

SCHIZOANALYTIC FLOORPLANNING AND CURATORIAL REFRAINS

by

Sunny Kerr

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Abstract

While art institutions are beginning to decolonise, curating is integrating uneasily with likewise decolonising university pedagogical structures and discourses. Simultaneously, the professional is surrounded by new amateur and consumerist “curation” and “curatorial subjectivities” emerging in neoliberal society. This project seeks to contribute critically to curatorial practice and studies by considering pathways made possible by the conjunction of different models of the curatorial. It rereads a portfolio of five of my texts published over the last ten years; speaking as a practitioner, the project applies a curatorial research method to reorganise and reread the portfolio of my own writing for gallery publications on artistic projects by Ciara Phillips, Les Levine, Yam Lau, Chris Kline, Ibghy and Lemmens, Nadia Lichtig, Josèfa Ntjam, Anne Riley and Jol Thoms. A critical and speculative framing text borrows theoretical tools from Félix Guattari’s militant “meta-modeling” to forage for components of mental and social ecologies of the curatorial and explore the potential of curating and thinking with the notion of the refrain. This new curatorial essay folds the portfolio across an interpretation of schizoanalytic cartography. Attending to broader ecologies that condition the breaks and sutures of curating, the curatorial and curation, the project speculates on a direction of curatorial practice-studies; so that it might venture off its foundations and develop a processual, listening, and trans-disciplinary ethos, I chart movements through a mental ecology toward a yet-speculative intervention in the social ecology of the curatorial.

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Introduction

A drunk person searches for their keys under a streetlamp. “Is that where you dropped them?” someone asks. “No, but the light is better,” they reply.

Just as the political construction of social health demanded experiments with social cure in psychotherapy, it demands social experiments in art. Just as an artist borrows from his precursors and contemporaries the traits which suit him, I invite those who read me to take or reject my concepts freely. The important thing is not the final result but the fact that the multicomponential cartographic method can co-exist with the process of subjectivation, and that a reappropriation, an autopoiesis, of the means of production of subjectivity can be made possible.¹

This introduction serves as a guide to the vocabulary, contexts, and methods of this portfolio-based doctoral research project. The project brings together ten years of curatorial writing and exhibition-making generated while I was a doctoral student and provides a critical encounter with changes in curatorial practices. The contemporary curatorial is not only increasingly re-making itself into a professionalized and accredited job with a related burgeoning academic presence, but also witnessing itself disperse into amateur and commercial ecologies. Inspired by the metamodeling militant research methods found in the work of Félix Guattari, I contribute a particular and contingent fold, a “translation” of five of my own curatorial texts’ socially embedded expressions

¹ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 12-13.

across a structure of new analytical instances. What I develop as a schizoanalytic curatorial method of “schizoanalytic floorplanning” forges for and amplifies refrains leading to “curatorial refrains,” speculative propositions on the potential social pathways of contemporary curatorial studies-practice.² I identify the work of the curatorial with the detection and amplification of minor refrains and I will define and discuss refrains and their rhythmic character with greater specificity in a later section. My use of refrains is borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, through which I have found the refrain to be a useful concept for naming moments of safety, stability, order or “being held,” that are emerging out of chaotic contexts, temporary territories that have the potential both for radical change and also for conservative reterritorialization.

Paradoxically the project’s solitary and scholarly break in flow of practice allowed by such “translation” into theory and back seeks to detect or create conditions for a more destituent and transversal curatorial studies-practice.³ What do we mean by destituent and transversal? Destituent politics, which elaborate modes of being together that don’t reproduce “constituent” relations of power through antagonistic difference are developed by theorists Giorgio Agamben and Marcello Tarì; rather than relying on these thinkers for my own relationship with this orientation to power, I explore artists’s work like that of Ciara Phillips, Anne Riley and others, along with the writings and lectures of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. A key goal is to avoid reducing social dynamics to the empowerment of an oppressive other against which one is working. For example,

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. “Of the Refrain,” *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 310–350.

³ A longer study would read Tarì through Indigenous refusal, Black Studies, Baradian diffractive methods and Guattarian subjectivation. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013); Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021).

institutional critique has found itself trapped in a dyadic formulation. I attempt to understand the ambivalence of concepts and practices (which can themselves oppress or liberate) and focus attention, rather, on the work of desire as it traverses ecologies within contemporary conditions. Janell Watson explains how Guattari introduced the notion of the transversality in 1964 as a key gesture of a critical response to his teacher, Jacques Lacan, rooted in his own reimagining of psychiatric hospital functioning, and as a means to avoid both the dyadic hierarchies of doctor/patient (and psychoanalytic transference in particular) and cliques, or the social compartmentalization of groups.⁴

To embark on a seemingly solitary, unique and specific cartography depends on the path-breaking work of many curatorial predecessors and comrades. In treating the ambivalence of the legacies and contemporaneity of curatorial studies-practice, the “field” can be ventilated with an attention to conjoining their different modelisations, an effort to which Félix Guattari’s work is uniquely relevant. Guattari developed a practice of tracing the mental, social and environmental ecologies of the so-called unconscious and is thereby able to ask key contemporary questions about how the subject is produced and distributed, such as “why do we act against our own interests?” or “why hasn’t there been a revolution?” His work allows me to give support to the question, “Can the curatorial decolonise itself?” In other words, given its “unconscious” participation in the correction or commodification of the subject associated with professionalized “curating” and neoliberal “curation,” respectively, can the curatorial open itself to more transversal assemblages?

Compared with Gilles Deleuze, with whom Guattari’s work continues its dialogue outside of their influential collaborative books, Guattari wrote with a more highly responsive practice

⁴ Janell Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought: Writing Between Lacan and Deleuze*. (New York: Continuum, 2009), 22–24. Helen Palmer and Stanimir Panayotov provide a useful summary of transversality in the *New Materialism Almanac*, 13 September, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/t/transversality.html>.

orientation and retained concrete therapeutic and activist links through his insistence on organizing for social change and continuous tinkering to meet the specificities of evolving conditions; his systems of thought are devised to fluidly and continually find immanent routes for revolutionary therapeutic change by addressing symptoms appearing in predominating social refrains (such as museum policy or commodity fetishism); following rather than rejecting the schizophrenic deterritorialising breaks and repairs that characterize capitalism can reveal possibilities for systemic mutation. Breaking from the paradigm of clinical adjustment of subjectivities (advocated by most models of psychiatry) to produce better capitalists and from adherence to other transcendent ideals, Guattari's mode of therapy targets contemporary conditions themselves, considered as sites of change through recognition of the minor refrains to which they offer access.⁵ Simon O'Sullivan writes, "We might say that, in Guattari's system, the symptom offers an escape route from the impasses of the present, or, simply, belies the very presence of the infinite within the finite." Pertaining to the general curatorial concerns with bridging art with visitors, Guattari's last book *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, published in 1992, anticipated the increasing technological mediation of subjectivity that we have seen through global hyper-connectivity as well as the increasing importance of the aesthetic for all domains.⁶ Through its special attention to

⁵ Simon O'Sullivan "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," *Deleuze Studies* 4, no. 2 (2010): 272.

<https://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/guattari-aesthetic-paradigm.pdf>. In general, I'm enthusiastic about Guattari's thinking, but not without critical caution, especially with regard to the seductions if its possible ontological fixities, which Guattari himself sought to avoid. Guattari's systematization, especially through the notion of the rhizome and its role in expanding territory have distinctly colonial connotations. The notion of the machinic unconscious has avant-garde modernist edges. Guattari's whiteness and male privilege sometimes seems tied into the kind of libidinal freedom and excess that the work exudes; it causes many to date it to the 1960s or to call his a compromised, failed project, Deleuze and Guattari's cautions about deterritorialization and untrammelled desire notwithstanding. I rely on Guattari's later work for this reason among others.

⁶ Janell Watson's book *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought: Writing Between Lacan and Deleuze* demonstrates the complexity and range of Guattari's applications of schizoanalysis. For the present project, I restrict myself to Guattari's matrix of four functors, his exercise of thinking with overlapping three ecologies, and to a lesser extent, his sketching of aesthetic paradigms. In the case of his four functors, Guattari offers a matrix of

asignifying and non-linguistic expression (including but not limited to art, but retaining a special role for language) and processes of diagramming, Guattari's work itself can be read as a variety of curatorial practice; metamodelisation, especially, shares characteristics with curatorial methods such as exhibition-making. Floorplanning is involved in the arrangement of different worlds most often accessed through alignment with or against affective qualities of territories, actual spaces and artworks as a curatorial planning process. O'Sullivan paraphrases Guattari in *Chaosmosis*, describing metamodelization as "a theory of the auto-composition of different models of subjectivity."⁷ What I call schizoanalytic floorplanning is a mutant tool for this portfolio's curating of the curatorial, and ultimately may suggest different trans-individual singularities as curatorial futures.

Guattari's theories are vectors or conceptual throughlines that allow me to see the continuities and ruptures of the last 10 years of practices—both my own and those of the curatorial community. For example, Guattari's thinking was deeply involved with modern scientific developments and is adept at moving between cosmic and intimate scales, making his texts suitable tools for rereading my Ibhgy and Lemmens and *Drift* essays with attention to environmental ecologies. In my usage, "*Curating*" refers to the professional practice most often tied to galleries or festivals. "*The curatorial*," refers to a broader assemblage of applicable methodologies animating both professional practices and amateur practices, threaded through virtual, discursive and scholarly

terms—material-energetic fluxes, existential territories, machinic phylum and incorporeal universes of reference—that when affiliated make a surprising image of the unconscious, one that is materializing, actualized and in constant relation to the virtual. Watson defends Guattari's turn away from Lacan's language-structured model of the unconscious as allowing for much wider contemporary relevance, for example through "the interest he took in theorizing the impact on human existence of computers and the mass media, as well as the significance of genetics and ecology." Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought: Writing Between Lacan and Deleuze*, 59. Most of my dialogue with Guattari's concepts emerges from reading the English translations of his *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* and *The Three Ecologies*, along with interpreters of these. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

⁷ O'Sullivan, "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," 262.

dimensions. “*Curation*” in my text refers to amateur and commodity-focused versions. As the sequence of my own portfolio suggests, the curatorial is operating in increasingly transversalising modes, and their pedagogical, trans-disciplinary, autopoietic (self-creating) lines of flight are the subject of the project’s General Discussion chapter.⁸

Conceived as a text-based exhibition, this project is, itself, floorplanned. The project is laid out as follows: a contextualizing introduction; five texts from previously published books, four physical and one digital, published during the time of my doctoral studies, containing images of artist’s works and my own essays; critical re-readings of the curatorial methods associated with each of the exhibitions and catalogue texts; and a conclusion in the style of a manifesto. The texts from the catalogues are reproduced in the thesis; readers are encouraged to consult the books themselves to inaugurate their experiences with the visual content of the books and to unfold the universes of reference that their images open to. These are available at libraries or through the publishers linked here: [*Ciara Phillips: Free Hot Mess*](#), [*Les Levine: Transmedia 1964 to 1974*](#), [*Chris Kline and Yam Lau: Weave*](#), [*Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens: The Power Given to Abstractions that Make Us Stupid*](#), and [*Drift: Art and Dark Matter*](#).

In this introduction, after reviewing existing bodies of research in the field of curatorial studies-practice, I contextualize and introduce theoretical tools in more depth. Through the question of practice (I write as a practitioner), the introduction underlines the reflexive positioning and significance of pragmatic curatorial contexts in the creation of this project; through this lens, I

⁸ Autopoesis is defined succinctly by David Darling this way: “Autopoesis is a theory of what life is, developed by the Chilean scientists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in about 1973. The term literally means ‘self-creating.’ A living organism is understood as a circular, autocatalytic-like process which has its own survival as its main goal. The phenomenon of self-organization is sometimes seen as an autopoietic phenomenon. This theory with its emphasis on the closure of the living organism has been an appropriate remedy for the overemphasis on openness in open systems theory.” <https://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/A/autopoesis.html>.

reflect on what it means to group a portfolio in the curatorial context. I further introduce curatorial methodologies including curatorial writing and floorplanning and indicate how I am transferring them into the formation of this portfolio project. I introduce Guattari's schizoanalytic metamodeling and cartography in more detail as varieties of structure/anti-structure. Next is the portfolio itself, sequenced with reference to mental, social and environmental ecologies rather than chronology.

A re-reading and general discussion follow the portfolio, which use the above theoretical tools to reconsider the portfolio, leading to speculations on the future of practice. For example, I define the idea of the refrain and prepare the ground for the appearance of refrains in the analysis of each essay and I discuss each original curatorial essay with elaborations of their dominant and minor refrains across the routes opened by Guattari's four functors and three ecologies. Rather than dividing context and methodology into separate sections, the exhibition and curatorial writing methodology of centring artworks or texts demands that the bulk of my elaboration of context emerge from encounters with the original expressions found in each essay. For example, for context amid discussions of my 2018 text "Museum of Mott Art Catalogue," I introduce theories proposing neoliberal capitalist subjectivity as a mode of consumerist curatorial. This, in turn, sets up specific speculations I do in the portfolio project's General Discussion.

In this portfolio PhD, curatorial projects/writings are curated together, extracted from a wider selection of my own curatorial work, marking an entwining of method and context. This reflexive arrangement of texts emerges from a critical appraisal of curatorial methodologies of writing and floorplanning regarding their capacities to bridge the contexts of scholarly publication and curatorial studies-practice. This project, by editing together and framing a portfolio of my own curatorial essays as a text-exhibition, can be read as itself curating the curatorial. The arrangement of the Introduction, Rereadings and General Discussion form a curatorial essay shaped for a

scholarly context, and seeks to invent a mode of operation that draws on the modernist auto-critical core of the curatorial that is always both presenting and presenting the frameworks of presentation.⁹

Any curatorial essay attempts to protect the polyphonic multiplicity of texts, artworks and other entities while giving readers a logic for the particular assemblage they're encountering and offering guidance as to the ways one might approach reading the assembled entities of focus. This project's framing texts adopt, transversalise and reflexively weigh the forms and goals of the curatorial essay in a scholarly context. Practicing curating the curatorial is a method for producing an accessible "knowledge object," but it is, more importantly, a way of metamodeling and self-transforming the practice.

To assert and explain the arrangement of curatorial texts as a variety of exhibition is also to lay out rationale for—and contexts that condition—my own selection process. Material factors at the intersectional nexus of class, gender, race and ability have shaped which curatorial projects I have initiated and become involved in, and which are treated through texts. In what follows I address these factors through Guattarian terms such as "material-energetic flux," "phylum" and "territory." Sometimes the production of texts is related to the availability of funding and a gallery Director's willingness to use it for that purpose; sometimes it is due to the curator's own desire or capacity to think and write in this context (material-energetic fluxes). Most often the production of curatorial texts has to do with the vicissitudes of schedules: who got there first and took up the available capacity and resources? And, for example, how does exhibition scheduling (machinic phylum), especially when it corresponds to the academic term reflect and encourage segmentation and non-relation of over time? As I will discuss regarding the notion of practice, the production of texts is

⁹ Boris Groys, "Curating in the Post-Internet Age," *e-flux Journal* no. 94 (October 2018): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/94/219462/curating-in-the-post-internet-age/>.

always related to the degree of privileged proximity to capital, and it habituates injunctions to and distributions of work time. Sometimes it depends on the artists's own appetite for, or interest in, having a text written about their project and by whom (existential territories and universes of reference). Discourses of mastery, authority and interpretive violence play their roles here, that I relate to Guattari's concept of faciality. I will foreground and question, for example, the pressure of individualism, correction and self-mastery, an existential territory felt by both the art world and the academic system, that meanwhile shapes milieus that produce what, in actuality, should be more accurately understood as collective enunciations.

I have included essays I have written in dialogue with artistic works in the contexts of project by Ciara Phillips, Les Levine, a pairing of Yam Lau and Chris Kline, Ibhgy and Lemmens, and a group residency and exhibition *Drift: Art and Dark Matter* featuring Nadia Lichtig, Josèfa Ntjam, Anne Riley and Jol Thoms. I reread the essays with attention to different consistencies and breaks derived from the artworks and the problematics detectable in the ambivalence of social change, museum policy and curatorial practice.

Field review

In this section, I situate my curatorial studies-practice within a field of contemporary curatorial studies-practice and in relation to selected broad theories and modelisations of the curatorial as articulated by practitioner-theorists. With specific attention to the projects covered in the portfolio, I add detail to the historical positionality of my practice and doctoral project.

I am cautious about the form of the literature review since it could construct 'others' against whom my goals or work would be differentiated, grounds on which I figure. Such fabricated binaries can create processes of falsely individualizing narrativization and subjectivation. They can also concretize the field itself when my objective is, rather, to detect and encourage collective enunciation and spontaneous materialist capacities, interrogative refrains and mutant subjectivation.

At the same time, a field review's articulation of historical embeddedness in collective singularities can help avoid the construction of dyadic subjectivation that would be implied by a seemingly insulated author. A field review could articulate conjunctions whereby practices that are different yet in solidarity can be understood to be emerging from unique material conditions. A materialist approach to solidarity, though, must be located squarely in the ambivalence with which I am forced, and each antecedent is forced, to operate. A particularly clear example of such ambivalence can be read in institutional critique, whereby the 'other' is too often reinforced through the very act of critique when the ambivalence itself is the common code.

While the formal goals of my curatorial research-based approach to the portfolio thesis are mutant and hybridizing, they aren't immediate. The transversal spirit of organizing a portfolio as a text-based exhibition may have antecedents in the work of artists Alan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, Alison Knowles, Gordon Matta-Clark, Les Levine, Andrea Fraser, Thomas Hirschhorn, Pierre Huyghe or Theaster Gates. My text about Les Levine in this thesis exemplifies this spirit. I tend to learn more about the transversal possibilities of curating and the curatorial from artists than from other curators, since a solidarity across different roles can emerge in curatorial work with artists. My practice has been shaped with artists I have worked with directly like those featured in the portfolio, but also those including Camille Turner, Allyson Mitchell and Dierdre Logue, Tau Lewis, Park McArthur, Lisa Figge, Clive Robertson, Carmen Papalia, Brendan Fernandes, Jinny Yu, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Walter Scott, Sandra Brewster, Neven Lochhead, Michelle Bunton, Hadley Howes, Taymah Armatrading, and Derya Akay.

While such outside influences and my prefacing ambivalence seek to trouble the insulating tendencies carried by the disciplining and professionalizing of the curatorial, my texts make unavoidable reference to decolonising curating and the curatorial's academicisation and commercialisation that require a more detailed articulation of my positionality in a field. This

becomes increasingly complex when considered through the notion of the “expanded field,” but I am committed to at least articulating a constellation of curatorial influences. I will focus briefly on four: 1) a cluster of practitioners articulating the dynamics of a pedagogical turn in art and curating in the 2000s including Irit Rogoff, Kristina Lee Podesva and Carmen Moersch; 2) curators reflecting on the socio-cultural expansion of the curatorial including Paul O’Neill and Maria Lind; 3) Candice Hopkins whose work exemplifies rigorous curatorial practice and expression through an Indigenous curatorial lens; 4) and Ruangrupa, curators of Documenta 15.

My earliest positive encounters with curatorial discourse as distinct from exhibition essays or critical writing were articulating a pedagogical turn in the context of contemporary art, texts by Irit Rogoff, Carmen Moersch and Kristina Lee Podeswa.¹⁰ I was in a student education programs role at a university gallery and invested in bringing my artistic practice into the relational forms of university and museum pedagogy. I was further introduced directly to this milieu by the work of colleagues Maiko Tanaka and Janna Graham. Rogoff’s “Academy as Potentiality” was influential, as was her contention that knowledges could be tested through curated “events of knowledge.”¹¹ Pablo Helguera is also a strong influence in this area. When I came later to curate and write about Ciara Phillips’s work, these notions were still fresh in my mind. I came to the practice of curating from thinking about pedagogical encounters as forms of artwork in a way that implicitly deepens the zones of practice recognized by Nicolas Bourriaud as “relational aesthetics.” I was curating projects like *Rochdale College* at the University of Toronto which used fictionalizing and pedagogical forms

¹⁰ Kristina Lee Podesva, “A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art,” *Fillip* (Summer 2007), <https://fillip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn>; Carmen Moersch, “Alliances for Unlearning: On the Possibility of Future Collaborations Between Gallery Education and Institutions of Critique,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 26 (2011): 5-13, DOI: 10.1086/659291.

¹¹Irit Rogoff, “Academy as Potentiality,” *Summit: non-aligned initiatives in education culture*, (2007), <https://www.raggeduniversity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Rogoff-academy-as-Potentiality.pdf>; Irit Rogoff, “Turning,” no. 00 (November 2008), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/>.

to engage with a locally relevant historical moment. My interest in curating events of knowledge continues through my experiments with playgroup forms and has recently reconnected with these earlier legacies through conversation with my colleague Nasrin Himada.

At the time that I encountered the pedagogical turn, I was also part of the first of a few art collectives that I have joined over the years, this one with Yam Lau, Tania Ursomarzo and others, making relational and public artworks and framing them for audiences. My simultaneous participation in artist-run collectives like Pleasure Dome, YYZ, Corridor Culture and Modern Fuel grounded and confirmed my feeling that artists could invent and maintain, for all their hard work, institutions for selection and presentation of artistic projects.. My affection for Ibhgy and Lemmens's *The Golden USB* and work more generally comes out of this spirit of invention. My curatorial practice emerged both from the minoritized locus of museum education and from a do-it-yourself tradition that carries an avant-garde autocritical imperative.

My allegiance to disciplines, institutions or fields is more ambivalent than my solidarity with curators I have had the opportunity to learn from in more direct settings. These include Jan Allen, Denise Ryner, Christof Migone, Helena Reckitt, Barbara Fischer, Alicia Boutilier, Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Kitty Scott, Michael Davidge, Kevin Rodgers, Heather Anderson, Sandra Dyck, Charles Stankieveh, Carina Magazzeni, Dylan Robinson, Emelie Chhangur, Sebastian De Line, and Jacqueline Kok. I certainly enjoyed *A Brief History of Curating* by Hans Ulrich Obrist, but I did not see myself reflected there. Then, Paul O' Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* brought the tools of cultural studies to bear upon the increasingly common construction of the curator as author/artist at a key moment when I had been shifting my cultural studies graduate work toward the subject and methods of the curatorial. In particular, his chapter "The emergence of curatorial discourse from the late 1960s to the present" summarized the context

impactfully.¹² I read David Balzer's *Curationism*, and it left me feeling cynical and powerless, but I'm curious to reread it after the results of the current study have changed my orientation to curation. I was more interested in the political and aesthetic marriage embodied in social practice conveyed by curator Nato Thomson and his work with Creative Time and excited about the work in his edited volume, *Living as Form*. I have been aware of Maria Lind's work, especially her work on popularizing the term "the curatorial." Lind was known for articulating curating in an "expanded field."¹³ Coincidentally, in 2022 I changed the title of the small grad seminar I've been teaching from "Curating in Context" to "Situating the Curatorial" only realizing later that Maria Lind had written a text for *e-flux Journal* with the same title in March 2021. In "Situating the Curatorial," Lind suggests optimistically that the curatorial is a political constituency that is building an "art-centric" "counter-hegemony."¹⁴ The course I have been teaching in Screen Cultures and Curatorial Studies at Queen's University scrutinizes the claims and approaches as experienced through texts or lectures by practitioners including Lind, Emily Pethick, Pip Day, Alison Green, Nora Sternfeld, Tara McDowell, Charles Esche, Leon Tan, Binna Choi and Annette Krauss, Clementine Deliss, Prem Krishnamurthy and Emily Smith, as well as Art Historian/curator Boris Groys. My resistance to critique, disciplining, professionalization, commercialization had left me unsatisfied with the consistency and orientation of curatorial studies-practice despite locating certain refrains in its ambivalence, especially in the context of anti-racist and environmentalist urgencies.

Candice Hopkins and Dylan Robinson used the notion of the score as an exhibition organizing principle in 2019's *Soundings* at Agnes Etherington Centre.¹⁵ I had already been inspired

¹² Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Boston: MIT Press 2016), 1-49.

¹³ Maria Lind, "Situating the Curatorial," *e-flux Journal* no. 116 (March 2021): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/116/378689/situating-the-curatorial/>.

¹⁴ Maria Lind, "Situating the Curatorial," 14.

¹⁵ Candice Hopkins, "Repatriation Otherwise: How Protocols of Belonging are Shifting the Museological Frame," *Constellations. Indigenous Contemporary Art from the Americas*, October 2020,

by the use of scores as an organizing principle in Documenta 14 curated by Adam Szymczyk with Candice Hopkins as a curatorial advisor. Documenta's presentation of Beau Dick's work in Kassel Germany, in particular, highlighted an important strategy whereby his Kwakwaka'wakw masks were presented as both contemporary art and as reflecting a localized spiritual tradition. The dangers of gestures of translation and consumption in colonial contexts are addressed by Dylan Robinson¹⁶ and non-Indigenous scholar María Inigo Clavo,¹⁷ but here the framing device of scores allowed a confident fluidity that eschewed museological framing and capture. Likewise, Hopkins' presentation (with several other curators) of Zacharius Kanuk's and Isuma's long and slow film *Kivitoo: What They Thought of Us* (2018) and other videos in the 2019 Venice Biennale's Canadian Pavilion carefully asserted cultural autonomy and encouraged listening. I have appreciated Hopkins's curatorial work at the Toronto Biennial in recent years. With regard to learning about Indigenous lenses on the curatorial I have also been influenced by the work of curators Nakasuk Alariaq, Linda Grussani, and Wanda Nanibush and by working directly as curator with Indigenous artists Walter Scott, Anne Riley, Shelby Lisk, JP Longboat and (less directly as yet) Tanya Lukin Linklater.

I was aware of Okwei Enwezor's innovative Documenta 11 and later enjoyed his use of the concept of overlapping filters at the Venice Biennial. From afar, I admired the work of Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack who curated Documenta 12. I was aware from afar of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's artistic approach to Documenta 13. Ruangrupa, however, curated Documenta 15 in a way that has had a profound influence on my thinking-working. The trans-local solidarities

<https://muac.unam.mx/constelaciones/assets/docs/essays-candicehopkins.pdf>.

¹⁶ Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

¹⁷ María Inigo Clavo, "Traces, Signs, and Symptoms of the Untranslatable," *e-flux Journal* 108 (April 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/108/325859/traces-signs-and-symptoms-of-the-untranslatable/>.

articulated amid global environmental and political crises by collectives from all over the world invited by the Ruangrupa collective convinced me that it is worth the friction and effort of translation to look past the sectorized and culturized art world toward the building of new economic systems. My trust in art allows me to let go of my protectiveness of art, so long as a genuine solidarity is being built. Ruangrupa's *lumbung* practice allowed new solidarity among the artists and between the artists and curators in the albeit fragile, complex and sometimes turbulent project of creating a new economy of collectivity.¹⁸

Candice Hopkins's and Ruangrupa's work also affirmed my enquiry into an emerging ethico-aesthetic paradigm that had been articulated in Guattari's later texts. Reckoning with class, race and the hidden workings of what Guattari calls a machinic unconscious led me to look for tools that can tap into the deeper listening and transversalising possibilities of the curatorial and to read texts by curators explicitly using Deleuze and Guattari like Matthew Poole, Demian Petryshyn, Andrew Hunt, Leon Tan and Heidi Aishman.

Theoretical tools and the question of practice

In this section, I introduce the theoretical tools and methods through which I reread the portfolio. I consider the components of this doctoral project itself as asserting curatorial priorities and perspectives through its forms such as the portfolio, the curatorial essay and exhibition floorplanning. Then I discuss the relevance of Félix Guattari's proposals of schizoanalytic cartography and facial and rhythmic components of passage. First, I consider the pragmatic grounding of this doctoral project in professional curatorial studies-practice and identify a complex material interrelation of practice and theory.

¹⁸ "Ventilation," *Documenta Fifteen*, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/lumbung/>, accessed January 6 2023.

As it is stimulating a locally-focused extension of contemporary curatorial studies-practice enmeshed in broader socio-historical contexts and methods, the portfolio-exhibition can be read as exemplifying a variety of stakes of action. For example, the methods of the curatorial are commonly rhetorically articulated as being practical, and this has two effects, one self-delusional and the other characterizing the dominance of finance and science: first, the naive denial of its own middle and upper classes privilege and the concomitant masking of its function of cultural reproduction.¹⁹ In this delusion, curators are thought to be changing the world through their work of caring for art, tastemaking, etc. (ironically, in scholarly study, curating is attributed hidden *practical* ideological constitution and effectiveness, perhaps deservedly). Simultaneous and contradictory is the second function of the application of practice, which is to deny the potential of curatorial practice to be a kind of knowledge, in the same way that artistic and working class knowledges are devalued due to their distance from capital and distance from the legitimation of rational certainty.

One need only experience an exhibition to see that so-called practice, on the contrary, does a kind of theorizing and so-called theory does a kind of practice. Indeed, the inseparability of research, art and ethics is demonstrated by the work of artists and the progenitors of cultural studies who transversalise academy across culture and society through rhythmic components of passage; relating research, art and ethics across zones, I assert the privilege to reimagine practice. Despite being afforded by economic and racial advantage, even this transformative potential shouldn't be eliminated, especially if it can be thoroughly shared. Curiosity-curriculum-*curare*: this is curatorial's concatenation of research-art-ethics situated at the moment of transformation.

¹⁹ This is an example of an ignorance and denial of what the curatorial's doing is doing. Here we can point to the curatorial's cultural reproduction of the sectorization of culture, as well as its normalized reproduction of the paradigm of neoliberal whiteness through deterritorialising extractive, commodifying meritocratic, correctional, carceral museological or international curatorial traditions.

I weave Schizoanalytic approaches into my own critically self-aware curatorial practice in a way that allows them to act like a textile weft against the warp of materials drawn from professional curating and cultural studies. Guattari's schizoanalytic techniques are examples of fittingly practice-led and socially embedded tools; perhaps they so easily apply in adapted form to this curatorial pragmatic context because they themselves emerged from Guattari and Deleuze's conjunction of clinical psychotherapy, social activism and philosophy.²⁰ Anne Querrien and Andrew Goffey speak to the theory-practice interaction in Guattari's lifelong therapeutic work: "In his critical combat with the institutions of psychoanalysis, his ambition was to give everyone the means to orient themselves in the trajectories of their lives, to enable others to get a vision of this to facilitate a collective apprenticeship to the transformation of existing social coordinates."²¹ In dialogue with practices both activist and psychotherapeutical, especially Guattari's radical experiments with clinical psychoanalysis within radical French institutional psychotherapy provide a model for operating within colonial capitalist carceral modernity and caring for and enabling emergent re-singularization (both personal and collective).²² Guattari sought catalysts that could foster "active, processual ruptures within semiotically structured, signification and denotative networks, where it will put emergent subjectivity to work."²³ His blend of theoretically guided militant activist politics seems

²⁰ These methods are invented to be militant and clinical-therapeutic and not strictly philosophical. The applied and futural aspects are useful in relation to the curatorial's applied and futural character, but I am careful to attend to their specificities and resistance to capture by academic methodology, for example.

²¹ Anne Querrien and Andrew Goffey, "Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy: Scales of History and Action," *Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy: Reading Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 102.

²² Birgit Mara Kaiser writes helpfully, "For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, singularization brings into focus the formation of objects and subjects, or the (trans)formation of entities - unlike individuality or specificity, which are terms geared toward the classification of differences (as species or genres) that are already formed on a molar level." "Singularization," in *Symptoms of the planetary condition. A critical vocabulary*, 155-160, eds. Mercedes Bunz, Birgit Mara Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele (Lüneburg: meson press, 2017). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/1738>.

²³ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 19.

more and more necessary and his early and acute grasp of the interlinked complexity and nuance of issues affecting environmental degradation is worth revisiting. Particularly relevant is his rethinking of psychic liberation against the psychiatric orthodoxies implicated in reproducing capitalist repressive subjectivities. His work with Gilles Deleuze and later solo works point to the positivity of desire, the power of the imagination and to an increasing importance of the aesthetic, for good and ill.²⁴ I respect the idea of schizoanalysis for its rhizomatic emergence from Guattari's clinical practice and refinement through its development with Deleuze in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in dialogue with philosophy, Marxism and psychoanalysis. Recognizing the "unconscious" as the virtual and also actual of a set of widely shared relational ecologies, schizoanalysis is designed as a loosely held method that can be extensively useful and applied to different scenarios. Especially in Guattari's last book *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, he articulates methods of arranging models, or metamodelisation (methods easily recognizable to curatorial studies-practice) by diagramming a flux of actual and virtual, possible and real (machinic unconscious). A curatorial version of schizoanalytic cartography that we might call schizoanalytic floorplanning encourages a practice of listening, theorizing/practicing, disentangling and re-entangling and may hold potential that I explore in my General Discussion, to traverse academic, amateur and commercial territories.

²⁴ Guattari writes, "I simply want to stress that the aesthetic paradigm - the creation and composition of mutant percepts and affects - has become the paradigm for every possible form of liberation, expropriating the old scientific paradigms to which, for example, historical materialism or Freudianism were referred." He continues, "All the bearings - economic, social, political, moral, traditional - break down one after the other. It has become imperative to recast the axes of values, the fundamental finalities of human relations and productive activity. An ecology of the virtual is thus just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world. And in this regard, poetry, music, the plastic arts, the cinema - particularly in their performance or performative modalities - have an important role to play, with their specific contribution and as a paradigm of reference in new social and analytic practices (psychoanalytic in the broadest sense)." *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 91.

Portfolio

In this section, I consider the form of a portfolio and its methodological advantages. My process of curatorial research for this portfolio PhD involves assembling and re-staging 10 years of curatorial writing. That is, I collect and sequence texts drawing on curatorial exhibition floorplanning as a method for analysis, to bring to light and care for polyphonic artistic and curatorial expressions as well as create an accessible cultural object. I engage a process of binding and rereading five of my own curatorial essays to create a text-based exhibition. The core enunciations of this project are produced through its rhythmic montage of essays, their new proximity allowing different connections and disjunctions between artworks and my past curatorial writing and broader questions about the practice-study. The analysis of the text-exhibition's components in this Introduction applies Guattari's three ecologies and fourfold model of the unconscious as a tool for thinking, which I will describe in detail in the section entitled "schizoanalysis." Such a layered, diagrammatic enunciation can reveal the changing overlays of ecologies enmeshed with the curatorial over time, what gives it consistency and perhaps how to create new consistency.²⁵ Environmental, social and mental ecologies, for Guattari, are not situated in value hierarchy, nor do they delineate phenomena into different categories; every phenomenon is an overlapping drift through interwoven ecological locations, phylum, scales and orders of complexity, which, through this lens, models the constitution of its existence through complex processes. Guattari's three ecologies, through a "logic of intensities, or eco-logic" can trace what he calls the "movement and intensity of evolutive processes."²⁶

²⁵ In *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari uses mental, social and environmental ecology to complexify what is too often a narrow consideration of "the environment" but also to allow phenomena other than so-called natural phenomena to be considered fractally in a variety of scales of relation, from mental to cosmic, whereby the differing scales can be shown to be mutually influential.

²⁶ Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 44.

In art contexts, a portfolio is a tool for carrying or encountering process through loose papers, and indeed, a portfolio doctoral project can allow a temporally unbound binding aligned with creation and process. The word's etymology also suggests "portfolio's" connection to the idea of thresholds and passing through.²⁷ The contiguities created through stacking of texts (stacking in the practical sense by which pages of text are read as bound on top of one another in a thesis submission) facilitates a metaphorical stacking whereby a linear "passing through" can create chains of associations that speak to environmental, social, and mental ecologies of curatorial practice. Assembling texts as an exhibition allows readers, myself included, to notice inherited forms, unexpected ruptures, possibilities, and desires. To enable new readings and open artistic and curatorial enunciations to critical process, the project is a work of experimental curatorial inquiry that weaves together the process and the outcome of an assemblage. The "assemblage" is the subject of hermeneutics that emerged from Guattari's "cybernetic understanding of the machine" and inspired by Melanie Klein's desiring machines as a crucial step in Guattari's rejection of Lacan's systematized unconscious structured as a language.²⁸ The use of the term "assemblage" was influenced by Deleuze as he and Guattari used it to shift from mental and semiotic to supra-personal machinic scales as articulated in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and also in Guattari's solo works, especially *Molecular Revolution* and *Machinic Unconscious*.²⁹

With rhythms and intensities created by this new adjacency and analytical attention, my selection of essays when treated as a text-based exhibition might disturb and reveal new refrains that cut across the texts's previous institutional functions. For example, while each emerging from the

²⁷ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/portfolio>.

²⁸ Guattari invented the "machinic" unconscious as an alternative to Lacan's linguistic structuralism in an attempt to attend to asignifying expression and liberated desires. Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought*, 58.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

material contexts of art institutions where a curatorial essay's degree of critical latitude conditions a politeness even if it shows a critical tint, a text-exhibition like this one, can bring tools into a scholarly context to make pathways across assumed models themselves. I understand Guattari's work as a kind of curatorial work, a metamodeling through which to begin to create such connections, disjunctions and conjunctions, in this case, by assembling essays. I experiment with metamodeling as an "active, diagrammatic force" which is a process of change, a blueprint while it is also a map, and approach metamodeling as a technique to curate models.³⁰

As a portfolio of previously published works, this project both locates conditions for layered collective speech and also tracks an apparently individual concentration of a particular ecology and its trajectory over time.³¹ In this sense, a portfolio echoes the commonplace technology of conveying and valuing an artist's work over a given period, which belies and is a hidden sign of its social context. The portfolio records a practice of thinking with art in public, marked by time and

³⁰ Guattari writes "Schizoanalysis does not . . . choose one modelisation to the exclusion of another. Within the diverse cartographies in action in a given situation, it tries to make nuclei of virtual autopoiesis discernible, in order to actualise them, by transversalising them, in conferring on them a diagrammatism (for example, by a change in the material of Expression), in making them themselves operative within modified assemblages, more open, more deterritorialised. Schizoanalysis, rather than moving in the direction of reductionist modelisations which simplify the complex, will work towards its complexification, its processual enrichment, towards the consistency of its virtual line of bifurcation and differentiation, in short towards its ontological heterogeneity." *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 60-61. Also Holmes, "Guattari's Schizoanalytic Cartographies: or, the Pathic Core at the Heart of Cybernetics *Continental Drift* (2009). Simon O'Sullivan writes, "Metamodelisation is, then, an anti-structure of sorts in which different elements (signifying and asignifying, discursive and non-discursive) become loosened, moving between terrains, migrating across the four quadrants of Guattari's model." O'Sullivan, "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," 270.

³¹ Guattari articulates a crucial difference between the individual and subjectivity: "The subject is not self-evident; it's not sufficient to think in order to be, as Descartes declared, since all sorts of other ways of existing establish themselves outside consciousness, and whenever thought deliberately tries to grasp itself it's likely to take off like a madly spinning top, without any hold on the real territories of existence that drift off from each other in all directions like tectonic plates beneath the surface of the continents. Rather than the subject, maybe we should speak of components of subjectivation, each working more or less on its own. This would necessarily lead us to re-examine the relation between the individual and subjectivity, and above all, to make a clear distinction between the two concepts." Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 35.

experience of a particular ten years in Kingston, Ontario.³² The texts inevitably portray a subjective interval and intersection of historical and geographic vectors shaping and shaped by influences like artistic work, institutional gallery practice and the emergence of curatorial studies.

Along with Valarie Walkerdine and others, I think of subjectivity as an effect at the crossroads of vectors of social groups, processes and machines.³³ In portraying an individual, the texts in this text-exhibition also inevitably portray a schizophrenic site, singular entities in process that are products of forces both subjectifying and what Deleuze and Guattari call “dividual”: forces constructing trans-individual flows of data and information created and operated by state power through the machinic participation of people.³⁴ A set of virtual and actual intimacies and

³² It is important to acknowledge and build from the particular social assemblages from which my own observations emerge. This project links a decade of thinking and working in contemporary art contexts in international, national and local ecologies based in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. The decade began for me with an immersion in research creation, which I employed as a personalized integration of artistic and scholarly work; it then included a long period of immersion in a public art museum context of professional curating including museum practices and debates and exposure to the art market; it included careful thinking about artworks in curatorial assemblage with social context and associated theoretical questions. My own interests in the last few years have turned to curatorial studies and my own teaching practice. This work in a university/public gallery with a split mandate draws the forces of artistic work, public funding, academic research, teaching norms and the art market into overlap with a correctional industry that thrives on the oppression of working class and Indigenous peoples that mark Kingston. 2012-22 was a decade of Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Bernie Sanders to Trump, TRC and revelations of evidence of genocide, and COVID-19. We can call our current social context, broadly, post-globalization. The thrust of *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present* is that we are living in a time when new cartographies are being drawn as an old system dies and a new one is born. Following Gramsci and Baumont to a point, the editors describe the present moment as an interregnum. Globalization has birthed a reaction that takes a neofascist form now. *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, edited by Paul O’Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson, Cambridge and London: LUMA Foundation and The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College 2019. For Berardi, we are in a baroque period in the sense that Deleuze defined it as transitional. Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018), 35. What does this change to machinic phylum mean for the neoliberal norms of subjectivity that have suggested certain limitations and hidden possibilities over the last ten years? Also, can the curatorial work transversally to create collective assemblages of enunciation that can intra-act across class divisions?

