

DRAFT
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Issue 4

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The *MODA Critical Review* is dedicated to exploring and presenting artistic research, forms of criticism, and creative work beyond the academic format. Edited by students in the MA in Modern Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies (MODA) at Columbia University, each annual issue is organized around a keyword that serves as an origin for a diverse body of contributions.

The key word for Issue 4 is *Draft*, a proliferative term that has inspired a wide-ranging collection of work. Anyone engaged in creation with any medium appreciates the crucial nature of draft as preparative, in-process, palimpsestic. Yet the term's myriad other associations—that of wind, force, leakage, sip, shelter, conscription—hint at its richness. This nuanced and generative term is this issue's through line.

This year's contributions take full advantage of the textured term. Artists **Meghan Elyse Lueck's** *Cella* and **Nick Farhi's** *If on an autumn night a deliverance* approach the artistic process methodically and poetically, offering highly personal and intimate revelations on what it means to create on what it means to create. Similarly, **Aidan Chisholm's** photo-essay *Notes*, which assembles screenshots of artists' "Notes App," figures the iPhone as a site of creativity.

Approaching process as a liminal space, **Jonathan Harris's** *umbilicus* explores the draft as a productive scaffolding for abstract thought. Likewise, **A.M. Devito's** *Consenting the Voice*, provides a model for ethical collaboration in artmaking through a continuous drafting process. **Theodora Bocanegra Lang's** *Falling into Pieces* sheds light on ceramicist Kathy Butterly's dynamic and layered process.

Thinking of drafts in architecture, **Omar AlAttas's** *The Jeddah Tower* examines this major infrastructure project's "unfinished" state as a crisis of capitalist modernity. Interrogating on the other hand, the impossibility of "perfect" or "finished" work, **Farren Fei Yuan's** *The Inefficacy of Drafting* links a historical building in Japan to an escape plan from Beirut, lamenting failed attempts and unfulfilled projects. **Darcy Olmstead's** *(Non)Publishing* examines a similar problem, proposing that an unseen draft can be a means of grounding in the hyperspeed of our digital present.

Approaching draft from the perspective of forced migration, the collaborative photo-essay *Paths of Desperate Hope* by photojournalist **Federico Ríos** and **Carlota Ortiz Monasterio** chronicles the journeys of Venezuelan migrants crossing the Darien Gap. In the same vein, **Victoria Horrocks's** *Actively Being with Us: a Conversa-*

Editors' Letter

tion with *Guillermo Galindo* examines how a human migratory presence is evoked by the leakage of one substance into another. **Liz Peterson's** *Deep Drafts* reflects on her performance enacting the sound of an iceberg to consider early colonial migration across the North Atlantic passageways.

Rounding out the issue with personal reflections, **Christine Chen's** *A Contemplation with Tehching Hsieh* and **Phoenix Guquing Wang's** poem "*About the Mountain*," the title of which echoes John D'Agata's namesake piece, offer responses to the ways in which the term draft can shape our ways of thinking and our perspectives on our quotidian experiences.

We are deeply grateful to the contributors and readers of this year's issue. We would like to extend special thanks to MODA Director Dr. Janet Kraynak and Financial Coordinators Faith Batidzirai and Sonia Sorrentini for their support of the *MODA Critical Review*. We would also like to thank our graphic designer, Jinu Hong, for collaborating with us to put this year's publication together. Lastly, thank you to Columbia University Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Council for their generous grant, which supported the publication of *Draft*.

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Victoria is a writer, curator, and art historian based in New York City. Her research includes modern and contemporary American art history, the intersection of art and literature, and the construction of historical and personal narrative. She is a graduating MODA student and previously received an MSt in History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of Oxford and a BA in English from Cornell University.

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Darcy is an art historian, critic and curator from Arkansas based in New York City. Her work often focuses on themes of digitization, surveillance capitalism, and outmoded media. She is a graduating MODA student and is preparing a thesis that explores three contemporary artists' publications that engage with issues of digital time. She received her BA in Art History from Washington & Lee University.

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Christine is a rising second-year MODA student from Sydney, Australia. She is interested in the impacts of colonial infrastructures on the art practice and identities of minority communities, diasporic art and theories of the archive. She has previously worked in licensing for Australian Aboriginal art and developed campaigns promoting the copyrights of Aboriginal artists. She earned a combined Bachelors of Laws and Bachelors of Arts, majoring in history and development studies from the University of New South Wales.

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Editors' Bios

Bob Chow (Zihan Zhou), Editor

Bob is a rising second-year MODA student. He earned his BA (Summa Cum Laude) from the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in Art History (with Honor) and Economics, minoring in Cinema and Media Studies. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and once received Dick Wolf Cinema & Media Studies Awards for Best Undergraduate Essay. He has held positions at Sidley Austin LLP, Prime Capital Management Shanghai, and Shanghai Museum. He is also a cinephile, a freelance film critic, and an independent film producer.

Omar AlAttas is a New-York based researcher and M.A. candidate in the Museum Anthropology program. His research focuses on constructions of national identity in museology.

A.M. DeVito is an internationally recognized artist, writer, composer, musician, and sound designer originally from Toronto, Canada and currently based in New York City. Their work explores the non-hierarchical, multidimensional possibilities of collaboration, with an emphasis on transdisciplinary installation art, movement and space, the speaking voice and oral history. DeVito is an MFA candidate in the Sound Art program and is currently exhibiting their sound sculpture, *Intimate Listening Space for the Hyperreal #1: Dendrophilia* at the Wallach Gallery.

Meaghan Elyse Lueck is an artist working at the intersection of design, biomaterial sculpture and performance. Her work explores the precarious and porous dynamic between our bodies, other beings, and our wider ecological surroundings. Along with collaborators, she is interested in creating spaces for interaction, for rest, for dreaming, for mourning, for healing.

Nicholas Farhi is a New-York based painter, poet, and a second year M.F.A. candidate in visual arts. Nick often makes still life paintings in unusual scales as commentary on societies that are in contemporary states of cultural reexamination.

Farren Fei Yuan is a writer, curator, and rising second-year MODA student. Her research interest lies at the intersection between photography and other media in relation to notions of time and memories. She graduated from The University of Oxford where she earned a First Class Honors BA in History of Art.

Jonathan Harris is a New York-based artist whouses objects, sound, and space as tools to explore cognitive and perceptual phenomena. This work typically involves the creation of environments that investigate sound's physical and spatial characteristics, often taking the form of site-responsive installations whose sonic elements push against traditional temporal constructs and exist as sculptural or architectural materials themselves.

Contributors' Bios

Theodora Bocanegra Lang is a writer from New York and a second year MA student in the MODA program. She received her BA in Art History from Oberlin College. She most recently worked at Dia Art Foundation on exhibitions with Maren Hassinger, Joan Jonas, and Jo Baer, among others. Previously, she worked at Gavin Brown's enterprise and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Liz Peterson is a director and producer of theatre and immersive performance. She is a graduating M.F.A. candidate in the Theatre Directing program. Her practice frequently explores staging science fiction and eliciting different states of attention in the audience.

Federico Ríos is a Colombian documentary photographer focusing on social issues in Latin America. He has over 10 years of experience as a photojournalist and his work is regularly featured in The New York Times and other media outlets. His photographs have been exhibited in museums, galleries and festivals in several countries around the world and have been recognized with the Jury Prize at Days Japan International Photojournalism Award (2017), the Portfolio Review New York Times (2017), and the Eddie Adams Workshop XXVII in New York (2014). His published photography books include *Verde* (2021), *Fiestas de San Pacho*, *Quibdo* (2013), and *The Path of the Condor* (2012).

Phoenix Guqing Wang is an MA student in English and Comparative Literature. Her research lies at the intersections of the long 19th-century American and transatlantic literature, environmental humanities, and Gothic studies. In creative writing, she is especially interested in exploring how forms of the Gothic—ghostliness, monstrosity, and other supernatural traits—navigate transcorporeal experiences and speak to the ecological world in the unsettling Anthropocene.

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Cella

Meaghan Elyse Lueck



Cella's Anatomy: Open + Closed
Rendering by George Milev

Porosity, in short, represents an essential feature of life— but also an essential vulnerability of living. A perfectly sealed cell is a perfectly dead cell. But unsealing the membrane through portals exposes the cell to potential harm.

— Siddhartha Mukherjee, *Song of the Cell*

In the early 1600s, English scientist and polymath Robert Hooke was one of the first to look through microscopes at objects. He discovered and illustrated minute bodies of animals and plants at a magnification never before seen by the human eye. The eye of a fly appeared to him as a lattice; a piece of cork appeared as “many little boxes”¹ - pores in collective, repetitive units.

Inspired by honeycombs or the living quarters of a monk, he coined the term *cell* - from the word *cella*, a Latin word meaning *small room*. The word

¹ Hooke, *Micrographia*, 1665

can also mean the inner chamber of a temple.

Cella is a beautiful and haunting form who has



Spider, Yurt, Greenhouse



hovered over me for some months now. She is (1) dome-like in shape, (2) made up of many smaller scales, cells or petals (whichever you prefer to call them), and (3) sentient and shifting to the world around her.

After making many drawings, the sculpture has not yet been fully realized. What is the song of this collection of cells, this *cella*? What has she come to tell me? This piece – the artwork and my writing here – is a draft. It is ongoing

and shifting, it is full of questions. For now, though, these are things I know to be true of her anatomy:

(1) She has a sheltering shape. The dome form is old, recalling yurts: portable circular dwellings used in Asia for over 3000 years. The curved armature is like some combination of the evenly spaced decorative geometries of a greenhouse, combined with the awkward protective legs of the spider sculptures by Louise Bourgeois. Both provide protection for growth within, but bring up questions of care and constriction, freedom and control.

(2) She is made up of smaller parts. As with vege-

tal structures, such as female pinecones, folded scales or bracts are positioned in relation to one another without gaps to receive the most sunlight. The hard-shelled woody



Interlocking Greek Phalanx

case of a female pinecone serves also to protect its seeds. Like an armor – an interlocking phalanx of shields forming a wall through which a mass of spears points to the enemy - there is protection in numbers. The whole works together to form a secure, protective unit over the structure.² What kind of positive or negative domination can be achieved through this tactic of collective defense?

To view her gestalt is aesthetically satisfying: a whole composed of an abundance of smaller parts. As designer Ingrid Fetell Lee articulates, there is joy and satisfaction to be found in witnessing a collection of multitudes; for example, when we look upon a tree full of fruits, something primal in us is satiated by simply knowing that we will have enough food to last. We can exist in an abundance mindset.³

(3) She is concerned with maintaining and dissolving herself at once. She navigates a porousness with a wider collective of beings, organic or man-made materials. When she is closed she is herself

2 “Phalanx Warfare: The Face of Hoplite Battle,” thegreekphalanx.org/phalanx-warfare.

3 Lee, Ingrid Fetell. Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness



Female pinecone closed & open

when she is open she is everything.

Her opening and closing mirrors the seed-bearing pinecone's ability to respond to changes in humidity: "scales gape open when it is dry, releasing the cone's seeds... when it is damp the scales close up".⁴ She is fertile, a being in tune with her natural cycles. She ebbs and flows with the changes in her environment, allowing her seeds to have the best chance at survival.

The petals behave as a system of small windows, which I believe speaks to a human love of apertures in our homes: "the opening provided by the windows, which is turned not only towards the 'outside' but also towards the 'outside' 'inside' ourselves, is an existential entity that we can't live without."⁵

I am curious about the porosity provided by these windows. I wonder - when do we need to be open? When do we need to be closed? As Siddhartha Mukherjee eloquently illustrates for the cell, the most basic unit of life, openness is essential but also makes us vulnerable. We cannot remain closed off or we will die, yet there is a danger in opening up.

Nevertheless the sensation and reaction of Cella seems to provide an intuitive protection for an internal baby or thing that it loves. The vent as

4 Nature, Pinecones

5 Karl Ove Knausgaard, Winter.

a form of love.










She seems to hold me from above: opening and closing her flaps as if breathing - deciding when it's safe to be open. Safe to be closed. She is a second skin, an outer nesting doll. She is a small room, a collection of cells, an extension of me.

What does it mean to hold?

To clench?

To exhale.

To let go.

<p>open  = danger outside. in closing up! (you should come inside)</p> <p>open  = you safe to come inside!</p> <p>open  = you should be outside! danger!</p> <p>open  = it is safe for me to be outside.</p>	<p>open  = danger outside!</p> <p>open  = you safe to come inside! (you should be outside)</p>
<p>open  = you should be outside! danger!</p> <p>open  = it is safe for me to be outside.</p>	<p>open  = danger outside! clenching up. don't come inside.</p>



Steel scales +
1/8 of her form

***(Non)Publishing: Katie Paterson's
Future Library in Digital & Deep Time***
Darcy L. Olmstead

I first learned about Katie Paterson's *Future Library* (2014-2114) online. I found the project's website, futurelibrary.no, while sitting in my apartment in New York City. A year later I would find myself on the outskirts of Oslo, Norway, hiking through a frozen forest to touch the library itself. The need to fight through a Scandinavian snowstorm to see a library felt odd, especially given the fact that the project is fully documented and free to access online. However, had I not researched the project physically, I would not be able to understand the true force of what Paterson was hoping to accomplish. I had no other choice but to hike.

Paterson's *Future Library* consists of a network of sites located in and outside Oslo; it encompasses a forest, a physical library room, a website, and unpublished manuscripts by internationally famous authors such as Margaret Atwood and Han Kang. The work began in 2014, when Paterson planted one thousand trees in the Nordmarka forest (fig. 1). The trees

are to be left to grow until 2114, when they will be harvested and transformed into various publications by different authors chosen annually by the Future Library Trust. Each text is to be held in a vault as manuscripts, remaining unpublished and unread until a century has passed (fig. 2). Then, in 2114, they will be bound and published for a global audience.



Fig. 1, Darcy Olmstead, *Future Library Forest*, 2023.



Fig. 2, Darcy Olmstead, *Future Library Silent Room with Manuscript Vault*, 2023.

Paterson's project brings an obvious ecological perspective to the artist's book as well as interesting assumptions about the future of print media. She assumes a deep time inherent in the printed form, something that relies upon the longevity of trees. The *Future Library* also depends

upon a website—an art object in and of itself designed to keep track of new developments and authors involved in the project. Paterson therefore simultaneously relies upon the future of both print and digital media, two futures that are notably precarious due to the looming climate disaster. The project is best read as a reflection on time and concepts of the outmoded in media. Most importantly, it provides an argument for empathic, slow mediation.

