

Jos Boys
Mel Y. Chen
Rosalyn D'Mello
Satu Herralá
Jesal Kapadia
Pia Lindman
Hardeep Mann
Sanni Purhonen
Vidha Saumya
Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen



La Biennale di Venezia

60. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

The pleasures

EDITORS

Yvonne Billimore

Jussi Koitela

we choose

Pavilion of Finland

at the 60th International

Art Exhibition –

La Biennale di Venezia

complain, vent roll your eyes be shocked, and stain those perfect whites speak in volumes of glistening treasures don't bottle tight these mighty

K.

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Frame Contemporary Art Finland

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...that if all that gets stored in the thick
flesh as a result of inhabiting so many toxic
territories, generation after generation, needs
to be released and reclaimed through the ink
of a pen, the point of a needle or the sculpting
of clay. These are slow and often repetitive
actions, enacted time after time, until they are
entirely embodied. How might many more of
us — until all of us — encourage and embolden
one another to resist the pressures of time,
labor and productivity exerted on our bodies
and instead learn to more fully embody
the pleasures we choose.

Pavilion of Finland
at the 60th International
Art Exhibition —
La Biennale di Venezia

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The pleasures we choose

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Frame Contemporary Art Finland

The pleasures we choose

20 April to 24 November 2024

Pavilion of Finland at the 60th International
Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

ARTISTS

Pia Lindman, Vidha Saumya and
Jenni-Julia Wallinheimo-Heimonen

CURATORS

Yvonne Billimore and Jussi Koitela

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PAVILION SUPERVISOR

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Elmo Holopainen, Maaria Mustakallio, Jenna Mutanen,
Rebecca Yallop and Venice Art Logistics

EXHIBITION ATTENDANTS' SUPERVISOR

Tamara Andruszkiewicz, Venice Art Logistics

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Anu Aaltonen, Pinja Korhonen and Antti Soulanto, Artlab

TACTILE MAP

Taktiili Oy

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland · Kone Foundation · The Swedish Cultural
Foundation in Finland · AVEK The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture · The Church Media
Foundation · Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired · Embassy of Finland in Rome

The pleasures we choose

Pavilion of Finland

at the 60th International Art Exhibition

La Biennale di Venezia

EDITED BY

Yvonne Billimore

Jussi Koitela

K. Verlag

Frame Contemporary Art Finland

2024

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Yvonne Billimore

Jussi Koitela

The pleasures we choose

An Introduction

The sensual pleasures of encounter, contact, and intimacy may lure us away from the temptation to wall ourselves off within a narrowly human sphere, even as painful histories saturate embodied recognitions.

— Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*

While I am waiting, I am using my pen,
steadily altering words.

Where the card says “medically indigent”
I cross it out and write indignant.

Where my records say “chemically sensitive”
I write chemically assaulted, chemically wounded,
chemically outraged. On the form listing risk factors
for cancer; I write in my candidates: agribusiness, air fresheners,
dry cleaning, river water, farm life,
bathing, drinking, eating, vinyl, cosmetics, plastic, greed.

— Aurora Levins Morales, “Patients”

Jussi Koitela

If architectural discourse has from its beginning associated building and body, the body that it describes is the medical body, reconstructed by each new theory of health. Throughout the twentieth century, designers positioned architecture against medical and psychological trauma. Each new instrument of medical diagnosis implied new positions for design and new systems of architectural representation. The occupant is a patient, with modernity itself being both a disease and a possible cure.

— Beatriz Colomina, *X-ray Architecture*

“Liberated future” is a misnomer

Better maybe to say:

a place where the body is shared and social

a place where literature is not for oneself

we know nothing of scarcity

we have retired lack

my having is your having

a place with no need for catharsis

Or the treadmill of public opinion

No more bad dreams

Joy in the form best suited to the joy-seeker

— Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*

Drink in beauty. Pleasure is a practice.

Practice pleasure like your life depends on it.

— Alana Devich Cyril, quoted in:
adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism:
The Politics of Feeling Good*

THE PLEASURES WE CHOOSE: AN EXHIBITION

The pleasures we choose speaks to the inseparability of art and life. It is the outcome of a multifaceted collaboration by artists Pia Lindman, Vidha Saumya, Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, curators Yvonne Billimore and Jussi Koitela, and architectural designer Kaisa Sööt, presented as an exhibition in the Pavilion of Finland at the 60th Venice Biennale, which this publication accompanies.

The pleasures we choose weaves together the work of three artists whose practises are acutely informed by their embodied experiences of structural, environmental and social imbalances in the world. In Lindman's, Saumya's and Wallinheimo-Heimonen's practises, art, life and activism are consciously intertwined. Articulated across a wide range of materials and processes – including drawing, stitchwork, sculpture and healing – their artworks celebrate the pleasure of the personal as a powerful means of inhabiting, imagining and remaking more plural worlds.

Lindman's, Saumya's and Wallinheimo-Heimonen's specific experiences of the world, responsive approaches and relationships with materials saturate their artworks. Together, they transform the Pavilion of Finland into a space in which audiences are exposed to different "occupancies" – entangled relationships between people, buildings, objects and spaces – and are invited to re-adjust themselves and (re-)consider how different

bodies are expected to look and behave according to social norms.¹

Embraced as a collective project, *The pleasures we choose* has been shaped by exchanging both shared and individual experiences of art and life. This shared process has influenced the artworks and generated the building blocks for architectural elements that accommodate access and bodily needs across registers. Exploring ways of becoming-collective through presenting works and bodies in relation rather than isolation, the project extends this to the audience: the pavilion is not only a site for the presentation of artworks but an exhibition of intersecting needs for emancipatory spatial and social conditions.

- 1 In *Doing Disability Differently*, architectural researcher and writer (and contributor to this book) Jos Boys explains, “I have chosen to mainly use the term ‘occupancies’ as a way of describing the entangled relationships between people, buildings, objects and spaces. Other common terms, such as use or inhabitation, seem quite problematic, because they remain connected to older cause-effect, stimuli-response, man-environment, subject-object framings, which persistently separate out the person from space. Meanwhile the ‘newer’ terms being introduced to grapple with this difficulty – choreography, enactments, performance – all also have their limitations in focusing on describing the dynamic qualities of our engagements with space, rather than on social practices. In fact, what is most interesting is how lacking language is in being able to express our ordinary (and diverse) inter-weavings of social and spatial experiences”. See Jos Boys, *Doing Disability Differently: An Alternative Handbook on Architecture, Dis/ability and Designing for Everyday Life* (Routledge: New York, 2014), 2.

Presenting their works and lived experiences in correlation with one another, the artists position art-making, conceived through embodied knowledge, as a mechanism to survive a world that renders the existence of some bodies more *use-full* than others. By choosing to inhabit the world *otherwise* – spending their time and labour stitching, drawing, sculpting and breathing their experiences to material forms – they resist the normative utilitarian demands placed on their bodies, and insist that all bodies should be afforded the right to choose pleasure.

EMBODIED PRACTISE(S)

“Research” is now the arena in which we negotiate knowledge that we have inherited with the conditions of our lives. [...] And it is here, in the immersion in conditions, that “research” transforms from an investigative impulse to the constitution of new realities [...]. It is thus that we recognise that “research” is not some elevated activity requiring a great deal of prior knowledge, nor is it simply the urge to “find things out”. It is in many ways the stuff of daily life.

— Irit Rogoff, *Becoming Research*

Embodied knowledge – drawn from the world and bodily encounters with it – and the myriad ways it is harnessed to guide research and practise is at the core of the project. As is understanding bodies-entities-materials-environments as inseparable from one another. This notion of porosity spreads through the exhibition and the artist’s works, speaking to the

multi-sensuous messiness of everyday life and resisting Cartesian body-mind dualisms.

Continuing with her practise as an artist and healer, Pia Lindman's work explores the world of the subsensorial – a realm of experience that is beyond the capabilities of our everyday human sensory perceptions. Following mercury poisoning, the artist experienced heightened sensitivity of her nervous system and micro-signals from within her own body, and began to incorporate these into her artistic practise. By transforming these signals into material manifestations – images, melodies, words and colours – Lindman attunes to atmospheres, toxicities and materiality in different spatial and social conditions. In this sense, her practise investigates the subsensorial far beyond merely human registers, drawing connections across lifeforms and paying particular attention to current planetary conditions, the parameters of which are not limited to, but affected by capitalism, the extraction industry, pollution, anthropogenic climate change and disturbance and destruction of biodiversity, living soils and landscapes. In the exhibition Lindman's *Collectivities Cycle*, presents different materialisations of this careful process of attending to subsensorial matters and bodies. Interrupting the spatial and microbial architectures of the pavilion, she has crafted an air-conditioning clay sculpture that allows visitors in their individual and interconnected bodies and breath to be exposed to air that is being treated by the sculpture's organic matter and the microbes it supports. This clay sculpture supports visitors entering the exhi-

bition in an embodied way, creating a space that heals through the simple act of breathing. In seeming contrast to the materiality of the sculpture, Lindman's "living digital paintings" – a series of artworks emerging from her ongoing participation in an online Tong Ren healing community – visibly radiate into the room with luminous images that slowly glitch and transmogrify into different bodily forms and energies.² Inspired by Lindman, we invite you to ask: what potential forms of life and action might the subsensorial give rise to if we were to attune ourselves to this critical realm?

In her practice Vidha Saumya also attunes to seemingly minuscule matters: honing into minute details, behaviours, social choreographies and objects that most of us pass by without giving a second thought to. Often engaging with the intricate relationship between human presence and the environment, Vidha Saumya's works challenge the norms of aesthetics, gender, academia and nation-state. In her work, one encounters an interplay of desire, intimacy and (home)land, offset by the mundane, heteronormative demands of utility, time and (dis)placement. *To all the barricades...the rumour got you* (2024), is presented as a bricolage of three distinct bodies of work, displayed across three planes of the pavilion. The first plane comprises a multi-panel ballpoint pen drawing on silk cloth of an assembly of individuals waiting in line. The queue, as an embodiment of time spent waiting, is an offspring of bureaucracy and trickle-down

2 See the conversation "Dance for Meaning" in this volume, 81–103.

economy, and thus a universal architectural feature of our lives. The drawing style juxtaposes empty spaces next to densely patterned forms while the translucence of the fabric simultaneously sucks in and blocks out the architectural details from the surroundings. On the second plane, a series of sculptures mimics the insignificant debris lining the city sidewalks. The pavement signifies not just a physical surface but a shared domain traversed by countless individuals. Occupying the liminal space between utility and obsolescence, these insensate props of marginality, the immortal trash, change form but do not perish. The third plane consists of a constellation of cross-stitched textile forms replicating stains: appearing as patches of moisture, mould, pollutants or toxins, where stains are containments of further spread. Just as human-made architecture often fails to contain the natural climate and breaks out in stains, these forms question who and what is rendered a contaminant in our natural and social climates. Through a heterogeneity of form and various subject matter, Saumya encourages us to reflect on our shared existence within this evolving world.

A multi-dimensional artwork containing a textile installation, moving sculpture and short videos, *How Great is Your Darkness*, by Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, points to the hate speech people with disabilities are subjected to – particularly from within the medical and social care industries. Across her practise as an artist and activist, Wallinheimo-Heimonen advocates for a shift from the medical model of disability, in which those with disabilities are typically “treated”

to fit society, towards a social model, in which it is the ableist cultural attitudes and structures that need to be transformed. The fantastical scenes she creates re-story people with disabilities as their own agents of transformation. Under the guise of parties, pearls and exquisite stitch work, her piece is thickly laced with references to the hate speech, stereotyping, judgment, shame, and guilt that people with disabilities are forced to endure in their everyday lives. Despite human rights treaties and modern definitions, people with disabilities are still too often prescribed as defective, deficient, inferior or even inhuman. This is especially the case within capitalist economic frameworks that demand productivity from bodies. And yet, Wallinheimo-Heimonen's intricately fabricated realities also embody her incredible sense of humour by celebrating a world in which a biodiversity of human bodies have won the right to choose pleasurable life over mere existence.

ACCESS ARCHITECTURE: INTERRUPTING ART AND LIFE

The problem with a misfit, then, inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their juxtaposition, the awkward attempt to fit them together. When the spatial and temporal context shifts, so does the fit, and with it meanings and consequences. Misfit emphasizes context over essence, relation over isolation, mediation over origination. Misfits are inherently unstable rather than fixed, yet they are very real because they are material rather than

linguistic constructions. The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits.

— Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept”

The artists’ works are connected conceptually and materially through architectural interventions – collaboratively shaped by the artists and curators, and presented by architectural designer Kaisa Sööt – that reimagine the Pavilion of Finland, as well as the kinds of art, bodies and experiences that the space can support.

A historical canon of exhibitions, developed predominantly by Western institutions and cultural frameworks actively embroiled in colonial and extractive practises, still largely determines the ways of seeing, categorising and presenting artworks, artefacts and other forms of cultural expression. The conditions for presenting and mediating art – be they for social, spatial, architectural or formal strategies of exposition – thus carry and extend the intersectional burdens of classism, racism, colonialism and ableism that force artworks and bodies into certain formations and displays. We argue that these conditions separate artists’ bodies, lives and labour from artworks and deter audiences from engaging in more embodied ways. With *The pleasures we choose*, we emphatically manifest the questions: whether and, if so, how, as curators collaborating with artists in the framework of prestigious institutional commissions, can we make visible, interrupt

and transform the inherited bias of epistemological and cultural power structures?

In Tony Bennett's seminal text "The Exhibitionary Complex", the sociologist states that the art institutions are "involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public arenas where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society".³ Bennett's notion of art institutions and exhibitions as "vehicles" of power in the moment when something is displayed publicly allows us to recognise and (re)consider which objects, narratives, *bodyminds*, and ways of being and relating are consistently excluded.⁴ Deeply ingrained in these consid-

3 Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex", *new formations* 4 (Spring 1988): 74.

4 The term "bodymind" challenges the divisions generally made between body and mind in Western thought. It is a term often used in disability studies to emphasise that the body and mind are inseparable and interdependent. See, for instance, this statement by disability studies scholar Margaret Price, "According to this approach, because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other – that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two – it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term." See Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain", *Hypatia* 30/1 (2015): 26.

erations, or lack thereof, are Western-centric histories of art and culture, their gazes and canons; however, as curator Satu Herrala emphasises in her text in this publication, bodyminds and their relations and needs are rarely taken into account when thinking about making art public. The spectating body is simply expected to flow through the exhibition space, ticking off the visitor count, but they must not loiter or make the space their own.⁵

Mindful of these issues and wanting to encourage embodied and multi-sensorial experiences, *The pleasures we choose* introduces forms of “access architecture” to support different social, physical and microbial architectures present within the pavilion. Leaning on artist Céline Conderelli’s acclaimed work on “support structures” that attend to *who* and *what* gives support, the “access architecture” that is part of the exhibition at the Pavilion of Finland seeks to intensify and multiply the sensory and physical relays possible between artworks and audiences by offering access tools, spatial guides and places to rest and connect to the space and each other. In dialogue with the artworks, these structures sustain different rhythms and durations of engagement. They ask how differing bodyminds can move with others in pleasurable ways, and empower visitors to have more bodily and cognitive agency in exhibition spaces.

5 To read Satu Herrala’s essay “Embodied Curating”, see 41–55 in this volume.

Not limited to acting as internal structures, they also disrupt the architectural bounds of the pavilion and extend into the Giardini's grounds via a handrail that functions as both intervention and invitation to find and enter the building. Softly directing visitors from the outset, this structure gently guides visitors into and through the pavilion as their bodies enter various relations with the space, artworks and other bodies.

The pleasures we choose refuses the exceptionalism of art and the myth that the artist is separate from the world, emphasising on the contrary that it is precisely the experiences which draw attention to co-existence – getting in line, taking to the streets, breathing the same toxic air – that drive us towards drawing new collective futurities into existence. In this iteration of the Venice Biennale, the Pavilion of Finland is dedicated to those who, through their embodied experiences of the world, cannot afford to differentiate life and art, even if they might never have the opportunity to pass through these walls.

EXTENDING BEYOND THE PERIPHERY OF THE EXHIBITION

The publication you are now holding also leans into the concept of access architecture employed in *The pleasures we choose*. It acts as a guide for the exhibition – a way to orient and mediate our experiences of the works – thus promoting access and communication on different registers. Intended as a handbook, this exquisite little book, beautifully designed by Helsinki-

based graphic designer Samuli Saarinen, can be read in direct relation to the exhibition, but it also exists as a relay to those who could not visit the pavilion. In short, it extends beyond the pavilion's walls to present the core practises, processes and politics of the project via the more intimate format of a publication.

Akin to the multiple panes encountered in the pavilion, the publication unfolds a small space thickly laced with material thinking and practises on the intersecting social, cultural, environmental and systemic imbalances that structure our lives and livabilities. In dialogue with the ideas, processes and artworks of Lindman, Saumya and Wallinheimo-Heimonen, the contributions gathered here speak to matters of access, agency, toxicity, architectures of violence (social, cultural and environmental), institutional conditions, disability justice, interdependency, collectivity, human and planetary health, healing, embodiment-as-power, rest-as-resistance and the radical art of selecting and sustaining pleasure. In what follows, we briefly introduce the gifts our guest authors have shared with us for this publication.

Whether by way of pen-on-silk, cross stitch, paper sculptures or words, Vidha Saumya is both a drawer and a poet – this unique sensibility is visible throughout her practise. For this publication, she teases us with a series of poems to keep us company while waiting in line: for organic fruit or food stamps; for transportation or deportation; for a seat at the table. These poems echo the same sentiments of Saumya's work in the

exhibition, transpiring a profound understanding of life through seemingly mundane or disposable actions, transactions and plastic wrappers.

As curating bodyminds interested in embodiment, we invited curator Satu Herrala to share her work on Embodied Curating and the (curatorial) body as a transmitter of relations. In her essay, she asks, “What can a body do by linking with other bodies? How do connections between bodies strengthen their agency?”⁶ Writing through her own practise, relationships and bodily attunement, she considers what conditions, temporalities, spaces and structures are needed to genuinely and meaningfully support different bodies and energies to participate in the arts.

Jos Boys’s thinking, writing and editorial work on access, dis/ability and architecture has been a long-term influence and a key reference in shaping the project – both conceptually and in the spatial and architectural design. To our delight, Boys was interested in thinking with the project as an opportunity to specifically explore the architectures of art and art institutions: as cultural frameworks and physical spaces that prescribe and uphold “normative” relations with art. Her writing in this collection now guides us to notice and more rigorously interrogate which bodyminds cultural spaces are orientated towards, and which are ignored. The essay teems with examples of how disabled and other non-normative

6 Herrala, 53 in this volume.

artists have been “carving out this space for themselves, leading the way on what kinds of artwork are possible, and how these might engage differently with audiences”, suggesting new ways to read and amplify their radical practices of inclusion and transformation.

Contributing a multi-perspectival conversation, artists Jesal Kapadia and Pia Lindman, together with healer and organiser Hardeep Mann, reflect on their connections – with the body, energies, one another, and the world – that developed by participating in weekly online Tong Ren healing sessions over the past four years. Orbiting Lindman’s work on the subsensorial, “a realm of things you don’t see, yet it affects you”,⁷ and how this manifests in her healing and artistic practises, specifically her paintings, they discuss the intelligence, power and agency of the body. A red thread in their conversation is collectivity as a form of activism and how the intention of coming together – and healing together – is everything. Crucially, they extend this interdependency beyond human bodies and relations, speaking to the porosity of the body and its “coexistence with other species, elements and substances”, including the microbial world.

As mutual admirers, Sanni Purhonen’s and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen’s artwork, activism and poetry have long been in dialogue. In their

7 Pia Lindman, quoted from Kapadia, Lindman, Mann, “Dance for Meaning”, 88 in this volume.

collaborative, poly-form text, Wallinheimo-Heimonen's artwork presented in *The pleasures we choose* is opened up in correspondence with Purhonen's poetry. Combining data from medical studies and government surveys with lived experiences, personal anecdotes, dreams and desires, their exchange reveals and enriches the surrealism and symbolism woven into Wallinheimo-Heimonen's work. Deeply intimate and layered, this contribution speaks to the very real ways that statistics on hate speech, discrimination and the dehumanisation of people with disabilities play out in their bodies and lives, and how Purhonen and Wallinheimo-Heimonen playfully subvert this as disability justice artists and activists.

