over again the mantras of critical diversity, the alphabets of violence, to those who choose to sustain such violence whilst not even needing to be literate in it.

Desai refers to adrienne maree brown by noting, “how people of colour (and especially Black people) are in an imagination battle, having to contend with building lives and futures whilst at the same time being bombarded with images of racist stereotyping, violence and deprivation through our culture.”<sup>23</sup>

She argues how that battle extends to and shapes the experience of workers embodied in difference in the cultural sector. Imaginations she urges us to reclaim, to liberate.

The discomfort of the affected, the surfacing other, is a discomfort ever inherent to the discourse itself, the colonial fabric

and relationalities of and around institutions such as nation states or museums.

A discomfort that is continually marginalized yet loudly and perpetually articulated by scholars, activists, practitioners who themselves are assigned as *other* in the aforementioned imagination battle.

Revisiting her 2020 work in her 2022 essay, “What do we want from each other after we have told our stories,”<sup>24</sup> Jemma Desai reflects:

*This Work isn't For Us\_ theorizes my embodied collisions with “recently,” case study, data, and lived experience. It moves back and forth between these axes. It is nomadic and wandering, trying to gather meaning and find resonances—from culture, from film, from music, from the news, and from government.*

*Perhaps, in academic terms, this “recently” might be “disciplined” as describing a “conjuncture,”*

*but for me it was a kaleidoscope, mixing layers of affect that reoriented themselves to present new meanings every time I returned to the research.*

(...)

*The written parts of the research fell out of me, words fleshy and softly formed, finding their shape on theory written differently, with different intentions, less \_ recent\_ pain. At the time,*

*I felt that the body of the writing was held in place by the work of critics who saw things that I didn't. I relied on the stability of such texts to lend me their authority, because my experience of working in the cultural sector gave me none. I was too close, my pain too fresh.*

*Or my hands too unclean.*<sup>25</sup>

The open-endedness of embodied work, the aliveness of movement through research and questioning. Jemma Desai’s methodological approach deeply resonates with what

the following pages are trying to do, a body of text operating in movements interrupted by interpellations. Ever open to revision, considering impossibility and acknowledging the necessity of failure.

Julietta Singh develops vulnerable reading as a methodology of close reading that “resists foreclosures by remaining “unremittingly susceptible to new world configurations that reading texts—literary, artistic, philosophical and political can begin to produce. Vulnerable readings resist disciplinary enclosure, refusing to restrict in advance how and where one might wander through textual engagement.”<sup>26</sup>

Singh posits how her engagement with Mastery derived from an intangible form of discomfort and how failure becomes a crucial framework in her approach.

*Failure is absolutely crucial to my attempts, and to the ways that the texts I engage across this book invite practices of reading that confront and question our subjectivities.*

*Following Halberstam’s suggestion that we read failure as a queer refusal of mastery (2011, 11), I attend to mastery’s recurring failures in postcolonial literature as promising, hopeful, even utopian. In failing to master, in confronting our own desires for mastery where we least expect or recognize these desires, we become vulnerable to other possibilities for living, for being together in common, for feeling injustice and refusing it without the need to engage it through forms of conquest.*<sup>27</sup>

Failure as queer refusal of mastery.

Singh departs from investigations into the desire for mastery towards an unthinking of it. Delving into failures as portals for other possibilities of engagement, living and commons.

## **Failure. Error. Glitch.**

*The glitch is a passage through which the body traverses toward liberation, a tear in the fabric of the digital.*<sup>28</sup>

And not only the digital but the very fabric of the programmed normative. Legacy Russell calls for us to embody the glitch, interrupting the binary coding of gender and violent programming of normativity. Russell urges us to “inject our positive irregularities into these systems as errata, activating new architecture through these malfunctions, seeking out and celebrating the slipperiness of gender in our weird and wild wander.”<sup>29</sup>

## **The slipperiness of identity, of legibility.**

Legacy Russell gathers “practitioners who, in their rebellion against the binary body, guide us through wayward worlds, towards new frameworks and new visions of fantastic futures.”<sup>30</sup>

Fantastic futures that echo Lola Olufemi’s “otherwise”.<sup>31</sup> An otherwise that Jemma Desai extends through Xine Yao and their striving towards a feeling otherwise.<sup>32</sup>

Janaína Oliveira proposes to “dance dancing”<sup>33</sup> towards such an (curatorial) otherwise.

She threads *to dance dancing* in reference to Brazilian musician Ben Jor and Édouard Glissant’s poetics of trembling. “*Tremblement*”,<sup>34</sup> trembling as a way of being in relation. Oliveira enacts Glissant:

*... the instinctual feeling that we must refuse all categories of fixed and imperial thought. Tremblement is thinking in which we can lose time, lose time searching, in which we can wander, and in which we can counter all the systems of terror, domination and imperialism with the poetics of trembling – it allows us to be in real contact with the world and with the peoples of the world.*<sup>35</sup>

And further picks up his understanding of *the thought of trembling*<sup>36</sup>

as

*An instinct, an intuition of the world that we can't achieve with imperial thoughts, with thought of domination, thoughts of a systematic path towards a truth that we've posited in advance. It's metaphorical, but it's also real, concrete.*<sup>37</sup>

Oliveira recalls how to dance dancing resonates with her paths towards cinema and curation. Non-linear movements that resonate with mine. She alchemizes Ben Jor's dance with Glissant's tremblement and extends towards Wally Fall's film title *Mantjé Tombé Sé Viv (2023)*.

Translating into “almost stumbling is life” or “dancing the stumble.”<sup>38</sup> Establishing her movements towards a curation of care as epistemology. Moving through, *an unstable terrain that shakes, where you need to*

*know how to stumble. A terrain in which curating is unhesitatingly assumed as an extended experience that expands the curators activity beyond research, selection, and programming of films.*<sup>39</sup>

Oliveira urges for a curatorial practice of care that is relational and expands on care as an epistemology referring to Tina M. Campt, who describes care “as refusal to be insensitive to the pain or suffering of others,” a refusal “to be indifferent to the multiple traumas of coloniality.”<sup>40</sup>

A care that needs us to consider who is sidelined and where cinema perpetuates trauma, a care that calls for us to spin webs of relations between spaces, screens, bodies and audiences, to shapeshift, to listen, to translate. To hold space that allows for looking deep without hurting.

Oliveira ends by quoting Glissant and Chamoiseau in their

manifesto “all re-generation emerges from disruption.”<sup>41</sup>

Her stumbling in non-linear lines echoes Saidiya Hartman's wayward movements and Glissant's errantry. Survival inscribed in detours, mangroovy ways, serpent lines. Wandering without being lost, refusing the root-system, operating in rhizomes.

**Stumbling and trembling. Instinctive and situated movements, activating visceral knowledge, gut feelings, heralds guiding towards relation.**

It is moments of disruption, of rupture and void, of glitch, interference and trouble that I look at, tracing how these movements operate as speculative curatorial movements emerging from discomfort.

Driven by the discomforts of greediness for living in other fictions, for lessening the hurt, for moving towards

and in solidarity with shifts and endeavors for a recalibrated togetherness—towards new constructions beyond or dwelling subversions of this hyper-capitalist, (neo)-colonial, cisheterosexist, racialized matrix whose architecture relies on and continuously perpetuates violence—I wonder what shapes our practices, informed by discomfort and speculations on what could be, as in some realms always has been, can take.

What ruptures inform the spaces we navigate and shape, what glitches define our movements and what breaks discontinue violent continuities and continuous violations? What does staying with trouble look like, how do we cope with constantly being troubled? What traces do our glitches, ruptures, failures and troubles leave and what shapes and bodies do they take, are they carried by? How does

dissident theory, Black, queer-crip-feminist re-conceptualization, methodology, thought and reflection inform the shapes, configurations and manoeuvres we aim for?

How do trouble, rupture, and glitch—as situated movements emerging from discomfort—enact embodied, transformative interruptions as speculative, relational, and fugitive curatorial strategies towards an otherwise? How do they challenge the reflex of performative transformisms<sup>42</sup> and quick fixes masked as acts of restitution or repair? Performances of progress and inclusion, cosmetic interventions that allow to maintain hegemonies of exploitation and oppression to succeed and perpetuate.

Mechanics and negotiations that instead of working towards repair and liberation, center chewing on performative discourse around restitution, enacting the slippery diversion of

maintenance to suspend guilt and responsibility, in denial of the profound ruptures of (ongoing) colonial violence and exploitation.

In relation and companionship with practitioners/theorists, scholars of Black Studies, crip and queer theory, of media, moving image and curation, of emotion, affect and time, with dear colleagues, friends and artists, we trace such movements towards inhabiting these norms differently, towards an otherwise.<sup>43</sup> Lola Olufemi, whose *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* ground the thesis's horizon, offers an Otherwise that “requires a commitment to not knowing.”<sup>44</sup>

*otherwise as in, a firm embrace of the unknowable; the unknowable as in, a well of infinity I want us to fall down together.*<sup>45</sup>

This body of text operates in lapses and movements emerging from discomfort. Four

lapses, each oscillating around notions of trouble, rupture, and glitch moving towards the otherwise, each centering one such notion as a starting point of questioning, stumbling and tracing. Ruptured by interpellations, openings—artistic practices, curatorial gestures, moving image works and formal translations that enter and shift the conversation. Collapsing theory and practice into one trembling movement.

Four essays, trace thought in motion, meandering in wayward lines, speaking towards each other, ruptured and held by interpellations.

Claiming an errant writing close to the senses, to the body, to gut feeling, visceral knowledge and discomforts shape-shifting and oscillating in its rhythms and means, vulnerably reading, I lean on the notion of essay—a convention providing shape and

protocol, yet one to be glitched, stretched and appropriated.

I think of this text-body as the beginning of an assembly, of a gathering, open-ended finding its first textual iteration, craving to translate into space, onto screens, under skins, into relation.

12. Ibid. Kazeem (turia + kant, 2009), 71.
13. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 4.
14. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 143, 148, 155.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Desai. 'This Work Isn't For Us.'
18. Ibid.
19. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Duke University Press, 2012), 72.
20. Desai. 'This Work Isn't For Us.'
21. Ibid.
22. Nora Sternfeld, "Erinnerung als Entledigung. Transformismus im Musée du quai Branly in Paris," in: *Das Unbehagen im Museum*, eds. Nora Sternfeld, Charlotte Martinz-Turek, and Belinda
23. Ibid.
24. Jemma Desai, «What Do We Want from Each Other After We Have Told Our Stories?» (2022).
25. Ibid.
26. Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Duke University Press, 2018), 22.
27. Ibid., 21.
28. Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 13.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (Hajar Press, 2021), 8.
32. Jemma Desai, "What Do We Want from Each Other."

33. Janaína Oliveira, "A Manifesto for Curation," in *Five Manifestos for a Beautiful World*, eds. Phoebe Boswell, Saidiya Hartman, Janaína Oliveira, Joseph M. Pierce, and Cristina Rivera Garza (Alchemy, 2024), 41.
34. *Ibid.*, 42.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 43.
39. *Ibid.*, 50.
40. *Ibid.*, 53.
41. *Ibid.*, 60.
42. Sternfeld, "Erinnerung als Entledigung," 71.
43. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 155.
44. Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, 17.
45. *Ibid.*, 7.

**trouble –  
essay one**

**In fact, staying  
with the trouble  
requires learn-  
ing to be tru-  
ly present, not  
as a vanishing  
pivot between  
awful or edenic**

**pasts and apoc-  
alyptic or salv-  
ific futures, but  
as mortal crit-  
ters entwined in  
myriad unfin-  
ished configura-  
tions of places,  
times, matters,  
meanings.<sup>46</sup>**

Mortal critters entwined in a myriad of unfinished configurations, entangled in the messiness of being. Being embodied in difference already is a presence of survival. Donna Haraway calls to stay with trouble, by speculating around new configurations, by weaving new string figures and other fictions.

*Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplacé, entangled and worldly.*<sup>47</sup>

With Haraway, staying in trouble means to make oddkin, to “become-with each other”, to refuse the technologies promising easy fixes and to instead enact relational technologies of transformation.

*Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.*<sup>48</sup>

Quiet places to depart towards, places that bear the possibility of the otherwise, of “response-ability.”<sup>49</sup> The ability to respond, to live agency in kinship, enacting relational accountability within the ecosystems we are entangled in, ready to make oddkin, ready to step into unexpected and unlikely alliances and kinships.

Motions of trouble, echoing a hum,<sup>50</sup> a buzz, an anthill, restless movements and soundings deconstructing whilst rebuilding, moving in spirals, confusions and tensions, tickling sensations and vibrations. Movements, motions and departures emerging from discomfort, detaching as rejected by the surface, oneself becoming surface. Slipping out of what one is supposed to do.

*Your body, your desires, might be registered as error: to err is to stray; to err is to go the wrong way. When you slip out of what*

*or who you are supposed to be, you slip into trouble.*<sup>51</sup>

An error, a queer failure in resonance with Jack Halberstam.<sup>52</sup>

*The trouble a question can cause became my feminist pedagogy.*<sup>53</sup>

Sara Ahmed traces her relation to trouble as a feminist pedagogy journeying with Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.<sup>54</sup> By drawing upon the impact of Butler’s approach not only to gender and sex as the subject of their writing, but also to the impact of their relation to theory as a means of trouble, Ahmed states the importance of trouble as a feminist condition and a strategy, as a means of embracing what one is normatively not supposed to. Trouble as a strategy and an act of spillage, non-containment, leakiness. The refusal to “put things into brackets.”<sup>55</sup>

Ahmed understands trouble, and as she further expands in her own work on “willfulness”, as feminist strategies, conditions of struggle towards creating what Butler calls “liveable lives.”<sup>56</sup> Enacting an intersectional reading of trouble, she reminds of the uneven distribution as well as the assignment of the condition and picks up the notion of failure. It is through failure that openings emerge. The failure to inhabit the norm, the becoming surface she elaborates in relation to discomfort.<sup>57</sup>

A becoming surface that becomes familiar when refusing to put things into brackets in the spaces and institutions one navigates. The refusal of bracketing violence that, in turn, is framed as violence, or at least as the causality of trouble. The refusal of an assigned space or place – one that is specifically molded out for the embodied other – leads to surfacing in positionality and positioning. Troubling the imagined configuration and constitution, causes trouble in the imagination battle.

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*Trouble is an interesting word. It derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning “to stir up,” “to make cloudy,” “to disturb.” We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times.*<sup>58</sup>

**To stir up, to make cloudy, to disturb.**

**To blur.**

What does it mean to inhabit distortion?

Fred Moten introduces thought in resonance with and reference to Édouard Glissant, whose poetics of relation demand for bodies to relate in opacity, in order to be able to tremble together.<sup>59</sup> Suspending legibility as grounds for relation allows for forms of relation beyond capture, allows for oddkin in Haraway’s sense. Moten expands on this notion of illegibility as the excess within and beyond capture, the spillage that can not be contained, something that Tina M. Campt voices as the hum beneath images of capture,<sup>60</sup> what exceeds legibility persists as sonic, affective, and social surplus.<sup>61</sup> Blur and opacity operate as refusal of legibility and capture, a refusal inherent to trouble, inherent to non-containment and surfacing.

Much of this text’s engagement with discomfort and in consequence trouble evolves around questions of whose discomfort gets centered in debates around restitution, harm-reduction, repair, transformation and finally liberation. Whose discomfort dictates institutional and curatorial movements? And what are the movements and motions that transcend these dominant configurations?

Departing from the institutional framework of responsibility it is so often not about response-ability<sup>62</sup> but about the fastest way of suspending discomfort and trouble. A practice that leads to the very surfacing of embodied others as Ahmed and Desai describe.

A surfacing that leads to the transmission of discomfort onto bodies embodied in difference. An object transmission, a transmission that becomes an inscription. When the discomfort of the institution is transferred onto the bodies causing trouble by surfacing, by merely being present, it leads to detachment and transformation of the assigned into a multiplicity of existences beyond protocol. Sara Ahmed introduces stickiness, pointing to the transmission of affect onto objects or signs.<sup>63</sup>

*What is the relationship between signs and bodies? (...), economies of disgust also involve the shaping of bodies. When the body of another becomes an object of disgust, then the body becomes sticky. Such bodies become ‘blockages’ in the economy of disgust: they slow down or ‘clog up’ the movement between objects, as other objects and signs stick to them. This is how bodies become fetish objects: as we shall see, feelings of disgust stick more to some bodies than others, such that they become disgusting, as if their presence is what makes ‘us sick.’*<sup>64</sup>

In applying the notion of stickiness to disgust, Ahmed demonstrates the stickiness of devaluation and violence. What works for disgust, works for irritation, disruption, and thereby discomfort too.

**The often painful, surfacing as embodied trouble.**

*Getting into trouble can be costly, painful. A feminist and queer politics of trouble might require that we share the costs of getting into trouble; that we find ways to support others in the project of creating what Butler calls “liveable lives.”*<sup>65</sup>

Queer discomfort allows for the embracing of trouble as this very surfacing, for trouble as a pedagogy, as a practice towards an otherwise. Yet the pain of detachment and the cost of dissidence are not to be romanticized. The necessity of detachment results from the ongoing perpetuation

of colonial and supremacist violence, a condition that Christina Sharpe theorizes as “the wake”.

Sharpe understands the wake as a condition suspended between mourning, consciousness, and vigilance: a collapse of linear time shaped by the ongoing precarity of Black life and death by the violence enacted upon Black bodies. Wake work becomes a method of attending to the everyday realities and archives of imminent Black death while tracing the fissures, refusals, and possibilities that emerge within them. For Sharpe, practices such as Black annotation, aspiration, and redaction constitute methods of wake work.<sup>66</sup>

Legacy Russell’s practice echoes such practices of annotation and wake work. Her body of writing is deeply informed by curatorial gestures and relational practices. A curatorial methodology of trouble.