When I arrived in the *Future Library* forest in Oslo, all I could focus on was the stillness, how time sat frozen alongside Paterson's trees encased in snow. Technically, I was still in the bustling city of Oslo—I had taken a metro directly to the trail (fig. 3)—but the forest was completely silent. If I didn't move, all I could hear was my own breathing. Like the spruce needles frozen beneath my feet, I felt trapped in space. However, as I sat meditating, I began to notice the branches of trees shiver in a gentle breeze. I began to notice the fog in the mountains slowly shifting past me. The tallest trees were, in fact, swaying, ever so slightly. The forest was not entirely frozen, but alive and *breathing*. With my phone stored away, separating me from the anxieties of digital hyper-

speed, I slowly became enmeshed in the forest's unique time scale.



Fig. 3, Darcy Olmstead, *Future Library Trail Sign*, 2023.

The lifespan of the *Future Library* trees is predetermined—they will only live for 100 years. This is a short timespan from the perspective of a Norwegian spruce, which can live between 200 and 400 years. Yet from the perspective of the people following the *Future Library* project today, a hundred year lifespan is incomprehensible. Despite the near daily news about irreversible climate catastrophes, most people cannot comprehend a complete destruction of the natural world within their own lifetime. Our sense of time is limited. This limitation is the central problem probed throughout Paterson's

entire oeuvre: how can one transform deep time into something comprehensible within the lifespan of a being who can only hope to live up to 100 years?

In order to understand the time scale that Paterson is working within, one has to attempt to put themselves within the perspective of trees. These are beings that, like humans, contain calendars and histories that can be recorded for future generations. Trees embody time itself and, therefore, can be understood as media. According to media theorist John Durham Peters, up into the 19th century, the term “media” referred to natural elements such as water, earth, and air. In the natural sciences “media are vessels and environments, containers of possibility that anchor our existence and make what we are doing possible.”¹ It is therefore possible to draw a connection between the media of television, film, or the internet with that of trees. Peters emphasizes that “above all, media capture and fail to capture time, whose fleetingness is the most beautiful and difficult of all natural facts.”² A camera is able to capture time through a momentary, luminous snapshot. A book is able

¹ Peters, John Durham. *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*. Chicago; London: the University of Chicago Press, 2015, 11.

² Ibid.

to capture time within its text. A tree is able to capture time within its rings.

Norwegian philosopher, Arne Johan Vetlesen, argues that it is impossible to theorize about the environment and therefore life itself without living *within* it. He postulates that:

To make a difference in the real world... a shift must be made from theorizing nature to experiencing nature... It can't be a matter of either theory or experience, but of both. Environmental philosophy... needs to recognize...that the natural entities it addresses is at risk: harmed on a day to day basis, at accelerating speed. The longer nature is treated as a mere means to human centered ends, the more degraded it will become..³

Vetlesen thus argues that an abstraction of nature, rather than a lived experience of it, leads to its ultimate destruction. Even the environmentalists theorizing and abstracting issues of climate change are complicit. Therefore, I had to see the *Future Library* in person.

3 Arne Johan Vetlesen, *The Denial of Nature: Environmental Philosophy in the Era of Global Capitalism, Ontological Explorations*. Abingdon, Oxon [UK] ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

Before visiting Oslo, I was stuck with the problem of how one can read an artists' publication that will not be published in their own lifetime. The only answer was to follow Vetlesen, to enmesh myself into the environment and attempt to understand Paterson's project on a phenomenological level. As an artists' publication, Paterson's *Future Library* produces a strange form of "reading." In many ways, *Future Library* is a denial of reading. Even those members of the *Future Library* Trust responsible for selecting each year's author cannot read the final manuscript. Only the authors themselves know their own printed manuscripts sealed in the glass time capsules in the Deichman Bjørvika Library. Yet even they will not be able to read their own work in its final, published form. Reading is therefore not an essential part of the work.

Instead of reading in the traditional sense, *Future Library* promotes a more immediate form of mediation. The book delays the voice of the author via the written word, its publishing, and then its distribution. Paterson has further delayed this notoriously slow form of mediation by drawing out the publication process by 100 years. Yet through this delay, Paterson

promotes more direct experiences. Each year, rather than directly engaging with that year's texts, the *Future Library* hosts a handover ceremony, where the library trust leads a public walk through the *Future Library Forest* led by the author. At the center of the forest, the author gives a speech over their box holding the precious manuscript that is then passed over to Paterson, who will seal it behind glass in the Silent Room (fig. 2). After, everyone is asked to sit in silence for one minute. They do what I did alone on a random January morning—they become immersed in the time and space of the trees. Rather than reading, the *Future Library* forces people who consume incredibly quick forms of mediation daily to engage in direct human-to-human and human-to-environment connections.

The last ceremony in June 2022 was documented in video by Paterson so that anyone with access to the internet could also experience it.⁴ This is only one of many cases in which the Future Library utilizes the digital to promote its seemingly anti-digital project. Despite focusing on the oldest forms of media in the world, Paterson's

⁴ *Future Library Handover Day with Karl Ove Knausgård and Tsitsi Dangarembga, 2022, 2022.* <https://vimeo.com/748050819>.

project relies on new media — the project website and the digital files the books existed in prior to being converted into physical manuscripts.⁵ These drafts and Paterson’s website therefore exist in a strange time scale between the lifetime of trees and digital speed driven by obsolescence. Paterson is aware of such a phenomenon in new media, how the ways in which desperately grasping for the future has led aspects of outmoded media to fall apart. By focusing on the future through incremental updates of *Future Library*, Paterson sets the groundwork for the project, prolonging its lifespan after she is gone. She relies upon promoting the work through a website that consistently needs updating, as will the chairs of her *Future Library* board.

Yet unlike new media, the mediation in Paterson’s project is delayed. None of the books produced by the *Future Library* can spread quickly. Instead, the project today exists only as a means of mimicking the networked realities of new media while delaying the core texts the project revolves around mediating. Wolfgang Ernst speaks of “the idea of a feedback loop between an analogue past and a digital present”

5 Paul Benson, “On Unpublishing: Fugitive Materiality and the Future of the Anthropocene Book,” in *Publishing as Artistic Practice*, edited by Annette Gilbert, (S.I.: Sternberg Press, 2016).

in Media Archaeography:

“Digital retro-action” dramatically takes place, actually by digitizing analogue source material in the archives and bringing it into a technomathematical present thereby translating an analogous world into a digital matrix. The microtemporality in the operativity of data processing (synchronization) replaces the traditional macro time of the ‘historical’ archive—a literal quantization.’ Our relation not only to the past but to the present thus becomes truly archival.⁶

Yet what can we make of our future archives? Paterson’s project provides yet another reversal of this ‘digital retro-action’ by taking the digital (the PDF drafts of *Future Library* texts) and converting them into future books. Because they won’t be bound until 2114, they exist mid-feedback loop between the digital present and an analogue future. Thus, Paterson examines a reverse Media Archaeography, imagining a future in which digital and print media continue to sustain each other.

6 Wolfgang Ernst, “Media Archaeography: Method and Machine versus History and Narrative of Media,” in *Media Archaeology*, edited by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 251.

Paterson's project provides an interesting proposal for engaging with the speed of digital life. She promotes ecological awareness in a way that is sustainable, not easily lost in the swarm of digital and global existence. Her project renews itself every year. Yet the *Future Library* also withholds a form of dehistoricized immediacy associated with the digital condition. It is an archival project, deeply aware of its own history and precarious future. Each year, people are to be reminded of their past, their present, and, most of all, what this means for the future. The way the project forces people to engage with soil, trees, and each other promotes its own survival. A physical awareness of the environment and deep ecology encourages people to protect the forest. It is an optimistic project, for sure, but a strong reminder of the timescales that exist outside of ourselves and how their very existence is also being threatened.

A Reflection on The Inefficacy of Drafting

Farren Yuan

Draft, by definition, refers to its own incompleteness. A draft does not exist in and for itself, but only as a shadow of the ideal figure which it presupposes and anticipates. Finalization is its fate. A curious case is the draft that is never brought into fruition: that lone figure of a fallen seed, a lost letter, or a crumpled piece of paper containing abandoned dreams...

How can we recuperate these buried possibilities from history, if not regarding them as the final 'work' rather than 'drafts'? Both the Surrealists and New York School Poets have challenged this distinction between drafting and poetry *propre-dit*, with all its conventions and structures. And so in an exploration of the idea of the draft, I set out to write this piece without drafting – to freely associate, to meander, to drift in my memories across histories and geographies – hoping that I could make some discoveries along the journey...

[1891, Tokyo]

In January, an electrical fire burned down the Imperial Diet Building in Hibiya Parade Grounds, Tokyo. Just two months before, the building was completed to host the first session of the Diet, the parliament established by the Meiji emperor in 1881 in the hope to consolidate national unity and claim Japan as an equal modern power to its Western counterparts.

The building was unremarkable, with plain facades and gabled roofs. Intended as a temporary functional structure amidst an unresolved debate over an appropriate design that could stand for the identity of modern Japan. Two proposals had been made by a German architectural firm engaged by the Meiji government who sought to modernise the country's architecture by emulating Western architectural styles and practices. Due partly to financial constraints and partly to resistance against the foreign style, neither design was finalised.

The uncertainty towards the image of a modern Japanese nation reflects the tension between the Meiji modernisation program and the desire for independence from the West amidst government officials and cultural elites. In reaction to the dominant ideology of Western learning, movements to revive Japanese traditions developed which were, ironi-

cally, often led by Westerners residing in Japan promoting an idealised vision of authentic Japaneseness. In this vein, the American architect Ralph Adams Cram conceived a somewhat orientalist building based on traditional monumental style. Cram's proposal was welcomed by the Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi who lost power before further discussion could be made of the design.

The first temporary structure was rebuilt soon after the fire in 1891, whilst the government continued its work on a permanent solution. An official trip to Europe and the U.S. to study Western legislative building was made; a panel discussion on Japanese modern architecture was organised; two Treasury commissions on the Diet Building were formed; and two public competitions were held that called upon both Meiji-trained Japanese and non-Japanese architects. This protracted process, however, did not lead to a unanimous agreement. As if allegorising the fraught design process, another fire in 1925 again destroyed the second temporary structure.

The three winning entries from the second competition in 1918 were this time all created by Japanese architects who variously amalgamated features seen as Western, thus 'modern,' and traditionally Japanese. None, however, singularly offered an idea satisfactory enough to be built. The final permanent building that still stands in Tokyo today is instead the result of a compromise, taking elements from all three entries based on negotiations between members of the committee and representatives of the Diet. The building in what can be described as an austere, geometric style suppressed overt historicising features from either European or Japanese architecture. It is as if the neutral appearance could seal off the problem of Japanese modern identity articulated by the extended process of drafting and re-drafting. Crumpled as Godzilla ravages through Tokyo, or targeted by the student protests around the US-Japan policy after WWII, the building and the "National" Diet have never been fully accepted by the people. Overlaid by its history of construction, destruction, and planning, it stands rather for the contradictions of the Japanese government caught between the democratic propositions of the Diet on the one hand, and, on the other, its oligarchical structure, imperialist ambitions and repressive policies.

[1977, Beirut]

Leaving, or preparing to leave. That is the condition of exile in time of war. Planning becomes a futile, at best, salubrious activity. Borhane Alaouié,

arrived in 1968 Europe as a youthful Lebanese filmmaker. As a student at INSAS in Brussels, he witnessed the revolutionary fervour of the student and worker movements across the continents. That was one year after the Arab defeat to Israel at the end of the Six-Day War. Though involved in the heart of the European intellectual scene, Alaouié's concern was with the plight of his own country which, after the Palestinian war, was shifting towards the centre of the intensifying Arab-Israeli conflict.

As Alaouié's was finishing his studies in Brussels, the civil war at home was brewing. Lebanese were in variously ways displaced from their hometowns: those in the South moving towards Beirut and the North because of Israeli air raids, the well-off in Beirut escaping to Europe and the United States. Following Alaouié's camera, we see Haydar, a Shia man, has just arrived in Beirut. The city had been divided into two since 1977 as part of the temporal armistice at the end of the Two-Year war. Phoneline between the East and West part of the city has just been restored after the ceasefire, but still intermittent. Life was almost suspended; it was a time to breathe; but the air was thick with the fume and ashes still cladding the wreckage of city. On the other side of the city, Zeina was preparing to leave for the United States the next day. She has been separated from Heydar since the war. Though a brief phone call, they arranged to meet for the last time in a café they used to visit. In the city, everyone in Beirut is desperately on the road – to return, to reunite, to leave – yet these movements to and from all directions resulted in a standstill: traffic – a microcosm of the stymied city.

Haydar missed Zeina due to the traffic. Via a second phone call, they promised to make each other a cassette recording to be exchanged at the airport before Zeina's flight. On the day of her departure, Haydar arrives early and, this time, Zeina was delayed by the traffic. The recordings – individual rehearsals of intimate conversations, with interludes of soliloquys – never spoke and were never heard. Haydar leaves and lets his tape to be crushed under tyres. Through the recording process, however, the two confess their doubts, regrets, and distress in face of the violence and divisions in Lebanon, as if accounting for their missed encounter. Titled 'Beirut, the Encounter,' Alaouié's film never shows the two lovers in the same scene. The encounter refers less to Beirut as a meeting place than the confrontation with unexpected situations in which individual forces (plans, efforts, and desires) lose all power.

★

'L'avant-projet', one of the French words for "draft", encapsulates the temporality of drafting and the fissure (literally, the hyphen) between the draft and the final product. The architectural plans and the lovers' voice recordings, as both unrealised drafts, mark the confrontation between possibilities imagined and real coincidences and complexities. The process of drafting, while seeking to resolve these clashes, often ends up bringing them out and coming to hinder its self-realisation. What my journey tells me is an old wisdom that I have never taken to heart: that reality rarely goes as planned, and hopeful anticipation often leads to disappointment. Yet rather than rejecting planning as counter-productive, can we not invest in the beauty of aimless drafting?

***Being Actively with Us: A Conversation with
Guillermo Galindo***
Victoria Horrocks

It's February 8, 2023, 9am CST and 10am EST. My phone rings and the composer-artist Guillermo Galindo is on the other end. We've gotten the time zones confused and are beginning our call both late and early. I was eager to speak with Galindo about his sculpture *Fuente de Lágrimas*. The work is part of the project *Border Cantos*, a collaboration between Galindo and photographer Richard Misrach that includes Misrach's photographs of the two-thousand-mile Mexican-American border and pieces by the two artists that use artifacts of migration, such as backpacks, water bottles, clothing, and more, that Galindo engineers into sonic devices.