Invited to engage in yet another kind of correspondence, Rosalyn D'Mello and her ink pen entangle her own work with that of Vidha Saumya in a text that beautifully crafts connections through ink, labour, time and materiality. First written by hand, then transcribed, D'Mello's approach is one of writing from the "gut". This is something that is instantly felt in the way that the text glides through memories, thinking and daily domestic life, transcending the constructs of linear time and space: the story that unfolds from D'Mello's encounters with Saumya, her works and words, tells of processes, places and people from both Saumya and D'Mello's lives. Intimately and intricately combined, her text is a wonderful demonstration of where thinking-with artworks and artists can take you.

Closing this book is series of passages selected from Mel Y. Chen's recent book *Intoxicated: Race, Disability, and Chemical Intimacy Across Empire*, published by Duke University Press in 2023. For many years, and particularly during this project, Chen's writing has led us in navigating the entanglement of toxicity, disability, race, gender and agitation and how these manifest in the (institutional) context of the exhibition and national pavilion. The excerpts shared here speak to some of the underlying thinking on the connection between bodies, toxicity, knowledge and agency explored in *The pleasures we choose*.

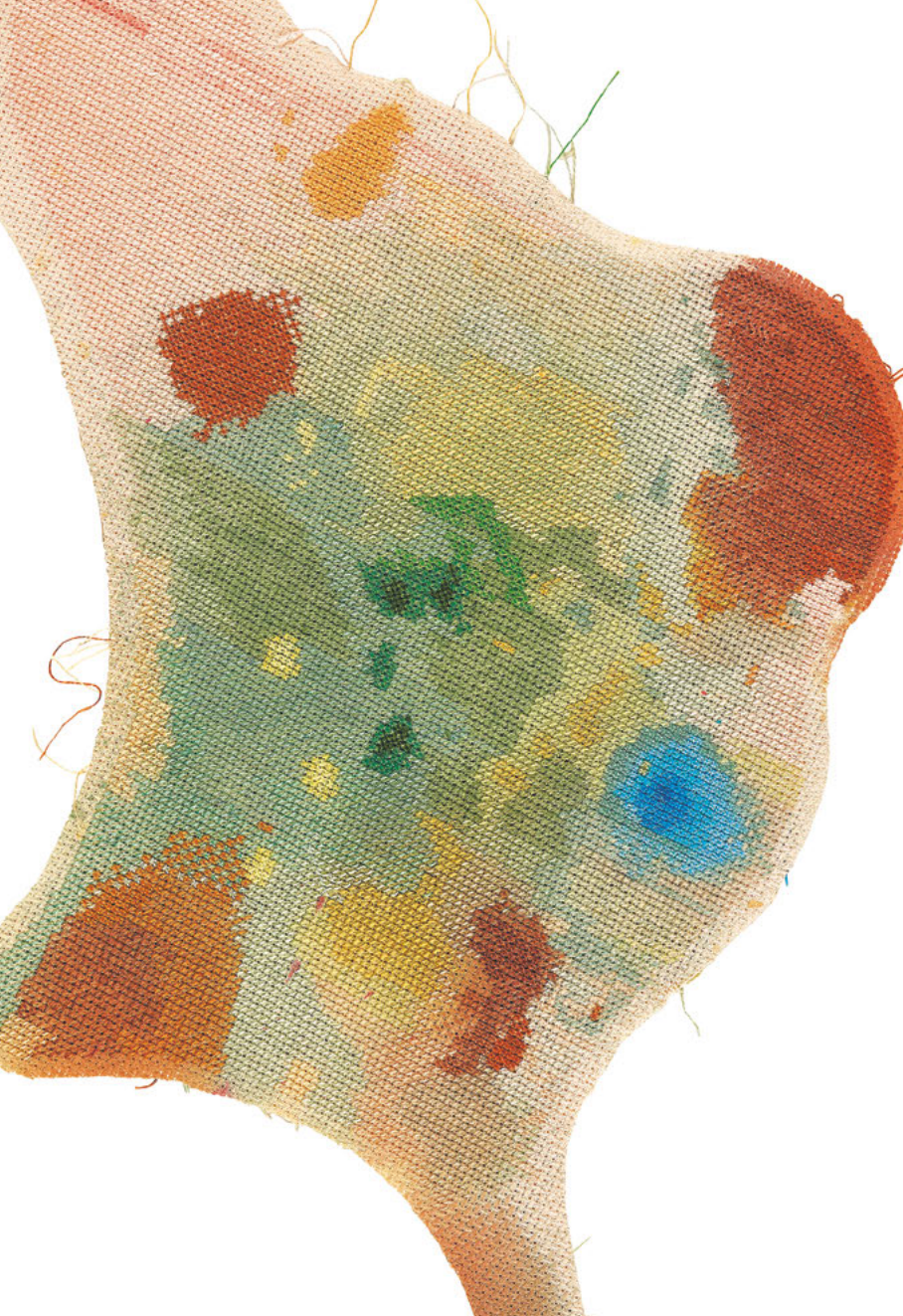
A NOTE ON CO-AUTHORSHIP

Since it is not always so clear where one body (of knowledge) ends and another begins, we would like to acknowledge that there have been many hands, eyes, minds and senses involved in composing this text. Much of the thinking in this text has found form through years of learning from and with Pia Lindman, Vidha Saumya and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, and through embarking on this collective process together. Some sections have been gleaned from existing texts on the artists and their works, including their own words, as well as conversations, notes and the countless scribbles exchanged between us. Thank you for this generous collaboration – it has been a pleasure!









Vidha Saumya

|

Culinary Verses

Five Poems

CLING-FILM LULLABY

crisp salad
in a plastic wrap
mosaic maki
in a plastic wrap
crackling baklava
in a plastic wrap
clotted cream
in a plastic wrap
fruits, meats
vegetables, sweets
fresh, odourless
marked food-grade
shelf-life extended
no flavours fade
all settled straight
in a plastic wrap

STABLE CULTURE

flour and water
held-in laughter
sit combined
on the counter

once a lump
now weaving life
bubbles appear
behold the rise

nourish, support
revolt, rage
scale, mix
proof, bake

over skillet
under sand
mould to shape
flatten by hand

roti, pao,
naan, double
warm and crunchy
welcome trouble

people, rights
freedom, land
no one's to take
no one's to hand

IF YOU LITERALLY NEVER COOK

imagine mustard seeds
sputtering in hot oil
chopped onions
mosquito coil
sauté till translucent
keep moving; don't spoil

sweat
onions
grate
garlic
crush
ginger
puree
tomato
mosquitos whine
flaps per second, their wings a thousand times

as per a rumour floated by the mosquito union
you should let it finish sucking blood to prevent itching later

GIGGLE-GURGLE

ferment like pickles
well-seasoned troubles
sharp and bright
their tangy gurgles

some dill of gossip
a juicy thrum
in its runny brine
let feelings come

decorate the table
with a mouthful of words
brazen, unrationed
those vinegary blurbs

complain, vent
roll your eyes
be shocked, and stain
those perfect whites

speak in volumes
of glistening treasures
don't bottle tight
these mighty pleasures

bolster drama, come on
why keep it plain?
polite is NOT
your middle name

ISN'T THIS HAPPINESS?

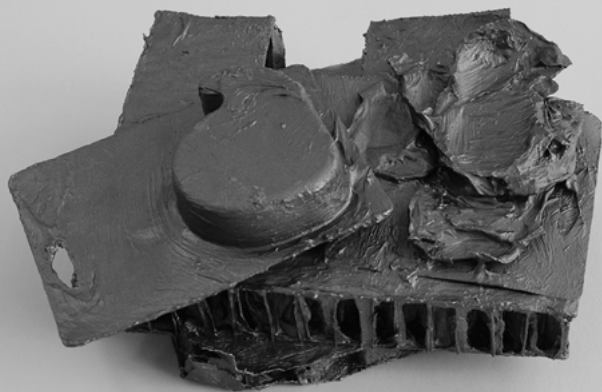
recipes live
in the hands' memories
out at full speed
in movements, they speak

galloping like oil from a can
or water dancing on a hot pan
people cook for people
they don't even know

how can it be called a transaction?
let's throw this word away
bring to the table
those perfectly sliced limes
that aren't on the menu









Embodied Curating

An Invitation to Inhabit and Enact Bodies
as Collective Forces

Ethicality is part of the fabric of the world; the call to respond and be responsible is part of what is. There is no spatial-temporal domain that is excluded from the ethicality of what matters. Questions of responsibility and accountability present themselves with every possibility; each moment is alive with different possibilities for the world's becoming and different reconfigurings of what may yet be possible.

— Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

We exist in bodiliness. There is a corporeal vulnerability that accompanies our being in the world. Our capacities to attend, function, connect and engage are linked to our bodily abilities and states. Yet, the systems and structures that operate most functions in industrialised societies today have very little consideration for bodies. Art is not an exception. Bodies that create, produce, contribute, supply, sustain and engage with art are frequently taken for granted and burdened with assumptions about what they can do or encounter in a limited time or with insufficient conditions. Artistic production processes are often driven by demands to ensure smooth functioning of the institution regardless of the needs and capacities of the bodies involved. What if the production and presentation of art and welcoming audiences were regarded as embodied activities? What if our myriad embodiments mattered through all art practises? What then would working in art spaces, and visiting exhibitions and art events feel like? What if a biennial were not physically exhausting but energising to organise, participate in, and attend?

We exist in bodiliness so a lack of consideration for bodies withers the potential of art and a sense of agency for artists and audiences. I think of agency as something that can be recognised and felt. It is a vital experience of possibility, political subjectivity and relational power; a capacity to enact in the world. Feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad's thinking about the inseparability of matter and meaning has been seminal for my unfolding attempt to comprehend agency. They write:

Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse.¹

Barad stresses that matter is not predetermined. Agencies do not precede but emerge from their intra-action. "Intra-action" is a term they forged to replace "interaction", which assumes that pre-established agencies meet with each other. Intra-action acknowledges that agency is not a property of individual things or beings, but something that emerges through the moment of encounter itself. Our being and agency are entangled with other agencies, without a self-contained, independent existence, and constantly becoming with everything and everyone we encounter. Therefore, we must pay attention to *how* we intra-act.

Barad calls for "an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being".² They insist that "each intra-action matters, since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and

1 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 184.

2 Ibid.

the world is remade again, because the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter”.³ This approach to understanding the world and how specific intra-actions matter they call “ethico-onto-epistem-ology”. It grounds the ethics in the very act of being alive as a body woven into the fabric of the world. I find it simultaneously immensely expansive and simply practical, with a scope that encompasses everything that matters. I try to linger in that pause between inhale and exhale to understand how those transformative possibilities could be enacted in the world.

Yvonne Billimore and Jussi Koitela invited me to write this text, as theorising and enacting embodied knowledges and embodied curating resonates with their work in *The pleasures we choose*. They asked me to expand on my work exploring how curatorial practise can create conditions for intra-action to emerge and be acknowledged in collective work. I was delighted by this invitation as I sensed that their collective project with artists Pia Lindman, Vidha Saumya, Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, architectural designer Kaisa Sööt, and graphic designer Samuli Saarinen is deeply informed by embodied experiences of the makers and the subversive potentials that rise from their commitments to inhabiting the world otherwise.

I work as a curator and researcher and my work is shaped by all the intra-actions that have co-constituted the worlds I have inhabited and that have inhabited

3 Ibid.

me – with no clear boundaries – including decades of practising dance, choreography and somatic movement practises, as well as long-term collaborations with curators and artists, such as Eva Neklyaeva and Pauliina Feodoroff, who work with reverence to the wisdom that bodies carry. I curate from bodies, with bodies, for bodies. Currently this involves researching the role of embodiment in curatorial work and its relationship with agency; how embodied curating could foster collective and transformative agencies among artists and audiences by summoning conditions for art to emerge that pay attention and respect to myriad bodies that come to relation through the production and presentation of artworks and artistic process. My aim is to find and articulate a methodology of ethical intra-action: a proposal for how embodied curating could be practised by finding the lowest common denominator to form a connection and following that as a base for a common ethic. I propose bodily existence as the common denominator and look for ways that this connection can be felt. Bodily existence is made up of material-discursive phenomena in the world; social, cultural and political aspects are intertwined in the materiality of the body. How might this common denominator guide our intra-actions and how we act ethically when we are aware of our entanglements, not as one but from our differences? According to Barad, entanglements do not mean interconnectedness or oneness but “specific material relations of the ongoing differentiating of the world” and “relations of obligation – being bound

to the other”.⁴ This ongoing responsibility opens up a possibility for justice. Could attention to various embodiments as well as to the knowledge that emerges from gatherings of embodied beings endorse the social impact of art and artists? I argue that when we become more attuned to our bodily coexistence in the planning, curation and implementation of artistic processes and art events, we can better recognise how to organise the conditions in which myriad bodies gather. Then art can emerge in ways that are more meaningful and just. Art’s iterative and embodied nature discloses micro-political potential, especially when it reveals cracks in our habitual systems, and invites us to being, perceiving, living and acting otherwise.

I have learnt curating “hands-on” from working with other curators, artists, audiences, places and many beings who come into contact with artistic and curatorial processes. Through my background in working with body and movement I have learnt to trust my bodily knowledge and a “*felt sense*” as intrinsic to my living, working and decision-making. Philosopher Jaana Parviainen defines bodily knowledge as “knowing in and through the body”⁵ – a “reflective, embodied process that can turn sensuous information

4 Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come”, *Derrida Today* 3/2 (2010): 265.

5 Jaana Parviainen, “Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance”, *Dance Research Journal* 34/1 (Summer 2002): 11.

about the moving body into practical knowledge and self-understanding”.⁶ *Felt sense* is a concept developed by philosopher and psychologist Eugene T. Gendlin which he describes as: “A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time”.⁷ To me, it is an important tool for an embodied recognition of the situation with which I am being and intra-acting. A capacity to act is always political. Within the curator-artist relationship, power is enacted, and disparities of power do appear. Introducing felt sense to the decision-making process may not dispel bias or the distribution of power, but it grounds decisions in the embodied materiality of the interactions, and that is where change can happen – when “boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted”.⁸

I understand curatorial work as a field of operations, which entails formulating assemblages, organising conditions for art to emerge, and negotiating relations in the space between its creation, production, participation, communication and reception. In my experience, a curator serves as a mediator between artists and their artworks, and audiences, institutions, and their practises. They also navigate the spaces, situations,

6 Jaana Parviainen and Ilmari Kortelainen, “What is Bodily Knowledge?”, Bodily Knowledge site, bodilyknowledge.com/home.

7 Eugene T. Gendlin, *Focusing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 11, 37.

8 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 183.

forces and energies that flow through the bodies of those entangled in these relations. A curating body is a transmitter of these multiple relations. I am interested in how the qualities and rhythms of these relations are transmitted and transformed in a curating body. One practical tool in an intensity of a curatorial process is slowing down in order to create more space to recognise different (bodily) needs and respond to them.

Operating models for structures hosting contemporary art practises and research often contradict the intentions of these very practises. There is much discourse around care and healing, while simultaneously people burn out producing the same discourse. I have experienced and witnessed this multiple times myself. The problem, however, is more structural than personal. Structures and operating models have historically formed within systems that prioritise some bodies and knowledges over others. So, how could they exist outside of the modernist, colonial and ableist logics that formed them, and how could embodied curatorial practises contribute to this shift? That answer shall begin with an awareness that politics happens in every move of one's body, and its intra-actions with other bodies. Therefore, we know critical work needs to be done at the bodily level.

The body is drawn to what feels familiar, and therefore safe, so in order to be able to trust the body's knowledge we must be conscious of our biases – not just as intellectual conventions, but as embodied phenomena too. Unlearning the biases that live in

our bodies and cause fear, prejudice, separation and violence is life-long work that needs to happen collectively, not only individually. Systemic and structural injustices must be recognised and addressed on the bodily level. An example of a pervasive injustice and the root for racialised trauma is the affliction of the white body being considered as a standard against which other bodies' humanity is measured. According to trauma therapist Resmaa Menakem, white supremacy is not just an ideology and structure, but something that lives in our bodies: *white-body supremacy*. Therefore, it has to be unlearned on a bodily level. In order to do that as a collective process, Menakem has developed a method for an embodied anti-racist practise called Somatic Abolitionism. It's described as "a return to the age-old wisdom of human bodies respecting, honoring, and resonating with other human bodies".⁹ A central practise in Somatic Abolitionism is settling the body or, in other words, calming down the nervous system. As Menakem writes, "A settled body enables you to harmonize and connect with other bodies around you, while encouraging those bodies to settle as well".¹⁰ Nervous systems are different and settling can take many forms, therefore it is important

9 Resmaa Menakem, "What Somatic Abolitionism Is", resmaa.com/movement.

10 Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press 2017), 151.

not to assume how a settled body looks or feels. The role of the curating body as a transmitter of relations can play a part here in attuning to the bodies entangled in a particular context and guiding them into a shared field where they can settle in resonance. Settling bodies and attuning to each other's resonances does not mean avoiding disagreement, discomfort or conflict. Instead, it means paying attention to a web of relations rather than focusing on individual psychologies. It means being able to hold space in changing situations and to contain intensities without breaking the relations.

Considering that the unjust structures in place have been formed and calcified over centuries, undoing them (at the bodily level) requires time. Philosopher, writer, activist and professor of psychology Bayo Akomolafe asserts that “the times are urgent; let us slow down”.¹¹ For him, slowing down is about deepening awareness, noticing who is present, and sensing subtle changes: “it’s a function of intimacy with a world that is agentially alive”.¹² In order to sense in more subtle ways we must listen with our whole beings and resist the forces of efficiency over well-being. Then the bodies can take their time to settle, connect in more nuanced ways, choose pleasure.

11 Bayo Akomolafe, “Slowing down and surrendering human centrality”, Green Dreamer (podcast), 20 July 2021, greendreamer.com/podcast/dr-bayo-akomolafe-the-emergence-network.

12 Ibid.

Paying attention to embodiment calls for considering access to art for all bodies, for which disability justice activists have long advocated. Producing art in institutional frameworks and attending art events often requires significant physical and mental effort. Artist Finnegan Shannon has addressed this issue with an artwork and an intervention *Do you want us here or not*, where they designed benches and chairs for museums and galleries with inscriptions such as “THIS EXHIBITION HAS ASKED ME TO STAND FOR TOO LONG. SIT IF YOU AGREE” and “IT WAS HARD TO GET HERE. REST HERE IF YOU AGREE”.¹³ This is an example of a work that has embodied, transformative potential among the public and within the institution that presents it. Shannon’s work enacts how poet, educator and activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha talks about accessibility as an act of love and reminds us that “more access makes everything more accessible for everybody. And once you’ve tasted that freedom space, it makes inaccessible spaces just seem very lacking that kind of life-saving, life-affirming love”.¹⁴

An individual’s capacity to stay open, attentive and receptive to art is finite. Exhibitions and performances can be energising, though they can also be overloading

13 Finnegan Shannon, *Do you want us here or not*, shannonfinnegan.com/do-you-want-us-here-or-not.

14 Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 78.

and draining, particularly if they are large-scale. The same with working in arts – I have exhausted myself as an art worker, and I witness a lot of exhaustion around me. I also get energised from working with people creatively. I have often felt sparked by the energy of my collaborators and sharing space and time with an open and curious public. How do we move from overload and exhaustion to cycles of attention and energy that are alive, nourishing and resourceful? To start with, listening to the body and taking it seriously. Allowing the cycles and energetic levels of the body to guide working rhythms and decision-making. When we attune to our bodies we can move and synchronise with their rhythms. Different bodies have different needs and cycles of energy so we cannot assume that something works for everyone. We must form structures that can accommodate and support diverse needs and multiple energetic cycles simultaneously. Basic structures are space, time and resources. What kind of a space? How much time? What is sufficient? How are the resources distributed? Instead of perpetually aiming for a generative maximum, aim for the imaginative essential with better conditions and a capacious working process within the available time and budget. This can be possible if we consider that curating is about finding structures and conditions that support particular content and then forming a constellation of bodies and things that gather in a specific space and time. Too much structure or too much content stagnates energy, whereas their insufficiency

collapses it. There must be just enough structure and content to create a container where energy can circulate and something unexpected can unfold.