Russell assembles turning points in American media history and visual culture, gathering mediated forms of distributed Blackness.<sup>67</sup> She explores the construction of digital virality online and away from keyboard (AFK) and gathers key moments from 1900 up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century to trace the development of distributed media towards what we now understand as memes.<sup>68</sup> Russell coins the notion of transmission, meaning the mediation, copying, and carrying of Blackness itself as viral agent as the definition of the Black meme. A notion sustained by the engine of visual culture and modern media such as the internet.<sup>69</sup> Looking to the period before 1900, she identifies the transmissions of the Middle Passage as the site of the first Black memes. Here, the circulation of the Black meme is tied to the movement of Black data through Black people themselves, initially through the physical Black body. Further she positions the Middle Passage as a rupture in Black speech, gesture, movement, and embodiment, later violently appropriated within the logics of American capitalism.<sup>70</sup>

### **A rupture in Black speech, gesture, movement and embodiment.**

Russell points out how Black virality precedes cyberspace and the networked internet that we are familiar with. She stresses the correlation of Blackness as a condition of and contribution to the development of contemporary digital technologies and cultures, a relationship she frames as symbiotic. By understanding Blackness as in itself mimetic, Russell centers the fact that the Black meme often contains imagery of Black people subjected to extreme violence, or in contrast, as entertainers performing what she refers to as material within an economy of white spectatorship. Here she underlines the lack of Black consent or compensation while the mentioned forms of display feed into a fetishization, altering and othering Blackness, leading to a hype of affect and desire for a very particular violent form of proximity. By means of the key moments gathered, Legacy Russell underlines how representation and consumability do not correlate with being compensated. Christina Sharpe echoes this argument by stating “spectacle is not repair.”<sup>71</sup>

Russell thereby troubles the spectacle of hypervisibility and violent virality, the circulation of disembodied capture and the dissociation from corporeality deeply connected to Black social death. A spectacle that informs an entire genealogy of image making, exhibition practice, production and circulation of moving image, art history, museology, film history, anthropology. Looking relations<sup>72</sup> and dominations. A spectacle operating on a multiplicity of levels, where what is seen is merely the surface, the index of violence linked to lived realities and circumstances of labour and exploitation.

Circumstances and realities that Jemma Desai dismantles in “this work isn’t for us.”<sup>73</sup> A text-body that operates as “an ongoing study

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(...). Partly a critical appraisal of historic ‘diversity’ initiatives, partly an alternative policy document,” as well as “an embodied ethnography, assembling testimonies from arts workers navigating institutionally initiated gestures at ‘inclusion.’”<sup>74</sup>

Desai constitutes her methodology as follows:

*This paper is the result of a lifetime of living as a minority in predominantly white spaces, and of being subject to the ‘imagination of others.’ (...) By putting my voice in dialogue with others, I honour the stories and thoughts shared with me without repeating the harm of the cultural sector’s diversity policy which as I will go on to show, so often unfeelingly makes individuals performatively hypervisible and invisible at will, and which so often renders us completely disembodied when discussing our lived realities.*<sup>75</sup>

A disembodiment that echoes the Black meme, that links and unearths the ratio of spectacle, representation, mimicry, commodification and lived reality. The viral disjointed circulation of Black media artefacts that Russell traces and the disembodiment Desai documents in cultural institutions are iterations of the same structural mechanism and rupture.

Jemma Desai constructs a relational architecture of dismantling, of questioning. Weaving conversation, research, policy, advocacy and lived experience into a living document. Speaking from the embodied position of a curator, film programmer and diversity worker, she manages to build an architecture that holds tensions, contradictions and spillages. Through Ahmed, she evokes the dominant institutional discomfort:

*In “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” (2007), Ahmed writes about discussing institutional whiteness with a room full of white academics. She describes the ways that in the section for questions, the impulse to change things is raised,*

*how can the spectre of whiteness be resisted? What can be done? She clarifies these impulses as acts of containment and deflection:*

*“The desire for signs of resistance can also be a form of resistance to hearing about racism. If we want to know how things can be different too quickly, then we might not hear anything at all.”<sup>76</sup>*

Appeasement and resistance mechanisms of denial and derailment avoid the labour of doing the work, a deflection of being implicated in the critique.<sup>77</sup> A performance and an understanding of (white) institutional neutrality, maintained through the suspension and denial of the power and domination structuring the relations that constitute the position itself.

Desai dismantles the ways in which the language of diversity so often dehumanizes the very people it seeks to include and how this happens through a disembodiment and dissociation from lived experience. She points out how the signaling and performing of work towards an undefined future and unspecified change for the better in diversity policy and diversity framings, suspend and render invisible the present and past lived realities and struggles of cultural workers embodied in difference.<sup>78</sup> By dissecting acts of language such as prejudice or bias she shows how a performance of “being in all of this together” operates as an underlying current of institutional disavowal and derailment from acknowledging and facing systemic inequality as the root cause for the necessity of diversity policy and initiatives in the first place.<sup>79</sup>

Sara Ahmed amplifies such mechanisms of suspense and passing in her passage on discomfort:

*If you cause discomfort (by not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness), you have to work to make them comfortable. You have to pass by passing your way through whiteness, not by becoming white, but by minimizing the signs of difference.<sup>80</sup>*

Jemma Desai further points out how even if audiences and addressees of art and cultural programming are presumably diversified, and with that a criticality in spectatorship, reception and reading meets the work in the transitory, the socio-political and historical situating and publishing keeps on happening through a monocultural lens.

*The result is that whiteness as a lens to view art remains the norm.*<sup>81</sup>

Desai reflects on her work as a public programmer and questions the configurations of spaces and audiences, asking:

*Can programming work that depicts and attracts certain bodies change the shape of spaces that have taken the form of others? Who does such work belong to? And where should it be seen? Who should ultimately profit from such exchanges? These are considerations that often show up in the form of unease and discomfort in my body when I am working and viewing art and spending time in cultural spaces.*<sup>82</sup>

It is the discomfort of surfacing that this text-body departs from. The discomfort that hardly finds space or expression, that is so often framed in relation to the institutional discomfort urging for the suspension of all discomfort working towards change whilst performing the readiness to do the work.

Reflecting on shifts in discourse and the moment of uprising in 2020 – during and as an aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests in response to police brutality, killings through the hand of the state and the murder of George Floyd, which became a catalyst for a global moment and movement in self-organizing, demands for justice and acknowledgement of violence caused by the racial matrix – Desai refers to cracks, openings and mechanisms of response to an urgency

felt, though not understood, in the larger cultural field.

*Everywhere cracks are appearing, in the arts, the media, the state, the higher education sector. Everywhere, these cracks are being hastily plastered over. As Black people and those who stand with them burn with rage at decades of injustice, decades of white supremacy, white institutions and leaders say they are ready to ‘do the work’. What is the work? Is it us, who have been excluded, setting about winning the hearts and minds of those who have indifferently excluded for decades? Writing and consulting, colluding and becoming complicit in our own subjugation.*<sup>83</sup>

In an introspection Desai asks –

*Where do I go,*

*To (un)relate*

*To (re)imagine*

*When I am still so much more familiar with the contraction I’ve been in, the twisted position of the tiny space I’ve been shoved in?*

*SNAP.*<sup>84</sup>

Through Sara Ahmed, she enacts the feminist snap.

A snap, a rupture. SNAP, departing from a sudden break or quick movements. Ahmed theorizes “snap” as something perceived, as the starting point of something that has been going on, unnoticed, for a while.<sup>85</sup> The snapping of a twig due to pressure unperceived. A pressure that (cultural) workers embodied in difference, “killjoys,” as Ahmed introduces them,<sup>86</sup> and women of colour experience in common. Ahmed shifts snapping into feminist methodology, not always planned yet preceded by pressure and oftentimes violence, snap allows for movement, for a snapping out of disembodiment back into bodies, for communication, for attunement, for reception for change. Snap as a moment where trouble manifests.

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*By snapping we become feminist ears; we become willing to receive. A feminist ear can provide a release of a pressure valve. Just loosening the screw a little bit, a tiny little bit, and you have an explosion. We need more feminist explosions. Of course that is why professional norms of conduct are about keeping a lid on it; institutional loyalty as silence in case of institutional damage.*<sup>87</sup>

Desai snaps and moves towards a place of re-imagination, a suspension of institutional walls. Embracing such ruptures as radical openings.

*And when there is no wall, a conversation emerges, it’s not a challenge or confrontation but a radical opening. A space where no one is rendered illegible, no one has to move into silence, or move from centre to margin or margin to centre, but the whole space opens up into a space of liberation: “not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. This is an intervention. I am writing to you. I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different, where I see things differently. I am talking about what I see.”*<sup>88</sup>

Desai imagines openings and desired spaces of liberation, yet looking at the false promises of diversity initiatives, also warns against confusing “desire” with “denial.”<sup>89</sup> This resonates with Eve Tuck’s advocacy for a desire-based research framework. Tuck frames this in contrast to a damage-based one, calling researchers to refrain from causing and reproducing the damage that they think they want to transform, but produce “theories of change” that “establish[es] harm or injury in order to achieve reparation.”<sup>90</sup> In response, Tuck proposes enacting desire as “the song about walking through the storm, a song that recognizes rather than denies that pain doubtlessly lies ahead.”<sup>91</sup>

### **Ahead and beyond.**

*Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities.*

*Desire is involved with the not yet and, at times, the not anymore. In many desire-based texts (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cheng, 2001; Didion, 2005; Williams, 1992) there is a ghostly, remnant quality to desire, its existence not contained to the body but still derived of the body. Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. It is integral to our humanness.*<sup>92</sup>

Desire is what the assembled positions in this text-body share, amongst each other, as well as with the intention of my own writing. The desire to stay with trouble towards an otherwise, towards openings and ruptures that allow for liberation, the desire for the suspension of walls, for feminist ears, for lives worth living, for reimagining, for reassembling and reintegrating imaginaries and embodied experiences.

*To hear snap, one must thus slow down; we also listen for the slower times of wearing and tearing, of making do; we listen for the sounds of the costs of becoming attuned to the requirements of an existing system. To hear snap, to give that moment a history, we might have to learn to hear the sound of not snapping. Perhaps we are learning to hear exhaustion, the gradual sapping of energy when you have to struggle to exist in a world that negates your existence. Eventually something gives. This is why snapping is not always planned. Indeed snapping can get in the way of the best-laid plan. Snapping can be about the intensity of a situation; when you can no longer do something you have done before. In the end, it can be something little that ends up being too much. A snap can be a story of how you get to the point when it is too much. When you snap you are snapping not only at what is in front of you, but what is behind you; that history of what you have put up with. A snap can be experienced as a delayed snap, once it happens, you can wonder with frustration what took you so long. A snap can tell us when it is too much, after it is too much, which is how snap can become a scene of our feminist instruction.*<sup>93</sup>

46. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 1.
47. *Ibid.*, 4.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, 2.
50. Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017), 45.
51. Sara Ahmed, "Being in Trouble: In the Company of Judith Butler," *Lambda Nordica* 20, no. 2–3 (2015): 184.
52. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011).
53. Ahmed, "Being in Trouble.", 181.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 182.
56. *Ibid.*, 185.
57. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 148.
58. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.
59. Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Duke University Press, 2017), xv.
60. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 7.
61. Moten, *Black and Blur*, 35.
62. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.
63. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 89.
64. *Ibid.*, 92.
65. Sara Ahmed, "Being in Trouble: In the Company of Judith Butler." *Lambda Nordica* 20, no. 2–3 (2015): 185.
66. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 113.
67. Legacy Russell, *Black Meme* (Verso, 2024), 13.
68. *Ibid.*, 12.

69. Ibid., 11.
70. Ibid., 13.
71. Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (Daunt Books, 2023), 36.
72. bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” in: *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press, 1992), 128.
73. Desai. ‘*This Work Isn’t For Us.*’
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ahmed, *Living A Feminist Life*, 132.
81. Desai. ‘*This Work Isn’t For Us.*’
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Sara Ahmed, “Snap!” (2017), <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/>.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Desai. ‘*This Work Isn’t For Us.*’
89. Desai. ‘*This Work Isn’t For Us.*’
90. Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities.” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 413.
91. Ibid., 419.
92. Ibid., 417.
93. Ahmed, “Snap!”

# Interpellation – I



video still (browser capture by the author) —  
Mai Ling kocht: *Eating as Pleasure and Protest*  
(2021)

Mai Ling

# MAI LING KOCHT: EATING AS PLEASURE AND PROTEST

Experimental Video, 12:27min, 2021

*.. this relationship with  
food is rather sticky.<sup>1</sup>*

The subcutan crackling of a knife under apple skin. Gooney matter stretching between fingers. A naked chicken, carefully massaged and caressed in a saucepan. Breath against microphone membranes. Leftovers of a feast.

pleasure/disgust

comfort/discomfort

excess/control

Soothing whispers amplify how these dichotomies dominate representations and imaginaries around female asian migrant bodies relating to food.

The work seduces, indulges, textures the body, to name the violence organizing and structuring spectatorship and engagement.

Presumed intimacy performed and dismantled as spectacle. Consumption as projection surface in double bind. Destabilizing the spectator's desire.

Chewing on the precision of analysis—racialized desire, disciplinary excess. Indulging in performativity and transversality. Owning and producing stickiness.

Mukbang, as performative eating practice, in its reception and related spectatorship is charged with violent racist and exoticizing projections and desires.

*Some mukbang eaters end up embodying these expectations and perform it as a form of disidentification. They profit by fulfilling the Western fantasy of the exotic. It is done subversively to perform an otherness that is enticing and is contrary to white normative standards. The “otherness” of mukbang eaters make their performance magical, seductive—filled with satisfaction and relief. Although their interaction with food is unapologetic and pleasurable. They further complicate sticky double binds by being tangled in the white gaze. These sticky double binds are the results of capitalism, food insecurity and structural oppression.*

Unapologetic Pleasure.

Dismantling shock and spectacle. Inhabiting—glitching spectacle.

A rupturing of projection, a blurring of legibility.

Sticky affects, sticky matter.

Reflections on (s)kinships, desires and longings. Soothing touch.

*Our comforts and food consumption gets messy when they are capitalized upon, monetized and re-enact oppressive structures. (...) Guilt, sadness and shame has been associated with indulgence created as a result of systemic oppression and capitalism. Women, Black People, People of Colour, fat people and working class people are made to feel bad for feeling pleasure, for resting, for indulging (...) Pleasure is necessary in surviving and counteracting oppressive structures.*

Pleasure is necessary in surviving and counteracting oppressive structures.

Crackling sounds. sticky relations.

//

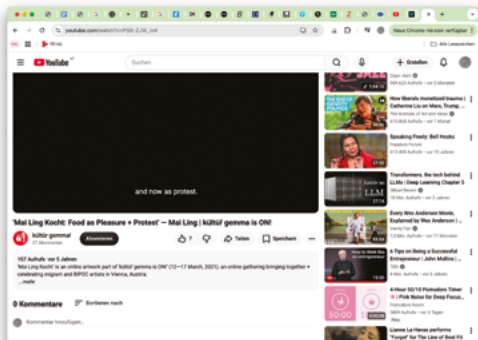
*Mai Ling deconstructs, “recurring representations of the Asian female migrant body by questioning notions of exoticism, the kitchen and the sensorial, and aesthetic experiences of food. The performances of Mai Ling Kocht unfold the narratives behind migration and food, not only as multicultural additions to European palettes, but as representations of societal barriers and invisible forms of discrimination.”*

*Founded in Vienna in 2019, Mai Ling is an anonymous artist collective and association committed to fostering dialogues on racism, sexism, homophobia, and prejudice with a focus on FLINT\* (women, lesbian, inter, non-binary, and trans) of Asian descent diaspora and migrants.*

*The collective name, Mai Ling, refers to an eponymous German television sketch from 1979 that showcases sexist and racial stereotypes against Asian women, which are still embedded in German-speaking society. Challenging the Western heteropatriarchal gaze and racist fantasies that keep reproducing stereotypes about “Asia,” the collective amplifies multi-layered voices to reclaim agency through collective resistance and pleasure. Mai Ling engages in various forms of artistic practice and activism, including videos, audio installations, cooking performances, community gatherings, public interventions, and protests.<sup>2</sup>*



Mai Ling Kocht: Food as Pleasure + Protest' – Mai Ling | kùltūr gemma is ON!



video still (browser capture by the author) –  
Mai Ling kocht: *Eating as Pleasure and Protest*  
(2021)

Mai Ling

1. Italicised passages are voice transcripts from the work.
2. Adapted from the collective's self-description on their homepage.  
Mai Ling, *About*, [mai-ling.org](http://mai-ling.org).

**essay two -  
listening  
to ruptures**

**a correspon-  
dence in  
vibrations—  
on frequencies  
of refusal, res-  
onance, and  
relation.**

*The following movement arrives as correspondence—a series of letters exchanged between February and April 2025, written in and against the institutional context inhabited by us as correspondents and companions. Departing from discomfort, it enacts rupture as listening—unfolding an echolocation of relation, clicking across distance, attuning to each other’s frequencies, feeling out the contours of refusal before shaping the next sound.*

The following essay documents an open-ended conversation between Djamila Grandits and Zuzana Ernst, both members of the curatorial team at D—Arts – Project Office for Diversity.<sup>94</sup> The epistolary exchange unfolds as a series of letters written between February and April 2025, forming a relational and speculative dialogue that moves between frequencies of rupture, resonance, refusal, and listening.