Fuente de Lágrimas, "fountain of tears" in English, is one of these sonic devices made from a water tank that had previously been placed in the desert for migrants in need. Supported by wooden planks and topped with a colorful flag to signal its location, the sculpture at first glance appears to be a replica of the real-life object. Standing next to the piece, however, the viewer can hear the sound of water dripping onto a metal sheet at the bottom of the wooden structure. It is loud in its softness: an assertion of presence by way of sound in the face of absence, both absence of

the migrant from the scene and the slow depletion of the life affirming water that sustains the human body.

In the spirit of the publication's key word "Draft," I spoke to Galindo about the material history of the sculpture, the way leakage of water and sound comes to codify meaning, and how the different instances of display have affected the piece.



Fountain of Tears/ Fuente de lagrimas, Guillermo Galindo (2014),
courtesy of the artist, photo by Richard Misrach

Victoria Horrocks: One of the places that we could start our conversation today would be if you could tell me a little bit about the process of creating *Fuente de Lágrimas*. For example, where did you find the container for the body of the sculpture? How did the piece develop over time?

Guillermo Galindo: Yes, at the time Richard [Misrach], my collaborator, was photographing for

days and days while I was teaching. He found this organization in San Diego called Water Stations. It is a humanitarian, civilian organization in a very small town, El Centro, California. And these people...there's the bartender and the pharmacy worker and the post office woman, and everybody came together voluntarily at around 5:00 in the morning. They have a coffee and then they take these large tanks that hold six gallons of water and place them in strategic points in the desert with colorful flags for the migrants to find. They have to do this very early, at 5:00 in the morning because later it gets unbearably hot. It is so honorable. And you're asking me how I got the piece? The organization donated one of these tanks to us.

VH: Wow. I mean, it's such a meaningful place for, I think, any kind of work to start. The fact that it has been used by people... Did this history of obtaining the container or the history that object harbored impart anything on your artistic process?

GG: Yes. It's interesting. All the things that I use are very charged. They either belong to somebody, or, somehow they made their way into the immigrant journey from Central America or many other places. There's something I'm very much focused on: this idea that I sometimes think of

1 * The "militia" that Galindo refers to here is an organized group of anti-immigrant U.S. citizens who own land along the Mexican-American border.

when I worked at the Oakland Museum of California. I used to stay after hours and go up to the exhibits about the Native American people. It always caught my attention that they would have all of these tools, like axes, utensils for eating, and many other things like that. And they were there, unused and out of context, behind a glass wall. That display completely changes the meaning of the piece or the object present there. It would be like putting a Christmas tree behind glass to show how typical Westerners celebrate Christmas! Real life objects and how we relate to things that surround us has always caught my attention. It has a lot to do also with how I believe that living and “non-living” objects are part of our own personal journey in life. I think about things as not being dead or unanimated, but instead as actively present in our lives.

VH: Yeah, absolutely. And did that suggestion of presence inspire the audio piece to this work?

GG: Yeah, it’s interesting because what happens with these tanks is that the militia shoots them.* They shoot the tanks. So I simulated the bullet holes in the tank. I imagined that tank dripping out. I thought of someone weeping or crying. It’s about emptying oneself, about emptying the tank, about crying as emptying your sorrow, your soul.

That's very important for me. And I imagined how those drops might sound. If they fall right on the ground, they don't make a sound. Or they make sound, but it is not audible. So I imagined this platform made of metal, which is the device at the bottom of the sculpture. It makes a sound that is very familiar—the sound of rain on tin roofs in small humble houses within towns in Mexico and Latin America. So I thought it was quite possible that it could sound like that: like a tin roof under the rain.

VH: That's amazing. I'm now thinking about a writer whose works I've been studying recently which are coming to mind as you're speaking. Her name is Valeria Luiselli. She wrote the novel *Lost Children Archive*, if you've heard of it?

GG: Yes, I heard about it. I love to hear you say that.

VH: Absolutely! Her book is structured like an archival encounter with chapters in different boxes and things like that. It includes photographs and personal narrative and maps and these similar kinds of objects that you're talking about from the perspective of one woman and her son. She's a sound documentarian and is invested in picking up what she calls silent echoes, if you will, along the border of the United States and Mexico on a road trip. What I've been thinking about a

lot in the context of her work is how she locates a kind of presence through an absence of the human body—the notion that there is a presence of the people she’s trying to connect with, who she can’t seem to find, or whose stories have been erased. I don’t know if that resonates at all for you in terms of the use of the water or the use of the tank, but I’d be curious to hear your reflections on some of that.

GG: Yes, it’s interesting you’re saying that because you are hitting the hammer right on the nail. The objects that I use in *Border Cantos*, the personal objects, the border control objects, are telling the story from the point of view of the object. There’s a term called “prosopopoeia,” that means the object tells the story. Or the animals, or the environment. Not the human side of the story, but the object’s. It becomes the story of a human that is not there anymore. And both with my work and Richard’s works, we don’t include humans. His photographs are the scene where something happened—not what is happening, but where it happened. So there’s a space for imagination and for creating imaginary stories, no? Who was here? What was the story? The situation has its own narrative. I’m very impressed that you’re talking about this because Richard and I started calling it at some point, “the presence of absence.”

VH: Yes, that's really powerful. And I guess to kind of bring it back to the word "Draft," you know, I've been thinking about it for this specific piece as the process of leakage. So, you know, how a draft is the kind of leakage of air into a space, but it's kind of invisible. And so that air kind of has this movement or a presence into some space. So thinking of leakage, I thought of the drops of water and how there is a presence both in the physical dropping and in the sound of the drops that creates a presence.

GG: You're right. Very good. Yeah. I love that. I'm actually feeling inspired again!

VH: Oh, I'm so glad to hear that! Well, you know, I first encountered your piece as a student educator. I was working at the Johnson Museum in Ithaca while I was an undergrad, and it was the first museum job I ever had, a first kind of encounter with art. I remember teaching in the gallery where your sculpture was, and you could hear the drops so loudly.

GG: Wow.

VH: Yeah, it was really amazing. And it's really stuck in my memory.

GG: I never saw it there, for some reason I couldn't go.

VH: It was for the show “how the light gets in,” which was about migration all across the globe.

GG: Well, on the High Line the sound was amplified, but you couldn’t really tell.

VH: Oh really? I didn’t know that actually.

GG: Because there’s a lot of traffic there and stuff. It gets noisy, you know, it’s just New York.

VH: Yeah, of course. I was going to ask about that too—about moving that piece to an outdoors space when the object itself used to be indoors. I imagine you had to integrate, you know, amplification and other things like that into the work. What was that process like?



Image credit: Fountain of Tears/ Fuente de lagrimas, Guillermo Galindo (2014), courtesy of the artist, photo by Schenck High Line Art Musical Brain

GG: It's very interesting because it's an acoustic matter, no? You know, I was trained as a musician. I really did not learn this in the conservatory: what happens is that in a Western tradition of learning music they don't teach you acoustics, how the music that appears in one specific geographic zone, acoustic setting, or culture relates to the environment that surrounds it. I learned as a traveling musician that you don't play the music or the sound, you play the space. You have to adapt to the space where you are. And it kind of resonates with the immigrant experience. You see people coming from jungles in Central America and they come into a desert. They've never been in the desert. So it's a process of adaptation. And then they end up, hopefully, you know, in the U.S.A. They can be from very small towns sometimes, so being in an American city that doesn't speak their language, with different spaces, with different organization... it's still a process of adaptation. Acoustics is also a process of adaptation. You cannot pretend that you're in another space playing the music you used to play, because it's not going to sound the same. The sound doesn't sound the same in every space.

VH: Yeah, absolutely. I'm thinking about, as you're speaking, this sense of filling a space as opposed to the kind of emptying of the space that you were

talking about earlier in the conversation.

GG: Yes.

VH: There seems to be a really beautiful interplay there, where the sound of the drops are filling the room—activating that presence. They have a fullness to them that takes up space, even if they begin as points of absence that are emptying the tank.

GG: Yes. It's also a matter of context. You perceive an object or a person in context. Communication depends on context and adaptation to a context.

VH: It was so funny because I hadn't known that piece was going to be on the High Line. Then, when I was walking through Chelsea, I saw it down one of the avenues. I had to do a double take thinking, "Wait, is that that piece?" I went back and kept trying to see it again but I couldn't find it. And it was like a mirage or something.

GG: It's like seeing a person that you know in a different context...

VH: Exactly. That was exactly it.

Paths of Desperate Hope

Federico Ríos + Carlota Ortiz Monasterio

More than 7 million Venezuelans have left their country since 2015. Continued social problems, devaluation, and shortage of food, medicines, and other products, services, and opportunities have obliged them to flee their homes.

During the first big wave of migration, thousands of Venezuelans left their country on foot towards Colombia, crossing valleys and mountains. As the crisis deepened, many more decided to walk South to seek refuge in Brazil. In the village of Pacaraima, a shelter was set up to accommodate indigenous people, particularly the Warao, coming from the Orinoco River Delta. The leaders noted that most of the population fled to the shelter and only a few remained in their territory. All of those who arrived said that hunger, scarcity or the uselessness of money forced them to emigrate in the hope of finding a way to feed their families.

A few years later, a second wave of migration was unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic. After quarantine, many businesses went bankrupt and the economies of receptor countries suffered a sharp slowdown. Dozens of Venezuelans, finding themselves without resources and food, decided to return to their home country. After an arduous journey back, carrying not only their scant belongings but also their defeated hopes, they arrived in Venezuela to find that conditions had only worsened: the hunger was at its peak, and there were no opportunities to be found. Soon thereafter, they decided to make their way back to Colombia in a third wave of migration.

Then a fourth wave began, this time, people from more countries in South America seeking shelter in the United States. In recent years, increasing numbers of migrants have begun to trek through the Darien Gap, the selvatic expanse connecting Colombia and Panama. The

journey through the jungle, just a small part of the larger trek north, can take up to a week or more on foot. Since 2020 what had been traversed by only hundreds of people a year, suddenly became inundated by an avalanche of desperate families.

In 2021, over 130,000 people—most of them Haitian—crossed the Darien Gap. In 2022, the number reached almost 250,000, nearly 20 times the yearly average between 2010 and 2020. The people crossing the Darien in 2022 were mostly Venezuelan, many of them worn down by years of economic calamity, but they are just part of a diverse movement of migrants through the jungle. Today, more than 80 nationalities attempt the perilous passage on their way to the United States, risking all in the hope of a better future for their families.

— **Federico Ríos**

Colombian photojournalist Federico Ríos has spent his career capturing the complex realities of Latin America. Whether photographing indigenous populations in the region, gangs in El Salvador or Medellín's Distrito 13, the FARC's last days in the jungle, illegal gold mining on the border between Colombia and Venezuela, hardship in Haiti, or the waves of migration through the Darien Gap, Ríos's lens has documented the arduous conditions under which millions of people in the region live.

This photo-essay accompanies *Paths of Desperate Hope*, an exhibition I curated at Columbia University's International Affairs Building (April-June, 2023) which presented nearly 60 photographs taken by Federico during his years chronicling displacement in Latin America. The images in this piece depict a group of Venezuelan migrants as they traversed the Darien Gap in the Fall of 2022. The images are accompanied by captions written by Federico which shed light into the stories, fears and dreams of a handful of the people he encountered. We hope that together, these images and stories, serve as a window into some of these journeys of desperate hope and resistance.

— **Carlota Ortiz Monasterio**



Gabriel Infante, in the center with red shorts, grabbed onto the hand of Francheska Lopez, 6-years-old, while descending one of the Darien Gap's steep hills. Although she was not his daughter, Gabriel helped her over the course of several days, often singing children's songs to keep her entertained during the long trek. September 2022.



Yohana Sierra lost her grip on a guide rope and fell down a muddy hill. Yohana was pregnant when she decided to cross the Darien Gap. Although she suffered no fractures during her fall, she woke up the next day bleeding, probably having lost the baby. September 2022.



Arnoldo Villegas of Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, 36-years-old, with his son Leonardo, 5-years-old. When asked why he had chosen this route, Mr. Villegas said: "All the other countries closed the door on us." Then he began to cry. October 2022.



Yordy Jose Chino sat on a rock at a river and kissed his nephew, Matias Smith Sanchez. Matias was just one month old when they crossed the Darien Gap trying to reach the United States. September 2022.



A man holding a crying baby while crossing the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama. September 2022.



A group of migrants stops on a hill during the second day of the hike through the Darien Gap. September 2022.



Angel Garcia, 42-years-old, helped Sarah Cuauro, 6-years-old, traverse the muddy terrain towards the Banderas hill in the Darien Gap. Angel took care of Sara during the several days she was separated from her mother in the jungle. October 6, 2022.



Hamleisy, Hamletsky and Adriannys Ortega, ages 15, 13 and 8, lost their mother to breast cancer in 2017, a time when Venezuela's healthcare system had virtually collapsed. Their father, Hamlet Ortega, a former Ford Motors employee, blames her death on the government. Jheympi Jhennifer Bastidas tends to Hamleisy Ortega's foot wounds from the several days of walking in mud and water while crossing the Darien Gap with her father and sisters. October 2022.



Hamlet Ortega bursts into tears while taking a break next to the Tacartí river, days into his journey through the Darien Gap with his three daughters. October 7, 2022.



Luis Miguel Arias, a 27-year-old Venezuelan, rests exhausted with his 4-year-old daughter Melissa Arias during the second day of trekking across the Darien Gap. The jungle crossing can take between 10 to 12 days. September 2022.

excerpts¹ from umbilicus (draft)
jonathan harris

I.

I am developing a public artwork addressing concepts relating to spatial and sonic embodiment, using atmospheric presence and sonic/non-sonic resonance as ways to provide opportunities to encounter oneself through the unconscious body and mind, while drawing on the writings of Böhme, Pallasmaa, Leitner, Lefebvre, Canepa, Borges, Ovid, and others. The work consists of a labyrinthine series of traversable chambers that borrow from various mythologies, as well as forms inherent to hives, syconia, and ancient city plans. Each of the volumes within this space bear a unique acoustic fingerprint and conditioning intended to guide and disorient its occupants. I am currently researching the phenomenographic experience of atmosphere and acoustics as a means of informing the installation's architectural and semiotic design. Additionally, I am studying the sonic imprint of hidden structures and architectures that foreground collective construction processes and perceptual phenomena to examine the emergent behaviors within these sites, investigate the impact of their

¹ Selected by Aidan Ford Chisholm.

atmospheres, and integrate these elements into the final work.