Art at its best is at the core of common activities: gathering a specific constellation of beings together to consciously intra-act in ways that can only unfold now. It will somehow transform those who engage with it and reverberate beyond. It represents and reflects the conditions and realities of societies and lifeworlds while creating and shaping them and their visible and invisible conditions. The terms and conditions of artistic and curatorial processes pour into artworks and art events. For instance, if care, hospitality and generosity are orientations to guide the work, they undoubtedly affect audience encounters and are, in turn, affected by these encounters. Therefore, artistic and curatorial work are full of potential to reconfigure what may yet be possible and how the world could become.

What can a body do by linking with other bodies? How do connections between bodies strengthen their agency? When we find ways to connect and form collective bodies, our capacities can expand far beyond the capacities of individual bodies. When we experience and understand how our embodiments are entangled in complex ways, we can work towards that which is common. Through attuning to each other's bodies, we can recognise ways to coexist, to affect and to be affected: the core of political agency.

What if our strength lies in our instinct
to wind together and swell into a chorus,
each of us a tone in a chord vibrating with
the past and yet imagined futures.¹⁵

15 Okwui Okpokwasili in Okpokwasili and Asiya Wadud, *Day pulls down the sky: A filament in gold leaf* (New York: Belladonna* Collaborative / Danspace Project, 2019).

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Disrupting the Gallery

I recently googled “person looking at art” and immediately found a series of very similar stock images – someone standing at a discreet distance from an artwork, quiet and earnest contemplation indicated through a hand held to the chin and a serious expression. Here is Pierre Bourdieu’s seminal concept of “aesthetic distance” made concrete, the performance of cultural competency through taking time, effort and appreciation.¹ According to Bourdieu this shows an ability to distance oneself from economic necessity by expressing this distancing through cultural activities. Looking at art in a gallery setting, then, becomes a refusal of “mere” direct sensuous pleasure, and instead a kind of disembodied aestheticism – “as self-imposed restraint [...] defying nature, need, appetite, desire”.² The work itself participates in this performance. It does not give up its meaning easily or straightforwardly but needs the cultural competence to be interpreted properly. Most often this

1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

2 Bourdieu, 254–55.

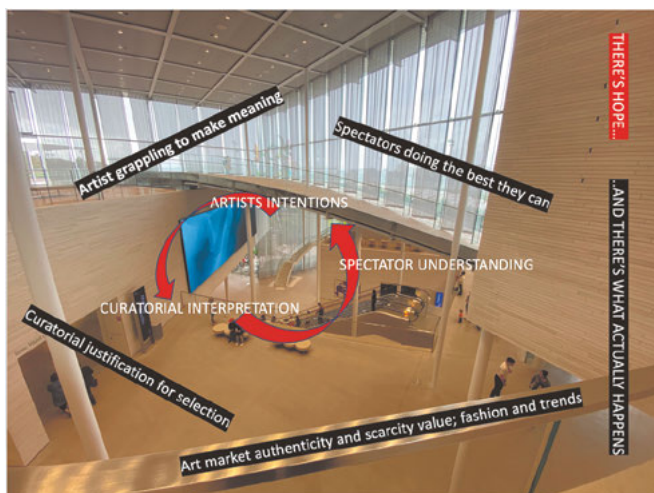
is aided through accompanying texts – labels that function mainly to place the work as authentic, referencing author, date, medium and summary and wall panels that “help” us decipher an appropriate understanding.

So here we have the stereotypical spectator as an upright, sighted, culturally knowledgeable, unencumbered, mobile and “autonomous” subject, immersed in social, material and spatial settings and routines, which denote such a relationship to artwork as “normal”. Through all the associated paraphernalia a story is both told and choreographed about what it is to be a gallery visitor. As theorists Joel Sanders and Diana Fuss have tellingly shown in considering the history of the museum bench, the very materiality of the bench orientates towards the upright spectator.³ Contemporary gallery and museum seating tends to lack “all traces of comfort, like soft upholstery or supporting backs and arms” because sitting too easily suggests a “position of not attention but abjection, not sovereignty but submission”. So actively resisting concessions to real human bodies reveals just whose “bodyminds” are valued and supported and whose are not.⁴

Curator Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk, taking a more oblique and poetic view, also interrogates what

3 Joel Sanders and Diana Fuss, “An Aesthetic Headache: Notes from the Museum Bench”, *JSA*, 2015, jsamixdesign.com/an-aesthetic-headache-notes-from-the-museum-bench-with-diana-fuss.

4 Margaret Price, “The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain”, *Hypatia* 30/1 (2015): 268–84.



else surrounds the singular spectator-artwork relationship.⁵ He understands the exhibition and gallery as an “ecology full of things” that are usually assumed so mundane as to not be considered in artistic analysis but which he considers crucial players. Here not just the artwork or exhibition but the whole spatial setting and its institutional elements “creat[e] a space where species meet, where ontological and epistemological registers clash, overlap, and contaminate each other, where the living and inert, organic and inorganic exchange properties, qualities, and performances”.⁶ He too notes that the label “has to hinge on [the artwork’s] translation into text – be it theoretical, academic or visitor-friendly – in order to reach out and allow for itself to be [...] properly understood”;⁷ and that both labels and information panels in reality have the impossible task of communicating what the artworks themselves cannot do, that is, translating meanings into words from a different and essentially non-verbal medium.

This is not a trivial matter – these are the everyday, unthought-about procedures through which some bodies and minds are welcomed into the experience of art, and some marginalised or ignored. Just as importantly, the sheer ordinariness of what is expected when visiting a gallery – for those “in the know” – obscures

5 Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk, *The Standard Book of Noun-Verb Exhibition Grammar* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2018).

6 Lekkerkerk, 15.

7 Lekkerkerk, 103.

the differential effects of power that are enacted there. So, we need to ask exactly what kinds of bodyminds are cultural spaces orientated towards. Who is included and valued, and who is marginalised or ignored? And what can we do to challenge and transform such normative social, spatial and material practises towards more equitable and accessible engagements with art, whether in the gallery or other public settings?

Crucially making such a shift is not merely about “adding” new initiatives to galleries, and the already existing patterns of inequality they (re)produce. Whilst art galleries and museums internationally have become increasingly concerned with diversifying curators, artists and audiences, rarely has this challenged the very nature of the spectator-artwork relationship, or the ecology of things and spaces that orchestrates and supports it. Here I argue that it is disabled and other non-normative artists, curators, activists and scholars who are at the forefront of critiquing normative systems, and of re-arranging the boundaries of who counts and who doesn’t. I will first outline a method for opening up the everyday limited framings of our bodyminds that underpin current notions of spectatorship; then give some examples of how disabled and non-normative creative practises are attempting to reimagine such framings; before finally speculating on what this can tell us about how an art gallery might become a different – and more equal – kind of place.

A DISORDINARY METHOD

The DisOrdinary Architecture Project, of which I am co-founder and co-director, is an informal platform that brings together disabled artists with students, educators, and practitioners (both nondisabled and disabled) across the built environment and cultural sectors.⁸ We are an informal platform, begun in 2008, that aims for creative and critical dialogue and actions that co-explore how disabled and other non-normative bodyminds offer a valuable and generative force in art, design and architecture. Informed by the vital contemporary work of disabled artists, activists and scholars internationally, we explore how dis/ability (inherently intersected with other identities) can be rethought, not as simplistic binaries but as a complex, intersectional, situated and dynamic patterning of enabling and disabling practises and spaces. Rather than focusing on conventional functional accessibility, we are interested in how to shift underlying normative practises that create existing patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the first place.

One of our foundational methods to address how such inequalities are perpetuated is to move beyond common sense able-bodied and disabled categories. In

8 In the UK, the term “disabled people” rather than “people with disabilities” is generally preferred. DisOrdinary Architecture always uses the phrase “disabled artists” to signify that disability is integral to a person, not an “addition”. However, preferences vary across countries, contexts and individual disabled people, so I have used both terms in this text to recognise these differences of perspective.

talks and workshops with students, educators and professionals, DisOrdinary Architecture often starts from participants' own embodied assumptions and experiences. Building on the work of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a feminist disability studies scholar, we instead use the concepts of “fitting” and “misfitting”.⁹ Rather than characteristics of ability (or gender, race, class, or sexuality) being located “in the body,” these are always relational – dependent on the dynamic intersections between particular bodyminds, spaces, objects and encounters. To “fit” is to find the normal world unproblematic, to be able to operate smoothly in it, without needing to take much notice of your assumptions, behaviours, surroundings or routines. As Garland-Thomson explains, such fitting occurs in “a world conceptualized, designed, and built in anticipation of bodies considered in the dominant perspective as uniform, standard, majority bodies”.¹⁰ In contrast, misfitting occurs whenever your needs, preferences or desires are unmet (whether unnoticed, marginalised, misinterpreted or deliberately excluded) by the design of built space and by its other occupants. You become (however momentarily) “the odd one out”.

So, we ask our DisOrdinary Architecture workshop participants – and you the reader – to think about how smoothly *you* fit within your social and built surroundings.

9 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept”, *Hypatia* 26 (2011): 591–609.

10 Garland-Thomson, 595.

When and how often do you have to negotiate a failure to take notice, a lack of care, or experience thoughtless assumptions about who you are or what your needs are? This might only be about noticing uneven floor surfaces, awkward steps, and a lack of lifts when you are looking after a baby in a pushchair. Or it might be about negotiating the complexities of being the only woman or person of colour at a formal meeting; or it might be about hiding (“passing” or “masking”) the experiences of chronic pain or sight loss or neuro-divergence at work, because disclosing it is likely to adversely affect your experience.

Disabled artists who work with DisOrdinary Architecture have created various workshops that ask people to change their bodies in creative ways, as a means to imagine how we might make a different world if we truly valued the richness of our bio- and neuro-diversity. For example, David Dixon in his project *Alterator* playfully requires participants to alter their own bodies within groups and then make drawings. This is based on his experiences of how non-disabled people view his prosthetic leg as either better (super-human) or worse (sadder) than “normal” embodiments whilst he finds it just a different way of being, which becomes a starting point for alternative forms of creative practise.

It is this “starting from difference” that I want to explore further. In an ongoing collaborative project (2006–15) called *The Disabled Avant-Garde Today!* disabled artist Katherine Araniello and Deaf artist Aaron Williamson responded to, and made artwork based on, some seminal creative practitioners, including Jake and

Dinos Chapman, Leigh Bowery, Simon and Garfunkel, Martin Kippenberger, Tom and Jerry and Busby Berkeley. Through a series of videos, the artists (re-)perform their various artistic and cultural (non-disabled) heroes and are in turn hilarious, absurd and sarcastic commentators. Though humorous, their point is a savage one – nobody will, of course, ever believe that disabled people can actually form a creative and artistic avant-garde. But I want to suggest that starting from disability as a concept, and people with disabilities as a constituency, really does have the potential to be at the leading edge of contemporary art and to generate some truly radical, avant-garde and creative practises. This is both in terms of the work itself and in its ramifications for disrupting normative spectatorship and gallery spaces. Here I will just draw out three threads: working with forms of art that refuse aesthetic distance; reclaiming non-normativity and unruly bodies as valuable and creative; and creating forms of resistance that explore alternative ways to thrive. Finally, I will speculate on what this might mean for reimagining what more equitable and welcoming art spaces might be like.

REVEALING/REVELLING IN THE MESSINESS OF HUMAN EMBODIMENT

It's important to note that many contemporary art practises already challenge both concepts of aesthetic distance and the limitations of showing art in an institutional gallery setting. In his book *Disability Aesthetics* Tobin Siebers demonstrates how, whilst the eighteenth-century ideal of “disinterestedness” – separating the

pleasures of art from those of the body – remains common, recent trends in art often invoke powerful emotional responses to the corporeality of aesthetic objects,¹¹ whether Andy Warhol’s car crashes and other disaster paintings representing the fragility of the human body, or artists such as Nam June Paik, Carolee Schneemann and Chris Burden “who have turned their own bodies into instruments or works of art, painting with their face or hair, having themselves shot with guns, and exhibiting themselves in situations both ordinary and extraordinary”.¹² Here, though, I want to explore what happens when disabled artists explicitly aim to reveal this messiness of human embodiment as a critique of ableist framings, and/or to revel in it from an explicitly unruly perspective.¹³

This is because, in the global North, bodies have been increasingly treated mechanistically: to be measured, classified, ranked and separated out as “good” or “bad”. As many authors have shown, this historical process has been contested and inconsistent, but has made commonplace an understanding of “normality”, around a particular “proper” bodymind which should be aspired to, and against which others are found wanting

11 Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

12 Tobin Siebers, “Disability Aesthetics”, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 7/2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 63.

13 Suzanne B. Mintz, *Unruly Bodies: Life Writing by Women with Disabilities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

and “faulty”.¹⁴ Neurodivergent philosopher Robert Chapman argues that in neoliberal and late capitalist societies, which centre individualism and competition, this has become increasingly exhausting to achieve for both non-disabled and disabled people as we struggle to fit or become the ideal type.¹⁵ Many disabled artists, activists and scholars are unravelling the apparatuses that reinforce stereotypes and inequalities, across political, social, medical and everyday procedures. They are campaigning against being categorised as a problem and then “treated” accordingly. They are making creative work around the documents and processes that aim to separate out the worthy from the unworthy. For example, Finnish artist Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen works around systematic violence against women and disabled people, aiming to unravel how discrimination is disguised as care. *Form/Iomake* from 2020 uses performance and cutting humour as critique. The artist wears a voluminous paper dress based on a gigantic version of the typical standard paperwork people with disabilities must regularly fill in to obtain financial support, as she says, “regardless of whether the limb has not grown back or vision returned”, between applications.

14 Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995); Peter Cryle and Elizabeth Stevens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Vierkant, *Health Communism* (London: Verso, 2023).

15 Robert Chapman, *The Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2023).

The engulfing, entwining whiteness of the costume is underpinned by a refusal to answer questions when these are framed around the disabled body as only a malfunctioning deviation from the norm, who only deserves basic functional support. Instead, the answers speak to messy and joyous humanity:

B) *What kind of help do you need to get dressed?*

I am a very insecure dresser. I went to a colour analysis and visited a dressing consultant, but I still ask my hub and kids how do I look? Is this combination OK?

[...]

D) *What kind of help do you need in seeing, hearing or speaking?*

My family thinks a lot and often. Sometimes even the change of season passes me by. I keep getting feedback that I don't listen properly and I can't find my stuff, even if it's in front of my nose. I still get nervous before public presentations and practice them for a long time, sometimes even in front of a mirror. I would like to be able to verbalise my feelings better and not to raise my voice on unnecessary little things.¹⁶

In such ways disabled artists are creatively and critically showing that our diverse bodyminds do not fall into clear-cut categories or binary opposites, constructed around superior/inferior and included/excluded,

16 Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *Form/lomake* (2020), performance and paper costume; script excerpt from jenni-juulia.com/form-lomake/index.html.

valuable/waste, human/less-than-human. This is a crucial theme for the contemporary world, where such simplistic binaries are increasingly used politically as a means to demean and discriminate against particular populations such as refugees and people of colour, as well as people with disabilities.

Some disabled artists are using more public means to rage against inequalities and discriminatory patterns of inclusion and exclusion. In different ways Liz Crow, Dolly Sen and Caroline Cardus, all based in the UK, challenge societal discrimination through taking work beyond the walls of the gallery, aiming for public connections rather than divisions between people by creating moments of and opportunities for solidarity. In *Figures* (2015), a mass sculptural durational performance, Liz Crow makes visible the human cost of austerity and urges action against it. Using excavated raw river mud and taking up residence on the streets and foreshore of central London, she sculpted 650 small human figures, each one representing an individual at the sharp end of austerity. Once dried, the figures were part of a mobile exhibition, creating a talking point for members of the public to grapple with the questions raised by the work. The figures were then returned to Thames foreshore, and fired in a bonfire, while their corresponding stories of austerity were read aloud.

Section 136 (Maybe it's the World that's Mad) by Dolly Sen with Caroline Cardus is in three interlocking parts. During 2023, there was a documentary "on how the [UK] Department for Work and Pensions

(DWP) is driving disabled people to starvation and suicide and how disabled people are fighting back using art, love and rage”.¹⁷ This was supported through a live performance “sectioning” the DWP. Sen applied this mental healthcare term – for when you remove someone for being a danger to themselves and others and put them in a place of safety – to the government department, arguing that the DWP is exactly this kind of danger to other people. Finally, a series of conversations about issues surrounding madness took place in a bed covered with cuddly lambs that was set up in unusual locations.

RECLAIMING NON-NORMATIVITY AND UNRULY BODIES AS OF VALUE

While artists are making work that critiques popular and political attitudes to disability and non-normativity, they are also valuing the gains rather than the “losses” of impairment. For example, from her own experience of a chronic condition caused by mercury poisoning, Finnish artist Pia Lindman uses her creative practise as a way of turning what can often be debilitating into a capability “that help[s] me tune in and express human conditions”.¹⁸

¹⁷ Dolly Sen, *Broken Hearts for the DWP* (2021); documentary film, 14 minutes, dollysen.com/broken-hearts-for-the-dwp.

¹⁸ Pia Lindman, “Articulations of Forces at Play”, in *Rehearsing Hospitalities: Companion 1*, ed. Yvonne Billimore and Jussi Koitela (Berlin: Archive Books, 2019), 72.

It also frames how she understands bodies, health and sickness, life and death.

As microbes bring life, they also decompose it. The state of being is temporary and partial. It must be reassembled and integrated constantly. What we think of as sickness might appear when there is not enough integration and, instead, entities that should be “you” are pulled into other beings or non-beings. Being, death, and sickness appear on a sliding scale. They are matters of point of view – in place and time.¹⁹

In her *Articulations of Forces at Play* series of artworks, Lindman treats her participants (or receivers as she calls them) utilising various ancient healing techniques and her own sensitivities, while her collaborator Anna Matveinen uses voice and sound healing. Throughout the sessions they ask their receivers to listen into and explore their own bodily “glitches” and to “build, draw, sing, imagine the articulations”. Lindman is particularly interested in traditional methods and myths that might better express the interconnectedness of our “subsensorial” systems (that is, the interstitial work of mind and body, the signals and effects of its intermediary space). In an accompanying essay the artist discusses crochet as a women’s art that “exemplifies the intricate abstract and dynamic patterns that carry wisdom beyond the rationality of daily functions”²⁰ as a potential initiator

19 Lindman, 73.

20 Lindman, 72.

of more spiritual journeyings; and as a method for creating subsensorial enhancement devices.

For me, these are exciting and radical ways forward that refuse contractual and capitalist modes of operation. Including ritual and humour, they reach to richer and more diverse ways of being in the world.

POSITING FORMS OF RESISTANCE, FINDING ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO THRIVE

Several artists with chronic conditions have been exploring forms of resistance to the ableist body as upright, sighted, culturally knowledgeable, unencumbered, mobile and autonomous – whether contemplative as in the galley or energetic and productive as preferred in public and work spaces. This includes reimagining time and space to make room for resting. Examples of work that centres on horizontality and rest include Aine O’Hara’s *Nap Club* (2023), Raquel Meseguer Zafe/ Unchartered Collective’s *A Crash Course in Cloudspotting* (2016–23) and *Restful City* (Coventry, 2021; Bristol, 2022–23), and Finnegan Shannon’s *Do You Want Us Here or Not?* (2018–20). As part of the *Seats at the Table* installation during the London Festival of Architecture in June 2023, disabled artist and performer Raquel Meseguer Zafe together with artist-architect Helen Stratford created a resting space in Postman’s Park, London. Using a simple arrangement of beanbags and shade canopies, the work hosted quotes from people living with invisible disabilities and chronic illnesses, alongside gentle invitations for people to pause, rest and lie down.

In 2019, the *Anti-Stairs Club Lounge*, coordinated by disabled artist Finnegan Shannon, organised an event to protest Heatherwick Studio's *Vessel* in New York, a piece of public art made up of 154 outdoor staircases, up to a height of 16 stories, which was not only functionally inaccessible to many disabled people but explicitly valorised character traits of mobility, speed, energy, fitness and autonomy as its main goal.²¹

Other disabled and non-normative artists represent and create spaces of interdependence and solidarity, another means to critique the solitary and autonomous spectator. Vidha Saumya's work concerns the norms of aesthetics and bodies in their socio-cultural contexts. In her drawing *Nursing this Wound* (2018), women sit crowded together as a pile of inseparable, relaxed and conversational bodies; seeming to express a kind of collective recovery within an acceptance of pain and what Saumya calls "their indecipherable relationships". This, then, offers other ways to thrive that accept debility, through the conviviality of diverse people together rather than segregation by "normal/abnormal" divides.