Djamila approaches her work through Black queer-feminist thought and anti-racist cultural critique, tracing moments of trouble, rupture, and glitch as speculative curatorial movements emerging from discomfort. She inhabits in-between spaces structured and informed by localities and the entanglements of European and Afro-diasporic minority constructions.

Zuzana focuses on methods of deep listening for political practices in the arts, drawing on her engagement with critical listening positionality. She listens through and with postmigrant and queer-feminist perspectives, from the in-between, shaped by a migration biography as well as whiteness—benefiting from its privileges while trying to remain alert to what and who is made absent.

We both write from within and against European curatorial contexts, aware that our standpoints are shaped by local structures of power, whiteness, ongoing colonial mechanisms, politics of migration, and diasporic entanglements, from

intersectional, shifting locations, shaped by different forms of structural positioning and institutional proximity. Our respective practices, as much as our shared practice in the context of D—Arts are marked by entangled tensions: between insider and outsider, critique and care, complicity and vulnerability.

The following correspondence does not aim to present a conclusive argument or static position, but instead offers an evolving choreography of thought on political and curatorial practices—emerging from friction, memory, and embodied experience. It unfolds within the framework of critical diversity work, informed by decolonial, feminist, and postmigrant thought and is grounded in shared yet differently situated practices of curating, organizing, and sense-making.

This letter exchange grows from our respective curatorial practices and research, and simultaneously reflects tensions and possibilities of working within D—Arts—an office that operates both inside and alongside institutional frameworks, navigating the friction between advocating change and transformation whilst reproducing structures marked by exclusions.

D—Arts emerged as an initiative in becoming, as a performative gesture of prefiguration that came into being 2020, whilst performing structure. An ongoing process of shapeshifting and reconfiguration is an inherent part of its practice, self-understanding and form. Operating between network, office, project and loosely tied communities, a messy and dense multilayered set of strategies and negotiations inform the urgency of figuring out what such an office should, could and can hold space for.

The use of letter-writing references Black feminist, Chicana, and decolonial traditions of correspondence as collective thought-work. It resonates with practices like

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Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s epistolary exchanges, Audre Lorde’s and Adrienne Rich’s feminist letters, and the work of Sara Ahmed, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Christina Sharpe, who show how writing in relation can be a refusal of closure—a way of thinking and feeling in motion, together.

While our shared practice does not claim to decolonize the structures it moves through, it gestures towards cracks, refusals, and practices that unsettle dominant, colonial, racist, and discriminatory logics.

Working with and within institutions and dominant structures is far from easy to navigate. This correspondence does not offer solutions, but holds space for the contradictions, frictions, and negotiations that arise in motion—a space of (un)learning, a kind of emancipatory rehearsal sensing into urgencies and the discomforts of ongoing racist and colonial violences. We acknowledge the necessity to inhabit such a space—to reflect, pause, or dwell in not-yet-knowing—can turn into a privilege that is not equally granted. A privilege depending on positionality and situatedness that relies on access, resources, and temporalities related to institutional proximities that remain unevenly distributed. Holding space for slowness and relation is in itself a practice shaped by structural conditions. This correspondence claims slowing down as a form of listening engaged as a method, as well as a critical, political, and sensory practice: a way of noticing silence, rehearsing refusal, and building alternative orientations in and against institutional logics, allowing for vulnerability.

This exchange is a weaving of reflections and tensions—a resonant space for discomfort, glitch, and fugitive resonance—written in the hope of inviting others to pick up the threads, continue the patterns, or unravel them altogether. Stumbling together through a soft space of emergence. Stumbling together through a soft space of emergence.<sup>95</sup>

5.2.2025

Dear Djamila,

I’ve been thinking about how to begin this exchange, while I keep returning to our last conversation, when we spoke about movement—not just in the physical sense, but in the way ideas shift, unsettle, and refuse to settle. A thought that stayed with me – as it opens the possibility to shake the machineries of long-established institutions. As you described it: Movement as rupture, as friction, as a refusal to conform to dominant structures. Discomfort, too, is a form of movement—an interruption that unsettles assumptions, forcing a reckoning with positionality. Discomfort as a continuous encounter with what we once believed to be fixed. It demands that we engage with the instability and fractures of the systems that surround us. Perhaps this exchange itself enacts such movement: a score of resonances, disruptions, and refusals.

Your work on trouble, discomfort, and the speculative potential of rupture resonates deeply with my focus on listening—listening not simply as passively receiving, but as a site of power, a contested terrain where exclusions are enforced and refusals take shape. Listening is never neutral. As Dylan Robinson argues, listening is conditioned by positionality—by the histories, privileges, and biases that shape how we hear and engage with sound.<sup>96</sup> Robinson identifies dominant listening habits as inherently extractive, structured by colonial and institutional frameworks that dictate what is considered valuable knowledge and whose voices are amplified or silenced. Listening, in this sense, is often a form of control, a way of determining articulation and legibility within existing power structures.

In *The Politics of Listening*, Tanja Dreher extends this critique by

examining the privilege not to hear, the systemic refusal to listen, embedded in institutional and social structures.<sup>97</sup> This refusal is not an absence of listening but a selective inattention, masked as neutrality or objectivity. For decades, countless cultural activists have repeatedly pointed out existing discriminatory structures, only to be ignored. When we began D—Arts in 2020, addressing this very idea of disguised control was central to our work, to gather, organize and actively challenge the refusal to listen. Further than challenging the structures that determine what we listen to, we were driven by the urgency of reimagining how articulation itself is framed.

The act of listening can be understood as a means of examining and dismantling such hierarchies—questioning who gets to speak, who gets to be heard, and what is rendered to appear or disappear through sound and silence. So D—Arts is about creating spaces where multiple forms of knowledge and articulation could exist beyond the boundaries set by those who traditionally held the power to define them.

By disguising exclusion as universality, an established listening order is reproduced, reinforcing certain voices while dismissing others as noise defining whose sounds are received, whose are silenced, and whose discomfort is acknowledged or ignored. Sara Ahmed similarly critiques the illusion of neutrality, exposing it as a construct that upholds dominant norms while erasing embodied, historically situated perspectives. In her view, discomfort is political—not merely an affective state but a confrontation with structures that dictate belonging, recognition, and legitimacy.<sup>98</sup>

For years, in our projects, we have looked for forms that not only challenge the norm but deliberately slip away from its grasp. Navigating within normative orders means learning their rules—often more

thoroughly than those who set them. But what happens when we step out of that movement altogether? When the goal is not to work against the order but to move beyond it? A refusal can begin as a simple no, but refusal, as Tina M. Campt frames it, reaches further.<sup>99</sup> It shifts the focus away from the alleged centre that fails to listen and turns instead towards the small, fleeting gestures of refusal—those quiet soundings that are too subtle, too slow, too unruly to be fully captured. Campt calls this the refusal to be refused: a different kind of listening senses the hum just below audibility, insisting on presence despite attempts to erase it.<sup>100</sup> These soundings of fugitivity, as Fred Moten reminds us, exist beyond capture at the margins of institutional listening, resisting incorporation into dominant logics.<sup>101</sup>

So, what does refusal sound like? In what ways can listening take shape through refusal—not as absence, but as an active force, a dissonance that carries the potential to reconfigure relations? When listening is denied, what lingers in its absence? And how does the refusal to be refused shift the dynamics of rupture—not only as an interruption, but as an insistence, a persistence that unsettles dominant modes of reception?

Listening becomes a form of disobedience, a refusal to conform to dominant codes of meaning. Where does listening fail, where is it withheld, and where does it move otherwise—beyond the terms imposed by institutional structures?

Refusal, and discomfort are deeply embedded in the curatorial and aesthetic methodologies you are developing. How do these tensions manifest in listening practices? What kinds of attunements emerge in the gaps between what is heard, unheard, and refused?

Perhaps listening, too, is always in motion—circulating in vibrations,

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in silences, in glitches, in frequencies just beyond audibility. If movement unsettles and interrupts, it also carries the potential to realign, to reorient, to insist on other ways of being in relation. Where does listening move from here? ;-)

Looking forward to your thoughts and to how this conversation unfolds.

Hugs,  
Zuzka

21.2.2025

Dear Zuzka,

I love to think of this exchange as a pattern of movements, as a score of resonances, as a web of relations. I kept your letter from myself for a number of days, waiting for a moment of full immersion, wanting to give it my full attention when reading it first, but I realize how attention performs the very disobediences and refusals I am interested in. Whilst moving between your lines I find it hard to focus, as the departure from conversing and listening closely the other day excites me so very much.

Discomfort – tangible, embodied, situated – a familiar state that we depart from, that informs our articulations, our political practice and the urgency to sense in relation.

Easing into this excitement I almost feel the hum, as if touching an old TV-screen, that tingling feeling when haptically, audibly and visually perceiving noise. Particles moving, following their own score beyond and between meaning, interrupting a flow of broadcast, refusing legibility, linearity and two dimensional order. Particles bleeding through the membrane of skin and screen moving (through) my body.

Our conversation echoes, as notions of listening and observations around names as

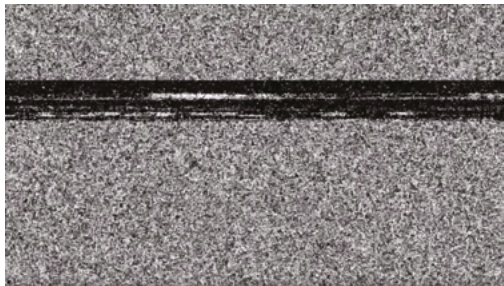
carriers of movements and ruptures wander in my mind. I wonder how and if remembering is also a form of listening.

Legacy Russell expands on Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's exclamation that "the only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new," voiced in *The Undercommons*,<sup>102</sup> and elaborates on how "glitch feminism asks: Can a break be a form of building something new? Can our breaking shit be a correction, too?"<sup>103</sup> As Fred Moten speaks about existence beyond capture,<sup>104</sup> Legacy Russell calls us to refusal, to the nonperformance of the binary, to indecipherability, to the refusal of performing in the score of gender, insisting to inhabit the in-between, to navigate the void, to sit with discomfort, to depart from and towards rupture or at least a break. Calls on us to be the glitch.

If we listen into white noise and delve through the subversive potentialities of refusal, I wonder, what does it mean to listen beyond the dominant narratives?

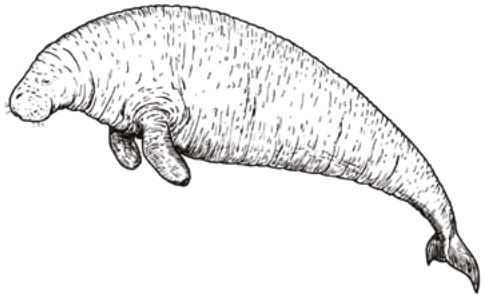
Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks, "How do we mourn and survive the violence of being known?"<sup>105</sup> whilst remembering an oddkin, a giant of listening – the *Hydrodamalis Gigas* who could hear for miles and only 27 years after being discovered went extinct. She describes her as follows, "Once upon a time there was a huge and quiet swimmer, a plant based rough skinned listener, a fat and graceful mammal," wondering what we can learn by listening to her.<sup>106</sup> She further speaks to whales and reflects: "Echolocation and communication overlap, sometimes sounds I make are about measuring my surroundings, sometimes there is something I need to tell you, usually it's both."<sup>107</sup> Talking to these giants underwater she calls us to take responsibility for our frequencies.

To listen beyond what we anticipate to hear, beyond the urge



*Screenshot from Old Retro TV – Static  
(Black & White)*

Video by Alexey\_Nikiforov, Shutterstock  
(Clip ID: 1108809531)



*Sea cow (Hydrodamalis gigas, late relative),  
monochrome pen and ink illustration*

Artist: Mateusz Atroszko (03.11.2020)

of productivity and response, beyond the desire for capture, bears the possibility of stretching time-spaces to situate ourselves, in community, through echolocation, through the movement of frequencies, through the amplification of resonance and the courage to sound into dissonance.

How do we then do this? What does it mean to unlearn forms of hungry listening and exploitation together? How do we stay in trouble with voices that have been silenced, whilst holding space to imagine and listen to what remains unheard? How do we rehearse to listen deeper, to decipher the silences, the noise beyond and between formed language and intended tonalities? What if we learn not only to listen but to perform off score? What if we listen to the noise whilst trying to be the noise?

I sense us tuning into the crackling and the noise, eager to inhabit potential spaces of attunement, into the unsound possibilities beyond capture.

I am in love with this precious experience of sharing.

Hugs,

Dj.

2.3.2025

Dear Djamila,

I read your letter with a big smile, imagining us like the whales sending out clicks across the distance, receiving them back transformed, enriched, layered. A process of sensing and resounding, forming thoughts as we move through frequencies, relations, and refusals. I love that you brought in Alexis Pauline Gumbs and her conversations with the giant listener she commemorates. By learning to listen underwater we explore different physics, different temporalities. Sound moves five times faster in water than in air, but the

human ear struggles to locate it. Under water, sound has no clear direction for us—it reaches the body from everywhere at once. The ear alone is no longer enough. The whole body must attune—our bones and cavities sensing vibrations through the skin, sensing shifts in pressure, absorbing waves unsure about the source.

Our exchange reminds me of string figure games, the way we weave patterns, pass ideas, trying out new moves, shifting shapes. Haraway speaks of research as this kind of play: “giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential, of relaying connections that matter [...] String figures can be played by many, on all sorts of limbs, as long as the rhythm of accepting and giving is sustained.”<sup>108</sup> The rhythm of listening, too, is sustained through offerings and responses, through tension and release.

When you describe the tingling touch of an old TV screen, I can feel, even smell and taste it—the charged dancing dust particles, choreographed by static energy, diffusing the borders between skin and screen, as if screen and body are made of the same stuff only humming at different frequencies. Listening happens here, at the edge of perception, where sound becomes vibration, where frequencies move through bodies before they are named. The hum, inaudibly buzzing, crackling at the threshold of hearing, is there, fleeting.

Transported back to the old family living room, flickering with light, zapping through channels, fighting for the remote, recording music videos on VHS—I feel how sound sparks memory, how remembering itself is a form of listening. Memory moves through resonance. It carries traces of voices and gestures, of shared rituals and past conversations—sometimes clear, sometimes fragmented. It holds

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the weight of history, the echoes of struggles and resistances, the persistence of knowledge passed through language, movement, and place. Memory is also shaped by violence and silences, by distortions that render certain pasts illegible, voices difficult to retrieve, histories unevenly preserved or erased. In a time that demands response, listening is increasingly devalued—drowned out by proclamations, declarations, and the relentless production of statements detached from relation. Sound is used to assert authority rather than to connect, leaving little space for resonance. Power is exercised through monologue, neglecting to pause, to attune, to listen. Against this, remembering becomes more than recollection—it is an act of attunement, a refusal to let certain frequencies fade into oblivion.

I feel an urgency to make institutions listen: listen to the crackling and knockings from the margins. From those who have been refused, time and again. Even more urgently I want us to rehearse listening together, not only as individuals but within movements and collectives. To train our ears and bodies to listen beyond the surface, to develop an echolocation of relation—a way of sensing presence through distance, distortion, and fragmentation.

Gumbs asks: “How does echolocation, the practice many marine mammals use to navigate the world through bouncing sounds, change our understanding of ‘vision’ and visionary action? [...] Echolocation is not the same as mind-reading. Some of this magic is just the complexity of being a mammal alive in sound.”<sup>109</sup>

Learning to echolocate requires full body listening, a quieting down in order to sense frequencies deep in our bones and blubber. It requires slowing down despite urgency—an act of resistance against the demand to respond before reflecting: “And then I will be quiet,

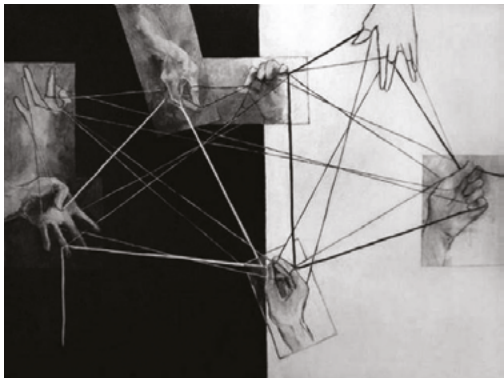
so I can hear you breathing. And then I will be breathing and you’ll remind me: Do not rush.”<sup>110</sup>

Listening, in this way, is relation and resistance. It is an insistence on a pause, an act of refusal, a performance off score, as you write. Listening to noise and being the noise. Refusing capture. Refusing to be deciphered. A kind of listening that requires practice—spaces offside institutional structure where we slow down, collectively attune, unlearn. Spaces where we can remember without flattening differences, where we can listen to gaps in memories, to missing voices in the archive, to what refuses to disappear. And at the same time, we need to enter institutional spaces and demand this practice too, continuously insisting on responsible ways to listen. This simultaneity is slippery. Moving between both institutional and subversive spaces, we risk to skid into moments of disguised normativity, reproducing the very systems we critique.

We need practices of deep listening that unfold within and beyond dominant institutional structures as well as in the in-between—through the glitch, through the break. The break offers a pause, an opportunity and insistence to sit with indecipherability.

What if listening came first, before sounding—before a political discussion, before an artistic practice? What if a warm-up prepared the body, directing attention to sounds received through all senses—ears, skin, heart, and tongue? This kind of exercise could be a practice in shifting focus, learning to listen at different volumes, turning down certain frequencies, amplifying others. Not just about making sound, but about relating to what already resonates.