How this work might *actually* evolve from research to realization forms the basis of my response to MCR's call for proposals on the theme *Draft*. The intangibility of empathy and the ephemerality of sonic resonance also bear a relationship to this prompt.

I propose an essay that discusses these theoretical and philosophical concerns, and the process of combining them into an autonomous artwork, with the hope of conveying to MCR's readers some sense of the ineffability of (and my attraction to) these themes and of the artistic process.²

II.

Fifty years before the first stone was laid the art of architecture, and especially that of masonry, had been proclaimed as the most important branch of knowledge throughout the whole area of China that was to be walled round, and all other arts gained recognition only in so far as they had reference to it. I can still remember quite well us standing as small children, scarcely sure on our feet in our teachers' garden

tion of the lowest-grade school. I say lucky, for many who before my time had achieved the highest degree of culture available to them could find nothing year after year to do with their knowledge, and drifted uselessly about with the most splendid architectural plans in their heads, and sank by thousands into hopelessness. But those who finally came

and. Only . Only . Shoung to shoung, a ring of flowers, a current of blood no longer confined within the narrow circulation of one body, but sweetly rolling and yet ever returning throughout the endless leagues of China.

3

² Submitted as proposal to the editors of *MODA Critical Review*, Vol. IV, 31 Oct. 2022.

³ Kafka, *The Great Wall of China* (Trans. Muir, 1946)

III.

Perhaps it was a work of fiction. Although detailed (and conflicting) plans — alongside some remnants of models, sketches,^A narratives, maps,^B and fabrication materials — have since entered the public record, no formal documentation of the site exists, nor contemporaneous or historical first-hand account of the experience of the space itself. Still, there are several

^A See Harris, https://www.are.na/jonathan-harris/underscore-under-score-underscore-underscore-underscor-e-underscore-my_jczu3dy (2022)

IV.

According to Henri Lefebvre, our conception of place and space emerges from within ourselves from our earliest, cellular inception. Similar to how spiders and mollusks “secrete” the spaces they inhabit⁴ — spaces that double as tools for navigating existence, providing shelter from predators, providing a means for obtaining prey, forming the basis of worldly experience — so do humans “produce” space. For Lefebvre, this happens in the bodily sense of generating inhabitable space (as cellular masses form into embryos, a division between inside and outside is

^B See Harris, https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVP_7cbYQ=/ (2022)

⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Trans. Nicholas-Smith, 1991), with regard to webs, shells, and hives: “...the production of space, beginning with the production of the body, extends to the productive secretion of a ‘residence’ which also serves as a tool, a means.”

developed),⁵ and, later, it happens architecturally.⁶ “Each living body is space and has its space — it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.”⁷ In Lefebvre’s view, this evolution from interior to exterior lies at the heart of a fundamental irreconcilability with life,⁸ or, as suggested in a discussion on Walter Benjamin in the translator’s introduction to philosopher Gernot Böhme’s *Atmospheric Architectures*, “the ‘pervasive and debilitating split between subject and object’ scarring modernity.”⁹

Sound — alongside atmospheric resonance — plays an intriguing role in this model of space, both in terms of

⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Trans. Nicholas-Smith, 1991), “The living being constitutes itself from the outset as an internal space. Very early on, in phylogenesis and in the genesis of the individual organism, an indentation forms in the cellular mass. A cavity gradually takes shape, simple at first, then more complex, which is filled by fluids. These fluids are relatively simple to begin with, but diversify little by little. The cells adjacent to the cavity form a screen or membrane which serves as the boundary whose degree of permeability may vary. From now on external space will stand opposed to internal space or milieu: here is the primary and most decisive differentiation in the history of biological being.”

⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996): Construction is “guided by the body in the same way that a bird shapes its nest by movements of its body.”

⁷ *Ibid.* (5)

⁸ *Ibid.* (5), “The whole history of life is characterized by an incessant diversification and intensification of the interaction between inside and outside.”

⁹ Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures, the Aesthetics of Felt Spaces* (Trans. Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2017)

the physical anatomy of the ear (which, inside our bodies, transduces and processes the physical energy of vibrating air molecules into neurological signals), and the way, external to our bodies, the reflective properties of soundwaves articulate architecture (and/or any listening environment) and make space comprehensible. A defining characteristic of human auditory perception is our aptitude for using microscopic units of time, timbre, and loudness to determine — with incredible precision and efficiency — a sound's position in space and its interaction with the material properties of the space we inhabit. We have evolved to use, even without the aid of other senses, this native locative skill in conjunction with sound's haptic properties to provide us with an aural map of the environment we navigate through, respond to, and seek refuge from.

In utero, vibratory sound transmitted from the mother through the life-supporting fluids in which we reside provides a primary record of safety/disturbance, of space, of the known world.¹⁰ Architect and theorist Juhani

¹⁰ Leitner, *Sound:Space* (1999): (U. Conrads): "The power of acoustics has its roots in the way a person is tied into the sound of a room, into the particular time of a room."^a Yet it is man himself who must make the room resound — with his steps, his speech, with any activity that generates sounds, even with his breathing. This interconnection between man and space, which is achieved with sounds and affects our innermost being, is like a kind of dialogue which is

^a "Oh time thy pyramids" ^{*}

^{*} Borges, *The Library of Babel* (Trans. Irby, 1941)

Pallasmaa describes the primacy of the sensation of vibration¹¹ and later cites anthropologist Ashley Montagu's assessment of hapticity's critical role as communicator.¹² The receptors in our ears are, effectively, long-range fingertips: because a sound's shape and texture, by the time it reaches our vibration-sensitive ears, models its surrounding environment, our inner ear "touches" the perimeters and other architectonic qualities of our situated space.

Acoustics, resonance, and perception form a sonospatial topology of the world. Like Lefebvre's spider, we actively create the spaces we inhabit through an intricate, choreographed courtship between sound production and spatial perception. Authors

determined by the acoustic premises. This dialogue enables us to experience ourselves in the sound of a room." (B. Leitner, response): "Unquestionably, two of our senses are already fully developed in the embryonic state. While one of these is only preserved in our body memory as a diffuse primeval feeling of confinement and tightness as well as unity and security, the other — our sense of hearing — already functions in a substantially different way: the outside world enters the body with sounds and chains of tones and noises. But while the first, the sensorium of the skin, has always played a part — as a kind of primeval experience — in building and treatment of surfaces, the other sensorial experience in the womb⁶ — why should we avoid this poetic expression? — remained largely unnoticed even though it is also a spatial, space-orientated experience in much the same way."

¹¹ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996): "The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity."

¹² *Ibid.*: Montagu: "[The skin] is the oldest and most sensitive of our organs, our first medium of communication."

⁶ "And as life itself began in the sea, so each of us begins his individual life in a miniature ocean within his mother's womb, and in the stages of his embryonic development repeats the steps by which his race evolved, from gill-breathing inhabitants of a water world to creatures able to live on land." ³

³ Carson, *Mother Sea / The Grey Beginnings* (from *The Sea Around Us*, 1950)

Blesser and Salter, for example, describe humans as having an in-built “sonar” navigation system.¹³ Paul Oomen, director of the Spatial Sound Institute in Budapest, describes this relational, echolocation-based phenomenon as having a triangular configuration, highlighting the inseparability between self, sound, and space, each generating the next.¹⁴

When considered in this manner, sound provides a particularly effective means of reconciling the interiority of personhood with inhabited, exterior space, bringing extra-perceptual coherence to an epistemological understanding of how we reside in and relate to space, a way of knowing and of being in the world. As Pallasmaa writes, “Our bodies and our movements are in constant interaction with the environment; the world and the self inform and redefine each other constantly.”¹⁵ He continues: “Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy makes the human body the center of the

¹³ Blesser/Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* (2007)

¹⁴ In discussing “human sonar” and “the triangle of sonification”, Oomen states that “the physical presence of our body and how we direct ourselves in space is not just changing our perception but it is actually changing the reality of the sonic-spatial field, and that means we physically not only receive but also influence the sound image, which then again influences our perception, which then again informs how we move and behave in space.”, from Spatial Sound Institute. (2019). On spatial sound [Video]. Vimeo. https://vimeo.com/340861350?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=16927955. Accessed 11 Nov. 2021.

¹⁵ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996)

experiential world. He consistently argued [...] that 'it is through our bodies as living centers of intentionality that we choose our world that our world chooses us.'¹⁶ Once again, depending on cultural context,^c we as listeners are witness to an indistinction between exteriority and interiority, with sound as the glue.

Naturally, spaces constructed over time that implicitly bundle memory and sense of place can act as ideal habitats for listening, and, given the power that the energizing of space through sound has on self-perception, listening spaces may serve as more than just models for entertainment, spirituality, habitat, and shelter. Through sonic experience, they also provide a reconnection with the embryonic self. Gaston Bachelard famously speaks at length about space as a psychological vessel for memory by acting as a physicalized topology of the mind.¹⁷ Using the acoustics of a given space to map this topology thus utilizes spatial sound as a fulcrum for making sense of not only our worldly experience (exterior), but our historicized selfhood (interior).

Spaces designed for listening, both secular and sacred — concert halls, churches, etc. — might then be described as more than merely kinds

^c It is crucial to bear in mind the differences between listening (cultural) and hearing (biological), that the former has everything to do with sociocultural experience.ⁱ There is no singular way we experience space.

¹⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996)

¹⁷ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (1957)

ⁱ Blesser/Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* (2007)

of “listening technologies,”¹⁸ but, rather, as technologies that provide portals through which one might recapture a kind of existential totality, architectures within which we can begin to understand our metaphysical relationship with space, providing an essential (acoustic, spatial) feedback loop for experiencing haptic, worldly selfhood. Embedded within the auditory perceptual model is a key enabling us to unlock the muscle memory of our vestigial, single-celled bodies, our once-fused interior and exterior selves. Sound is the physical phenomenon that shapes our world while we shape it.¹⁹

V.

“Heinrich Wölfflin established [...] that the spatial shape of architecture was not merely a matter of what you see, but is rather experienced in and by the body, as if it were realised internally [...] an expression of a corporeal state.^D [...] [A]rchitecture does not realise given spatial structures, but first and foremost constructs for human experience. [...] Bodies delimit space, space is the extension of bodies, their measure.”²⁰

^D “I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me.” ⁱⁱ

¹⁸ Meursault, *Echoes Return*, from *Spectres II* (Bonnet/Sanson, 2020)

¹⁹ Adapted from Harris, *Auralization of space as a means of connectivity with self (and others)* (2021)

²⁰ Böhme, *Atmosphere as Mindful Physical Presence in Space* (2006)

ⁱⁱ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996)

*“[T]he space of bodily presence is an atmosphere into which one enters, or in which one finds oneself. The reason arises from the nature of the experience, which is bodily sensing. And, by contrast with objective, physical space, it is in this sensing that the space we call bodily felt space is unfurled. [...] Felt space is the modulation or articulation of bodily sensing itself. [...] Wölfflin not only conceived of architecture in its bodily sensory effects but interpreted it, conversely, also as an expression of bodily disposition. Thus, he saw the great periods of European architectural history as manifestations of changing bodily self-understandings.”*²¹

*[A]tmosphere is the space of mindful physical presence into which one enters or finds oneself, owing to the type of experience involved. This experience is mindful physical sensation. [...] [T]here are also non-thing-like or non-corporeal generators of atmospheres, such as in particular light and sound. It bears emphasising that they too modulate mindful physical space by creating confines or expanse, direction, delimiting or transgressive atmospheres. [...] [T]ruth lies in the interplay between [...] mindful physical presence and the body, between sensitivity and activity, between the real and reality.”*²²

²¹ Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures* (2005)

²² Böhme, *Atmosphere as Mindful Physical Presence in Space* (2006)

VIII.

That which distinguishes a labyrinth from a maze is its central chamber.

VI.

Perhaps it is a work of fiction. Being perfectly frank, it may never exist at all in physical form, though perhaps someday apart from this essay and a variety of duress-driven proposals the work might live as an endless array of Kieslerian models. Also, it is one of those projects that would require an excess of collaborators and money and time to which I have no present access. (And what becomes of these monstrous, multi-decade, multi-million-dollar projects anyhow? Can anything more be expected of them than cultural embarrassments like Heizer's scar-white *City*?) Better for it to live, elastically, as a work of the imagination; a soundless sound art; a demonstration of the aggregation of influence that ultimately becomes a singular work, for better, for worse. Perhaps anyway this is a new model for constructing a fictional labyrinth and art in general. Or an old one first imagined by Borges (or Cervantes, or

²² Böhme, *Atmosphere as Mindful Physical Presence in Space* (2006)

Ovid²³).^E A model of a model of a model.

VII.

A fig is not a fruit but an inflorescence known as a syconium. What we consider the “fruit” is actually an encasement, a husk containing hundreds of inverted flowers. Before this interior garden blossoms, a fig’s shell is merely an urn-like structure hiding floral ovaries, chambers requiring a sacrificial wasp for fertilization. Both the wasp and fig need one another for survival, though in the case of the wasp, the aforementioned self-sacrifice is literal: the wasp dies inside the fig as it pollinates.

²³ The following story (here paraphrased and including versions of the myth from other sources) appears at the midpoint of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: Poseidon gives a white bull to King Minos — a sign requested by Minos as assurance he would ascend the throne — to use as sacrifice. Instead, the King, in an unusual bout of selfishness, keeps the bull for himself and sacrifices another, hoping the God would not notice. He did. As revenge, Poseidon, with the help of Aphrodite, stimulates in Minos’ wife, Pasiphaë, an insatiable lust for the bull. Pasiphaë begs Daedalus — architect, father of Icarus — to help her quench her taurine thirst. Daedalus builds Pasiphaë a hollow, hide-covered heifer within which the queen could crouch to offer up her sex. Pasiphaë soon delivers an unnatural hybrid-fœtus from her womb: the Minotaur. Mortified by scandal, Minos orders the beast, his shame, to be hidden away in the central chamber of an encasement of bifurcating paths — ironically also designed and fabricated by Daedalus — a prison so convoluted, in fact, that the architect himself almost could not escape.^Y

^E The Talmud, with its central text debated in the margins by contemporaneous rabbinical scholars, also acts as an early hypertextual model. (Read Mindy Seu on this topic, as well as Ted Nelson.)