SPECULATING ON ALTERNATIVE ART AND CULTURAL SPACES

What are the implications for the future of cultural spaces and other normative built environments? I have been arguing that museums and galleries need to move

21 Kevin Gotkin, "Stair Worship: Heatherwick's *Vessel*", *Avery Review* 3 (2018), averyreview.com/issues/33/stair-worship.

far beyond the simplistic addition of a non-normative exhibition, curator or artist to their programme; or understanding disabled accessibility only as a functional entrance into a building or show, or as “extra” services such as touch or BSL tours. This goes beyond “inviting” diverse people in; it is about shifting entire systems and paradigms. This could start from a critique of the spectator-artwork relationship, and the explicit development of an alternative “ecology of things”. How, then, do the examples offered here help us imagine other modes of engaging with art in the gallery?

Some of the work of disabled artists outlined above centres on rest. Many understand this as a resistance – as a challenge to capitalist cultural processes, which seems a good place to start disrupting the gallery. As Trisha Hersey, founder of the Nap Ministry, writes:

The Rest Is Resistance framework also does not believe in the toxic idea that we are resting to recharge and rejuvenate so we can be prepared to give more output to capitalism. What we have internalized as productivity has been informed by a capitalist, ableist, patriarchal system. Our drive and obsession to always be in a state of “productivity” leads us to the path of exhaustion, guilt, and shame. [...] The distinction that must be repeated as many times as necessary is this: We are not resting to be productive. We are resting simply because it is our divine right to do so.²²

22 Trisha Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022), 62.

This shift away from the dominance of the upright spectator is already happening. Finnegan Shannon's artistic project *Do you want us here or not?* (2018–20), already mentioned, consists of several variations of exhibition seating with white slogans against a blue background (such as “this exhibition has asked me to stand for too long, sit if you agree”). Norwegian filmmaker and architectural historian Anna Ulrikke Andersen co-created an exhibition in 2021 called *Chronic Conditions: Body and Building* at Palácio Sinel de Cordes, organised by the Lisbon Architecture Triennale as part of the Future Architecture Platform. This is part of a larger ongoing research project called *An A to X of Chronic Illness: patients' architectural histories (an incomplete guide)* which explores the settings for people who live with chronic illnesses. The exhibition design by L'Atelier Senzu made spaces for lying down to view films (projected on sloping ceiling panels) and used fabric for display elements that softened sound and offered a gentle and natural background scent to the space.

This is a beginning. What else could artists and curators do to make and mediate work that disrupts normative spectatorship and supports a rich variety of ways of being?

Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen's *When the Dishwasher Escaped/Kun tiskikone karkasi* (2023) is one great example of an artwork that readjusts normative spectatorship. It is a film about a couple who married in secret over fifty years ago because one of them was blind. The film is shown on a television, with a curtain

of lenses in front that disrupts the moving image in beautiful ways. Not only does this challenge conventional spectatorship, it enables a defocusing of the visual onto sound and audio description.

Disabled curator Amanda Cachia has also been developing exhibitions that centre on the sensory aspects of artworks and “challenging the ocular-centric modality of curating exhibitions and the tendency to rely on the convention that objects must be experienced through vision alone”.²³ Cachia argues that:

[...] part of the decolonizing work of disability studies is for curators to begin to practice experimental, inclusive curatorial strategies to “crip” art history and the mainstream contemporary art world. By incorporating discursive programming, access as a creative methodology, a sensitive approach towards curating complex attitudes about disability and language, and sustained engagement with the ethics and practicalities of curating disability-related subject matter, these strategies offer a radical approach to paving critical space for the disabled subject in contemporary art.²⁴

She also notes that, as I have hoped to show here, disabled and other non-normative artists are already carving out this space for themselves, leading the way on

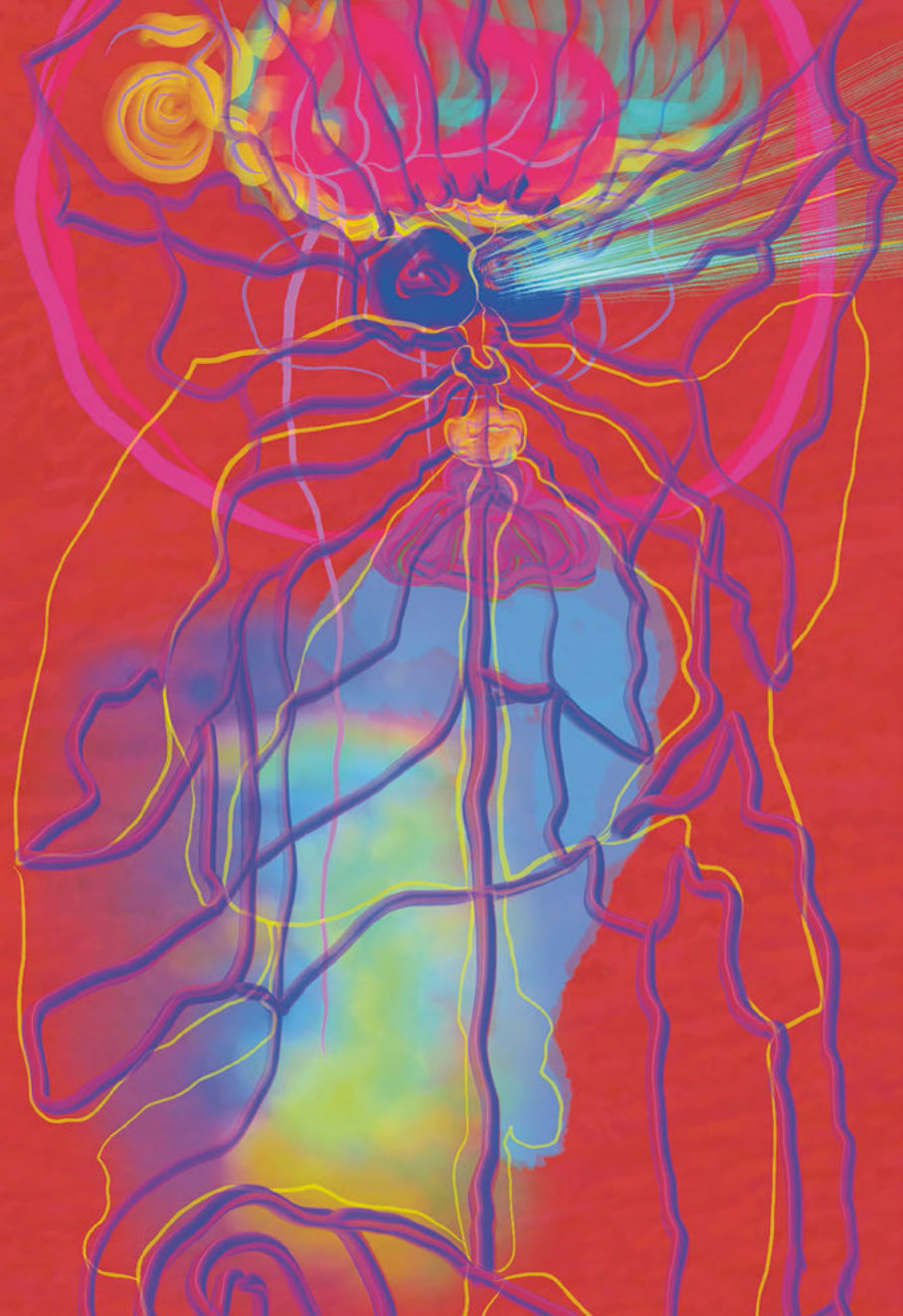
23 Amanda Cachia, “Curating New Openings: Rethinking Diversity in the Gallery”, *Art Journal*, College Art Association, 76/3–4 (Fall/Winter 2017): 48–50.

24 Amanda Cachia, “Disabling the Museum: Curator as Infrastructural Activist”, *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* 12/3 (2013): 257–89.

what kinds of artwork are possible, and how these might engage differently with audiences. I would add to Cachia's list of ways forward the importance of transforming all our assumptions about artistic spectatorship, not just its intensely visual focus, but also its embodied relationship of aesthetic distance to the work and the mechanisms through which curation, installation and gallery spaces reinforce this. Galleries and museums have a powerful role in normalising particular patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and now would be a good time to stop.



OF RESTFUL SLEEP
COMMUNITY



Jesal Kapadia
Pia Lindman
Hardeep Mann

Dance for Meaning

Our body is the first interface with the world, it makes meaning. Meaning is a shapeshifter, a conglomerate, coming together in desires, needs, mood, matter, air and fluids – like a dance

Over the last three to four years, Jesal Kapadia, Pia Lindman and Hardeep Mann have been getting together online to participate in weekly Tong Ren sessions, an energy healing tapping practice first developed by Tom Tam while practising acupuncture.¹ People from all over the world join in and form a community of collective healing. Pia Lindman first learned about these sessions led by Hardeep Mann from her

1 “Tong Ren is a blend of Eastern and Western philosophies. It relies on Western knowledge of anatomy and physiology as well as Western diagnostics, and combines them with the Eastern concept of maintaining a healthy flow of ‘chi’, or life force, to maintain health. Many people come for treatment after being diagnosed by a medical doctor, and many conditions that do not respond well to Western medicine respond positively to Tong Ren Healing”. Via “Tong Ren Healing”, Tam Healing website, tamhealing.com/services/tong-ren-healing.

colleague and friend Jesal Kapadia. Having been developing her own healing sessions for over a decade and making paintings based on them, Pia for the first time began participating in healing sessions led by someone else and found herself making paintings from these. This revelation expanded how Pia understood her art practise: instead of being private, these experiences of healing and the consequent art are collective.

In close discussion with Jesal – and other colleagues loosely organised around the online collective The Society of the Friends of the Virus,² facilitated by Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri – Pia has honed and solidified her understanding of why and how healing, art and pleasure are the means towards a sustainable more-than-human life; believing that through multisensory (including subsensorial) engagements we can connect with the world in ways that make us feel we belong to it. This is the pleasure of life, and the impetus to care for the world as it is to care for oneself. In October 2023 Pia met online with Hardeep and Jesal to talk about healing and art. They shared their notes from previous sessions together, and Pia showed samples from her video works of her paintings in slow transformation, presented in the Pavilion of Finland at the Venice Biennale in 2024. The following transcript shares some of the core thoughts and sentiments from these reflective discussions.

- 2 The Society of the Friends of the Virus was part of the programming of assemblies by 16beavergroup. More information: 16beavergroup.org/assembling.

ONLINE CONVERSATION, 9 NOVEMBER 2023
PIA, JESAL AND HARDEEP

Jesal, notes in chat:

Healing is in repetition, it is a cycle
It's about coming and going, a cycle of healing,
a cycle of ill health.
It's not a straight line
It's a winding
The nervous system isn't straight
Cycle, as a concept is very important

As the person was describing their back pain, Tom drew a picture of the nerves on the back, or the meridians on the back. As he drew, the person describing the pain could also see the drawing. Tom then began tapping with a pen on the spot in the drawing where the person described the pain... and this healed the back. This was when he discovered "Oh, you can actually do it (heal) this way."

Hardeep That is exactly it – how he noticed that something took place.

Pia I focus on this because there is the visual connection [**Hardeep: yes**], and the touching through the visual, and then the sound of the tapping.

Hardeep And the observation of observing.

Pia Exactly. These things circulate in the field of healing all the time. For me one of the things to think about is: how can you touch? What is touching? Tom was touching with the tapping, even though he wasn't directly touching the person. Then again, there is the hearing, the sound, which is a very, very powerful nerve signal, and at the same time as the visual, which is another nerve connection thing. I am actually not sure I understand how the visual connects, but I know that it does it. It sort of... travels.

Hardeep The visual means that the eyes, irises and the optic nerve are stimulated. You can see the light and entities in the world. As the light "touches" the irises and goes in, it signals – really it is a signal, not even seeing. After the optic nerve, it reaches the visual cortex and occipital lobe, where the brain makes sense of it all. Either the brain has "seen" it before, had an earlier experience, or it is a new signal. If it is new, the brain has to send it into different parts of itself and this becomes another thing the brain has learned. This experience is then stored in the brain. The hippocampus in the brain plays a very important part in that. If the brain can't relate, then the experience becomes a new item. The visual can be even stronger than the auditory in this process. The visual is also sensual. And it is faster than "the speed of light". The brain cannot forget a visual experience. We may not use everything we see, but everything goes in and is stored.

Pia Now I understand why you do believe in those paintings I make.

Hardeep Seeing the work you make, it's fantastic. As light penetrates it produces colours. Colour is light and we are light ourselves. Colour/light is bioelectricity roaming in our bodies. It energises our body. This is how light and sight are connected. In a similar vein, a nose is not just something you breathe through. The bladder meridian goes through the nose and certain acids pass from the nose into the brain. [...] Another example is how waking up at dawn is great for the pineal gland because the blue light regulates our sleep rhythm. It is always about connection and balance. The body is amazing that way, we can see that the yin and yang, positive and negative, is built into us. The tragedy is that we live in houses...

Jesal Walls... yes, they protect us, and they also block us from being touched by light, because what we miss is the elements in nature and the universe. When we close ourselves from sunlight and we don't get enough fresh air (and those "negative" ions), the difficulties start to happen in our body. Architecture is changing, slowly, into a different form, so we can receive everything we need.

Pia I have been making architectural structures, in my practise but also in building my house, using natural materials that have the capacity to breathe and heal.

One thing that I am curious about and I would like to ask you is: what is a healing space?

Hardeep First of all, the body is a healing space, and our bodies, when we gather together, become a bigger healing space. And then the larger collective, that's an even bigger space. And all of those spaces, they affect us [...] I think the "healing" space is the thought process together and how we view the world. What our worldview is becomes really important. I don't think of it as just a space on Zoom... I think it is much, much larger than that. It is us, humans pulling together, that is the space.

Pia Vinciane Despret, Christine Avenir and Juliette Salme wrote an essay, *Living in Mycelium*, for the Belgian Pavilion exhibit In Vivo at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2023.³ That project used mycelium and mould to create building blocks. The interesting part was the speculations they presented, about how to actually live with the mycelium, to live with the mould. This mycelium is an intellectual presence, and the essay speculated on how people who might be living with it would describe how their thought processes and sensory experiences changed – even to the point that they would have sensory experiences that they never knew existed.

3 Vinciane Despret, Christine Avenir and Juliette Salme, *Demeurer en mycélium / Living in Mycelium* (Brussels: Cellule architecture, 2023).

Hardeep I think that we awaken this in each other. As we speak about it, I think about how knowledge of these things has previously been equated with magic. Magic, belief, environment and nature – it was all one. You looked at nature as home, not separate. That affects you differently. Now knowing your body has become another important factor. What is internally going on, how does it work? Part of it is that we don't know how it works, how it comes alive, into being, and how it runs itself, you know, you and I are not running it. We don't have to plug ourselves in somewhere.

Jesal There is this misconception that we alone do everything to make our body function. This is such an individualistic thinking, because actually, there are a lot of other influences and elements that are making it work. Even our brain is not our brain, as you said, Hardeep. We have mirror neurons, emotions are controlled through food, hormones, there is always so much going on... how do we convert it all into love and care? What is love and care in this context? It is not about “good” or “bad”, it is about how we affect each other, in a loving and caring way. And why loving and caring, for what? I think this philosophical question becomes obvious when we talk to each other in this healing space, and we decide together that this is worth caring for!

Pia I think that the “worth caring for” is the thing, right?

Jesal What is worth caring for is not understood properly sometimes. People care for different things, but when they confront each other in a healing space, which is full of love and generosity, a non-judgemental space that supports everyone to be open, it expands our capacity to listen to someone else's pain without judgement. We feel that we want to remove suffering, somehow, make it such that everyone is "getting better" without converting it into something egoistic, as if its "our job". I think this conversion happens in this healing space. This is a sustainable space, anytime you come to Hardeep's healing space you feel good!

Pia I talk about the subsensorial, which is a realm of things you don't see, yet it affects you. And when we talk about light and colour, and microbes, mitochondria, all these different things, salts and minerals – "we breathe in minerals", as you said Hardeep – this is what becomes our materiality. This is so interesting to me because to me subsensoriality seems so ethereal, iffy, and then suddenly when you describe this process, I realise that actually, light, sound, colour become material things and processes in your body. What can be more material than that?! So, I ask myself, when we are in this process, and we are light, colour, microbes, the minerals we breathe, the vibrations, resonances – and then we become materiality, but what is that materiality? I mean, it is not that individual identity, rather it's something porous. Then I ask myself, is there life, is there death? Does it matter? What is health, actually?

Because what is my body anyway? If I become a pool of microbes, I am still alive, in a way. So, when Jesal asks what is worth caring for, in this context, what's worth caring for is not about the "utilitarian me", the "producing me", the "speaking identity", it could actually be the worth of caring for that pool of microbes.

Hardeep Our bodies have adjusted according to what the requirements are. We have settled so that we don't feel the spinning of the earth, but the minute the cerebellum goes wrong you feel the spinning. Language teaches us thinking. We are taught to say "eeech" to microbes and most things around us, even within our bodies. We have to reinvent concepts of the body. Current language makes us battle with our bodies. We see ourselves as isolated bodies, not in flows of relations. This is the environment we have built – societies, in which we are isolated and singled out. This affects how we look at the climate and land. Yet we are not so different from the atoms or particles that exist in the environment – we are made of the same things.

Pia Yes, our bodies adapt to the environment, not just the natural environment but also social and political conditions of life. What is the spinning of the world that our brain does not register and yet affects us?

Here activism comes in. Not a very traditional activism of trying to affect politicians, but one of trying to build that community through which you can heal together. Being able to counteract the pressures that

come from life's circumstances and oppressive systems. Hardeep, you talk about these conditions, saying: "let's be lazy bums"; "you don't always live up to everybody's expectations"; "you don't need to be a utilitarian body"; and these are very important things to voice and enact. But can activism also operate on a deeper level, on an embodied level? We understand that we are part of systems that involve more than just humans. We are porous, we do not have a single immutable identity. Our being in this world is fluctuating in its coexistence with other species, elements and substances. I think knowing this makes you think differently about your politics, how you relate to the world: what is violence, what is force, what is love.

Hardeep The amount of violence we humans do is quite a bit. It all depends on the kind of systems we build. Too often we set ourselves against each other in competition. But there is another space in us where humanity and love are at the forefront. Just that in this moment "fend for yourself" seems to be the loudest cry, and that creates a very anxious body. We can't care only for ourselves; we are a species that can create anything when we come together.