Sara Ahmed speaks of feminist ears as attuned to the murmurings and knockings that happen outside closed doors—ears that listen for



*Cat's Cradle String Theory* (2008)

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

the complaints of others, that tune into the quiet acts of resistance within institutions, that gather not only sound, but shared struggle. She writes: “We are louder not only when we are heard together, but when we hear together.”<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps listening, in its fullest form, is always already beyond the ear. Moving through the body, through relation, through refusal, through discomfort, through resonance. Perhaps it is less about deciphering and more about inhabiting the hum.

What if, before sounding, there is a pause to listen to the crackling, the tingling frequencies already present, to the noise that refuses to disappear? What can this pause be on a collective level when we put it into practice?

I imagine us tuning into this space together—clicking, bouncing sound waves, inhabiting the in-between, feeling out the contours of refusal, before shaping the next sound.

I will stop here. This letter turned out much longer than planned, spinning the strings you offered, moving with tingling diffusion, looking for focus. Looking forward to the next figure.

Hugs,

Zuzka

13.3.2025

Dear Zuzka,

I am trying to catch your strings, picking up strands with my teeth to transform the patterns spun around my fingers, clicking my tongue as threads reconfigure to offer a new constellation to you.

Strings and knots, nodes and inbetweens. Again I am drawn to the gaps separating the clear lines, the spaces, the voids. The holes in memories, the silences in histories and the ruptures in linearities, negative

spaces of refusal. I care for the intersections, the muddles, the frictions. Entangled strands that need us to pause to detangle before moving on.

Click, in *Black Meme*, Legacy Russell writes about Michael Jackson’s song and music video Thriller, and how in all its ambivalence it contains empowered and self determined imaginaries of Blackness, how it’s virality comes and still goes with exposure and spectacle and how embodiments of Black queerness and the subversion of Zombieism allowed for the reveal and ridicule of white America’s greatest fears at the time, and connects these implications with acknowledging the media historiography of recording, elaborating on the relevance of taping broadcasts on VHS.<sup>112</sup>

To me too, music videos were early iterations of collective engagements with imaginaries and constructions of otherworlds, self-defined fictions and performances, queering and piercing linear forms of localized afternoon TV. Dense clips full of coded expressions and messages, spaces of projection, play and drag, recorded on tape or in memory, the deciphering of these very expressions as well as of their meaning to my becoming is only possible through listening back, through choreographies of restructuring pasts, through dances and songs allowing me to travel time in order to understand a notion of now. “If you listen back, go over something, realizing what you did not see at the time. Clarity can be jarring.”<sup>113</sup>

You write about how “memory is [...] shaped by violence and silences, by distortions that render certain pasts illegible, voices difficult to retrieve, histories unevenly preserved or erased.”<sup>114</sup>

Sara Ahmed introduces the feminist ear as a channel for complaint to go elsewhere and reflects on how to turn that ear either outward, inside out, or to direct it back to the past and consequently

towards inner spaces. I like that image of inversion, of altered embodiment, of shifting shape in the service of care and attentiveness, in order “to comprehend—to grasp.”<sup>115</sup> Ahmed offers a practice of listening and of becoming otherwise, refusing the allegedly neutral stance of hegemonic structures, to inhabit distortion. To be that feminist ear means to hold space not only for complaint but for trauma, for the voids, the gaps and the unspeakable \_\_\_ to allow for “the kind of hearing that lets something in, however shattering, whatever the consequences.”<sup>116</sup> Reassessing lived experience through collectivized complaint, through hearing together through listening to each other in order to understand. “Sometimes, we can only hear something in our own story when we share it with someone else.”<sup>117</sup> To reflect our hearing positionalities, as Dylan Robinson calls for, to situate them in the larger intersectional structures we navigate, taking responsibility for our frequencies, making use of our channels and amplifying complaint.<sup>118</sup> As “to listen to complaint is to learn from those who are listening, to learn from those who have to fight to get into institutions, fight to be accommodated by them.”<sup>119</sup> Sara Ahmed holds us accountable reminding us that “if we can see through the glossy image of diversity, we can also hear through it, the buzz of it, to what is not being said, to what is not being done.”<sup>120</sup> So once again listening allows for movement, for echolocation.

So how do we practice complaint whilst rehearsing care and transformation? When last week at our general assembly Sonya Lindfors<sup>121</sup> spoke of the relevance of frictions for emergence and a discussion around discomfort, its acknowledgement, its avoidance and its appropriation sparked, I was moved by an urgency to collectively work through how that informs our practice. To work out scores and choreographies to move through unstructured spaces and

voids, to hold space for discomfort, to find chords and sounds of complaint moving towards sighs of relief and tears of shared grief.

Ahmed also reminds us to listen to the mechanics of the machine, of the institution, the buzz, the knocks, the clocks, the sh’s, the slamming of doors, the sounds of hesitations, the cries of outrage, the noise of distraction and the screaming silences. She also recalls the power of shared critical spectatorship,<sup>122</sup> as introduced by bell hooks, recounting a screening room pierced by silent rage, sounds of complaint and collective sighs and laughter in relief in reception of a feminist film on trauma and notions of justice. When thinking about projection practice and curating, this is what I want us to move towards, to create environments, to allow for those forms of gathering and sharing. Listening outwards to then listen into pasts of not yet understanding, finding languages to listen into future imaginaries of transformation and justice.

Echolocation of relation you say, I think this might be what we are striving for. Sonic encounters, contact zones,<sup>123</sup> scores of stumbling, failing and searching together. Shapeshifting bodies of alliance and frictions, committing to rehearsing forms of listening otherwise, of gathering beyond colonial protocols, refusing dictations of dialogue and assimilations blurring differences and imposing resolution.

*May we gather beyond capture, learn to know each other aware of the violence and the vulnerability of being known, become that shapeshifting monster, that giant of listening, a giant of complaint with a belly for gathering and rest shielded from the violent soundscapes, tuning into the blubber of collectively working through, digesting and brewing new ways of being in a whirlpool or a pot of soup, fluids and potions of becoming. Pausing on the + as the place of hearing itself,<sup>124</sup> but*

*also the very intersection we meet at, the place of becoming more than one, a space of addition and emergence.*

I hug you,

Dj.

17.3.2025

Dear Djamila,

Thank you for these intertwined figures spun between fingers and teeth; for stretching, releasing, un-tangling. The strings most urgent to follow connect to frictions; the recurring question of how to collectively hold space for discomfort. A general acknowledgment of the destructive practices of avoidance and appropriation resonated across the room after Sonya Lindfors's input at the general assembly. Yet how do we stay with it, sustaining the pause, collectively, before rushing into resolution? With the many unequal partners in the room?

The practice of echolocation of relation requires both, navigating in resonance and dissonance—sensing across asymmetries, clicking through power imbalances in search of connection without erasure. What practices of attunement are already in motion, and where might they be expanded or sharpened? Over the years, I have worked, within and beyond institutions, to create unlikely connections, to build bridges, to attune my ear to different frequencies. Yet when friction arises, my instinct is often still to smooth it over—to apply the oil that keeps the machinery running, to stay in relationship, to leave doors open to resources and power.

Bridging is often a necessary strategy. But there are moments when bridges are not what is needed—when maintaining connection requires the willingness to enter the rupture instead of leaping across it. Some distances ask for something slower, less linear, even messy. Perhaps the first

move is to listen across and stay in the stretch between positions.

D—Arts grapples with this kind of listening across distances. It is a space where players move towards each other, approach and retreat, meet and clash—often in highly asymmetrical relationships. A space of unequal players, demanding unusual rules, ones that must continuously shift in order to create equilibrium. Holding this balance is often draining, failing to meet all needs, we are many but at times not enough. The “fake it till you make it”<sup>125</sup> structure is in ongoing negotiation, adjusting with every iteration, trying to hold space for complaint and for listening, for rupture and bridging simultaneously, still hesitating between what it is and what it needs to become.

I notice how this tension echoes in my body, especially in moments of discomfort. I often hesitate before acting or speaking. My breath shortens, the chest tightens, the voice catches in my throat. Discomfort makes itself heard—my voice shakes, deepens, turns raspier than usual. My face flushes, exposes, impossible to mask. Rather than trying to smooth it over or push past it, I've been trying to sit with it. To observe these patterns, to breathe into them, to pause before they overtake. To make space for listening instead of preparing to speak. Not to build a wall of defense. Not to construct counterarguments while someone is still talking. Not to shout or shut the door. A friend recently told me: The deeper the conflict, the quieter the communication needs to be. Whispering makes the other side listen-in, rather than turn away.

Can D—Arts provide a feminist ear? Can it hold space for complaint and trauma when harm is embedded within the very structures we navigate? The threads we're holding—between those who have been systematically refused and those entangled in institutional power—are always under strain.

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In some ways, we have moved beyond “faking”. Yet, we continue to maneuver within precarious infrastructures, pulling on strings that may snap at any moment.

Is it possible to be a killjoy and build bridges at the same time? Or is it a kind of relay, where different roles must be played—a coordinated movement of strategic disruption, like a dance of refusal, negotiation, intervention? D—Arts performs multiple strategies at once. A full-body exercise—training different muscles, sharpening reaction speed, strengthening coordination, estimating when to push forward and when to step back. Agility, endurance, rest.

Practicing so that the knock knock... on closed doors actually opens some, like the clicking of echolocation directed towards institutions. These are different kinds of giants: vast, loud machineries, clunk clunk..., grinding, drowning out quieter sounds, leaving little space to listen. How to make them respond—to the knocks and clicks, the low frequencies?

Sara Ahmed takes the knock of complaint at the door, moving from a singular, triggering moment into a collective insistence: “knock, knock, we are here.”<sup>126</sup> D—Arts is trying for this collective practice—through discourse, working groups, training formats—for alternative artistic expressions, interruptions of normative quality imaginaries, and self-determined modes of representation. The urgencies and expectations are high—often outpacing what our resources can sustain. Like a makeshift telephone made of two yogurt cups and a string, we try to transmit across power divides.

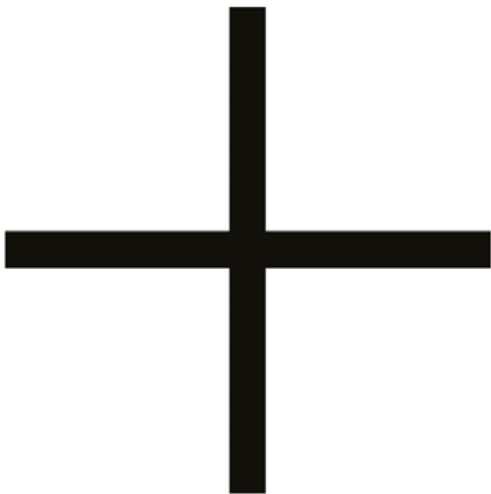
Ahmed speaks of institutional brick walls—of how “will” becomes a “wall,” when diversity is tolerated only to a certain

point, when listening reaches a threshold beyond which it is no longer welcome.<sup>127</sup> These walls don't always look like outright refusal; they may take the form of bureaucracy, exhaustion or polite dismissal—structures that absorb discomfort just enough to neutralize it, leaving little room for real transformation.

So how do we move through or around such walls? What kinds of practices can we develop to navigate spaces not designed for everyone? The answer may lie not in confrontation alone, but in cultivating alternative orientations: ways of sensing, knowing, and connecting that operate outside dominant codes.

In a world where vision is prioritized—where seeing is tied to knowing, legitimacy, and control—other ways of navigating often go unrecognized. Some people living with blindness or visual impairment develop forms of echolocation by clicking their tongues and sensing how sound reflects off surfaces. This practice is not a substitute for sight, nor should it be romanticized as compensation. Rather, it reveals how dominant norms define what is considered a deficit or an advantage, and how bodies constantly negotiate these frames. Echolocation, in this sense, opens up ways of relating—through embodied sensing, through attunement to vibration, echo, and reverberation. Listening is not confined to the ear: it can move through the skin, the bones, the breath. Sensitivity is not static; it can be trained, lost, relearned, deepened, and shared—shaped through relation and practice.

If institutions listen only on certain frequencies, then practices like echolocation suggest ways to sound out beyond those limits. They offer a model for aural imagination, as Dylan Robinson calls it—the ability to listen beyond expectations, across and through difference, to



*Plus Sign icon (transparent PNG)*

Source: [PngFind.com](https://www.pngfind.com)

attend to what is rendered inaudible by dominant structures.<sup>128</sup>

Echolocation of relation becomes not just a metaphor, but a method. It resists capture by linear norms. It gestures outward. It allows for attunement across rupture. It is the +—a space of becoming more than one, of addition, a connective practice that moves between ways of being. As Robinson writes about the + as “a mark made by lines connecting and moving outward towards other space; it asks how we as listeners attend to being between these ontologies and sound worlds.”<sup>129</sup>

I pause here, holding the tension, unfinished, observing the gaps, the breaks, the void shapes between the strings. I was more hesitant this time around, circling the formation, plucking and pinching at different places, unsure what shape I wanted to offer next—to you and to those who may read along. It feels like we are only beginning.

Another long hug,  
Zuzka

*PS: Stumbling score: Lean so far to one side—either side—until you stumble. Remember, stumbling keeps you from falling.*

3.4.2025

Dear Zuzka,

Thank you so much for reminding me about how stumbling keeps us from falling. I often refer to my movements as stumbling ones – literally but also as in a mode of navigating surroundings, spaces and temporalities. You ask how to stay with discomfort, I want to pick up on how we echolocate across resonance and dissonance and think of the multitude of frequencies between and beyond.

I relate to your vulnerability around frictions, and I think of listening and wanting to comprehend—to grasp.<sup>130</sup> Always and

again trying to make sense of it all. I think of how I learned to listen to the sub, the in-between and the unspoken, the tough love, the silent pain and the violent embrace,<sup>131</sup> the sonic projections and the confidence screaming fear. I think of listening as a technology of survival.

We decipher, we code-switch, we re-code and we stumble. We deliberately fake it, and we try so together, we gather in strength and knowledge, conjunct through echolocation, opposing marginalizations by a claimed center knowing that the bodies of water we are navigating are endless and vast, yet we move on lands and shorelines torn and undermined by colonial structures and violences.

When thinking of the river I am unsure of bridges, though I like bridges—especially at their middle, being the furthest possible away from a shoreline in a bridged constellation looking up and down, resting. But when I think of constellations and D—Arts as a network as such, acknowledging the unequal distribution of power and privilege, the diverging realities and yet some common threads of interest, care or curiosity I wonder how we meet and move, through spaces and times. So to listen into the discomfort is above all to stretch and delve into all that could be, to stretch the assumed lines and spaces and to meet elsewhere or maybe sometimes not meet at all. I am thinking about submerging to the currents, to cold and ever moving waters, about islands of rest and desire, about archipelagos of practice and imagination and temporary infrastructures that allow us to connect and disconnect.<sup>132</sup> I care for the undercurrents and the soundings, the frequencies and the webs bearing possibilities of reconfiguration, agile and never fixed. Deep ties won't easily be undone but strengthened, as strategic threads can be spun and cut anytime.

What if listening to discomfort means taking responsibility for our frequencies? Owning the echolalia

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and the vibrations and holding each other accountable for them. What technologies of listening across, below and between can we develop if we decide never to unhear the urgencies of survival and complaint. How can a network and office, a shapeshifting monster of gathering be a constellation of feminist ears, killjoys, mediators, communities, allies, opponents, transformation-curious institutional bodies, lived utopias, well-meaning individuals, time travelers and workers? Many exhausted, many ever struggling and surviving the violent logics and infrastructures that others operate, uphold and if even, only slowly start to see.

We stumble towards and through such questions and encounters, we rush as the currents take on unexpected speed and we rest as ruptures and failures force us to. Moving in ever-changing constellations above the surface and below, in deep waters where golden threads weave figures of movements, intersections creating a network of islands. +

Finding a temporary end to this exchange feels almost impossible, with attention disobedient to linear timelines. I deeply enjoy this dreamy killjoy-dolphin string figure play and I want to come back to Legacy Russell calling us to be glitch, to be error and to tear it all open.<sup>133</sup> So let's stretch the voids torn by ruptures to listen into them as a constellation of feminist ears to whistle, click and speculate around what else is possible and trust—lending the title of Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung's book—that In a while or two we will find the tone.<sup>134</sup>

I am deeply grateful to you for spinning and weaving—leaving this space curious about future movements and new constellations of sharing and listening.

Hugs,

Dj.

*Tear it all open. Stumble into—voids and wormholes. listen/whistle/click.*

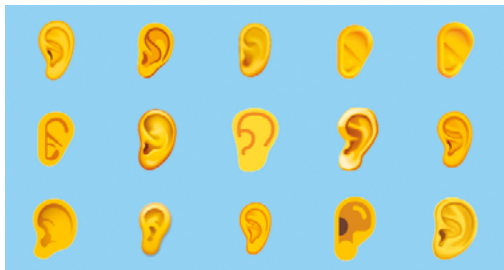
*Fabulate to reconfigure.*

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The exchange does not end here. It continues as ongoing rehearsal: stumbling, stretching, reconfiguring. Along the way, a softness emerged. One that allows space for intimacies, to become vulnerable, as what is being discussed is sticky and uncomfortable. As the themes we move through—rupture, refusal, breaking—are often jagged, the form takes on a tone of care. A care that sharpens attention. This softness shapes the rhythm of the correspondence as a beat for generative exchange—it opens space for being affected, for staying in relation, for building a ground on which disagreement doesn't collapse connection.