^Y In some versions of this story, Minos, in order to prevent the labyrinth’s map and model from disclosure, subsequently locks the architect and his son high in a tower offering only one means of egress: the air.

Later, Minos begins sacrificing young men and women to the Minotaur to avenge his son Andregeos’ death, who had been killed by the Minotaur at the behest of a jealous King Aegeus. Theseus, Aegeus’ son, conspires to kill the beast, finding his way out of the labyrinth with the help of Minos’ daughter, Ariadne, who provided Theseus, with whom she had fallen in love, a sword and a skein of cord. (It is Daedalus himself who gives Ariadne the key as to how to escape the labyrinth.) Ariadne and Theseus subsequently escape to the island of Naxos; he abandons her later that same evening, for reasons still not fully understood.

Each species of fig has its corresponding wasp. Female wasps detect a fig tree is ready for pollination when each of the syconia slightly loosen their ostioles, releasing pheromones individuated for each species. A wasp carrying pollen from a distant tree enters the fig's epidermis through its tight, bract-lined passage, and in the process, damages her antennae and has her wings shredded off. She lays eggs in the enclosure's substrate, pollinates the inverted flowers, and then dies.^F

XI.

Formally speaking,^G *umbilicus* is a hive-like, biomimetic site consisting of a series of volumes arranged in a spiral configuration²⁴ of bifurcating arms. Each chamber in this sequence is a unit of space and air containing individuated atmospheres, differentiated only by their distinct aural presence and innate emotional tension, invisible but nonetheless sensorial qualities amplified by the transitions made between each space.^H Though classified as a work of sound art, *umbilicus* employs no media diffusion of acousmatic sound; rather, the chambers vary in height and spatial volume, as well as in surface texture and subsurface materials, to

^F In some species, the wasp lays her eggs via an ovipositor from outside the fig's architecture. In other species, wingless male wasps fertilize the encased female and then die. In yet others, the male creates an aperture to escape the fig, but, wingless, waits upon the hull for a female with which to mate; if this happens, he dies and the female abandons his carcass in search of new figs to pollinate.

^G "Form is not the most effective but rather its reverse: space, the emptiness spreading rhythmically between the walls that delimit it, its liveliness nevertheless more important than the walls." ⁱⁱⁱ

^H "Atmosphere is a kind of excess effect caused by the difference between places." ^{iv}

ⁱⁱⁱ Endell/David, *Vom Sehen: Texte 1896-1925, über Architektur, Formkunst und "Die Schönheit der großen Stadt"* (1995)

^{iv} Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (2000)

²⁴ See Lamb <https://www.sacredrealism.org/artists/catherine-lamb/the-interaction-of-tone/?content=spirals>. Accessed 18 Sep. 2022.

form unique resonances in each. The rectilinear spaces and convolution of passages in this sequence are enclosed, as plain air acoustics are insufficient for rendering the necessary aural effects. Spatial volumes are integer-ratios of one another, acoustically coupled by timbrally serializing the spaces' resonant modal properties, the whole forming an integrated acoustic arena.

Enclosures situated at locations where passages meet and bifurcate along the arms feature near-duplicated dissimilarities, with aesthetic conditioning (e.g. geometry, size, patina, surface treatment, organization of access/egress passages, loosely-related embedded objects, flora, etc.) designed to disorient occupants and distort their mental maps — visual and spatial redundancies that eddy, circle back on themselves, or provide outlets to emergence.

The next phase of the project, scheduled for summer 2023, entails a 1:1 rendering of two architecturally coupled but atmospherically discrete chambers.

XIV.

“All art articulates the boundary surface between the Self and the world both in the experience of the artist and

the viewer. In this sense, architecture is not only a shelter for the body, but it is also the contour of consciousness, and an externalisation of the mind. Architecture, or the entire world constructed by man with its cities, tools and objects, has its mental ground and counterpart. The geometries and hierarchies expressed by the built environment, as well as the countless value choices they reflect, are always mental structures before their materialisation in the physical environment. Our world is structured on the basis of mental maps. [...] We do not live in an objective world of matter and facts, as commonplace naive realism assumes. The characteristically human mode of existence takes place in the worlds of possibilities,^⓵ moulded by our capacity of fantasy and imagination. We live in mental worlds, in which the material, the experienced, the remembered and the imagined completely fuse into each other. We could say that the lived world is fundamentally 'unscientific' when measured by the criteria of empirical science. The lived world is closer to the reality of a dream which evades scientific description. [...] Art creates images and emotions that are as true as the actual encounters of life; fundamentally, in a work of art we encounter ourselves and our being-in-the-world in an intensified manner. An artistic and architectural experience is fundamentally a strengthened experience of self. [...]

^⓵ "Actuality is that mode of being in which a thing can bring other things about or be brought about by them, the realm of events and facts. By contrast, potentiality is not a mode in which a thing exists, but rather the power to effect change, the capacity of a [thing] to make transitions into different states" ^⓶

^⓶ Tim, "Actuality vs. Potentiality in Aristotle, June 4, 2012," in *Philosophy & Philosophers*, June 4, 2012, <https://www.the-philosophy.com/actuality-potentiality-aristotle>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2022

*One of the tasks of art is to safeguard the authenticity of the human experience. [...] Art and architecture can have a renewed task in cultivating and supporting the human abilities of imagination and empathy. Art and architecture today have to begin with the questioning of the absoluteness of the world and with the expansion of the boundaries of the self.”*²⁵

“[N]euroscience lends support to the view that we experience entities before elements, and we intuit lived meanings without conceptual or verbal signification. [...] Our atmospheric sense is clearly an evolutionary priority and a consequence of the activities of our right-brain hemisphere. [...] Research has revealed that the process of vision is a fragmented and discontinuous mosaic that constantly fuses perceptions with memory and imagination. [...] The potential superiority of the unconscious processes in comparison with consciousness is revealed dramatically by the neurological fact that the information-handling capacity of our entire nervous system is estimated to be 10-15 times the capacity of our conscious system. [...] I suggest that the atmospheric sense could be named our sixth sense, and it is likely to be existentially our most important. Simply, we do not stop at our skin; we extend our bodily self by means of our

²⁵ Pallasmaa, *Lived Space — Embodied Experience and Sensory Thought* (2001)

*senses and our technological and
constructed extensions.”*²⁶

XV.

here, at the perimeter, time slows.²⁷

j.h., cdmx, oct–dec 2022

²⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Sixth Sense — The Meaning of Atmosphere and Mood* (2016)

²⁷ all of this is just scaffolding.

The Jeddah Tower: Architectural Ideology between Draft and Completion

Omar AlAttas

In Islamic eschatology, a sign of the apocalypse's approach is societies' competition to erect tall buildings.¹ Ironically, the fourth-tallest skyscraper in the world, the Clock Tower, overlooks the Kaaba in Makkah, Saudi Arabia—the focal geographic point for all Muslim communities. I evoke this irony not to forecast an apocalypse but for its metaphorical significance: the elevation of buildings embodies temporal progression. Skyscrapers also stand for cities' capitalist development and their economic globalization.² These significances assume the completion of such architectural projects. However, an hour's drive from Makkah rises an incomplete skyscraper in Jeddah. Stuck somewhere between draft and completion, the Jeddah Tower stands as a monument to liminality. In its incomplete state, it reveals architecture's instrumental role in capitalist cities.

In Jeddah's coastal suburb of Obhur, a more than 60-story skeleton of concrete and steel tow-



Alejandro vn, La torre de Jeddah en Junio de 2017, ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeddah_tower_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeddah_tower_(cropped).jpg)), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>

1 The provenance of the source *Hadith* is contested. "الموسوعة الحديثية - شرح الأحاديث - الدرر السنية -", dorar.net, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/23583>.

2 Martin Parker, "Vertical Capitalism: Skyscrapers and Organization," *Culture and Organization* 21, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 217–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2013.845566>.



Adrian Smith + Gordon Hill, Jeddah Tower, http://smithgill.com/work/jeddah_tower/#

ers over a quiet landscape of empty lots, asphalt, and endless stretches of wall fences. In 2008, Obhur was announced as the site of the Jeddah Economic City, a major development project that aimed to transform the city into a global economic hub.³ This five million square miles multi-purpose development was intended to be “an urban marvel” boasting numerous investment opportunities and the world’s soon-to-be

highest building.⁴ The official website and press releases showcased dozens of 3D renderings, mock-ups, and blueprints that cemented an idealized image of the project and its potential in Jeddawis’ imagination. Many moved northwards to the then sparsely populated Obhur in anticipation of the area’s growth.⁵ Despite the urban sprawl, construction came to a complete halt in 2018. Mystery shrouded the project and updates are elusively sporadic. As of March 2023, there is no official timeframe for completion. Interrupted was the reverie inspired by the initial drafts.

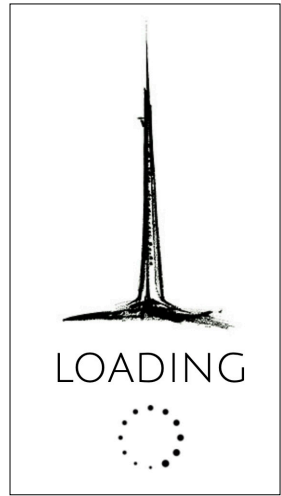
Yet however unfinished, it still imposingly stands. Local critiques have been less about the project’s detachment

3 Lucia Brandoli, “Jeddah Tower’s Works Are Stalled,” *Domus*, August 18, 2022, <https://www.domusweb.it/en/news/2022/08/08/the-works-for-the-tallest-tower-in-the-world-are-stalled.preview.html>.

4 “Jeddah Economic Company, “Jeddah Economic Company - The City - Overview,” <https://www.jec.sa/>, 2015, https://www.jec.sa/en/6_19/portal/The_City/Overview/.

5 Sindi, Mohammad B. “أبحر الشمالية المنسية” [*Forgotten Northern Obhur*]. *AlBilad News*, January 30, 2023, <https://albiladdaily.com/2023/01/30/أبحر-الشمالية-المنسية/>

from the urban environment than about its incompleteness. If public attention only problematizes unfulfillment, the project's urban implications remain concealed. Completion of the project would have been negligently costly; diverting attention and resources from the city's infrastructural issues amidst its population's exponential growth, the project was impractical. The architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri posited that such concealment is a function of "architectural ideology,"⁶ a concept he traced to Enlightenment thinkers' framing of the city as a natural phenomenon, akin to a forest.⁷ Tafuri problematized this naturalization as he believed it abstracted the city from its socioeconomic structures and imposed an aestheticized order onto unorganized cities.⁸ Drafts of architectural projects are instrumental in this concealment. Take for example the Jeddah Central, another project across town which will replace historical neighborhoods, municipally condemned as slums. The drafts of architecturally monumental landmarks and multi-use buildings including new skyscrapers overshadow the neighborhoods' ongoing demolition and their residents' displacement with ambiguous promises of Jeddah becoming a center of activity for global



Jeddah Economic Company,
Loading Icon, <https://jec.sa/>

6 Manfredo Tafuri, "Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology" in K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 2–36.

7 Michele Caja, "From the City as Forest to Forest-City," *AGATHÓN, Art and Design* 2 (December 30, 2017): 89–94. <https://doi.org/10.19229/2464-9309/2122017>.

8 Tafuri, 8.

capital.⁹ These projects idealize said development as natural and inevitable and are propagated via architectural ideology.

Unfinished, the Jeddah Tower speaks of a malfunction of architectural ideology. The very rupture that put the project into this liminal void speaks of a capitalist predicament. In 2018, two stakeholder chairmen were indicted in a state anti-corruption campaign, the first of its scale in Saudi history. Under the pretext of financial reform, large sums of



Ammar shaker, Jeddah Tower being built in northern Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Building progress as of 13-Jul-2016 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeddah_Tower_Building_Progress_as_of_13-Jul-2016_003.jpg), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>

their net worth were seized, and their socioeconomic influence was curbed.¹⁰ Construction has stopped since then. The unfinished Jeddah Tower reveals the failure of architectural ideology to naturalize but one capitalistic projection of Jeddah's future. What remains is a monumental site of liminality. In this lack of realization, we see architectural ideology short-circuited. In its site, the marching of time towards an economically globalized modernity—or Islamic apocalypse—is interrupted.

9 Jeddah Central, "Projects - JEDDAH CENTRAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANY," 2022, <https://www.jeddahcentral.com/en/projects>. And Radwan Radwan, "How Jeddah Redevelopment Project Aims to Clean up Urban Environment, Improve Quality of Life," *Arab News*, April 14, 2022, <https://arab.news/gtbn6>.

10 Rosie Bsbeer, *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 218–30.

If on an autumn night a deliverance

Nick Farhi



Nick Farhi, *Everyone has a hungry heart/if on a winters' night a deliverer*, 2022,
Oil, pastel, enamel on aluminum

How timely, a person walking past me just ate one of the flowers from a bouquet in their hands. Right up off the stem, aligned to their mouth as I walked by. Maybe they felt nervous or embarrassed to have them in hand. A universality and a sociality.

When you engage with someone else's footsteps, on the road, or in a car, in rubber souls, all of us, thudding against the brake pedal...or maybe it's thundering and lightning, making your sky a dark grayish site...or when just after 1:00pm looks more like 5:20pm, you might walk faster to avoid the elements, or you might pay closer attention to your afternoon commute. You might look for details in your path, to exchange exits.

At least I did that day. I noticed the smell of the water on the scum beneath my toes, a scent that obstructs the aroma of everything in coexistence, the wet, Scottish hemisphere windowpane to green: the freshly cut northeastern grass across the avenue of Central Park West.

Lost in a moment I was. Staring. Lost in the gestalt of a single day, encased in the fever of it, after a long windy year, one collision of commonality presented itself. For one, my own parents are more introverted than they were before the pandemic, and yet the society that keeps everyone from danger, from the torment of the pandemic, was reminding me of this and volcanically erupting right in front of me. Like gold and blue fireworks on New Year's Eve. Two Uber drivers begin to squermish. Presumably two people who don't even know one another. Like ships passing or crashing into each other without a light on the sea scape. One moped parked, crying for dear life that the SUV would stop backing into their space. I had to yell to the driver to please look and be more careful. The two men began to argue instantly before me, until a speeding yellow taxi took the opportunity to ambiguously glide past them, instilling more fear in everyone present.