³³ Valarie Walkerdine’s text is useful for this application of subjectivation. Walkerdine applies Guattari’s methods as an artist and with scholarly rigor to understand models of education amid class oppression. Valarie Walkerdine *Using the Work of Félix Guattari to Understand Space, Place, Social Justice, and Education*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10), 2013. 756-764. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413502934>.

³⁴ “Dividual” is term derived from Deleuze and Guattari that points to forces constructing non-individual flows of data and information created and operated by state power through machinic participation. Gerald Raunig’s work on the concept is material for a future study. Gerald Raunig, *Dividuum*:

abstractions inform a context for the last ten years of my work: settler status on colonized land, consumerism and other forms of capitalist cultural reproduction, classed desires, institutional racism, misogyny, modern exhibitionary imaginaries, the curatorial individual, and academic readymades. To use academic readymades as one example, this portfolio connects and shows seemingly individual intellectual processes to be thoroughly social, but also machinically dividual, enmeshed in machinic processes connected to academic procedures: linear sorting, categorization, statistics, pragmatic allegiance to values and modes of social science, and accreditation. Whereas a single essay seems to close down the processual phyla of life including by co-producing the individual as a subject of enunciation, in editing together and stacking texts, different versions of myself over time are shown in their inconsistency; stacking the apparently non-dividable zones of the subject, a portfolio can assert a conjunctive subject enunciated at the edges of differing versions of myself, at the nexus of dividual forces, materially and energetically attached to differing models. Les Levine models a kind of design of multiple selves as discussed in the portfolio. My text on Ciara Phillips enunciates a collective state of flow; my text on Ibhghy and Lemmens recognizes the alien quantities of the self. My text on *Drift* enunciates a state of agency given and taken by the past and future entities alive in the present. I don't exclude the examples that arise over the ten years of reversals of opinion nor mistakes, such as over-reliance on safe harbours of meaning-making. The portfolio provides the possibility for tracking these inconsistencies and thus is a means of understanding the multiplicitous unfoldings of a curatorial practice in one institutional location over time. By avoiding over-reliance on a personal, it may, in turn be a basis for my transversalising speculations that account for the infra-individual and supra-individual.

Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution, trans. Aileen Derieg (Boston: MIT Press, 2016).

Centring artworks in curatorial essays

In this section I consider the first of several curatorial methods that I adopt in this doctoral project. I discuss the form and customary function of the curatorial essay and identify the ways in which the *détournement* of the curatorial essay form toward auto-curating may be a way to study the mental and social ecologies of curatorial studies-practice.

The written voice in the following curatorial writing is entwined with the self-presentation of the institutions to which I am materially and energetically attached and only critical in an immanent way, or, indeed, through the curatorial-scholarly assemblage. There are institutional limits to the critical freedom afforded to institutionally supported curators. The expected auto-criticality of the institution appears only through the voice of the curator, which implies the status of the curator as critically autonomous even while the texts simultaneously carry institution-friendly goals.

The goals of the curatorial are meant to be accomplished without focus on the curatorial itself, which curators strategically divert. If they are doing their job well, curators and their work are not the focus of attention, but are holding and offering the medium of attention for looking at art. The subject of the curator and of the curatorial, most often strategically decentred and buried in encounters in public exhibition, can be briefly surfaced through the reflexive mechanics of a portfolio as a tool of scholarly analysis to show the faciality of the curatorial as an effect and tool of hegemonic subjectivation and dividual forces.³⁵

In the curatorial processes at work in the original projects, especially in writing, the focus is traditionally on artworks. The portfolio essays, for example, investigate the complexities of collectivity and the textility of making and looking.³⁶ The texts attempt to see through the experience

³⁵ Guattari uses the term “subjectivation” instead of “subjectivity” in order to prioritize process and mechanism of making selves over the assumptions of the supposedly bounded self from which we begin and assume to be timeless.

³⁶ Tim Ingold introduces Gilbert Simondon’s critique of Aristotle’s hylomorphism and the implications of

of works of art, whose weave of materiality and idea offers access to chains of incorporeal universes of reference. Art's chains of incorporeal universes of reference might enter dialogue with existential territories. Artworks, for Guattari, are "transversal entities"³⁷ with simultaneous access to both universes of "trans-sensible infinitude" and "sensible finitude of existential territories."³⁸ Curatorial writing's normal and cultivated distance from scholarly contexts or science's more rigorous application of reason creates a tendency toward loose speculative thought, which can detect incorporeal universes of reference more readily. This necessitates a kind of multi-planar reading of artworks to be communicated in a way that anticipates equally multi-planar interpretations.³⁹

Enunciating with artworks, the essays in the portfolio and the re-readings that of each bring out the following examples of refrains: I think through the messy risks and potentials of non-accumulative social enjoyment in the social practice and printmaking work of Ciara Phillips. I discuss Les Levine's para-disciplinary practice through his innovative *Catalogue of Services* (against a backdrop of emerging neoliberal ways of being). Retreat emerges as a subject in the pairing of the works of Lau and Kline, which I articulate as a dialectic of receptivity and activity (doing and undergoing) and bring it into relationship with Guattari's idea of chaomic folding.⁴⁰ I claim that

Deleuzo-Guattarian non/ontology for how art/looking functions in encounter. Ingold, Tim. "The Textility of Making." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* no. 34 (2010): 91-102. <http://sed.ucsd.edu/files/2014/05/Ingold-2009-Textility-of-making.pdf>.

³⁷ Guattari (*Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* p. 109), qtd. in O'Sullivan "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," 264.

³⁸ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 110-11.

³⁹ Franco "Bifo" Berardi's book about Guattari is useful for articulating this productive, poetic gap. *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship, and Visionary Cartography*, eds. Stivale, Charles J., Mecchia, Giuseppina (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 68.

⁴⁰ Simon O'Sullivan has been a helpful interpreter of Guattari. Chaomic folding refers, for example, to the process in the encounter with an artwork instantiated by the installing of an interface between an artwork's finite materiality / operations and infinite incorporeal universes of reference. Guattari thinks of this as a process key to artworks, but, importantly, apparent in much wider contexts. O'Sullivan quotes Guattari from *Chaosmosis* "It is by a continuous coming-and-going at an infinite speed that the multiplicities of entities differentiate into ontologically heterogeneous complexions and become chaotised in abolishing their figural diversity and by homogenising themselves within the same being-non-being. In a way they never stop diving into an umbilical chaotic zone where they lose their extrinsic references and coordinates, but from where they

Ibghy and Lemmens construct speculative fictions of cosmic commodification as a conduit to the alien within the familiar. The exhibition finishes with suppositions on transversal science-art disturbances and co-mattering with the more-than-human in the work of artists in *Drift: Art and Dark Matter*. The essays also employ Zepke's geneology of affective readymades. An affective readymade, in contrast to a conceptual readymade is akin to a Situationist-style *détournement*, art found in life rather than art as everyday objects shown in galleries or surfacing in other art contexts.⁴¹ These affective readymades are "homelands" for the dissensus of universes of reference. The essays also consider conceptual and artistic engagements with facialities and predominating refrains. Deleuze and Guattari conceive of faciality as maintaining a split between conformity or violent exclusion. A co-constitutive "black hole" subsists within the white walls of an identity.⁴²

A piece of curatorial writing will perhaps complexify and illuminate artwork, but also intends to promote the work of the artist and, perhaps, promote the singular voice of the curator. The portfolio's original essays certainly add my interpolative and connective voice to the experience of the art and the world. The usual function of curatorial writing is to develop points of context and to enrich the experience of an exhibition, and also to be a conduit for the remote experience of people who won't see the exhibition directly but are interested in the artist's work. Curatorial writing seems to offer description and explanation while it desires to guard art's polysemy to leave readers to discover art. It operates at a distance temporally and spatially from the artwork itself.

can re-emerge invested with new charges of complexity. It is during this chaotic folding that an interface is installed – an interface between the sensible finitude of existential territories and the trans-sensible infinitude of the Universes of reference bound to them." O'Sullivan, "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," 110-11.

⁴¹ "The Readymade: Art as the Refrain of Life," *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New*, eds. Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (London: Continuum, 2008), 33-44.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472546333.ch-004>.

⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Year Zero: Faciality," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 167-191.

My training as an artist and my professional work as a curator condition my habit of asserting that curators should not make conclusions. If they do present perspectives, assertions, arguments, these strictly concern methodologies or contexts; arguments directly pertaining to the meaning of artworks, are delicately left open to continued variation and dissent over interpretation; curators are self-interested in fostering the multi-planar affects of the artworks that are the components of curatorial assemblages, but which have their own lives. The minor refrains carried by art exceed the signification of knowledge in essays about them. Likewise, the minor refrains detectable in essays are not entirely signified in these essays. Sometimes the interpretation is focused on specific components and sometimes it is dispersed across a set of diverse works, causing the meanings derived from the collective enunciation to be imposed unfairly on the individual work. Every curator would attempt a vigilant attention to such forms of violence that are enmeshed with the curatorial. However, in a scholarly context, the demands of a line of thought can allow for a greater degree of instrumentalization; critical distance is crucial to such a project at the same time that autonomous works, employed as components of curatorial thought, each have their own trajectory and agents are bound into a relation of trust. The goal isn't necessarily to critique in a negative sense, but instead, for cultivated distance to allow the detection and amplification of refrains that accompany steps into new territory. Maybe we want desire to run differently, where a new subject, a new effect of the world, can make a claim of authorship upon what desire itself has brought about. Combined in single exhibition-portfolio accompanied by its own curatorial essay, the content of the works as well as the form of their exhibition can open questions about curatorial studies-practice. The components are like clusters that disturb each other and set off the superradiant amplified refrains that make possible the speculations in the General Discussion chapter.

Floorplanning as method

In this section, I discuss the second curatorial method that I adopt in this doctoral project. In this section, I am thinking about the role of floorplanning as a curator and as the producer of this portfolio. Floorplanning is a pragmatic and intuitive process in exhibition planning, a process of joining, spatializing and sequencing components of a polyphonic assemblage through attention to the affective qualities of territories artworks or other components. I draw on this curatorial imaginary to edit this portfolio-exhibition, which includes five essays, as published. One's primary curatorial role is to make sure components of an exhibition can express themselves. I take in what the art or other components does. What does it need to be able to do it, and do it better? I take in what an artist might be desiring that it do, understood through collaborative dialogue. I then try to organize the affects in gallery spaces or other contexts to the artwork's best advantage, using tools like guiding the eye through sightlines, through pacing, density, proximities, heights and sizes, movement and stillness, signage, lighting. Another floorplanning consideration is how one encounters other viewers' bodies (one sees art both through our own eyes and the eyes of another). "Free Hot Mess," follows such a schizophrenic splitting and commoning of space, for example. Through floorplanning, art is always in dialogue with autocritical discourse that splits exhibitionary space between frame and reflexive presentation of frame. Floorplanning organizes the invitation we make to the viewer and multiplies and supports a range of possible experiences of engaging with the components. It's a little like producing a record. It takes production that is *in tune* with voices to bring forward an accessible and consistent assemblage. As discussed in the preface such consistency depends on the methodical priority of the visual and asignifying components of experience, for they catalyze the multiplicities birthed in dialogical relations of territories and universes of reference.

I attempt to chart through the portfolio's stack of texts, an expanded method of floorplanning that forages for possibilities of revolutionary subjectivation inspired by Guattari's

ecosophy.⁴³ Opacities as well as new flows emerge as contours and passages between territories that can account for the virtual, the emergent and unconscious. The ecosophy of Guattari and the refractive thinking of Karen Barad (whom I rely upon in my essay on *Drift*) are operative for other curators, such as Heidi Aishman who explores and builds a method as a score for her practice of floorplanning and exhibition-making:

From this perspective, I view curating an exhibition as a form of affective diagram creation. I am not using an exhibition to diagram how I think about various connections, I am using exhibitions as part of the curatorial process to generate new connections diagrammatically as Guattari described.⁴⁴

As Aishman implies, the terminology and practice of diagramming and cartography can be connected to material practices already embedded in the curatorial, and with a machinic model of “the unconscious” underlying Guattari’s cartography one can account for the unseen. As Valerie Walkerdine points out, “The cartography is a journey of transformation in which the virtual, the imagined landscape of the new is as important and significant as the material landscape of one’s location.”⁴⁵ A consistent thread in the curatorial essays is a gradually self-aware investigation of the unconscious in the work I have been undertaking for ten years, especially when read alongside the generative critique of psychoanalysis launched by Deleuze and Guattari.⁴⁶ I began looking for

⁴³ Both Guattari’s *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* and *The Three Ecologies* prepare the ground for an idea of ecosophy. The translator’s note in *Chaosmosis* provides a helpful definition: “While it shares with traditional ecology a concern for biological species and the biosphere, ecosophy also recognize ‘incorporeal species’ that are equally endangered, and an entire ‘mental ecology’ in crisis: ‘How do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity - if it ever had it - a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of the Cosmos?’” trans., *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 71.

⁴⁴ Heidi Aishman, “Diffractive Curatorial Practice: Ripples, Gaps and the Space In-between,” May 2019, PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 155.

⁴⁵ Walkerdine, “Using the Work of Félix Guattari to Understand Space, Place, Social Justice, and Education,” 10.

⁴⁶ Schizoanalysis doesn’t describe a desire birthed by lack nor the psychic roots of pathology, but instead

patterns that reveal what my work is doing wittingly and unwittingly within the ecologies of art, institutions, the curatorial and curatorial studies to feel extant relations and new possible relations without expanding the ego's claim on experience.

My method uses the focus of academic research (with which curating is increasingly entwined) to make the curatorial appear briefly despite its resistance described in an earlier section. I translate aspects of the curatorial through Guattari's theoretical categories, especially components of passage: faciality and refrains. Through the rereadings and thinking ahead to the General Discussion, I use schizoanalysis to divert analysis into its therapeutic modalities. Part of the purpose of this study is to provisionally apply schizoanalytic cartography as a tool for understanding and renewing the curatorial and related modes of critical imagination. As Guattari himself advocated, I make practical use of the theory rather than attempt a rigid systematization. Rather than ask what schizoanalysis contributes to curatorial practice and what analytic potential schizoanalysis offers, in other words, the goal is to determine through a personal document-based cartography, what curatorial individuations are adequate to the present moment.⁴⁷

To attempt to continually give life to curatorial work and curatorial studies my method is to re-read and bind my curatorial writing (itself collective enunciations) to create layered "floorplans" followed by wayward speculations. This study is motivated likewise by the double rhythm of binding of fragments into a coherent object, moving in and out of phase with a simultaneous schizoanalytic unbinding driven by countersigns within the work, rhizomatising possibilities, deterritorialising movements, connecting to outsides and black holes. Schizoanalysis allows me to assess the flows

describes the futural productive work of the "unconscious," specifically, in the desiring machine of art and its institutional ensembles.

⁴⁷ I am producing a necessarily processual, loose and incomplete schizoanalytic cartography. It is based on a cautious mediation of both the experimental science of curating and utopianism of ethical worldmaking.

and dissonances from within. In binding a set of writings, I can metamodel the flows disturbed and dissonances revealed.

Schizoanalysis

The joke in my epigraph about the drunk searching for their keys under the lamp post appeals to the sense in which a certain model of subjectivation ignores the virtual to its own deprivation and detriment. The curatorial's neoliberal hyperactivity and class anxieties along with the paradoxes at the heart of its simultaneous normalizing functions and ethical claims demand schizoanalysis. The scale of its contemporary local/global reach, the complexity of its auto-critical practices would escape less rhizomatic approaches. The hyperactive rhythm of performance for granting bodies or for awards, and the self-perpetuating pressure of social media, and publication are inseparable from the performance of the neoliberal self. The performance of the liberal self is inseparable from the cultural reproduction in which the curatorial participates. The contradictions between being a bureaucrat and artist, between doing social good and presenting "good" art, between decolonising/demodernising content and its colonialist/modernist forms, between work and life, performance of self in work and in life, solo practice vs. collective enunciation are just a few of the breakdowns that indicate machinic processes at work. Anxieties emerge in, among other contexts, the power dynamics with artists rooted in classed behaviour, in the white guilt, in a generalized neoliberal imposter syndrome and translating across differing practices of self, and in continual sectorization of the professionalized curatorial and its frictions with both the rational paradigms governing science and academia and the amateur and commercial varieties of curation.

Schizoanalysis is about healing through the pragmatics of the unconscious rather than what the unconscious can be said to mean (unlike psychoanalysis). The capacity for change remains the focus, rather than detours through history such as into dealing with childhood trauma, for example. The priority is the future over the past and being free over being safe.

I use the four functors of schizoanalytic cartography as a vocabulary and structure for reviewing texts. These are material-energetic flows, existential territories, machinic phylum and incorporeal universes of reference. Universes of reference are the worlds of memories, associations, dreams, intuitions and feelings, aesthetic images conjured forth as trans-sensible virtual possibilities. Janell Watson helps us understand Guattari's incorporeal universes of reference in this way: "Universes [U] – concrete, oniric, pathological, or aesthetic. [...] A Universe is constellation of values, of nondiscursive references, of virtual possibility, not real and not actualized, and yet necessary to any process of actualization and realization. Crystals of singularization."⁴⁸ For Guattari, they're always in dialogue with existential territories. Existential territories are finite, real but virtual, characterized by familiarity, belonging, and the feeling of being held. In Guattari's schema, finite existential territories could refer to the curatorial, to the identities of viewers, artistic practices, homes, transforming space, and social ecologies. Material-energetic fluxes are the actualized flows that make up the real. They are how Guattari thinks of the ungraspable Lacanian Real. They are capricious particles, more than human and post-human, hospitality, movement of people, labour and capital. Machinic phyla are the actualized rhizomes that make up all possible ordered societies and systematized knowledges. They are effects rather than affects; concrete and abstract machines defined as any cuts into flows, knowledge, general intellect, capitalism. With these functors, Guattari builds an "ecosophic object with four dimensions."⁴⁹ This allows Guattari "to speak of machines rather than drives, Fluxes rather than libido, existential Territories rather than instances of the self and of transference, incorporeal Universes rather than unconscious complexions and sublimation, chaosmic entities rather than signifiers . . ."⁵⁰ Guattari's matrix of four "ontological

⁴⁸ Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought*, 124.

⁴⁹ Querrien and Goffey, "Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy," 103.

⁵⁰ O'Sullivan quotes from page 126 of *Chaosmosis* in a footnote. "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," 285.

functors” can be applied in a fractal way, across various scales. Although each of these moving parts should not be seen in isolation, in my re-reading process, breaking them apart and sequencing them temporarily allows for the breaking of the focus of the curatorial writing so that it might operate as part of a broader cartography.

Schizoanalytic cartography is oriented toward the creative birth of new kinds of subjectivation and grew out of Guattari’s implication in Institutional psychology in France. This movement from which Guattari (and Franz Fanon and others) emerged was founded on a recognition of the difficult challenge of psychosis, understood in a way that is socially embedded enough to be considered what later could be named “everyday psychosis” (distinct from the challenge of neurosis and the attempts to address it with Freud’s “talking cure”); institutional psychology was a politically active revision of norms of social health that Guattari transversalised into other domains. In his last book, Guattari summarized the emergence of schizoanalytic cartography from this context:

Just as the political construction of social health demanded experiments with social cure in psychotherapy, it demands social experiments in art. Just as an artist borrows from his precursors and contemporaries the traits which suit him, I invite those who read me to take or reject my concepts freely. The important thing is not the final result but the fact that the multicomponential cartographic method can co-exist with the process of subjectivation, and that a reappropriation, an autopoiesis, of the means of production of subjectivity can be made possible.⁵¹

Note Guattari’s focus on art and experimental process, on generous offering/borrowing, and on goals of revolutionary subjectivation. What follows takes some steps toward what Erika Biddle terms schizoanalytic cartography’s potential for “producing new forms of self-organization, self-

⁵¹ Guattari *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 12-13.

management, self-direction.⁵² The portfolio-exhibition is framed as a way of leaving the territory of expert knowledge. The fact that my project was largely produced in solitary reflection rather than overt collectivity marks an important limit; it seeks, rather, to accomplish a movement between mental and social ecologies.⁵³ While it inevitably retains and reinforces elements of dyadic relations of constituent power, the steps it takes are through the rethreading of collective enunciations and in the direction of social experiments in art.⁵⁴

Schizoanalysis allow us to understand complex assemblages and zones of potential change through the materials of curating, in particular art and its collective enunciation through exhibition and curatorial texts.⁵⁵ Erika Biddle writes “As a method, this allows for a great deal of flexibility and possibility, but not much in terms of direction or certainty of results. However, what this method does allow for is self-awareness of the ethics of positionality, reflexive criticism that provokes action, fluidity and experimentation, creative situation-based thinking and tangibly productive results.”⁵⁶

The goal is the emergence of chaotic subjectivity that is sensitive to the world.⁵⁷ The materials of

⁵² Erika Biddle, “Meeting A Patient as a Singular Event: Schizoanalysis and Collaborative Critical Research,” *Aporia* 2, no. 3 (2010): 19. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45088212_Meeting_a_Patient_as_a_Singular_Event_A_Philosophical_Reflection/link/57a9ca6108ae659d18255ca2/download.

⁵³ Schizoanalysis is a means of thinking about curatorial practice in group becomings. Lorna Collins writes, “Schizoanalysis is trying to locate exactly where and how these breaks in reality arise and then mobilise them to manufacture a new production of subjectivity.” Lorna Collins focuses on the artistic and therapeutic bases of schizoanalysis in “Schizoanalysis (a simple introduction).” *Lornacollins.com*. Accessed October 28, 2022. <https://lornacollins.com/research/schiz-basics/>; <https://lornacollins.com/research/schiz-basics/> Lorna Collins.

⁵⁴ Practitioners and readers of Guattari’s theory including Biddle and Collins caution that it is a lived method that is not transferable. In their view, it would endanger its integrity to establish it as an academic method, for example. The possibility of change is always immanent, it is the positive force recognized as ‘potential.’ Biddle writes, “It is about the production of possibilities (of social change), not mere expression.” She continues, “There are no hierarchical dyads or reductionist comparisons in schizoanalysis, only differences produced by entities mutually embedded in a network. Each entity takes part in the enacting of mutable component entities and is ‘always becoming.”” Erika Biddle, “Meeting A Patient as a Singular Event: Schizoanalysis and Collaborative Critical Research,” 20.

⁵⁵ For Franco Berardi, “Analysis becomes schizoanalysis when it adopts the perspective of multiplicity.” Berardi, *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship, and Visionary Cartography*, 68.

⁵⁶ Biddle, “Meeting A Patient as a Singular Event: Schizoanalysis and Collaborative Critical Research,” 19.

⁵⁷ Nauha’s thesis articulates a Guattarian aspiration for performance art. “Schizoanalysis as a Method in

the essays are woven into a disjunctive pattern that allows me to group observations of phenomena found in and across each, on many scales, into territories, universes, phyla, and fluxes; these can turn into lines that map and practice the curatorial. This way, the weaving with and across texts aims and focuses a schizoanalytic abstract machine that can flow across related domains and engulf and analyze the project itself.

Artistic Research.” <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/26327/29070>.

Portfolio

1.1 Free Hot Mess

For one of the events in Ciara Phillips' *Workshop* at Agnes Etherington Art Centre, participants came expecting a reading group, having been first asked to read a text about exhaustion and exuberance in contemporary art by writer Jan Verwoert (a significant choice, I'll argue). Instead of discussing the text we learned an effective and unexpectedly breezy print technique: simply drawing one's fingers over an inked screen. When combined with the magical reveal of screen printing, it was irresistible. Phillips's idea was that we would pick up any dry print from another artist out of an array on the floor and print new imagery on top of it. And it worked. We were improvising like a band forgetting ourselves and joining a song we all knew. I remember looking up from my work to see us working like a many-headed monster, together and separate, like a new kind of machine. Indeed, by re-connecting gallery to studio, *Workshop* re-routes desire and creates new flows between art and labour, resembling the "imaginal machine" of theorist Stephen Shukaitis.⁵⁸ This was an experience of the complicated pleasure of collectivity, and I gradually let go of some notions of pedagogy and identity-based habits for an immersion in a new, unpredictable and purposeless

⁵⁸For Shukaitis, this means "a particular arrangement or composition of desires and creativity as territorialized through and by relations between bodies in motion.... Imaginal machines are composed by the affective states they animate, reflecting the capacities to affect and be affected by the worlds that are contained within them. They activate a cartography of thought." Stephen Shukaitis, *Imaginal Machines: Autonomy & Self-Organization in the Revolutions of Everyday Life* (London/NYC/Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2009), 13.

kind of body. *Workshop* allowed a space for this surrender through twofold demystification: first by repelling the priority of the intellectual and second, by using the absorption in artistic work to subtly block expectations of controlled outcomes. These manoeuvres made collaboration seem so newly possible.

This was a workshop in a very specific way: *work* on creating solidarities, showing the shapes of new collectivities, and a *shop* realigned with its etymological origin pre-market, as a building without walls. As it continues to appear inside modernist “white cubes,” reorienting art presentation spaces,⁵⁹ we can understand *Workshop* as an instituent practice, in Austrian philosopher Gerald Raunig’s terms; it keeps attaching itself to existing authoritative nodes and employing printmaking as counter-apparatus. For Raunig, instituent practice means “exceeding mere opposition to institutions: it does not oppose the institution, but it does flee from institutionalization and structuralisation.”⁶⁰ To make this possible, *Workshop* adopts and complexly inhabits the mould of live artmaking and new forms of invitation and aesthetics of hospitality so attractive to today’s museums. Once it is instigated, Phillips uses various strategies to raise questions within an institution’s spatial and temporal structuralizing habits. One of the most important outcomes of her

⁵⁹ Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney Biennial, 2018; Kunsthall Stavanger, 2019; The Model, Sligo, 2020.

⁶⁰ Raunig expands: “Deriving from Antonio Negri’s concept of ‘constituent power,’ understood as a permanent process of constitution, instituent practices thwart the logics of institutionalization; they invent new forms of instituting and continuously link these instituting events. Against this background, the concept of ‘instituent practices’ marks the site of a productive tension between a new articulation of critique and the attempt to arrive at a notion of ‘instituting’ after traditional understandings of institutions have begun to break down and mutate. When we speak of an ‘instituent practice,’ this actualization of the future in a present becoming is not the opposite of institution in the way that utopia, for instance, is the opposite of bad reality. Nor is it to be understood simply in the way that Antonio Negri’s concept pair ‘constituent power/constituted power’ is conceptualized, necessarily in relation to being instituted or constituted power. Rather, ‘instituent practice’ as a process and concatenation of instituent events means an absolute concept exceeding mere opposition to institutions: it does not oppose the institution, but it does flee from institutionalization and structuralization. But while fleeing, ‘instituent practice’ searches for a weapon.” Gerald Raunig, *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, ed. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: MayFlyBooks 2009), xvii. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011734/00001/citation>.

exhibition, for example was the reciprocal conduit that it made available between making together and looking together, matching the pairing of distinct works carefully exhibited with an adjacent participatory space. Both the ostensibly “solo” and participatory threads in Phillips’ practice are material-conceptual investigations into the tensions at play in collectivity. The rewarding challenges and challenging rewards of public becoming are key to her work.

While it is most obviously discernible in *Workshop*, Phillips’ persistent immanent critique of social relations infuses the whole of her practice, springing as it does from the very tools of her work: the collaborative studio environments of printmaking. When I first emailed Phillips about developing a project with the Agnes, I noticed that she immediately suggested a face-to-face discussion. Later, once a plan came together around her work and exhibition ideas, it was clear that we would be taking a novel approach to public programs. Instead of the well-worn genre of show + artist’s talk, Phillips consistently proposed to meet small groups of people for artmaking sessions. These replaced PowerPoint-driven formats and their privileging of career, chronological narrative, and superficial treatment. When others approached her, her emphasis was likewise on forms that place two bodies near each other in space talking, or many hands making. What does this pattern reveal? Thinking about the ensuing exhibition, *Comrade Objects*, its residency project and Phillips’ broader practice from this point of departure reveals that a great deal is accomplished through Phillips’ engagement with art as an activity (as opposed to as a class of objects) engaged in by people (artists and other kinds of people). Combining a participatory space and a display space, the exhibition recognized artistic materials as channels for conjunctions between people and between codes of encounter that situate the aesthetic experience between product and process and between finite and infinite. These crossings are, appropriately, a moment for imprinting extrinsic contexts on each other. The moment of contact changes each. A change is brought to the paper and to the ink. Here, crucially, a change is brought to the site of viewing and the site of making, evinced, for

example, by the simple repetition of a shape across works or the lasting impact on the institution's self-understanding.

The fold in time enacted by such reciprocal crossing between exhibition and studio mirrors a much longer return, a re-visitation. Phillips returned to the site where she trained as an artist, Queen's University, to present a selection of recent screen prints on canvas, prints on paper and printed tunics at the Agnes. For *Workshop*, Phillips worked in-gallery on artistic projects with respected Kingston-based artist Clive Robertson, whom she first met when she was a student. Additionally, she worked with several other artists through a partnership with artist-run centre Modern Fuel, with members of the Katarokwi Grandmother's Council⁶¹ and with Jen Kennedy and other members of Contemporary Feminism who visited from New York to facilitate the related Globe and Mail Feminist Reading Group. The balance of finished works and process-based activities revealed a consistent rethreading, a playful doubling back between studio sociality and gallery visitor sociality. As such, they activated Phillips' unique common code or interface between processes and artworks that are completed and fetishized by habits of presentation, an interface wherein the origin, causality and directionality of art can be played with and questioned.

As if in response to the ubiquity of the social network and other transparently weak forms of neoliberal connection such as Airbnb or Uber, Phillips posed an intimate approach. In-person meetings or artistic collaborations ask for trust and hope for feelings of indebtedness to each other; working with ink, screen and paper requires that you show up, and it tests personal promises, discloses fantasies and exposes clichés. The felt impacts of such practices expose the thin hold capitalism claims on us. They are physical, slow, revealing, risky. In-person meetings and

⁶¹ Phillips worked with members of the Katarokwi Grandmother's Council to create prints as an element of a concurrent artist's residency with Cheryl L'Hirondelle, curated by Carina Magazzeni.

collaborations allow for bodily and facial expression in iterative processes of apprehension more than email or phone. The unpredictably generative technics of verbal conversation have a “give and take” that expends time, bringing us into a space of visual learning through collaborative proximity—which can be understood as its own type of research.

Phillips makes visible the contours of a kind of work that isn’t easily recognizable, much less valued. By turning all situations into opportunities for face-to-face dialogue and possible beginnings of collaborative making, she lets time be formed and informed by people and their relations to objects, in both the finished and process-based work. The sharing economy cannot easily bring people into such a material-intellectual exploration of making art; amid the failures and revisions of collaboration, Phillips takes pleasure in sharing this space.

Clearly, we aren’t talking about a simple elevation of the analogue handmade, nor a simple appeal to pre-modern authenticity. In Phillips’ work the assertion of the primacy of the handmade, laborious and haptic is an invitation into a public space to work through internal tensions of the current moment, to confront its desires, hardened habits and preconceptions: the promise of ownership, ego-driven competition, performance, individual genius, hierarchical divisions of labour and appeals to bright futures and weak tech-mediated collectivities.⁶² Among its strongest threads, her work defies the unchallenged preeminence of privacy in culture. Privacy is too often considered a cherished right rather than a symptom of individualism and its continual reproduction. Without losing a sense of artistic independence, Phillips shifts the frame around audience: from audience as an obstacle to one’s private satisfaction to audience as fellow humans involved together, not without difficulty and conflict, in instituting a site of public enjoyment. In a different way, prints stretched

⁶² Alain Badiou’s short essay on his notion of “Neolithic Order” provides a provocative broad contextual space for thinking about Phillips’ work. Alain Badiou, “The Neolithic, Capitalism, and Communism,” *Verso* (blog), 30 July 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3948-the-neolithic-capitalism-and-communism>.

and hung in fashions more familiar to gallery display also confront the retreat into either private making or private reception of art. Phillips often accomplishes this with her exposure of print's mechanics of collaborative proximity and open-ended process to make a collective assemblage of enunciation and analysis.⁶³ One could even describe this as instating public space to varying degrees in all of its chaotic and contradictory joy, and the possibility of non-fascist life.

One doesn't often get a chance to reflect on one's past work. In the case of this essay, making a long loop offers new advantages. *Comrade Objects* was the title I gave to Phillips' exhibition at the Agnes in late 2016. Her attention to forming new socio-mental relationships to commodified objects all around us (including artworks) seemed among the clearest urgencies of her practice. Reading Melissa Gronlund's perceptive essay for *Just You* at Bergen Kunsthall,⁶⁴ I was fascinated with the way Phillips opposes petrified habits of knowing and possession with living process, dynamic handling and usage. Gronlund drew a comparison to Russian constructivists, such as Liubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova, who actively used the seductions of commodity to contribute to a new socialist utopia. Investigating the power of the fetish, constructivists recognized how free and untethered it is from ownership and consumerism, accumulation, profit. I was easily seduced by what is certainly an important piece of historical context and an insightful way of looking at the work. In hindsight, I conflated my own desire for the promise of art with the promise of Phillips's work. Certainly, Phillips mingles warm, intimate and familiar gestures with print's public dimension, declarative messaging and sense of glossy off-the-rack duplication. She is an artist highly attuned to these contradictory promises of screen printing, which has always travelled uneasily between fine art, industrial, commercial and activist milieus—Phillips thrives on

⁶³ Here I'm indebted to methods of schizoanalysis developed by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze.

⁶⁴ Melissa Gronlund, "Just You," in *Just You* (Bergen, Norway: Bergen Kunsthall, 2014), last modified 7 March 2020. <https://www.ciaraphillips.com/index.php/more/texts/>.

interweaving these contexts and engaging them in several directions. For example, at times in her practice, she has taken print art out into explicitly political contexts by making a protest banner. She surely engages the seductions of the commodity and redirects its phantasmal influences by taking printing's most direct gestural technical possibilities, of which she demonstrates the most enticing qualities, and fervently exaggerates them.

However, her work is not related to a necessarily communalist future, but very much to a present. It is related to a future, yes, but not "The Future" since it clearly defies over-systematization. Phillips does not revive specifically Soviet communist artist ambitions for new ways of relating to objects. The promise of socialism might have gained some desiring movement through Constructivist art, but today, could such appeal compete with the deep unconscious desire stoked by capitalism to work *against* our better future.

Phillips takes the image of warm personal intimacy of collaborative making into the fine art context; in doing so, she stirs our repressed desire for and concurrent fears of the public (perhaps fears of exposing our own unconscious and being exposed to those of others) and turns them toward artistic materials through which we can experience enjoyment of the apparent obstacle: people. The public is where our interests lie—despite the prevailing focus on the private. For Lacanian theorist Todd McGowan, "the great deception of the capitalist system is that it convinces us that we are self-interested beings." The deception cuts deeper since "we are in fact beings devoted to imperiling and even destroying our self-interest ... As long as we remain committed to obtaining the object (whatever that object is), the private world will seem like the only site for satisfaction. But there is no satisfaction for the subject without the act of engaging the public."⁶⁵ In

⁶⁵Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 57. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/queen-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4588232>, Created from queen-ebooks on 2019-05-05 14:30:32.

Phillips' work, the materiality of publicness itself is respected, and it is here that her approach to work, non-productivity and duration come into play.

A large, colourful word "NO" printed with a xerox-y texture was intentionally positioned on the most visible wall of the space dedicated to *Workshop*. It met the public's gaze with subtle antagonism that mitigated the openness of what else becomes visible in this gallery: a studio scenario and the vulnerability of the artist's exposure. The word "NO" helped to complexify the performance of subjective positions in the project. It signaled finitude within infinity and commented on the knot between governed and ungoverned practices that Phillips works out in her processes, spaces and images. In "Exhaustion and Exuberance," (the "reading" that Phillips selected) Verwoert articulates a strategy of refusal and solidarity in what he sketches as a neoliberal pressure to constantly perform.⁶⁶ Phillips' choice of text underlines pertinent questions about the contradictory space of art as simultaneously entrepreneurship, transgressive non-production and "a real job." Indeed, saying "no" is a countersign within a space of production that performs resistance to the art institution's own demand for productivity. The frank superposition of affirmation and negation allows her work to go into the risky chaos of sociality and make a node there for vexed counter-actualization of repressed sociality—a node of exuberant enunciation and collaboratively elaborated analysis that wasn't available before. Her work confronts privacy and creates rhythms of emotions and bodies, a structural refrain that allows us to recognize and risk the chaos of conflicting desires.⁶⁷ The image of production figured in the studio and finished work in Phillips' exhibition

⁶⁶ Jan Verwoert, "Exhaustion and Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform," originally published in *Dot Dot Dot* 15 (2008), <http://whyiseverybodybeingsonice.deappel.nl/concrete/index.php/chapters/exhaustion-exhuberance/ways-defy-pressure-perform>.

⁶⁷ To return to the notion of imaginal machines, Shukaitis wonders, "Is it possible to create a space and form for the organization of collective labour and creativity without it being turned against its own aims and intentions?" Shukaitis, *Imaginal Machines: Autonomy & Self-Organization in the Revolutions of Everyday Life*, 27.

allowed a question for audiences: how is what I do in this room full of art different from what I do in a room where art is being made? How do I behave with a collective in a space of making versus in the space of looking? Put another way, how are we looking in this room for making, and how are we making in the room for looking? This comparison is the central advantage and opportunity of an exhibition that includes both: to see what is common to different strands of practice and what is different that you might have thought to be the same. Her work crosses itself going in both the direction of fetish and going in the direction of material process and everyday life. The simultaneity of each of these supports and challenges the other. In her work, we have the co-emergence of the artist and the crowd, both called into being by the work. A context emerges wherein we can appreciate how any gesture is co-constituted by its capitalistic valence and its radically socialist valence and simultaneously co-ruptured by them. Here, to quote theorist Simon O'Sullivan, the event of "the finite presenting the infinite/the infinite becoming embodied in the finite—is horizontal, working *across* milieus."⁶⁸ A mutation in one sphere of life can have an effect on another.

Phillips re-uses patterns of offcut shapes that seem to indicate a negative space—that of the important bit that got used for something else. These shapes seem counter to the intentional mark, but they aren't random. Such forms eschew the careful scissoring by Matisse, for example, by suggesting that all things bear the undeniable presence of the other. What is so disturbing about these shapes on a formal level is their unshakeable sense of refusal to perform quite correctly. They suggest a demystification of the artist crafting her components. Instead of a final product, we are

⁶⁸ Simon O'Sullivan, "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," *Deleuze Studies* 4 no. 2 (2010): 259.
DOI: 10.3366/E1750224110000978, <https://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/guattari-aesthetic-paradigm.pdf>.

brought into an overall design. Like Joseph Beuys' social sculpture, this strategy prioritizes the connections through the work rather than the work itself.

Despite its perhaps false promises, the notion of "comrade objects" still allows a space of semiotic play. Phillips' works seem to make a winking gesture to a collectivity of printers, a constellation of the artists' own friends. The adjacency of the work to the voices, movements and traces of a collectivity of collaborators actually working live in the gallery nearby also provides a rich allusion. Crucially, "comrade objects" also describes how the artworks genially reveal how they are made and could therefore be remade, perhaps suggesting that *you* could make something. Phillips is self-aware and grounded in her openness to the public exposure of process, attentive to its repeated tests of social bonds. The rewards, however, of enjoying without accumulation cannot be measured. For Marx, "capitalism is already essentially abolished once we assume that it is enjoyment that is the driving motive and not enrichment itself."⁶⁹ Changing relations with our objects of desire might just be a matter of practicing making a free hot mess.

⁶⁹ McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets*, 244.

1.2 The Museum of Mott Art Catalogue

1. In 1971, Les Levine published *Museum of Mott Art Inc.: Catalogue of Services*, a staple-bound, offset-printed booklet appearing to issue from the Museum of Mott Art Inc., an institution incorporated in the State of New York and named for the street on which Levine resided. Among other activities, Museum of Mott Art Inc. sold the distinctive range of services listed in the booklet and in its later (1974) version, titled *Mott Art Catalogue of After Art Services*. Mott Art also “represented” the museum’s fictional artists Kenmare Mott, Mulberry Baxter, and Elizabeth Grand, each named after streets near Levine’s apartment.