The mind thinks differently when the nervous system is not on high alert, a rare and desirable state in a realm of constant overwhelm. Attunement deepens when there is space to pause, to fumble, to feel. We hold this space as one of rehearsal, at times of searching and not-yet-knowing, of sensing towards something rather than arriving.

*What would it mean to train the body to listen otherwise? To echo without being absorbed or flattened? To stay with trouble.*



*Ear icons (composite image assembled from free transparent PNGs)*

Source: [PNGFind.com](https://www.pngfind.com)

94. D—Arts - Project Office for Diversity is an initiative with a growing alliance of over 80 member associations and institutions operating from Vienna and Salzburg. D—Arts works to identify systemic gaps and to develop sustainable conceptual, curatorial, and advisory frameworks that support long-term change towards discriminatory-critical practices in arts and culture. D—Arts aims to center the voices, practices, and initiatives of those directly affected by discrimination—supporting cultural work shaped by lived experience, activism, and resistance. Through building networks, strengthening relationships, and encouraging dialogue between cultural workers, institutions, and policymakers, D—Arts seeks to foster more equitable structures, improve working conditions, and open space for collaborative, critical approaches in the arts.
95. We would like to thank Lara Belton, Lucia D’Errico, Robert Gabris, Myassa Kraitt, Ivana Pilić for reading and listening, for being outside eyes and generous critical friends in this exchange. Their reflections offered essential resonance—precious offerings in this ongoing string figure conversation. Held in a space of collegial care, inviting their feedback was offering us grounding and attunement in the delicate movement between intimacy and publicness, allowing us to stay in the complexity of our thoughts-in-motion. We are equally grateful to all those we think, practice, and stumble with in the context of D—Arts and beyond. This work unfolds within a collective terrain of fragile structures held together by trust, continuous negotiation, and shared unlearning—moving in non-linear ways, listening as we go.
96. Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 11.

97. Tanja Dreher and Paula de Souza, *Listening In: Community Media and the Politics of Listening* (University of New South Wales, 2021), 14.
98. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 155.
99. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 113.
100. Ibid., 32.
101. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 202.
102. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 6.
103. Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 120.
104. Moten, *In the Break*, 4.
105. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (AK Press, 2020), 18.
106. Ibid., 18.
107. Ibid., 19.
108. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 10.
109. Gumbs, *Undrowned*, 18.
110. Ibid., 19.
111. Sara Ahmed, “Feminist Ears,” *feministkilljoys* (2022, June 1), <https://feministkilljoys.com/2022/06/01/feminist-ears>. While the text does not explicitly distinguish between “hearing” and “listening,” the concept of “feminist ears” may be understood as a politicized form of listening—one that moves beyond the auditory to encompass embodied attunement, relational awareness, and collective responsiveness.
112. Russell, *Black Meme*, 75.
113. Ahmed, “Feminist Ears.”
114. quoting Zuzka in her previous letter from 2.3.2025

115. “Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away.” hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” 59.
116. Ahmed, “Feminist Ears.”
117. Ibid.
118. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 11.
119. Ahmed, “Feminist Ears.”
120. Ibid..
121. Sonya Lindfors held a Keynote titled *Working with f(r)ictions – towards decolonial, feminist and speculative practices* at the D—Arts general assembly in Vienna on March 7th 2025.
122. hooks, *The Oppositional Gaze*, 128.
123. Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Ka-  
miński and Nora Sternfeld, *Kuratieren als antirassistische Praxis* (De Gruyter, 2017), 23.
124. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 9.
125. Note: Two years ahead of its formal founding moment, D—Arts emerged whilst being performed, an instrumented prefigurative practice of becoming, so to say. Before a commitment of policy makers and sustainable funding, it enacted an office and imagined missing structures into being.
126. Ahmed, “Feminist Ears.”
127. Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Duke University Press, 2021), 83.
128. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 1.
129. Ibid, p. 9.
130. hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” 59.
131. Phaniel Antwi, *On Cuddling Loved to Death in the Racial Embrace* (Pluto Press, 2023), 27.

132. Édouard Glissant and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Archipelago Conversations* (Manchester University Press, 2020).
133. Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 27.
134. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, *In a While or Two We Will Find the Tone: Essays and Proposals, Curatorial Concepts, and Critiques* (Archive Books, 2020).

# Interpellation – II



video still —  
*Hydra Decapita* (2010)

The Otolith Group

# HYDRA

# DECAPITA -

# THE

31 mins – HD Video,  
Colour, Sound, Stereo. 2010.

# OTHOLITH

# GROUP

an author, a voice transcription.  
the labour of subvocalization.  
the effect of voicing on the body.  
distorted code.  
a song of painting.

sunset/after a storm.

liquid planets.  
a world within itself – human  
form was left at the door.

hydratic journeying/  
in tidal motions.

dark waters, glistening/opaque,  
a black plane, flickering white  
spots.  
Black Atlantic.

horizon. an opening.

a projection. pixelation.  
distortion. glitch.

noise. sonic/visual.  
waters, flow – overwhelm – freeze.

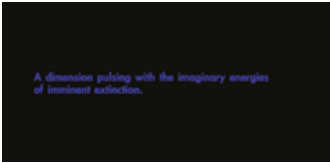
layers of paint.

horizon.

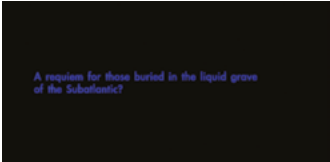
“ (...)

*It fills you with silent voices.  
I hear them all the time.  
In my throat.  
What I listen for is the stance this  
voice adapts, what he stands for,  
whom he speaks with.  
I call him the author.  
I separate air from turbulences  
Most of the time I can no longer see*

*what I can hear.  
I track the voices as they move  
around a fiction system they call  
Drexia.  
An invented world whose effects  
remain incalculable.  
The author envisioned a world ruled  
by tidal forces.  
Forces that conducted currents  
through the interior of a liquid planet  
A dimension pulsing with the imag-  
inary energies of imminent extinction.  
My transcription is filled with the  
remnants of ancient death.  
In his imagination, the author sum-  
moned immense powers.  
He is a starmaker.  
Speculatively Speaking.  
Rival hypotheses of Drexia's origin  
surfaced, submerged, resurfaced.  
Might they be water breathing, aquat-  
ically mutated descendants of those  
unfortunate victims of human greed?  
The voices asked themselves.  
They spoke of women in labour  
thrown overboard by slavers.  
Of 1781.  
The Zong.  
Was Drexia a mausoleum for their  
dead?  
A requiem for those buried in the  
liquid grave of the Subatlantic?  
Why has the author sealed off his  
fictional world system?  
Why would a starmaker assemble a  
speculative wormhole between hydro-  
gen and death?  
Only to close it?  
The system is fictionalizing  
Taking over my throat.  
Storm of torture the after breath  
drawn deep by bossom of lifting the  
like.  
Drexia is using my subvocal.*



A dimension pulsing with the imaginary energies  
of imminent extinction.



A requiem for those buried in the liquid grave  
of the Subatlantic?

video still —  
*Hydra Decapita* (2010)

The Otolith Group

*It seeps through my transcripts.  
Is this how it occupied the author?  
Interning itself in his shell?  
System star the planets liquid done  
was travel interhydratic.  
Low and cold gathers which night of  
mist upon are cast breakers.  
Lines scarlet in moving a cloud-rain  
streaming.  
Night of hollow in themselves lose to  
sunset of fire.”<sup>1</sup>*

another transcript, another author.

sonic f(r)ictions.

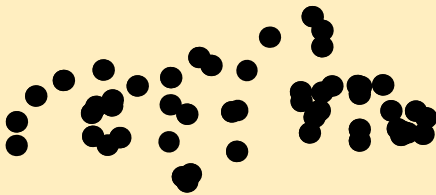
listening into the depth. an abyss.

submerged in the imaginary of  
liquidity and transcendence.

subatlantic wormholes,  
break beats and noise.

a requiem. a wake.

into abolition.



*Hydra Decapita takes the influential  
Detroit techno duo Drexciya's mythos  
of aquatic mutation as the starting  
point for its elegy on the afterlife of  
Atlantic enslavement in Britain. In  
Hydra Decapita, Kodwo Eshun and  
Anjalika Sagar's focus on the motion  
of light on water redirects the sonic*

*fiction produced by Drexciya's James  
Stimson and Gerald Donald towards  
an occult meditation on the spectres  
of race that animate Ruskin's writings  
on Turner's treatment of water.*

*From 1993 until 2002, the Detroit  
based electronic musicians James  
Stimson and Gerald Donald of  
Drexciya produced eleven singles and  
four albums that mapped the sites,  
the sounds and the energy zones of  
Drexciya: the subaquatic mythscape  
peopled by Drexciyans descended from  
pregnant African women forcibly  
drowned during the Middle Passage.*

*Hydra Decapita can be understood as  
a séance on capitalism and slavery  
conducted through an art of darkness,  
blackness, saturation and benighted-  
ness.*

*The Otolith Group have researched  
and produced densely textured  
moving images works, installations,  
photographs, murals and performanc-  
es, which frequently reference the  
trajectories of the non-aligned, and  
the transnational legacies of the global  
majority and its diasporas. Through-  
out this practice runs a precoccupa-  
tion with shifting the decolonial form  
of the essayistic towards an untimely  
institution, drawn from thinking  
temporality as unbound by the po-  
litical formations that determine the  
notion of the contemporary.*<sup>2</sup>

1. Italicised passages in quotation marks are transcriptions of the intertitled voice track from the work. Additional non-intertitled voice parts are not included.
2. Adapted from the Otolith Group's descriptions of the work and the collective. *Hydra Decapita*, [otolithgroup.org/work/hydra-decapita](http://otolithgroup.org/work/hydra-decapita); *About*, [otolithgroup.org/about](http://otolithgroup.org/about).

**glitch –  
essay three**

**With physical movement often restricted, female-identifying people, queer people, Black people invent ways to create space**

**through rupture. Here in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired cross-road of gender, race and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch.<sup>136</sup>**

*She became the dolphin whose flesh she had eaten. And she was moving through the water alongside the ship, propelling her long sleek body forward with easy beats of her tail. She was seeing differently, her eyes now on the sides of her head instead of in front. Her head had extended itself into a hard beak. She was breathing differently – or rather, she was not breathing at all until she felt the need and found herself surfacing in a slow forward roll that exposed her blow-hole-nose briefly and allowed her to expel her breath and take new air into her lungs. She observed herself minutely, saw that her dolphin body used the air it breathed much more efficiently than an ordinary human body. The dolphin body knew tricks her own human body had taken time and pain to learn. How to expel and renew much larger portions of air from the rest, the waste, and use it to fuel the body. Other things. (...) She reveled in strength and speed of her new body, and in its keen hearing. In her human shape, she kept her hearing abnormally keen – kept all her senses keen. But dolphin hearing was superior to anything she had ever created in herself. As a dolphin she could make sounds and they would come back to her as echoes bearing with them the story of all that lay before her. She had never imagined such hearing. (...) Her dolphin body was wonderfully agile. She seemed to fly through the air plunging back smoothly and leaping again without strain or weariness. This was the best body she ever shaped for herself. If only dolphin speech came as easy as dolphin movement.*<sup>135</sup>

In Octavia Butler's novel *Wild Seed*, Anyuanwu transforms into a dolphin during a transatlantic crossing in 1690. Anyuanwu possesses the ability to shape-shift and can take on the form of any living being whose flesh she has tasted. Shapeshifting as a Black feminist strategy of resistance and survival, holding within it the possibilities of self-determined pleasure and play. The ocean as a space of play and lived experience beyond capture and appropriation.

Octavia Butler mediates the Atlantic as a threshold space and the dolphin body as a carrier medium for Anyuanwu's immortal, shape – and body-shifting being. She describes the sensory transformations Anyuanwu experiences in her metamorphosis and the specific technologies and medialities inherent to the dolphin body and its oceanic environment. Echolocation and choreographies of desire and community open up modes of being beyond a terrestrial, anthropocentric perception and embodiment. In Butler's work, science fiction is a site of resistance and reclamation, a site of bridging. In transformation, (oceanic) bodies become tangible in their complex charge and in their function as surfaces of projection.

Anyuanwu glitches not only her physical constitution but also the space-time continuum she is bound to. By interrupting her relation of capture, her living in a gendered, racialized, human body, she stretches open a space of pleasure, play and liberation.

**A glitch as an error, a failure to conform, a failure in programming and continuum. A failure to be, yet one opening endless possibilities of expansion, through glitching categories and binaries, corrupting the structures themselves, tearing a rupture to the script of dominant normality.**

Legacy Russell introduces the glitch as enactment of failure, as refusal of binary codings and as embodiment of resistance.

*With physical movement often restricted, female-identifying people, queer people, Black people invent ways to create space through rupture. Here in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired crossroad of gender, race and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch.*<sup>136</sup>

**Inventing ways to create space through rupture, openings for**

## **reconfiguration and reorganization of mind-bodies in space time.**

Fred Moten reminds us how the break is an inherent space of emergence within Black Radical Tradition.

*(...) rather we might look at the temporal-spacial discontinuity as a generative break, one wherein action becomes possible, one in which it is our duty to linger in the name of ensemble and its performance. That break allows, indeed demands, a fundamental reorientation that we might call novelty, that always exists at the heart of tragedy and elegy, which (...) is there as that poetry would enact-through the opposition of description and explanation-the free music and politics, the free mode of organization it moves within and points to and whose logical structures it shares.*<sup>137</sup>

Picking up Moten's notion of the break, Legacy Russell connects the threads:

*In Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's 2013 text "The Undercommons," Moten argues: "The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new." Glitch feminism asks: "Can a break be a form of building something new? Can our breaking shit be a correction too?"*<sup>138</sup>

In resonance with notions of break and rupture, Christina Sharpe traces where and how aesthetic and material fissures and ruptures can be located within everyday archives of immanent and imminent Black death. Sharpe offers the wake, as not only the traces of a ship in the vastness of oceanity, but expands it as a condition of Black reality after the Middle Passage, a practice between mourning and tracing, questioning what emerges through engaging in the wake of rupture.<sup>139</sup>

*In short, I mean wake work to be a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and unimaginable lives. With this analytic we might imagine otherwise from what we know now in the wake of slavery.*<sup>140</sup>

She enacts wake work as a methodology that gathers and attends to the phenomena that disproportionately and destructively affect Black life. Black annotation, aspiration and redaction are the wake work she calls for.

Situating the glitch performed by Anyuanwu and, with it, the possibility of an embodied otherwise, Octavia Butler inscribes embodied and transcendent knowledge into the Black Atlantic.<sup>141</sup> By doing so, she enacts wake work, described by Christina Sharpe as the practice of dissolution of linear temporality in the confrontation with the precarity of Black mortality and the violence enacted upon the Black body.<sup>142</sup>

Historically tracing the virality and circulation, as well as mediation of Blackness, Legacy Russell too refers to the Black Atlantic and argues that looking at before 1900 one could understand the first Black memes to be those transmitted via the Middle Passage.<sup>143</sup> Russell breaks the transfer of the Black meme as material down to the movement and circulation of Black data carried by Black people, first in the form of Black physical bodies. She points out how the Middle Passage marks a rupture in Black speech, gesture, movement and embodiment that was further violently co-opted by American capitalism. The Black meme is thus not only a time-bound digital phenomenon but an ongoing glitch in the system of racial capitalism, a carrier of excess that circulates beyond control, data that refuses to stay contained. Questions of virality and circulation of Blackness as explored in *Black Meme*, thread into the abyss of representation and capture as well as the circulations of Black social Death as a spectacle.

I wonder: how does a "curatorial" of refusing spectacle take shape?

In *Scenes of Subjection*<sup>144</sup> Saidiya Hartman traces the spectacularization of Black suffering;

hypervisibility as the very condition of invisibility, the spectacular display of Black pain as what forecloses rather than enables repair.

*spectacle is not repair.*<sup>145</sup>

As Christina Sharpe reminds us.

Spectacle does not bear witness—it consumes.

In *Eating the Other* bell hooks refers to the dominant desire, hunger for the other and the commodification of difference as spectacle.

*The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.*<sup>146</sup>

**The consumability of spice, the devouring of the other, looking in order to ingest, witnessing without “response-ability”**<sup>147</sup>.

What, then, is the relation of witnessing and spectatorship?

bell hooks traces the relations of and to looking in conversation with Black Female spectators, interrogating what she calls the oppositional gaze.<sup>148</sup> She attends to the specific relation of looking and looking back: the clandestinity and forbiddenness of looking, the act of looking through dis-identification, the power of looking, the not looking too deeply.<sup>149</sup>

The oppositional gaze operates as the refusal of the position the spectacle assigns. Not simply looking, but looking back: claiming a right to look that has been historically denied, and enacting through that claim a rupture in the smooth surface of dominant cinema’s assumed universal spectatorship. hooks traces how Black women spectators developed this gaze not despite but through the violence of representation, out of

the necessity of surviving images that negated their existence. The oppositional gaze as a form of the glitch; as a rupture in continuity.

**Looking against the grain.**

**Relating to the excess that spills beyond the capture of framing.**

A practice that embodies the glitch, the blur and the power and agency in looking, I find in the neurodiverse practice of visual stimming that entails the practice of manipulating one’s own view in order to self-soothe or cope with overwhelm. By deliberately glitching perspective, blurring and directing, one takes agency of one’s own field of vision. Moving eyelids like shutters, bringing to present the bodily function and possibility of one’s own power in editing and manipulating what is in front of the lens.