My recollection of the water, falling from the sky, over and over, brings me back to understanding or believing that nature or a higher energy was upset with us all, and that for some time, roll-

ing an eye at this kind of pluralism was acceptable in the United States. No more, I hoped, and sought to believe in what was always there: nature's unapologetic surge of ethical deliverance. All of us are unsure why we carry flowers to anyone, why we ask others to carry anything to us beyond the fact we are all becoming lazier. Can we brush our moral sensibilities with a paste that makes us feel healthier, a gel so frosty it beckons a warming sensation in our gums, melting our sticky trash we put on to concrete like the fallen petals of the city's alto-gardens? If these trees could rap to us. Why do we do this dance of instantaneous aggregation? There will be no more petals floating to summon and ingratiate our consciousness if instant gratification soars to normalcy, and at what crossroads are we then consistently satisfied.

Nothing wakes me up more than to have nothing, and to give something away to someone sitting on a street curb. That is natural ecstasy. For me personally, that is goosebump raising elation, from dropping cash or change, I couldn't afford as a younger me, into a bucket of someone I just flat out never met or didn't ever know. This of course was a joy I experienced as a younger person. As a working artist for the past decade, in recollection, that's the only real instant gratification, and completely true expression in an ecstasy of communication that I can say is or was consistently generative for me before sort of becoming an adult of this capitalistic society. And as Baudrillard once said, the only ecstasy of communication is communication itself. And if we all morph into these aimless boats on the nights sky, may we skip our stars into each other's bows, patching the holes in our ship's floors, with the glue of planets and blossoming from our kindest eye, our most loving songs, denouncing this newest rate of life, I just say, slow down and give it a thought before you forget what elation truly costs.

Consenting the Voice – Essential Collaboration and the Iterative Draft as Creative Practice

A.M. DeVito

Consent for the self has vastly changed in recent years. For example, it is now considered respectful and an act of community care to ask and present pronouns during an introduction, thus allowing a person agency in their expression of selfhood and self-identity. “Consent for the Self” is the voluntary, autonomous, and informed permission of how the expression of a person’s own identity (gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and class) and their different psychological, physiological, and anthropological interactions (Thagard, 2014) are presented in social discourse. This is a sense of community care also needed in creative discourse—especially when creating art using another person’s identity or representation. Iterative consent through the collaborative drafting process can generate art that ages better by minimizing long term harm. Positioning this phenomenon as a constructive and stimulating collaborative tool can be its own creative practice.

There is a long history of mindlessness around identity-based topics that emboldens direct harm. Today, there is significantly more awareness of how this harmful process has worked. The evolution is a new dawn in the expansion of creative practice through community care, acceptance, opacity, and cyclical communication. I propose the term *Essential Collaboration* to center the need for continuous, informed, and iterative consent through the collaboration process. This practice can be applied

when producing creative work that uses personal and cultural histories and identity stories, and, perhaps more importantly, when such is expressed and embodied through the subject's recorded voice. The process is 'essential' when creating sound art formed by deconstructing and reforming the disembodied voice from oral history recordings. The speaking voice is sonically and semiotically rich beyond the physical sounds themselves—they are vibrational vessels of who we are as social, multidimensional beings.

Consider, for example, the settler-colonial ethnographers in early 20th century “canada” who convinced the Indigenous communities to record their songs for “the sake of safekeeping.” After years of cultural decimation and abuse through the residential system and the Indian Act, many Indigenous leaders had agreed to the recording and archiving of their sacred canon. The leaders were strategically unaware that this initial permission—under duress—would translate to the appropriation of their song, oral history, and dance by settler-colonialist composers, educators, and artists in perpetuity through on-going, *presumed* 'consent' (Robinson, 2020: 150). In his book, “Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies,” Dylan Robinson notes:

“...one of the ways ethnographers tended to promote the value of Indigenous song was by encouraging its use by composers in the more ‘elevated’ aesthetic form of art music. As such, this advocacy promoted by ethnographers was not so much a break with the residential schools and Indian Act’s moral reform, but as an extension of a civilizing par-

adigm in which Indigenous song was recast in a seemingly more sophisticated form.” (Robinson, 2020: 156).

The centering of Canadian settler entitlement to the archival material for “heritage and knowledge” and the use of non-iterative consent was and continues to be harmful because it diminishes and prevents the interrogation of appropriation under the guise of education. Indigenous communities were abused and oppressed in the name of “solving the Indian problem” (Scott, 1910) while their voices were stolen and appropriated as entitled cultural epitaphs of the white colonial settlers of “Canada”. Many Indigenous communities no longer have access to their own sacred cultural canons because of this practice. Their voices, songs, rituals, and stories were re-appropriated without iterative consent to create settler-colonial art music, which in turn modified their value and changed their ownership from those to which they belonged over to the oppressor.

Consent must be iterative, continuous, and (allowed to be) ever-changing to reflect the nature of cultural and societal growth, education, perception, and awareness. Situations change due to the changing tides of history. Humans should be in control of their given consent as these changes occur. Without it, harm is inevitable.

It is not only the method of *Essential Collaboration* that is ideal in these situations, but what the processes afford for the finished work and the community relations fostered by the creative collaboration itself. The word ‘essential’ is used like ‘necessary’ or ‘vital’ here, rather than as ‘fundamental.’ It is positioned this way because

of the material and the necessary modulation of the material (for example, the editing of recordings) for creative purposes. I do not use it to infer that the technique is fundamental to every collaboration, but rather that, when chosen, collaboration within the work is an *essential* part of the creation of the artwork itself - as a multilayered action. It is *essential* because engaging with content related to the self requires care and consent to create intimate work that does not take from its subject violently; dismantling the voice (through composition and sound design) being the violent act. It is *essential* because the iterative consent condoned in the process is vital to the final art piece. This technique should be viewed as a method to include personal identities and histories in an art piece ethically.

Some may purport that the strict, continuous, and iterative consent may hinder the creative practice or slow output. In response, I frame Essential Collaboration the same way one may understand and practice certain compositional rules for specific art and music styles. These “restrictions” that may occur only form and reform new artistic possibilities at each separate instance of the essential collaborative stage of the piece’s inception. A “box” ferments unseen forms due to the ever-changing rules set by the subject’s ecstatic and ongoing consent. However, if you are interested in the beautiful community-building potential of Essential Collaboration, you must also be open to its possible failure. This practice must be seen as a branch of experimental art, as the final product may or may not result in the artist’s initial fruition. In his book, “Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond,” Michael Nyman muses that the experimental composer utilizes:

A vast number of processes to bring about ‘acts of which are unknown’ (Cage). The extent to which they are unknown (and to whom) is variable and depends on the specific process in question. Processes may range from a minimum of organization to a minimum arbitrariness, proposing different relationships between chance and choice, presenting different kinds of options and obligations (Nyman, 1999).

That is both its beauty and challenge.

Our inner being, our essence, is disseminated from the brain and through the vocal cords. The voice is therefore the perfect medium to create sound art, but only if done consensually. Tearing the voice into pieces for art’s sake has the potential to be violent and violating—a by-product we must aim to avoid. Great art balances on the line of subversion without harming people. The study of the physicality of the voice is so deep and misunderstood, as the study of linguistics and phonetics is non-linear and ever-changing. Even today, where audio recording technology is common and highly accessible, and hearing our recorded voices is more common than ever, we still cringe at the sound of our own voices (Vedantam, 2019) (Maurer D., Landis T., 1990). We feel it betrays us. It tells a story we want to guard. It also sounds very different to the outer ear than our inner, hence the discomfort. Yes, we cringe because we do not hear ourselves the same as in our skulls, but this resonance could be more profound. “The voice is processed in a part of the auditory cortex cabled directly to the brain region that recognizes facial features,” (Colapinto, 2021) and it vibrates from *inside* us – a truly intimate space. The voice does

more than vibrate the vocal cords; it vibrates through the physical spaces of our flesh vessels – the ephemeral interacting with the constant – once again coloring our audible identities.

In May of 2022, I worked with Santiago Tavera, a Columbian-Canadian artist based in Tiohtià:ke/”mon-treal”, on a project called “Patterns of Plasticity” where I recorded him and his family’s oral history account about a difficult event in their lives where his aunt lost her ability to communicate after suffering a stroke. I used a compositional style called text-sound composition, where the recorded voice is deconstructed, and the different parts of the speech – the phonemes and morphemes - are used as the sonic palette or musical content of an avant-garde sound composition. For a project with this type of intimacy and vital connection with the audience, the text-sound style is extra fitting; human beings have an inherent, evolutionary attraction to the sound of the voice and curiosity especially piqued when an uncanny or surreal modification to our most intimate, audible essence reaches our ears.

I recorded Santiago and his family member’s account of these experiences along with his poems and journals and used the recordings as sound material for the composition. The key to this collaboration was that during the drafting process I would confer with him during each stage to ensure that he was comfortable with how I was editing, designing, and composing with his voice while telling his deeply personal story. Furthermore, we had many discussions about the different ways we could develop semantic coherence and dissonance through diverse sound design options along with his choice of

language (Spanish or English) to use for certain parts of the story.

Now, although “Patterns of Plasticity” flourished using the technique of *Essential Collaboration*, I am not proposing how to conduct a collaboration at every instance but, instead, presenting this as a unique practice—a technique with its own values, skills, method, goals, and results; a technique that fits best in a situation where the representation of identity and personal histories are used to create an art piece. I do not suggest that every instance of collaborative work or work with a subject’s likeness is obligated to utilize this technique. Artists may regard this practice as a form of community care and self-care but choose the technique because of the unique output it produces; art sculpted by creative choices led by iterative consent and the iterative drafting process.

Suppose the subject is uncomfortable with a particular modulation or use of their voice, story, or identity. In that case, it will require an ever-developing level of skill and technique for the composer and sound artist to reform that section to satisfy both the artwork and the subject’s consent, “proposing different relationships between chance and choice, presenting different kinds of options and obligations.” (Nyman, 1999). This balance is the sweet spot for a sound art piece using oral history through the voice, a place to be artistically rich and communally caring.

This parallel to how we alter language as society and how culture changes is why the iterative draft process flourishes in *Essential Collaboration*. There is constant modulation of sound memory by experience, time, age,

and perspective. In fact, the study of psychoacoustics examines the varying psychological responses towards sound, since there is not consistent relationship to how the physiological processes of hearing are perceived by different brains and brain states. Constant, informed, and iterative consent is required because our experiences of sound—the same sounds—change as time changes; our understanding of sonic events changes drastically with our mental and physical states. As our sound experiences modulate, we must feel our relationships within sonic collaboration and experience it—the flow and vibration of the collaboration.

In the vibration of creative collaboration, the individual is the equilibrium. The intersection between individuals spurs the displacement of an equilibrium. Energy begins to swing, pulse, and swell as they interact. Much like the pulse of conversation and discussion, too much pressure from one end may cause cancellation, muting, distortion, or clashing of frequencies. One person initiates motion through the triggering of an idea. The vocalising of this event begins the momentum. The other person is acting in the position of low pressure; they listen, causing a vacuum that pulls the energy from the high pressure of the person's instigation of an idea. A moment of stillness is required to attract the momentum needed to engage the subsequent vision in the collaboration. These vibrations vary temporally and dynamically during the entire collaborative process. Feeling and respecting the flow of this vibration from the back and forth of the collaborative process is vital. Conflict and resolve are also binding energies to this vibration.

These vibrations of emotion, memory, and interaction

are all sonically related. These collaborations feel different, as should be expected, and their differences should be respected; the more profound the emotion and the memories, the deeper. Carefully, we must engage with the material and the creative work—we must be extra sensitive to the pulsing vibration throughout it.



Patterns of Plasticity

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10:22
Notes
April 9, 2023 at 10:22 AM

feat.
conor dowdle
jonathan harris
erica a Enriquez
nima jeizan
yiwei lu
aristotle forrester

compiled by aidan chisholm

09:15
All iCloud
February 27, 2023 at 09:23

How are you doing? I have a question about paper choosing. Right now I am working on a photo collage project that the format is cutting the figure out of the print

3:35
Notes

Iowa Dream
A lobster from a wheelbarrow

Have you ever stood on a frozen lake, California? ✓

Marry Me, Curly

Raised on cake

snipe hunting (fools errand).

1:25 PM
All on My iPhone

Anonymous we don't posture we're no Hironymous

11:33
Notes

Le labo pizza doc martines crust

SUN
JIZZ
&
Alcohol

12:27
Notes
February 24, 2023 at 10:53 AM

this morning the staircase in my studio building subtly smelled of blueberry tea, and after one whiff it ratatouilled me to third grade book group when my teacher Ellen would make us blueberry tea that we would drink over conversations about the book Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan.

I don't really remember what that book was about, but I remember there was one character abuelita who would take strands of her hair and knit them into the things she would make and I still think about that a lot.



5:32
All iCloud
January 21, 2023 at 5:32 PM

twin oscillation

cord
bifurcation (^^)
lattice
matryoshka doll
keys
passage/path
midpoint
empathy
grief
abandonment

3:33
Notes

multiple adjectives are always ranked accordingly:
opinion, size, age, shape, colour, origin, material, purpose, Noun.

Always leaving the room like you'll be right back.

She always left the room like she would be right back.

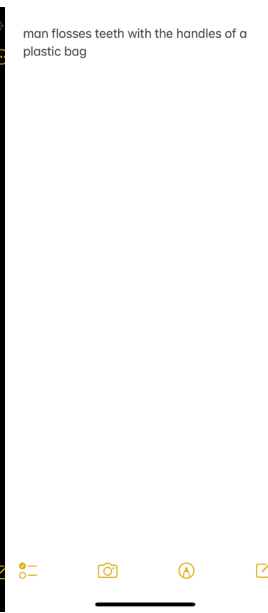
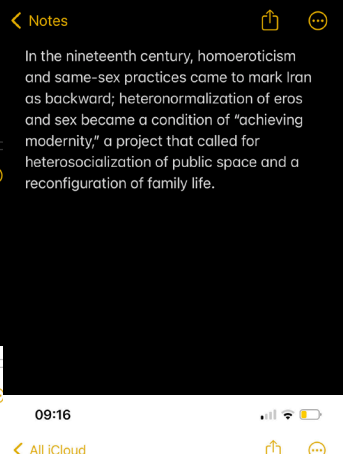
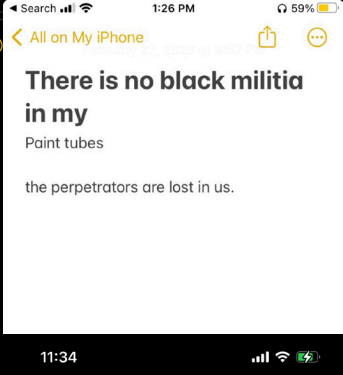
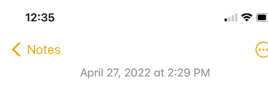
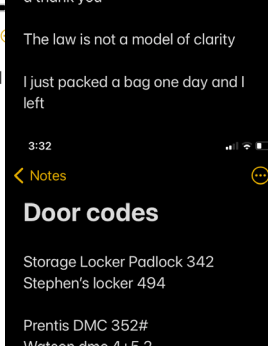
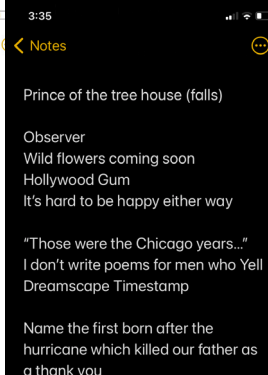
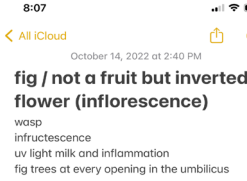
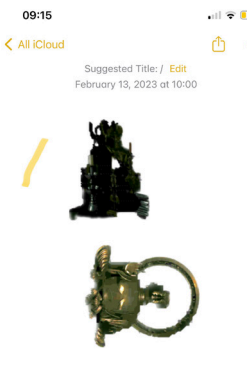
A painting for 45 years (approximately).