2. Seen from a current perspective, the numbered list of sixty-five services is a consistent extension of Levine’s practice of moulding his art to media circuits and systems through vehicles such as press releases and stock investments.⁷⁰ Indeed, following his *Levine’s Restaurant*,⁷¹ the *Mott Art Catalogue* sustains the image of an artist seemingly able to imagine things into being, to make art with almost any orthodox system as support and

⁷⁰ *Profit Systems One* (1969) is described in an entry from the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art on Canadian conceptual art. “Canadian Conceptual Art: Les Levine; Language/Emotion+Syntax=Message,” http://ccca.concordia.ca/resources/searches/event_detail.html?languagePref=en&vk=7371.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

material. What is new in this project is the scale of fabulation and its fusion with social exchange and what we might now recognize as network forms.⁷²

3. The 1971 *Mott Art Catalogue* includes services that seem to be influenced by Levine's art-world tabloid, *Culture Hero* (1969–70), including "Art for capital gains," "How to become an artist's spouse," "Where to be seen," and "How to avoid becoming an artist's spouse." Central to its wit and tension as a conceptual object is the familiar image of a museum, yet one occupied entirely by activities that simultaneously threaten to dissolve its autonomy. If art is a service, for example, who is the client? Is Levine's implication that the museum, despite its claim to higher purpose (via purposelessness), carries out an unacknowledged pedagogy and commercial relationships masked by formalism? Levine centres the devalued socio-economic manoeuvrings that are scrubbed from the museum's image, but which actually play outsized roles. Levine is far from directly critical of capitalism, however. Although he may be attacking the pretensions of liberal museums, it is precisely capitalism's heterogeneous performance that he seems to embrace.

4. *Mott Art Catalogue* elicits a curious mix of tone: the frankness and enthusiasm of the adoption of everyday commerce and deeply ironic marketing are inflected here with the feeling of an ambiguous leave-taking, especially when the title shifts, in 1974, from offering "services" to offering "after art services." Levine told interviewer Glenn O'Brien, "What it really is is a very decisive overview of where the art world is right now."⁷³ While it

⁷² Levine's acts of myth making are better described by Gilles Deleuze's word "fabulation" than by "fiction." I'm indebted to Lane Relyea for tracing the network form in conceptual art histories. Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

⁷³ Les Levine, interview by Glenn O'Brien, "Museum of Mott Art Inc.: Les Levine, President," *Interview*,

may accomplish being this, especially when seen in retrospect, it does so through meaningful distancing action. I read *Mott Art Catalogue* as a self-design of the artist in motion against a changing landscape.

5. The scope of Les Levine's expansion of the terrain of art is stunning. To construct a contemporary reckoning with *Mott Art Catalogue* without remythologizing Levine is a challenge that must be guided by Levine's own carefully cultivated distance and matter-of-fact subjectivity. It is instructive to view this work against shifts in the role of culture that we've observed since this piece was conceived. Particularly at this moment of American political crisis, when art critics are interested in what might succeed neo-liberal contemporary art, the thresholds crossed by *Mott Art Catalogue of After Art Services* are significant.

6. Seminal critic, activist and curator Lucy Lippard mentioned Levine's Museum of Mott Art Inc. and its catalogue of services in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*.⁷⁴ The Museum of Mott Art Inc. and *Mott Art Catalogue* certainly are among the flights from the paradigm of the timeless discrete object that concern Lippard's book. First, *Mott Art Catalogue* is an advertisement, and it takes part in Levine's broader use of advertising as a way to capture public attention, aligned with his interest in side-stepping the conventions of aesthetic appreciation by favouring the communication of information. Levine's work in the 1980s more forcefully used the

1972.

⁷⁴ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 262.

graphic and textual language of advertising—1980's *Taste Class*, or 1985's *Blame God* billboard series, for example.

7. Second, the Museum of Mott Art Inc. engages and extends conceptual art's revelation that the exhibition is the primary unit of art's meaning, to suggest, further, that the broader system of presentation is structured by institutions as frames or envelopes. Levine's investment in services rather than objects is a searching for a different kind of materiality that incorporates this realization, one that sees him managing his own envelope, a kind of bestiary of desires and exchanges. At the same time that *Mott Art Catalogue* is a critique of the authority of museums and perhaps a satire of audiences, it anticipates new freedoms of the individual and outsourced labour afforded by biopolitical power. It enacts a networked materiality that follows a performative logic rather than a representational framework: the establishment of relationships and communication.⁷⁵ Business took note and followed a similar model.

8. David Joselit begins his 2012 book, *After Art*, with an Andy Warhol epigraph: "Business art is the step that comes after Art."⁷⁶ Artists had no way of knowing what business would take from conceptual art, nor whether art would come to die on the vine or be invaded by business. The fruits of circulatory labour developed by conceptual artists are easily mistaken today for viral marketing, and Goldin+Senneby in their *Headless Inc.* project, not unlike Levine, inhabit a zone of ambiguous value, exploring withdrawal and

⁷⁵ Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World*.

⁷⁶ David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

visibility.⁷⁷ Their adoption of the language and forms of offshore business is, however, the exception that proves the rule typified by the career of Jeff Koons.

9. Are the aesthetic critiques of the 1960s reappearing today as the most powerfully ingrained aspirations informing subjectivity? In *After Art*, Joselit calls conceptual art “the most widespread ‘international style’ to emerge since the mid-1960s.”⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the most compelling aesthetic interface in our daily lives is the social network, with its smooth operating systems linking and shaping our public selves. As a thought experiment, imagine for a moment that *Mott Art Catalogue* was a formative influence on the development of neo-liberal visuality.

10. The movement of this work is withdrawal. The notion of “dropping out” was certainly in the zeitgeist, but Levine’s work seems to participate in a “becoming other” rather than declaring exit. In her 1969 *General Strike Piece*, Lee Lozano had taken an intensely negative “art as life” stance with a total commitment to personal and social revolution. While Levine was producing exhibits in the United States, Canada and Europe, his museum seems to bring its intensity to an ordinary personal level, its artists named for streets within walking distance. This localism insists on an ephemeral quality and simultaneous dispersion of meaning across nodes of a city.

⁷⁷ See <https://goldinsenneby.com/practice/headless/>

⁷⁸ Joselit, *After Art*, 7.

11. The 1974 version of *Mott Art Catalogue* includes services like these: “How to stop being an artist,” “Language services for painters,” “How to kill yourself,” “Where to be seen,” and “How to appear to be an artist after art.” This list draws a vivid picture of a period that Levine seems to be both predicting and declaring is already occurring. The next step is going underground, and the piece resembles less a strike or symbolic death than a declaration of endurance and struggle for self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship in a zombie culture.

12. Some have described the piece as a mock catalogue, but Levine assured interviewer Glenn O’Brien that plenty of people had taken him up on the advertised services.⁷⁹ He explained that all the clients have different needs, some finding half of the services laughable and the other half useful, and some finding use in an entirely different selection.⁸⁰ Today, the meaning of the piece pivots around the use-value of *Mott Art Catalogue* to its clients. Does the piece slyly suggest that museums should actually provide this kind of service? Levine may have been anticipating the contemporary transformation of the museum into a platform for community engagement through museum education, relational aesthetics and social practice.

13. Lee Lozano’s *Dialogue Piece* (1969) provides another point of comparison, since both Lozano and Levine invited people to interact and perform an exchange. Although Levine employs the distancing effect provided by money, he would investigate his clients

⁷⁹ Les Levine, interview by O’Brien, “Museum of Mott Art Inc.”

⁸⁰ Ibid.

and their intentions before agreeing to provide a service, in an effort to determine if his service would be useful.⁸¹ The utility of the services can't help but draw the work toward what we now recognize as an artistic zone of social practice. *Catalogue* expresses both an appeal to participate and an indifference to whether or not people do—the latter being consistent with Levine's usual focus on the non-material. Levine's claim that people used his services has weight, however, especially since it comes from an artist who started a restaurant where one could actually buy food. With the Museum of Mott Art Inc., Levine effectively created a "reciprocal ready-made," Marcel Duchamp's term for the opposite of the ready-made, whereby art is moved into "real" space.⁸² The museum becoming horizontal? A model of an underground art economy as a new social commons? We can surely see Mott Art in the context of artist museums, both bureaucratic and entrepreneurial, that were springing up all over the world at that time.

14. What kind of complicated sincerity is being produced in *Mott Art Catalogue*? Does it matter, for example, whether Levine needed the money? *Mott Art Catalogue* reflects Levine's actual qualities, a dizzying set of skills, knowledge and opinions offered for sale—with an express helpfulness undercutting any art hero image. Even his name is removed and subsumed within a new entity populated by fictional artists. Levine came from an experience of hunger, growing up during World War II in Ireland, and he tells performance artist Linda Montano that it has a permanent limiting effect on one's sense of

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Stephen Wright, "The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade: An Essay on Use-Value and Art-Related Practice," *31 Readings on Art, Activism & Participation (in the Month of January)*, Volume 1 (series), January 2007, 16 Beaver Group. <http://www.wearethethinktank.org/readers/reader-voll.pdf>.

self-importance.⁸³ Nevertheless, there is a construction here: like other artists of this time, Levine enters media circuits by inhabiting a persona.

15. It is instructive to think about the way that this strategy has become second nature to us now. Critic Boris Groys' assertion that all of us have become self-styling artists seems to echo Levine's provocations.⁸⁴ Levine often talked of the pre-limited menu of options given to us by television through which people are making themselves up. For Levine, there seems to be an urgency to puzzle out the mediated self.⁸⁵ *Mott Art Catalogue* likewise probes the spreading contours of personhood. In Mulberry Baxter and the other fictive artists, Levine practises the design of other selves. Perhaps we see in this work the establishing of the network as a new deity that artists simply channel, and this withdrawal a relinquishment of responsibility for meaning.⁸⁶

16. It is impossible to separate the artist from the businessperson, making the nomination of business as art a redundant, retroactive oversimplification. Levine's catalogue of services is an early example of the performance of self-appreciation; it redeploys the individualizing forces of neo-liberal capitalism to activate a model of inventive authority within then-emerging networked cultures.⁸⁷ Even though *Mott Art*

⁸³ Linda Montano, ed., *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 182.

⁸⁴ Boris Groys, "Self-Design, or Productive Narcissism," *Superhumanity*, *e-flux Architecture*, September 2016. <http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/66967/self-design-or-productive-narcissism/>.

⁸⁵ In his video interview with Steven Poser, Levine clearly describes the experience of learning about oneself on video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtI1_wWSrRwhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtI1_wWSrRw.

⁸⁶ Boris Groys, "Self-Design and Aesthetic Responsibility," *e-flux* 7 (June 2009). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61386/self-design-and-aesthetic-responsibility/>.

⁸⁷ See Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," *Public Culture* 21, 1

Catalogue was compelling art into the “merely real,” Levine didn’t disappear but instead gained stealth through his modular cognitive service work.

17. *Mott Art Catalogue* is an escape plan that retains its dignity via art coefficient. For art, though badly injured, permeated by business and lagging behind the digital interface, has not ended.

(Winter 2009). DOI: 10.1215/08992363-2008-019.

1.3 Crossing Thresholds

Passing through a door can feel like a moment of stillness within movement even though it is an experience informed by different instances of sensory input. Likewise, the act of crossing a threshold simultaneously connects and separates; it joins and divides inside and outside, private and public, self and other. German media theorist Bernhard Siegert suggests that doors are “cultural techniques” used to invent inside and outside—concepts we retroactively attribute to experience.⁸⁸ Opening a door and crossing a threshold, we are thresholds crossed by the technique’s enframing, becoming sites of the division of inner power and the law silently thought by the medium. It is in this way that thresholds are sites of resistance and repetition for unauthorized, repressed or othered bodies. They mark sites of “passing.” In this milieu, to cross a border without fear or anxiety is an experience of social privilege, whether or not one is aware of it at the time.

After passing through the gallery door and entering the spaces of *Chris Kline and Yam Lau: Weave*, the character of one’s perception is light. Perceived forms are restrained but not opaque nor aloof. Indeed, there is a ready, clear and elegant unity of harmonious parts in which the pressures of the socio-economic seem temporarily suspended. The song-filled gallery space embodies a sense of intimacy and introspection. The combination of sound, colour and architectural framing immediately reminds me, “Slow down. There’s more here.” I am in the midst

⁸⁸ Bernhard Siegert, “Doors: On the Materiality of the Symbolic,” trans. John Durham Peters. *Grey Room*, no. 47 (Spring 2012): 6-23. https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/GREY_a_00067.

of a formation of experience, immersed and active, gathering impressions of colour and shape, coherence and dissolution of virtual architectures.

To “weave” is to take an indirect route, liberated from instrumental routine. It is to move at one’s own pace, on one’s own authority. If you can successfully negotiate the pressures of the socio-economic order, you might accept the invitation to move between Kline’s and Lau’s works, let your gaze drift across their surfaces. If you let it happen, an itinerant assemblage of mind, body, image and object reflects and re-enacts the movement that interlaces material qualities to aesthetic experience.

Imagine the harmonizing wave patterns of a musician joining a drummer in time or a surfer catching a wave; a harmonized pattern that overlaps creative rhythm with material rhythm is what I am led to experience by Kline and Lau’s work. Yet, this attunement is only one of the exhibition’s subtle social acts. The artists’ works suggest introspective turns, and at the same time the exhibition’s pairing of different disciplines encourages reflection on what is shared by painting and video across each artist’s introspection. Tensions emerge through the dialectic between interiorized insight and enunciation, that inflects experiences of the work in this context. To illustrate, we need to let the “weave” play out through the white cube that was made for work of this kind, and for which the work was made.

At first glance Chris Kline’s *La Manche* (2017–present) paintings seem like a series of differently coloured flat monochromes. They are arranged in tight groups based on size, colour and subject matter. The “colour-space” of each group—uniquely rendered with subtle textures and tones, compositional forms and enigmatic traces of the painter’s hand—conveys a specific emotional tone. By slowing down and giving time to individual paintings I discover surprising traces of an unstretched canvas ingrained into the surface. This almost imperceptible image comes into view faintly sometimes, and other times more sharply. Kline made the figurative element of each

painting by using a discarded canvas—a canvas that has been stretched, painted and then removed from the stretcher frame—as a pattern that was stamped onto the surface of the new work. This use of a printmaking technique for creating a diagram leaves an additional implicit imprint on our perceptions; I apprehend a moment of contact and force that is repeated across the surface of each painting, an impression that seems to be held at a distance as it becomes, ambivalently, content.

In this body of work's image content, each painting's material/structural support—a wooden frame—is represented through its nonappearance. Instead of stretcher, we are focused on a loose fabric. Of course, Kline's reference to the genre of abstract painting itself as "content" reminds me of the utilitarian objects I am indeed with in the space, the wooden painting stretchers and cloth canvases. Sometimes a picture plane appears to give a visual counterpoint; it is a pictorial illusion created through the painting's "framing" of an indistinct interior space around the printed image's rectangle I can't help but see as a lit window, or at other times a dark doorway.

There is a quality of matter-of-factness to Kline's work that is not without complexity. It oscillates between "painting as painting," "painting before painting" and "painting after painting." You can interpret these pieces as the work of a conceptual artist who uses not just the mechanics but also the genre of painting as a motif. Like the best of Minimalism, however, Kline's paintings refuse to be anything other than their own form, and despite the reflective mirror being held up to the discipline of painting and its history, they seem to be only fleetingly about themselves. Indeed, as I will discuss, they apply the virtual to the material in a way that is felt in the immediacy of its occurrence.

Kline's gradual revelation of an unstretched canvas seemingly imprinted on the surface of a stretched canvas beautifully aligns with Yam Lau's unfolding of constructed and computer-generated architectural space in *Nūshū: Echo Chambers* (2014, 2018). The interior volumes of Lau's carefully crafted pavilions designed specifically for this exhibition "echo" the spaces depicted

in the animations that unfold on the flat screen monitors embedded in the far wall of each architectural form. These “stages” resemble white shrines or elegant roofless gazebos. With translucent fabric skin stretched over three walls and long built-in benches that look like pontoons, Lau’s twin pavilions are placed across from one another and set on an oblique angle in the passageway between the galleries housing both artists’ work. When standing in this threshold between the galleries, the pavilions feel like reflections of one another. The tain of a mirror describes a zone of contact between the real and its reflection. What is uncanny about mirrors is the irrational notion that they might reflect contemporaneous and/or latent versions of reality. Lau’s installation suggests the presence of the virtual through its construction of real space— “rooms” that viewers can enter concretely that are lent a virtual quality by their mirroring in space.

As in Kline’s works, which are marked by the moment and image of contact between stretched and unstretched canvas, the pavilions seem to play off of their own construction as a way to draw attention to the chiasmatic relationship between interior and exterior. This reading of the architecture’s open form is reinforced by the “reflective” relationship between the physical and computer-generated buildings in Lau’s piece.

Lau’s work often suggests an openness to myriad possible forms, but there is a recurring theme addressed within *Nüshū: Echo Chambers*. The whole gallery is filled with the sound of tender melodies sung in the “women’s” language of *Nüshū* that accompany the animations presented in each pavilion.⁸⁹ Each animation introduces a temporary monument (memory-space), a shelter for a disappearing linguistic form. The animations foreground the interplay of interior and

⁸⁹ *Nüshū* is a syllabic script derived from Chinese characters, some say to better-fit embroidery patterns. Literally “women’s script,” *Nüshū* was used exclusively among women in Jiangyong County in Hunan Province of southern China. Yam Lau, “*Nüshū: Echo Chambers*,” *The Site Magazine*, (October 2018), <http://www.thesitemagazine.com/read/nushu>.

exterior, mass and void, and the layered interpenetration of all possible contours and forms, as the women's voices call a secret language in and out of being. The structural elements of the walls, crosspieces, curtains and *Nūshū* calligraphic letterforms rotate in and out of place, and their shadows have the effect of unsettling the sense of foreground and background, positive and negative space. The slow-moving shadows introduce oblique planes and counter-movements that sometimes disturb the implied solidity of architectonic elements, revealing cycles of formation and formlessness. Lau lends a feeling of exquisite discipline, eternal equilibrium and repose to his subject.

To "weave" is also to thread from front to back, like the relationship between warp and weft in the creation of cloth. The exhibition highlights the way in which a viewer becomes entangled in artistic experience through material encounters and sensory impressions that foreground embodiment. In this, a dialogue takes place between form and idea that Tim Ingold calls "textility."⁹⁰ This textility of viewing is analogous to the textility of making. Ingold's work in anthropology provides the useful notion of "undergoing" that adds a further ethical inflection to this aesthetic relationship. When you split wood, you are surrendering to the wood; you are both passive and active as the wood grain's field of force guides the axe and shapes the desired object's final form. Rather than being violently slashed with a knife as in the work of Lucio Fontana, in Kline's and Lau's work images are formed through the act of perception, as surfaces lean toward contact, are implied, held in tension and made abstract. Undergoing is akin to opening oneself up to the other, putting oneself in the other's shoes.

⁹⁰ Tim Ingold introduces Gilbert Simondon's critique of Aristotle's hylomorphism and the implications of Deleuzean ontology. Tim Ingold, "The textility of making," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, no. 34 (2010): 92-102. <https://academic.oup.com/cje/article/34/1/91/1696932>.

It was Stephen Horne's idea to bring these artists together. He conceived of this exhibition based on an intuition that the artists' complementary preoccupations with the screen and the textile would inspire a productive leap of faith into the possibility of materializing a complex harmony. The similarities and differences in the artists' approaches draw attention to dialectical processes that fabricate self and other. This in-and-out movement best characterizes the experience of the exhibition as a whole, as it "diagrams" the crossings or continuities of inside and outside, form and content, virtual and actual. In Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's metaphysics of substance, "inside" and "outside" are simply folds of the same. The works in *Weave* show thresholds to be overlapping areas where these plications fold into one another.⁹¹

As I pass through the threshold leading to the second gallery, I reflect on how the privileges afforded by ability, gender and institutional context allow the artists and curators to operate "freely," without having to justify the pleasurable use of colour or the allusion to graceful creation in the void. The milieu we are working in doesn't mark our very presence as political or interpret our work through a biographical lens. Global capitalism's demand for productivity and speed would mark the works' "retreat" as an act of resistance, however. The work's subtle challenge to the intimate aesthetic domain of learning and being in the world depends on this inward turn. Motivated by a resistance to contemporary culture, the artists have produced "models of retreat as protest." See for example, the model of the monk's cell and the Chinese scholar's studio that inspired Lau's pavilions, or the Japanese teahouse that was a direct inspiration for a later ceremony/performance.

⁹¹ Simon O'Sullivan, "Definition: 'fold'" <https://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/deleuze-dictionary.pdf>.

The exhibition's theme suggests the "free" movement of bodies as an essential element. In the individual works and their intertwining with one another we are drawn into the making of space for the body, including the other's work (and possibly the "other" in broad terms). Essentially, the artists have bent their distinct and multivalent practices toward each other, making the play of differences into new material folds. In *Weave*, Kline's and Lau's different formal and conceptual engagement with retreat, singularity and otherness come into contact and suggest a real and symbolic meeting of minds. Bringing together painting and video installation folds visual responsiveness into zones of introspection and respect: thresholds, doubled and inverted volumes, the play of nearness and distance, repetitive framing and reframing, different forms of textile enmeshment and self-reflexive processes of making and unmaking. All of the pieces in the show gently compel viewers to slow down and give time. Through their sensitively conceived spatial and visual compositions the artists make space for self-reflection and deference to the other. Their individual pieces also embody such entwining.

Kline's *La Manche* paintings are highly distilled and meticulously crafted. His paintings draw the viewer into a heightened experience of looking. Although smooth and well defined, their monochromatic surfaces contain irregular passages marked by creases and wrinkles. What at first seem like easily reproducible monochromes reveal themselves to contain traces of the hand, striations created by concentrations of pigment as a brush pulled acrylic medium across a surface. The associations with printmaking techniques and mechanical reproduction make me doubt these perceptions, however. Have these brushstrokes really been made by hand, or have they somehow been transferred onto the canvas in a manner that can be infinitely reproduced? Since the presence of the hand remains elusive, the paintings suggest a troubled relation to the re-presentation of previously stretched canvases. The slow disclosure of the "content" in these paintings reflects ambivalence toward revealing how they were made and places emphasis on a relational and

embodied response to painting as a form of thought. Through the textility of looking, structural and material aspects of the work are abstracted as a kind of afterimage of process. They become images of what is discarded or is left undone. The gesture of showing an imprint of the material used for a previous or future work alludes to a kind of emptying out of expectation. Significantly, in *La Manche*, imprinted canvases were clearly folded over a stretcher and then taken off to introduce a kind of wrinkle, a fold that marks a brief reversal of process. I see this as a folding of the present into past and future moments of touch. There are deconstructive and performative dimensions to Kline's work; by tracing stages done and undone in the process of making, we reconstruct a prior act.

Lau's *Nūshū: Echo Chambers* animations also display their own process by exploring the outer edges of painting. They don't make claims to any seamless simulation of reality. Instead, they embrace computer-generated imaging, characterized by smooth mechanics and digital artefacts, to reveal its medium and artifice. In the videos that pay tribute to a disappearing language and culture, I see energetic voids in which brief passages of time are given to the assembling and disassembling of architectural forms in a never-ending cycle. Lau's making and unmaking of animated domestic spaces connects obliquely to the making and unmaking of the painting's structural support in Kline's work. Both artists allude to times before and after the moment of encounter, figuring the process of creation within the finished piece. Kline embraces the traditions of painting and foregrounds the work's material support—the stretched canvas. As a result, the paintings in the *La Manche* series simultaneously draw the viewer into an enfolding of a past moment and into a space of potentiality. This enfolding of the historical moment is also embodied in Lau's tribute to an outmoded language and cultural form: *Nūshū*. Citing Lau's training in modernist painting and his work's continued dialogue with the discipline, Kim Neudorf describes the artist's work as an

“interval between painting that is and painting that has yet to be.”⁹² With Lau’s work we encounter a space that seems outside of present time, a space that holds a sense of infinity and suggests a “groundless ground” of investigation. Michel Foucault wrote that the goal of scholarship is “to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.”⁹³ It isn’t a stretch to apply Foucault’s idea to the work of Kline and Lau by substituting “painting” for “scholarship,” with the goal of learning to what extent the effort to paint one’s own history can free painting from what it silently paints and thus enable the artist to paint differently. In this context, an auto-critical approach to process foregrounds the materialities that are medium and vestige of a historically situated self-investigation. With these works, are we witnessing a struggle to free the mind (and painting) from the limitations of material and tradition, while simultaneously showing how the struggle is carried out?

Following on the work of Susanne Langer, Brian Massumi suggests the concept of “semblance” best describes artistic events that incorporate the recent past and near future as much as the present. He refers to semblance as “the manner in which the virtual actually appears” and “the being of the virtual as a lived abstraction.”⁹⁴ Here, the “virtual” signifies moments in time before, after and during the event’s appearance. Kline’s *La Manche* series provides a material articulation of the play of the virtual and the actual. The role of semblance is of equal concern to Lau, and is clearly present in the *Nūshū: Echo Chambers* installation. Upon viewing Kline’s work, an afterimage appears that is like the shapes that seem emblazoned on the retina under the eyelid. It is like a secret code given to those who take the time to approach things with an open mind (here,

⁹² Kim Neudorf, “Two sightings: On the work of Yam Lau,” *Syphon* 3.1, Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre (Spring 2015): 6.

⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9.

⁹⁴ Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2011), 16.

the mind is a blank surface made available for my own marks). Lau is also concerned with the pastness and futurity of painting. The emphasis on painting's infrastructural support doesn't negate or outlaw content. Indeed, it radically opens to it. Think of Lau's use of the car as a kind of support for other artists in a work like *Vehicle* (2007), done with the WayUpWayDown Collective (Yam Lau, Sunny Kerr, Tania Ursomarzo). Also think of his Donkey Institute of Contemporary Art (2008–present) in Beijing.⁹⁵ Lau often works across disciplines, inside and outside of institutional contexts, questioning art's conventional spatial and temporal framing. And he often makes the exhibition platform a work in and of itself, where “content” plays a minor role.

As I touched on earlier, Horne's curatorial gesture made it possible for both artists to make works that anticipated the other's, and to be involved in how the exhibition as a whole was installed. In *Weave* each artist's skillful approach to framing is allowed to open onto and inform the other's work. Kline is best known for his translucent poplin works that are graced with a single mark and show the wooden painting stretchers “hidden” behind the surface. Lau is known for delicate 3D-rendered architectural spaces that constantly move. For Lau, the new pavilions act like largescale translucent paintings in architectural form. For Kline, as in Lau's *Nūshū: Echo Chambers*, there is an engagement with the void, a spatial/temporal event that precedes form. Each experiential echo/resonance within the space stems from this layering of sensibilities. Lau's pavilions reframe Kline's work, Kline's paintings reiterate the evanescent interior volumes presented in Lau's installation. We could say that each artist gives the other space through a renegotiation of the exhibition's curatorial and architectural frame. For example, as I walk through the gallery, Lau's

⁹⁵ David Court, “Yam Lau: A Life of Re-creation,” *Yishu* 10, no. 5 (2011): 82. http://yishu-online.com/wp-content/uploads/mm-products/uploads/2011_v10_05_court_d_p079.pdf.

translucent fabric walls distort my vision, creating an atmospheric “unframing” of all that surrounds, including Kline’s work.

Kline sidesteps painting’s grand expectations, and nimbly considers the relationship between art and everyday life. The paintings gently force us to consider the simple reality of the frame and the fabric. In this exhibition he has arrayed his paintings in tight groups that evoke a sense of 44 45 “any possible colour.” On first blush the paintings feel like colour fabric swatches; colour is itself a diagram of potentiality, since any hue includes all colours in the spectrum. Embodied and convivial, colour doesn’t surface without the gaze and depends on “the background” for its mercurial qualities. On a formal level, the relationships between figure/ground and nearness/distance create a productive tension between autonomy and contiguity. The singular emotional appeal of each painting is tempered by its placement within a series; the singularity of each piece is elevated and problematized by its inter-reliance on the others. I read this as a formal appeal to an aesthetics of mutual support. Beyond form, Kline’s approach to displaying the works intentionally eschews a market paradigm dependent upon the autonomous life of a singular painting, usually shown in a “neutral” white space.

The pairing of these artists is also complex because both employ “withdrawal” and “retreat” as formal strategies, strategies that place value on slowness, self-reference, mirroring and denial of authority. Their investment in “retreat,” as a tradition and space of inward turn is itself communicated in the moment of retreat. A kind of dance takes place in the sustained movement between withdrawing and making space. Lau’s animations present a “non-place,” a dynamic void that precedes form. They position the women’s songs as non-diegetic sound that nevertheless belongs to architectonic forms that seem to build and unbuild themselves. The architectural “models” or “diagrams” in Lau’s animations seem to develop outside of time, as if they inhabit a parallel world in which things come together and then disintegrate for the pleasures of enactment

alone. In Lau's work, there isn't a willful imposition of form; instead, it seems like the void or perhaps the singing voices themselves, engender the architecture. What I'm seeing as a contact point of introspection and relationality may be even more basic. In *Semblance and Event*, Brian Massumi articulates an ontology that depends on a "constitutive doubling of the event into co-occurrent relational and qualitative dimensions."⁹⁶ This implies that subject and object are not divided, but part of a continuous process of becoming, and that experience is "aesthetico-political" at its core (in both actual and latent magnitudes).

It is through this latency that I read in Lau's work a resistance to re-inscribing patriarchal traditions at the same moment that it memorializes *Nūshū*. Lau does not seek to revive this disappearing language in the way that an activist might do. Instead, he pays tribute to its voicing of overlooked solidarities. *Nūshū: Echo Chambers* seems to respect and appeal to a transindividual voice expressed by the songs of "missing home" and "friendship" that were shared as unnoticed communications between members of a sisterhood.

The sound of the songs has an important physical effect in the exhibition, evoking the inner voice as interlaced with but independent of the body. Both artists directly address the body of the viewer. Kline's paintings have an immersive size and temporal dimension. His title, *La Manche*, is itself a bodily metaphor, referring to the "sleeve," a textile stretched around the wrist, or other part of the body. It suggests a textile, receptive and cylindrical space, that figures the body through its absence. It also folds a counterintuitive depth into the supposed flatness of painting. Correspondingly, Kline has said that these paintings "play in the envelope between medium and genre, touch and distance, material and light."⁹⁷ The idea of "the envelope" might be easier to

⁹⁶ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 4.

⁹⁷ Email from Chris Kline, April 24, 2018.

understand if we note how Massumi describes a line on a chalk board as being not a line, but in fact an oval that crosses the limit between chalk and board.⁹⁸ A mark on a painting is at once on the surface and of the surface. Likewise, a sleeve describes Kline's suggestion of the continuity between surface and support. Lau's work literally frames the body in its pavilions. Like the unstretched canvases and painting stretchers in Kline's work, the bodies of the Nūshū singers are present through their absence. Their voices drift beyond the architectural frame, while their absent bodies are enclosed by the animated structures. Lau's pavilions are places where viewers can enter to focus on the video animations, or rest on the exterior benches and observe Kline's work. Like subverted Minimalism or Post-Minimalism and like architecture, all the work in *Weave* needs the body.⁹⁹

In "Percept, Affect, and Concept," Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss the creation of affects as a job of the artist who "invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters."¹⁰⁰ The interplay of works in *Weave* and their folding together of private process and public encounter make a critical nexus for retreat and openness. They retreat from certain masculine traits associated with power: aggression, stoicism and physical strength. Even the stereotypically masculine actions within space—building structures, cold minimal abstraction, computer animation—are subtly subverted, and the work comes to reveal a far more profound change within the subject. Key instead, is a letting go of servility to territories and a release

⁹⁸ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 89.

⁹⁹ In an influential interview about renewed approaches to formalism and how they can be understood as reclaiming Michael Fried's critique of Minimalism, David Getsy said, "In order to critique a [...] coyness of Minimalism, Fried drew out its solicitation of the viewer—its "need" for the viewer [...] and [...] the affective intensities possible when a viewer engages with even the most reductive geometric form." Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy, "Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation," *ArtJournal Open* (March 31, 2014). <http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=4468>.

¹⁰⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 174.

of infinite variety. Kline's and Lau's works accept groundless grounds, figure pastness and futurity, remain open to vulnerabilities and becomings, and spatialize fugitive forms of expression.

I leave the exhibition's subtle and dynamic interplay of refined gestures. The artists' folding of perception into material, and material into perception, has carried me across aesthetico-political thresholds that prepare a renewed, gracious readiness for collective life.

1.4 Speculative Fiction in the Work of Ibghy and Lemmens

One might enter a hushed museum space containing seeds arranged in a grid and a wooden birdcage under dramatic spotlights. One might encounter a video projection of a woman rehearsing Dutch vowel sounds. In their ongoing project, *The Golden USB* (2014–ongoing), Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens display such objects and concepts in surprising arrangements as samples from the artist duo’s *Trade Catalogue of Everything*. One can comprehend the exhibition’s structure—disparate things assembled, categorized and presented according to a greater idea—even if one doesn’t read the promotional or didactic texts before viewing one of its exhibitions, or perhaps even if one is a child without many historical touchstones. For each presentation, Ibghy and Lemmens add items to and highlight different selections from the ever-growing collection. Repeat samples include a video featuring a performer picking up, displaying and putting back on the ground different organic materials in a single unedited take, a piece entitled *Things That We Did Not Produce through Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, in a Laboratory or a Factory Other than Air and Water—Things Found on the Ground; Things Found in the Ground*.¹⁰¹ As one proceeds through the exhibition, the gold-plated Universal Serial Bus (USB) itself is revealed.

The Golden USB’s titular storage device conveys sublime grandeur elevated high above the humble flash drive’s origin, and accomplishes several formal/conceptual ends. The device is the “greater idea,” a taxonomic and literal vessel for a list of all of the things on display and a proposition concerning their use. The project’s inaugural shock: all of these concepts and objects

¹⁰¹ This demonstrative formal pattern repeats in several samples in the project, including *The Attribution of Numbers to Describe the World—Analog Devices That Determine Quantities in Physical Process—Instruments That Measure Things* (2017).

have been organized and presented as items for sale to aliens through a commercial catalogue. The USB is a container for a trade catalogue to be sent into space to propose a profit-making relationship with extraterrestrials, and contains a functional inventory of goods and services. *The Golden USB* exhibits index each sample to its locus in the catalogue with a graphic floor plan for interstellar shoppers:

Living Things, Alive or Dead, Whole or in Part

Living and Non-Living Things, Transformed into New Things

Non-living Things, Whole or in Part

Invented Things, Material or Immaterial

Everything Else.

A single audio speaker intones a seemingly endless list of the Earth's contents: "Etruscan mythology," . . . "congee," . . . "*If I Didn't Dare* by The Ink Spots in mp3 format," . . . "whiptail lizards," . . . "the concept of historical materialism," . . .

In his preface to *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (1970), Michel Foucault mentions the categories (as told by Borges) in a Chinese encyclopedia for the discrete division of animals, categories such as "belonging to the Emperor," "embalmed," "drawn with a very fine camelhair brush" and "having just broken the water pitcher."¹⁰² Foucault proceeds to describe how the different logic of this systematization marks a limit of thought and contour of the unthinkable: "In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that."¹⁰³ In *The Golden USB* the

¹⁰² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), xviii.

¹⁰³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

idiosyncratic and often poetic systematization by Ibghy and Lemmens seems to be inspired by a non-human sense of radically equalized value. In a reversal of Foucault's formulation, the exteriority of an unthinkable alien "gaze" marks an Earthliness. It also makes an immediate satire of both naive commercialism and anthropocentric value hierarchies and knowledge systems. In its playful nexus of research and experience, it raises pressing questions about reality, history, exchange and solidarity.

The project's conceptual strategy hinges on a double deployment of speculation: economic speculation on the one hand, and speculative fiction on the other. To engage in the former, one bets on the future, usually attached to a framework of property ownership and with a focus on increasing value. For the latter, one entertains notions about the potential of reality, asking "What if?" and playing out thought experiments. In *The Golden USB*, Ibghy and Lemmens invoke and explore the act of looking that is at the root of both forms of speculation. The artists have previously used and continue to use fictions and the act of conveying fiction as fact in their work. They cite The Atlas Group (1984–2004), a project by Walid Raad, as having inspired their approach.¹⁰⁴ Ibghy and Lemmens' *Visions of a Sleepless World* (2014–2015), for example, is a video installation in which we witness a fictional educational video showing the results of wakefulness-inducing drugs. The work positions a performer's errant behaviour to comment on the functionalist management of the human body for greater productivity. It is, meanwhile, inspired by a historical film, and makes reference to the film's having been commissioned by a Swiss pharmaceutical giant that's still in business.¹⁰⁵ It is pertinent to note the connections between labour

¹⁰⁴ Email to the author, May 2017. Also, see a summary of Walid Raad's project here: Kassandra Nakas, "The Atlas Group (1989–2004). A Project by Walid Raad," *Universes in Universe, Nafas*. September 2006, <https://universes.art/en/nafas/articles/2006/the-atlas-group/>.

¹⁰⁵ The artists' website explains: "The idea for the piece is inspired by a film produced by the Belgian-born French writer Henri Michaux in 1963 on the hallucinogenic effects of mescaline and hashish for the Swiss pharmaceutical company Sandoz. The black and white images presented in the small video monitor show the

and attention highlighted by this project. The speculative fiction of *The Golden USB* allows Ibghy and Lemmens to combine their irreverent performance methods with their interest in data visualization, into an investigation of attention itself. Their work's ongoing critiques of knowledge systems and the commodification of life are combined through an experiential and affective space that enacts a satire of the colonial gaze and its framing of the future.¹⁰⁶ The fiction opens a moment for self-reflection through its perturbed sense of agency and fluctuating scales of time and space. Is this what a trade catalogue of everything on Earth would look like? What would it feel like to watch the things and beings of the Earth sold in this way? Where do I stand in relation to them?

Like *Visions of a Sleepless World*, *The Golden USB* is anchored in history. It works by “taking after” NASA's Pioneer Plaque (1972–1973) and Voyager Golden Record (1977). The Pioneer Plaque was a metal plaque illustration attached on Pioneer 10 and Pioneer 11.[7]¹⁰⁷ It was a diagram that attempted to graphically communicate Earth's knowledge and give other beings a sense of the character and advancement of our society. The Voyager Golden Record was a much more elaborate attempt to communicate human knowledge and culture to

current location of the pharmaceutical company in Basel, born of the fusion of Ciba-Geigy and Sandoz in 1996.” *Visions of a Sleepless World* (2014–2015), Ibghy and Lemmens, accessed 1 December 2018. http://www.ibghylemmens.com/Visions_Text.html.

¹⁰⁶ There is only one part of the exhibition that is not part of the *Trade Catalogue of Everything*. This is the business plan, a tongue-in-cheek visualization imagining a possible rationale for the viability of the initiative. Target markets are the habitable planets, and trade routes map the Milky Way. The plan includes one of Ibghy and Lemmens' quintessential ways of working: picturing theories. These miniatures draw from their previous work, specifically *The Prophets*, and are based in real economic theories such as “Points of Indifference,” the theory that there is a point where a quantity of something traded ceases to matter. *The Golden USB*'s business plan bears comparison to the “Financial Section” from Marcel Broodthaers' conceptual museum, the *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles* (1968–1971). “The Financial Section” (1970) attempted to sell the museum itself and produced unlimited golden ingots. Ibghy and Lemmens, and Broodthaers, play off of the methods of presentation possible within a museum, as well as the content viewers expect in these institutions. “Museum As Muse: Artists Reflect,” Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999, accessed 15 September 15, 2017.

https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1999/muse/artist_pages/broodthaers_musee.html.

¹⁰⁷ “NASA on The Commons,” *Flickr Photostream*, accessed September 15, 2017. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nasacommons/>

extraterrestrials.¹⁰⁸ Created in 1977, it was a physical disc sent into space on Voyager 1 and Voyager 2. A collection of our accomplishments, histories, and interesting facts about Earth that was meant to be received for educational purposes, it included a greeting from U.S. President Jimmy Carter and tried to characterize the Earth and humanity with examples of human appearance and arts, through images, field recordings and music such as selections by Johann Sebastian Bach and Blind Willie Johnson. Although self-important and naive, these were seemingly acts of openness and generosity. Perhaps today we might find these gestures foolishly optimistic.

At first blush, *The Golden USB* presents something quite different: an unflattering image of the current epoch. It presents humanity as selling out the planet (and each other) and performing for someone, as if through a giant “selfie.” For whom, performing? And to what end, selling? Marking a movement from plaque to record to flash drive (is *The Golden iCloud* next?), the project seems to reflect how social and political forces have changed since the 1970s. The vector of the last forty years of neoliberal globalization, shown in *The Golden USB* as naturally extending outward to the extraterrestrial is nonetheless surprising. The commercialization of the contents of Earth is not new, of course, but is rather an extension of colonial extractive capitalism and its turf wars.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, however, we can easily imagine a “space force” staking out interplanetary coordinates and introducing capitalist property relations, with trade following quickly. The more recent development is the naturalization of colonial extractive capitalism, which no longer seeks to be hidden by humanistic goals. Ibghy and Lemmens are working at a moment when their sophisticated humour is mugged by true absurdities. The recent resumption of the American

¹⁰⁸ “What are the contents of the Golden Record?” NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology: Voyager, accessed 15 September 2017. <https://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/whats-on-the-record/>.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, “Our Latest Greatest Hope,” *L’avenir (looking forward)* (Montreal: Montreal Biennale, 2014), 202.

government's interest in space betrays this bald collusion between military muscle and colonial greed. Witness American president Donald Trump's "space force" announcement and the less and less secret commercial interests in conquering space.¹¹⁰ *The Golden USB* is a fiction that is astonishingly prescient in this regard, addressing nothing less than the threatened destruction of the commons in space. Given power, an early twenty-first century American president could seek to rescind the UN treaty that made space "common space."¹¹¹ Yet, Ibgly and Lemmens's project is not a requiem for the heyday of space exploration. Despite its playfully all-encompassing volume, it is not nostalgic for the Golden Record's universal presentation of humanity—its thinly veiled white male privilege underscores what is excluded from the commons—or even its sense of naive realism.