Jesal How do we protect ourselves from absorbing and propagating these mind-sets of war and violence? If we are caring, that's how we are going to affect, to radiate, as we talk to other people. This is very helpful as a form of activism. Activism doesn't mean that you

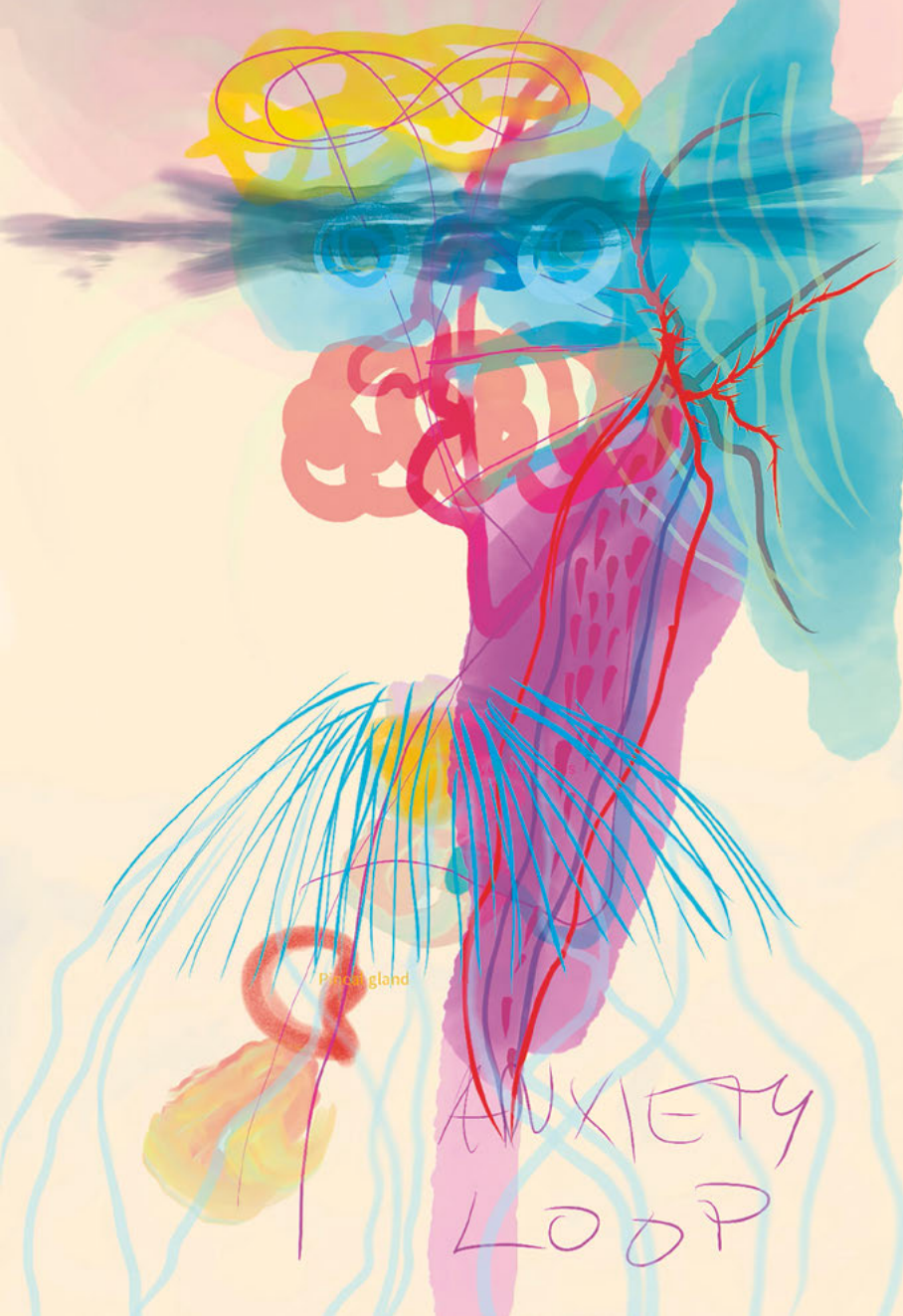


Photo: England

ANXIETY
LOOP

have to go out and protest all the time. When it is important to show up in numbers, you show up, but it is also important to engage in the power of thinking and building this kind of resistance, to not allow for those dividing thoughts to settle in your mind. This question of activism is very important because sometimes it separates the mind from the body and the heart. Activism has to be integrated with these thoughts about care and love from a very different perspective.

Hardeep You have to really think about what change means and how you bring it. Protest is just one thing, but then you also have to discuss bringing about steps of change. How do we do that? How do we create that kind of space? That's always why I feel that this healing that we do is part of that, part of that new alternative of looking at each other, looking at the human in an entirely different way. The healing that we do... you tap for the body, you massage the body, and the body gets back into its normal homeostasis. The healing system focuses on removing the blockages that hinder the circulation of blood, bioelectricity and nerve impulses. The direction contemporary medicine is taking us – into technology, technological items, machines – is not enough.

Pia I am thinking of allopathy as a philosophy of expulsions and erasures, instead of different forms of life facilitated to live without competing. Competition makes life forms create toxins. It is indeed a different way of looking at health.

Pia I live in a house of clay where the mould is happy⁴ therefore I am also happy.⁵ I built a mud hut in Brazil because the mud makes a happy environment for a certain kind of bacteria that, in turn, make humans happy.⁶ The mud hut was a perfect healing space. In Venice, I am building a clay structure titled *Collectivities Cycle: Air Conditioner*. Flowing out of its holes will be air treated with clay-nurtured bacteria. Certain materials, such as clay, help microbes to be happy and this has a bearing on how we feel together with the bacteria in that space.

Hardeep In India, we have not lived in brick and concrete houses that long, but previously, we lived in mud

- 4 The term “happy” is often used by mycologist Giuliana Furci when describing how fungi react in different environments. “Happy” in this context means that the fungi, when not experiencing hostility from the environment and thus not having to defend itself by creating mycotoxins, is indeed at peace, i.e. “happy”. See Giuliana Furci, fungi.org/en/meet-giuliana.
- 5 When building a mud hut at the São Paulo Biennale in 2016, I had discussions with microbiologists from the University of São Paulo and it became clear that a particular kind of microbe (found in the rumen of cows, but also elsewhere in nature) thrives in walls of the traditional adobe-style mud huts in Brazil (built in the technique of *Pau a Pique*). This bacteria is nick named “the happy bacteria”, because it creates an atmosphere where humans seem to become calm, concentrated, and... happy. See also issuu.com/pialindman/docs/clay_office_to_building_for_breathi.
- 6 Lindman, *MUDHUT* (2016); healing space as part of installation *Nose Ears Eyes* at SP32 Biennale “Incerteza Viva”, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016.

houses, and these kept cool and hot when needed. The environment was exactly as humans needed it.

[Hardeep watches Pia's video of her paintings in slow transformation]

Hardeep I love the slowness, the subtle changes in different places. There's a whole motion of things going on if you take your time to look. You have captured what healing is. How the body responds to these changes that are taking place either internally or in the environment, or in your auditory space, in your sensory cortex, and motor cortex. All of it is beautiful. It is really a description of what this healing is. It's not that you understand it. It's coming together, and you find a method of how you calm it and you slow it down and things in themselves change. Sometimes you don't have words, right? To show something or how something presents itself – and you just did that.

Pia When I look at it, I forget what the paintings were. I don't recognise them, I'm just looking at this thing that happens in front of my eyes. It is like looking at Aurora Borealis. Because you never know how they are going to shift. Sometimes they shift quickly and then they don't. And sometimes you think they have disappeared.

Hardeep That is a beautiful tie. You can't explain it more than that – light in us, like light in the sky. Whenever I use words for the body and say, oh, how does light





respond? We are light. And... I always feel like that's not enough. What does that mean? But you just showed it in the way different paths light up and fade. This is what the body is doing all the time: a cycle of relationships, internally. When one thing goes out, another is forming. That is the sequence of the body itself. From one circuit to another circuit. It's a dance! And you're right, it's the dance of...

Pia ...light and energy.

[Jesal watches the video]

Jesal I am pulsating with it, what an amazing creature. Yes, I see oxygenation. It's like liquid light. Pia, there is so much energy reaching me here by just watching this.

Pia It's not about the individual paintings, but the transition between them. You don't know when a painting is "complete". It's in and out of processes. It's a life cycle, a life process. They just keep moving and transforming. The creature that's emerging in this painting *Stem cell and the brain waves* is for NN. It is rare that I name specific people. But I name NN often because there is such a need for her specifically. But the titles of all the paintings are the different body parts, organs and brain cortexes that are being addressed.

Jesal Yes, this background is pulsating really nicely. Now I can see C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7!

Oh, and I see the entire T₁, T₂, to T₉!⁷ Decalcification. I see Kidney Meridian. Ghrelin hormone.⁸ What is that purple... that ball?

Pia That is the heart.

Jesal It is so sensitively done. Subtle and delicate. Let me read something for you:

[...] the green of trees, the smell of the woods, and the oceans. The need for touching, smelling, sleeping, making love. This accumulated structure of needs and desires, that for thousands of years has been the condition of our social reproduction, has put limits on our exploitation, and is something that capitalism has incessantly struggled to overcome.⁹

I felt like reading this to you right now because I am working on something, as you are working on something, and our activities are organically flowing. We may be living in two different parts of the world, but because there is resonance between us, we are in harmony. When you show me these beautiful paintings, I do not have to

7 The location of each vertebra of the spine is defined with a letter and number.

8 The “Ghrelin hormone” is a gut hormone.

9 Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism* (Binghamton: PM Press, 2020), 119–20.

create an external excuse to read this passage to you, because actually we are synchronising! And here is my favourite section:

A history of the body can be reconstructed by describing the different forms of oppression that capitalism had activated against it. But I have decided to write instead of the body as a ground of resistance. That is, the body and its powers. The power to act, to transform itself, and the body as a limit on its exploitation. There is something we have lost in our insistence on the body as something socially constructed and performative. The view of the body as a social discursive production has hidden the fact that our body is the receptacle of powers, capacity, and resistances, that have been developed in a long process of coevolution with our natural environment and as well as intergenerational practices that have made it a natural limit to exploitation.¹⁰

I am mesmerised, I just love watching it. I feel the glow. As if alien creatures are tickling my body, my organs... I feel that goofy, spooky thing going on! It's like jazz... building the rhythm; building the tempo, building the beats... and unexpectedly something happens. The beginning was wild, this one eye shining. Serotonin in your stomach. Oxytocin everywhere!

10 Ibid.

Pia I love the way that you are actually transforming the paintings into processes, chemicals and energies. It doesn't have to be the same as what I see or think. What you associate them with become physical processes in your body.



Peitli extraction / operation One hand
under amygdala (or whatever it is) and the other
2cm over p.a.c.

Amygdala also plucked down by under eagle
Wing of a bright eyed little boy naive
cruelty







How Great is Your Darkness?

My body is not written for others
my affairs are none of your concern I can
colour
exaggerate
tell lies
I'm not accountable
I'm allowed to be angry and SCREAM
to be silent and keep my secrets

My disability does not symbolise anything.

Not weakness, vulnerability or being an outsider. I feel helpless mainly at the doctor's appointments when there isn't any space left for my story. The stereotypes create privacy screens between us.

Appointments always happen behind closed doors.
I got used to locked doors already as a child.

According to a joint study conducted by Harvard Medical School and other universities, 82 percent of American physicians believe that people with disabil-

ities have a worse quality of life than nondisabled people.¹ Physicians, of whom a smaller percentage than the general population have disabilities, assumed that their knowledge of diseases increases their ability to assess the quality of life of people with disabilities. However, the study showed that people with disabilities often receive inferior care. Many surgeons assume, for example, that women with breast cancer who use wheelchairs want a mastectomy instead of a breast-conserving surgery, believing that women with disabilities do not care about their appearance.

What do you need shoes for? As you have no sensation in your legs, you cannot feel cold.

— I should go to work.

the doctors are not
such interesting people
serial killers want to dissect corpses, too
and so do poets, of course

in a wheelchair, I can wear stiletto heels
or just socks if the shoes are needless

walking is not an interesting form of moving

I'm thirteen years old and looking at my breast buds in the mirror. The doctor called me chicken breast.

What is wrong with these?

In 2010, the following language was still used in an introductory work to medical studies:

The occurrence of hereditary diseases cannot be easily prevented. The only option is to prevent the birth of genetically deficient individuals with genetic counseling and by aborting defective foetuses. [...] Some defective individuals live until birth but die soon after when the supply of nutrients through the placenta ceases. Some live a short life and some a long life while being ill.²

Interaction at an appointment is like penance. But who is confessing and what? I hope your mind lightens as you tell me things I have already told my children. Things I heard as a child from my mother, and my mother heard as a child from her father, the first mutation in the family. I forgive you for not knowing what to do to me. But, can you give me absolution for being born and giving birth with a body condemned to demolition? Is my wallet the only thing becoming lighter here?

I confess I'm a human – do you see yourself
would you drop your child from a cliff
even to a neighbour's child one could not

In my installation, there is a doctor who didn't want children whose genetic makeup would represent human diversity.



Do the seed vaults built deep underground include rare genetic defects in case the circumstances on the planet become favourable to them?

According to the Finnish Ministry of Justice's survey on hate speech in 2015 and its follow-up survey in 2017, 50 percent of the hate speech faced by people with disabilities comes from social and healthcare personnel and 25 percent from other authorities.³

I was not surprised by the percentages. When I talk with people at disability organisations' peer events or dive into social media, a recurring theme in the narratives of people with disabilities is the discriminating and dehumanising treatment they experience from within the healthcare services.

Is it okay if I ask medical students to join here?
Let them guess your condition.

I'm sitting on the edge of the examination table in my panties
I don't want to.

There are five of them, and they're looking
at my bruised legs,
back, pot belly, and
my arms filled with goose bumps.

Look at her eyes

They look directly inside my head.
I got caught doing something terrible.

In his article "Classifying and Identifying the Intensity of Hate Speech", the political science and communication studies scholar Babak Bahador presented a hate-speech intensity scale to identify hate speech.⁴

“If I were to end up in that condition, I would kill myself” or “It would have been better for all if you had died in that accident”, are located in the black colour category, which includes death threats and wishing for death.

Do the police identify a hate crime if a person with cerebral palsy experiences spasms during a mammogram procedure, and a nurse yells, “Goddammit, I can guarantee that if you don’t hold still, this is going to hurt”?

In the history of medicine, there are several examples of punishments disguised as therapies, particularly for female patients.⁵

Marie Antoinette was crazy
she told people to eat cake that’s what we’ve been told

what else could we expect
from a harlot like her

hair like spun sugar
legs fragile as candy canes

before being put in a straitjacket, Marie challenged
doctors in a food war
mouths and eyes filled with marzipan

she didn’t make it to the court
or, the case is still stuck
in some human rights clause

luckily, there was a cost-effective solution to her ailment
and so, her head was chop
ped off
and the guillotine blade smelled of sugar

Psychologist Rhoda Olkin has written about inconsistent communication in people working with individuals with disabilities.⁶ When assisting, some professionals feel unconscious disgust ~~lust~~ toward people with disabilities.

It was my child's health examination, when the doctor wanted to know why I sit in a wheelchair. I said, because this chair is so beautiful, my friend laughed. I mean... This is so light and beautiful, isn't it?

In Babak Bahador's hate-speech intensity scale, **negative actions** are included in the early-warning **yellow category**. The **denial of reasonable accommodations** for a person with a disability may meet the definition of discrimination even if it does not meet the criteria of hate speech.

A lawyer specialising in disability rights said, "The correspondence and statements of authorities include very sophisticated ~~hate~~ speech that many people with disabilities recognize with their instinct".⁷

From early on, ableism teaches children with disabilities problem-solving and survival. The loop forms as legislation is created through this internalised hatred.

Over the past few centuries, men's life satisfaction and social positions have not been advanced with medical experiments on their genitals but with their political rights.⁸

In the Finnish Disability Forum's report on hate speech, discrimination and ableism, one of the interviewees stated, "Many disability service decisions are so inhumane (even though the officials in question consider them politically right) that I find them to question the right to live as a person with disabilities".⁹

I'm making demonstration signs.

Medicine maintains structural discrimination against people with disabilities!

End to the culture of institutionalisation!

Social Darwinism increased Covid mortality!

Apologise for the genocide of people with Down syndrome!

A truth and reconciliation process for the deaf and sign language users NOW!

I have never seen a group of doctors at our demonstrations.



why would you think you have any right
too liberally raised

all available services
have no guarantee of quality
remember to express gratitude

you are as human as the next person
for now, we cannot deny it

we don't consider you ill

but every three years, we should check
if you have been cured

Viktoria Webster, a British-Finnish specialist in accident and emergency medicine who has cerebral palsy, described in her biography how people tried to stop her from graduating as a doctor.¹⁰ However, having a disability turned out to be useful in patient work. It is easier for patients to talk about certain issues to Webster as she is not the epitome of perfection in her white coat. Medicine has a critical position in the fight for disability rights, but the principle of “nothing about us without us” is poorly implemented among the medical community.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!¹¹

my darkness is greater
than you could imagine
in a cave where
lights won't reach me

I'm unbelievably stunning

in the dark, I grow a little twisted

stronger than you believe

In the fourth century, Bishop Epiphanius wrote a book of heresies that was used in the sixteenth-century reformations to preach against the heretics. Witch hunts, as well as many early works on gynaecology, were based on hate speech. For centuries, medicine was a social and cultural action without a modern scientific foundation.¹²

Based on the legend, an alternative option for celebrating Saint Lucy's Day could be taking women with disabilities to prisons to bring light and give a middle finger to men guilty of discrimination and violence.

The old tradition of choosing a beautiful and physically

privileged Lucia and the visits to the poor, sick, and disabled are cultural appropriation and distortion of disability history.

Reima Välimäki, who has studied the history of hate speech, wrote that hate speech is an action, not an expression of emotion. Hate speech does not strive for truth, and it is not a way of resolving conflicts. The purpose of it is not genuine, transparent communication but something else.¹³

According to nursing homes, doctors placed illegal “do not resuscitate” orders on entire units without consultation at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁴

At first, the name of my biennial piece was supposed to be *roasting*. Filled with the smell of meat frying above a campfire.

I have blown into coals, too:

Social worker from the service for people with disabilities: What do you do for a living?

Me: Political art about how disability services are actualized in Finland.

Bahador defined dehumanisation and demonisation as an orange category of hate speech. Demonisation is portraying a group as dangerous or in a negative light. In dehumanisation, a person or group is equated to culturally despised entities, such as pigs, rats, parasites or filth.

elephantiasis

mad cow disease

faun tail nevus

white rabbit syndrome

duck gait

lobster claw deformity

swine flu

raccoon bruises

salmon patch

monkeypox

buffalo hump

ugly duckling sign

bat-wing tremor

codfish vertebra

bulldog jaw

useless eaters

parasites

I have turned into a wheelbarrow
that is used for taking flowers to the garden
how long do I have to carry soil in my mouth
carry everyone's burdens

I have turned into a weed
shining in your garden

when you look away for a moment
I grow wild, spreading from yards into forests

Even though you know the scientific names of the “imperfections” you found in my body (I have never benefited from that information), the assumptions of their impact on my life, happiness, and social relations are not real. The deaths, break-ups and substance abuse problems of loved ones have affected me more than any fracture. The scars that remind me of you.

why should I have resilience
is it just growing like a radish from the ground

I'm tired of being elastic and surviving
bouncing like a rubber ball from counter to counter

I don't want to be flexible anymore
always bending before breaking

Demonisation involves portraying the object of hatred as superior: **as a monster, cancer** (the diagnostic scale is a story of its own), a plague or **war** outside human control. The destruction of the demonized adversary is not only considered acceptable but even desirable and beneficial for the survival of “Man”.



Freak accident

first-aid kit in the hallway
an axe in the corridor behind the glass

you make a pressure bandage
and stop the bleeding
you know how to turn an unconscious person
on their side

how could any accident be strange
yet no one expected me to arrive

the environment seems safe
you take care of the daily tasks
and act normally

if you have understood the word “normal”
that way
you are not particularly looking for trouble

without any explanation
unexpectedly

the engine just fails along the way
the building wall collapses

can you believe that

I'm able to cause enormous destruction even death

Demonisation occurs less often than dehumanisation toward people with disabilities, but **monsters** inspired by disabilities are common in films and literature. We are demonised most from the economic perspective.

Giving birth to this kind of child becomes costly for society.

The appreciation of medicine in society guarantees integrity for social and health services. When it comes to children, we should discuss the ways in which doctors, nurses and therapists get involved with words and deeds that influence a child's process of developing self-perception. Disability culture and the social model of disability may remain unadopted in the process, and as a result, a person keeps repeating outdated medical thinking not only in relation to themselves but also to other people with disabilities.

The development of medicine and psychology in the twentieth century politicised the diversity within the human species in an unprecedented way. Despite modern definitions and human rights agreements, most authorities, doctors, assistants and other people I encounter in my daily life think that, in the end, discrimination, such as an environment that is not

accessible, is caused by the ~~disability~~ deviant characteristics of people like me. The weaker position is explained and justified as a natural consequence of our defectiveness. If you don't walk, you can't go everywhere.

people, books, computers, stones and other parts of the universe hold information inside of them

BUT
information might be untrue

experience is often more valuable than book learning

a successful organisation is prepared for all possible situations

go for a precautionary walk at your home to see where the required things are

we can't help the ones who don't walk when

the elevator is broken
no kids from the yard are asking if I'm an adult

we never have take-the-stairs days

use the elevator at your own risk
it does have an environmental impact

but at least no one is falling in the shaft

I presented the works of my disability art exhibition to a visitor. “Yeah, I know”, the visitor said, “I’m a doctor”. I fell silent and hoped that the experiences of discrimination, violence, poverty and sense of not belonging are not their everyday life, too.

In the biennial, I have to address the reason why nothing changes.

– You, as an ordinary person, cannot understand it.

This is not about my subjective experience.