Secret Handshake

The sun rises quickly, after a long night

Tyrant managment 101: if he laughs you laugh

All the tall stories



Falling into Places: Kathy Butterly on Process

Theodora Bocanegra Lang

Kathy Butterly's ceramics brim with rich detail, inviting a closer look, and then another. Her recent sculptures demonstrate a focused inquiry of serial elaboration, inventively reshuffling and varying exchanges between form, material, surface, and color. Butterly probes relationships between clay and glaze, blurring boundaries between sculpture and painting. While her sculptures range widely in shape, a recent series elaborates a nascent structure of a cast store-bought fish bowl. Using this as a starting point, Butterly manipulates the clay into unique shapes that evoke similarly-sized familiar objects: pitchers, organs, or purses with strings drawn. The techniques the artist uses with the once malleable clay are echoed in the fired sculptures. Evidence of twisting, pinching, and spinning all remain. Sagging, flopping, and tearing demonstrate the weight of the clay in motion.



Falling into Places, 2022
Porcelain, earthenware, and glaze



Nude Beach, 2021
Porcelain, earthenware, glaze

In *Falling into Places* (2022), the bowl is carefully pleated into a swirling twist, though it tilts over and bends off-kilter. *Nude Beach* (2021) folds in on itself, as though collapsed. These features index the artist's practice, recording the process of creation. Ceramics are often unrecognizable transformations of rough clay into something smooth and fragile, but Butterly foregrounds the elemental materiality of clay, yielding exquisite objects that simultaneously highlight their beginnings. About her process, Butterly writes:

A piece is done when it stops bugging me! When I see that it says or is what it needs to. I work on many at a time so I have a big conversation going on. They each have a different need at a different time. Sometimes a piece will be sitting on the working platforms that are in front of me near the wall (about 10 feet away) for months before I know what it needs.



Modern Moss, 2022
Porcelain, earthenware, and glaze



Deep Think, 2022
Porcelain, earthenware, glaze

The luster of the work lies in Butterly's skilled exploration of her other main material: glaze. Upon moving closer to single works, the surfaces reveal miniscule intricacies, radiating auras of precious treasure. Meticulous details become visible: each form is fastidiously glazed in seemingly endless layers, centering the materiality of glazes as well as clay. *Modern Moss* (2022) has a smooth and uniform black surface with a thin wash of bright yellow dripping and trickling down, in-and-out of its creases and folds, accentuating the shape. Playing with reflection in *Deep Think* (2022), Butterly finishes the polished surface with thick, matte, and opaque splotches on bulging curves. On the relationship between form and color in her work, she reflects:

Form and color are interesting. Sometimes I emphasize the form and other times I go against it with a gesture or line. I'm really interested in that fine spot of tension and/or grace. I'm drawn to describing this by color choice, texture choice, and whether a glaze is opaque, or translucent, matte, shiny...there are so many choices. And then there is application—should a line be thin, wide, flat, have volume, be nervous and shaky or perfect and straight? All this adds direction to the conversation—think of an Alice Neel drawing, she said so much with the quality of her line making. She used a fat sharpie with abandon and a fine BIC pen with so much emotion. These are things I look at and

think about in others' works and my own.



Pink, 2022
Porcelain, earthenware, and glaze



This, 2022
Porcelain, earthenware, glaze

Each work includes a plinth. Made separately from the undulating cast porcelain pots, the pedestals are exacting and precise rectangular prisms made from earthenware clay. Butterly uses these pairings to complement, as in *Pink* (2022), or juxtapose, as in *This* (2022). On this vessel-cube relationship, she notes:

I wanted to work with this contrast of opposites—the smooth, emotive, luscious poured porcelain slip top in contrast to the hard-edged and hand-constructed cube made from a less sensual clay—very opposite ways of working. At a certain point I questioned myself as to why I didn't make a cast of a cube for the base; it would be so much easier. But I realized that a cube is a very formal and strong/solid idea and structure, and that by pouring clay it felt wrong...it needed to be built. The cubes and the vessel forms were not dedicated to each other early on. I made sep-

arate pieces and like musical chairs moved them around and tried many different sizes and colors until something clicked. The combo of the top and bottom form made sense to me. Some of the pieces fuse the top and bottom by many firings of glaze and others are simply placed there and bonded. It really depended on what felt right.



Dark Calm, 2021
Porcelain, earthenware, and glaze



Before Clarity, 2022
Porcelain, earthenware, glaze

Dark Calm (2021) appears dipped into a tar-like black glaze, with the preceding layers of veined white and orange craquelure left untouched on the bottom portion of both the top form and the cube. The black coating puckers under the lip at the top of the work, peeling off and revealing the underpainting in small cracks.

The most bewildering work in the exhibition is *Before Clarity* (2022), a pinched and bunched bowl sitting atop a cube, both painted black—a stark contrast to the other ceramics that joyfully teem with color and playfulness. This all-black sculpture is a visual shock that mysteriously beckons for an even closer

look to discern the minutely subtle shifts in the texture of the glaze: matte and smooth on the plinth, bubbled and satiny on the pot. Butterly is a career ceramicist, though that term carries certain connotations, perhaps calling to mind stuffy antiques or grandmother's china. The innovation of her work lies in her use of recognizable ceramic forms coupled with her own evocative techniques, precise details, and luxuriating glazes. 'Sculptor' is more fitting, however her work also proves her prowess as a painter.

This text is adapted from what was originally written as a review of Butterly's solo show 'Color in Forming' which ran from February 26–March 26, 2022, at James Cohan Gallery, 48 Walker Street, New York.

Included are excerpts from a correspondence with the artist over email in March 2023.

Deep drafts¹: rehearsing a performance about what lives beneath the surface

Liz Peterson



Vertical Sound

The best way to describe what an iceberg sounds like is vertical. It resonates with grinding tectonic hums and high-frequency tweets. At one extremity it produces tones like a 1970s synthesizer, while at another it echoes like the turning of a vice. It's hard to imagine where the sound even comes from. It doesn't sound natural. The compression and collapse of enormous bodies of ice has an epic, industrial quality to it, as though it serves some monumental purpose and we're the sacrificial listeners.

Below the surface of the water, a large hidden mass, like the draft of a spectral ship, carries countless life forms; some dormant, some gurgling gently. During its journey south, sediment is released with a hush onto the ocean floor, leaving a trail of enriched sea life, and a choir of ecosystems follows as it is pulled along by the current.

Rehearsal Day 1

I arrive at the studio, and I prepare the space. I am planning to speak about the research I've done, but I don't want to overload

¹ A boat's draft is simply the distance between the waterline and the deepest point of the boat. "A shallow draft is best to chart unknown waters."

the performers. It's the first day and they will already be taking in a lot of information.

People trickle in; I put faces to names. As they introduce themselves, I hear from several people that they were drawn to this project because they are concerned about climatic changes. I never said the project was about climate change. It strikes me that icebergs are evolving as a symbol. Once feared as unknowable natural disasters that could sink ships, now they're icons of the environmental collapse caused by humans. But I don't pursue this out loud. Instead, I talk about the sonic frequencies of icebergs which are either very high or very low. They produce no intermediate frequencies, in other words, the frequencies of the human voice.

So, the question we begin with is, *how do we sing like an iceberg?*

Scene 1

An iceberg made of paper is held up by a small crowd of people. They hold it high above their heads, hands in the air, trying to stay in contact. Lights shift around the structure, morphing its shape. Time is passing and the day turns from night back to day. The audience are an island and the singers surround them.

ENSEMBLE: (singing)

Adrift, adrift, adrift (C#4, G#3, E3)

broken off and afloat,

800 meters per hour,

layers of orbital force soften

and I trail brackish water.

Adrift, adrift, adrift (C#4, A#3, F3)

deposits of dropstone and tillite sink

to bed on the ocean floor

Life that will migrate into foreign sediment

Prepares to change form

Adrift, adrift, adrift (c#4, A#3, F3)

ANGELA: (spoken)

Her draft is an ancient underwater city,
a coarse matrix of caves and crevasses.

The current drags her south and weight divided by density, divided by length, divided by width, multiplied by three, rises up against the shore.

Deep draft

The first colonizers to make the journey across the North Atlantic were the Portuguese and the French. It wasn't until the 1570s that the English developed the technology to navigate beyond their local waters. They were gradually constructing their national identity as imperialists, and building deep draft vessels were essential to the expansion of empire.

Just like their Portuguese and French counterparts, the English were looking to the Northwest Passage, a sea route in the Arctic Ocean through an archipelago that was already inhabited by Dorset and Inuit communities. Connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans meant a shorter journey to Asia and, with the incorporation of the East India Company (1600), a more efficient extraction of Indian resources.

Many Europeans famously attempted to traverse the passage without success. The unpredictability of the weather made it impossible to navigate. The ice flow was a morphing shield, suddenly looming out of the fog, of depths unknown, dangerous, and undetected by pre-sonar technology. It froze expeditions in their tracks.

Rehearsal Day 7

Performance is the compression of time. I will often give the note, do it slower, because I want to observe the compression. Every moment contains within it the moment that came before.

Tides

I immigrated to Newfoundland with my Indian father and my English mother when I was three years old. My dad was a marine engineer: he fixed diesel engines on ships. He had trained in the 1960s with the Indian Merchant Navy, which was, at the time, a newly nationalised institution that galvanized India's freedom to trade its own goods. This freedom was only gained in 1947 after more than 400 years of British colonisation.

We moved to Newfoundland in the 1980s because my dad wanted to break out on his own. His plan was to team up with a naval architect to build and maintain vessels for local fisheries. There weren't a lot of Indians in St. John's at the time, but my

dad would seek them out, building a network of found family. I grew up as a “Newfie”, while also understanding that my family weren’t Newfoundlanders. As a child, the sight of icebergs in June simply meant the start of the long summer ahead.

By the time we moved there, technological advances in fishing had already precipitated a steady decline in sea life. Unlike indigenous and local fishing methods, industrial trawlers dragged the ocean floor for catch. Ultimately, the long-term impact on the cod population was catastrophic. Government studies had grossly over-estimated the cod stock and by 1992 the fishing industry in Newfoundland collapsed entirely. It was the largest industrial closure in Canadian history. It changed the cultural and socio-economic life on the island and triggered an outward migration. Today, many Newfoundlanders work on the tar sands in Alberta, extracting oil.

Scene 3

The engine room of a fishing vessel. Three women in oil covered overalls observe a large running diesel engine, the sound is deafening. STEPHANIE wears noise cancelling earphones and is taking notes. RUTVA photographs the engine. STORM stands by the controls. RUTVA motions to gear down. The tone of the engine shifts lower, slower. Suddenly, the engine cuts out. The vessel lurches and they are thrown to the floor.

Rehearsal Day 4

Is the iceberg a she? Asks Bee, one of the performers.

We’ve been running the opening sequence, where the ensemble enter singing, carrying a five-foot iceberg made of paper, wire, and plexiglass. I’m beginning to think the object itself is a mistake. The ensemble is supposed to be the iceberg anyway, so why do we need this model?

I answer Bee.

The identity of the iceberg is different for each performer.

I try to elaborate:

I think the iceberg carries within it the chaos of life: it is powerful, destructive, creative and vulnerable all at once. You should each

have your own interpretation of how to perform that.
I'm certain that I've confused them, so we go back to the beginning.



Rehearsing for *Deep Drafts*, 2023.
Images courtesy of Liz Peterson.

I focus on a moment when they will all turn to look at the audience on cue. I remind them that an iceberg is mutable and constantly changing, just like our ensemble. They sing, *adrift, adrift, adrift*. We continue like this: I will say something to the group, someone responds, and it becomes a layer in the understanding of what we're doing. Then we repeat the action, and we see how it changes. I adjust what I say, and we do it again. Gradually the layers build up into a shared knowledge and the practice of the ensemble. Eventually, our repetitions are tidal, and we become so porous, that our gestures dissolve in motion. Our voices escape into echo, and we drift in waters that were once unknown.

About the Mountain
Phoenix Guqing Wang

I. Ruins

I keep a Yucca plant on the balcony
Its greenish blue stirs up
My rambling whims in grey
Of the early morning heavens

Serenity sometimes betrays
When the spike pains me
Weeping – I run to my mom
Her arms always wrap me tight

No te preocupes.

She points to the contour afar
The mountain beyond has devoured
Much of the gall, and so will mine.

I do not catch her – but I sense
her corporeal being through the air
When its flow carries her breath
The Yucca plant grows white blossoms

Every Sunday evening mom watches
The plant flinching– and then turns back
Her eyes look limpid as her corpse shrouded
Among a plethora of specters

Sometimes Yucca blooms pink
As the hue of the dawning mountain
In mom's yesteryears – the same air lingered
I piece together the leakages of yore

In memory of the face in the photo
Her contours were beclouded by ashes –
Spilling over –
A wandering ghost in ruins.