The project satirizes gross colonial commercialism by taking it to absurd lengths, whereby the further the abstraction that is capital gets from Earth, the less natural and more alien it becomes. Correspondingly, the more intimate the terrestrial "product," the more alarming its display feels. For example, just beneath the outer crust of Earth is a second layer that makes up eighty percent of our planet's material: the mantle.¹¹² Humans have never been there, which might suggest to aliens that it is "up for grabs" if broadcast in the right way. Ibgly and Lemmens use the Roman legal concept of *Res Nullius*, which means, "new things not owned by anyone or abandoned things" to categorize this part of the Earth as *Terra Nullius*.¹¹³ The term *Terra Nullius* was arguably used to

¹¹⁰ Sarah Lewin, Associate Editor at Space.com recently wrote: "The department [of Commerce] also sent a legislative proposal to create a consolidated bureau of space commerce, leading to a one-stop shop for space commerce regulation." "Plans for Space Force Laid Out at National Space Council Meeting," October 23, 2018, accessed November 1, 2018. <https://www.space.com/42237-national-space-council-space-force-meeting.html>.

¹¹¹ "Can any state claim a part of outer space as its own?" *United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs*, accessed September 15, 2017, <http://unoosa.org/oosa/en/informationfor/faqs.html>.

¹¹² This sample was suggested through a collaboration with Alexander Braun, a geophysicist at Queen's University.

¹¹³ "res nullius," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed 1 November 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/res%20nullius>.

rationalize Europe's colonization of Africa and Australia.¹¹⁴ There is nothing, it seems, that can escape objectification and speculation. And the cosmic estrangement of each thing in *The Golden USB* is consistently startling, as the artists generously deploy the value-laden significance imparted by art and museum spaces. For each sample, the experience of its material and affective qualities forms a parallax for the economic lens, distorting it to the point of absurdity. How, we must begin to ask, can we value the contents of the Earth and the lives of humans alongside each other?

Ibghy and Lemmens describe their modus operandi as “making things matter.” Often this involves materializing illustrations of abstract concepts, as with the “charts” of *The Prophets* (2013–2015), through which they take them down a notch with the bathos of their fragile and diminutive materiality. In works such as *Real failure needs no excuse* (2012), Ibghy and Lemmens contest economic speculation's permeation of everyday life by taking time to play within and dissociate from the instrumentality of labour time and the supposed purposefulness of materials. Through the labour invested in research they seem to ask, “How do things matter?”

Here again the artists seek to profane the economy.¹¹⁵ *The Golden USB*'s particular form of “mattering” formally challenges the expansions of ownership. Ibghy and Lemmens portray this extension and expansion as both outward (the creation of colonies) and inward (the colonization and commodification of social life). Wealth and wisdom alike are privatized and segmented for profit. Like *The Prophets* as described by Lorna Brown, *The Golden USB* is “oriented toward growth and accumulating like capital.”¹¹⁶ Its expanding catalogue symbolizes a form of growth in that it mimics economic expansion, and perhaps imitates both global markets and museum plunder

¹¹⁴ There is some controversy concerning legal uses of the term, specifically whether it came into use during colonization or later, during legal battles for decolonization. In any case, the idea of “nobody's land” describes colonial behaviours that presume property relations and erase Indigenous peoples.

¹¹⁵ The artists use this formulation. See Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, “Our Latest Greatest Hope” *L'avenir (looking forward)* (Montreal: Montreal Biennale, 2014), 202.

¹¹⁶ Lorna Brown, essay in this volume.

through colonial expropriation. Confronting the growth of *The Golden USB*, we are asked to reappraise the framework of the Earth and its contents (including social life) as held in common. Does this “in-common” shrink correspondingly? Among the propositions in *The Golden USB*, it is this attentive labour that we are encouraged to do. Because, as an ostensible by-product of the preposterous premise, within the exhibition we are close to the creative profusion of the stuff of the Earth.

But one is faced with a choice about how to proceed with this looking. One is seemingly caught between the project’s false totality and the isolation of the particular samples, between the satire of the universal and the detachment of the local fragment. Furthermore, one is caught in a possible turn from technological utopia toward nostalgia for nature.

Thinking about the 2013 post-apocalyptic science fiction film *Oblivion* may help to clarify this bind. It is a film that shares with *The Golden USB* a concern for the encounter with things as a key to a social commons of history. Jack Chambers (played by Tom Cruise) is an indentured man at the tail end of his servitude and hours away from being delivered to a new home planet. Anticipating a bright future, he and his “mop-up crew” repair the last drones employed in a massive Earth energy extraction project. We eventually learn that Chambers is a clone, whose memories are replaced each night; he is a component in a great machine, and living a completely fictitious existence under the perpetual illusion of near salvation. He is plagued, however, by remembrances of a different life that come in flashes as if from an obscured history. These flashes are triggered by his discovery of lost experiences from the past, such as putting on a vinyl record and drinking from a clear stream.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Joseph Kosinski, *Oblivion* (Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 2013), Netflix.com.

The film sets up an opposition between machinic colonial capitalism and nostalgia for authentic life, pre-digital warmth and closeness to nature. Perhaps one acts out this contradiction today when one participates in the degradation of the Earth's environment in the name of comfort and progress. In the absence of false humanist public goals, one projects idealism onto Silicon Valley, with its new thin forms of social commons and proposals of technological band-aids for climate change. If valuing technology and a longing for nature both seem disconnected from the possibility of sustainable planetary life, it's because nostalgia plays a role in amnesia, as the weak twin of progress that helps capitalism's power seems inescapable.¹¹⁸ As in the film, the illusion of scarcity and the injunction to work both obscure the commonality of earthly heritage in contemporary society. Experience of the world for its own sake, and confronting the unknown while learning from it, continually lose ground to the imperatives of productivity driving capitalist economic forces. We seem less and less able to centre material experience where it counts: in our cultural and social aspirations, and in our labour as a consequence. Repressed material needs, forces of the non-human and non-organic return, and not in a good way.

Only the broken clone with ultra-competent observation skills can unlearn his "self" and ultimately connect with humans. Perhaps the implied higher ethics of *Oblivion's* scriptwriters, as the superego within the film, causes the breakage, lending Chambers visions of an alternate life? Or is it the work of the clone's unconscious? Or that of the scriptwriters?

Lacanian psychoanalysis would have it that the gaze of commerce is one of desire that thrives on absence and lack.¹¹⁹ Is this lack what drives colonial expansion? *The Golden*

¹¹⁸ Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis used the term "porosity" to describe cities where the new and old overlap thus providing a space of play. Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis, "Naples," *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1976), 168.

¹¹⁹ Todd McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and its Vicissitudes," *Cinema Journal* 42.3 (Spring 2003): 27-47; and Loraine Haywood, "Reflecting Absence, Mediating 'the Real': *Oblivion* as a requiem for 9/11." *Performance of the Real Working Papers* 1, no. 2: 26-46.

USB's tradeshow scenario places the perspective of commercial desire onto an anterior gaze, which is then, by virtue of our taking the place of aliens, displaced onto the viewer, likewise shifting the direction of audience desire uncomfortably onto things of the Earth (including ourselves). Ibghy and Lemmens' experiential space for comparing acquisitive and non-acquisitive attention reveals how the gaze can function dialectically as both a function of mastery and as a momentary glimpse of the Real.¹²⁰ Art also instrumentalizes, but it does so differently. The artist duo has staged material relations from an oblique historical perspective that makes the hold of paradigms momentarily porous, and supports forms of attention based on improvisation and asking questions.¹²¹

Ibghy and Lemmens contend with the humbling force of computing and communication technology in shaping the human sensorium, by taking an unapologetic step toward a joyful montage of the rough, analog cornucopia of being. It hardly seems important whether it is art or not. Everyday stuff is "immortalized" and simultaneously radically de-valued. The artists place research and their experience of reality at the forefront of a gallery project, forging a unique locus for knowledge-labour. *The Golden USB* relies on the non-commercial museum space for the impact of its premise, of course. It also draws its form from Conceptual Art's propositions, documents and readymades.¹²² However, it blithely sidesteps the trappings of art historical reception with a seamless takeover of viewing spaces and behaviours through its lighting, material density and signage.

¹²⁰ Perhaps, as further discussion illuminates, we are dealing with a "symbiotic real" in Timothy Morton's terms, rather than "psychoanalytic real," in Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017), 21.

¹²¹ Benjamin and Lācis, "Naples," *Reflections*, 168.

¹²² David Joselit lists these components of conceptual art in his essay about the activity of the aggregate in globally circulating conceptual art projects. A longer study might place *The Golden USB* in this art historical context. See David Joselit, "On Aggregators," *October* 146 (October 2013): 3-18, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275012976_On_Aggregators.

While certainly profaning lofty ideals, here “making things matter” also operates in reverse, with the stress on “matter” as a value statement; that is, these things are *important*. These things *matter* historically. Amid the hypothetical version of a trade show, forms of mattering collide as things are estranged, their value thrown into question, and the material quality of things matters differently. As one begins to experience the project, a tension reveals itself between fiction and reality. The conceptual premise of *The Golden USB* is gradually superseded by the careful attention paid to the sensuous materiality and aesthetic richness of its contents. Samples are given singular attention in a way that might contrast with the vulgarity of commodification by slowing us down and directing our attention to the qualities of things around us. *The Golden USB* is affective, immersive, and even relational. The exhibition has a sonorous quality, with multi-sensory experience. Indeed, on a physical and emotional level the experience is more like an ecosystem than a catalogue or even a trade show. It is not insignificant that it is the labour of both cataloguing and looking that comes into relief in that moment. *The Golden USB* encourages disobedient attention to objects within its conceptual regime. Against a fossilized regime of commodification, the artists place emphasis on sensory experience.

Where do “we” stand? *The Golden USB*'s heightened irony forbids the occult, and in the absence of the transcendent, and amid the catalogue's abundant fuel for rapacious commodification, we are faced with a posthuman extremity that verges on “post-ethical.”¹²³ For example, the inclusion of human beings like “grandmothers” in the list of things for alien scrutiny, evaluation or consumption describes a vision of the posthuman wherein all things are

¹²³ Here, a third kind of speculative gesture confronts economic speculation and speculative fiction: speculative realism. I refer to it here in an unfairly simplified way to point to the ways that Ibghy and Lemmens provisionally suspend human value systems and to the somewhat capitalist-aligned results of the current philosophical attempts to think beyond the human.

instrumentalized. Recognizing a tendency to “appropriate and externalize”¹²⁴ one can begin to feel what it might mean to be threatened with the colonization of oneself, and perhaps the ways in which one participates in the colonization of others. When the project shifts occasionally from organizing objects to organizing subjects, the discomfort with such dehumanization increases.¹²⁵ What happens, for example, should the artists include something that is sacred or crosses the line in terms of cultural appropriation? The humorous tone would fail. Some contents of the Earth cannot be fitted to the functioning of the artistic project, because it depends on debasement. Consider recent critiques of posthuman ontologies for the way they ignore the racist dehumanization of some humans.¹²⁶ It is the very sense of dehumanization that threatens, when one feels it in *The Golden USB*. It is this that is alarming. Meanwhile, one is reminded of relationships and emotional ties to our planet and those living on it. Perhaps we can practise rejecting the false choices of transcendent totality or alienated fragment, utopia or nostalgia.

Ibghy and Lemmens’ project is not a retreat into a localist position. There are salvageable ruins of universal address in the experience of *The Golden USB*. Indeed, it brings about more than just alienation. A rejection of separation and instrumentalization opens the potential of solidarity with the non-human. Through a reappraisal of the human, the posthuman is used here to point to a different solidarity. Because he appears so curious about the remnants of civilization, Cruise’s character in *Oblivion* is recognized as different from the other clones by the “scavs” (who are

¹²⁴ Morton, *Humankind*, 35.

¹²⁵ In one development of the project, the artist duo devised an artistic version of a committee process to structure their residency at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston. They sought ideas from local artists, scholars, poets, technicians, and curators among others, as to what should be added to the catalogue. This process intentionally mirrors the process undertaken around the Golden Record when Carl Sagan created the committee that decided on the Record’s final contents.

¹²⁶ For a survey of such critiques see Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy,” *Lateral Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2016), accessed 6 October 2018. <https://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-new-materialist-philosophy-tompkins/>.

actually humans gone underground). He improvises in a wrecked baseball stadium, performing through the porosities of overlaid historical plots. By figuring viewers as the customers for our own stuff in *The Golden USB*, the project allows one to see “stuff” through an alienated perspective whereby one is reminded of a common condition. The samples, as dialectical images figured against the porosity of the catalogue, encourage attention to speculative solidarities. Despite their isolation in plinths under glass and their capture in video, and despite the seeming arbitrariness of their selection, the “samples” are bonded and interrelated. They/we belong together. The affective quality of material experience can help us, in its detail, to question our true distance from life, and perhaps from “the other.” The logic of “everything,” so tenderly funny in this project, might suggest there is actually a universality to be sought in the idea of solidarity as a noisy thing including non-humans.¹²⁷ A posthumanist paradigm shift can even help us to understand our imbricated relations with the non-human, and maybe to see plainly the abstractions that help us to objectify and instrumentalize. This new cosmic perspective might adjust our economic value system in ways that recognize its dialectical relationship with social forces, by drawing attention to our tendency to externalize and appropriate. With this project Ibgby and Lemmens provoke exercises of collective thought about the things around us before or after exchange.¹²⁸

The Golden USB is staged as a futuristic proposal that reveals its belonging to the past in its reflection of colonial capitalism, and is ultimately a way to understand the present through these deteriorating tectonics. Like the pedagogical services Ibgby and Lemmens propose on their intergalactic marketplace, *The Golden USB*, itself, is a provisional tool for remapping the brain, this time with material relations at the core of reality. This aspect of the project injects a sense of the

¹²⁷ Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, 23.

¹²⁸ McKenzie Wark on Francois Laruelle: “It is an astonishing thought: that of a Real untouched by exchange, a Real unknown *and unknowable* to capital.” McKenzie Wark, “Laruelle’s Kinky Syntax,” *Public Seminar*, 23 (April 2015). <https://publicseminar.org/2015/04/laruelles-kinky-syntax/>.

historical into intimate habits of knowing things, creating a space for breaking away from teleology. *The Golden USB* is a machine for noticing that plays both sides of the idea of universality. It asks us to look around—rather than look ahead—at the multiplicity, the mutability, the marvelous variety, beauty and relations.¹²⁹ The project continues as a tool for “looking around” itself. What connects me to the earth? Am I in solidarity with the non-human? In what way am I in solidarity with aliens?

¹²⁹ This “art of noticing” is suggested in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 21. Also, Jussi Parikka has written of “psychogeophysics,” which McKenzie Wark suggests might “be able to detect and map a much deeper and broader field of “vortexes, flows and eddies,” aiming for a “planetary scale aesthetics” without letting go of the category of labour. McKenzie Wark, “A Geology of Media,” *Public Seminar* (February 2017), accessed December 2, 2018. <https://publicseminar.org/2017/02/parikka>.

1.5 Forays in the Underburden

In 2018, Agnes Etherington Art Centre was invited to think with dark matter by the Arthur B. McDonald Canadian Astroparticle Physics Research Institute (McDonald Institute) and SNOLAB. In group forays—which included the participating artists Nadia Lichtig, Josèfa Ntjam, Anne Riley, and Jol Thoms—we journeyed deep under the surface of the Earth on the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation, Robinson-Huron Treaty territory, now Sudbury, Canada. After plunging two kilometres into Creighton Mine #9 in a caged elevator, we parted ways with the groups of miners who were heading to work and walked laterally into the ground through a hot dark mining *drift*, a horizontal passageway that follows the vein of a mineral deposit. To reach SNOLAB, scientists walk together in their boots, orange coveralls, and headlamps through a drift in

the active Vale copper and nickel mine to antechambers, where they shower and change their clothing before entering the brightly lit, ultra-clean physics laboratory. When the lab's astroparticle detectors are switched on, the mass of underground rock located above them is effectively converted into an essential component of various particle sensing technologies. While we were only down in the lab for day trips during two week-long visits that were part of the residency, the subterranean visit provided an exceptional point of departure for the exhibition (and eponymous publication) *Drift: Art and Dark Matter*. As the curator of the exhibition, in what follows, I trace the polyvocal potentials of the artistic works and approach them as sensory agents that have emerged alongside the search for undetectable dark matter in the incomprehensibly vast Universe that it improbably holds together.

Mattering Out of Sight

Unseeable matter exists, slipping past flows of light, unaffected by forces binding together more familiar material realities. Making up most of the matter in the Universe, its gravitational energy seems to hold galaxies together. Not only does this so-called “dark” matter contribute to the cosmos being held together, but scientists have also proposed that many galaxies would never have been born without its constituent mass.¹³⁰ While it imperceptibly and indifferently passes through us, dark matter scaffolds the conditions of our own origins and becoming-life on planet Earth.

With the aid of the norite rock's density, more common particles are slowed and filtered out, allowing SNOLAB experiments to search for both rare and speculative particles. The affordances of deceleration are well known to artists; indeed, artworks can preserve fluxes of sensation that

¹³⁰ NASA, “Galaxies Over Time,” James Webb Space Telescope (website), <https://jwst.nasa.gov/content/science/galaxies.html>.

otherwise pass too quickly to be noticed.¹³¹ Artists and curators slow down and organize chaos. As an analogy, slowing helps me to think about art as a grounded beginning for *Drift: Art and Dark Matter*, a project adrift within a multiplicity of ungrounded zones, as well as various traversals, anticipations, and disjunctions.

Like particles decelerated by the cold terrestrial mass of the Sudbury Basin, overzealous questions can also be slowed, as well as given shape in and through the materials of art and written speculation, and thereby fully encountered. Questions about the Earth, the body, language, mattering, and agency emerge along with the work of the *Drift* residency artists. What drives the desire to isolate and detect dark matter? Through what pragmatics and unconscious transferences is it established as a scientific problem? What worlds make its stories? Could we already have a non-sensory affinity or non-rational kinship with dark matter?¹³² Does dark matter already contribute to the sensible, even if its role is beyond our contemporary comprehension? What power and freedom, multiplicity, or wild agency are indefinite and alive within the Earth and within bodies? What worlds can dark matter's stories engender? What might it help reveal of a people yet to come?

Given dark matter's strict incompatibility with the human senses, artists in the *Drift* residency looked right through it, or past it, and instead found other connections to both the

¹³¹ In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's model of aesthetic experience, intensities mark the limits of perception and much of reality is virtual (real but not actual). An artwork is a "bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects." In art's encounter with visitors, universes of reference set off new refrains. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 164. Notably, in another work, Guattari quotes Marcel Duchamp proclaiming, "Art is a road which leads towards regions which are not governed by time and space." Félix Guattari, "The new aesthetic paradigm," *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 101.

¹³² Physicists suspect that even if it is a particle, dark matter will remain opaque to unassisted direct perception. And yet, wouldn't dark matter contribute directly (or indirectly) to the gravity we experience as weight on Earth?

laboratory and the Earth. They began by addressing the material and conceptual supports and speculative repercussions of dark matter's "known unknown" condition rather than contriving to represent the non-visual.

Anne Riley's key work, *dark matter garden* (2021–ongoing), for example, steps past experimental detection and begins instead with the land and deep time. It takes the form of a gift of commitment to, and care for, a piece of the planet and all life that might pass through it over eons, both past and future. This work is carefully attuned to healing the land and deepening a multitude of relations with and through it; in our present context, the work meets contemporary oppressive systems, conflicting ways of occupying the land, and differing accounts of invisible forces that surround us. Significantly, Riley meets them outside the gallery and outside the exhibition timeline to reach for a spacetime of renewed freedom.

To discuss her intentions for this expanded garden form, in 2019, Riley began reaching out to Elders within Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee communities in now-Kingston, Canada. In August 2021, she heaped soil and rich mushroom compost into an oval shape about nine metres in length on the lawn of Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Nourishing the life that is already there, she also communicated an open invitation for Elders to plant in the zone. Agnes Etherington Art Centre has committed to stewarding relationships around the piece and attending to the work's ongoing teachings; among these, practising complicity with the occluded land and excluded peoples. The local university will continue to manicure the lawns and plant annual flowers around it but will leave the oval region to recover as a space of small but tangible Indigenous freedom or to simply regain a circumscribed but genuine wildness in peace.

Artistic participation in these contexts requires a magnitude of labour that is largely invisible to settler-colonial partners.¹³³ Extraction and denial prevail in institutions and coalesce into a continued ignorance of the hidden workings of power within modes enacted with even the best of intentions.¹³⁴ For this project, thinking with extra-colonial time and the darkness and softness of soil, Riley instead seems to figure her own emotional labours toward social healing as engendering a form of kinship with dark matter. *dark matter garden* is suffused with care and respect for life, and this may buoy her labouring-in-solidarity to allow it to reach beyond bitterness, to intra-act with a small patch of land. Evading oppressive mass, bending spacetime, the work may move joyfully, as if alongside dark matter's indifferent velocity.

In a 2019 performance called *I am nameless*, Josèfa Ntjam looped and manipulated poetic chants until, in the final moments, her repeating voice was pushed lower, granulated and abstracted.¹³⁵ This granulation suggests permeable molecular states of organization that allow difference to operate in stable conceptions of the self, collectivity, or the Earth, recalling the exchange and resistance of particles between matter. Ntjam's installation for *Drift* includes *Luciferin*

¹³³ For Anne Riley, engaging with modern, white-coded art or Western science systems as a Dene artist presents the risk of increasing the burden of trauma, the result of the wrongs still inflicted on Indigenous peoples. Indigenous artists might experience Western science and art systems complexly as symptoms of a centuries-long state of emergency, as suspicious mechanisms of an intruding force, or sometimes begrudge them as presently unavoidable pathways. Conversation with the artist. See also Anne Riley, "Iladzeee: Pulse in the Wrist," *MICE Magazine* (Spring 2016). <https://micemagazine.ca/issue-one/%C4%AFIadzeee%CC%81-pulse-wrist>.

¹³⁴ Whether land is the explicit object of one's focus or not, one's artistic practice is forced to be associated with the expropriation of land and dislocation that is a legacy of colonization. Frequently, one's identity gets foregrounded by institutions in a way that allows (re-)racialization that normalizes systemic practices. In these institutions, one is occasionally included, and overtly or subtly asked to do the work to represent one's identity group, marked as rescued victim, or expect to share special cultural wisdom. And then one is even asked to labour in the effort to decolonize science and art. For these artists, institutions are fraught with dangers as systems that consciously or unconsciously threaten both extraction and normalization, all with "virtue signalling" smiles. Broken trust takes time to reconstitute. It is rare for decolonizing institutions to take the real risks required for the beauty of real change. On these and many other questions related to settler-colonial politics, see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

¹³⁵ Josèfa Ntjam, *I am nameless* (2019). <https://vimeo.com/376128569>.

Drop (2020), a large blown-glass beaker-like vessel containing glowing green liquid and resting on a stand fashioned from four replicas of human feet. The sculptural bare feet evoke a sensitivity to touching the ground while simultaneously striking a transient and fugitive stance signaled by speed-blur lines. Meanwhile, Ntjam assembles layers of mimicry and associations with extraordinary deep places and times: among them, Western science's hidden histories in Africa, galaxy rotation, the enzyme that causes bioluminescence, and glowing flashes prepared in underground particle detectors at SNOLAB. The sculpture seems to take direct inspiration from the use of scintillating fluid to reveal particle interactions in the liquid argon-based DEAP-3600 dark matter detector or the SNO+ neutrino detector.¹³⁶ In such remote thresholds, the deep seems to urge transformation: like deep-sea creatures, SNOLAB's deep-Earth prosthetics bring inventive modes of sensation ever closer to what has never yet been perceived.

Ntjam's video installation *Myceaqua Vitae* (2020) carries the viewer through a vast rotating starfield until a giant water droplet slips through the centre of a spinning galaxy (narrated as the birth of a luminescent mushroom), and it then plunges viewers into the planetary—through what one imagines are successively smaller particle zones of molecules, atoms, and so on. Together, Ntjam's imagery and poetic narration evoke fractal relationships of scale and hint at recursive flows of time. To create a kind of sci-fi viewscreen station, Ntjam plants a circular textile work, called *Organic Nebulae* (2019), on the ground in front of three screens. This carpet is adorned with digitally assembled images of uncategorizable mauve entities and a Benin ceremonial mask, among other things. The appearance of the African mask evokes differing sciences, non-Euclidean geometries of past and future—like the mathematics from the plundered ancient flourishing capital

¹³⁶ SNOLAB, "Active Experiments." <https://www.snolab.ca/science/experiments/>.

of Edo.¹³⁷ Ntjam insists upon such a liberatory potentiality already at work—not in origins or destinations, but in fugitive solidarities of life across space and time.

From a human perspective, dark matter indicates a curious excess within existence, for it is extraneous to the direct particle building blocks of “regular” matter. Likewise, art exists in speculative and aesthetic excesses far beyond reason and utility, often resulting in unaccountable strangeness (from a human perspective). The art in the *Drift* exhibition can seem even more fantastical for its proximity to the rationality of science. Ntjam repurposes representational strategies from biology, chemistry, physics, and science fiction to disclose unfathomable intensifications of beauty. Physicist Dr. Tony Noble remarked that the feet in *Luciferin Drop* make it look like a wildly unwarranted crustacean body. As we will see, while it may not be arranged to affirm it, science, too, reaches such strangeness beyond reason and utility.

The sound of inhalation in a darkened room. Light falls on regions of marked cloth and then jumps across the ground, glowing briefly and fading in new spots, fluctuating in synch with sounds of breathing and vocalizing. In Nadia Lichtig’s *Blank Spots (Reichstagbunker)* (2017–2022), breath and intoning voice sounds are linked to a theatre lighting sequence that frames and reframes sectors of unstretched canvas frottage on the floor; their sonic and visual shifts are near-simultaneous. The aggregation of breath, sound, light, and earthly canvas forms an indefinite being, a space for considering life as a cosmic phenomenon and consciousness as entangled with the Universe. This near simultaneity recalls the theory of non-locality, whereby particles at a distance

¹³⁷ See Mawuna Koutonin, “Story of cities #5: Benin City, the mighty medieval capital now lost without trace,” *The Guardian* (18 March 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/18/story-of-cities-5-benin-city-edo-nigeria-mighty-medieval-capital-lost-without-trace>; Paulus Gerdes, “On Mathematics in the History of Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Historia Mathematica* 21 (1994): 345–76.

may be linked as if they are a single entity.¹³⁸ Bodies are re-linked, adjusted as singularities formed with the air we breathe and waves of sound, only tenuously distinct from the ground we walk on.

Each canvas has been hand-coloured with careful site-specific rubbing and drawing processes that sometimes result in traced patterns evoking flooring or sometimes recall stains created from scouring blemishes or spills. In both cases, the frottages convey a searching intimacy with the ground and a sense of exhaustive repetition. Lichtig's *Blank Spots* ritually draws household or familiar dust from the ground and puts it into analogous relation with the cosmic dust that is purportedly the foundational stuff of all earthly matter, the vestiges from exploded stars that are "regular matter." Playful translations in Lichtig's work include associating stardust with what she calls "unglamorous" dust. Her series of five photograms, *Dust (Reinigungsarbeiten)* (2020), takes visual traces of cleaning work through transmutations wrought by scalar ambiguity to express reveries of the cosmic.

It is key to remember that although we don't seem to need dark matter, we're indebted to it in ways we haven't yet learned to appreciate. While making up most of the matter of the Universe, dark matter is thought to be decaying matter leftover from the Big Bang.¹³⁹ Lichtig's provocations cover more ground if dark matter may be compared to lingering wreckage, like the material traces of history that are around us every day yet dismissed as waste. We forget, deny, or take for granted dark matter's role in creating us and our conditions. What if dark matter could be theorized through the materiality of such oblivion, in and through those things that don't appear as useful, but which are in reality essential. Walter Benjamin articulates the estranged traces of non-linear time

¹³⁸ George Musser, "How Einstein Revealed the Universe's Strange 'Nonlocality,'" *Scientific American* (November 1, 2015). <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-einstein-revealed-the-universe-s-strange-nonlocality/>.

¹³⁹ Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, *The Disordered Cosmos: A Journey into Dark Matter, Spacetime, and Dreams Deferred* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021), 20.

carried by the debris of history in his final essay, “On the Concept of History.”¹⁴⁰ One could say, taking up Benjamin’s thread, that what we tend to think of as debris is actually a multiplicity of connectors among apparently disparate spacetime continua. Similarly, overlooked dust drawn from the oppressed past enables new senses of becoming in Lichtig’s work, where thought may drift with dark matter past the certainties of progress and earthliness.

The Earth is brought into focus again through Jol Thoms’s installation *n-Land: the holographic (principle)* (2021), especially by way of a large relief map of the impact crater made by the comet that created the Sudbury Basin 1.85 billion years ago. The hum of industrial ventilation and the wisps of a wind tunnel—sounds that Thoms recorded in the underground drift—saturate the room. Thoms delicately fastened shatter cones and norite rocks that he acquired from museum giftshops into brass sculptural armatures. He diagrams the land in every layer of his speculative assemblage of images, apparatuses, and stories. The central video, *n-Land* (2021), draws us from pre-ancestral comet impact, down through underground mining and laboratory spaces, where we encounter some of the measureless implications of the many-worlds interpretation (MWI) of quantum mechanics as relayed by the altered voice of Dr. Miriam Diamond. The video then re-surfaces to dwell on the autumn landscape above ground as intertitles acknowledge the local First Nations. Incorporating scans of archival records of the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty into the video (as well as the prints and photocopies of recent legal documents in the installation), Thoms refers to the current annuities case through which the local Anishinabek First Nations are challenging the Canadian Government’s failure to honour the Robinson-Huron Treaty. How would the story of

¹⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 389–400.

progress change if the obscured matter of its victims and protagonists were seen to be lending agency to each other?

Thoms's conception of landscape-laboratories as deterritorialized scientific assemblies (or new modes of Earth-ing) informs his artistic construction of associative layers; these layers might collectively enunciate unexplored disclosures of potential new adjacencies. He expands the repertoire for thinking landscape-laboratories in this work with the holographic model borrowed from theoretical physics, along with diffractive methods developed by Karen Barad; with these conceptual allies, *n-Land: the holographic (principle)* traces the interference of earthly and cosmic layers across dimensional projections. For Thoms, such a method might open human thought to realizing its intra-active diffractive relationship.¹⁴¹ From such de-centred coordinates, dark matter's opaque-yet-gravitational assembly might suggest that Western culture's inheritance of subject-object separability is inadequate to the task of knowledge. How does the acquisition of artistic and scientific knowledge participate in the project of colonialism by insisting on logics of separability? Can we learn from dark matter how to evolve beyond cultural and environmental extraction and its engine of rapacious capitalism and instead strive for relations beyond taking (and knowing)?

Often, astroparticle physics asks us to look far afield: out into distant space, to the origins of the Universe, to weird quantum states, or to a future time. While the artworks in *Drift* often retain certain attachments to Western scientific concepts, they also try to incorporate bigger questions profanely and approach them as things we share in. It is commonplace that science and art function through looking with "new eyes." Art often begins by "looking again" and "looking around" at the

¹⁴¹ Thoms is probing the ethics of Karen Barad's diffraction methodologies and onto-epistemology. Intra-action "describes the mutual constitution of entangled agency, that is the mutual constitution of our ability to act." See "intra-action," <http://makecommoningwork.fed.wiki/view/intra-action>; and Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

strange within the earthly familiar.¹⁴² The experience of travelling underground together to SNOLAB may have helped to expose the enigmatic within the terrestrial. Drawing from the limitations indicated by the singularity of dark matter itself, each of the artists brings the Earth into contact with a variety of speculatively decentred perceptions. How do we make a hospitable home (*oikos*, eco-) in a largely imperceptible universe of chaos and change?¹⁴³ Such an ungrounded grounding allows the artists to reorder elements into art. As their earthly imaginings reach beyond individuated human consciousness and its practices of life, time, or space, they enable artistic speculations about the body in a more concerted assembly.

Matters That Em-body

Bodies are both aesthetic and anaesthetic, sensitive and self-shielding. Like a giant kidney, the two kilometres of rock between SNOLAB and the surface of the Earth filters out particles and radiation that researchers are not searching for, thereby suppressing the cosmic background. Both art and science often require types of isolation through techniques of filtering and shielding to obtain their desired results. In the case of art, infrastructural filters often perpetuate forms of concealed authority hiding within an apparently critical platform. For example, the art gallery's "white cube" space claims a Euclidean universalism and neutrality maintained by eliminating or absorbing so-called "minor" cultural ways, associative behaviours, or adjacent sensations. Science largely filters out and dislocates sociopolitical and ethical questions; art permits, celebrates, and recognizes

¹⁴² Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's take on the practice of "looking around" is a clear influence on *Drift*. See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹⁴³ An insight from Leroy Little Bear exposes the structures of differing sciences: Western science assumes it discovers the hidden order of the broader world, whereas Indigenous science assumes it is bringing local order to a universe of constant flux. See Dr. Leroy Little Bear, "Rethinking our Science: Blackfoot Metaphysics Waiting in the Wings. Reflections by a Blackfoot," a public webinar at Queen's University Biological Station (12 April 2021), <https://qubs.ca/littlebear>.

them—only to the point of simulating temporary freedom, releasing the pressures of general antagonism.¹⁴⁴

Space often appears in science and art as an abstraction or metaphor de-linked from bodies. Reversing this tendency, Josèfa Ntjam welcomes the visitor's body into the spacecraft form of her installation and its circular sense of scale wherein the tiny and the vast are visited at once.¹⁴⁵ Its curvilinear spacecraft console visualizes "alien" signals. She uses the familiar motif from science fiction to construct a prophetic image of science as seen from embodied perspectives unthinkable in our present.

Anne Riley's insistence on cultural healing begins from an acknowledgement of the violence enacted through and on bodies by the logistics of ruling social relations. Her video document, *the heart of the matter* (2020), features a recording of a video call in which she speaks directly to visitors about the possibility of saying "I love you" to herself in Dene and what this might do. Her question develops in relation to specific forms of change to her body that could help recover such an ancestral belongingness for the future—a hidden love. In a parallel to the scientific search for dark matter whereby SNOLAB's experiments "feel for" signals of rare particles (beyond touch as we perceive it), Riley's focus on the sensory being and possibilities of the body initiates a different kind of search.

Riley's attention to emotional labour also underscores how frequently settlers demand Indigenous artists address the appearance or disappearance of indigeneity through an insistence that compounds colonial oppression of racialized and Indigenous peoples. In the context of *Drift*, a demand converges on Riley to reveal and articulate Indigenous cosmology, or, in some way to react

¹⁴⁴ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021), 124.

¹⁴⁵ Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, "Grounding Metaphor: Towards a spatialized politics," *Place and the Politics of Identity*, eds. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (New York: Routledge, 1993), 67–83.

to Western science explicitly on behalf of her culture. The *Drift* project presumes, perhaps, to share Riley's identity. Instead, she studies invisible-ized relations and curiosities carried by the body.¹⁴⁶ She points to the ways in which queer and Indigenous bodies and desires have been imperceptible to institutions, always empowered in solidarity, yet disregarded in the genuine formation of institutional visions.¹⁴⁷ She evokes an excluded "body" analogous to an "undercommons" or "the surround" in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's terms, as well as the multitudes of support workers and unseen artists in Gregory Sholette's metaphorical dark matter.¹⁴⁸

Emotional labour is, at first glance, akin to direct particle detection—as if it were the registration in the body of unseen mass. With *the heart of the matter* and *dark matter garden* Riley seems to organize her own variety of filtering, rather, to suppress the "background" of colonial "noise" in science and in art to create a quiet, energetic space amenable for healing with human and non-human relations. Rather than knowing, the body is involved in joining. Riley makes the body visible in her video while entailing a hidden matter, a longed-for presence.

Nadia Lichtig's *Blank Spots* conjures the absent body that exhales and sings, the human who rubs canvas against the ground to create frottage. The visitor's body is redoubled in intensity. The work entails an artistic subjectivity that is tracking a cartography, and the exhibition label refers to the artist's practice of constellating crime scenes. Lichtig figures her own search for the missing within her personal story, one "smuggled in" and not directly available in the work.¹⁴⁹ She has

¹⁴⁶ A previous work by Anne Riley and Cease Wyss, *Soundtrack for the Radical Love of Butterflies* (2018), is an audio cassette that draws attention to the shrouded transformation of the butterfly (in the context of Mike MacDonald's work). A total change (holometabolism, as scientists name it) occurs in the dark of the cocoon.

¹⁴⁷ Conversation with the artist.

¹⁴⁸ See especially "Politics Surrounded," in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 15–20; and Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Conversation with the artist. See also Marion Dufour, et al., *Nadia Lichtig: Pictures of Nothing* (Berlin: Kerber, 2014), 64.

created frottage work from various locations—Vancouver, Bremen, Aix-en-Provence, Montpellier, Zamość, and Poznań. Ongoing, Lichtig makes each on grounds where a traumatic event took place (such as in the Reichsbahnbunker in Berlin). What traces of the Holocaust are perceptible in the dust drawn into these blotches and rubbings? Not an end, however, Lichtig's indexing of each frottage to a specific place is a first step in a complex aesthetic encounter; an impasse appears where the sublime might enter. Through the absurd image of scrubbing or tracing wrongs of such magnitude, Lichtig discloses a destitute irrationality whereby the body cannot know, the intellect might collapse, hand rebuffs representational gesture, and voice reaches a kind of nothing-space that sings beyond language.

Experiments built in SNOLAB are sensing apparatuses that extend far beyond human bodily capacities as they look for signals through great silent tanks waiting deep underground. Jol Thoms observed that artists are also sensitive; they're stereotyped, of course, as having receptive temperaments, but they have developed their perceptual capacities by training their attentions upon affects arising from the tiniest material decisions.¹⁵⁰ Deep in the mine, Thoms turned the detector into a camera and focused it on the artists' bodies. Thoms's group portrait, *Drift Decay Portrait (SNO+)* (2020), deploys the SNO+ neutrino detector and its data visualization, which he video-captured as a computer indexed and translated the radiation detected on our own bodies when we visited the lab. The detector shows these bodies as effecting an interference of singularities, and it also marks bodies as out-of-place, unclean, and threatening, carrying extraneous matter that has slipped past the filters. With *Drift Decay Portrait (SNO+)* Thoms turns the detector's readings into an affective readymade.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Conversation with the artist.

¹⁵¹ I prefer Stephen Zepke's genealogy of the readymade wherein art is recognized within life rather as conceptual nomination of fragments of life as art and appearing in the disciplinary apparatus of art. See

Especially when considered from a higher spatial point of view in the exhibition, Lichtig's *Blank Spots* shares some visual motifs with the detector data visualization screens recorded in *Drift Decay Portrait (SNO+)*: signals coming in as irregular translations populating and depopulating chart-like areas. Lichtig, like Riley, could be said to be looking into the body for dark matter. Might artistic senses become so sensitive? Could artists, with time and practise, become dark matter detectors? According to scientists, no. Even if a human being trained and evolved over millennia to become ever more sensitive, they could never achieve unassisted perception of dark matter. Yet, it is in us and around us in a way that is *differently physical*. If we consider dark matter as a thing that is here with us, as it is with all parts of space, it may provide a useful conceptual framework: an invitation to entertain and accommodate what is not sensible but potential.¹⁵²

The darkness, voice, and flickering lights of *Blank Spots* invite a hypnotic transport and loss of boundary. Marion Dufour suggests Lichtig's work can be understood as inviting a getting-in-sync with the artist.¹⁵³ This begins with being present with one's own bodily thresholds and letting go of one's "program." Lichtig's *Headless (Dark Matter)* (2018–19) series of paintings combines digital prints on canvas with charcoal mark-making. The charcoal plays the roughly analogous part of dark matter, loose on their surfaces and spreading onto gloves, hands, or doorknobs. The series title suggests Lichtig's privileging of process over ends, a "beheading" of the superego narratives of the self in favour of being-with material differently.

Another Framework Is Possible

Stephen Zepke, "The Readymade: Art as the Refrain of Life," in *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New*, eds. Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (London: Continuum, 2008), 33–44.

¹⁵² Denise Ferreira da Silva's text in this volume advances this position; such a conceptual framework holds promise for differing valuations of collectivity not dependent on naturalistic individual bodies, allowing for prosthetic assemblages that are nonetheless intimate and connective. The authorial gesture itself could thereby be understood to come from "social individuals" or clusters.

¹⁵³ Marion Dufour, "Echoes of Language," in *Nadia Lichtig: Pictures of Nothing*, 82.