News about hate speech in healthcare focuses on patients who display threatening behaviour. Sometimes, extreme cases arise, such as seriously cruel treatment in mental health hospitals or in housing units of people with disabilities. In these cases, the conversation turns to poor leadership, indifference, lack of time and resources, but not to disability hatred and emotions that make an adult in a caring profession tie a hyperactive child with ratchet straps in a chair for years.¹⁵

Among those receiving home services, there are individuals whose entire human contact is only with other people with disabilities, authorities, or nursing staff. A cage or blockage like this can be created by a huge multinational care enterprise. According to the Finnish Disability Forum's study, people with disabilities rarely report their discrimination or hate speech experiences because it is considered useless.¹⁶ Nothing changes with copy-and-paste apologies, but it does consume all our spoons.



we make a surprise inspection into a zoo of the disabled
a report with a headline:

Is a cage the place for a disabled person?

as a plus, a local workshop has made the cage beds
this way, people with disabilities are of indirect use
in the job market

in a discussion forum, someone notes that
by giving birth to an intellectually disabled child,
you condemn them to life imprisonment
you might as well put them in a cage
aren't we all, in a way, our own prisoners

as a minus, it should be written down that
the use of cage beds violates human dignity
if we're talking about humans here

but in Finland, more important than personal moral
is, in the end, what the official says

so, we express our deepest disapproval:
the use of cage beds must stop!

Hate speech in social and health services desensitises us so that we tolerate bad behaviour, judgment, ordering around, bursts of rage, and arbitrary instructions and decisions in other areas of life. Hate speech influences disabled people's conceptions of ourselves and our rights. This causes long-term stress, social exclusion and even premature deaths. The core mission of health and social services is to secure a good life. The system should generate well-being, not shame.

When you are expecting mythical creatures
– unicorns, dwarfs and quasimodo –
to arrive at appointments,
the chosen language may turn out to be wrong.

“You are not accepted if you are not like
I want you to be.
That's abandonment.”¹⁷

Hate speech is not about words.



La nobiltà
et u
donne
hili

- 1 Anita Slomski, “Doctors Share Views on Patients with Disability”, *Harvard Gazette*, 1 February 2021, news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/02/survey-finds-doctors-have-negative-perception-of-patients-with-disability.
- 2 *Galenos: Johdanto lääketieteen opintoihin* (Sanoma Pro Oy, 2010), 29.
- 3 Nita Korhonen, Laura Jauhola, Olli Oosi and Hannu-Pekka Huttunen, “‘Usein joutuu miettimään, miten pitäisi olla ja minne olla menemättä’: Selvitys vihapuheesta ja häirinnästä ja niiden vaikutuksista eri vähemmistöryhmiin”, Oikeusministeriö, selvityksiä ja ohjeita, July 2016, julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/76633/omso_7_2016_vipu-raportti_158_s.pdf.
- 4 Babak Bahador, “Classifying and Identifying the Intensity of Hate Speech”, *Items*, Social Science Research Council, 2020, items.ssrc.org/disinformation-democracy-and-conflict-prevention/classifying-and-identifying-the-intensity-of-hate-speech.
- 5 Elinor Cleghorn, *Unwell Women: Misdiagnosis and Myth in a Man-Made World* (New York: Dutton, 2021).
- 6 Rhoda Olkin, “What Psychotherapists Should Know about Disability”, *Disability and Society* 16/4 (2001): 626–29.
- 7 Jukka Kumpuvuori, lawyer and executive director of Kumpuvuori Ltd., via messenger chat with Jenni-Julia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, 2 January 2022.
- 8 See Cleghorn.
- 9 H. Gustafsson, J. Ahonen, A. Lavikainen, S. Haapala, E. Montonen, H. Lindholm, M. Silander and M. Ristolainen, “Vihapuhe, syrjintä, ableismi – vammaisfoorumin kyselyn tuloksia”, *Vammaisfoorumi ry* (2019), 3; vammaisfoorumi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RAPORTTI-Vihapuhe-syrjint%C3%A4-ableismi-1.pdf.
- 10 Victoria Webster and Diana Webster, *So Many Everests* (Helsinki: Schildts & Söderström, 2010).
- 11 Matthew 6:22–23.

- 12 Cleghorn, introduction.
- 13 Paula Collin, “Vihapuhe on vuosisatoja vanha ilmiö”, *YLE*, 30 September 2018, yle.fi/a/3-10429263.
- 14 Threshold Association, “Vammaisuus ei voi olla tehohoidon eväämisen peruste”, press release, 30 March 2020, kynnys.fi/vammaisuus-ei-voilla-tehohoidon-evaamisen-peruste; and Vammaisfoorumi ry, “Vammaisten ihmisten oikeudet ja niiden toteutuminen koronaviruksen aiheuttamassa poikkeustilanteessa”, 31 March 2020, vammaisfoorumi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/vammaisten_oikeudet_STM_310320.pdf.
- 15 Jaakko Mäntymaa, “Päivät teipattuna tuoliin ja yöt kuormaliinoilla kiini sängyssä”, *YLE*, 8 November 2021, yle.fi/a/3-12175567.
- 16 Gustafsson et al., 9.
- 17 Helena Anhava, *Sivusta: mietettä* (Helsinki: Otava, 1976).





I don't remember the context, the why and the how of the revelation at the time, it felt clever, a flick of phrase, a click of tongue. I don't think I even actually inscribed it letting it float instead in the guise of an FB post. All ink is archival. It had the weight, texture and provogue of a truism. I return to the memory of it last week when I 'made time' for me to work and instead of attending to this deadline, I dug through all the open pages that are being held together by staples that constituted my essay-beast-milking time. There were several weekly installments that hadn't yet been labelled. I had lost track of how many weeks had transpired since I had begun. Had I already surpassed the 39 weeks to which I had committed, a span mimicking a period of gestation in my womb? (I had) Has had I already entered the post-partum phase that was meant to be my post-script or addendum within which I could empty out and repress all the leftover thoughts, dreams ideas and sentences I was not able to include at the time? (I had) After having catalogued all that had been written by me on the stolen stationery, I made a picture of the contents of the box - one could see how the first page had melted. It was a light magenta blob and seemed the opposite of archival. The only reason I did not have to give the distribution of those words was because I was secure in the knowledge that I had already transcribed it. Even when my laptop stopped something after it became the casualty of an unexpected violent hailstorm - a victim of my morbid stupidity left the window of my workshop open the day of last's funeral, I knew I had a print-out of it. Thankfully, I had indeed a copy of all the text that constituted the first 10 chapters. They amounted to several thousand words. When I shared the picture with Partho he messaged me a list of "archival inks". While I loved the thoughtfulness of his message, I felt a little stupid about not realising there was such a thing as documentary ink. I don't know anymore how "old" this ~~ink~~ is. I bought it one afternoon at least 3 years ago at an Athenian in Boreen. I paid £6 or so - at the time it felt really expensive, but I was choicelless - my old Schaeffer was no longer functional. I used a replacement that was also when I bought the fancy Beryl crystal ink - the blood-coloured hue I used to begin my text before switching to Turquoise. There's a touch of irony perhaps that the mention of this ink. The day after, I received Partho's suggestion I gooped to see if I could purchase the inks he mentioned. And even though I paid them, I felt some kind of internal reluctance towards buying them. Today I wondered if writing in archival ink is, in some way, an act of hubris. In not saying it is an act of hubris. I'm merely wondering if I am reluctant to buy it because I am afraid of ~~feeling like~~ buying it is acknowledging a certain hubris about my words and the act of writing in itself. I wonder if I am drawn to these crystal inks because of their sobriety the omnipresent threat of erasure, the ever-present reality that what had so painstakingly been inscribed, by hand, can be reduced to a stain.

All Ink is Archival

I don't remember the context, the why and the how of the revelation. At the time it felt clever, a flick of phrase, a click of tongue. I doubt I even inscribed it, letting it float instead in the guise of a Facebook post. "All ink is archival".

It had the weight, texture and promise of a truism. I returned to the memory of it last week when B, my partner, made time for me to work. Instead of attending to this deadline, I dug through all the open pages held together by U-pins that constitute my essay-beast, *Milking Time*. There were several weekly instalments that hadn't yet been labelled. I had lost track of how many weeks had transpired since I had begun. Had I already surpassed the thirty-nine weeks to which I had committed, a span mimicking J's period of gestation in my womb? (I had.) Had I already entered the post-partum phase that was meant to be my post-script, the addendum within which I could empty out and repurpose all the leftover thoughts, dreams, ideas and sentences I was not able to include at the time? (I had.) After having catalogued all that had been written by me on the stolen stationery, I made a picture of the contents of the box. One could see how the first page had melted. It was a light magenta blob and seemed the opposite of archival. The only reason I did not have to grieve the dissolution of those words was because I was secure in the knowledge that I had already transcribed them. Even when my laptop stopped functioning after it became the casualty of the same unexpected and violent hailstorm – a victim of my having stupidly left the window of my workroom open the day of Carla's funeral, I knew I had a print-out of all the text that constituted the first ten chapters. They amounted to several thousand words. When I shared the picture with Partho, he messaged me a list of "archival inks". While

I loved the thoughtfulness of his message, I felt a little stupid about not realising there was such a thing as documentary ink. I don't know anymore how old this LAMY fountain pen is. I bought it one afternoon at least three years ago at an Athesia in Bozen. I paid forty euros or so. At the time it felt really expensive, but I was choiceless. My old Sheaffer was no longer functional. I needed a replacement. That was also when I bought the fancy Beryl crystal ink – the blood-coloured hue I used to begin my tract before switching to this turquoise. There's a touch of irony, perhaps, that the writing that dissolved had to do with the mention of this ink. The day after I received Partho's suggestion, I googled to see if I could purchase the inks he mentioned. Even though I found them, I felt an internal reluctance towards actually buying them. Today, I wondered if writing in archival ink is an act of hubris. I'm not saying it *is* an act of hubris. I'm merely questioning if I am reluctant to buy it because I am afraid that buying it involves acknowledging a certain hubris about the longevity of my words. Am I drawn to these crystal inks because of their solubility, the omnipresent threat of erasure, the ever-present reality that what had been so painstakingly inscribed by hand could be reduced to a stain. I am attracted to the idea that in using soluble ink, my words are somehow endangered. I don't mean that the possibility of their easy erasure makes them more precious or endows them with significance. I suppose I like the idea of ephemerality, even if I would never dare to will that for myself.

Yesterday, as I was glancing through images of Vidha's cross-stitch works, I noticed the stains. I loved how her rendering of them draws one's attention to their incidental, accidental nature, as well as the labour involved in their fabrication. They seem to suggest both wounds and paint drippings, shed blood and ink blots. The medium of cross-stitch both allows for the revelation of the underlying grid and disguises it, so that from a distance, the illusion is intact. Your perception of the details is enhanced by proximity as well as distance. The cloth is unshapely so it seems like discards. Ever since I saw these images, I have been thinking about the stationery paper I have been using to write my memoir. I showed them to Vidha yesterday over our video call. As someone who has always been fascinated by the materiality of paper, who has delighted in the touch and feel of high-quality paper, these sheets feel like a step down. They are sometimes glossy, sometimes matt, but I chose them because of the ease with which the LAMY glides over their surface. Sometimes, I have to literally let the ink dry before heaping page upon page, so unabsorbent are they. But the glossiness allows for movement and the enhanced mobility allows for me to input or record a vaster sum of words per minute, which allows me to milk the little time I have. There is a second function to choosing such an un-aesthetic surface – it takes away the pressure of writing delicately. It allows me to *forget* the possibility of ink being archival, the weight of words themselves. I am thinking now of an object I

have carried with me since 2007 – a hand-made paper book a Tibetan refugee gifted me. I can't remember his name. He was Tsundu's roommate at that time when I went to Dharamshala – my first solo trip ever – and he came to drop me to the bus stop so I could return to Delhi. He placed the traditional shawl over my head and gave me this book he had made himself. It is so gorgeously textured, not fine grain paper. In fact, there are spots where one can indeed recognise fragments of the newspaper that was pulped and dried to create this writing material. It has remained with me ever since and is relentlessly blank because each time I contemplate writing in it, I feel sure my words are not worthy enough and fall short. So I stop myself. This book has been with me ever since, inhabiting every room I have ever inhabited – JNU, Haus Khas Enclave, Khirki Extension (and Khirki Extension across the road from the previous flat), Kailash Hills, and now Tramin, first in the drawer of my writing desk at my in-law's and now in my work room in the apartment across from them that we have been renting since September 2021 (when I was about five months pregnant). Will I ever write in it or is it fated to remain blank?

When Vidha told me how she arrived at the grids for the cross-stitch works, I wondered what it might look like if I used the software she uses and translated an image of the dissolved first page of my manuscript into a grid that could support the stitch, attempting to select a shade of thread closely resembling the liquid blots of dissolved Beryl ink. Another crafting idea

for my retirement bank (although I have never figured from which of my many vocations I might retire). Vidha talked about her relationship with drawing. It is difficult to recount it anecdotally, because to do so implies working against the grain of my art journalist self-training and its reliance on only ever referring to actual transcripts and never “speaking for” an artist. But a large reason our practises are somehow entangled with each other is because they have similar impulses. We both seem to centre within our respective practises notions of frugality, repurposing leftovers, *preserving* ideas the way jams are made as a way of containing a harvested over-abundance of something we fear may not come into our possession again.

I had to pause because my writing was, just now, suddenly, so breathless, my ink ran dry. How paradoxical, to speak about the euphoria of a let-down and for one’s writing instrument to suddenly well up with air. This is one of the most exciting things about writing by hand – like needing to occasionally empty out the air pipe of a saxophone or trumpet – this having to refill and pause before continuing. When I asked Vidha to take me back to the beginning of her multi-panel meditation on waiting and queues, she told me about the history of her relationship with the Cello Gripper. I knew this ballpoint pen well; I had experimented with it in school but had chosen the Reynolds pen instead, because it was cheaper, and its lightness offered my cursive hand an edge in terms of speed. Vidha had preferred the Cello Gripper because, unlike the Reynolds,

the gripper prevented slippage on account of sweat. When she was at Sir J.J. School of Art, she had a professor, John Douglas, who used to regularly take the class to VT station and get them to make at least 100 drawings of people. His critique, when it came to her work, was that they lacked movement and rhythm. He asked her to show him her instrument. She did. He then suggested she remove the refill and use just that. She said the improvement in terms of enhanced mobility and movement was startling. Still, she never really embraced drawing as a medium, as “her” medium, until she attended an illustration course at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology. Just like how she arrived at the threshold of cross-stitch during the Radical Cross-Stitch workshop at the Museum of Impossible Forms in Helsinki.¹

* * *

It is becoming increasingly evident that I need to rinse my nib, my suspicion is that the internal tracts are saturated or lined with deposits of dried-up ink, impeding my flow. Funnily enough, before I began today's dispatch, I had to scour my workroom for loose papers, because I have “run out” of the stolen office stationery. This was when I chanced upon the spiral notebook with these boxed lines that are not unlike a cross-stitch grid. I could have written within the book, which had been assigned the function of containing

1 See museumofimpossibleforms.org.

the manuscript I had conceived that has eventually manifested as *Milking Time*. I called it *The Miracle*, an abbreviation of the title I had originally designated, *The Miracle of the Loaves and the Fish*. This book had perforations on each page so I could tear them out in a bunch. It mattered. I seem now unable to write within the confines of a bound book. It seems integral to my process that I write on pages that are loose leafed. Any form of binding needs to be subsequent, an afterthought. Writing on paper has an element of heat to it. There is this tension between the nib and the paper's surface and the slant of my hand. It matters that I do not focus on legibility. It matters that I enable only a certain immediacy and transparency of thought and that the stamina of my writing hand is sustained by the firing of my brain's synapses. Writing like this... as I am also simultaneously thinking and remembering and processing the joy we shared during our conversation yesterday, communicates some of the urgency I feel about making art that is invariably filtered by various forms of lack and limitation.

I related to Vidha when she told me how drawing with a ballpoint pen in her blank-paged notebook when she was working at Galerie Mirchandani and Steinruecke, which is where and how I know her, helped her to at least connect with the part of her that felt the imperative to make art. This was different, she explained, from the daily diary she also kept that she simultaneously used for everyday jottings of to-do lists and sketching ideas. Notebooks have held a

similar function in my own practice. I never was one for recording anything chronologically or using the format to memorialise the day. When I consider the role diaries (the writer's version of a drawing book) have played in my explorations of the medium, I see how they reflect how my best work was always tangled up in writing that emerged from irrepressibility. Why has it taken me almost a decade to come close to even realising a second manuscript after *A Handbook for My Lover*? Because I foolishly believed writing was bound to structure. The first page of this found spiral book reveals how invested I was in constantly returning to structure.

I didn't make it beyond the first page. I drafted some over-arching thoughts, which I still feel elated by. I can also see, retrospectively, how many of these ideas seeped into my manuscript. Maybe the moment when I jotted them down in bullet-point form was when I first began metabolising them. This point is striking: "Pregnancy as a question of form". On one corner of the page, I also wrote:

Having time
Penelope time
Harvesting time.

I also located a thought that has been carried over within my subconscious and has yet to find resolution; "Process as prayer". What does it mean to become a prayer? I wrote:

to pray
to fall on one's knees
Simone Weil: Our father

I can trace the origin of this cluster of thoughts to the time I was preparing for my interview with the artist Theaster Gates. He responded to a question of mine. He spoke about that moment when the clay is in the oven, and you don't quite know what will happen. This suspense-surrender is also a form of prayer. As I re-read my notes, I kept thinking about what Vidha said about her professor John Douglas, whom she and her classmates never quite took seriously as students. But now, all these years later, it is her encounters with him that seem somehow formative to how she recounts her artistic origins. Possibly, in an effort to inspire in his students an earnestness about their relationship with artmaking as a form of discipline, he offered musician Kishori Amonkar as an example. Did she simply just "show up" for her morning Riyaz? he asked them. John Douglas theorised about all the prepping Amonkar would have done before she was ready to even begin practising. This story touched me because I keep lamenting my inability to follow any form of routine in the aftermath of motherhood. The mornings seem to pass by like a tornado. I am woken up to the hustle of breakfast and must strive to help B to get J ready to leave the house within the hour so I can be tethered to my desk for at least two hours before I have to get into lunch prep (I cook one large batch to last for dinner).

Then, before I have time to get out of my PJs, they are back home. These days, because he had a recent growth spurt, J (twenty-one months old) can comfortably reach the doorbell. He delights in pressing the switch multiple times and the jolting buzzer-like sound indeed announces to me that I've run out of time.

Vidha said that the ballpoint was a "ready medium", unlike a pencil that needs sharpening. This felt revealing too, of a person who was trying to nurture something elemental to their soul in the absence of time. I imagined Vidha commuting just as I spent at least a decade dependent entirely on the local trains in Mumbai. When she spoke about bodies huddled together in a space and how they react in both the presence and absence of a directive, I *got* exactly what she meant. In many ways, her reliance on the ballpoint to make the drawing happen is akin to the working housewife (a paradox, I know, all housewives work) chopping vegetables in the ladies compartment of the local train, because, by the time they arrive in the Northern Suburbs, it is already dinnertime.

Looking over the transcripts (mostly my handwritten jottings as V was talking), I begin to wonder if the movement and rhythm Douglas felt her drawing lacked began to enter not only through her mastery of the use of the ballpoint refill, but conceptually... When I think of her practise, I perceive it as the work of someone able to feel the pulse of everything that moves and doesn't. I'm not suggesting this is innate to her, but I wonder if it relates to what she feels drawn towards.

She told me, for example, about how challenging she found it to draw voluptuous bodies, because that is not what one is encouraged to do in art school. She assumed it was about enlarging the proportions, but learned, eventually, that she had to begin with the spine (is the spine a symbol of structure? I suddenly wonder if there is an intuitive logic to my ongoing preference for writing on spineless paper). I suppose I think of Vidha as a metabolic artist, someone who is constantly digesting ideas and frequencies of thought and observation, but whose artistic core is somehow “in a state of waiting” for that let-down to happen, for the irrepressibility to manifest. She alluded to this when she was walking me through her past work. She had been unofficially schooled in cross-stitch. She said around mid-2021, she felt an anxiety about whether she would ever draw again. She had returned to two smaller drawing works from her Grey Noise Lahore solo exhibition and had begun working on them again. She started feeling excited, but had limited resources in terms of time. After learning cross-stitch, she had an idea for an abecedarary but she eventually “got a sense of it not going anywhere”. I identified with this feeling entirely. It is at the heart of why it took me so long to write anything of substance post-*Handbook*. None of what I attempted felt seeded enough or capable of seeding and sustaining something long-form. But, after skilling herself in the language of cross-stitch and processing the images emerging from the anti-CAA protests in India, the juices began to flow. She said she had the same

feeling as when she started doing illustrations after the Srishti workshop, like she had “so much to draw and not enough time”. She finally arrived at a way of synthesising all the found images in her newspaper cut-out collection and found ways of bringing together multiple images in one cross-stitch piece. It was “meditative and calming”. The smaller format meant she could sit anywhere with it. “You have to work with a medium long enough for it to become your medium”, she told me as she detailed the trajectory of her experimentations with various mediums.