Zackary Kiebach juxtaposes glitch/poetry and the crip subject as disruptions and interferences within a legible norm.

*Poems, like both disabilities and glitches, are quite commonly staunchly inconvenient. The page is not immediately comprehensible, but a site of difficulty and struggle. Contrary to the cultural mythos around the amputee or visually impaired climber summiting Everest and “overcoming” their disability, our focus with a page of poetry should not be on overcoming interpretive difficulty or demonstrating a false mastery over a poem’s lexical meaning. Rather, a crip reading of a poem demands sitting with its difficulty, allowing it to open new avenues of meaning and interpretation on its own terms.*<sup>150</sup>

Tracing the violent history of disability’s epistemological and linguistic construction through notions of error and variance, Kiebach dismantles the eugenic framing of disability as deviation.

*The “tiny variance” of the glitch belies the more insidious language that largely led to the creation of disability*

*as a social category. The construction of disability is inextricably tied to the invention of statistics in the nineteenth century, as the use of mathematical theories of “variance” and deviation from a supposed “norm” by Adolphe Quetelet and Francis Galton similarly underlined theories of eugenics.*<sup>151</sup>

Offering a crip poetics of glitch, they assess the potential of disruption and opacity, within normative algorithms and societal textures.

*The crip poetics of the glitch becomes evident as the phantasmic glitching of our neurological systems requires a staunch refusal of conventional approaches to line or meter, the defacement of page or screen a necessary analog to the disabled body or mind. Crip poetics demands an acceptance of bodily, neurological, and textual opacity. It revels in the fractured line of text and insubordinate digital interface. The reading of bodies and minds is not dissimilar to the reading of texts. We regularly demand legibility, attempt to sort both into discrete categories: poetry or prose, disabled or not. Crip poetics is hybrid, non-lexical, and resolutely fugitive. It is, in other words, a simultaneous textual and embodied glitch.*<sup>152</sup>

A textual and embodied glitch allowing for relation in tremblement and opacity, for engaging otherwise, refusing the imposition of spectacle claiming control.

Glitch, that refuses to give in to an economy of attention and a hypervisual, occularcentric reality that ever aims to control and monitor visual engagement and gaze, an economy that produces, centers and reinforces an able-bodied occularcentric somatic norm.

As museums start to eye-track the movements of visitors to analyse what they engage with, a reduced idea of engagement emerges, one that suspends the vast realm of sensory relations and the endless possibilities and choreographies of navigating (exhibition) spaces.

I often think that moments of looking or moving elsewhere or

away, moments where our bodies adjust by fidgeting, by stimming, by taking agency, are those we should most care for, as they hold the friction of access, movements of attunement, of trembling.

So what then are the configurations of engagement and spectatorship we aim for, how do we glitch the conventions of (inter)action and display, of movement in or through space, of cinematic configurations beyond a fixed and exclusive relation between screen and audience?

Reconfigurations of refusal can be found on screen when thinking of subject/object relations and assignments being ruptured and glitched within cinematic discourses of restitution and repair, as in Mati Diop’s *Dahomey* (2023), drawing a thread to Nii Kwate Owoo’s *You Hide Me* (1970), to Sarah Maldorors’ adaption of Aimé Césaire’s play *Et les chiens se taisaient* (1978) as well as to Chris Marker and Alain Resnais’ *Statues also Die* (1953), which Isaac Julien picks up on in one of his latest works *Once Again... (Statues Never Die)* (2025). A web of works challenging the objecthood of deities and suspending the technicalities of capture. Diop introduces a superconscious entity speaking and observing from the void, ridiculing and dismantling performative practices of maintenance and care. In doing so, she translates the idea of repair into discourse, into friction, into assembly and the agency of uncontrolled colliding speech acts.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung draws an analogy of choking on greed when poignantly unravelling the practice of ethnological museums, their practice of capture and blackmail as well as their performative approach to restitution. Drawing on the activism of Berlin Postcolonial, the seminal paper by Bénédicte Savoy and Felwin Sarr and the mounting discursive and political pressure

at that specific moment in time he writes from,<sup>153</sup> he points out the misconceptions of objecthood and denials of subjecthood in such institutions, and how they mirror the genocidal and dehumanizing colonial practices of their origin.<sup>154</sup>

*Yet what many Western museums and institutions wrongly and forcefully harbouring many so-called ‘objects’ from the non-West do not understand, or have not fully recognised, is that most of the so-called ‘objects’ have never been and will never be objects. The objectification of these ritual and spiritual beings, historical carriers, cultural entities, orientations and essences is in line with the dehumanisation and objectification of humans from the non-West. If the skeletons have been delivered from objecthood, it is about time that the so-called objects also be freed from the bondages of objecthood, in which they have been detained ever since they were taken away from their societies as captives, as were humans as slaves. Understanding these so-called objects as subjects necessitates a radical shift from Western understandings of subjecthood, personhood and community, as well as a drastic shift from a Western understanding of art, authorship and society, and subsequently a profound reconfiguration of what it means to be human.*<sup>155</sup>

What it means to be human, a question ever echoing throughout Black Studies, particularly through Sylvia Wynter. Her seminal address, “No Humans Involved,” stresses how the dehumanization of Black life in the wake as an ongoing continuum and a corporeality results in Black physical and social Death.<sup>156</sup>

Wynter exposes how the “western” apparatus of knowledge restricts the category of the “human” to a specific, exclusionary genre of being: “Man,”<sup>157</sup> which requires the systematic casting of Blackness as the ultimate baseline of non-being and disorder. This conceptual erasure manifests not merely as abstract prejudice, but as a material, state-sanctioned protocol

where Black subjects become structural anomalies, marked for premature death to secure the boundaries of predominant “western” conceptions of humanity. An erasure operated through the very institutions equipped with the executive power of defining, archiving, and curating life.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung applies the image of choking on greed to the discomfort of the institution as it is entered in the discourse: its moral obligation, its good intentions, its skillful maintenance—a maintenance practice that evokes deadly protocols of hygiene, eliminating living organisms and ecosystems, materialities and breathing mechanisms in service of capture and accumulation masked as a performance of preservation and care.

In “Das Unbehagen im Museum,” translating to the “discomfort in the museum”, an anthology that gathers critical voices on postcolonial discourse in museology and exhibition practice, scholar, curator and memory worker Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, one of the co-founders of Pamoja-Movement of the Young African Diaspora in Austria and the research group on Black Austrian History and Presence/Pamoja, dismantles the narrative dominance over subject-/objecthood in her essay »... *UM DIE LEICHE DES VERSTORBENEN M[F:]JEN SOLIMAN...*« *Strategien der Enttherzigung, Dekolonisation und Dekonstruktion österreichischer Neutralitäten.*

Johnston-Arthur’s first movement in the referred text-body is establishing her authorial narrative sovereignty as “embodied other” in a predominantly white environment and enacts Grada Kilomba’s notion of “writing as becoming” as a political act. She traces the inconsistent assignment of subject – and objecthood to Angelo Soliman, who in death, against the opposition and resistance of his daughter, was assigned, fixed and violently spectacularized in the Imperial Cabinet of Natural Curiosities of Emperor

54

55

Francis II. Throughout his life, Soliman, born as Mmadi Make, was enslaved, freed and in his death violated again, captured into the fantasy of an objectified other.

### **Evidence of the fragility of assigned subjecthood through white supremacy.**

By tracing the narrative assignments and perpetuating mechanisms, Johnston-Arthur collapses past/present and future into each other, opening up a break, performing a profound political act of writing.<sup>158</sup>

I come back to Fred Moten opening *In The Break* by stating:

*The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist.*<sup>159</sup>

Alexis Pauline Gumbs starts her preface by questioning “what is the scale of breathing?”

Stumbling movements of desire through readings happen to surface a circle moment when I find out that Anyanwu’s transformation was Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ point of departure for *Undrowned*. A body of writing departing from the glitch of survival, delving into the vast of the ocean, relating and learning from marine mammals, tackling capture and resistance, collectivity and play.

Three decades prior to the publication of *Undrowned*, the Detroit based electro-techno duo Drexixya<sup>160</sup> offered sonic realms of such survival, fabricating an entire cosmos of oceanic utopia. Matriarchal structures, a realm glitching the rupture of the Middle Passage. Sonic iterations of break, rupture, glitch—opening up a Black Atlantic, where breathing under water becomes the condition of survival of aliveness in sound.

**Soundings and echolocations into the break. Glitching binary codings and taxonomies, liquid expansions and embodiments. Transmissions of resistance. Shapeshifting towards the notion of otherwise.**

As Alexis Pauline Gumbs reminds us – breathing, ever undrowning.

*(...) and the planet, wrapped in ocean breathing, breathing into sky. What is the scale of breathing? You are part of it now. You are not alone.*

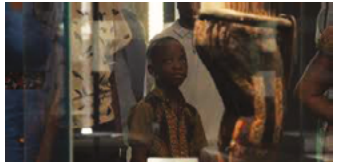
*And if the scale of breathing is collective, beyond species and sentience, so is the impact of drowning. The massive drowning yet unfinished where the distance of the ocean meant that people could become property, that life could be for sale. I am talking about the middle passage and everyone who drowned and everyone who continued breathing. But I am troubling the distinction between the two. I am saying that those who survived in the underbellies of boats, under each other under unbreathable circumstances are the undrowned, and their breathing is not separate from the drowning of their kin and fellow captives, their breathing is not separate from the breathing of the ocean, their breathing is not separate from the sharp exhale of hunted whales, their kindred also. Their breathing did not make them individual survivors. It made a context. The context of undrowning. Breathing in unbreathable circumstances is what we do every day in the chokehold of racial gendered ableist capitalism. We are still undrowning. And by we, I don’t only mean people like myself whose ancestors specifically survived the middle passage, because the scale of our breathing is planetary, at the very least.*

*Are you still breathing? This is an offering towards our evolution, towards the possibility that instead of continuing the trajectory of slavery, entrapment, separation, and domination and making our atmosphere unbreathable, we might instead practice another way to breathe. I don’t know what that will look like, but I do know that our marine mammal kindred are amazing at not drowning. So I call on them as teachers, mentors, guides. And I call on you as breathing kindred souls. May we evolve.*<sup>161</sup>

135. Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed* (Doubleday, 1980), 88–90.
136. *Ibid.*, 7.
137. Moten, *In The Break*, 99
138. Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 113.
139. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 15.
140. *Ibid.*, 18.
141. Russell, *Black Meme*, 13.
142. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 22.
143. Russell, *Black Meme*, 13.
144. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1997/2022), 54.
145. Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (Daunt Books, 2023), 36.
146. bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press, 1992), 21.
147. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 1.
148. hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze,” 115.
149. *Ibid.*
150. Zackary Kiebach, *Glitch Ability: A Crip Poetics of Failure* (2025). <https://post45.org/2025/01/glitch-ability/>.
151. *Ibid.*
152. *Ibid.*
153. Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, 2018).

154. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, *Die Gestorbenen sind niemals fort: Über die Aufrechterhaltung der Vorherrschaft, das Ethnologische Museum und die Verstrickungen des Humboldt Forums* (Archive Books, 2018), 7.
155. Ibid., 22–23.
156. Sylvia Wynter. “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no. 1 (1994).
157. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument” (CR: The New Centennial Review).
158. Araba Johnston-Arthur, “‘...UM DIE LEICHE DES VERSTORBENEN M[.]JEN SOLIMAN...’ Strategien der Entherzigung, Dekolonisation und Dekonstruktion österreichischer Neutralitäten.” In *Das Unbehagen im Museum* (2009).
159. Moten, *In the Break*, 1.
160. See: “Interpellation II.”
161. Gumbs, *Undrowned*, 1.

# Interpellation III



film still —  
*Dahomey* (2024)

Mati Diop

# DAHOMEY -

# MATI DIOP

CCTV

monitored storage. an archive, secured.

fluorescent light / ancient matter.

a neck, roped.

glass cases, locked.

sterile movements, clumsy handlings.

performances of professionalism and maintenance.

“objects”, managed.

(re)journeying beyond capture — an assembly.

multivocality / friction / emergence.

the aftertaste of sea.

junctions of shapeshifting.

containment / (re)capture.

the turned-into-object-subject speaks back.

an endless force of metamorphosis.

dreams replacing repair.

*As far back as I can go  
there has never been a night  
so deep and opaque.*

*Here, it is  
the only possible reality.  
The beginning  
and the end.*

*I journeyed so long  
in my mind  
but it was so dark  
in this foreign place  
that I lost myself  
in my dreams,  
becoming one  
with these walls.*

*Cut off  
from the land of my birth  
as if I were dead.*

*There are thousands of us  
in this night.*

*We all bear the same scars.  
Uprooted. Ripped out.*

*The spoils  
of massive plundering.*

*Today, it's me  
they have chosen  
like their finest  
and most legitimate victim!*

*They have named me 26.  
Not 24.*

*Not 25.*

*Not 30.*

*Just 26.*

*26.*

*Why didn't they call me  
by my real name?*

*Don't they know it?*

*“You can leave now!*

*“26, go back home!”*

*Return to*

*the surface of time...*

*leave behind my brothers,  
prone, ignored*

*deep in the unnamable.*

Go back home?  
What awaits me elsewhere?  
Leave  
the kingdom of the night  
to enter another.  
My head is still assailed  
by the rattle of chains.  
I have in my mouth  
an aftertaste of the ocean.  
In several languages,  
these memories  
whisper in my ear  
the full weight of a past  
of which I am  
the trance, the trace.  
I'm torn  
between the fear  
of not being recognized  
by anyone  
and not recognizing anything.

[Hum]

Is this the end  
of the journey?

[Crickets chirp]

Everything  
is so strange.  
Far removed from the country  
I saw in my dreams.  
My head is spinning.  
I give myself up  
to this tropical caress  
to the smell of childhood,  
[Leaves rustle]

/I did not  
expect to see daylight again.

[Drilling]

Where I am

is where I must be?  
I wonder...  
in the conviction  
that it will change nothing  
in the  
present-under-construction  
that is history.  
I feel attracted  
by something  
from ancient times,

...a sort of invitation.  
Perhaps a new beginning.

[Light switch click echoes]  
Night again.  
[Ocean murmurs; Crickets chirp]  
Atlantic,  
shores of the wound.  
May the light engulf you.  
I walk.

[Atmospheric chanting]  
I will  
no longer stop  
at each junction,  
where my humanity  
will be challenged.  
I'll no longer mull over  
my incarceration  
in the caverns  
of the civilized world.  
I won't ever stop.  
I never left.  
I am here.  
[Cricket chirp]  
I don't forget.  
There is nothing to repair.  
There are the dreams  
of the continent,  
the path calling us  
to the very end.

[Club music plays, over bar speakers]

I am the face  
of the metamorphosis.  
I see myself  
so clearly through you.  
26 does not exist.  
Within me resonates infinity.  
I walk.  
I won't ever stop.<sup>1</sup>

Dahomey – Mati Diop, 68 min,  
France/Senegal/Benin,  
2024, DCP, color. 2024.

Dahomey follows 26 royal treasures  
of the Kingdom of Dahomey as they  
leave Paris to return to their country  
of origin, the present-day Republic of  
Benin, in November 2021. Among  
thousands of artefacts plundered by  
French colonial troops in 1892, these  
26 are granted a voice — that of  
object 26, Ghezo, King of Dahomey,  
written and voiced by Haitian writer  
Makenzy Orcel. What attitude to  
adopt to these ancestors' homecoming  
in a country that had to forge ahead  
in their absence? The debate rages  
among students at the University of  
Abomey-Calavi.  
Mati Diop approaches cinema as a  
means of rupturing the colonial mo-  
nopoly on Black and Afro-diasporic  
histories, restoring lost images and  
challenging violent representations.<sup>2</sup>



1. Italicised passages are voice transcripts of Ghezo (26), written and voiced by Makenzy Orcel, from the work's subtitles.
2. Adapted from the work's synopsis and director's biography. «Dahomey,» Berlinale, [berlinale.de/en/2024/programme/202414781.html](https://berlinale.de/en/2024/programme/202414781.html); and Matene Toure, «Mati Diop's Reparative Cinema,» Africa Is a Country, January 29, 2025, [africasacountry.com/2025/01/mati-diops-reparative-cinema](https://africasacountry.com/2025/01/mati-diops-reparative-cinema).

**essay four—  
otherwise**

**Imagine  
otherwise.  
Remake  
the world.  
Some of us have  
never had any  
other choice. 162**

When I approach the otherwise, I hope it does not back away, frenzied, yelling, 'No, not yet. I am not ready for you.'<sup>163</sup>

I hold, like those before me, that experiments can and do fail. I am trying to make an argument for the otherwise. Not otherwise as in- >>>>>over here!!!!>>>>>come find me, or a small black dot that recedes as I approach. Not that thing that is obscured and needs to be unobscured. Not a smudge, or an absence, or an entity to be owned or conquered.

The future is no one's property; no need to shackle it. Not otherwise as in, the political horizon awaits; otherwise as in, a firm embrace of the unknowable; the unknowable as in, a well of infinity I want us to fall down together.