I found myself trying to articulate to physicists and science communication specialists focused on the Standard Model or on symmetry, that artists are often interested in revealing, escaping, or reshaping frames. For example, some of the first works Nadia Lichtig showed me after visiting SNOLAB were like un-framings: drawings, found materials, and wooden frames arranged like diagrammed frozen disintegrations of artworks.¹⁵⁴ “What you think isn’t all,” claims Sam Gilliam regarding the power of abstract painting.¹⁵⁵ Doesn’t science also thrive on frame-breaking? I was told that science’s frame-breaking is always course correction in aid of the tweaking of functional certainties.

For Michel Foucault, art’s greatest power is active in disclosing epistemic frameworks; it is not in “showing the invisible, but rather showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible.”¹⁵⁶ That is, the institutional frame, which crops out and obscures the potentially visible, becomes itself an invisible frame through which scientific (and art) institutions structure what can be said and what can be heard as if it were giving events privileged permission to occur in value-free space. Notwithstanding art’s own exclusions, Kathrin Busch engages this insight to refer to the potential in art’s difference from science: art “permits, therefore, a subversion of science when it refers to the exclusions inherent in scientific knowledge production.”¹⁵⁷ The search for dark matter is a special case of framing. Can artists address dark matter without exploring the visible and

¹⁵⁴ These could be read as extensions of Lichtig’s ongoing series, titled *(Un)unframed* (2012–ongoing), in which drawings/event scores appear in hinged frames like opened windows. See the artist’s website, “un-unframed,” <https://www.nadialichtig.com/un-unframed>.

¹⁵⁵ Sam Gilliam, “Abstract Art is Political,” Louisiana Channel, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciN6ZPDMJV4&ab_channel=LouisianaChannel.

¹⁵⁶ I’m grateful to Elvira Hufschmid for bringing this text to the residency process. Kathrin Busch, “Artistic Research and the Poetics of Knowledge,” *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/busch.html>. For his most comprehensive elaboration of this idea, see Michel Foucault, “La philosophie analytique de la politique,” in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988, vol. 3, 1976-1979*, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 540–41.

¹⁵⁷ Busch, “Artistic Research and the Poetics of Knowledge.”

invisible frames science is instantiating?¹⁵⁸ After all, physics foregrounds the known elements (calculations of galaxy rotation, gravitational lensing measurements, etc.) that form the epistemic frames determining the shape of the unknowns of dark matter.

If the content is invisible, the framework itself is ever more apparent, as we've seen with the body and the Earth. If artists are invited to represent dark matter, to bring the unseen to light and make visual the strictly non-visual, it is appropriate, rather, that dark matter's suprasensible opacity and sensory transparency reveal to their fresh eyes what is right in front of us: the invisible frames made up of prerequisite disciplinary cultural scaffolding, the frames of material infrastructures, and the machines that drive and convey unconscious motivations to detect it.¹⁵⁸ The invitation turns the artists toward an exploration of the methods and practices of mattering whereby we might make connections to social, material, historical, and speculative contexts; they practise interfering in active constellations of materials and ideas.¹⁵⁹

Dark matter must be thought of as dependent upon a certain kind of measurement, an imperceptible matter considered missing only according to the measurement of a finite gravity "budget." Considering the singularity of the search for dark matter is a way of bundling dark matter along with its narrative frames in a way that allows one the chance to continually approach the complexity of how it is mattered.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ This idea is relayed from a discussion with Emelie Chhangur that was essential for revealing the insight that certain opacities in the project turn artists toward methods and collectivity.

¹⁵⁹ The manner of *mattering* becomes key. Guattari usefully addresses an influence aesthetics brings to politics: its ability to confront Being assumed as "inert facticity" and the ideal of the Universe as passive and undifferentiated. This deployment of aesthetics gels in what he calls ecosophical thinking: "The emphasis is no longer placed on Being—as general ontological equivalent, which, in the same way as other equivalents (Capital, Energy, Information, the Signifier) envelops, encloses and desingularises the process—it is placed on the manner of being, the machination producing the existent, the generative praxes of heterogeneity and complexity." See Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 109. A longer study could productively compare Guattari's science-inspired non-ontology with the "generative praxes" of Karen Barad's feminist science studies and their common concern of centring ethics.

¹⁶⁰ A singularity, according to Levi Bryant, is "that within a thing that will generate qualities and shape when a

In Lichtig's *Blank Spots*, the lights installed above the canvases constantly delineate and define them, creating one instantaneous compound after another of framing, the framed, and the unframed. The traces of translation and non-translation between medium and language, observable most directly through Lichtig's related *Blank Spots (Reichstagbunker) Score* (2022), speak to aesthetic scanning practices and speculative leaps. The situatedness that is consciousness as a process is activated with all its points of porosity, leakage, opacity, and breakdown.

Anne Riley refuses to engage directly with the pre-existing frameworks drawn by mathematical calculation; her works thereby make visible the invisible quality of the expectations of presence and legitimation. Instead, she reframes what might be outside of understanding as being akin to a subjugated vital cultural heritage. In this situation, study constitutes the detection of and collusion with these past, present, and future peoples. In plotting this orientation, Riley's playful negotiation also threads the spatio-temporal frame of an exhibition. *dark matter garden* is literally and figuratively outside, composed of nutrient-rich soil that is allowed to wild-seed, a mound of compost given to whatever is there. The piece's assertion of space outside the art system's galleries and its regular schedules is a kind of lively generative practice of dark matter. By developing *dark matter garden* from a transdisciplinary residency, yet slowing and eschewing participation in prescribed framing, Riley might draw attention to the fugitive situatedness of dark matter as a shifting set of practices: one that can emerge in new fields of force as differing compounds.

When it uses landscape as a large-scale laboratory instrument, physics ventures outside its habitual zones. Jol Thoms uses signifiers of the laboratory and borrows tools of theoretical physics

thing enters into a particular field of forces." He continues, "singularities are points of tension and potentiality within matter or a thing that are absolutely unique to that thing." Finally, "things always harbor topological singularities whose effects, when entering into this field of forces, cannot be calculated." See Levi R. Bryant, "What are Singularities?" (14 June 2012), <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2012/06/14/what-are-singularities/>.

to trace and demonstrate this expansion. His aesthetic tools for thinking-making take this drive to extremes that might recognize the potentialities offered by rogue geographical assemblages. Thoms's work represents additional dimensions that might enable a multi-perspectival reframing or might contract them so matter that is imperceptible to one dimension might cast shadows in another (for example, three-dimensional shapes would appear as two-dimensional in flatland). Relevantly, Philip Tanedo and collaborators recently proposed that dark matter may be better understood as operating in a four-dimensional space with "dark" forces.¹⁶¹ Seeing a fourth dimension would mean, for humans, seeing a three-dimensional object from all sides at once, and Thoms's sculptures, *The Bulk: Frameworks* (2021), are emblematic of his play with flattening and building out multi-dimensional views; the outlines of interlocking cubes made with angle steel seem to project shadows of further dimensions, interfering with each other in fascinating ways as the sculpture spins. Correspondingly, the crisp rotating floor shadows of the hypercube sculptures offer a re-flattening and surprising new legibility.

Riley seems to draw upon the desire of energy and the amorous transport beyond everyday existential territories that might heal bodies and reconnect with ancestors. Both of her works in the exhibition are material gifts to the future. They are, again, *differently physical*; one doesn't possess love like one allegedly possesses information, knowledge, or art. Both are sitting with the present-day untranslatability of certain cultural and disciplinary knowledge systems. In sitting so, among other things, they're modelling strategies for negotiating with colonial institutions by fostering unseen transformations that don't need to sacrifice to ideals of capture.¹⁶² Given the anticipation of

¹⁶¹ Iqbal Pittalwala, "A new dimension in the quest to understand dark matter," PHYS.ORG (2 June 2021), <https://phys.org/news/2021-06-dimension-quest-dark.html>.

¹⁶² María Inigo Clavo, "Traces, Signs, and Symptoms of the Untranslatable," *e-flux Journal* 108 (April 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/108/325859/traces-signs-and-symptoms-of-the-untranslatable/>.

presence that conditions this project, it is easy to see the power of not presenting.¹⁶³ It is a form of cultural work in Riley's practice to reconsider prefigured acceptance within settler systems and the ways its rewards are valued. There are elements of refusal in Riley's work for *Drift*, alongside key moments of engagement. As carefully as she negotiated her presence in the residency, Riley negotiates it in the exhibition space through the conversational video piece, *the heart of the matter*. Riley's attention to dark matter physics is guided by the flux of identity and the ethics of responsibility learned from her mentors and from teachings of her relations among the Slavey Dene. Notably, Riley does not share the words for "I love you" in Dene itself. "It's sacred," she says in the video. She positions this love that is "invisible" but nonetheless "there," a gift of an allegory for dark matter, something present and unseen.

The scientific search for the "known unknown" of dark matter creates circuits of information, methods of enquiry, and material manifestations out of a wish for a direct experience. In *the heart of the matter* Riley gives a personal experience of something we might call Indigenous science: circuits of information, methods of enquiry, and material manifestations that are likewise born of a longing for an experience of presence. *the heart of the matter* decentres the framing of the residency in a way that focuses, rather, on the process of searching. At the same time, the piece takes advantage of its strategic opacity—the aspirations for love shared through secret and sacred language—and points toward zones ungovernable by settler art and science, and therefore imperceptible to some gallery visitors. It also demonstrates a strong independence that will not be

¹⁶³ Refusal is a potent strategy for Indigenous artists who are approached with tokenizing and instrumentalizing invitations in contemporary culture. For a summary of approaches to refusal, see Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes "Fugitive indigeneity: Reclaiming the terrain of decolonial struggle through Indigenous art," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 1 (2014): i–xii; Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (December 2007), https://pages.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/class_web/ES-270/SimpsonJunctures9.pdf; and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014): 811–18, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077800414530265>.

instrumentalized, while deploying what Riley refers to as “radical softness” in its moments of engagement.¹⁶⁴

Artworks and artists are unconsciously figured into the position of dark matter themselves during the residency; the artworks are often baffling, and the artists are perceived to embody alterity, to think and behave in ways that are beyond comprehension or prediction. Being considered dark matter can discount and disregard artists already marginalized through intersecting forms of social disempowerment. In other cases, such opacity-to-some is a useful position for artists; it preserves and generates the possibilities of freedom and difference.¹⁶⁵ Opacity often contributes to the break, the central non-communication through which art communicates. For Félix Guattari, “With art ... the finitude of the sensible material becomes a support for the production of affects and percepts which tend to become more and more eccentric with respect to preformed structures and coordinates.”¹⁶⁶ Art, too, is a “known unknown.”

The confrontation with science and dark matter gives art a reflexive awareness of its claims to freedom. What frameworks must be in place for art to claim a kind of escape into what Amanda Beech calls “non-representationalism”? For Beech, art has claimed “privileged access to ‘other’ spaces and presented them as spaces of movement, time, duration, change, flexibility and mobility that were argued to be and go beyond conditions of global power.”¹⁶⁷ I suspect that the habituation of a framing device normalizes the framer’s claims to a kind of enclosure and related positionality. That is, being the one who does the framing or unframing is precisely the logic and the reward of

¹⁶⁴ Conversation with the artist.

¹⁶⁵ Tarin Dehod, “Responsible Hearts: T’uy’t’angat-Cease Wyss and Anne Riley,” *BlackFlash* 35, no. 3 (2018), 16–22. Emelie Chhangur’s discussion of the right to opacity by way of the thought of Édouard Glissant was also influential here.

¹⁶⁶ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 100–101.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Stewart and Amanda Beech, “Non-Place and Movement: An Interview with Amanda Beech,” *OnCurating Journal* 45 (April 2020), <https://on-curating.org/issue-45-reader/non-place-and-movement-an-interview-with-amanda-beech.html#.Ys8rX-zP1UC>.

framing's power. The unanswered question: How do art's claims as an autonomous form of knowledge participate in colonial appropriation and accumulation?

To frame is to scaffold, but also to cut. The etymology of science is "skei: to cut, split."¹⁶⁸ To return again to Foucault: "Knowledge ... is made for cutting."¹⁶⁹ Could we give dark matter a new name that describes something present and virtual, not rationally foreclosed nor mystified, an a-signifying matter passing through a paranoid straight-jacket? Since dark matter is present and yet nonfigurative, what if its name were pointing to vital heterogeneity rather than lack, latency, or ignorance? Pointing to the need for assemblages of enunciation, a people yet to come, that could forge new coordinates of analysis, could we call it "schizo-matter"?

Negative Vitality

Our use of the word "drift" in the residency and exhibition titles suggests a surrender to unpredictability or even delirium. Does art's claim to freedom of sensory invention and difference gain any purchase in its association with physics and dark matter? What erotics draw us into the singularity of dark matter? Art must trust its methods if it is to claim such complicated visibility in relation to science. Anne Riley's use of "dark matter" as a name for soil is revealing; it is a linguistic reclamation of the situatedness of the search for dark matter that draws on its poetic contact with a vitality.¹⁷⁰

It isn't dark, having no relationship to visibility, but its name already carries a certain negative vitality. Dark matter has been given this particularly exhilarating misnomer for being such a

¹⁶⁸ Brian Holmes points out the common etymology of science and schizophrenia in "Guattari's *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, or, the Pathic Core at the Heart of Cybernetics," *Continental Drift* (website) (2009), <https://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/guattaris-schizoanalytic-cartographies/>.

¹⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-64.

¹⁷⁰ Anne Riley's work often takes pleasure in repossessing language. For example, Riley and Wysse called their cassette tape *Soundtrack for the Radical Love of Butterflies* and its launch a "release." See Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, "If the river ran upwards," <https://www.banffcentre.ca/if-river-ran-upward>.

reportedly mundane substance. The bundle of unconscious desires driving its semantic associations brings complexity to the particularity of the search for dark matter search. For example, a scopic regime locates an opacity in the encounter with the kind of blockages, limitations, and epistemological difference natural to the search for dark matter. Those attuned to the history of contemporary aesthetic practice can observe the privilege of the retinal in its use of “dark” in reference to imperceptibility. The visual is only one of the ways our perception falls short. We also cannot hear, smell, or identifiably touch sub-atomic particles. Dark matter is said to be matter that is invisible to the human eye, and obscure to radio waves, microwaves, infrared light, ultraviolet light, X-rays, and gamma-rays. It also does not appear to interact with the electromagnetic force. Yet, seeing is the favoured metaphor for knowledge, both as that which is revealed to sight and that which has been empirically proven; even if it is invisible to human perception, it is still “seen” by physics.¹⁷¹

It is the electromagnetic “blindness” to dark matter that opens broader sensory ways of knowing: indirect uses of sound or touch (the vibration of a crystal lattice in Super Cryogenic Dark Matter Search, for example) that are at work in SNOLAB.¹⁷² The scopic regime operates equally in its “negatives,” such as the mental image of artists and scientists deep underground elaborating an “undercommons” away from the pressures of the present upon our disciplines.

Still, a subversive, generative praxis of *mattering* dark matter must emerge through and against the grain (field of forces) of its over-coded name, even if it is to avoid naming. In her 2019 performance, *I am nameless*, Josèfa Ntjam looped her chanted poetic refrains towards what she

¹⁷¹ This is especially so in the case where it interacts with the electromagnetic spectrum. Can we say that we perceive something through its absence? Can we truthfully say that we perceive dark matter through mathematics?

¹⁷² “SuperCDMS | Super Cryogenic Dark Matter Search,” Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (website), <https://supercdms.slac.stanford.edu/>.

called “infiltration and non-appointment.”¹⁷³ In this piece, nameless infiltration is a “survival strategy” that allows racialized artists to resist entreaties to origins and other forms that (re-)racialize and foreclose polysemy. Enclosure can, she suggests, be subverted by keeping factors in tension, by keeping a space for creating in the dark. Could we live without naming, like Ntjam’s narrator who intones “In the loneliness of collectivity I’m nameless!”

Artists are commonly aware of the composition of negative space in the composition of the positive, and some are no doubt suspicious of its binary construction. Dark matter commonly signals a lack, a gap in knowledge provoking a desire for detection that could be understood more productively as a site of affirmative desire. If the legacy of dark matter’s name is haunting us, what spectral potency does it hold? What worlds can the name make? Can we give its nascent condition a new poetic value in relation to its frame?

Most kinds of light are invisible to humans; the energy of ultraviolet light that causes the liquid of *Luciferin Drop* to glow is too high for humans to see and it is only “out of band” leakage caused by the bulb’s coating that one perceives. Dr. Arthur McDonald pointed out that Ntjam’s use of blacklight in her sculpture shows how often “the perceived” seems to have an unperceivable source. All light is a cascade of forces whereby transmission and reflection may be caused by an “known unknown.” Causality is another desire bundled into the individuation of dark matter. Quantum switch experiments give us reason to suspect that such assumptions of causality arise from human bias rather than nature.¹⁷⁴ That which we don’t know how to know and which we don’t know we can know have unclear causal relationships with what we can experience or theorize as energy or matter.

¹⁷³ Ntjam, *I am nameless*.

¹⁷⁴ Natalie Wolchover, “Quantum Mischief Rewrites the Laws of Cause and Effect,” *Quanta Magazine* (11 March 2021), <https://quantamagazine.org/quantum-mischief-rewrites-the-laws-of-cause-and-effect-20210311>.

Ntjam's work in performance, digital collage, sculpture, and video offers us a conduit for the enunciation of anterior assemblages we narrativize as mythology, stories drawn from a rhythmic and poetic space of trance states, and speculation about the shapes of being. It offers the possibility to un-narrate or re-narrate science. The vessel *Luciferin Drop* appears in both sculpture and video form, carrying its glowing substance, a futuristic alchemical vessel shaped like a giant water droplet or glass beaker with human-like feet. The implied intra-action of the work's components suggests infinite speeds like those implied in quantum mechanics, whereby measurements performed on one system seem to be instantaneously influencing other systems entangled with it. Complicating easy causality, the vessel seems to be resting only temporarily on Earth, or at least it seems to have arrived at high speed and could leave as quickly as it came.

The desire for story, too, is bundled into the singularity of dark matter. Ntjam's video *Myceaqua Vitae* uses computer-generated imagery (CGI) and microscopic camera footage to present a poetic narration apparently spoken by an unclassifiable bioluminescent organism that seems to have come from outer space, birthed, she says, by "the thought of ancient water."¹⁷⁵ The visuals and narration describe a condition of hybridity inspired by a species that is neither plant nor animal. Like her digital collage work in the installation's circular carpet *Organic Nebulae*, the poetic intimates a kind of speculative kaleidoscopic abstraction that offers complexity to the ocularcentric binarism of contemporary culture and the name of dark matter. The artist mixes fragmentary references to dark matter physics with references to biology, chemistry, and alchemy: "Dig the earth to understand the stars, catch the light to detect the intangible," chants the narrator as we zoom into microscopic components of material. "Under the layers of metamorphic stones I expressed myself, in binary figures, in luminous explosions that one tries to detect." Ntjam, who has described her

¹⁷⁵ Josèfa Ntjam, *Myceaqua Vitae*, 2020, video with sound. Collection of the artist.

own writing as “po(l)etique,” a mix of “poetique and politique”¹⁷⁶ whispers, over a bed of music that seems to pay tribute to Detroit Techno.¹⁷⁷ The chant is an articulation of unceasing resilience, a vitality that resists capture: “I still escape the existence that was assigned to me.” The piece allows finite expression to manifest the presence of the infinite. In *I am nameless* she declared, “let the shapes of the universe express themselves!” Ntjam articulates a poethics of becoming-with intra-connected material realities outside of rationalized time.¹⁷⁸ Her work points to the way in which science is already inseparable from aesthetics and narrative, and she demands a new story, new worlds. In *Myceaqua Vitae*, Ntjam figures a protagonist through which art and science could re-figure agency.

Matter-Curious

There are at least two kinds of curiosity: major and minor. The major kind belongs to the nobler pursuit of knowledge by capital “S” Science and capital “A” Art. Anne Riley’s work is often materialized in the honest articulation of questions. Early in the *Drift* residency she asked several respected scientists: “Why are you looking for dark matter?” The question had the clarity that could only be pronounced by someone unembarrassed by not knowing, unfettered by the assumptions that structure a discipline. The answers they gave were reasonable: the universal desire for incremental knowledge of nature, technological side benefits, etc. What characterized them in this moment was their institutionally conditioned self-evidence, which had made them functionally unquestionable. Riley’s new question made the invisibility of their self-evidence visible.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Interview with the artist.

¹⁷⁷ Drexciya is an important influence for Ntjam. See Albert Freeman, “A Guide to Drexciya’s Futuristic Electro” (18 April 2019), <https://daily.bandcamp.com/lists/drexciya-album-guide>.

¹⁷⁸ Poethics is a concept introduced by Joan Retallack; see Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); it is further elaborated upon by Denise Ferreira da Silva in “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,” *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 81–97.

¹⁷⁹ Using Michel Foucault’s formulation as quoted in Busch, “Artistic Research and the Poetics of

Approaches to the limits of knowledge are a central concern of any project attempting to think with dark matter. But the concept of knowledge limits constantly drives an ontological assumption there is a discoverable pre-existent. As the search for dark matter is motored by this construction, it continuously promises new knowledge. What ends does the promise pre-construct?

Minor curiosity, I propose, is always at work within science and art, stealthily migrating into unregulated transversal solidarities. Riley's "Why?" is a question about what curiosity can *do*. Theorist Perry Zurn opens a productive space for thinking such undisciplined curiosity, pitting its "affect of political resistance" against lofty or voyeuristic varieties of curiosity.¹⁸⁰ In the heart of Riley's "Why" question is action of becoming rather than assumption of ontology; it is akin to asking what can this inquiry or study allow us to be?

What modes of curiosity were active in the *Drift* residency's chiasmic zone of thinking-making? As we ventured outside of art's normal sphere—although not legitimately inside science—the artists seemed driven by practices of indisciplined connection-making.¹⁸¹ This kind of curiosity distinguishes their work from a transgressive paradigm, whereby a critique of science would play out as a reactive position.¹⁸² Without necessarily assuming inert facticity, ontology, scientific standards, identity, or classification, this kind of curiosity is nonetheless inspired by the liberatory possibilities of scientific propositions: neutrino phase oscillation, quantum entanglement, Baradian intra-action

Knowledge."

¹⁸⁰ Perry Zurn, "Curiosity: An Affect of Resistance," *Theory & Event* 24, no. 2 (April 2021): 611–17.

¹⁸¹ In this *Drift* residency web call, Josèfa Njiam discusses indisciplined connection-making; see "What is an art and dark matter residency?" Agnes Etherington Art Centre (website), <https://agnes.queensu.ca/digital-agnes/online-exhibition/drift-art-and-dark-matter/what-is-an-art-and-dark-matter-residency/>.

¹⁸² An apt reflection appears in Félix Guattari's *Cartographies Schizoanalytiques* published in 1989, which, for Holmes, "goes beyond the critical perspective, suggesting how marginal groups acting on their subjective territories can put together experimental formations at the cutting edges of science and art, following the compass-points of their intimate cartographies of desire." See Holmes, "Guattari's *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*."

and mattering. Nor are the artists scientizing art.¹⁸³ Art and science both seem to show us what appears (or is becoming) beyond direct sensation, no doubt with different goals.

Riley's work takes contemporary practice into its uneasy edges; in *the heart of the matter* she takes it toward potent embarrassments of love. For Riley, vitality is a given: spirit's energetic material relations are alive in the world. Matter is an active space of change and potential from which we can have no strict separation. In conversation, she has responded to manifestations of the mechanistic model of matter with the question: "What matters?" Asking "What matters?" is to ask what or who is important, ethically. It is, equally, to ask who or what the agent is that is doing the mattering, to ask, effectively, "What matters us?" We ourselves are at once "mattered" and "mattering." Riley's work suggests, along with Karen Barad and others, that mattering is ethics in practice. Both of her projects, *the heart of the matter* and *dark matter garden*, seem to refuse to participate as expected and instead explore how we might practise mattering in a good way alongside other forms of agency deserving of respect. They both focus on the manners of becoming and practising a kind of art making approximating the caterpillar inside a chrysalis, or the future and past generations of plants carried inside a seed.¹⁸⁴ The works are seeking unseen love recovered for a people yet to come.¹⁸⁵ They model a rooted sense of care and self-care and a cautiously generous imagining, mattering of polyvocal future people.

Jol Thoms and Riley are inspired in different ways by Barad, a feminist science studies scholar who introduced an agential realism linked to the concept of "intra-action."¹⁸⁶ Barad's

¹⁸³ Kathrin Busch writes that Foucault "expresses the clear-sighted fear that the scientifically institutionalized 'will to knowledge ... tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse.' He refers to this will to knowledge that makes the arts seek to base themselves in science—'in short, upon true discourse' as a powerful system of exclusion." See Busch, "Artistic Research and the Poetics of Knowledge," 4.

¹⁸⁴ Conversation with the artist.

¹⁸⁵ Zepke, "The Readymade: Art as the Refrain of Life."

¹⁸⁶ Whitney Stark writes in the *New Materialism* almanac that Barad uses the term "to replace 'interaction,'

agential realism model arrives at the shore already reached by a much older Indigenous science. Leroy Little Bear and Sebastian De Line were also influential in the *Drift* residency.¹⁸⁷ Barad's philosophical provocation, aligned with Blackfoot, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe perspectives, posits a more-than-reflective collectivity that extends relations beyond the human.¹⁸⁸ A more-than-reflective paradigm would suggest that all parts of the Universe, including dark matter, give each other agency. For Barad, the paradigm is grounded in the *ungrounding* provocations of quantum mechanics, the stranger implications of which are not widely accepted in science. Thoms is interested in the agency of the Earth and the magic of the Universe.¹⁸⁹ His installation *n-Land: the holographic (principle)* suggests that science could understand the quest for knowledge differently if it took to heart the uncanny implications of its own theoretical speculation and movements beyond the lab.¹⁹⁰

which necessitates pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces ... in which all designated 'things' are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably. Intra-action also acknowledges the impossibility of an absolute separation or classically understood objectivity, in which an apparatus (a technology or medium used to measure a property) or a person using an apparatus are not considered to be part of the process that allows for specifically located 'outcomes' or measurement." Whitney Stark, "Intra-action," New Materialism: Networking European Scholarship on "How Matter Comes to Matter" (website) (15 August 2016),

<https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/i/intra-action.html>. See also Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁸⁷ Conversation with the artists. See also Dr. Leroy Little Bear, "Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Dr. Leroy Little Bear Talk," Banff Centre Talks, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJSJ28eEUjI>. The work of Anishinaabe artist and philosopher Dolleen Tisawii'ashii Manning is also an influence.

¹⁸⁸ Cher M. Hill, "More-than-reflective practice: Becoming a diffractive practitioner," *Teacher Learning and Professional Development* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1-17.

¹⁸⁹ Conversation with the artist. For a discussion of quantum mechanics and magic see Miguel Ferrero, David Salgado, and José Luis Sánchez-Gómez, "Quantum Mechanics and Magic: An Open Discussion," *HAL: open science* (2014).

https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal01057583/file/Q.M._and_Magic._An_open_discussion.pdf.

¹⁹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari write, "if nature is like art, this is always because it combines these two living elements in every way: House and Universe, *Heinlich* and *Unheimlich*, territory and deterritorialization, finite melodic compounds and the great infinite plane of composition." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 186.

Among the implications of certain Indigenous and feminist models is the claim that stories themselves are agents that don't represent the world but create it.¹⁹¹ Donna Haraway wrote, "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with ... It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."¹⁹² *Drift* has been asking what world makes the story of dark matter. Haraway might ask what the story of dark matter does in the world? What can it do? If the Impressionists invented fog (which was there, but which we simply hadn't learned to see) what might the artistic speculation on dark matter do?

Affects that aren't yet fully recognized can be explored by art. However, affective sensations that seem to belong to geometries or temporalities introduced by art may seem delirious because they aren't yet recognized. Thoms's work looks almost like a science lab as it probes the visualities of science. At the most basic level, Thoms is interested in an immanent critique of Western science, meaning he doesn't separate himself from it but introduces difference and hybridity while being inside it. Thoms is finding art in science. He appears first as a documentarian, and to add complexity he borrows imagery, materials, and strategies of science. Thoms takes a diffractive approach that includes rather than isolates. *n-Land: the holographic (principle)* puts SNOLAB into the context of vast cosmic and geological time scales.

In collaboration with geographer Sasha Engelmann, Thoms wrote that particles lure "the Technosphere outside of itself."¹⁹³ Along with Barad, Thoms and Engelmann suggest that apparatuses of perception themselves are without clear boundaries and are inextricable from and

¹⁹¹ Jerry Lee Rosiek and Jimmy Snyder, "Narrative Inquiry and New Materialism: Stories as (Not Necessarily Benign) Agents," *Qualitative Inquiry* 26, no. 10 (2018): 1151-62.

¹⁹² Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

¹⁹³ Sasha Engelmann and Jol Thoms, "Ve Vm Vt. The Ideal Cosmic Messengers," *Technosphere* (15 November 2016), <https://technosphere-magazine.hkw.de/p/Ve-Vm-Vt-The-Ideal-Cosmic-Messengers-gTQ3sSabgSXLhFm2Hag5ny>.

productive of phenomena. Thoms is probing the possibilities suggested by science, but with a critical reading motivated by ecological concerns. He uses artistic effects of texture, rhythm, and experimental sonic composition. He connects large and small scales and attempts to think beyond them, sensitively crafting extended assemblages. He takes the implications of quantum mechanics seriously in broader aesthetic magnitudes, influenced by Karen Barad, Niels Bohr, Donna Haraway, and Isabelle Stengers. Science, for Thoms, is a broad and long kind of activity. He views science as if it is fortune telling, trying to do something magical, consciously taking it far afield of its mechanistic operations. Could we call this a practice of dark mattering in the sense that it is coming to new capacities? Do these come with or introduce new ethical bonds?

Riley's work is intent on transforming practice. Riley is interested in softening thresholds with strengthened trust. In her *dark matter garden*, the darkness and softness of the soil are vital for plants to take root. Read as a practice of mattering, it can become about loving oneself against colonial norms, accepting one's own force of movement in the diffractive space of ancestors and future generations. The work calls on us to consider our relationships with different modes of time.¹⁹⁴ Like Riley's search for Dene love, Josèfa Ntjam reaches toward anterior states of being woven precariously into time, states of being that impoverished forms of culture, myth, or religion fail to integrate. Ntjam recalls Sun Ra in searching for other worlds to come: "If space is the place," Ntjam says, "I'm ghostly-me, waiting for the rise of other worlds."¹⁹⁵ As the time-travellers in her work make clear, if dark matter is obscure to perception, the occluded, oppressed past and possible future are also unknown terrains of potential.

¹⁹⁴ Dehod, "Responsible Hearts: T'uy't'tanat-Cease Wyss and Anne Riley."

¹⁹⁵ Ntjam, *I am nameless*.

Like each of the artists in their own way, Thoms's practice produces extensive space and time through a certain kind of anachronic layering.¹⁹⁶ If things appear to have dimension and time but are in fact encoded info, by constructing cross-dimensional projections Thoms creates intensities at the limits of perception.¹⁹⁷ Artworks are material-conceptual portals that can intimate the outside.

An experience of transient destitution marks Nadia Lichtig's work, where traces of a material, concrete history ground the piece. Lifted marks and layered fragments detach from indexical signification. Lichtig pointed out the slogan, "we guarantee disappointment," developed by the performance art group COUM Transmissions, who later became the pioneering noise group Throbbing Gristle.¹⁹⁸ Such disappointment is another way of saying the delirium that happens in artistic creation, essential to its multi-polar making and the gulf that separates it from its subsequent multi-polar reading, is worth infinitely more to art's operation and survivance than matching and achieving mainstream cultural recognition, communicability, or scientific legitimacy.¹⁹⁹ Art's failure to achieve realization, fulfillment, or possession, is not a hysterical self-definition; it is a confident assertion of its power. Non-discursive potentiality, the sequence of gasping and singing, is coordinated with the light beams over the frottages. Lichtig makes delirious reading. She pointed out the word "errance," which recalled the Situationist revolutionary strategy of the *dérive* (drifting).

¹⁹⁶ Through his prints and use of shadows, Jol Thoms speculates on how three-dimensional and higher dimensional info might be encoded in two-dimensional space if we are to think of the holographic principle. His sculptures play with how four-dimensional space is encoded in three-dimensional space. Thoms's work is about ways of seeing that learn from science, but also try to show new assemblies to science, including new views of itself in incomplete relations.

¹⁹⁷ Jacob D. Bekenstein, "Information in the Holographic Universe," *Scientific American* (1 April 2007), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/information-in-the-holographic-univ/>.

¹⁹⁸ Email from the artist.

¹⁹⁹ Franco Bifo Berardi, *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship, and Visionary Cartography*, eds. and trans. Giuseppina Mecchia and Charles J. Stivale, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 68.

Art has the gift of the involuntary.²⁰⁰ Sometimes it has to do with involuntariness, of looking away (like Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s image of foraging).²⁰¹

Toward a Physics of Residency

If experimentation defines both art and science as a narrative of process, *Drift: Art and Dark Matter* is its own sort of experiment. The *Drift* residency began with a proposition to connect contemporary art with the physics of dark matter at SNOLAB. The experimental prediction: artistic making-thinking could provide new routes for public access to scientific knowledge—even while pursuing affective ambiguity. It also proposed a second more difficult question of whether art could apply its own methods convincingly to the situatedness of the search for dark matter. More provocative still are the cartographic points we mark in the process of crossing disciplines with differing aspirations.²⁰² These emerged in the slowing process via discussion and through artworks and began to develop their own refrains: marking outsides sensible through earth and body, what frames are visible or invisible, what gets filtered out of art and science’s prevailing models, Indigenous science and the continued colonial threats to its legitimacy and survivance, de-linking from extractive modes of habitual thinking within art and science, the possibility of being accepting of not knowing, speculation on radically decentred attractive forces that hold us together in cohesion across difference, and, finally, what it means to make the Universe more habitable. It is not merely that we make new portals, but we engender hybridities through reframing and estranging the Earth in multi-scalar, multi-centred, and multi-dimensional frameworks.

Dark matter is drifting through and past us, unrecognized and undifferentiated, opaque and uncapturable. To practise dark matter would be to rest with unknowing and attend to the forces

²⁰⁰ Busch, “Artistic Research and the Poetics of Knowledge.”

²⁰¹ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 21.

²⁰² Ben Eastham and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Anna L. Tsing on Creating ‘Wonder in the Midst of Dread,’” *ArtReview* (29 November 2021), <https://artreview.com/anna-l-tsing-on-creating-wonder-in-the-midst-of-dread/>.

that enable collective agencies across constructions of the human and non-human. For Anne Riley, it is a radical love. The underground darkness of the drift and the isolation of SNOLAB's experiments provides, metaphorically, for rebirth and becoming differently. Here, we can trace the ways epistemological conflict may flow, not mobilized as a counterpoint within a Western understanding as a "benign otherness," but instead by introducing a process of creative cross-contamination.

SNOLAB provides an easy and seductive metaphor for isolation, purity, non-relation, abstraction, and context-blindness. Artists, scientists, and curator, neighbours in our urgent post-global moment, grasp a thinned and "weakly interacting" sense of solidarity. Art can offer apt accompaniment to physics by noticing and fashioning aesthetic connections to zones of imperceptible matter and beyond. In the translational space of a hybridity-to-come, the moments of disturbance or opaqueness can help us practise new ways of relating that might allow us to extend our imaginations. Trusting in art, we map out what might be the existence of a secret commons. Have we sketched recoverable routes toward such a space where the values of art and science might co-mingle, and where their co-presence is necessary? The border-crossing tendencies of art, at least, have put new relational singularities into wayward motion.

The results of artistic making-thinking and various disciplinary frictions have enacted this and other definitions of "drift." The varieties of isolation and sovereignty that are key for experiments in astroparticle physics (and, in a different sense, for contemporary art institutions) can become troubled by unruly tendencies within art. These tendencies include ambiguity (a missing matter of sorts) and ethical entanglements in the contemporary social context, which complicate notions of subjectivity, objectivity, or causality (as they are complicated in science).

Alongside the “known unknown,” Nadia Lichtig, Josèfa Ntjam, Anne Riley, and Jol Thoms generate a superradiant surplus; the artists approach a kind of re-enchantment in constant hiatus where errant curiosities—underground and underburden—proliferate.²⁰³

Dark matter will always be a matter of anticipation and unknowing. Likewise, the drifting speculative rhetoric of this text must be considered as anticipating the moments produced only in the encounter with the work of art. Even if physics were to chip away at learning its inner workings through math and experimental deduction, dark matter will always be anticipated. It will never be grasped in a way gravity, time, or energy are even partially understood. While such anticipation of presence is our constant refrain, the obscurity of dark matter’s avowed presence kicks off involutory refrains that re-route and track entanglements across the self and other. These refrains feel for our own values in shared space and recognize our tensions, imbroglios, and inhumanity. They may also pursue lateral jaunts to attend to processes of transformation and figure out ecologically enmeshed ways of seeing and being. Here, forms of non-translation and poetic insight are allowed. Love and futurity: these are matters threading, circling, and stretching the frames of the physics of residency.

²⁰³ I’m indebted to Etienne Turpin for the gift of the neologism “underburden,” through which he implies a metaphorical richness that shadows and escapes the predominating refrains carried by the mining term “overburden.”

Rereadings

Refrains

Following the idea of the refrain as invented and illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari, I argue that curatorial projects are like songs one can sing to oneself in the dark, talismans one takes to a new territory.²⁰⁴ In this section, by way of beginning a process of rereading the portfolio, I discuss the idea of the refrain and how it can be more carefully employed in curatorial practice-studies.

Refrains are rhythmic deterritorializing and freeing ensembles of unconscious and conscious material that are coincident with new reterritorializations; they have the precarious tasks of caring for and enabling emergent singularities (including infra and supra-individuals, collectivities) within practices active in colonial capitalist carceral modernity. It is worth quoting Guattari scholar Janell Watson at length on the role of such components of passage:

In Guattari's componential genealogy, concrete machines like faciality and refrains are also known as "components of passage," a phrase which emphasizes their ability to move from assemblage to assemblage, effectuating change. Both of these special components of passage rely on physiological perception and yet they simultaneously play a semiotic role, hence their ability to bridge, for example, biological, aesthetic, and social assemblages. Since components of passage are defined as concrete machines endowed with materiality, faciality and refrains can simultaneously engage form, substance, and matter (Hjelmslev's terms; MR 154-162/RM 364-376). Components of passage are crucial to the functioning of psychic and social assemblages because they are "functional articulations . . . which cause other coordinates of existence to emerge suddenly, allowing for a way out (CY10/AH 102). As articulations, they make connections, like joints. They

²⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "1837: Of the Refrain," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 310-350.

can transform an existential state, or even bring new entities into existence. With their ability to find "a way out," they are important in schizoanalytic therapy as well as in projects of liberation, two situations where blockages creatively, often interfere with the ability of assemblages to function productively.²⁰⁵

Risking safe passage—through provisional fetishization—across the dangers of violent rupture or capture is the very heart of curatorial innovation. Refrains can be domesticated, hijacked due to their ease of fetishization and inherent tendency toward reterritorialization; they are provisional existential territories after all. Walkerdine illustrates existential territory as being like skin and as being what gives us the sense of being held.²⁰⁶ This safety allows us to acclimatize to change, but if safety is grasped too tightly, it can distract from the diversity and potentials of life in which they occur (incorporeal universes of reference) and naturalize participation in the fantasies of faciality. The refrain is a tool of de- and re-territorialization. For example, radicalizing the curatorial as a space of good debt (Moten and Harney) means finding/making places of safety (undercommons) for allowing new solidarities and joys, minoritarian becomings of the curatorial to emerge with the work of artists and others struggling against racist colonial modernist capitalist norms.²⁰⁷ When curatorial refrains are territorialized, however, they become commodified or museal, reinforcing the curatorial's implication in environmental destruction and the cultural reproduction of classed and raced oppression.²⁰⁸ My intention is to grasp the potential of emergent curatorial assemblages

²⁰⁵ Watson, *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought*, 76.

²⁰⁶ Walkerdine, "Using the Work of Félix Guattari to Understand Space, Place, Social Justice, and Education," 11.

²⁰⁷ Gary Genosko describes Guattari's concept of minor cinema, another example, as allowing for "minoritarian becomings." Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 156. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney articulate their ideas of good debt and study in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013).

²⁰⁸ I am speaking from the perspective of a practitioner in a specific context, tracing a materialist entropy of the curatorial. I cannot claim to have answers or ethical prescriptions, despite what often shows optimistic desire to fix things. Google apparently understands itself as doing curation, and we might describe their algorithms as poor curation. As Michael Bhaskar suggests, premium curation is only available to those who pay. "Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess," *Talks at Google*.

that are active in my portfolio like those formed in the *Golden USB*, but also in projects that happened between or are happening after these, as they are constellated with scholarly and amateur forms of the curatorial. Potential might emerge from the decentralizing strategies of my own playgroup methodologies and pedagogical interventions such as *The hold* with Lisa Figge, shadow curator activities with Neven Lochhead in *A guest + a host = a ghost*. With a new awareness of its pedagogical and commercial dimensions, the curatorial must move beyond self-justifying rhetoric and risk its own safety, to crack open care (*curare*) and run within new currents and curricula, expanding existential territory in ways that are useful for safe passage and breaking territory.