* * *

What charmed me about Vidha’s recounting of her arrival into drawing was her admission about a perceived lack of skill, as John Douglas told her, her inability to tease out rhythm and movement. Glancing at the images she messaged me of the multi-panel work, I feel a sense of awe at what she has achieved. There is this fabulist quality to the figuration. They seem both located within a certain social context and yet outside of it and I wonder if that has to do with how she has synthesised her observations about Finnish queues and the queues we both know from back home in India. The title of the work suggests something bureaucratic, but also a feeling of having been *had*. It reminded me of my ex-plumber Gullu lamenting how he stood in a secret queue behind some curtained shop in Kailash Hills believing he could buy a bottle of beer during the first pandemic lockdown in India.

After hours, when he finally got to the front, he realised the overpriced beer was alcohol-free. He bought a case, nonetheless. During this first lockdown, for the first time ever, because of the threat of contracting a virus, people were obediently assuming a spot in a queue. I remember shopkeepers making chalk circles on the ground, thus orchestrating people's bodies. Vidha said she noticed how, during her recent trip to Mumbai, people stood differently in queues. The abundance of easy entertainment thanks to smartphones has altered bodily behaviour, the mannerisms of anxiety seem absent. I wonder if it is because the Indian population is somewhat resigned to its fate of being terribly governed and the ensuing dependency on always having to wait one's turn for something elusive. I'd genuinely believed that after the hell we went through after the move to demonetize currency in the value of Rs 500 and Rs 1000, people would have acted on the collective sentiment of outrage. By the time the Covid-19 wave really did its number in India, I was jaded enough to know no one would take the government to task for the sheer number of people who died because of the unavailability of oxygen cylinders. I see in Vidha's figures a mixture of lightheartedness and resignation, a purposefulness in the language of publicly waiting for some undefined resource and yet a leisureliness in terms of body language. Traces of forced resilience. Author Jeanette Winterson, in an interview, referenced this notion of what it means to feel within the body a call to make something or to

articulate or self-express.² Vidha told me how, when she had decided she wanted to cue in on queues, she researched the subject and found so much had been said, it was a discourse in itself. What overwhelms me about the final outcome of her multi-panelled work is this sense one gets of its internal pressure.

Vidha's sculptures suggest the culmination of what forms, invariably, when discarded objects collect because the sight of one discard is read by someone else as permission to discard something else. One object's presence validates the other in this oddly magnetic way. The sculptures read like poems that are amorphous (non-contoured), constantly in a state of alteration and becoming, and reference her hyperlocal lived reality.

Could it be that because of all these intuitions, or suspicions, I have about Vidha's practise, writing breathlessly like this, throwing all illusions of structure and premeditation to the wind, feels like the most fitting way of responding? Or is this gesture of mine a way of acknowledging to myself that this is now my practise? How do I explain how and why, as a writer with an enviable typing speed, I have chosen this analogue format? I tried in vain, once, to use a typewriter, because I wanted to slow down my brain. I realised, eventually, that, in fact, I was seeking a medium that would disable

2 "Jeanette Winterson has no idea what happens next", Katy Waldman, *New Yorker*, 29 October 2023, [newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/jeanette-winterson-has-no-idea-what-happens-next?](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/jeanette-winterson-has-no-idea-what-happens-next?)

me from using the backslash and re-writing or editing as I wrote. Because re-writing over erased words on a Microsoft Word file is different from over-writing on paper. Not looking at a screen also allows for fewer distractions (and takes away the frightening prospect of beginning with blankness).

My internal pressure valve rests on the tip of my nib. It dictates when there is still enough left unsaid.

What feels delicious to encounter in V's practice is how she is able to use visual mediums to reference or even dare I say pay homage to certain leaders that are unabashedly third-world. The sculptures do this well - show what forms, invariably, when discarded objects collect because the weight of one discard gives someone else ~~lead~~ ^{lead} by someone else as permission to discard something. And objects presence validates the other in this dchy magnetic way. The sculptures read like poems that are metaphors and constantly in a state of iteration and becoming.

Could it be that ^{because of} ~~for~~ all of these intuitions or suspicions I have about her practice, ~~the~~ ~~only~~ ~~writing~~ breathlessly I have this, throwing all notions of structure and remediation to the wind, felt like the most fitting way of responding? Or is this gesture of mine a way of acknowledging to myself that this is now my practice? How do I explain how, as a writer with an unriable typing speed, who can literally type at the speed of thought, I choose now, just cap this, anagram-style, this old-fashioned format, I tried in ^{an} ~~in~~ ~~to~~ use a typewriter - wanted to slow down my brain, or so I thought but in fact, what I was looking for was a medium that disables me from using the backstash + e-writing - because e-writing over erases words is different from over writing. ~~Because~~ Not looking at a screen also allows for fewer distractions. I am forced to be efficient with my time, which is the price we pay for our precarity as writers and artists. ~~My~~ ~~vision~~ ~~seems~~ My presence value is on the tip of my nib. It dictates when I have ~~aid~~ ~~my~~ ~~final~~ ~~fare~~ ~~and~~ when there is still enough left unsaid.











Passages from

Intoxicated: Race, Disability, and Chemical Intimacy Across Empire

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

As part of our research for *The pleasures we choose* we spent a lot of time considering how arts and exhibitionary institutions might better address the conditions and struggles (bodily, social and spatial) that emerge from living in toxic worlds. One of the key challenges has been questioning how toxicities and violences, held in the body and beyond, can be confronted in an exhibition. How does this extend to a curatorial practice? How can we, as art workers, deviate from the harmful and exclusionary forms of violence so inherent in spaces of artistic and cultural presentation? What does it mean to present artworks in the context of a national pavilion that instantiates direct experiences of institutional and state violence? How can we share the lives, practises and artworks of artists in correspondence with one another, while acknowledging the difference, commonality and inseparability of ableist and racialised spatial and social conditions, toxic air and microbiological and ecological health?

From the outset of this project, the writing of Mel Y. Chen has been a great help and tool to navigate the entanglements of toxicity, disability, race, gender and agitation – and has inspired us to think through where these lurk and materialise in the context of the exhibition and national pavilion. This chapter is composed of a series of passages from Chen's recent book *Intoxicated: Race, Disability, and Chemical Intimacy Across Empire*, published by Duke University Press in 2023. The selected paragraphs that follow speak to some of the underlying reflections on the connection between bodies, toxicity and knowledge explored in *The pleasures we choose*. As excerpts from a larger body of work and thinking, they naturally do not capture the full complexity and context addressed by Chen in their book; therefore, we encourage you to read their full publication for more on how race, disability and intoxication are entangled. In the reprinted sections here, the accompanying marginalia denote the pages in *Intoxicated* where the passages are sourced; the footnotes refer to the original notes in the book.

Chen, 104. I hold on to suspension, dissatisfied by the stubborn exclusivities attributed to human embodied-minded being (such as skin boundaries, the apex of sentience), as well as the easy promulgations of presumed exteriorities (such as air that is not of body) across a swath of educational domains and lay pedagogies. I take suspension to offer, for the purposes of this book, that the very materiality of human being – as well as the presumed externality of the stuff with which it engages – must remain in suspense, casting continued doubt on, for instance, the facial phenotypes of race and the visible prosthetic determinants of disability, as

well as the forms of becoming involved in, for instance, *breathing things*.¹ My respect for the ample mysteries of suspension that escape contemporary epistemological closure is tied in some way to my having been influenced by discussions on the right to opacity and williness: the project of exhaustive knowledge for its own sake mimics the rapaciousness of colonial desire, and one response to it is to reject the obligation to be known or knowable.² These are anticolonial discussions that wax and wane in the literature, but remain necessary due to the sticky coloniality of what has been established as scholarly.

Chen, 2. The need to investigate ongoing interactions between race and disability cannot be overstated, as scholarly work and many recent activist movements – disability justice and the Movement for Black Lives among them – have helped to make clear. Environmental justice movements of all kinds have, furthermore, made the point that racialized and Indigenous peoples are overwhelmingly made to absorb environmental harms (and their associated disabilities, to the extent that they rise to thresholds and priorities of identification), often over generations. And if the occupation

1 Timothy Choy and Jerry Zee, “Condition—Suspension”, *Cultural Anthropology* 30/2 (2017): 210–23.

2 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189–94. [Original note expanded by author’s own dedication.]

of a racially gendered position is enough to discredit someone intellectually, then the dyad between race and disability is well entrenched indeed. But exactly how is it that some forms of disability themselves bear distinctly racial histories? I wouldn't allow that one just falls out of the other, as many still claim about race – that race is simply derivative of class, or that one is simply a nuance of another.³ Nor would I insist on the uselessness of one or another term, as if disability were simply “white” or race were simply, at this point, institutional; I continue to hear versions of both. Rather, I accept that race and disability live with deep mutual entanglement; and I have also spent too long in these weeds to call any of this obvious or formulaic. There is, and was, far too much traffic, too much mysterious exchange.

[...]

Chen, 3–4. There is one *seemingly* unlikely place where the nexus between race and disability vibrates, has vibrated, quite resoundingly, and yet is perhaps one of the most transparent participants in becoming, for it represents nothing but change. Change that tips into damage, or threatens abandonment, spiritual escape, or even revolution, or all three. That place is toxicity – or intoxication. Both toxicity and intoxication hover around disability (as intoxicated incapacity or depressed capacity,

3 Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear, “Unspeakable Offenses: Untangling Race and Disability Discourses of Intersectionality”, *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 4/2 (2010): 127–45.

for example); and because of the chemical intimacies attached to race, they also hover around that. If you join me for these archival explorations, you will witness intoxication's explosive role in two scenes that became immensely relevant for the disability–race nexus, and in very different ways. The telling that is most attendant to history's abuses is that oppressive policy and settler colonial imagination made it a likelihood that Indigenous land and the surrounds of many racial others would be most exposed to toxic chemicals.

And this is true. I also had some different questions. I wanted to know how the inedible soup of illusion and design sloshed and cavorted into beloved beings, altering their lives and deaths forever. I wanted to describe beyond doubt the doubling effect in which chemical abuses were followed by discrediting of the beings so affected. You can call that racism, settler colonialism, and it is; but it also has more to teach me. I delved into a nineteenth century historical archive [which in the book edition of *Intoxicated* appears in chapter 1, but is not included here], that of John Langdon Down, because I finally had to face it, after years of disbelief, that someone could gamble, and so ostentatiously, to make connections that had no business being made. Later I realized how ordinary and in-line his scholarly gesture was, and how ordinary it might still seem today, but with a few tweaks. And I thought about the making of connections that had no business being made and wondered about that; that's when I decided to look at Down's archive more closely. Which connections had no business being made?

It was no longer an example of “look how bad it got,” but of “think twice, it’s right here next to us.” But all the above still discusses intoxication like it’s only a violent reflex of pollution, coming on like a wave from elsewhere. I also wonder about what it brings in spite of itself, and how it has been welcomed, even desired. In other words, I want to consider here intoxication’s own capabilities – the ways it seems to enable taking leave of a flattening, even murderous present, to a temporal and sensory otherwise, to a place of tolerability. Is there a way in which it is matched, even suited, to the resonant natures of race: that racial beings often feel so much more spectacular than, so much more than, what is alleged?

DIFFERENTIAL BEING, INSTITUTIONS, AND PEDAGOGY

Chen, 101–02. In asking questions about the collective entity of the university, its institutionality, and the bodies – human, nonhuman, and inhuman – within it, I am concerned with the ways in which fluency or its interruption become marked, as well as ways in which the systemic maintenances of difference are adjudicated.⁴ By difference, here, I do not refer to a singular dimension of segmented, segregatable, or even centerable identity. Rather, differential

4 With Dana Luciano I discuss “inhuman” in relation to a wide map of previous critical work engaging the human, in Luciano and Chen, “Has the Queer Ever Been Human?”, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21/2–3 (2015): 182–207. [Original note expanded by author’s further explanation.]

being finds itself arrayed across many dimensions, nameable and unnameable. My book *Intoxicated* lays out radically different scenarios for variously agitating bodies. These current sections broaden the terms by which these bodies are imagined in their variety, beyond intersectional factors almost consolidated in their regularity: race, gender, nation.

[...]

Undergrowth, undercommons. Undergrowth (one take, anyway): the apparent relative slowness of the universe that nevertheless makes good on what it suggests. Undercommons: what can be found in and around the university, in spite of the canceling tendencies of the settler state found within it. That is, by pointing to the universe before the university, I celebrate an undergrowth that defies value judgments or quantitatively shriveled takes on its beneathness and instead owns a promise of subtension, a vastness of potential that remains in spite of every thing. As those studying the university's dependency on diversity have pointed out, the tyranny of names includes those of race and disability, which, along with a few other exclusives, are tethered to the work of co-optational diversification. Undergrowth and undercommons recognize that as much as these tyrannical imaginations may lay claim to something of what's there, there is always a supplement or a fundament that escapes their reach.

[...]

Chen, 106. In a space where it takes courage not only to be a racialized isolate, but also to rock, to twitch, to stand when others are not standing or to sit when others are standing, to laugh out of sync, to lie down, to have any kind of a discernible smell other than racialized class-appropriate scents, to make intellectual connections between circumscribed domains and across accepted genres that “sound mad,” undergrowth must remind that it is not only there, it constitutes a ground by which the “there” of the university may be defined.

PARTIAL COGNITION, CRIPSTEMOLOGY

Chen, 129. Let us think not only about chronicities, toxicities, and effects, but also about points of bodily departure, particularly what integrities are proposed by what haunted presumptions of essence. Who gets to begin, in the regard of others, with a body? And who gets to begin, in the regard of others, with a mind? I refer here to profiles of race, gender, and labor that produce variable “body–mind” distributions that are keyed to their proper place in a hierarchy.

The kinds of transnational felt resonances that might cripistemologically inform one’s approach to people positioned as conventional “others” (through racism, coloniality, class, political geography, or, indeed, disability) become less palpable precisely because of the differential corporealization of “good”-minded selves and “other” possible embodied subjects – other possible experiencers, other possible bodily situations, other possible cognators.

[...]

Chen, 129–31. To be clear, cognitive or intellectual disability – and its broader matrix of cognitive variation – is the near unthinkable for academia. What are we to do with the brain fog that has become our troublemaking partner in this context, more prevalent than we were told to believe? What if we cannot cancel it, for those of us who arrive here on more secure cognitive ground? Or those of us who have experienced cognitive change with various shifts due to age, illness, injury, or other bodily transition? What about the cognitive imposters who have always thought “I don’t think” while somehow getting through? And there could also be the fact that cognitive imposters are us, in that we have all trained in an unfamiliar specialty of cognitive style for which we have paid, not necessarily life and limb, but certainly money, passion, and labor. Finally, what about those deemed cognitively deficient their entire lives, about whom definitions, sometimes insidiously, vary; and what about those trapped by the strange trades between cognitive disability and race? Where and how do all these differences fit into this picture of criptistemology?

I began studying cognitive science from the perspective of linguistics in graduate school, just before neuroscience began to predominate the field. Today the commonsense acceptance of a biologized and hence neural basis of mind is in part why I think the terms *neurodiversity* and *neuroatypicality* are used with such pervasive commitment by community members,

activists, and disability studies scholars, and in part why experts appeal to neuroscience for insights on autism. And yet some characterizations of neuroatypicality seem only tendentiously neural in character and seem to have more to do with old-school cognitive elements such as information retrieval, calculation, and the like. Thus, even in neural approaches to cognition today, there remains a notion of information being acquired, held, sequestered, and corralled. I know that calling it all “information” is a rude reduction of what was going on in cognitive science then and now – or, rather, it bears mentioning that the “information” matter of cognitive science itself is continually protean and under revision. And yet, information has prevailed, I think, by and large.

An information-handling reading of cognition, rather than being a remote disciplinary feature proper only to cognitive science, is integral to the prevailing mechanisms for the contemporary production of knowledge. As humanities and social science scholars we are tasked to work with a fluid cognitive tool set: taxonomies, namings, retrievals. Ultimately the academic institutions we inhabit are at this moment adept at producing what I would call disciplined cognators. What happens to us in that process? I do not mean that some people simply become canonical or affixed to disciplinary frameworks. I mean that our disciplining goes much further than disciplinarity. We know this, but to what degree have we explored its consequences for our production of epistemologies? What kind – perhaps

even, what cognitive kind – of epistemologies do we wish to produce? Must we consider brain fog – or other kinds of cognitive states deemed improper – necessarily punishable in an epistemological, or even cripistemological, context of collective devising?

The concept of cis-ness might help us move toward tentative answers to some of these questions because of the ways in which it opens up questions of time, change, and transition. *Cis* is a term that within popular gender-forward practices indicates not only “same” but a singular ordinary-to-present “home-ness” in a given gender position as assigned at birth, as in “cisgender man.” But monolithic cis-ness is in large part disingenuous; we are all too complex for such linear transhistorical sameness. Then what could a venturesome term like *ciscognators* mean? Someone who has the same style of cognition as assigned (such as “normal” or “not delayed”) when they were born? Maybe not with full sincerity; but maybe we can use it as a conceit to talk about an expected temporal trajectory, not consistent throughout but – like sexual development narratives – having its own proper spurts and ebbs, a mapped journey of cognitive elaboration (known to cognitive scientists and pediatricians as development), such that a cognitive identity can be felt and armed in a way that produces the effect of a “cis.” But the becoming that neurotoxicities, for instance, invite, is something else. Yet Marquis Bey extends the critique of cis to point to its ineffable racialization; or, rather, that both

trans and Blackness – along with cis itself – refuse cis’s simplicity.⁵

We are all becoming, and I credit trans studies for helping me think through body- and self-becoming’s rich complexities. Trans studies helps to open and critique beginnings, middles, and ends – such as in “cis” – to meaningful inquiry. It asks fundamental questions of temporal projection, certainty, and closure, precisely for epistemology. It helps to frame ways in which we are becoming environmentally, too, and in a way that transitions seem harder to sort into good or bad if we were to rely on characterizing the materials that move them along as toxic or not, endogenous or exogenous. Already in 2011, Eva Hayward suggested that transing frogs – frogs whose sexing appears to be correlated with densities of environmental toxins – might represent an opportunity to see who and what we become together, as opposed to simply an indicator species for what might become of us. She wrote:

I don’t believe that a single environmental factor could explain transsexuality; the assertion is ridiculous. But it does open the realization that bodies are lively and practical responses to environments and changing ecosystems. Instead of toxic sex change as a sinister force that threatens all life, it might be about reinvention, as well as

5 Marquis Bey, *Cistem Failure: Essays on Blackness and Cisgender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

about political and economic systems that affect everyone, including animals.⁶

That process of “becoming together” is particularly relevant for disability and its edges, especially if we can bracket the properly human.

INTOXICATED METHOD

Chen, 132–34. Throughout this text, I have made repeated gestures to the questions regarding intoxication, wondering what is lost when it is treated as a zone of exception or exclusion. I have constantly asked myself what it means to be or become, say, “intoxicated” by a substance like opium – temporally ingesting and thinking with its inter-human temporalities, its urgent demands, its soothing, its very pace, and its extensive consequences – and what it means to treat it as method. These are not straightforward questions, however. In practice, asking about intoxication’s effects in knowledge also requires not only approaching the critical boundaries of the toxic versus the nontoxic, but also exploring the affects and other categorial blurrings in that *production* of the toxic. For entities defined as toxic, this attention to its conditions means to examine not only the toxic–nontoxic axis, but other axes of equal importance, such as disability–debility, incident–chronicity,

6 Eva Hayward, “When Fish and Frogs Change Gender”, *IndyWeek.com*, 3 August 2011, 13, indyweek.com/news/fish-frogs-change-gender.

human–inhuman, constitution–interconstitution, quickening–slowing. In every move from a first to a second term, a sharply defined exceptional state shifts toward something much more complex, inviting estrangement from privileged values. If my goal is more toward intoxicated presentism than a kind of drug voluntarism, I am not sure I can fully leave aside the question of prescriptive intoxication for the benefit of learning or unlearning. I am thinking here of the ordinary, socially legitimate uses of attention drugs, speed, antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, and wine after a talk, to liberate other knowledges and knowledge performances.