Otherwise: the future is now and all those political promises we make to one another, all the wishing and hoping in earnest (say it three times like a spell: wishing and hoping, wishing and hoping, wishing and hoping), all the leaps from the edges of bridges and mountaintops, all the reaching for and around, all the drug-taking and sex everywhere-we-should-not, all the serious study and strategy, theorising and making anew, all the breakages that slice historical space-time—all those movements that clear space and mark our struggle to live free, live better, love more, to knit abundance, all that is the work of another realm that is not-here. I am trying to make an argument for unbounded affective technologies that go beyond the body, beyond the rightsbearing citizen, that precede revolutionary violence, subtend misery, technologies that eject us anywhere but the drawn-out present.<sup>164</sup>

Lola Olufemi molds and invokes the otherwise in her *Experiments of Imagining*, refusing approximation, rather playing into fugitivity, linguistic stand ins, political urgencies, temporal suspensions. Picking up the thread from Christina Sharpe stressing the necessity of world making as survival, she offers a hybrid space of articulation, a realm of disobedient text moving in its own wayward<sup>165</sup> forms

and rhythms, evoking Glissant by practicing trace thought.

Glissant writes, "Trace thought enables us to move away from the strangulations of the system. It thus refutes the extremes of possession. It cracks open the absolute of time. It opens onto these diffracted times that human communities today are multiplying among themselves, through conflicts and miracles. It is the violent wandering of the shared thought."<sup>166</sup>

Cracking open the absolute of time, is something that Olufemi enacts in her writing, assembling fragments, between pamphlet and play, speculation and journal, poetry and prose. A web of spellings in situated language, a leap into the spelled well of infinity.

Now, the counterarguments. Against the idea that this is not 'real' politics, or that the material is stripped by every wish for the unknowable, I say... yes! I am trying to inflate the material. I am reaching for the creation of a general mood, for a stirring that awakens; I am trying to shake you so you wake up and wake up ready. You are going to have to give something up and it will not be easy. Some of us are not ready for narrative disruption. We will have to be pulled, kicking and screaming, from this world and its falsities. Here is my method: above all, feeling! I aim, through experiments in feeling, to reveal and destroy what it is that keeps us here, what it is that stops us from deciding to leave even as the cinders mix with our hair, the smoke corrupts our lungs, the flames engulf the people we love. Only when we know this can we activate the bond of the otherwise and turn back to meet it. Some call it the communist horizon (this implies some distance between us and the future), others call it prefiguration (the future in our actions), others 'the worlds we seek to build' (desire desire desire)—any name will do.<sup>167</sup>

Callings for the inflation of the material, for sensory and affective technologies exercised in poetic proposals, narrative disruptions and "sticky, sticky relation!"<sup>168</sup>

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Callings, departing from the affective realms of discomfort and desire, their relation, their tension, their friction towards the horizon of queer futurities, towards imagining, creating and producing otherwise. In her call for "(desire desire desire)," Olufemi evokes Sara Ahmed's "sticky affect" and Muñoz' "horizon," Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," as well as prefigurative practices of rehearsal and fugitivity suspending present hegemonic and epistemic limitations, echoing Eve Tuck.

It is a desire for the sensory, affective and material manifestation of an otherwise, political materiality, reality, driven by the urge of suspending misery and harm, a material reality of what could be.

A desire echoing this text's bodies' endeavor and craving, for the not-yet, for politics and practices of emergence and becoming.

*What could be is a linguistic stand-in for a set of political, social and cultural demands, strategic aims, revolutionary longings. As such, it resists singular definition: It is an unwieldy phenomenon and its currency is chaos. It is an unwieldy phenomenon and its currency is chaos.*<sup>169</sup>

Olufemi threads on the claim that the collective approach to artistic production is the only one worth protecting as she refers to the emergence within and around grassroots spaces and radical collective artistic relation, expanding on the notion of political organizing as creative space.

She herself is a writer, researcher and curator as well as part of bare minimum collective, an interdisciplinary anti-work arts collective. *bare minimum collective* practices art-making and political organizing in search for *other temporalities and unrestrained resistance*.<sup>170</sup>

*We're okay with not knowing everything. Our collective tastes are basic*

*and obscure—we're not trying to be culture-makers, we think artistic ego and performative signalling of cultural capital is trite. Whilst art institutions are here, we believe in using them strategically. Put frankly, we want to steal money, funding and resources for our own purposes. Like Moten, we think that this is the only ethical relationship we can have to them. We have no desire to change anything from the inside; our relationship to institutions is purely selfish. This is only a short-term strategy, one we will abandon soon enough.*<sup>171</sup>

Practices sustained by relation that are at the core of my shared desire for what a curatorial *could be*. A desire for practicing assembling gathering—otherwise. A *could be*, as in a realm of possibility and imagination for what is not yet.

José Esteban Muñoz articulates a "not yet here," as queer futurities, as horizon.<sup>172</sup> A horizon that stays out of reach but through engagement becomes the source of prefiguration and survival. A utopian horizon of queerness emerging from desire, longing and relation, openings and ruptures in the everyday allowing for suspension of temporal and normative linearities the emergence of otherwise.

*To see queerness as horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold that I describe as straight time is interrupted or stepped out of. Ecstatic time is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future. Opening oneself up to such a perception of queerness as manifestation in and of ecstatic time offers queers much more than the meager offerings of pragmatic gay and lesbian politics. Seeing queerness as horizon rescues and emboldens concepts such as freedom that have been withered by the touch of neoliberal thought and gay assimilationist politics.*<sup>173</sup>

To rescue and embolden concepts such as freedom from incorporation, commodification and assimilation, echoes what Lola Olufemi articulates: “I’m trying to inflate the material.”<sup>174</sup>

Olufemi addresses the notion of the archive, the violence of a performed universality of history, the limitations of exclusive linearity of time-spaces. Muñoz centers queer ephemeral archives, the transitory, the fugitive, moments of performance and staging as realms that hold and open into queer fictions and futurities, as excess, as surplus that escapes capture.

For Saidiya Hartman, the gaps and ruptures, openings and ghosts in the archive are points of departure and urgency for what she posits as critical fabulation.

*The necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future.*<sup>175</sup>

*The task of writing the impossible, (not the fanciful or the utopian but “histories rendered unreal and fantastic”), has as its prerequisites the embrace of likely failure and the readiness to accept the ongoing, unfinished and provisional character of this effort, particularly when the arrangements of power occlude the very object that we desire to rescue.*<sup>176</sup>

Fabulation and imagination as methodologies of repair and futuring, enactments of trace thoughts, and testimony of survival.

Phoebe Boswell too reflects on the horizon out of reach and yet so urgent.<sup>177</sup> Drawing on the imagination of fishermen in search for an unknown place beyond the line of the horizon, she points out how hard and unrehearsed it actually is to imagine desired places beyond. She quotes Olufemi:

*the way we talk about this life and living, the language we use, builds a kind of structure that turns the horizon (that point where potentiality meets the substance of our reality), into a mirage.*<sup>178</sup>

### **That point where potentiality meets the substance of our reality.**

Boswell further enacts Zoé Samudzi asserting that –

*decolonisation is a horizon. decolonization has no end.*

Departing from the notion of decolonial horizon, Boswell recounts an episode she lived through during the COVID 19 pandemic, reflecting on the denial of access and care, on the necropolitics of the moment and the ongoing perpetuation of Black Death. In doing so, she evokes the breaking of the world in its continuity, the denial of breath, the callings of George Floyd for his mother and the visceral dimensions of collective grief.<sup>179</sup> Boswell details being invited to partake in an online artist-residency as part of a virtual museum prompted by the restrictions and inaccessibilities of physical cultural spaces during large parts of the pandemic. She writes of the excitement and the openings of engaging in a space of possibility not bound to the physical restrictions of the particular moment in space-time and then vividly describes her first engagement in the virtual matrix.

*I learn quickly how to navigate the controls and I turn to see what looks like a massive window, floor to ceiling, possibly sliding doors, outside of which is this idyllic patio of plants and flowers. In the distance I see what looks like a forest, and in front of it, a vast and glistening lake, so emerald-blue and fantastic I immediately want to move to it, to dive into it and float there. I move closer to the window, and as I do, the controls stop working, and the picturesque outside becomes merely pixels. I have gone too close, and they haven’t worked*

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*that part out yet, you cannot go outside. You can’t break the glass or gracefully glide through it and across the grass to reach the water. Fine.*<sup>180</sup>

She virtually moves through a massive building mirroring the imperial architecture of a museum. Beyond its window, landscape appears, horizon, that when trying to engage with, pixelates, glitches, refuses itself. She is bound to the architecture, limited by the space. The space is intimidating and not accessible in its imagination. It has stairs, no ramps, no elevators. She reflects on physical museum-visits with her sister who occasionally uses a wheelchair and on her assessments of access and its politics.

*And here we are, in the full freedom of virtuality, and this place fails at access. It is hard to mount the stairs.*<sup>181</sup>

*I trip. I stumble. I glitch. Eventually I get up to the top and immediately-another wall. Another preventative edge. How is it that we’re in a virtual space, and we keep bumping into actual non-actual actual walls? Why make a wall in virtual space? Why make the same architecture that we already know, an architecture that has come to represent spaces that simply do not welcome all of us? In the full freedom of the big big internet, why make a white cube?*<sup>182</sup>

Searching for her assigned space in the virtual museum complex, she glitches and stumbles towards an outside building named „annex“, less imperial, less elaborate. The annex turns out to be her assigned space of residency.

*Annex? What? In a building that does not exist, you’ve made for me an annex?*

*Annex. Noun. A building joined to or associated with a main building, providing additional space or accommodation.*

*Verb. Add as an extra or subordinate part.*

*Verb. Add (territory) to one’s own territory by appropriation.*

(Oxford Dictionary)

*Verb. To take control of a country, region etc., especially by force (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary)*

*An annex. In a building that does not exist. I continue.*<sup>183</sup>

Boswell revisits the virtual reproduction of physical politics of space and assigned belonging. The violence of the museum, the institution reenacted.

*That feeling of being shifted towards the outer edge of the institution, to the not-quite place, the diversity and inclusion tick-box place, the but-where-are-you-really-from place, the but-can-I-touch-your-hair place, the we’re-so-glad-you’re-here-with-us, please-make-us-relevant-but-you’ll-never-be-in-gallery-one-with-Manet-love-so-be-proud-of-this-place place-My immediate response is No. We’re in the middle of a global pandemic, tasked with reimagining everything.*

*Reimagining beyond capitalism, beyond the capital carceral state. Beyond walls and beyond borders. The people designing this virtual museum had all the freedom to make it anything.*

*Limitless freedom. They were not restricted by patronage, costs, histories, legacies, bricks, geography—and yet, they created a building, appointed a director, and proceeded to place artists within constructed walls associated with constructed hierarchies. Could the limits of the imagination not stretch a little bit further than the known architecture of the museum?*<sup>184</sup>

She contemplates on her option of engagement with this assigned virtual and imagined space, not-quite-place. She decides to burn it down.

*I wonder then, what next. What happens after the burning?*

*If we burn down the institution, what happens next? Do we trust ourselves to know?*

*I think about all the times we are called upon by institutions to right their wrongs, to perform metaphorical burnings of their inflictions against us, and how often we become implicated, serving the purpose of freeing them from their guilt through our own time, labor, thought, care and love for ourselves and one another, how that somehow gets perversely wrapped up in the performance, in alleviating the guilt and shame of those who never choose to fully see us. So I do not stop at the burning.*

*We continue. The annex will burn to the ground. A slow, meticulous, majestic, ritualistic, beautiful and brutal burning.*<sup>185</sup>

(...)

*Now, gaming technologies are cyclical, so coded narratives exist in loops. The museum will inevitably rebuild itself, then burn again, then rebuild, and burn, again and again, ad infinitum. But some things we can program to remain temporal.*

*Over time, explosion after explosion, the sediment that lands inside the lake will begin to take shape, to accumulate and grow. Over time, an island will begin to form, in the middle of this lake, outside the museum, and made of its ash.*

*A new place.*

*A place for us.*

*So then comes the question,*

*What is this place? What do we need it to be?*<sup>186</sup>

In the suspension of linear progression, in the loop as a condition for temporal residue, Boswell breaks the assigned assumptions and reproductions that virtually manifest and anchor colonial violences of world-making and instituting. She decides to break

shit down.<sup>187</sup> To move from the break, the suspension, the in-between, the virtual, the glitch.

**An island, an archipelago.**<sup>188</sup> **Space and Place-Making. Evolving from the residue, the sediment. Cycles and loops of collapse and reconstruction, collapse as repair.**

**What is this place? What do we need it to be?**

*Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.*<sup>189</sup>

Alison Kafer opens her chapter “Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips” by quoting Muñoz, introducing the relational dimension of disability and time, where temporal registers and taxonomies assigned to grasp and describe disability are reclaimed through “crip time,” understood as a reorientation to temporality itself.<sup>190</sup> She inquires how queer time and crip time intersect, overlay, blend into each other.

*How might our understandings of queer futurity shift when read through the experiences of disabled people, or when interpreted as part of a critique of compulsory able-bodiedness or able-mindedness? What does it do to queer time to place it alongside crip time, or queer futurity alongside crip futurity? Can we crip queer time?*<sup>191</sup>

Echoing this, Ellen Samuels further expands on the notion of crip time through a conjugation of the multiple overlaying dimensions of temporality and time related to disability.<sup>192</sup> Attending to the frictions of temporal assignments in medical registers and diagnosis, through assumed linearities and projected desires for cure and repair, Samuels and Kafer theorise and enact crip time as self-claimed and -structured temporal structures and pacing, through the emergent frictions of access and time.

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Sean Lee, artist, curator, and Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability in Toronto, builds on Kafer and Muñoz in shaping the crip-horizon and developing a curatorial practice situated within and oriented by reimagination towards a practice of access understood as portal into cultural transformation.<sup>193</sup>

*The Crip Horizon is not a distant utopia that lies beyond reach. It's a conceptual space—a shimmering elsewhere and elsewhere—where our access work becomes world-building. It's not one fixed destination, but a constellation of potential futures where disability is not just accommodated, but fundamental to how we organize, create, and dwell together.*

*The Crip Horizon asks: what if access isn't just about the here and now, but about imagining otherwise? What if our practices of access aren't just tools for compliance, but portals into cultural transformation? It's a space where access is cultural, not clinical. Where our communities don't just survive ableism—they reimagine what culture can be.*<sup>194</sup>

**A shimmering elsewhere and elsewhere – where our access work becomes world-building.**

Extending this curatorial attention to relational formations of access and reimagination in artistic research and practice, Ren Loren Britton looks into coalition constellations and bouquets, gathering and assembling moments where intersectionality manifests in mutual aid and joint struggle.

*This work is part of the larger research project, Coalition Storytelling\*, and is directed against forms of passivity and negativity in our present society and moves towards a 'we' that is multiple, complex, maintaining a multitude of goals, practices, collectives, and oppositions, while still making political change possible. This ongoing research collects stories of when things went well for and between oppressed groups—especially when*

*living conditions were previously dire—towards developing collaborative storytelling practices aiming to uplift and empower our collective coalitional political imaginaries.*<sup>195</sup>

**Coalitional Political Imaginaries.**

Britton's proposition operates as a constellation, a configuration of space and material, allowing for multiplicity and a multitude of simultaneous access points.

Relational practices of the otherwise: horizons of presentism and futurities beyond violent limitations and hegemony that plays struggles against each other. Breaking assigned narratives, they look into moments of opening and joint rupture.

The break, the cycle, the loop, the residue—point towards a horizon. A horizon of decoloniality, a horizon of queer futurity, a crip horizon, a horizon of the otherwise. How can this be a liberatory horizon of coalition, where futurities and imaginaries of otherwise glitch, bleed, blend into one another?

*Queerness's ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world.*<sup>196</sup>

**Horizontal Temporalities.**

Reflecting on temporalities and time as infrastructure, Marina Vishmidt attends to apertures, delays, and gaps as sites that allow for the detection of underlying power relations. Expanding on institutional critique, she theorizes infrastructural critique as a practice, concerned with the material conditions and compositions “of the institution's reproduction, both in and beyond the art field,”<sup>197</sup> whilst tracing the speculative potential immanent to appropriative and transversal practices across political situations.

*Time is an infrastructure because it is a condition of possibility for conscious*

*perception and action; infrastructure is made out of time insofar as infrastructure is that which repeats. The repetition is normalized into everyday routine, and when it stops functioning, an aperture is cut into its artifice—through which history and power relations can be seen.*<sup>198</sup>

This account of time as infrastructural repetition and rupture points towards the uneven production of temporal regimes, particularly in relation to the colonial cooptation of history and futurity.

Questions of how such regimes are produced through temporal infrastructures are taken up by Rasheeda Phillips and Camae Ayewa through their collaborative practice *Black Quantum Futurism*, which investigates the coloniality of time and develops alternative Black temporalities. Phillips extends this in her writing, expanding her inquiries into race, space, and time through quantum and archival frameworks.<sup>199</sup> She engages notions of the otherwise through Black Quantum Futurism's principles and artistic practice, which render Black life and urgency through quantum conceptual frameworks, opening up space for Black imaginaries and relations beyond capture and fixed or assigned positionalities.

Drawing on quantum perspectives, particularly the principle of quantum superposition—which describes how a particle can inhabit multiple states simultaneously, with determination occurring only through observation and the act of capture—Black Quantum Futurism engages multiplicity as a condition that has always shaped Black realities. Acknowledging how time and temporal regimes have been weaponized against Black and marginalized communities, Black Quantum Futurism reclaims and reconfigures Black space-time-matter. Their work resonates with Karen Barad's concept of "spacetime mattering," emphasizing the inseparability of space, time, and matter.