Ecologies

The technology of the curatorial assemblage is shaped by and is shaping mental, social and environmental ecologies and following its own constellated vectors helps build a diagram of the emergent virtual. Here are Guattari's three ecologies: the environmental ecology of the curatorial tracks the cosmic, more-than-human machinic phylum, planetary material-energetic flows, capitalist global/local dynamics and the ways in which schizoanalytic approaches to these might allow for changed relations at this broad level; the social ecology of the curatorial is operative in apparatuses of capture within subjectivation and machinic "enslavement," the operations of gender, class, and race, national, municipal, global/local capitalist dynamics including machinic phylum such as the functional languages guiding academic and public museum institutional exhibitionary imaginaries, professionalization, and counter-collectivities; the mental ecology of the curatorial subsists in the formation of its individual subjects and the role of curatorial assemblages in the creation of new subjects in relation, the effects of crossing diverse incorporeal universes of reference, and the

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ5WHZARhvY>.

shifting of existential territories. I explore the appearance and counter-mobilization of the curatorial in the three ecologies of exhibition as collective enunciation, staging the curatorial essays roughly in telescoping order of intimate to vast scale. With a concern for creating new existential territories that diagram new cartographies, I return repeatedly to mental ecologies in transition, in encounter with refrains that connect to social ecologies.

1.5.1 Free Hot Mess

In this section I write about the curatorial through and across the essay “Free Hot Mess” using Guattari’s matrix of four functors of schizoanalytic cartography. A few words first about the function of this variety of writing. A curatorial essay is meant to contextualize and sympathetically bridge an artist’s work for visitors and readers. It must do so without reducing anything to psychological determinism nor by denying the unpredictable material effects of desire, components of what Guattari calls a “machinic” unconscious. It must do so without eradicating the proliferation of difference made possible by the artwork’s polysemy, the essay’s vehicle and subject. A curatorial essay might pick up and reinforce predominating refrains or spend time cultivating minor ones. Ideally, in harmony with art and exhibition, it should create opportunities for self-worlding.

The curatorial might know *what* it is doing and *why* it is doing it, but does it know what it’s *doing* is doing?²⁰⁹ Does it know that its doing has effects that contribute to the “unconscious” recognized as univocal real? Rather than proceeding with the framing of a problem in the way it has been handed to you, the task of curatorial research is to articulate the problem anew. Toward what kinds of worlds does the encouragement of self-worlding lead? What fantasies are preserved by the

²⁰⁹ Gabriel Tupinambá articulated the necessity of disciplinary self-analysis, saying “being responsible for the form of your problem is the most emancipated you can be.” Jordan Osserman, host, “Gabriel Tupinambá: The Desire of Psychoanalysis Exercises in Lacanian Thinking,” *New Books Network* (Podcast), July 26, 2021, accessed 1 November 2022. <https://newbooksnetwork.com/the-desire-of-psychoanalysis>.

curatorial's faciality and refrains (components of passage) even while the successful concretization and proliferation of the curatorial and its cycle of repetitions continues? What "unconscious" materializations are later singularized under the name of the curatorial? Situating the curatorial is the problem of the curatorial, because its affinity with refrains and faciality allow it to cross assemblages, existential territories and ecological scales.

With careful risks, the curatorial has potential to cultivate a mutation to result in something more like a practice of refraining that generates subjectivities involved in foraging for the affective readymade.²¹⁰ In "Free Hot Mess" I write about Ciara Phillips' project as confronting privacy as its first challenge and then creating rhythms of making and looking together, seeking a safe site for remediating known and unknown, mediating desires whether they are smoothly channeled or conflicted. Engaging directly with these overlaps at the intersection of mental and social ecologies, *Workshop* and *Comrade Objects* are fitting sites for my investigation of curatorial schizoanalytic process. First, let's ask about the forces that power Phillips's project and consistencies that support its action, as well as the consistencies that power and support my presentation of it, and my own voice within it.

Mental ecology of the curatorial assemblage

As it does for ecologies more generally, the existence of "the unconscious" already presents a problem for the curatorial that hasn't reckoned with what it is and does blindly. It hasn't reckoned, especially, with what determines the bounds and isolation of professionalized interiorities of the curatorial. For Guattari, this is less about mysterious personal interiorities (although these are indeed created) but more that we are constantly experiencing "the unconscious" without knowing it.

²¹⁰ Here I am interested in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's notion of the forager and Stephen Zepke's exploration of Guattari's model of the readymade. Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Zepke, "The Readymade: Art as the Refrain of Life."

The Guattarian subject is not an individual as it is commonly understood.²¹¹ For Guattari, we become so-called individuals with claims on “mental health” amid many possible incorporeal universes of reference. We are supposedly working with others of these and attended by publics made up of more.²¹² Nor has the curatorial grappled with its participation in dividual machinic flows. Guattari recognized with Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* what Deleuze would articulate later in “Postscript on societies of control”: the enforcement of personal individuality is just one form of state/economic violence. The other is decoding and de-individualizing or “dividualizing” flows.²¹³ The state creates subjects through the cultivation of individuals. The state also creates machinic “enslavement” through the creation of dividual flows. Submitting statistics to the Canada Council detailing attendance, how much different categories of artists were paid makes one wonder what work the curatorial is doing for the capitalist state through alternately cohering and splitting subjects.

My curatorial position breeds sympathy for the state and its interlinkages with the corporate university; I rely on this sympathy and these linkages for my own living; correspondingly and consequently, these emerge as naturalized through my work. I see consequent small acts of

²¹¹ Gary Genosko summarizes, “Rather, the Guattarian subject is an entangled assemblage of many components, a collective (heterogeneous, multiple) articulation of such components before and beyond the individual; the individual is like a transit station for changes, crossings, and switches. In the development of Guattari’s conceptual language, assemblage came to replace group. This is not to deny the existence of core elements; on the contrary, there are nuclei or especially dense crossing points where interiority is found and from which energy can be extracted for further differentiation, complexification, and enrichment.” Genosko, *Félix Guattari: A Critical Introduction*, 76.

²¹² Guattari writes, “The vectors of subjectivation do not necessarily run through the individual, who in reality appears more in the position of a “terminal” for processes involving human groups, socioeconomic complexes, informational machines, etc. Thus, interiority comes into being at the crossroads of multiple components, each relatively autonomous, and in some cases, positively discordant with respect to the others.” *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 21.

²¹³ “There is enslavement when human beings themselves are constituent pieces of a machine that they compose among themselves and with other things (animal, tools), under the control and direction of a higher unity. But there is subjection when the higher unity constitutes the human being as a subject linked to a new exterior object, which can be an animal, a tool, or even a machine.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 131. Also “We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become ‘dividuals,’ and masses, samples, data, markets, or ‘banks.’” Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” October 59 (1992): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828>.

normative harm enacted on me and on those around me. Especially destructive violence is carried out on those who are both individualized and dehumanized at the intersections of economic extraction, racist culture, heteronormative and misogynist gender oppression.²¹⁴ I am supported by the privilege that has been attached to being born white, of middle-class parents, and within a relatively healthy environment. Land that my ancestors expropriated from Indigenous peoples is my life-giving context. My upbringing allowed a continuous and heteronormative home. I'm nurtured by food that I can purchase with a salary funded by taxpayers and university profits. Wage labour facilitates the extraction of energy, ideas, content, and value. In exchange for the material support and the feeling of freedom, I often give up meaningful social change or environmental change, settling for culturized propositions, tokenism or protest.

Material-energetic fluxes

We must begin by understanding the material-energetic flows and social processes fracturing and remaking psychic space or existential territories through which curatorial practice and the curatorial is constituted. What assemblages make up the mental ecology that might submit without question to policing, to channeling capitalist state violence?

The desire, labour, financial and resource expenditure required for the continuation of curatorial writing and contemporary art is most often invisible-ized. For example, this text was copy edited by Shannon Anderson, with whom, it must be recognized, my thinking has entered an assemblage. The same is true for "Catalogue of Services," copy edited by Judy Phillips. "Speculative Fiction in the Work of Ibghy and Lemmens" was copy edited by Jack Stanley. "Forays in the Underburden" was edited by Etienne Turpin and copy edited by Jack Stanley. There is a threat that

²¹⁴ See Kimberle Crenshaw and others for theories of intersectional anti-oppression. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

the money will stop flowing (material energetic fluxes), against which art institutions always must plead relevance and efficacy. Phillips' status as a Turner prize nominee and as former Queen's student were elements of a highly expedient recipe. On top of this, Ciara Phillips is an artist I went to school with. We both benefitted differently from levels of privilege accorded to varieties of whiteness and proximity to capital.

Material and energetic fluxes are also the domain of intensities of play and emotion to which Phillips's work gives access. Phillips's work centres play with material within a careful experiment with nomadic phyla by rhizomatically connecting material spaces and practices of "making together" with "looking together." Material fluxes between mental and social ecologies are the focus of my writing about Phillips's work whereby existential territories are opened to new incorporeal universes of reference.

The curatorial, too, is about play and testing reality. Artistic and curatorial research works by locating and activating affective readymades that can make creative life possible. The art studio functions as a conceptual as well as affective readymade in Ciara Phillips's work. It is affective in the sense that it is a space of play, newly seen for its artistic virtues. Guattari's phrase about the mutational workings of aesthetics that I quote in "Free Hot Mess" strikes me as very familiar to the testing play of museums. Look for example at how we are always striving to make new and better policy, only to have it be continually revisited, or look at how artist-run centres change with high turnover. He writes, "a striving that is in no way constrained, catatonic or abstract like those of capitalistic monotheisms, but animated by a mutant creationism, always to be re-invented, always about to be lost."²¹⁵ I connect Phillips's work to Moten and Harney's *Undercommons* in its refusal to attend to the "upper"-commons. I connect it with abolitionist thinking that would allow

²¹⁵ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 116.

knowledge to be lost in favour of creation. Ciara Phillips's project is a curator's dream, almost as much as *The Golden USB*, because it subverts the spatial logic of exhibition. Most curators would be grateful for a break from dealing with the traditional spatial logic of exhibition; it gives us a chance to facilitate a glimpse of altered codes of encounter.

Neoliberal capital will minimally support culture if it is sectorized as a zone of play that allows the non-threatening working out of desires that allow for capitalist subject to operate more effectively. Contemporary art is expected to perform a self-critical antagonism against this reterritorialization, this concrete effect in aid of the individuation of existential territories, while battling the predominating refrain that art has no lasting material effect but merely contributes to luxurious edification.

Ciara Phillips begins with the given territories and machinic phylum of visitor participation, exhibition space and studio space, and her practice connects these in a novel way. Her practice controls the terms of production's deployment. Dominant refrains become merely temporary supports for its nomadic instituent practice. Working across these milieus, it also connects the predominant refrains belonging to private and collective, amateur and professional territories.²¹⁶ The mediation of these ecologies through material in the process of becoming art releases new minor refrains. *Workshop* helps us to think about commoning, non-productivity, or appropriation of fixed capital as approaches to the slow dissolution of rationalist and extractive moderno-colonialism.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ "This is to map out an immanent field of events (or infinite/finite interfaces) without a supplementary dimension above or behind them." O'Sullivan "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm: From the Folding of the Finite/Infinite Relation to Schizoanalytic Metamodelisation," 259.

²¹⁷ The idea of reappropriating fixed capital comes from Marx as an expression of the worker's seizing of her own commodification as site of power and is elaborated by Negri and Hardt in *Empire* and elsewhere.

Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s formulation of poetry and protest is useful: “when different refrains start singing in tune there occurs a shared world.”²¹⁸ Refrains, for him, are the rhythmic drive of daydreams; galleries, programs and artworks themselves are spaces for making new order, that is, listening to chaos and making order that is influenced by chaotic worlds and giving access to them. Berardi identifies access to chaos as the affective charge of art that takes experiencers beyond time as an illusion normatively filtered through consciousness. He articulates rhythm as the memory of togetherness. Rhythm puts time perception and time projection into synch.” The refrains in Ciara Phillips’s work have the capacity for originating new existential territories of the subject, which, for Guattari, are formed through new conjunctions with non-discursive and affective zones.

Existential territories and destituent therapeutics, dissensus, process

Mental ecology contributes to the sense of being held that makes up existential territories or provisional refrains. Ciara Phillips’s work is about overflowing existential territories. What mutations of subjectivity might be possible when these existential territories are brought into dialogue with new or different incorporeal universes of reference? We can easily think of what Ciara Phillips does, itself, as curatorial.²¹⁹

The curatorial

In this section I discuss the term “the curatorial” in the context of a destituent movement. The emergence of the formulation of the term “the curatorial” demonstrates a flight from both the professionalized practice of curating and the museum roots of the discipline. The curatorial is

²¹⁸ Berardi, *Félix Guattari*, 86.

²¹⁹ Calling curating an art process would be more complicated and spiked with difficult negotiations.

becoming an agent, an abstract machine with a consistency increasingly supported by professionalizing scholarly machinic phylum. Curator and scholar Tara McDonald notes, quoting Maria Lind, how becoming a methodology can lend the curatorial a “viral” presence:

Within this discourse, the curatorial was often ascribed its own subjectivity, its own agency. “At its best,” Lind writes, “the curatorial is a viral presence that strives to create friction and push new ideas, whether from curators or artists, educators or editors.” This is indeed the rhetoric of method: psychoanalysis interrogates subjectivity, consciousness, and desire; feminism critiques subject and object relations as they inhere at sites including the body and the gaze; poststructuralism exposes the motivated constructedness, rather than essentialism, of enlightenment and humanist values, and so on.²²⁰

The curatorial, like these other methods, granted a viral character, does not need to remain in a scholarly assemblage, nor a professional assemblage.

The curatorial’s abstraction from contexts of its emergence can be compared to and evidently attaches to the modernist avant-garde and international contemporary art’s set of practices and discourses, which function, like Capitalism, through rhythms of deterritorialising and reterritorializing. Through most of the curatorial writing I do, I make implicit and occasional arguments for preserving and adapting elements of modernist dissensual white cube avant-gardes. This “white cube” phylum has long left behind the architectural space of the gallery. Yet, the reflexivity and discursivity, of the contemporary art field (despite discourse about who can claim to create and offer the exhibitionary space and who has claim to enter it) remains targeted on critical appraisal of its own genesis and potential and unconsciously reproduces the dyadic power dynamics of “criticality.”²²¹ Ciara Phillips’s project shows the curatorial one way to simply ignore power. The

²²⁰ Tara McDowell, “Falling in love (Or is the curatorial a methodology?)” *Artlink*, accessed October 30, 2022. <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4785/falling-in-love-28or-is-the-curatorial-a-methodolog/>.

²²¹ Curatorial writing is sometimes caught within the constitutive harm of institutional functioning in ways that we can’t track and trace. “Free hot mess” carried a certain interpretive violence that I can trace and

challenge is to contend with the curatorial's whiteness (that is, its assumption of foundational status), its blind spots (facilities, white walls and black holes), its reinforcement of the continual sectorization as culture that might block and paper over the potential for deeper listening, dissensus and dialogue.

Our culture has a way of scooping up art that belongs to people and selling it back to them as if it weren't theirs to begin with. Folk music, canonized folk art, etc. are examples. This happens through commercial interests, but also through academic specialization. Groys argues convincingly that charges of elitism are the wrong way to understand the universalist discursive space of the white cube. Art should be understood as a common language that escapes the elitism of locality.²²² The question becomes about the harm of modernist universalism of the white cube in the context of tribalism in a post-globalisation world, which, yes, may translate across localities, but which may, in doing so, standardize and deterritorialize. The white cube is ostensibly trying to maintain a transferable equal ground, but it is schizophrenic; such a platform for this dissensus is, itself, subtended by hidden forces of power. Culture has an inflated sense of importance and self-importance in contemporary society to a certain degree, to a limit past which, it is denied credit for its effects. Creative work has an assumed value, a delusion of privileged autonomy. Can we get closer to re-weighting its value by seeing more clearly what its true effects are? The curatorial carries an inflated sense of importance and concrete although limited entitlements governing space / property. Curators are empowered at a particular striation of cultural zones that is different from artists. Its entitlements are restricted to a superstructural realm of culturing and cultural reproduction, which have been separated from basic material conditions. We take for granted the

acknowledge because I reversed elements of it before publication. The slowness of publication allowed me more time to write, and I noticed how certain minor refrains had magnetically attached themselves to the rhythms of predominating refrains in my thinking, particularly those around Constructivism.

²²² Groys, "Curating in the Post-Internet Age."

results of state operations of money and state formations of property, our so-called economy. We collect statistics at the end of the year that abstract and cut across, striate the representations of individual and project timelines in attempt to retain proximity to capital.

Beyond the pleasure principle there is non-productive curatorial understood as non-useful expenditure. Practice itself is a crucial starting point because it describes an undertaking that doesn't start and end with an individuated subject or an object and can account for participation in the processual flows of subjectivation and machinic "enslavement." Exhibitions are cartographies, when viewed from this perspective. Practice is practiced in the present and is incomplete; it is thus the essential fuel that lends its movement to the emerging idea of the curatorial as a methodology and its role in imagining and enacting transformation.²²³ Phillips, for example, takes the trouble to work with individual and collective articulations of subjectivity. Grounding in practice understood broadly can also allow it to look outside its professionalizing zones; is the curatorial no less than a tool for living adventurously, artistically? The curatorial needs to articulate refrains that help it to dissolve itself within new singularities; its radicalisation as practice must tap into a deeper disappearance: that is, tap into its death drive, its will to power, and give away its own professional stability to achieve its ethical being.

My claim in "Free Hot Mess" that "all things bear the undeniable presence of the other" makes apparent a kind of poetic concentration of the destituent sociality of the piece. The exhaustion points are anaesthetic points, where we drift, where we lose focused edges. For Marx,

²²³ Guattari writes "The precondition for any revival of analysis - through schizoanalysis, for example - is that as a general rule, once one takes the trouble to work with them, both individual and collective articulations of subjectivity are potentially able to develop and proliferate beyond their ordinary equilibrium. By their very nature, their analytic cartographies overflow the existential territories to which they are assigned. Thus these cartographies should be like painting and literature, domains where each concrete performance is destined to evolve, to innovate, to inaugurate prospective openings, without their authors being able to base themselves on secure theoretical foundations or the authority of a group, a school, a conservatory or an academy..." *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 21.

“capitalism is already essentially abolished once we assume that it is enjoyment that is the driving motive and not enrichment itself.”²²⁴ What this means in Guattari’s terms is that new existential territorializations of subjectivity can emerge from relations with and in reference to new incorporeal universes of value. These, in turn, can enact change in material and energetic fluxes. What is key is that with *Workshop*, enjoyment is social.

The curatorial project, and *Workshop* is a rhythmic abstract machine. An instituent practice is a machinic phylum. *Workshop* is a nomadic phylum. It is about finding nodes to work out the social ecology of art. It cares less about the policing of what is art and what isn’t art and more about reciprocal crossings between making and looking, territories and poetry/universes. It cares about the transversal appropriation of contemporary exhibitionary space.²²⁵

Here is the essay’s engagement with technology. Phillips can position a refusal against weak collectivities of neoliberal economy. The neoliberal economy requires subjectivity to stay cool, focus on details and retract from the ability to be touched. It is what Malabou defines as “difficulty letting oneself be touched,” which she explains “is the evil of our times, the paradoxical result of being wounded.”²²⁶ This essay grapples with the mess of “the unconscious” at play in social situations and mental ecologies. It quotes Todd McGowan, a Lacanian philosopher and film theorist as a way to critique privacy as a social technology of power. A Lacanian approach was useful there, but I’m cautious about fetishizing “the unconscious” because of how psychoanalysis

²²⁴ McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire*, 244.

²²⁵ Emily Pethick articulates several case studies that demonstrate this tendency, including work by Chimurenga in “Come in and Make a Place for Yourself: Instituting along Lines of Self-Determination and Interdependency,” In *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse*, eds. Paul O’Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson, 181–190. Cambridge and London: LUMA Foundation and The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2017.

²²⁶ Qtd. in Nauha, “Schizoanalysis as an artistic research method.”

can reinforce an individualizing and past-focused and power-indebted paradigm. Psychoanalysis is a methodology that offers less to the curatorial.

“Free Hot Mess” ends with speculations about the nature of enjoyment without accumulation. Unfortunately, it ends without summarizing sufficiently the sense of disordered collectivity that I wanted the piece to focus on. Given the chance, I would assert that Phillips is interested in returning to an educational institution and making a new relation of pedagogy possible that contains within it the seeds of refusal.

I came to the curatorial as an artist and the feeling of being an outsider. I carefully followed received wisdom and practices that make up its machinic phylum. Now, especially as a white practitioner, I am figured in the existential territory of an institutional insider. This risks further entrenchment as it perpetuates self-assumptions and social assumptions. To battle the faciality that forms around the territory, I’m interested to retain and encourage the empowered amateur in Stiegler’s terms at work within the professional and, potentially, also at work within what we can consider a privileged professional or even a privileged amateur.²²⁷

1.5.2 The Museum of Mott Art Catalogue

In this section I introduce the essay “The Museum of Mott Art Catalogue” and think about the curatorial using Guattari’s ecologies and matrix of four functors of schizoanalytic cartography.

Mental and social ecologies

²²⁷ Bernard Stiegler, “Automatic society, Londres février 2015, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 15, no. 2-3 (2016): 192-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702029.2016.1228883>. Also see Alison Green, “Why Practice?” *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, eds. Paul O’Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson, (Cambridge and London: LUMA Foundation and The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College 2019), 379.

My text on Les Levine's influential "services" attempts to understand a certain kind of subject of capitalism in his work, a kind of becoming-network or dividual (rhizomatic deterritorializing abstract machine); in Levine's work, we can also detect an avoidance of abstracted ethics that is simultaneously a dreaming hybridity (dismantling of faciality) and thirst for ego-dispersion (chaosmosis) and social imaginering (curatorial refrains). For Levine is working at a nexus like the one that Guattari traces between social and mental ecology:

Social ecology will have to work towards rebuilding human relations at every level of the socius. It should never lose sight of the fact that capitalist power has become delocalised and deterritorilised, both in extension, by extending its influence over the whole social, economic and cultural life of the planet, and in 'intension', by infiltrating the most unconscious subjective strata. In doing this it is no longer possible to claim to be opposed to capitalist power only from the outside, through trade unions and traditional politics. It is equally imperative to confront capitalism's effects in the domain of mental ecology in everyday life: individual, domestic, material, neighbourly, creative or one's personal ethics. Rather than looking for a stupefying and infantilising consensus, it will be a question in the future of cultivating a dissensus and the singular production of existence."²²⁸

Levine was seeding a curatorial subjectivation. He pursued the dissolving of the artist into society through strategies like the service, toward understanding and rewriting "social software." I connect Levine's work with Guattari's respect for art and disrespect for its sectorization, specialization that comes through in his ideas around the affective readymade. Despite the spirit of Levine's work, my essay and the book it was published in entrenches the phylum of galleries, and the mythologizing of artists. With it, art historical modes of knowledge and expertise are reinforced. Still, the piece has an involuntary logic that I have also found in "Crossing Thresholds" and "Forays in the

²²⁸ Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 2000, 33.

Underburden” whereby it seeks to create a metamodeling cartography through the work by putting the work’s models in contact with different models.

This metamodeling provokes a series of increasingly complex questions. Curators propose engaged assemblages: we work with artists and creators (or communities), entities and objects and calibrate guiding voices and experiences for audiences. We develop encounters: encounters that might connect people or stage objects for ephemeral experiences or assertions of cultural vitality, that might shape collections or mobilize resources for empowering platforms. What does curatorial practice unavoidably retain from its origins within extractive, civilizing legacies of middle-class whiteness, modernism and capitalism that continue to influence its practices? What are the potentials of these forces for the development of its modes and action? What methodologies can immanently subvert these legacies within the curatorial as readymade and academia as readymade? How do we define curating’s relationship with “instituting” and “institutings” broadly imagined? How best could curators work with artists who navigate heterogeneous fields? Through what strategies of curatorial practice can the contexts of presentation be rearranged in new flows? Who is an empowered amateur? What are the limitations of so-called “curating the self”? Understood within diverse institutional and non-institutional contexts and histories, as well as geo-political and social conditions, what curatorial situations are adequate to the contemporary moment? How does curatorial situation need to change now? Can we say that curating itself is self-maintaining yet also constantly introducing places to an outside? While obscuring itself, is it staying with the uncomfortable, facing the messy stuff?

Material-energetic fluxes

I was awarded a curatorial writing award for “Catalogue of Services” due to the mis-nomination (strategic or mistaken) by the public gallery for whom I wrote it. My essay on Levine is not curatorial writing, precisely. I did not curate a show of Levine’s work, but instead wrote *with* a

historical work, engaging in some dialogue with the artist. Instead of a curatorial focus, the text has a breezy variety of art historical gaze. It is not the same as art historical writing, however: it is condensed, seeming to be in process, seeming to disregard a need for refinement, putting material things into the lens of the present. It mimics Levine's own style of writing numbered bullets and especially the form of *Catalogue of Services* itself. The "Catalogue of Services" essay emerged as part of an arrangement to rent an exhibition; I was offered up as a writer for the catalogue, in a sort of horse trading between institutions. There is a way in which the other venue was coerced to agree to my being a writer for the book if they wanted the tour to travel to our venue (a situation that is a far cry from supposedly dispassionate peer review). I agreed, being highly interested in Les Levine's work and also trying to build my CV; I wanted to help make myself indispensable to my organization and relieve the pressure on my institution to project itself as a site of learned and publishing curators engaging in public dialogue. This image helps institutions to get public and private funding and create the expert artists and curators, and it helps pay my own salary. These are some of the material-energetic fluxes that manifest in the labour, cost and eventual text printed on paper that go into publishing a text in a book in this context.

It is a bumpy piece. The social ecology and its material energetic fluxes encouraged this appearance and mobility of the curatorial voice. The mental ecology which is motivated by desires created the piece that I look back upon as a creation of an individual subjectivity. The book certainly accomplished a celebration of the artist.

Transversal practice

I refer to Levine as an example of crossing thresholds *par excellence*. Inward and outward, he is crossing ecologies through institutions and back, the world in art and art in the world. Transversal practice, for Guattari, opens routes between, among other things, the separated economic classes, encouraging coming from outside and moving in, as well as in the opposite

direction. I refer to Levine as expanding existential territory. Deleuze and Guattari would have abhorred the centring of information and becoming-everyday of art in Levine's work, although Guattari might have recognized it as an affective readymade rather than a reciprocal conceptual readymade.

Rather than starting from readymade assumptions at work in the inclination to professionalize curating or curation, we begin with questions: how is curatorial practice "situable?" Where should it be situated? In what material conditions and social strata could it operate? Can curatorial methodologies connect to, genuinely reflect and intervene in material conditions? For example, given the current uneven acknowledgement of artistic research and research-creation in universities, a practice of schizoanalytic floorplanning tests the qualities of curatorial practice as research; what readymade silent machinic structures accompany the assumptions and territories of research?

The same quandary applies to institutional curating. Since curatorial practice continually explores and refines shared locations and structures for aesthetic experience, shouldn't it have an auto-critical relationship to contemporary injunctions governing both curatorial training and the isolating contexts of academic production and defense of knowledge? The curatorial exists at the point of social reproduction, like therapy and art. Curating is the repressive bureaucratic at some moments, and at others, the creative anarchist.

For Guattari, machinic phylum cut across the coded divisions of natural and technological. There's such a machinic phylum in what I describe as "bestiary of desires and exchanges" that has enabled new material flows in Levine's work. If I were to write this today, it might engage with the difference between destituent practices and instituent practices and how they play with different systematizations of art's contexts, drawing some comparison to how Ciara Phillips's work operates.

I would also address the dividual, machinic “enslavement” in dialogue with individualisation alive in Levine’s investigations. Certainly, there is a capitalist subjectivity happening here, but one focused on markets and not necessarily capital. Markets retain a freedom from the inhuman operations of capital. Levine’s own work was tracing fluxes across media and making new phyla.

Making rhizomes is a core activity of the curatorial, especially if they are developed in a way that might suggest or propose possible new cartographies. This includes recombining arborescent dead forms to encourage new rhizomatic outgrowth. Detaching from commonplace conceptions of desire, it is unearthing new routes of desire and simultaneously new values for capital to exploit. According to theorist Stefano Harney, scholars and artists are finding value and turning it over to capital’s voracious maw, creating new value propositions for management.²²⁹ For Harney, the “creative industries” is a name for both the management of artists and the creation of “unfinished business”:

This, then, is the real call of the creative industries –not the coming of management into the arts, nor of arts into management, nor even the advent of brand as art work, but the sound of police sirens in a new hunt. The dogs of this hunt chase not the artist but society itself. And the struggle is not for authorship, wages, or authenticity, but to use the distance, the ground still open between hunter and hunted, to plan something different.²³⁰

“Catalogue of Services” presents an opportunity to reappraise the virtue of creative re-performance of neoliberal subjectivity (the coming of arts into management) in the context of this struggle.

Self-appreciation

²²⁹ Stefano Harney, “Creative industries debate, Unfinished business: labour, management, and the creative industries,” *Cultural Studies* 24 (2010): 436.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09502381003750401#.UnkbOpSgk0o.>

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

Ultimately the curatorial subject that Levine presages is presenting folds of order and chaos, new refrains for creating order while listening to chaos and what it can teach us. Recognizing what I now call Levine's transversal use of affective readymades, I referred to Michel Feher in the final footnote in "Catalogue of Services" to support my contention that he dabbled in the creative performance of neoliberal subjectivity. Feher distinguishes neoliberal capitalism from liberal capitalism by its intensification of human capital and suggests possible reform through the potential in adopting its self-appreciating subjectivity, which, while taking part in the subsumption of all spheres of life to market relations, also offers a chance for individuals to determine what constitutes an "appreciable life"²³¹ Self-appreciation signifies progressive, prescriptive strategies for working within the individualizing functions of neoliberal capitalism given its seeming permission for changing what it values. Michel Feher writes at the end of his essay that adopting the self-appreciating subject may "be a way of warding off its current melancholy by means of reentering the domain of the enviable and desirable — of raising, from its own perspective, the question of what constitutes an appreciable life."²³² Working in a public environment as a curator, I'm less interested in the entrepreneurial or even the invested self. I may be less interested because of the time I need to spend on adapting to federal funding requirements, implementing programs, etc. in a public environment. My shifting from entrepreneurial contexts to public state-based support has allowed a basis from which to notice different components of subjectivation.

In both commercial and non-profit contexts, and available for some subjects, there is now something like the curating of subjectivity. While I view this phenomenon in relation to Guattari's theory of autopoietic subjectivation, it is helpful to return to the self-appreciation of human capital

²³¹ Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," *Public Culture* 2, no. 1 (2009): 41. <http://publicculture.org/articles/view/21/1/self-appreciation-or-the-aspirations-of-human-cap/>.

²³² *Ibid.*

charted by Michel Feher. Feher charts the forces that germinate and reproduce what we can call curatorial subjectivity in its current form far beyond the sectoralized curating, curation or curatorial as methodology. There is no longer any way to separate the disciplined role of the curator from generalized curatorial subjectivity. This is precisely a code-breaking and fracturing of curatorial space and a reterritorialization. We can ask what is symptomatic and also possibly productive about such a more dispersed or democratized curatorial role in the context of proliferating centres and localities, decentred meaning-making?²³³ One might look to Feher's recognition of self-appreciation's social character whereby new forms of subjectivity can singularize around novel rhizomatic phyla. The process, following Feher might, however, look like one of mixing investments: the creation of self through code-breaking aesthetic moves followed by a reterritorialized aridity of the subject and simultaneous professionalization of art curating as an apparently elitist space of power, excess desire and predominant refrain. This would be a subject erected by the consensus unified forces that are shaping thought, shaping culture and (disciplining of the role of the curator), a process entangled in mutual influence with colonial-modernist subjectivation, whereby all are resisting and subject to Cartesian reflective individuation and capital's dispersion into life. The curatorial subjectivity is among the freest and yet most caught by human capital's inner workings and state allegiance, potentially meaning that it could wield class power without even being aware it is doing so. If combined with schizoanalysis, however, curatorial self-appreciation might be akin to what Zepke describes as a way to "liberate the libidinal drives so that they can operate directly within the multiplicities and assemblages of enunciation constituting the socius."²³⁴

²³³ Berardi describes this as contemporary panic provoked by the "digital intensification of the semiotic flow" that "breaks the rhythm of mental time." Berardi, *Breathing*, 41, 42.

²³⁴ Stephen Zepke, "'This world of wild production and explosive desire' - The Unconscious and the Future in Félix Guattari." 7.

Appreciation is an experience shared across everyday contexts, but especially intensified in financial and curatorial spaces. It is intrinsic to curating and may be analysed in its various manifestations. Curators appreciate things. Our appreciation adds value. To go further, appreciation lends a curiously reciprocal structure to value. To appreciate means to gain in vision, in understanding by experiencing that which is appreciable. While I gain through the object's appreciable qualities, the object also gains. It gains in its very appreciability, by virtue of being considered for its qualities. Aspirations are built upon consensus notions of what can be considered appreciable, what can be "visible" at all—more than this, what can be an appreciable life, therefore what can live. The gallery is a space that makes things valuable or more valuable. Or less valuable for that matter; what matters is that it decides. But it also opens itself by presenting its own presentation.

To appreciate my self, to self-appreciate is both to self-view and to grow in esteem, a reciprocation that exists within social relations. It also means (stemming from Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism) that my attributes are figured as investments in myself, human capital for which I am responsible like every competitive subject, and that my "stock rises" or falls as I self-appreciate. An appreciable life is one from which I gain. Surrounded by objects and people that are appreciable and, more important, people who are appreciable. There is a kind of affectability being described in the "lack" by way of aspiration that seems to motor the action here. In this model are we motivated by the lack we perceive? The self-determination promised to the desired rational whole self, self-fulfillment is held up by Michel Feher, as the unexplored potential in neoliberal capitalism

https://www.academia.edu/37308665/_This_world_of_wild_production_and_explosive_desire_The_Unconscious_and_the_Future_in_Félix_Guattari.

to turn the self-interested toward new social goals; it is, however, still a romantic notion of the static idealized rational whole self. A reckoning with failure is missing.

Solidarity

In her article “Imagining personhood differently: person value and autonomist working-class value practices,” Beverly Skeggs uses Michel Feher for his diagnosis of the liberal condition and not for his diagnosis of a *neoliberal* condition, nor for the potential reformist value of his ideas. She dismisses such reformist attempts, writing:

In making itself more amenable to capital, the person has become a fetish in which the labour and resources required for its development is hidden and psychologised. But not all people want to engage in, or can access, the value practices necessary for becoming a capital loaded fetish form of value. They may have better things to do with their time and energy.²³⁵

Skeggs’s conclusion disregards Feher without explicit critique in favour of collectivist imaginaries:

If we only focus our theoretical gaze on abstractions from the bourgeois model of the singular self we will never be able to imagine or understand how value is produced and lived beyond the dominant symbolic and will repeatedly misrecognise, wilfully ignore and degrade other forms of value practices, person-value and personhood, by default performatively relegating them to the void of the valueless.²³⁶

Feher’s paper “Self-Appreciation...” advocates an entry into the markets, into the sign of the neoliberal condition itself. Suggesting that unions and feminism gained traction by entering the conditions of their own domination could weaken the argument for this path of reform; the compromises of reform we can recall in the evocation of unions and feminism mark a shortcoming in Feher’s paper. I am now convinced that this approach puts too much stock in self-possession; it lacks consistency in that, much like art, it lacks stable phyla and relies on established material fluxes

²³⁵ Beverley Skeggs, “Imagining personhood differently: person value and autonomist working-class value practices.” *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): 508.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 509.

and familiar existential territories. It leaves the valuing of collectivity entirely up to the choice of someone who must attach to a much stronger force for its survival and success. It also doesn't account properly for the dividual flows necessary for the capitalist-state formation.

To be successful as a curator means to be respected for having good taste and decisional power over shaping what is good taste. To speculate successfully on artist success. It is to be held responsible for the success of institutions and artists while falsely modestly remaining behind the scenes. Like Stengers' depiction of the scientist in relation to facts and the systems that construct and assume them, the art exhibition allows the curator to be mute, any words are just extras.²³⁷ To be successful as a curator means be an effective bureaucrat (although this aspect is also made invisible) at the same time as adopting the radical innovation inspired by artists or indeed *as* artist.²³⁸ Being a curator allows a certain kind of growth that seems unavailable to many. The curatorial's use of refrains allows a kind of node that is freeing in the sense that it makes a stable space for connecting to elements of chaos that can each further complexify its hybridity, expand the existential territory of the curatorial. And this positive schizophrenia of curating is available to all, but not without concomitant material support. My final chapter speculates on what it would take to make the positive schizophrenia of "curation" more widely available.

Destituent

The essential difference that I want to describe here is between this idealization of self as an aspiration as distinguished from a recognition of mutual fragility, or in-common woundedness. Can

²³⁷ Stengers, "Deleuze and Guattari's Last Enigmatic Message."

²³⁸ There is much polemic literature on the differences between curating and art. The fine points of the distinction arise in the mutual enunciations and periodically emerge in what follows. The disciplinary limits and sets of practices are important to recognise and often to protect in practice. This text, however, might stray beyond them as it articulates aesthetics more broadly.

Feher's focus on stakeholders as members of solidarity groupings intersect with Moten and Harney's idea of debt as positive value? Can it connect through the idea of entanglement or dependency, especially as articulated by the voices that are excluded, don't fit, or can't be fully captured; I'm thinking here of the work of Tau Lewis, which insists on animism, on a solidarity with a shared godliness.

Aspirations to better credit, to have self-esteem and to maximize sharing are key to a neoliberal resuscitation of the entrepreneurial subject, according to Michel Feher. The subject moves up, has a better life through a submission to individual subjectivation and machinic "enslavement." Such aspirations, however, he claims, are ripe for intensifications to excess and other mis-uses unanticipated by the operations of capitalism that give particular kinds of autonomy to the subject of interest. This can certainly question the extremes and indeed the continuum of value that white middle class culture builds around self-determination and affectability.²³⁹ Who can take up this kind of aspiration? Who is not permitted? What socialities can we produce when we think with Moten and Harney, for example, of "better credit" from the perspective of "good bad debt," which is itself a sharing?²⁴⁰

Could the invested self be said to demonstrate an inextricable entanglement—in good debt that resists subjection and machinic enslavement? This kind of subjectivation is less about the weight of subjectivity, and more about the sticky connections between us. To perform such entanglement is to introduce the excess of multi-polar meaning that belongs to art into a situation that interrupts a smooth kind of governmentality.

1.5.3 Crossing Thresholds

²³⁹ Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*.

²⁴⁰ Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*.

In this section I introduce the essay “Crossing Thresholds” and think about the curatorial using Guattari’s ecologies and matrix of four functors of schizoanalytic cartography. The essay “Crossing Thresholds” can help us understand the tools available in a schizoanalytic cartography through the way they are formed in an exhibition by drifting through an exhibition’s floorplan. The exhibition was inspired by everyday practices of aimless wandering and by the situationist *derive* of Guy Debord, a practice whose non-productivity facilitates noticing lines of flight. Passing through a door, I note my ease of permission, my passing. There are such moments of interruption throughout the text. Only on rereading do I notice the applicability of Guattari’s concept of the component of passage, and in this case, faciality.

Breaks

These interruptions reflect my own state of self-disputation owing to the ambivalence of retreat as a rarefied and privileged state. My public presentation of retreat in the text gets spiked with seemingly disconnected (from the flow of the text) connections to those who might be and or feel excluded. Art history haunts this project. There are zombie predominating refrains of the unpast, the revenant here: these include gallery space, white walls, contemplative mode, refined aesthetic gestures, a two-person show, male artists, male curators. I was bothered (made to feel guilty) by the isolation involved in the project’s potential of reterritorializing art experience through the romanticization of artistic genius; at the risk of seeming perfunctory or performative, I allowed myself to occasionally bring explicit political notions to bear by bringing the outside inside to cause surprise moments of disorientation in the essay. The prohibition here of the political is itself a faciality. To a certain limit, this porosity was suggested by the work itself (Lau’s coming through walls and fabric scrim, Kline’s picture and ground dynamic interplay), but I was always aware of where the political seemed unwelcome.

Retreat conjures a romantic image of the artist, philosopher king, member of the planter class; In this text, such interruptions exhibit a halting, periodic, and uncertain solidarity with general antagonism, which threatens violent rupture with the present; ambient insecurity is a symptomatic of current decolonial transitions.²¹¹ I detect minor refrains in the time each artist asks visitors to spend looking and relooking, and in the tender reframing each artist does to hold and give new existential territory for the other artist. A rare and quiet language is passed between them. The use of the repeating voice in song in Yam Lau's work is turned into a refrain that crosses assemblages. Coincidentally, the connection of two artists is mirrored by the connection of two curators, creating a fourfold collective enunciation. Why were we drawn together? Like in Phillips's process, the work is consciously bringing processual threads/images together with their ends/outcomes. Such textility of viewing is analogous to the textility of making. The show simultaneously diagrams an emergence of complexity in the coherence and dissolution of virtual architectures.