What above seems potentially an indulgence becomes more justified in the context of a critically disabled provocation to ask about the workings of our own memory and, more generally, apparatuses of what we consider as knowledge. For instance, if critical medical humanities calls for examining the knowledge forms of notions of health, illness, and disability, one might be led to reflect on the methods of medical humanities research, particularly given the early ethical motivation of the medical humanities to humanize the scene of treatment in the clinic. In the case of toxicity, what might it mean to take seriously an embodied approach, whether we call it witnessing, approximation, occupation, to the living or dead subjects of our study? What if we were to consider, for instance, the iterative quality of cognitive and perceptual effort that accompanies some forms of intoxication?

This is not an attempt to advocate for a kind of sensory cosmopolitanism or a singular, self-departing dalliance as a way of understanding the lives of interest, but instead an effort to approximate a method that may converse with other people's methods of survival and/or thriving – to recognize, for instance, the trade in alternative temporalities and perceptions that may already be present. This provocation is, of course, tentative, but it is inflected by a deeper reflection fostered by disability studies: that even though it is absolutely problematic to attribute a priori intellectual “deficiency,” it is equally problematic to assume that none involved have been thinking in difference; both are the products of the radical segregation of the observer.

And further: What does it mean to elect or enact a kind of cognitive idealism in the work we do, if or when we know that this is not always our thinking home, not always a reliable capacity? And is this kind of struggle to perform cognitive idealism different from the “hard work” required of any specialty? I would wager that it is. As a scholar with illness that reflects intoxications of some forms, and variable cognitive difference, whose occupation is temporally stringent enough to require my working *during* these variances of capacity, I have been led by necessity to meditate on reigning presumptions of research method, in particular on the ways in which idealities of scholarship value cognitive elaboration, purity, and clear thought over blurring capacity/incapacity and associative thinking. Disability theory urges the unraveling of ableist methodologies; and

besides the corporeal experimentation that we could describe as the practice of allopathic medicine, a decolonial approach avoids the positing of hierarchies of medicating systems (for instance, the prioritizing of allopathy over other entrenched systems). This rejection of colonial hierarchalization itself brings merit to the valuation and aesthetics of anticolonial ambiguity. A decolonial disability theory may ultimately avoid the positing of a particular, idealized, uniquely temporalized cognition as one of its methodological givens, and relax into the dual modes of intoxication and intellectual difference.

BACK TO GRASS; OR, DECOLONIZING CRIPSTEMOLOGY

Chen, 134–36. What cognitive kind of epistemologies is wanted?

Ever since interdisciplinarity, as a kind of characterization of an intellectual space such as a university or a realm of fields, or a trope for scholarly transformation, as well as a refuge for odd ones out, has come into itself, and those interpellated by it have gotten into the swing of it, a trajectory of epistemological culmination has been taking place – one in which, for instance, critiques of intersectionality, which articulates almost orthogonally to disciplinarity, have entered. Intersectionality and interdisciplinarity could be said to coexist today within a common era in which favored typologies have become solidified and stopped being animated so that race, class, sex, sexuality, and nation could be felt as comprehensive and could thereby become didactic.

Yet critiques of intersectionality, timely as they may be, should not undercut the fact that the term or concept remains a useful heuristic that can at times caution against unconsidered rehearsals of privilege, or forms of ontological packing. There is a sense in which intersectionality might find itself at the heart of cripistemology, animating some of its core questions. The next logical step, another phasal experience of the agnostic chronicity of academic production, might be something that looks and feels roughly like transdisciplinarity. I have elsewhere described transdisciplinarity as “broadband epistemologies.”⁷ What role should or might transdisciplinarity play in a shared cripistemology? One of the promises of transdisciplinarity is that canonical vocabularies become gently imperiled within such imagined spaces, potentially to a much greater degree than within spaces of interdisciplinarity.

Such a vocabulary mushing project, with its suggestions of slippery ground and the impossibility of a standpoint, may sound risky in the sense that multiple embedded projects of dissembling do not by themselves magically unmask insidious projects of coloniality, and I think it is certainly true that they do not automatically do so (this was the nature of the rejoinder to deconstruction, for example, by women of color feminists and queer of color theorizing). We might

7 Chen, “Broadband Epistemologies”, in *30-Year Retrospective on Language, Gender and Sexuality* (special issue), ed. Kira Hall et al., *Journal of Gender and Language* 15/3 (2021): 396–402.

even tell a story about interdisciplinarity as a style arriving precisely in time to defang the efforts of specifically feminist and critical race interventions, in that way that certain developments appear convenient or easy to certain people in ways that turn out later to look like the reproduction of patriarchal whiteness; this echoes Barbara Christian's skepticism toward "The Race for Theory."⁸ Christian's dry critique of the strained advancements of Western literary theory making, so often complicit with leaving race (and its own racialization) behind as if it were literally a drag, remains a striking account of the commodified movements of many strands of theory at the cost of race analysis, including their own practical racisms. Even though today one might identify a growing consensus among many fields that decolonization, for instance, and its racialized ramifications are in fact ever-more critical pursuits, it is also possible to identify other crests of scholarship for which a descent into race is intolerable, or reeks of bad taste or excessive particularity. Cripistemology must also ask: what practical colonialities may quietly sustain within it, even as it turns headlong toward the promising partiality of transdisciplinary communing?

Crippling the acknowledged partiality that Haraway theorized has the effect of blurring dearly held vocabularies, whatever they are. That recognized and shared partiality feels cognitive. There is, therefore, a cognitive

8 Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory", *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 51–63.

blurring relative to our former seat of comfort for those of us who have at some point resided more or less disciplinarily and in disciplined vocabularies, a blurring that certainly reads as “I can’t think” or “I don’t think,” that comes part and parcel with this kind of coming together.

But in light of a shared project of criptestemological making, I do want to ask what kind of cognitions, what kind of information management, what kind of memory retrieval will we require to do the theorizing that will be important to move forward? I think this has something to do with what Jasbir Puar asks of the new criptestemologies, that they will have to define “the ‘crip’ in criptestemology as a critique of the notion of epistemology itself, a displacement not only of conventional ways of knowing and organizing knowledge, but also of the mandate of knowing itself, of the consolidation of knowledge.”⁹ What knowing is desired? What would a decolonized or decolonizing criptestemology – one that took that decolonization seriously by recognizing coloniality’s serious attachment to typology, identification, and orders of knowledge – look, smell, and feel like?

Is it possible that we could talk about partial knowing working agonistically against, and thus also with, comprehension, almost as the queer works in odd partnership with the straight and narrow? And then recruit

9 Fiona Foley, *Biting the Clouds* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2020), 124.

from these forms of knowing to devise a criptestemology that takes seriously its own crippled reach, or rather, crips its reach while still feeling the stars? And make even a further turn to identify a different arrogance of partial knowing dissembling as whole, as the surely revealing condition of majoritarian knowledge, about which our frictive criptestemological partial knowing others a devastating, holistic if not quite comprehensive, rejoinder?

[...]

REDACTING EMPIRE, GIVING WAY TO THE WORLD

Chen, 139. “Intoxicated method” is at once an acknowledgment of the chemical present of intellectual engagement, and a set of questions about chosen ways of doing research and coming to knowledge. Ways that could involve something like the academic unthinkable of “categorical blurring,” which is normally marked as incapacity or intellectual slowness – or a sincere attempt to embrace sensorium, embrace one’s intoxication in such a way that it is not a form of temporary, voluntaristic pleasure – a blurring that in the usual sense would only be a point of arrival, a precise achievement for the creator, rather than perhaps a retreat from incessant taxonomy in one’s own ways of reading and naming, a disabled loss. It is a giving way to the world, a resignation of educationally cultivated agencies. Indeed, it is automatically ironic to raise this question of blurring in research venues (such as elite universities or

ranked peer reviewed journals), where the business of precision and analysis tends not to be questioned, and where moves away from them are read as anticognitive and thus somehow failing. I understand this as distinct from, but fully sympathetic with, Kandice Chuh's deeply consequential articulation of illiberal humanism, which comes to the fore through relational logics: "the common experience of disidentification rather than solidarity through identity. [...] It is the relationality of the felt, often wordless connectivity that occurs among minoritarian subjects because of misrecognition, and precipitates the sociality of being with, of entanglement; it is that commonality necessary to persist, to thrive."¹⁰ While it seems to me that Chuh's account is hesitant before what might be called the nonce blurring of disabled being, I want to affirm a path exists that does not collapse blur or indistinction with false equivalence. Blurring, and intoxicated method, are experiences and praxes that can certainly live in radically different ethics. They should not be seen as fundamentally equivocating, but forms of opening: they are modes of being with, of concatenation and assembly, and sometimes collectivity.

10 Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 95.

Yvonne Billimore's interdisciplinary practice facilitates situations for collective learning, exchange and experiences with particular attention to feminist and ecological practices. They are the artistic director of Bioart Society, a Helsinki-based association working at the intersection of art, science and society. Previous roles include associate curator of *Rehearsing Hospitalities*, Frame Contemporary Art Finland's public programme (2019–23); co-artistic director of ATLAS Arts (maternity cover 2021–22); and programme manager of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop (2015–18). With Jussi Koitela she is the co-curator of the Pavilion of Finland exhibition at La Biennale di Arte 2024.

Jos Boys is a freelance researcher, writer and architectural designer, as well as co-founder and co-director of The DisOrdinary Architecture Project. She studied architecture in the 1970s and was one of the co-founders of Matrix feminist design collective, as well as co-author of their book *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (Pluto, 1984/Verso, 2023). She is the author of *Doing Disability Differently: An Alternative Handbook on Architecture, Dis/ability, and Designing for Everyday Life* (Routledge, 2014). She is currently a guest professor at the Royal Danish Academy, Copenhagen, and an honorary associate professor in the Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education at University College London (UCL) in the UK.

Mel Y. Chen is Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Chair & Professor of Gender & Women's Studies at U.C. Berkeley. Books include *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012); *Intoxicated: Race, Disability and Chemical Intimacies of Empire* (Duke, 2023), and the co-edited *Crip*

Genealogies (2023, also with Duke). Chen co-edits a Duke book series entitled “Anima” and is part of a queer/trans of colour arts collective in the SF Bay Area.

Rosalyn D’Mello (she/her/they) is a feminist writer, art critic, columnist, essayist, editor and researcher currently based in the Italian Alps. She is the author of *A Handbook for My Lover* (HarperCollins, 2015). She writes a weekly feminist column for *mid-day*, and a monthly memoir-based art column on contemporary art for *STIR World*. She was a fellow at Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen (2021–22), an Ocean Fellowship Mentor (2021), and the recipient of an India Foundation for the Arts research grant (2019–22).

Satu Herralta is a Helsinki-based curator and researcher with a background in dance, choreography and somatic movement practices. She is interested in how attuning to bodily coexistence informs ways of being, knowing and acting, and how collective action emerges from embodiment. Currently she is working on a doctoral research on *embodied curating* at Aalto University with the support of Kone Foundation. Her curatorial works include *A I S T I T / coming to our senses* contemporary art programme, with Hans Rosenström, and Baltic Circle International Theatre Festival’s programmes 2015 to 2019.

Jesal Kapadia is an artist based in New York City. She likes to create spaces where art can heal, spaces that open towards a safe-house, where many intensities can reside and are cared for, where art, music, writing, poetry, food and wine is all prepared with the awareness that the struggle against racism,

sexism, militarisation, the financialisation of our life, of earth's resources, are all one inseparable struggle, and where we can re-communalise without the state.

Jussi Koitela currently works as head of programme at Frame Contemporary Art Finland, where he has co-curated the *Rehearsing Hospitalities* public programme with Yvonne Billimore. Selected curatorial work includes *Secured—Politics of Bodies and Space* at Vantaa Art Museum Artsi; *Performing the Fringe* at Konsthall C and Pori Art Museum; *City Agents* at Estonian Museum of Contemporary Art (EKKM); and *Untitled (two takes on crises): You Must Make Your Death Public* at de Appel arts centre. He has edited, among others, *Rehearsing Hospitalities Companions 1–4*, published by Archive Books. In 2015 and 2016, he was a participant in the De Appel Curatorial Programme. Together with Yvonne Billimore he is co-curator of the Pavilion of Finland exhibition at La Biennale di Arte 2024.

Pia Lindman explores the world of the subsensorial. After being poisoned by mercury, her nervous system became sensitised to micro-signals from within her body. These signals she transforms into images, melodies, words and colours, allowing her to tune into atmospheres, toxicities and materialities in different spatial and social conditions. She has exhibited at the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, MoMA, MoMA PS1 and HKW in Berlin, and was a fellow at Center for Advanced Visual Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) from 2004 to 2007.

Hardeep Mann is a mother, Tong Ren healer, community organiser and a really fun person. She says: in modern times Western

culture is dominant, where everything leftover from ancient times is seen as too old, obsolete, and the colonial effect has been devastating to people, their economies, cultures and their bodies. When we're healing, the vibrational mind-to-mind connectivity is taking place, we're having an effect on each other. Many of the alternative healing practices have slowly found their way in the periphery. Tong Ren Healing is two thousand years in the past, many years in the present and has a long future for humanity.

Sanni Purhonen is a poet whose poems deal for example with embodiment, femininity and disability rights. She has published three poetry collections, the latest *Jos vain muuttuisin toiseksi/If Only I'd Turn into Someone Else* (Arc, 2023) an upcoming English translation will be published by Nine Mile Press. Purhonen works as a literary critic, creative writing teacher, journalist, translator and communications officer for the human rights organisation The Threshold Association.

Vidha Saumya's practice weaves together notions of exile and utopia, questioning the normatives of aesthetics and socio-political ecologies. Through acrid humour, haptic textures and arduous workwomanship, her poems, drawings, photographs, videos, books, embroidery, sculptures, culinary interventions and digital artefacts are at once accessible and intensely challenging. She is co-founder and co-editor of *NO NIIN Magazine* and a founding member of Museum of Impossible Forms.

Jenni-Julia Wallinheimo-Heimonen is a multidisciplinary artist and disability activist whose work spans sculpture, video,

performance and activism within disability politics and policy. Her works deal with structural violence and discrimination framed as kindness, and issues related to women with disabilities. Wallinheimo-Heimonen has facilitated social art workshops and participated in exhibitions in Finland and abroad. She received the Finnish State Prize for Multidisciplinary Art in 2019.

I Culinary Verses

All works by Vidha Saumya:

- pp. 27–30: *To all the barricades...the rumour got you (plane III)*, series of 20, 2024. Cross-stitch broderie. 20–34 x 20–29 cm, respectively.
- pp. 37–40: *To all the barricades...the rumour got you (plane II)*, series of 8 sculptures, 2024. Fabric, paper, cardboard, plastic, cement, acrylic paint, varnish. 60 x 50 x 30 cm each. All reproductions courtesy of the artist.

III Disrupting the Gallery

- p. 56: Jos Boys, *Invisible Labours*, 2019. Student exploring “misfitting” as part of week-long project at Montreal International Design Week, University du Quebec a Montreal (UQAM), Canada. Photo by the author.
- p. 59, above: Jos Boys, *Critiquing Spectatorship*, 2024. Photo-illustration. Courtesy of the author.
- p. 59, below: Jos Boys, *There's hope... and there's what actually happens*, 2024. Photo-illustration. Courtesy of the author.
- p. 68: Jenni-Julia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *Form/Iomake*, 2020. Performance and paper costume. Image courtesy of the artist.
- p. 79: Raquel Meseguer Zafe and Helen Stratford, *Resting Conversations*, 2023. Public space intervention as part of a collaboration between DisOrdinary Architecture and Re-Fabricate at Seats at the Table, London Festival of Architecture, UK, June 2023. Photo by the author.

IV Dance for Meaning

The following reproductions show digital paintings created by Pia Lindman and stills from an animation of these digital paintings. Copyright of both elements of the work is held by Pia Lindman. Animation edit: Gabriel de la Cruz

- p. 80: *Transition from Hardeep 220723 seeing future to Hardeep 230823 circle of willis vagus spine cervix*. Still from animation, 2024.
- p. 91: *Transition from Hardeep 160823 eyes ears oxygen ghrelin hormone pineal gland stem cell to Hardeep 210823 anxiety loop*. Still from animation, 2024.
- p. 95: *Hardeep 310523 blood oxygen intestines wave stem cell*. Reproduction of original digital painting, 2023.
- p. 96: *Transition from Hardeep 310523 blood oxygen intestines wave stem cell to Hardeep 260823 stem cell governing vessel spine uterus lymph nodes*. Still from animation, 2024.
- p. 101: *Hardeep 260823 stem cell governing vessel spine uterus lymph nodes*. Reproduction of original digital painting, 2023.
- pp. 102–03: *GL28 Naïvete Emerging* from Lindman's series *Nose, Ears, Eyes*, São Paulo Biennale "Incerteza Viva", 2016. Felt pen and pencil on paper. The work was made during a session in the *MUDHUT* in the São Paulo pavilion. All reproductions courtesy of the artist.

V How Great is Your Darkness?

Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *How Great is Your Darkness*, 2024. Film stills and artwork courtesy of the artist.

- p. 104: Photo by Ella Kähkönen.
- p. 108: Photo by Ella Kähkönen.
- p. 113: Photo by Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen.
- p. 119: Photo by Jaakko Mäkikylä.
- p. 124: Photo by Katri Kuisma.
- p. 127: Photo by Rasoul Khorram.
- p. 130: Photo by Katri Kuisma.
- p. 131: Photo by Ella Kähkönen.

VI All Ink is Archival

pp. 132, 149 : Facsimiles of Rosalyn D’Mello’s handwritten draft of “All Ink is Archival”. Courtesy of the author.

pp. 150–54: Vidha Saumya, *To all the barricades...the rumour got you (plane I)*, panels 4–8, 2024. Ballpoint drawings on silk, 300 x 90 cm each. Courtesy of the artist.

This is a collectively composed reading list including influential texts that have informed the project as well the individual practices of Yvonne Billimore, Jussi Koitela, Pia Lindman, Vidha Saumya and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen:

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How Great is your Darkness, 2024.

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The pleasures we choose

Pavilion of Finland
at the 60th International Art Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia

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Initially pleasure activism was about claiming our right to experience pleasure, to be safe and respected in *the pleasures we choose*. It has expanded for me over the years as I have come to believe that facts, guilt, and shame are limited motivations for creating change. [...] I suspect that to really transform our society, we will need to make justice one of the most pleasurable experiences we can have. We also have to stop demonizing pleasure. We try to leverage control over the natural world by making our emotions and sensations less reliable than our thoughts, and then burn at the stake anyone who stays attuned to the ways and power of pleasure in the natural world. It's counter productive.

— adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, 2017

The freedom to pursue pleasure is not afforded to all. Many are conditioned to labour on behalf of causes assumed to be more purposeful or fruitful than art in order to keep the world turning and bread in our bellies. We are often told that art is an act of indulgence, but never a matter of necessity; only if we work hard enough to afford these leisurely pursuits are we deserving of their affordances. But what if our bodies need art? What if imagining, making and encountering art is the only way for us to survive this world, to make sense of it, and to reconstruct it? What if all that gets stored in the thick of our flesh as a result of inhabiting so many toxic territories, generation after generation, needs to be released and reclaimed through the ink of a pen, the point of a needle or the sculpting of clay? These are slow and often repetitive actions, enacted time after time, until they are entirely embodied. How might many more of us – until all of us – encourage and embolden one another to resist the pressures of time, labor and productivity exerted on our bodies and instead learn to more fully embody *the pleasures we choose*?

some dill of gossip a juicy thrum in its runny brine let feelings come decorate the table with a mouthful of words brazen, unrationed those vin

With essays, conversations and poetry by Yvonne Billimore, Jos Boys, Mel Y. Chen, Rosalyn D'Mello, Satu Herrala, Jesal Kapadia, Jussi Koitela, Pia Lindman, Hardeep Mann, Sanni Purhonen, Vidha Saumya and Jenni-Julia Wallinheimo-Heimonen