In this framework, superposition entails the simultaneity and overlay of temporal categories such as past, present, and future. By unsettling and collapsing these taxonomies, which, in relation to Black life, are deeply linked to death and erasure, Black Quantum Futurism reconfigures the temporal politics of culture, memory and futurity, situated and entangled within and beyond Afrofuturist expression and thought, and in dialogue with writers such as Kodwo Eshun and Octavia Butler. Central to this work are principles of temporal abundance, inclusive and expansive future visioning, and reparative temporal justice, understood as "a commitment to reshaping a future in which time is a liberatory resource, not a tool of oppression."<sup>200</sup>

Phillips writes on the quantum time capsule as a specific practice of counter-archiving and future-making. She notes that traces of Black life are largely absent from many preserved time capsules in the United States. Emerging from her experience in community housing advocacy, she describes how time capsules unearthed from such sites often contain unfulfilled promises and imagined futurities of stability that remain unrealized. These housing sites thus function as counter-archives. Time capsules buried there are frequently not assigned a date of opening; their burial operates less as a gesture towards future recovery than as a form of rooting, not intended to be ruptured.

Speculating on and materializing the concept of the quantum time capsule, Rasheeda Phillips and Black Quantum Futurism develop practices, that center the assembly of such capsules as sites of memory, reflection, and future-making.

Phillips is intrigued by time-travel as fictionalized by Octavia Butler in her 1979 novel *Kindred*, where temporal displacement is not grounded in technical or causal explanation but in its embodied

and relational effects. In Phillips' reading, Butler's configuration of the time travel narrative emphasizes how Black life is lived through entangled temporalities in which past and present are not separate but continuously implicated in one another.<sup>201</sup> This opens time travel as a framework for thinking racialized temporal experience beyond linear chronology, and for understanding how histories of violence, labor, and kinship persist in the present. *Kindred* thereby articulates how Black temporal experience disrupts the logics of linear progression that structure dominant historical and futurist imaginaries – disruption echoing Anyanwu's fugitive glitching of fixed continua in *Wild Seed*.<sup>202</sup>

What are the conditions, the ruptures, the breaks, the glitches—the (Black)space-time-matters of a curatorial otherwise, of instituting and relating, reading, writing, speaking, relating, feeling otherwise?

Realms and places holding space for failure and imperfection, suspending dominant narratives, and offering starting points other than how it has always been done, namely the perpetuation of dominance and violence.

Could resourcing such space-time-matters be a notion of repair?

A practice of gathering practices, expressions and principles working towards and along the otherwise, exploring the coalitions in struggle, labour and imaginary, inhabiting the not-yets, the glitches and the in-betweens, opens up bleeding horizons and futurities of liberation.

### **Quantum time capsules, sediment islands and archipelagos of practice towards a horizon of coalition.**

The spaces that the breaking, the rupture, the glitch allow to appear, need work, need configuration, need friction, need reassessment.

Yet as Lola Olufemi reminds us, the otherwise is not an abstraction but the labour of undoing injustice, the labour of world-making and liberation, a labour driven and informed by discomfort, by grief, by loss and chaos and always and ever – (*desire desire desire*).

*To imagine otherwise requires the possibility of feeling otherwise: (...)*<sup>203</sup>

162. Christina Sharpe, "Lose Your Kin," *The New Inquiry* (2016, November 16). <https://thenewinquiry.com/lose-your-kin/>
163. Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, 14.
164. *Ibid.*, 7.
165. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (Norton, 2019), xiv.
166. Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, 32.
167. *Ibid.*, 8.
168. *Ibid.*, 17.
169. *Ibid.*, 35.
170. *Ibid.*, 115.
171. Bare minimum collective, "The Bare Minimum Manifesto."
172. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009), 32
173. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 32.
174. Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, 8.
175. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 13.
176. *Ibid.*, 14.
177. Phoebe Boswell, "Manifesto of the As Yet Unlived Things," in: *Five Manifestos for a Beautiful World* (Penguin Random House, 2024), 69.
178. *Ibid.*, 7.
179. Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes*, 316.
180. Boswell, "Manifesto of the As Yet Unlived Things," 74.
181. *Ibid.*, 75.
182. *Ibid.*, 76.
183. *Ibid.*
184. *Ibid.*, 78.

185. Ibid., 81.
186. Ibid., 82.
187. Moten argues: “The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new.” Glitch feminism asks: “Can a break be a form of building something new? Can our breaking shit be a correction too?” Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 113; Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 6.
188. Glissant and Obrist, *The Archipelago Conversations*.
189. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 69.
190. Allison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 25.
191. Ibid., 27.
192. Ellen Samuels, “Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time”, *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i3.5824>.
193. Sean Lee, “Crip Horizons: Disability Art Futurism.” <https://akimbo.ca/akimblog/crip-horizons-disability-art-futurism-by-sean-lee/>.
194. Sean Lee, speaking about the crip horizon; <https://syncleadership.com/sync-leaders/sean-lee-2/>.
195. Ren Loren Britton, “Description - Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations” (2025). <https://www.lorenbritton.com/projects/coalition-constellation-constellating-reparations>.
196. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.
197. Marina Vishmidt, “Infrastructural Critique: Between Reproduction and Abolition,” *e-flux*, no. 155 (2025)
198. Marina Vishmidt, “Between Not Everything and Not Nothing: Cuts Toward Infrastructural Critique,” In *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (MIT Press, 2017), 265–277.

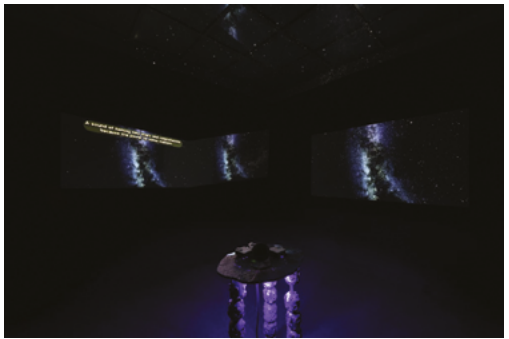
199. Rasheedah Phillips, *Dismantling the Master's Clock: On Race, Space and Time* (AK Press, 2025).
200. *Ibid.*, 14.
201. *Ibid.*, 5.
202. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 88–90.
203. Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America* (Duke University Press 2021), 106.

# Interpellation IV



installation view —  
Tactile star map to feel the stars from June–  
September in Innsbruck  
(swell paper print, 2025)  
*Coalition Constellation:*  
*Constellating Reparations (2025)*

Ren Loren Britton



installation view —  
*Coalition Constellation:*  
*Constellating Reparations (2025)*

Ren Loren Britton

# COALITION CONSTELLATION: CONSTELLATING REPARATIONS – REN LOREN BRITTON

Coalition Constellation

Three channel video with audio description, sound and closed captions (English), 26 min, 2025

Tactile star map to feel the stars from june – september in innsbruck, swell paper print, 2025

*a sound that reminds  
you of community.<sup>1</sup>*

crackling frictions  
access.

stargazing.

*catch each other towards  
a different world*

renaming constellations  
archiving possibilities.

organizing for shifting hardship, in  
resistance. resignifying reparation.

*a subtle resistance  
starts to play – it  
affirms, we don't want  
to be included in your  
burning house.*

*a sound sounding like  
the state paying so  
many reparations to  
the people it has harmed  
that it starts to dissolve.  
we are so well  
resourced that we set  
up paradigms of care:  
and thrive. Repara-  
tions make abolition.*

(im)proper beings in resistance.

*a sound that gives  
you a shiver of feeling  
like moving against  
fascism is possible.*

poetic projections

time travel,  
suspensions.

*a glimpse of  
a different world*

tactile mappings of multiplicity.  
imaginaries of sound and texture.

*music begins to play  
that feels like the 1908's  
in a queer-crip bar in  
Bremen, Germany.  
We have time travelled.  
You are flipping through  
the pages of the Krüppel-  
zeitung, smiling at your  
communities brilliance.  
You are wearing a  
tiny and fashionable  
hat and drinking your  
favourite pink drink.*

*a sound that reminds  
us that looking isn't the  
only way of sensing,  
that feeling—sound-  
ing—touching—vibrat-  
ing—stimming and  
waving are all other  
forms of knowing too.*

cracks and openings  
loops and fragmentations.

*Next to you is a hot  
butch who takes pride  
in their bowtie, a trans\*  
femme who adjusts  
her outfit and walks  
with a bedazeled cane,  
and a neurodivergent  
person who showed*

*a sound that feels  
like ways of knowing  
are to be pluralized  
always further*

*up a bit early is arriving to the scene.*

*The Krüppelzeitung you are looking at is Nr.2/1081 in it is a discussion about the intersection between the women's movement and the crip movement. Single issue politics are being refused ☹ in the mood if this evening, everything feels possible."*

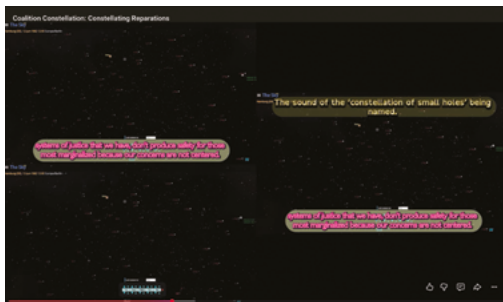
dreams and fabulations  
towards a horizon of coalition.

*the sound of a liberal  
fantasy crumbling*

*Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations is a multisensory installation following nonlinear stories about affirmative, collaborative practices of social justice. The stories consist of past and contemporary examples of collective self-empowerment that have led to success over time as a result of sustainable coalitions between Disabled people, trans-people, those affected by racism, and other oppressed groups.*

*Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations, was an installation, in a darkened space with two benches to sit and watch, hear, read and experience a three-part projection. There was a dreaming table, where three projectors rested and a star machine projecting the stars above this half of our globe. On the other side of the room was a small shelf with a tactile star map.*

*Ren Loren Britton is a trans-disciplinary artist-designer dancing with trans\*feminism, technosciences, radical pedagogy and disability justice. Trans\*ness in their practice considers what would be needed so that—pleasure for all—would be possible. They attend to hir – his – her – stories and presents of social and technical infrastructures making lives accessible and possible.*<sup>2</sup>



video still (browser capture by the author)  
*Coalition Constellation:  
Constellating Reparations (2025)*

Ren Loren Britton

1. Italicised passages are transcripts of the audio descriptions constitutive of the work. Ren Loren Britton departed from these descriptions in approaching the sound design, both of which are perceivable in the installation.
2. Adapted from the artist's description of the work. Ren Loren Britton, «Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations,» [lorenbritton.com/projects/coalition-constellation-constellating-reparations/](https://lorenbritton.com/projects/coalition-constellation-constellating-reparations/); and biography provided by the artist, personal communication, [May, 2026].



**epilogue**

**Discomfort involves this failure to fit. A restlessness and uneasiness, a fidgeting and twitching, is a bodily registering of an unexpected arrival.<sup>204</sup>**

**(...)**

*Think about this: when you don't sink, when you fidget and move around, then what is in the background becomes in front of you, as a world that is gathered in a specific way. Discomfort, in other words, allows things to move.*<sup>205</sup>

Restless and uneasy, fidgeting and twitching, this body of text emerges and moves, moves through mine as I stumble towards what gathers in front of me.

Grada Kilomba posits writing as a political act, as a technology of becoming a subject.

*While I write* is the title of the third act of her *Desire Project*<sup>206</sup> a sensory extension and amalgamation of a text-passage that first appeared in her essay *Becoming a Subject*<sup>207</sup> – moving images, plain text on screen, sounds of environment and rhythm that progressively surface and expand, creating space, amplifying, echoing relation.

*While I write, I become the narrator, the describer and the writer of my*

*own history. I become the absolute opposition of what the colonial project has predetermined. I am the author and the authority of my own reality. Writing allows me, in this sense, to reappear as the subject, instead of the object or the so-called objectified Other. It is this passage from objecthood to subjecthood, or (...), from the silent to the speaking subject, which marks writing as a political act – as a form of opposing against colonial positions and as a way of reinventing ourselves anew.*<sup>208</sup>

A passage, a transition, an opposition.

Associative, incomplete, open-ended in unexpected arrival, this text-body allows me to reflect, to become whilst I move, in disobedient attention. I hyper-focus, doubting, hurting, stumbling, hoping, desiring, ever restless, always fidgeting, still deeply convinced there is more to it.

In wayward lines, errant maneuvers and through vulnerable

reading, I relate and I fail. Acknowledging the impossibility of this world on fire, holding onto imperfect solidarities<sup>209</sup> whilst aiming for horizons of coalition and futurity.

I depart from discomfort, arriving, not at resolution but an assembly of openings and movements enacted through trouble, rupture and glitch, openings that allow for a sense of transformation towards an otherwise. What emerges across these four essays and interpellations does not claim to answer but to offer a constellation; a set of practices, relations and imaginaries that operate from within and against the institutional and hegemonic conditions and violences that produce discomfort and inform trouble.

Notions and horizons of the political labour and response-ability towards an otherwise.

Desires and urgencies for curato-

rial practices of the otherwise—assembling, gathering, programming towards the as-not-yet. Fugitive space for the excess the institutional cannot contain.

Towards the work of undoing and imagining.

Following gut feelings—wormholes, glitches and ruptures magically opened up to me. Time traveling, coding, re-coding, code switching.

I continue to stumble in wayward lines. Embracing failure. Listening into the void.

Collectively rehearsing. Acknowledging harm, wary of performance. Aware of my/our complicities and entanglements in oppressive architectures.

Assembling and gathering, noting, annotating. Assessing and ever reassessing.

Curious for this work of inquiry to further evolve, move and translate. Into space, onto

screen, into conversa-  
tion, into practice.

Archipelagos of prefigu-  
ration and string figures  
of relation. Islands of  
residue, island of rest  
and desire. In our own  
time. In our own times.

(desire, desire, desire)  
shared and amplified.

Bleeding horizons.  
Trembling grounds.

204. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 129.
205. Ibid., 132.
206. Grada Kilomba, *While I Write: Act III of The Desire Project* (film, 2016), 3 min.
207. Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche, and Susan Arndt, *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland* (Unrast Verlag, 2005), 30.
208. Ibid., 30.
209. Aruna D'Souza, *Imperfect Solidarities* (Floating Opera Press, 2024).



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The Otolith Group. *Hydra Decapita*. HD

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video, colour, sound, stereo, 31 min. 2010.

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essay two  
listening to ruptures

*Screenshot from Old Retro TV – Static (Black & White)*, Video by Alexey\_Nikiforov, Shutterstock (Clip ID: 1108809531)

*Sea cow (Hydrodamalis gigas, late relative), monochrome pen and ink illustration*, Artist: Mateusz Atroszko (03.11.2020)

*Cat's Cradle String Theory (2008)*, Baila Goldenthal, Reproduced in: Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)*Plus sign icon (transparent PNG)*, Source: PngFind.com

*Ear icons (composite image assembled from free transparent PNGs)*, Source: PNGFind.com

Interpellation I

Mai Ling kocht: Eating as Pleasure and Protest (2021), Mai Ling

video still (browser capture by me)—*Mai Ling kocht: Eating as Pleasure and Protest* (2021), Mai Ling

video still—*Mai Ling kocht: Eating as Pleasure and Protest* (2021), Mai Ling

video still—*Mai Ling kocht: Eating as*

*Pleasure and Protest* (2021), Mai Ling

## Interpellation II

Hydra Decapita (2010), The Otolith Group

video still—*Hydra Decapita* (2010), The Otolith Group

video still—*Hydra Decapita* (2010), The Otolith Group

video still—*Hydra Decapita* (2010), The Otolith Group

## Interpellation III

Dahomey (2024), Mati Diop

film still—*Dahomey* (2024), Mati Diop

film still—*Dahomey* (2024), Mati Diop

## Interpellation VI

installation view—Tactile star map to feel the stars from June–September in Innsbruck (swell paper print, 2025), *Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations* (2025), Ren Loren Britton

installation view—*Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations* (2025), Ren Loren Britton

video still (browser capture by the author)—*Coalition Constellation: Constellating Reparations* (2025), Ren Loren Britton

... this text-body was shaped in conversation with Lara Bellon, Zuzka Ernst, Rafal Morusiewicz and Anna-Lena Pante—thank you for soft guidance and profound editorial care.

In deepest gratitude,

to *uncoated* Anna Diagne and Ismahane Poussin—for the pleasure of a shared process, for translations and attentiveness in finding physical form.

to Sushila Mesquita—for doulaing me through wayward movements across an oftentimes violent and lonely terrain, for acknowledging and attuning to my glitchy mind.

to Jyoti Mistri—for telling me what I needed to hear.

to Ivana Pilić for limitless imagination of structure, for backing me.

to CineCollective and D-Arts —for a base of resonance.

to the students of *trouble.rupture.glitch* in SoSe 2024 and workshop participants of *curatorial discomforts* in October 2024.

to Anna-Lena Panter, Thomas Trabitsch and Lina Brion—for a multiplicity of threads and friendship over seasons, for episodes of *unexpected openings, debriefs, curators tours* and *protocollings of the future*.

to /ecm,—a container for detours and clarifications.  
to Nora Sternfeld, Renate Höllwart & Beatrice Jaschke.

to Anna's Archive.

to the collective field.

to Jey Baholzer, to Themba Bhebe, to Ren Loren Britton, to Borjana Gaković, to Karina Griffith, to Marie-Christine Hartig, to Tonica Hunter, to Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, to Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski, to Zhameli Khairli, to Marissa Lôbo, to Sunanda Mesquita, to Nelly Ya Pinkrah, to Andrea Popelka, to Nastaran Tajeri-Foumani, to Sarnt Utamachote  
for echoing practices and paedagogies of otherwise.

to dear companions in stumbling together.

to (odd)kin for bonds, air and space.

to lilkra—for having me, <3.

to Marijana Grandits, za svit.

to As Sy—for relation beyond rupture.

to those before—living in futurities.