One of the symptoms of contemporary curating is the denial or misrecognition of the infinite within the finite (chaosmosis). This essay for *Weave* is looking for the infinity within the finite (although it might be accused of too forcefully fixing meaning). This sense of infinity isn't just temporal, but also material. It is about the material-energetic flows between around and through subjects that are fetishized. It is about the way abstractions are immanent to experience. My desperate search for ethics in *Weave* leads me to think about infra- or supra-individual singularities, since it allows a *being for the other* by reflecting or holding space for them. It follows gestures of partial withdrawal / disappearing for the other in creation of an ethical space (existential territory).

²¹¹ Moten and Harney discuss the fear of complicity in their book *All Incomplete*. They suggest that all such fear is a fear of general antagonism. They suggest that we can instead choose to be complicit with the general antagonism. *All Incomplete*, 124.

This curatorial writing is a kind of risk, since one wrong swerve and one has constructed a weave that is too tight, and one can no longer see the artwork; The text risks the possibility of snapping threads that would mean unraveling everything. This writing risks reinforcing a faciality that rules out the unthinkable and makes it disappear.

“Unconscious”

A drunk person searches for their keys under a streetlamp. “Is that where you dropped them?” someone asks. “No, but the light is better,” they reply. [What do you say after a joke that doesn’t ruin it?]. Virtual and imagined landscapes are as important as material ones for artworks and for exhibitions. Existential territories are in constant dialogue with incorporeal universes of reference. Curatorial research recognizes destituent power and the revolutionary present that is virtual.

We can’t propose an emancipatory program nor even a ludic attitude before understanding better what field we’re in, the contours of curatorial existential territories, even if to focus on its complicity is to centre power. Curatorial studies often begins with defining and critiquing its own safe functioning modes, its faciality [the keys might be under the lamplight].²⁴² Curators are indeed virtue hoarders, (pretentious) bureaucrats, and they uphold the cultural reproduction of economic property relations and commercial modes, the subjectivation of individuals and machinic “enslavement” to carceral capitalism.²⁴³ The curator is a figure with mystique, power, the promise of, and sometimes actual membership in the professional managerial class.²⁴⁴ The curator participates

²⁴² Deleuze and Guattari conceive of faciality as maintaining a co-constitutive black hole, and, indeed, the white walls of curatorial practice require a kind of isolation as discussed in “Forays in the Underburden.”

²⁴³ This text by Lazzarato provides an overview of theories on the creation of the dividual and the individual: Maurizio Lazzarato, “The Machine,” Translated by Mary O’Neill, 2006, <https://transversal.at/transversal/1106/lazzarato/en>.

²⁴⁴ Catherine Liu applies the concepts created by Barbara Ehrenreich to our current moment in Catherine Liu, *Virtue Hoarders: The Case against the Professional Managerial Class*, University of Minnesota Press, 2021.

in the fraught material conditions traceable from feudal and early capitalist forms to today while also capitalizing on fluid allegiances made heterogeneously with middle class audiences, artists, occasionally the working class, the capitalist state funding bodies, the donor, and capitalist. Yes, to repeat this handwringing rehearsal would be to remain ensnared in the same obsession with power that limits institutional critique.²⁴⁵ Zepke writes, “For Guattari, a micropolitics of the ruptural event is creative and projective rather than simply a reaction against limits.”²⁴⁶ Therefore, a frank recognition of the organizing, structuring function of the curatorial and its possible counter-continuities (as well as ruptures) amounts to attempting to disentangle it from the in violence in which it is implicated, a first step in progressing beyond the rehearsals of complicity. Even though this exercise can tend to impinge on thinking the openness of the curatorial, the openness of works of art, potentials of exhibition, indeed of social justice, the current moment demands ethical focus on focus on planning organizing for the reckoning with the tools of white supremacy and economic oppression especially for white practitioners, who might too easily overlook these privileges of their positions.²⁴⁷

Chaosmic folding

What mutations of subjectivity can we trace in this text? I ended this essay with “The artists’ folding of perception into material, and material into perception, has carried me across aesthetico-political thresholds that prepare a renewed, gracious readiness for collective life.” My statement is certainly

²⁴⁵ Matthew Poole writes “to be anti-Capitalist one must set up an ontology of Capitalism, a monolithic schema, if you like, and this operation quickly falls back into the unhelpful dualisms that simply reproduce and reinstitute the hegemonic power of such Capitalistic operations.” Poole, Matthew. ‘Anti-Humanist curating: Finding a way further in,’ *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 9, no. 2 (2010): 91-101. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1386/jvap.9.2.91_7#.Uxy49OddWKw, 98

²⁴⁶ Zepke, “This world of wild production and explosive desire” - The Unconscious and the Future in Félix Guattari,” 8.

²⁴⁷ Andrew Hunt. “Minor Curating?”, *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 9, no. 2 (2010): 153-161. DOI: 10.1386/jvap.9.2.153_1.

hyperbolic and strategic. I desperately wanted to recuperate gallery exhibition politically through subtleties of shifts to existential territories made possible in the work. However, I may have returned us to the moment of culture as smooth integration in consumer culture, perhaps akin to shopping therapy.

At the same time, Guattari's weave of infinity/finitude and chaos and complexity is also a relevant way to further understand what is happening in "Crossing Thresholds":

It is by a continuous coming-and-going at an infinite speed that the multiplicities of entities differentiate into ontologically heterogeneous complexions and become chaoticised in abolishing their figural diversity and by homogenising themselves within the same being-non-being. In a way they never stop diving into an umbilical chaotic zone where they lose their extrinsic references and coordinates, but from where they can re-emerge invested with new charges of complexity. It is during this chaotic folding that an interface is installed – an interface between the sensible finitude of existential territories and the trans-sensible infinitude of the Universes of reference bound to them.²⁴⁸

Curatorial "machines" have the virtue of proximity to art that allows more immediate access to the aesthetic negotiation that in fact underlies all machines, and their connection to refrains positions them well for attending to the quiet voices. What are the rules of experience in art exhibitions?

One must drift and weave.

Mutational subjectivation and environmental ecologies

Weave has an engagement with cultural techniques, infinite speeds and demands on contemporary attention. Guattari writes: "The decisive threshold constituting this new aesthetic paradigm lies in the aptitude of these processes of creation to auto-affirm themselves as existential nuclei, autopoietic machines"²⁴⁹ Guattari writes in *Chaosmosis*: "The only acceptable finality of human

²⁴⁸ *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 110-11.

²⁴⁹ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 106. Also, Deleuze and Guattari quote Ernst Junger from his book *Approaches*:

activity is the production of a subjectivity that is auto-enriching its relation to the world in a continuous fashion. The machine, every species of machine, is always at the junction of the finite and infinite, at this point of negotiation between complexity and chaos.”²⁵⁰

Here we might usefully turn, through the work of Ibghy and Lemmens to the implications of the curatorial in *environmental* ecologies.

1.5.4 Speculative Fiction in the Work of Ibghy and Lemmens

In this section I introduce the essay “Speculative Fiction in the Work of Ibghy and Lemmens” and think about the curatorial using Guattari’s ecologies and matrix of four functors of schizoanalytic cartography. Territories in Guattari’s description are marked by the quality of being held. This essay was held by a supportive institution, collaborative partnership with artists, public funders, etc. as it was published in a monographic book by my own institution that I produced with the artists along with partnering public venues. In this context, the text had to follow the injunctions of a curatorial essay to focus on an exhibition I curated, but also to attend more than usual to the trajectory of the artists’ work. Like in the case of Levine, this puts the curator into a position of

Drugs and Ecstatic Intoxication in the following: “Puppet strings, as a rhizome or multiplicity, are tied not to the supposed will of an artist or puppeteer but to a multiplicity of nerve fibers, which form another puppet in other dimensions connected to the first: ‘Call the strings or rods that move the puppet the weave. It might be objected that its multiplicity resides in the person of the actor, who projects it into the text. Granted; but the actor’s nerve fibers in turn form a weave. And they fall through the gray matter, the grid, into the undifferentiated...The interplay approximates the pure activity of weavers attributed in myth to the Fates or Norns.’ An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 21.

expert and artist's ally (in tension with critical distance from both the artist and the institution). I probe the outer edges of *The Golden USB* project to try to expose how it, itself, is held.

Mental to environmental ecologies

To the degree that Ibghy and Lemmens are not concerned with making art objects in this particular project, their project has potential as a model of transversality. As a complete rhizomatic gesture, the gallery is taken over by different languages of display: those belonging to the trade show and artifacts in archival museums. The project's predominant refrains are trade commerce, colonial conquest and space exploration. Other predominant refrains are the arborescent forms evoked through museum display format and historical allusion, itself put back into dialogue with its birth in colonial conquest. We're confronted with a counter-archive of affective readymades that make minor refrains from satirical humour created through tension with predominant refrains; they evoke unfamiliar universes of references and new machinic phyla. The transversal takeover of the gallery is made effective by the expected heterogeneous performance of contemporary art and the permission it gives to "looking around" (without the acquisitive framework of "shopping around"). The tension is created by an inhuman gaze upon that which might hold value in relation to universes of reference under the sway of capital-like equivalency and exchangeability. The gaze helps us to see how the archive escapes such a gaze, the alien gaze of capital, and is instead already ultimately the cosmic in an actual real material-energetic flux and can be encountered as open to new universes of reference.

Existential territories of the subject are navigated and reformed as held temporarily by minor refrains. Resulting in a potential mutation of curatorial subjectivity, the artists came in with a curatorial strategy that I invited, and which displaced my own work into a more networking and relational community support role. What is a visitor? The visitor is free, carrying universes of reference and in constant terra-formation of existential territories. The visitor is ungovernable by

the entitlement of supposed governing of space and meaning-making. The visitor is ensembles of beings, assemblages of forces that are not just a discrete persons nor certain governed and ungovernable individuals. The visitor may not register or ever care about the small decisions that go into an experience, but such curatorial decisions do subtly or bluntly reinforce habits, or they expose and reposition affects and habits in a way that puts them into relation with others, or in a new context. Like in Ciara Phillips's *Workshop*, the attention to making and material is a proposition concerning what selves we make and what subjectivation can mutate when we drop transcendent modes of organizing and are forced to become curators ourselves.

The Golden USB engages existing machinic phyla or tools of organization: space flight and archival technologies. The Golden USB is a new machinic phylum that punctures transcendent organization through humour.²⁵¹ It satirizes a capitalist assemblage with reference to a transcendent enunciator that neutralizes difference. One could say that abstraction of the commodity has become the new face of the Earth. First developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Guattari continued to think about the concept of faciality:

For Guattari in *The Machinic Unconscious* faciality forms the coordinates of the face that intervene so as to define what is and what isn't licit, what is and isn't similar, what does and doesn't resemble, so as to reterritorialize what escapes when rhizomes are produced.

The face - a bit like space itself - is referred here to a planar geometry, one that is formed by the eyes, the forehead and the nose, 'which gathers together, formalises, neutralises and crushes the specific traits of the other semiotic components.'²⁵²

The *Golden USB* project is enacting a line of flight that speculatively subtracts the transcendent value. O'Sullivan summarizes Guattari's aesthetic paradigms drawn as pre-capitalist, capitalist and

²⁵¹ Andrew Hunt's "Minor Curating" is a useful text for how it figures humour as creating minor refrains.

²⁵² Querrien and Goffey, "Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy," 94.

postcapitalist assemblages with regard to schizoanalysis's capacity to notice breaks and allow new minor refrains:

Just as each of the three Assemblages are superimposed on one another within our own epoch, so the different aspects of a 'self' or a given subjectivity are likewise layered in a kind of palimpsest. Indeed, one might say that schizoanalysis, like the aesthetic paradigm more generally, involves the locating of an access point - or line of flight - from a given petrified individuality or transcendent mode of organisation.²⁵³

The overwhelming proliferation of difference in *The Golden USB* aids the satire of the notion of interplanetary capitalism. Curatorial practice needs such machines since it otherwise lacks phyla that can reroute material fluxes. Artists otherwise expect curators to draw on default modes. The project models non-consumerist vernacular collecting practices as avenues for curatorial phyla. Furthermore, it is a machine that amplifies post-humanist curatorial refrains capable of rejecting abstractions and practicing solidarity with the alien.

Materials were brought in and abstracted, brought in contact with an abstract systematization of the possible in a way that allowed its joyous rejection. Objects came in and went out as part of a project logic. The material-energetic flows were part of a transferable and scalable figure. Are transversal forms of exhibition foreign to and radically intervening in or simply an intentional aspect of the modern tool of exhibition? Perhaps it reinstates a properly transversal movement of the white cube that had been corrupted by market and other uses? In either case, it is a rhizomatic social ecology that is able to make work across environmental ecology in dialogue with mental ecology. This is a technology for pointing to the present. *The Golden USB* project cultivates

²⁵³ O'Sullivan, "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm," 272.

an ecology of attention that attends specifically to micro-ecologies of actuality and virtuality emerging in material-energetic fluxes.

Ibghy and Lemmens self-consciously elaborate a fiction that is draws on the curatorial's core function as a provisional signifying bridge. Simon O'Sullivan emphasizes the reintroduction of signifying material that Guattari advocates especially in the realm of contemporary art, which crucially accompanies the focus on the asignifying. O'Sullivan calls it a "concomitant construction of an assemblage to give the latter consistency, to make it workable."²⁵⁴

Extractive Violence

The Golden USB project is based on an engagement with colonial exploration and expansion and extraction both in environmental and mental ecologies, externally and in mental existential territories. Extractive violence is at work in contemporary art and the museum, as extractive violence is already active in the background maintenance of middle-class existence. State violence is alive in the overlaps of contemporary art and the museum with the academy and in the overlaps with the market. Regardless of practitioner, and intentions, the curatorial can reproduce class formation, racism and environmental destruction through its assumptions and practices, while ostensibly valuing life, freedom, beauty and, above all, change.

The point of so-called post-disciplinary injunction to productivity and self-styling is a violent form of care, which is differentially and intersectionally apportioned to classed, gendered and raced subjects. The violence also happens through dividual information flows. For Denise Ferreira da Silva, "For modern thought or ethical consciousness to produce form and value (property, capital, law) requires excess (violence), for this is the matter of representation, abstraction, signification,

²⁵⁴ O'Sullivan, "Guattari's Aesthetic Paradigm," 273.

calculation, and adjudication.”²⁵⁵ The colonial modern can only take form through extractive and reifying negation of the other. Colonial knowledge and colonial ethics are taking, they are extractive and reifying. Colonialism is disembodiment, sufficiency, firstness. For Ferreira Da Silva, it is separability, sequentiality and determinacy. Violence of police repression highlighted by Black Lives Matter uprising marks a moment for pointing to the complexity of complicity and need for change.

The critique of particular acts of violence is incoherent without the recognition of the distribution of corporate/state violence within which it occurs. The critique of isolated acts of violence by museums cannot be made without acknowledging their deeper roots any more than those state-sanctioned police, military or science. This is true in the same way that abolishing the police won't bring about the end of capitalist state violence, for example, since the state possesses and creates other outlets for its own self-sanctioned violence.²⁵⁶

Abolition

Abolition is useful as a way of thinking because it doggedly follows the repercussions of the previously unthinkable idea of something not existing in the future or being abolished.²⁵⁷ If curating were to be abolished, if the curatorial were to be wiped from Earth? What would we lose? Middle

²⁵⁵ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Unpayable Debt: Reading Scenes of Value against the Arrow of Time.” *Documenta 14 Reader*, eds. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (London: Prestel, 2017). https://anthropology.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/MORRIS%20CARDS/Boas/Unpayable%20Debt%20-%20d14%20Reader_Ferreira%20da%20Silva.pdf

²⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin “Critique of Violence,” In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, 277–300, ed. Petr Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986).

²⁵⁷ My simplified expression should not take the place of more original and authentic expressions by activist scholars like Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. As I have said, my direct accesses to abolitionist philosophies have been through artists like Hadley Howes and others, but I have also been influence in this regard by scholars like Lisa Guenther, Denise Ferreira Da Silva and activists like LaTanya Autry and Museums Are Not Neutral, <https://www.museumsarenotneutral.com/learn-more/we-are-stronger-together>.

management, bureaucratic, white liberal, culture industry? What would grow in its place? We would likely more readily recognise resistance to the present that is less visible, but active, nonetheless. What would grow in its place? The highest aspiration for the curatorial should be that it no longer exists, since it could dissolve into radical practices of singularity. The curatorial practices a variety of seeming free agency within and sometimes against the grain and strong invisible force of the colonial modern. Guattari's tools of complex assemblages allow us to understand what speaks through us, the participation of curating in state formation and violence and also, if we can locate them through careful cartographies, its nomadic possibilities. When is curating a violent extension of colonial capitalist modernist violence in its subjectivation and juridical dimensions, and when is it discovering latent commons, re-routing desire, making refrains and leaving the territory?

My project's attempt at applying schizoanalytic cartography and curating refrains also requires reckoning with whiteness in its assumption of freedom to explore. Although perhaps not celebrating the freedom to extract, it is still celebrating the freedom to connect, driven by a kind of assumed default modularity of components. The problem has to do with the deterritorialization and the unspoken privilege of whiteness. To sustain the curatorial is to sustain a distance that is formed of social class and which veils and maintains social class. The essay on Ibghy and Lemmens begins to question the neutral whiteness of the curatorial. Is the curatorial trying to retain the world in a white image? Put a stamp on it? give the world more of "me"? Am I trying to build a case for the importance of me in the context of a decolonizing art world that already has enough white male curators?

The space of culture seems to connect with material conditions only rarely, in part because of cultural denial and separation, a condition that itself necessitates repeated sutures. The activity of the curatorial exists at cusp points of capitalism's schizophrenic code-breaking

deterritorialization and its subsequent reterritorialization in cycles defined in the terms developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their series of texts comprising *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

“[...] schizophrenia is the exterior limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit... Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death.”²⁵⁸

Johnah Peretti summarizes: “As capitalism decodes and deterritorializes it reaches a limit at which point it must artificially reterritorialize by augmenting the state apparatus, and repressive bureaucratic and symbolic regimes” and “the schizophrenic never reaches such a limit. S/he resists such reterritorialization, just as s/he resists the symbolic and despotic territorialization of the oedipalizing psychotherapist.”²⁵⁹ Maybe it is no coincidence that Ibghy and Lemmens have structured their *Golden USB* project as a dream from which we must wake, a gaze we must check for its unconscious motivations. A new encounter must begin fresh from a discarded dream, let go, by looking around and being engaged in the world.

Its targets of satire are the faciality of the humanist archive represented by the USB and the master narratives about the colonial command of space. These are turned into affective readymades. *The Golden USB* itself is both an emergent machinic phylum and a collective assemblage of enunciation made up of a plethora of rhizomatic connections that image a plenum or material energetic flows. What does this say about the curatorial self-positioning as the arbiter of critical distance and autonomy? In *The Golden USB*, the art system’s visual regime is used for its well-travelled continuum between fetish and everyday materiality. What kind of autonomy of the

²⁵⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1983), 246.

²⁵⁹ Johnah Peretti, “Towards a Radical Anti-Capitalist Schizophrenia?” *Critical Legal Thinking* (December 21, 2010). <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2010/12/21/towards-a-radical-anti-capitalist-schizophrenia/>.

curatorial would need to be defended when such components of passage can thread research, art and ethics with little need for mediation?

Cosmic ecology of a transversal curatorial

The planetary can be the focus of the transversal curatorial. Specifically, attending to and protecting the richness of what escapes extraction. Is this not also a locus for freeing ourselves from the delusion of space segmented into here and there by consciousness, a delusion that hides our immersion in the ever-here infinite? And, simultaneously, freeing ourselves from a delusion of linear time as it is segmented through consciousness, a delusion that hides our immersion in the ever-present infinite?

The Golden USB approaches an epistemology of ecosophical relations or perhaps what Barad calls “more than reflective” relations. The question becomes about how to relinquish privilege and maintain a practice adequate and even liberatory for the contemporary moment. What is key is separating from the policing of machinic “enslavement” and declining the predominating refrains that tempt the subject away from collectivity.

Indeed, the methodological implications of *The Golden USB* are profound: they rhyme with Guattari’s assemblage of enunciation when he writes, “The primary purpose of ecosophic cartography is thus not to signify and *communicate* but to produce assemblages of enunciation capable of capturing the points of singularity of a situation.”²⁶⁰ Speaking to the ethical choices we are newly at liberty to make in late capitalism without “transcendent enunciation, a code of law or a unique and all-powerful god,” Guattari writes, “This is why the immense machinic interconnectedness, the way the world consists today, finds itself in an autofoundational position of its own bringing into being. Being does not precede machinic essence; the process precedes the

²⁶⁰ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 128.

heterogenesis of being.”²⁶¹ I consider the curatorial in this context as one small, interconnected machine, but one which has access to and practice within and between the differencing capabilities of art and the transversal co-creation of subjectivities. Here is a positive desiring model that can make humble use of social reproduction... one of many that are able to unleash diversity.

1.5.5 Forays in the Underburden

In this section I introduce “Forays in the Underburden” and think about the curatorial by applying Guattari’s ecologies and matrix of four functors of schizoanalytic cartography. I reread “Forays in the Underburden” which mediates a contemporary art residency with art and science partners and attempts to convey insights coming out the project by focusing on the art works as nodes for speculating about optimistic vitalism and the possibility of art and science working together. In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari cited Stengers and Prigogine on the loss of explanatory power faced by deterministic science with recent advances: “In fact it is the very productions of science, technology and social relations which will drift towards aesthetic paradigms. ... they evoke the necessity of introducing into physics a ‘narrative element’ as indispensable to a genuine conception of evolution.”²⁶² Guattari ends *Chaosmosis* writing, “all the disciplines will have to combine their creativity to ward off the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaotic spasms looming on the horizon, and transform them into riches and unforeseen pleasures, the promises of which, for all that, are all too tangible.”²⁶³ Before this can happen, the power struggle and reactive defence of territory that characterize the interaction of art and science need to be played out.

Material-energetic fluxes

²⁶¹ Ibid., 108

²⁶² Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 135.

²⁶³ Ibid., 135.

I note twin repressions exacted on Sudbury in the context of the *Drift* project: the city's chilling dependency and inculturation within the mining industry and the assault they must fend off from the critical international contemporary art paradigm which was parachuted down through artists and curators.²⁶⁴ We have already discussed the way that the assumptions of contemporary art bring a liberatory framework often experienced in a top-down way. Could we call the contemporary exhibitionary a desiring machine that desingularizes, deterritorializes? Agnes and its artists came to work in Sudbury and assumed a certain kind of criticality and responsibility to be operative on the ground. It was not.

To what extent are cognitive capitalist modes operative, whereby the capture of process itself, is key, colonizing the act of sharing itself?. Down in the mine where the scientists and artists are working, that is where freedom is. This freedom must be captured. If there were actual existing international working class and intercultural solidarity and not just ruling class networks, the allegiance of a curatorial project could be clearer (and it could dissolve without fear).

It seemed that art's presence emphasized the conflict in science about whether knowledge is to be understood as a mechanistic overlay on the Universe's infinite chaos, rather than revealing a supposed mechanistic real of the world. Artists naturally seize upon the way dark matter is a productive metaphor for the affirmation of difference in identity (chaos within such a mechanistic real); by this I mean that what seems to be held in common has access to imperceptible elements and differentiation. It can also speak, even more distinctly, to how what distinguishes us from each

²⁶⁴ Here is an instance of my criticism of Boris Groys's perspective; the situation points to Groys's argument in "Curating in the Post-Internet Age" lacks nuanced awareness of classed and raced inflections of the local and the global. He would favour any possibility of internationalist dissensus and dialogue taking ethical priority over the parochial local (which he designates as the real elite). I am more cautious about the assumptions that justify such deterritorialization, which can frame as dupes and disempower supposedly elitist local cultures, and paper over what harm might be carried by agents of the international, who, even if it is their intention to empower by internationalizing, may not be supported by a robust international "socialism" of cultural dialogue.

other is difference cut into an apparently continuous substance. Each way, it is a tool for thinking about possible missing singularities eschewing separability, determinism and sequentiality. Dark matter's asignifying imperceptible has its own (machinic) "unconscious" investment that I try to trace in the essay, attempting, like Guattari, "to regard the apprehension of a psychic reality as inseparable from the articulation of speech that gives it body, both as a fact and as an expressive process...."²⁶⁵ The extractive habits ingrained in culture are laid bare at several moments in the paper (and project more generally). In confronting its demands, I am led into the necessity of listening to the other. I look again at the search for dark matter through the artworks and processes of Nadia Lichtig, Josèfa Ntjam, Anne Riley and Jol Thomson as understood in the continuum of curiosity, art and care.²⁶⁶

The curator is performing a service for the artists, for the institution, for his own career through exhibition and publication. I tell the story of the residency and relate my impressions of how the artistic practices are connecting with the physics we encountered. Having gone through most of the same labs and meetings as the artists, my account of the *Drift: Art and Dark Matter* residency is influenced by, indeed inextricably knotted with the responses of the artists. I am part of a much wider assemblage and I attempt to relay entangled ecologies. I connect the constellations around the story of dark matter to Western science, to the story of artists practices, and to those constellations of which each of us is a part. I attempt to bring the incorporeal universes of dark matter into relation with our territories. My method is different from the scientific method.

Although I too am waiting for results, my function is the opposite of SNOLAB detectors. I explore

²⁶⁵ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 21.

²⁶⁶ As discussed in relation to *The Golden USB*, the museum is the perfect context in which to notice and reflect upon differentiations of human and object as well as non-art and art. Tracing cultural techniques like "the gate" and employing the notion of the "invaluable" from Fred Moten could be further approaches here.

breaks that open us to extraneous noises rather than filter them out. This text is like a cloud chamber showing trails of flight, representing multi-planar movements. It barely conveys argumentative directionality and rigor but uses the conventions of linear prose to suggest dreamspaces of strange relations and metamodeled spacetimes. We have already drifted into each other's orbits.

Cartography

Dark matter is like “the unconscious” as mapped by a schizoanalytic model: it has a profound effect on everything, but imperceptibly its components are variously actual real fluxes and actual possible phyla, virtual real territories, and virtual possible incorporeal universes of reference. It is the actual real of material-energetic fluxes in the sense that it has consistency and is having effects, material causality, apparently outside of human perceptibility across cosmic and intimate scales. Science is able to trace it through its machinic phyla: the instances where it rhizomatically connects with the perceptible. Dark matter is also the virtual real of an existential territory in the sense that it is a known unknown and linked closely with universes of reference. It is an inhuman consistency, a gaze, the perspective of which we can likely know nothing.

Science is focused on fluxes and phyla, and artists are focused on territories and universes. Artist

Tero Nauha warns about the risks of the uneven applying of the model:

... without taking the right side of Universes and Territories into consideration - the virtual and potential - we are replicating already existing fluxes. In turn, artistic practice cannot reside only in the domain of potential Territories and Universes, since it requires some machines, in other words significations and material fluxes of the real. In order to produce changes and transformations both in the singular, existential territory or ‘how life seems’ and in the relationships between the organizing power

of machines and material fluxes. Thus, practice ought to consider both signification and asigned potentials.²⁶⁷

When I speak about what science and art might do together, my speculation is aimed at achieving the kind of new consistency described here.

My use of “drift” in the title indicates a territory that is both signified and accessing universes of reference that suggest ways that we can be shown life other than how it seems. The tunnel called the drift is a territory in the mine that points to material and energetic fluxes: land and livelihood literally expropriated from Indigenous peoples and continuingly extractive from environmental ecologies. I wanted to open its major refrains through the significations related to mining, onto new contexts to liberate unexpected potentials, since the tunnel is a naturally evocative metaphor for the entwining of real and possible, virtual and actual. Specifically relevant here are the interrelations of phyla with universes of reference (science with art), material-energetic fluxes with machinic phyla (mining with science and art research). Deleuze and Guattari use the word “drift” in discussions of semiotics. Berardi describes its function in poetic enunciation in his book about Guattari:

since enunciation follows a route that can be defined as a drift (that is, the displacement from one point to another that has no recognizable logical consequentiality), then interpretation will have characteristics that we can define as delirious in the sense of de/lire, jettisoning the rules of logical and consequential reading to opt for a reading that is as multi-planar as was the enunciation).²⁶⁸

The title “drift” held potential that the project might sustain a rhizomatic interaction between actual and virtual, material-energetic fluxes and territories, that opens the door to universes of reference

²⁶⁷ Nauha, “Schizoanalysis as an artistic research method,” <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/26327/29078>.

²⁶⁸ Berardi, *Félix Guattari*, 68.

that might, in turn, effect territories. If it is able to orient itself and “drift” away from producing knowledge, such a new machine could actualize different material-energetic fluxes (economic, material, semiotic, libidinal, capital, labour, etc.). Holmes quotes Guattari from *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* to emphasize his concern with metamodeling’s potential to focus on actualizing transversal passages as enabling

a displacement of the analytic problematic, a drift from systems of statement [*énoncé*] and preformed subjective structures toward assemblages of enunciation that can forge new coordinates of interpretation and ‘bring to existence’ unheard-of ideas and proposals.²⁶⁹

Holmes concludes, “What he was concerned with, in short, was the articulation of collective speech.”²⁷⁰ Here collective speech is alive when universes occur within the visitor’s weave of perception and material in encounter with an artwork. Giving access to such chains of association, schizoanalysis offers escape from representation

There’s an essential component of inspiration involved in the interaction of the universes with phyla. Systematized knowledge encountering non-discursive and fleeting coordinates is the key rhizome of the project.²⁷¹ *Drift* is a rhizome that constellates universes of reference, that approaches being its own machinic phylum. A certain kind of schizophrenia is evoked through the ill-fitting striations of the mechanics of its new machines. *Drift* has an engagement with art systems, the technosphere, remote sensing technology, big science, but also with media representation, opacity and refusal.

²⁶⁹ Holmes, “Guattari’s Schizoanalytic Cartographies: or, the Pathic Core at the Heart of Cybernetics.” Holmes draws on Félix Guattari’s *Cartographies schizoanalytiques* (Paris: Galilée, 1989).

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Edmund Berger, “How Does Schizoanalysis Work? Or ‘how do you make a class operate like a work of art?’” *Deterritorial Investigations*. <https://deterritorialinvestigations.wordpress.com/2013/05/15/how-does-schizoanalysis-work-or-how-do-you-make-a-class-operate-like-a-work-of-art/#sdendnote10anc>.

Risk. When you make hybridities with other groups, you become a stranger to your own group. A sustained historical injury conditions art's suspicion of science. We haven't got over it yet. Warm relations, yes, but the artistic process was a secret I helped to keep protected. The Agnes throws its power behind centre-ing artists, sure, but it also figures us as the expert patriarch. Guattari's transversal practice would require the desegregation of roles to an uncomfortable extent. But wouldn't it allow for more repressed fantasies to come to light? There is an institutional break wherein some distrust between collaborators is foundational. Artist mostly don't risk their status in the collaboration. We wouldn't ask it of them, wouldn't allow it, wouldn't thrive from it. However, Anne Riley risked her status in anti-colonial communities by participating with certain settler partners. I risk having the partnership fall apart, embarrassing my institution on a public stage. I risk making a poor show. But none of this is as detrimental as the risk of destruction facing SNOLAB through communication crises, getting cancelled, angering their corporate hosts.

Material energetic fluxes are carriers of emotions of joy, anger and sadness. Art has been hurt by the centuries of legitimation conferred upon science, and any collaboration will draw it to the surface. For Stengers, "We no longer burn witches, but taking interest in empowering processes needs the knowledge that we risk having those words used against us. Indeed, it may well mean facing such accusations as irrationality, superstition, and regression."²⁷² She writes, "The desperate search for that which, being 'natural,' would supposedly have no need of any artifice, refers in fact, once more and as ever, to the hatred of the pharmakon, of that whose use implies an art."²⁷³ This is

²⁷² Isabelle Stengers, "Deleuze and Guattari's Last Enigmatic Message," *ANGELAKI journal of the theoretical humanities* 10, no. 2 (2005): 151-167.

²⁷³ Ibid. Pharmakon is perhaps another way of thinking of "drift." For more on Stengers and Pharmakon see Wark, McKenzie. *General Intellects: Twenty-One Thinkers for the Twenty-First Century*, Verso.

a hard place for art to go if it isn't submissive to serving the illustration or "knowledge mobilization" of its hosts.

I tried not to have my spirit crushed by science communications staff who didn't seem to have any faith in leaps of imagination. There was a moment when dark matter was called the "last great mystery in the universe" and it was a moment when I had the least sympathy for attempts to detect it. It is refreshing, however, to work with scientists who acknowledge that science is like a recipe that works, and beyond that we just don't know anything about the universe for certain. It is a house of cards, a construction.

Perhaps it is not feasible that artists would help scientists to detect dark matter. What is important, however, is to imagine something in the future. To try to work together to figure it out without moralizing. Art's hurt feeling must give way to hybridity. This hybridity is already happening in the latent and actual commons. Narrative suffuses science: you can't help identifying with the WIMPS over the MACHOs, for example. Dark matter is a goal known in advance but has a particular vulnerability that opens it for us. Scientists haven't "found" it despite the enormous expense. At the same time that simply opens a space of speculation on shared focus on process. Inspired by Jol Thoms, I begin from a recognition and urgent compulsion to come to action that we are living in crisis; we have tried to assert the value of both disciplines as research practices; as we do so, we notice instances of commonalities, shared practice and cross-influences between art and science. But we have seen what appear to be differing goals come into stronger relief. My hope is that traversing the disciplines could create further new hybridity that sees us creating shared goals at which we haven't yet arrived.

Research is none other than curiosity, the word that shares its linguistic root *curare*. Care also shares its first letters with curating: how connected or engaged is a given ethics? How can it be guided by art's grounded presence in the material? I interpose art between curating and care, as a

form of ecosophical being: listening, being open to surroundings and pulsating with its intensities, letting be what is, running with the flow's curriculum (another linguistic root of curating). In this model, it is the multisensory listening to and expression of the world, art, that links and tempers science and ethics.

Light and dark constitute each other. Art and science are machinic phyla, disciplined differently. Ideally, the exhibition is a kind of mutation whereby art and science are co-constituting a hybridity. This is different from the route some might have taken of complete refusal, of oppositional activist art, or even of complete freedom of making. Instead, it is truly compromised: and for integral reason.

In this experiment, as we relate across difference, art and physics practitioners are freshly presented with our own investments in our distinct methods. For example, I try to keep alive a sense of imagination in my encounter and experience a wild and sometimes disturbing swing in between imagining and rational understanding. This may be emerging from a delirious flow between worldviews, most powerfully apparent in the contrast between formalised experimental methods in the scientific search for dark matter and the poly-vocal play of the artist's research residency. Between paranoid investment and schizophrenic investment in the earlier binary formulation of Deleuze and Guattari.²⁷⁴ Science positions itself at the safe shore on a turbulent sea of endless multiplicity. Artists hate fixation even if they need it. We are striving for stability and serenity. Our gates protect us and are so familiar as to become invisible habits. Deleuze said "Reason is always a region carved out of the irrational-not sheltered from the irrational at all, but

²⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin, 2009).

traversed by it and only defined by a particular kind of relationship among irrational factors.

Underneath all reason lies delirium, and drift.²⁷⁵

This might be characterised as a constant restaging of worldviews and their particular anticipations; the difference is between the event-to-come of sensing something “natural” that has never been directly felt as compared to the event-to-come of the community-to-come emerging from the fabulation that would enact art’s time-travelling portal. What is active in the present? If we add the destituent politics of Benjamin, Agamben or Tari to the perspective, the “to-come” is revealed as a diversion from the real existing present. This fits Guattari’s vision of cartography and ecosophic metamodelization as modestly renouncing any pretension to durability or eternal scientific authority: “a heterogenesis of systems of valorisation and the spawning of new social, artistic and analytical practices.”²⁷⁶ We might say that my own “Forays in the Underburden” is a kind of metamodeling.

The moments of grasping, taking, wanting are the moments of violence. I am tempted to narrate a drama of extraction and refusal, one that involves revolutionary new hybrid practices happening deep underground. Each discipline’s extractive superego is demanding its visibility. In particular, how do we resist the construction of zones of non-being vs. Being. How do we recognize extractive thinking and resist the colonisation of dark matter? One of the lessons of that parable of the elephant could be that we could learn from each other when we can work together without our obsessional defence mechanisms. One of the clearest schizophrenic ways of operating that art and science share is wishful thinking that is always in conflict with and in mutual influence with what is happening. Isabelle Stengers in her reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* claims

²⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotexte, 2003), 262.

²⁷⁶ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 117.

that each discipline must cultivate resistance to the present's demand for value.²⁷⁷ Can art be in solidarity with western science, facing such a common task? Attempting to glimpse another present, create new disturbances that allow traces of the latent human and non-human commons or more-than-reflective practices and recognitions.

Ultimately these matters are key to what art and physics can and must do together. When we “mobilize knowledge” in this experiment, the process of becoming together, this “drifting” companionship shall be our common goal. I write as a curator about this process, not a scientist nor an artist. I've realised that my role is more like that of a forager, a forager for associations between narratives, contexts, shapes, structures and metaphors. In Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's identification of the forager as a model for the researcher, the mushroom forager isn't objective nor reticent to interfere.²⁷⁸ The forager, for Tsing, carefully disturbs an ecology and reveals buried connections, contextual assemblages and possibly latent commons. A forager can model and guide us through stories of our entanglement. The greatest challenge consists in opening a new space between disciplines with traditionally different goals. Negotiating the demands and possibilities of each sphere as they sometimes conflict in practice. There are many difficulties, and occasionally we arrive on common grounds. The first common ground is social engagement as spurred by the work of artists and filtered differently through Western science communication and curating. Our science partners wanted to make sure they included an Indigenous artistic perspective. In particular, the

²⁷⁷ Stengers is focused on the relationship of science and philosophy, and a longer study would look closer at art's relationship to these two domains. She writes “And it is precisely because a minority collectively produces a divergence without a dream of convergence, of representing a future majority or consensus, that some transversal connections are possible. A writer can understand something about an alpinist's discipline, or a mathematician about the judge's selective and creative processing of a case.” Stengers, “Deleuze and Guattari's Last Enigmatic Message,” 158.

²⁷⁸ Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 21.

presence and contribution of these particular artists poses a gap in comprehension and a state of social injustice from which science is isolated by way of the borders of the disciplines and which are only possibly surmounted through a clash of cosmologies.

Are the languages incommensurable? They might bear a superficial resemblance, but they might also form irrational bonds in the process of undergoing dissensual interpretation. This is especially promising when we're juxtaposing epistemologies and devising possible constellations, routes and guiding paths that are not just tracing existing ones but are disturbing or enacting their contact points, making tools for thinking. The second is in (a la Stengers) together conceiving of a kind of "art of attention" that responds to the intrusion of the universe, the return of nature, in a way that is unbound to milieu.²⁷⁹ We recognize a kind of institutional drift, however: coming together and then drifting back into habits, coming together without clarity. Forgetting of commonalities. Not without turmoil, we have reached the stage of committing to the risks of true innovation in a way that is demanded by our non-separate relation to each other.

Hybridities partake of the energy of drift. Now may be the most urgent time to relate to material conditions of global urgencies amid the dissolution of and destructive fallout of global capitalist modernity. Art and science are each struggling for freedom within a dying system that implicates us in state sanctioned violence, narratives of progress, etc.. Could thinking with dark matter help us to craft an epistemology of matter that grasps a material/poetic lived abstraction? This might allow for a practice with matter that is inextricable from relations and our care for them.²⁸⁰ Conceiving of the event of dark matter can attend to new shared practices and adventures

²⁷⁹ Haraway writes "The biologies, arts, and politics need each other; with involutory momentum, they entice each other to thinking/making in sympoiesis...." Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 98.

²⁸⁰ In an otherwise unpublished text downloadable from her website Katherine McKittrick, discusses the notion of a dream skin that is akin to a Guattarian machinic unconscious and its collective assemblages of

of thought, irreducible erotics of life, and the value of the uncapturable. Thought is instigated by the drifting, the weave of acting and undergoing. The works of art are in turn used speculatively to see if they have any relevance to the search for dark matter in science, whether speculation can find a transversal connection via the surround of the scientific method.

Can these tools help western science and art to resist the present (as Stengers urges via Deleuze and Guattari), cultivate futurity, survivance? Can a schizoanalysis of dark matter science mobilize a layered ecology capable of producing the kind of subject we need today? What is science's use value to the care for human and non-human relations?

It is worth considering whether and how the mobilisation of schizoanalytic approaches in art and western science crossover might increase capacities to creatively resist consensual scientific perceptions and consensual artistic perceptions. Perhaps this could be addressed by reorienting thought toward the latent commons glimpsed through fissures revealed by transdisciplinary encounter and by attending to the schizo-delirium and the interplay of incorporeal universes and existential territories.