II. Evening Breeze

I enjoy roaming on windless nights
Las Vegas smells immaculate
The city falls into a long, sweet dream
Needless to worry about my disturbance

I conjure up the mountain I encountered
When I was young – feet into the wilderness
The sands roaring hard, the clouds shuttling fain
Sinking – my torso, psyche, and a scorching soul
Into her infinite arms the night tender –
Flimsy boughs, watery moonlight
Under her feet I cuddled up, in delicacy
Melting my body into her soil

Neons on the streets always remind me
of her tears – Shimmering, stinging, leaking
Unsnarled – I seized her voice and her wounds
She trembled as I quivered in the freeze
What would it be like if I embraced her –
Would she sense what I feel and offer me
a belated kiss of dreams crippled and
Burned into ashes under the starry night?

But I know she cares about my fracture
My unfitting hair, my uncouth years
My guilt submerged into the city's sin
Enlivened in a breeze I lifted my feet –

III. Ashes

Every time
The madding crowd roars
I recollect my profiles
To see how beings are made into ashes

Alice. 24. Adventurer. Vocal system damaged. *Leaks.*
Juan. 55. Doctor. Infected. *Leaks.*
Jack. 70. Gardener. Bed-ridden. *Leaks.*
Luciano. 10. Actress. Blinded. *Leaks.*
Yucci. Age unknown. Symptoms unknown. *Leaks.*

Let them leak.
It does not matter because
They will soon become ashes

Then I could gather their fragments
And give them back to the mountain

Then I would behold
how ambitions once brightened the horizon
and withered in a flash

Then I would understand
why it leaks into the belly of the earth
Into her tangling veins

The rest will turn into rocks
Weathered, perpetuated
Till time immemorial

All before it is too late
The leakages sprawl over all
Like prehistorical greenery
Swallowing up our chimeras

IV. Crack

Will it work? Of course. Is that safe? Of course.

Really? Of course.

How long will it be preserved? 10,000. 10,000 – seconds? Minutes? Hours? Week?

10,000 YEARS.

[Enough for life to be transmigrated – for a million times]

How do you make sure of that? By calculation.

– Calculation... of what?

It is a matter of science.

But *it will leak*. Insofar as it leaks, every being leaks in its path till it cracks and annihilates.

Like a lizard in the desert Like a crab on the cliff Like the falling sky Like the felling trees

It cracks. *Nil*.

[They say there is a crack in everything – that is how the light gets in]

What if the crack is filled

By wastes and toxins?

Would light dissipate their shadow –

Or would it be assimilated into darkness unbound

And then – explode?

The bill was passed. Why don't we protest? Why should we do that?

How should we warn of its peril? There is no peril.

What if there is? Make signs.

Signs of languages. Of pictures. Of bodies. Of black and white. Of red and blue.

Do not worry about meanings. We make meanings out of nothing. Meanings will not leak.

And so it stands.

Over the mountain a huge black phantom is dozing off

The moonshine does not realize

And continues to gaze at her critters

Crooning in an ethereal lullaby

And so it leaks.

V. Yucca

I woke up in dizziness, brimming with
dusts of wood warbling around in a tone that resembled the
crackling ice crying for the sun
I smelt her tears I touched her voice I tasted her smile and
– she melted in my palms

My mind was raining heavily

There was once a time that I could remember the pain
remember how the steel chiseled into my body
how the nails tingled remember how the colorless toxin
followed the calculated lines into my veins remember
how my brains bid farewell to the fibers
grew into vegetation of irregular shapes.

I looked down at my heart

Cut asunder – Sutured – Labeled NO TRESPASSING

And I was whirled into a long, deep tunnel – sound asleep.

In oblivion I was reawakened

Forgetting how to cry and how to bleed

My limbs were sealed by the past

Intact without – crumbled within

The salamander mumbled in merriment

Claiming for my return – a being unknown

Forgetting is, he said, a way to escape

Even when you are bound

Earthbound – Toxinbound – Wastebound

Repository for a suicidal future

Shackled in a loop ceaseless

Yucca-bound

I broke away from the days begone

My body bleeds –

I sob at a loss;

Under the overflowing sunshine

Rivulets bewep for 10,000 seconds

Then driven into eternal silence.

***A Contemplation with Tehching Hsieh –
Life is an Album of Drafts***
Christine Chen



Film rolls of Tehching Hsieh in *Time
Clock Piece*, 1980-1981.

It was 9.30am on a crisp Tuesday morning in April 2014. No-one had visited the video space of the 19th Biennale of Sydney yet, so it was just me and the artworks. A sliver of hazy sunlight trickled into the dark reformed warehouse, and illuminated a flicker in the dark corner. This felt like a gentle nudge from above, telling me to investigate this particular piece.

It was a stop-motion-like film. Thousands of photos of a man next to a time clock rapidly flashed on the screen. His hair slowly grew longer, and the clock spoke spun quickly in circles. My eyes diverted to the walls next to the 16mm film. Vertically lined all

around the space were the thousands of photos featured in the film I just watched. Now, the film had become physically present and surrounded me. It was 9.45am. Still, no visitors. And still, I had no idea what this work was about.

I watched the film again. From the beginning, it stated on-screen,

“I have punched a time clock in my studio every hour on the hour for one year.”

Okay.

I got the premise of the work.

I watched it again.

And again.

Whether it was the same, or a recreation, the time clock featured in these photos physically hung below the projected film.

Something about this work captivated me.

Each time I watched this six-minute film, a different sensation was evoked inside of me.

But I don't know how to describe it.

This was the *Time Clock Piece*, the second piece performed by Tehching Hsieh in his oeuvre, collectively known as *One Year Performances*. Hsieh created six performances in total between 1978 and 1999. He put himself through extreme tests of mental and physical discipline over extreme durations to explore the temporal processes that

constitute our lives. In his *Cage Piece* (1978-79), he locked himself inside a cage for a year and self-imposed a ban on reading, writing and speaking. After his *Time Clock Piece*, Hsieh performed his *Outside Piece* in 1981 where for one year, he did not enter any building. Essentially, he lived, slept, bathed, or lack of, and defecated outside. In 1983, Hsieh performed his *Rope Piece*, where he tied himself to artist, Linda Montano with an 8-foot rope for a year. The final one-year performance prohibited him from making, viewing, talking or reading about art. His sixth performance, *Thirteen Year Plan*, lasted thirteen years where he made art but did not show it publicly. This oeuvre together is what Hsieh defines as his “lifeworks,” indicating how these works were created from the very experiences of life.

My first encounters felt weird. Now I know why. It was a metaphysical experience. I was watching Hsieh perform the passing of time, and yet here I was, doing exactly the same thing. For two months, four hours every week, my role was to invigilate the displayed digital works and assist visitors. Each week, I had around four hours to sneakily watch Hsieh’s film over, and over, and over, and over, again.

I was passing time while watching the passing of time being presented from a previous time. In 2014,

the film, the 366 punch cards, the 366 film strips – weren't the work itself. The original work no longer exists, just like time itself is ephemeral. These visual displays were simply documentary evidence of the time passed in 1980. One could say these were three ways of presenting time passing. Each individual film strip, each film flicker denoted a moment of time being passed. Each moment that I observed a photo or a film replay, a moment of time passed.

Being hailed as the “master” by performance artist, Marina Abramović, Tehching Hsieh pioneered his own category of art, “durational art.” One year (and thirteen years) is a long duration. It can hardly be categorized into the specific eventhood ascribed to performance art. Hsieh's sustained temporal presentation is a phenomenological experience of our everyday in its purest forms. This contrasts with the specificity of eventhood ascribed to most performance works. Every *Piece* is one draft that consolidates to constitute Hsieh's “lifeworks.” What carries the most intrigue is not the completion of his final “life” work, where Hsieh reported: “I kept myself alive.” Rather, it is the evidence showing each draft's performance in the 70s-90s. It's the prolonged process that brings intrigue to what is and is not shown. In *Cage Piece*, Hsieh's extreme self-limitations were documented through the testimonies of others and a daily photograph. Then

in *Time Clock Piece*, Hsieh's visibility increased by 24x fold through each time clock punch. Finally, his last two pieces placed him in almost total invisibility. Yet still, time passed. Hsieh had still lived those durations using the same temporal concepts, just with different conditions.

Pause for a moment.

Out of the 8,760 times that Hsieh should've punched the time clock for his *Time Clock Piece*, only 8,627 were fulfilled. Indeed, these 133 missed punches show his human side. Humans make errors. Yet the *Piece* isn't deemed ruined. Our perceptions of attaining perfection of one goal is an impossible task. Hsieh's oeuvre encourages us to view life as segments of time that all combine to make up who we are. Within Hsieh's lifeworks, his six "drafts" are further broken down into individual drafts that come together to make his work(s). Pulling out a piece of a *Piece* shows Hsieh life at any one fleeting moment. These drafts serve as an archive that is regularly referred to when retrospective exhibitions display a selection of his lifeworks. At every display, a different configuration is presented, making it a constant curation of Hsieh's life drafts.

Hsieh was born in Taiwan and later became a seaman, which allowed him to travel to the United States, where he jumped off the vessel and illegally stayed there. For the first fourteen years in New York City, Hsieh avoided all subways for fear of

deportation. It was during this time of uncertainty and living in a constant fear of legal personnel that Hsieh made these pieces. Hsieh entered a building once during his *Outdoors Piece* as he was forcefully taken before a judge. Perhaps he broke his own rules, but this wasn't one by choice. One could see the clear pain on Hsieh's face in the photos of him being ushered into the building by the police. While he did fear deportation, the destruction of his work's integrity was what concerned Hsieh the most. Yet unexpected circumstances arose that were beyond his control. Still, these experiences occurred. Now, it became a draft of Hsieh's life.

In February 2023, I met Hsieh in his self-built studio in Brooklyn. The first thing he asks me,

“Can you speak Chinese?”

Soon, in a long conversation where I spoke broken mandarin, and he spoke broken English, there were clear moments of mistranslated misunderstandings. When I mentioned his works as expressions of one's life “drafts,” he began by asking me to type it into Google Translate. He pondered. Then he asked,

“Isn't the word draft more related to texts?”

I answered, “In a traditional sense, maybe, but drafts can be used in a myriad of contexts. In this instance, if we can have essay drafts, why can't we have drafts of one's life?”

He nodded. Quietly meditating on my response,

somehow, in my broken Mandarin, he understood what I meant. At home, we call the free insertion of English words when we're speaking in Mandarin, "Chinglish." In an almost desperate act of being understood, an inevitable process of transformation occurs as we combine two languages into a mutual form of understanding. A new draft, born out of survival, is created.

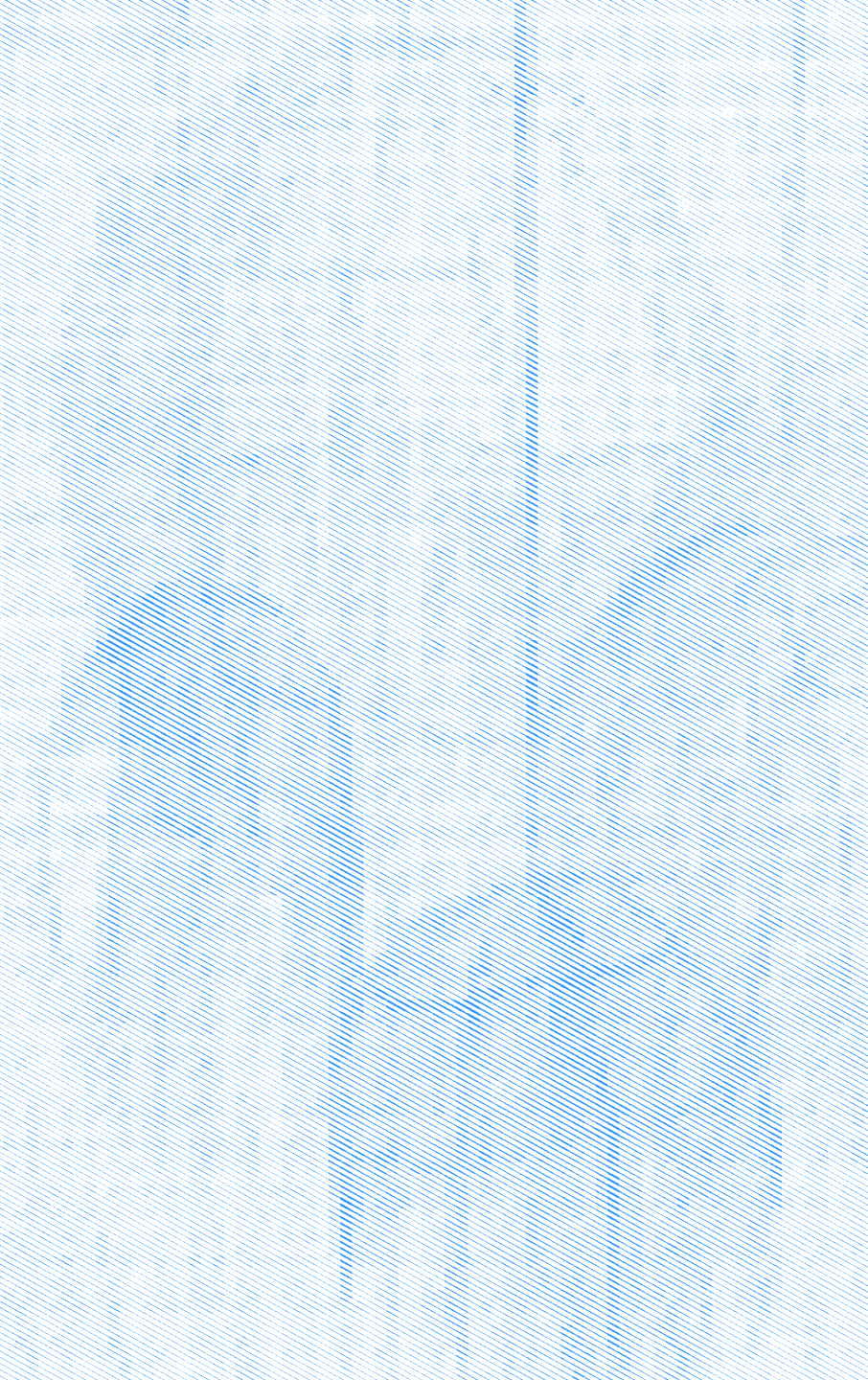
Hsieh used one year as his measurement, stating that this is the time required for the earth to orbit just once around the sun. Now we live in an age where every second is deemed too long. When I asked how his lifeworks juxtapose with today's culture of hyperspeed, he simply goes,

"You need to develop your own speed. It's about understanding your life and your rhythm."

Time itself is a fluid concept, it is subjective, and relative.



Tehching Hsieh in his studio, Brooklyn, 2023.
Photos taken by Christine Chen



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