My essay attempts to illustrate how Imperceptible material-energetic flux points back to the human psyche and points further to the invisible material energetic fluxes of desire, capital, labour. Follow the desires, dark matter seems to suggest. The material-energetic fluxes carried by the drift corridor in SNOLAB's host Vale mine are profoundly influential on the project. The SNOLAB site exists because of public funding and possibly corporate industry funding. It could not function without the massive technology of mining and its extractions. The ethical relation is out of joint, drifted, multi-polar, seemingly not directly consequential, but it is deeply entangled. Culture can be a way of obscuring material energetic fluxes, diverting attention from them, and it should be

enunciation. "Respite. (On NourbeSe Philip's Scientific Poetics)," <https://katherinemckittrick.com/>.

observed that science and art both have cultures. Science and art partners diverted funds and time to artists, yes, but extraction is built into this gesture in the sense that the science partners wanted something from artists: paid them to produce some resulting artworks that would accomplish an educational popularising role. To the extent that the science partners are interested in the particular artists' own perspectives, they want to display them in a self-serving way, especially through demonstrating a virtuous relationship to Indigeneity. This is extraction is undeniably operating in art too. Tokenism can be a way of making a quilting point to cover for unresolved ethics even while it also begins exchange and promises to engage a necessary process of reckoning. I was occasionally angry and cynical in the process about the extraction from artists and culture in general and the presumed self-importance of science and our partners's defensiveness; there was certainly a reverse extraction that we (art) were perpetrating as we asserted an equality and sense of control. We extracted knowledge, affect, novelty from the science partners. The science partners became defensive about the unpredictable and not necessarily communicational qualities of the results in addition to the time, energy and money spent on the project, and the ethical challenges posed by artists wielding critical perspectives. The curatorial role was challenged ethically, being at the centre of the politically unsympathetic but still relationally important demands of SNOLAB and, on the other pole, the demands of the norms of contemporary artistic and academic criticism. This tension broke at a moment when we had to ask an artist to change his work. The Canadian Anglo Saxon artist had pushed the ethical questions in the work as an earnest way to engage with the site and dark matter's singularity. Thoms's work was most objectionable to the science partners because it maps out material-energetic fluxes that characterized ethical entanglements. The Indigenous artist was cautious about protocols belonging to place that should guide her participation on the territory of a different Indigenous nation.

I was ashamed that we so smoothly joined extractive material fluxes. The flirtatious heterogeneous performance of art's existential territory is a key reason for this ease. It was fueled by the connection to the university. The joining by artists created an extractive flow that characterises university research. It also characterises mining in the sense that the project operated in secret, under cover of darkness, underground, and took away a self-enriching and mobilizing trove of goods. A class dynamic is entrenched in Sudbury whereby nobody in Sudbury seems to confront mining companies because the entire economy depends on them; the science lab profits from the continuation of this system. The curator accesses profit from institutional affiliation allowing recognition, recognizability, already within reach for petit bourgeois intellectuals. At the same time, what would it mean to refuse to engage at all? This would maintain the parochial boundaries of culture and science and leave the situation undisturbed.

I felt like it was my role and position to assert the autonomy and critical licence of artists against what consistently felt like the assumed self-evidence of legitimacy of science. I felt like artists and curators were figured into the zone of the fool, into the zone of madness, cultural identities that occasioned ethical care but maintained a frequent marginalisation of perspectives. At the same time, although perhaps well-meaning, the science communication teams were interested in exposing the artist processes. Here I felt it was the curator's job to protect the dark illegible matter and illegitimacy of artists processes, protect the polysemy of their work. I felt it was the curator's job to prevent the extraction of human capital, extraction of tokenising imagery. This was a case where the curator could interpolate and practice care that its role is so often attributed with. As our own touring exhibition's limitations were exposed for their brick-like, modular sensibility, I also became frustrated with everyone creating just another packaged modular vehicle.

The curatorial conjoins amateur and professional curating, commercial curation and curatorial studies. My concluding chapter is freed to speculate on the possibilities of further

conjunctive syntheses held by aesthetic paradigms outlined in Guattari's *Chaosmosis*.²⁸¹ Can the curatorial reach its full potential with a transversal move into the amateur? Should it likewise be mediated by material play?

General Discussion

This chapter draws out minor refrains that emerge from the introduction and rereading of the five curatorial essays in this portfolio project. As a general discussion, it will address these as approaches that are newly clarified and indicate areas for further development. Reflexively revisiting the essays and curatorial methods with attention to schizoanalytic cartographies has sometimes revealed material fluxes and their related blind spots; it has revealed interconnections with wider phyla, existential territories in dialogue with different universes. In an attempt to gather lines of flight that could help to develop a more transversal curatorial, the project has focused on the “components of passage” of the curatorial, including the limitations of the faciality of the curatorial and the potential of its minor refrains.

My question in the Preface, “can the curatorial decolonize itself?” has gained specificity and grounding through contact with Guattari's systematization. The current consistency of the curatorial is sustained by the conditions of colonial modernity, and yet the curatorial is specially

²⁸¹ I am indebted to Simon O'Sullivan's secondary work for concentrating and explicating Guattari's aesthetic paradigm.

practiced at attention to the asignifying, virtual components of ecologies (while maintaining crucial dialogue with language), and is oriented towards noticing and prioritizing the potentiality of minor refrains.²⁸² Given this focus on safely bridging to unfamiliar territory, could new curatorial machinic phyla be built from and across emerging existential territories, allowing for means of producing subjectivity in healthier relations to material fluxes? To put it another way, the curatorial's assemblage of research, art and ethics invites one to listen (curiosity), follow and share art (curriculum, metamodeling) and facilitate and organize refrains (care), and while it allows for varieties of passage, this concatenation may or may not help produce better-shaped material fluxes and empowered existential territories for life.

Break

This doctoral project, although engaging with and weaving together with enunciations from my own participation in socially engaged and practice-based collective contexts, is intentionally an exercise in scholarly retreat rather than an attempt to be directly relational (for example through community-based research, collaborations, or interviews). Accordingly, I'm very aware of the abstraction and extrapolation of practice I attempt, and of the lexicon-heavy quality of the proposals, which might bewilder, turn off and otherwise elude many. Curatorial writing must normally try to temper its communication at this nexus. In this doctoral project, however, it is a process of translation that needs such a break from the flow, a sense of retreat and concentrated rereading to chart a viable movement through a mental ecology toward social ecology. The break aligns with my presentation of an exhibition of essays filtered through metamodeling, since it makes a temporal fold that sits transversal to the normal schedule blocks and treadmill of productivity.

²⁸² In his accompanying text, Gary Genosko reminds us that, for Guattari, ecologies of the virtual are to be considered part of experience of the three ecologies, *The Three Ecologies*, 83.

The militant method of schizoanalysis and the context of the studies-practice of the curatorial demand that prescriptions remain provisional. The refrains I trace in the General Discussion are time-sensitive and local in character. Certainly, part of the work of the curatorial is the reterritorializing current that is the refrain, which allows for encounter with safety and consistency. Yet this is also its risk. Indeed, I have often become unsatisfied with attempts at the hardening of processes into the logics of codified methods, where refrains become reterritorialized repetitions. *The Golden USB* is saved from this fate by its sense of humour, Ciara Phillips by the necessary mess of self-organizing frameworks of desire. The pleasure of the curatorial is the surprising life that can emerge from refrains if you stand back and let them grow. While my texts do tend toward optimistic striving, in what follows, I present, rather, an exposition on curatorial entropy and the desire for disappearance, followed by an exploration of possible future paths and their challenges.

Disappearance as existential territory

I had written earlier that if we are to study it, the unstable existential territory we call the curatorial must be made to appear where it wants to disappear. I framed the curatorial as cultivating base stability and superstructural stealth. My essay about Les Levine's services touches upon the moments of "leaving" and "what happens after" that are part of that piece. In this section, I discuss a destituent line of flight that could describe a falling apart of the structure of access to material-energetic fluxes through the machinic phyla of the curatorial.²⁸³

²⁸³ Schizoanalysis wants to make new lightness possible. In his book on Guattari, Berardi shows how Deleuze and Guattari temper their early idealization of freedom afforded to positivized desire. Franco (Bifo) Berardi, *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography*, trans. and eds. Giuseppina Mecchia and Carles J Stivale (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 131.

At its practical level, the desiring movement of the curatorial constantly goes through processes of release and giving. The curatorial is structured by a kind of self-interested humility (or humble self-interest) to nourish itself/oneself in basic economic terms so that one can exercise this privilege to disappear. Certainly, the desire of the curatorial is to sustain the curatorial regarding its proximity to capital (material-energetic flux). Yet it is also to produce experience and create generative dissensus through which it recedes behind the potential of its effects. Remember that the curator's hand should be generous but not too apparent, garner praise for its subtlety.

The curatorial must recognize how its own practices might be more lightly held, by whom else they might be held in riskier new movements into fearsome territory that take a position and build new phyla in relationship to material conditions. The curatorial sustains itself with constant flight from the deaths signified by its poles: policing, authoritative statements of certainty, joyless repetition, administration, political and ethical complicity on the one hand, and on the other, collapse into the sphere of libertine artistic practice. Certainly, a curator desires to reinforce curating's apparent privileged coherence, its affinity with components of passage that allow it to cross assemblages, to engage in mobile self-situation. To present its content, the curatorial seeks material support and professional stabilization but always in a unique zone at an interconnected remove from both art and administration. It simultaneously sustains the partial objects of becoming-administration and becoming-artist. In this professional context, cultivating access to each pole, the curatorial is dutifully organizing new paths for protecting the polysemy of art and enlivening new social-artistic possibilities. In its current situation, it is always mixed anxiously with the ends of capitalist administration and indeed mixed anxiously with utopian or even ethical goals and their administration in public service, whereby critique is figured in dyadic servitude of power. It is, of course, always mixed anxiously with art itself. Curatorial practice is in a dynamic weave with art but doesn't need to be identical with it. Its proximity to art puts the curatorial into anxious relationship

with the rationalist standards of academic scholarship. Theory is elaborating a dynamic weave with practice, keeping discursive and non-discursive worlds in touch with each other. If it is too highly protected by the relative safety enabled by its material support, the curatorial risks missing or desingularizing new singularities that might emerge from riskier situations that promise access to new modes and solidarities.

Is it time for a leap? With its interrelation with the revolutionary potential of art, the curatorial has hidden potential of organizing and shaping experiences that would be starting points for the mutation of subjectivation in the contemporary moment and a reciprocal mutation of the curatorial.

This existential dynamic of grasping and offering can release new refrains if we listen especially closely to the offering. Rereading the texts has allowed me to bring forward abolitionist imaginaries, for example, that seem newly possible, which question the future material stability of the curatorial. It may not always be a profession, nor an academic discipline. Here I turn to fugitivity, camouflage, illegibility and subtraction as minor refrains already active within the curatorial.²⁸⁴ These have emerged from the essays about Ciara Phillips, Les Levine and *Drift*, especially. Curatorial coherence is preserved in several ways: through wielding language in art contexts and building up academic authority, and through fleeing or abstracting museum “curating” and the support networks on which it depends; through fantasies materialized through popular cultural mediation. In what follows I explore how many of these cohering factors have strong decohering opposites.

²⁸⁴ Like Fred Moten does, I acknowledge the influential Black Feminist work being done around this, such as in the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva. Andrew Culp detects and inserts subtraction as a component of Deleuze and Guattari’s vision of desiring machines. Further study would read Culp, Ferreira da Silva, Benjamin, Agamben and Tari.

With careful attention to machinic phylum, the transversal mobility of the curatorial might yield to both the becoming-administration by disappearing into “curation” but with its becoming-artist explosive metamodeling production at its heart.²⁸⁵ This project is beginning to establish a basis for theorizing work like this. In the ecologies of my own curatorial practice, I have been exploring through such avenues as *The hold*, playgroup methodologies used in *Dark Matter Playgroup*, *Rehoming Playgroup* and *A guest + a host = a host* and *Along the Way: Decolonial Ecologies Playgroup*. I have discussed a dispersal that is natural to the curatorial. Where else is the curatorial already transversalizing? Are there ethical and pragmatic grounds for following and amplifying these transversalizing movements of the curatorial?

Transversal paths

In this section, I introduce transversal paths while signaling the dangers of subjection and machinic “enslavement” of social engineering and the unconscious monsters or simply insufficient material-energetic flux of libertine desiring production. The curatorial is a material practice with multiple worthy points of resonance between theory and art, social urgencies, social ideology. But how do you unlink it both from whiteness, modern reflective power dynamics and property relations that are carried by the museum and unlink it from the heterogeneous instrumentalizations implied by curation? Can you detect and protect the self-forming minor refrains possible in these two territories-phyla?

Despite the dissensus encouraged by exhibition, a tone of projection, perfecting, purity or elitism can creep into this work that might risk assuming one’s own values to be universal, overdetermine interpretation or seek to correct experience. It is tempting to consider the core

²⁸⁵ I use the term “curation” as at least provisionally distinct from curating. I will propose that it become a legitimate focus of the curatorial.

question as whether one is participating in “Imageneering” or state violence: politics or policing. If we think of the exhibition as a microcosm of state formation, the preoccupying question might become where precisely subjection and machinic “enslavement” are served by the work of the curator in co-constitution with the visitor. The practice of yielding meaning and the self-determination and metamodeling cultivated by curating and the curatorial suggests, however, that it need not dwell on the above questions. The curatorial is always practicing the acceptance of risk that comes with being open to the social. The curatorial risks falling into complicity or indifference in hopes of bearing potentiality for good. Artist Tero Nauha quotes Guattari at length from “Transversality”:

Transversality in the group is a dimension opposite and complementary to the structures that generate pyramidal hierarchization and sterile ways of transmitting messages. Transversality is the unconscious source of action in the group, going beyond the objective laws on which it is based, carrying the group’s desire [...] It is my hypothesis that there is nothing inevitable about the bureaucratic self-mutilation of a subject group, or its unconscious resort to mechanisms that militate against its potential transversality. They depend, from the first moment, on an acceptance of the risk – which accompanies the emergence of any phenomenon of real meaning – of having to confront irrationality, death, and the otherness of the other.”²⁸⁶

Curatorial practice creates only a modest footbridge and intentionally leaves space for the other. Accordingly, I don’t have illusions about the direct political efficacy of art, the curatorial, nor scholarship and aim instead for developing minor refrains with potentiality, but yielding control of any long-term effects within wider ecologies. The curatorial way involves beginning with listening to materials, affective qualities, non-discursive potentials. Then it proceeds to organize, select and

²⁸⁶ Guattari qtd. In Nauha, “Schizoanalysis as an artistic research method,” <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/26327/29083>. “Transversality” appears in *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984).

arrange material according to its needs for care. This is the point at which it must cease control and expectation. It is let loose in the social. I propose two transverse approaches: a curator circle program and an undergraduate certificate in ecosophical curation.

Amateur conjunctive, collective assemblages of curatorial enunciation

In this section, I think about the curatorial in relation to the rise of “curation.” I think about what transversal possibilities already exist that are de-professionalizing the curatorial and opening it to varied practitioners. The curatorial already enacts a contemporary paradox of freedom because its subjectivities are both among the most apparently free and, paradoxically, among the most bound up with the aspirations of neoliberal subjectivity. More people are calling themselves curators and many others easily identifying “curation” happening in the world. A transversal curatorial would be the result of a transversal jump between curating art and curating subjectivity. This jump is already happening, but it might be radicalized with metamodeling as a site for new chaotic folds, territory-universe formations, new rhizomatic phyla.

We have seen the emergence of a predominant capitalist refrain whereby, at least among a privileged sector of the world’s population, the abundance of choice necessitates the expert selection and arranging of goods and “content.” Those without luxury capital are usually offered free algorithms or the narrowed choices of budget options. The proliferation of commercial curation is already too broad to summarize here. For now note, for example, the Flipboard podcast “The Art of Curation” whose episodes are titled “Craft chocolate DJing: Spencer Hyman, Cocoa Runners,” or “Personal finance voyeurism at its best: Hannah Rimm, Refiner29.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Mia Quagliarello, host, produced by Flipboard. *The Art of Curation*. Podcast. <https://flipboard.com/@artofcuration>

Furthermore, a dominant cultural refrain suggests we are curators of the self through self-styling via consumption-driven choices.²⁸⁸ All are subjected into an increasingly balkanizing milieu. Guattari wrote his last book in 1992 when the results of networked global capitalism were becoming clear and not yet popularly known as globalization. His chapter on aesthetics declares our era one of an “explosion of the individuation of the subject and this fragmentation of interfaces.”²⁸⁹ He predicted an increasing fragmentation of worlds, to which Berardi applies the notion of the baroque. The integration of the metamodeling ethico-aesthetics of schizoanalytic floorplanning could have a role to play in a new attention to presentation by amateur curation beyond selection and posting to its narrow platforms—if it is able to form a transversal refrain that could narrativize its belongingness among the amateur.

Professional curating, and to a lesser extent, curatorial studies is disturbed by the great polyphonic assemblage of the “curation” of content and “curation” of the self. The white walls of curating’s professional faciality confine amateurism to a “black hole,” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, and by and large exclude curating of the self along with other amateur vernaculars of curation from curatorial thought. We have already discussed the refrains and machinic phyla at work to individualize and institutionalize the multiplicities of practice.

What minor refrains can allow the curatorial to travel out of its comfort zones and intervene in the formation of the wider pedagogy of curation. For example, wouldn’t curatorial studies-practice (as both training and auto-critical analysis) rather follow the disturbance allowing for the beginning of a set of curatorial practices as a collective assemblage of enunciation? The core

²⁸⁸ Boris Groys, “The Obligation to Self-Design,” *e-flux Journal*, no. 0, (November 2008). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68457/the-obligation-to-self-design/>; Michael Bhaskar, “Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess,” *Talks at Google*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ5WHZARhY>.

²⁸⁹ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 108.

floorplanning strengths of the curatorial prepare it for metamodeling, meaning it would not just be blindly adopting a new model. Simon O’Sullivan describes the value of metamodelization this way:

Indeed, the goal of schizoanalysis is precisely to reconnect the petrified models of subjectivity to the field of desire from which they have been extracted, a technique that involves a confrontation with chaosmosis but then also that one models it differently, utilises other models alongside the more familiar ones, and holds all models lightly and strategically.²⁹⁰

Isabelle Stengers sees the value of such an approach in her work on science:

In contrast with the Deweyan public, what we now see emerging and stuttering has features of what Deleuze and Guattari called “minorities,” creating their own diverging lines of escape, their own ways. These may be called “objecting minorities,” minorities producing not as their aim but in the very process of their emergence the power to object and to intervene in matters which they discover concern them. The emergence of these divergent, problem-creating, multiple, “empow-ered” minorities is what I would define as an unknown of our epoch.²⁹¹

Slightly different stakes are similarly at risk in art. Stenger writes, “The only chance for science to resist its appropriation, to survive as a minority diverging adventure, may be to break the bind, namely the old strategic alliance with the great consensual, convergent theme of the struggle of reason against mere opinion.”²⁹² The great consensual convergent theme of art with which we must break the bind: only some people are artists, and professional curators police who gets noticed and supported in the specialized zone of culture.

If we are supposed to be curating ourselves, are there subversive possibilities hidden in plain sight in this neoliberal form of subjectivation as I have discussed in relation to Les Levine’s work? What would it mean in material practice to connect “professional” work of curating to a

²⁹⁰ O’Sullivan, 275

²⁹¹ Stengers, “Deleuze and Guattari’s Last Enigmatic Message,” 160.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 160.

platform for many curators through something like an expansion of “the curatorial” or a practice of “transversal curating”? It might be a reciprocal relation that sees the influence of the extra-art on art and also a conduit for the mode of “curators of ourselves” to encounter metamodeling and art’s deeper rebellious play with the stability of matters in something resembling “living art” or spacetime mattering.²⁹³ The notion of the peri-curatorial refers to a relation of proximity and a condition of permeation (being both inside and outside). It leads us down a line of questioning: what is the difference between the privileged amateur and the empowered amateur that Alison Green draws from Bernard Stiegler, as they manifest within the so-called professional both inside and outside in a peri-curatorial modality.²⁹⁴

Perhaps the result of curatorial intervention would be a rhizomatic desiring machine that connects billions of “curators of the self” with de-professionalizing curatorial becomings in a way that makes a transversal zone for the lateral mobility of the many, not optimized for building the mobility or territorialized power of the individual curator, nor individual artist. Surely the urgent task is not just the deterritorialization of the traditionally curatorial space, the expansion of territory through conquest of other spaces, but instead a minoritization; this is a mapping of the unconscious to better understand the refrains that each practice takes into new territory and aid the dreaming subjectivation of those in their orbit toward expanded existential territory. The curatorial might dissolve itself into curation but only if it can implant schizoanalytic metamodeling at its core. This would be creating social experience that is not about expanding the ego’s claim on experience. It would need to recognize the desire for collectivity at work in the curatorial if we are to figure the

²⁹³ Karen Barad’s term can be usefully compared to ecosophical thinking as touched by the affective readymade suggested by Guattari’s work (as understood via Stephen Zepke, who traces a different genealogy of Duchamp’s readymade). Or through Guattari, one could trace a line of influence reaching back to Nietzsche concerning positive desiring production.

²⁹⁴ Green, “Why Practice?”; Stiegler, “Automatic society, Londres février 2015.”

expansion of existential territory with more-than-reflective practices of relationality and models of sharing of power and listening at the core of the practice (Drift). Gary Genosko writes about the fundamental collectivization of La Borde, Guattari's workplace where he developed some experimental therapeutic forms:

This system was an analytic instrument (transversal tool) by means of which individual and collective affects could be articulated with institutional demands (material, social, bureaucratic, therapeutic tasks) towards the goals of enriching social relations, promoting the assumption of responsibility, participating in collective inventions (local jargon development, forging of new tools, rediscovery of means of expression), not only for patients, but for doctors and support staff as well. In short, he envisaged the transformation of those involved in the extraordinarily complex negotiations and interactions (progressive and regressive) entailed within the clinic on daily, weekly, and monthly bases, and in longer cycles.²⁹⁵

Can you plug curating or even the curatorial into “curation of the self,” without falling into tropes of “participatory” or “community art,” “tastemaking,” and retain the true qualities of art: irruption of difference and beauty?²⁹⁶ (Phillips). And without stumbling too far in the creation of psychic monsters that make oppressive forms from intersubjectivity?²⁹⁶ The challenge will be to insist on a curatorial that is less about cultural or commercial consumption and extraction and more about foraging, investment, elaboration of good debt, solidarity (Levine, Ibghy and Lemmens). Less about the individual and more about performing the act of collective individuation or subjectivation (Weave).²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: A Critical Introduction*, 71.

²⁹⁶ What example would this produce? Cults or destruction of the museum and the archives, or new and better protocols of care? Possibly it could produce the dissolution and explosion of curatorial practice itself into something else. How tied is curatorial studies to modernist space, the white cube of universal dissensus? Evidently, it is not confined to one kind of space since its codes sometimes successfully translate across a wide variety of contexts.

²⁹⁷ Zepke's work on Allan Kaprow is interesting here. Stephen Zepke, “Becoming a Citizen of the World: Deleuze between Allan Kaprow and Adrian Piper,” *Deleuze and Performance*, ed. Laura Cull (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Moten and Harney are once again a rich resource.

Guattari's diagram is useful once again as a diagnostic tool. Artist Tero Nauha summarizes Guattari's caution about attending to multiple components holistically, not leaving out crucial elements of the fourfold diagram:

Mere recombination of material and immaterial fluxes by the machines does not produce the new, but only recombination of discourses: a repetitive rhythm with a difference. However, producing the new, a process bound to helping new refrains develop and probing potential, often appears fragile and difficult to capture in practice. The potentiality to alter the existential territory needs to go beyond simply remaining potential. It requires a form and alteration of the material fluxes. Transformations must consider all four domains of the diagram proposed by Guattari.²⁹⁸

In what strategic ways should the curatorial reterritorialize, remain attached to existing phyla?

Without attending to existing or new machinic phyla, it could fail to make any changes to material-energetic fluxes even if able to begin to forge new existential territories. In the case of *Drift*, a schizoanalytic metamodeling reveals that the project's machinic phylum remains weak; its abstract machine could not build trust but only reveal and test allegiances. In the meantime, it stressed and strained an Indigenous artist's commitment to cultural work and refusal with its offer of compensation, an opportunity that may or may not ultimately hold value for them. Yes, the project responsively facilitated this artist's attention to asking questions and caused ripples of stress and anxiety throughout partnering institutions. It mainly facilitated white scholarly avantgarde critique. It facilitated commercial art practice of one of the artists and the academic careers of two others. It gave compensation, mobility and exposure to all the artists. It gave venues located in universities a chance to position themselves as trans-disciplinary.

²⁹⁸ Nauha, "Schizoanalysis as an artistic research method," <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=26327>.

Is there sufficient desire for a transversal curatorial of the self without the attractions of narratives of subjectivation tied to consumption and property? These include the attractions of prestige associated with gallery spaces, aspirations for career, and machines for turning life into art, art into property. Additionally, despite art's structural sociality based in its inherent insufficiency (it is only what it is when it is visited by its audience), one that encourages collectivity as its form rather than individuality, is there sufficient desire for a transversal curatorial of the self perhaps without the figure of the artist and the narrative of their destitution driving its autonomy and commitment?

We would anticipate some wagon-circling, policing and conflict from the museum, but it would be essential to take advantage of funding in both the world of contemporary art and the university for artistic experimentation. There are pedagogical experimental forms we can see operating in the projects I've discussed that could be drawn forward into a curriculum. We could have events like Ciara Phillips's workshops be a default form, for example. We could have Ibhgy and Lemmens-esque curatorial projects, which are like new anti-systems. Trans-disciplinary adventures like *Drift* could continue with the understanding that science communicators are themselves curators.

In what way is the subject of capital curatorial itself, to the degree that aspirational rhetorics of the subject create a certain reflective relation with the world and the production of value through the exposure of life? What if curation's curatorial productive capacity were cultivated? If these lines of flight can be retraced, putting forth instead a curatorial becoming-artist cut loose from a job role, they might suggest pathways to different models of process-self on a wider scale or could produce conditions of possibility for ethical becoming, wealth-other-than-accumulation or collective spaces. In proliferating difference, how do we connect across localities? We might take some cues from notion that emerges from Italian Marxists of the social factory (Negri, Virno, Berardi) and its capitalist instrumentalization, for example, to manage and monetize the free toil of social network

user generated content. Berardi describes friendship as the final lesson of May '68, community assembled based on provisional refrains. Could it be a space for articulating a method of curating that institutes flexible charters / protocols for the mechanics of transversal relations? What kind of collectivities could be enabled that would allow for the growth of this intellectual territory?

Curator Circle

I have been working on a method called Playgroup. It is a method that is inspired Cliff Eyland and Jeanne Randolph's *Your Own Grad School* and Anna Tsing's trans-disciplinary research groups for which she adopts the term playgroup. It is a method still in development and still too embedded in gallery programs. It is working on its third playgroup and still relies mostly on artists as members although sometimes in contact with or including experts in different areas such as physics and Indigenous land-based knowledge. The groups always expose the striations among people; one always notices the commonalities of people and one must navigate the status, maturity, expertise anew.

Curator Circle could borrow the fundraising idea of the curator's circle, drop the possessive "s" and turn it into something more lateral. A curator's circle is normally a way for museums to connect with wealthy donors by facilitating direct access to the curator's expertise and vision. A curator circle is still strategically mobilizing the desire for freedom and authority but finds it in diverse participants rather than in professional figures. In 2008, I had an idea when a friend told me about the Toronto Subaru Club, that we should join each other's clubs, which resulted in a collaboration between artists and non-artists who happened to own the same brand of car and could access different kinds of unexpected togetherness. More recently, I had been thinking that a group could be constructed with radio djs, artists, bloggers, activists, influencers, organizers, curators, who share a dispersed notion of the curatorial. Transversal curating that reappropriates the fixed capital of free choice, collection and display to ends other than expected. Streams of content that reach in

and out of the institution. These would be traversing the job role and leisure time apportioned to the curatorial. Making a conduit for living artistically that would be about slowing things down rather than accelerating.

Autopoiesis and weaving mutual elaboration with the world suggests that professional curators should spend their professional time building relations and new connections within activist groups and vernacular cultures within communities. Spend money there. Minoritize the practice: Finite, generic, immanent and real. Draw maps of the situation. Create schizoanalytic cartographers. What if all the micro black holes start to resonate with each other? What if it takes hold causing the profession to dissolve and no money flows. What if academia rejects the curatorial entirely?

As we move into a closure period when we at the gallery will have no spaces to work in, and the exhibitionary abstract machine will be maintained as the mobile international one, I have been changing my practice toward relations, toward collaboration. I am wondering if the curatorial is robust enough to be transversalized radically before it becomes taken over by curation. The face of the curatorial as profession is the museum curator and the contemporary art gallery and its collections; the black hole of the curatorial profession is the vernacular capacity. The rise of curation is no doubt mutating the faciality of the curatorial. Without the ethico-aesthetic advantages of metamodeling curatorial floorplanning, it might create monsters.

I am teaching and supervising students more frequently and wondering if the curatorial is robust enough to be transversalized radically before it gets settled in the academic space. Today, specialized graduate programs and new curators proliferate at the same time as the parallel non-specialist idiom takes hold according to which one should curate one's identity. I argue that curatorial studies attend to an eddy that holds promise for investigation outside of the art realm because it is formed and moved by broader shifts in subjectivation. If academic curatorial studies

are thoroughly hybridized with institutional curating, it can also begin to carefully hybridize with vernacular capacities.

Scholarly routes, ecosophical curation

The curatorial can be minoritized through amateur and scholarly routes. In combination, the goal is connecting curating to the world through a recognition of and access to a pre-economic artistic living in a potentiality of the present. This way it attempts to kick off and singularize new subjectivities through the aesthetic paradigm's access to non-discursive potentiality (novel machinic phyla can access and exchange with universes of value) toward the remaking of all three ecologies as dissensual and poetic existential territories. This kind of shift would also require attention to all four components of Guattari's diagram, including especially rearranged material flows. What does this focus for Guattari mean for culture freed from sectorized consumerism, freed from the role of reproducing capitalist subjectivity? In this section I consider grounds for transversalizing the curatorial through university education across the three ecologies and attempt to map out potential syntheses of the pre-capitalist and capitalist aesthetic paradigms that might be usefully compared with Guattari's articulation of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm. Already working in the field, my own privileged stability allows me the step removed from the heterogeneous performance as Shannon Jackson called it, which regulates the precarity and hyperactive work pressures of the art world and academia. This doctoral project itself makes an abstract machine as a cartography that connects curatorial practice to scholarly practice and contexts by way of a re-reading and translation through theoretical diagrams and back. The project itself has enacted material flows of labour and capital, more influenced by economies of the curatorial and, so far, impacting the economies of the curatorial more than those of directly or explicitly academic ecologies (or directly explicitly commercial economies). One manifestation of complicity with general antagonism is the anxious status of curatorial studies in academia; Guattari writes in *The Three Ecologies*,

It is as though a scientific superego demands that psychic entities are reified and insists that they are only understood by means of extrinsic coordinates. Under such conditions, it is no surprise that the human and social sciences have condemned themselves to missing the intrinsically progressive, creative and auto-positioning dimensions of processes of subjectification. In this context, it appears crucial to me that we rid ourselves of all scientific references and metaphors in order to forge new paradigms that are instead ethico-aesthetic in inspiration. Besides, are not the best cartographies of the psyche, or, if you like, the best psychoanalyses, those of Goethe, Proust, Joyce, Artaud and Beckett, rather than Freud, Jung and Lacan?²⁹⁹

Though it relies on a degree of academic legitimacy, the curatorial does not accede to fully rigorous standards, but instead prioritizes reflexive awareness of its material-energetic flows and workings of power expressed through it. This is possible because it *articulates with* what is already happening via broader openings of the discourse of the curatorial upon academic social ecologies.

Curatorial Studies has become an accrediting academic curriculum, graduate and increasingly undergraduate.³⁰⁰ The curatorial's short history, its ethical quandaries, its creative rewards, the fantasies of professionalism and its material supports are each taken up in differing approaches. Curatorial Studies is an extension of the professionalisation of curating at the same time that it amplifies its zone of autocritical and theoretical awareness. Social ecologies tend to facialize the curatorial. What would it mean to start an undergraduate program on curatorial studies and practice without the promise of a job or with the ambivalent precarious promise of a job like the case of most liberal arts education? If it were to borrow the "liberal arts" model and the

²⁹⁹ Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 24.

³⁰⁰ Canadian Art, "Criticism and Curatorial Studies: A Growing Field," December 15, 2018. <https://canadianart.ca/school-guides/criticism-and-curatorial-studies-a-growing-sector/>; McMaster University, "Concurrent Certificate in Critical Curatorial Studies (CCCS): An introduction to the theory, practice, and ethics of curating in galleries, museums, artist run centres and community arts organizations," accessed 1 November 2022. <https://sota.humanities.mcmaster.ca/undergraduate-programs/concurrent-certificate-in-critical-curatorial-studies-cccs/>.

permissions it gives to study without immediate job goals? Guattari shows us how the curatorial as metamodeling can be liberal arts par excellence. The machinic phylum and material fluxes of the university would support the thinking and send it into social ecologies without direction or a clear machinic phylum. This is a risk. The university may be too individualizing. Could the university context facilitate the slowing required of art rather than the acceleration that accompanies “curation?” To look into this further, we should explore the broader social ecology.

We could build a program that is about being a kind of “cultural clinic of the present” in Felix Ensslin’s terms, but without the Lacanian basis.³⁰¹ It could be built without the glamorization of curators, without the illusion of clear path to jobs, but embedded thoroughly in practicalities. It could be about group work, theory, wide cultural and ethical practice. Beneath its professionalized, refined, individualized and occasionally heroicized faciality, what is curating but a set of foraging practices that are developed in common and focus attention on recovering latent commons? Giving away curatorial practice-studies is a destituent curatorial gesture par excellence, but a program would need to also be fugitive and destituent in its politics. This requires a kind of stealthy artistic core.

In this section, I discuss creating temporary territories through slowing rhythms and rituals. The curatorial is about sequencing components at the material level to set a new rhythm. Franco Berardi writes “Rhythm is the mental elaboration of time, the common code that links time perception and time projection.”³⁰² The detection and facilitation of refrains is essential to the curatorial and curation. These can be capitalist, pre-capitalist, technological, luddite, modern, demodern, discursive or pre-discursive, etc. Refrains are rhythmic deterritorializing and freeing

³⁰¹ Felix Ensslin, “The Subject of Curating – Notes on the Path towards a Cultural Clinic of the Present,” *ONCURATING* no. 26 (October 2015). <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-26-reader/the-subject-of-curating-notes-on-the-path-towards-a-cultural-clinic-of-the-present.html#.Y2FZ0uzMIInV>.

³⁰² Berardi, *Breathing*, 28

ensembles of unconscious and conscious material and freeing institutional forces (coincident with reterritorializations) and have the precarious tasks of caring for and enabling emergent singularities within practices active in colonial capitalist carceral modernity.

Slowing and organizing chaotic components, refrains move to new existential territories.

Refrains can be liberatory (following Guattari) if new subjectivations are put to work by their poetic encounters. In music, for Silvio Ferraz, the refrain is

a machine for the production of differences, for connecting lines of flight, codes, milieu and rhythms. ... it is a matter of assembling a plurality of components and of constituting a territory in which such components enter into modulation and then leave, freeing up autonomous microfragments which will constitute new knots of assemblages, and so on.³⁰³

Refrains hold together and are components of passage between deterritorialized assemblages.

Guattari pays attention to institutional analysis, ecological urgency and connects with the often-separated aspects of desire and unconscious motivation, crucially articulating the presence of the above in the creation of subjects. *Chaosmosis* contains Guattari's last articulation of an "ethico-aesthetic paradigm," drawing on his thought developed with Gilles Deleuze, that claims an increasingly important role for aesthetics.

Social co-creation is the basic model of the aesthetic encounter that I have adapted from Guattari (who adapted it from Bakhtin in combination with a revised lineage for the Duchampian readymade). Guattari thinks of art as a portal:

The machinic entities which traverse these different registers of the actualised world and incorporeal Universes are two-faced like Janus. They exist concurrently in a discursive state within molar Fluxes, in a presuppositional relationship with a corpus of possible semiotic propositions, and in a non-discursive state within enunciative nuclei embodied in singular existential Territories,

³⁰³ Querrien and Goffey, "Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy," 98.

and in Universes of ontological reference which are non-dimensional and non-coordinated in any extrinsic way.³⁰⁴

A particularly salient resistance to the present consists of an ecosophic practice. It would need to understand itself in the context of reciprocal disturbance and acknowledge dimensions invisible to us. Like Ibhgy and Lemmens are unconcerned about whether what they do is art or not, I am less concerned with being understood through, or defined as the curatorial, or even as curation.

Guattari writes in the last chapter of *Chaosmosis*, “The ecosophic subject”:

The chaosmic fold of deterritorialisation and the autopoietic fold of enunciation, with their interface of existential grasping and transmonadism, implant at the heart of the object-subject relation - and before any instance of representation - a creative processuality, an ontological responsibility which binds liberty and its ethical vertigo at the heart of ecosystemic necessities.³⁰⁵

A pedagogical approach could be to build an undergrad program around ecosophical curation so that it attracts students interested in environmental ecologies. Querrien and Goffey’s exploration of the refrain in musical composition provides a fitting sketch of these possibilities:

Every model of composition is like the entrance point into a territory whose rules have not yet become stratified. The deterritorializing refrain allows for the passage from one milieu to another. A new persona-component is borne from the modulation between the components of associated milieus. Heterogeneous sounds combine in a ‘new refrain into which unforeseen modulations enter, in a free play of connections to bring about other refrains and unforeseen modulations.’³⁰⁶

In a program like this, courses could involve students in the detection and amplification of refrains as they move across mental, social and environmental economies using curation’s components of passage and access to artistic chaosmic folds.

³⁰⁴ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 110.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁰⁶ Querrien and Goffey, “Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy,” 98.

Scores as machinic phyla for transversalising the curatorial

Open access course models and scores can be important as scores for transversalizing. The use of scores in an early version of this project was aimed at harnessing the radical potential of forms of business-sanctioned collectivity and exploiting new permissions seemingly available in neoliberal subjectivation. I drew on Allan Kaprow, Yoko Ono, Michel Feher and others. Through the work of Dylan Robinson and Candice Hopkins, the score has since reached international effectiveness as a transversal tool linking art worlds, cultures and local and traditional Indigenous cultural zones.³⁰⁷ A score is a variety of machinic phylum, which can describe rules and regulations.

Summary

I have presented a portfolio of texts as an exhibition and then introduced a method and context for my schizoanalytic rereading of them which sketches a method of schizoanalytic floorplanning. In summary, I have reflected on the curatorial's logic of disappearance, and its possible manifestation in several transversal paths and new existential territories; techno-marketplace curation and pedagogical programs reconfigured with art at their core mark out possible novel machinic phyla.

These refrains come directly out of the process I call schizoanalytic floorplanning, which I have articulated with the portfolio texts, and which may unlock the possibilities of what Guattari called transversal movement. What if all the exhibitions I wrote about were layered at the same time same place so that all of their ramifications can compound and diffract. This might be a good way to think more carefully about architectural and program design or indeed about the structures of events of art encounter. Once framed by the sociopolitical contexts and methods of the research, the exhibition stacks my writings about art and exhibitions as collective assemblages of enunciation, an embedded, relational and situated curatorial research methodology. This project is research in

³⁰⁷ *Documenta 14*, 2017; *Soundings*, 2019.

the sense that it is curating the curatorial in a way that exposes its core problems and potentials. It does research with curating as a hybrid form of enquiry and knowledge. It also creates a new context for curatorial research for which knowledge objects are not the focus; rather the focus is on therapies or making new body-desire patterns by resituating its modes into amateur and scholarly zones.

A set of collective enunciations in the form of dialogues with artists' work are put into the context of schizoanalytic methods and goals to reorient them away from what can be said (historically positioned) and the performance of subjectivities (faciality) toward a new ecosophical poetics. Its methods of both analysis and creation are linked to recognition of the micropolitical decisions that block or re-route desire informed by a set of economic and technological forces. With the 'schism' accessed through rhythms of repression and meaning-breaking, one can create reciprocal multi-polar affective compositions wherein one can dream without rational causality and as such new spaces of imagination. Such spaces remove blockage, repair breaks, and revalues the imaginative as a plotting of coordinates of desire that counterbalance normative constants.

I am emboldened by an approach taken by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, who introduced her book whose chapters, like foraged mushrooms, attempt to "build an open-ended assemblage, not a logical machine; they gesture to the so-much-more out there."³⁰⁸ Without a definite goal this project begins from a set of finished works that are made to operate in a new way that is indeterminate and inter-subjective.

The method is a rereading, a mapping, and a revision through chiasmatic connections created when texts written for different purposes are bound and metaphorically unbound. Using a research method that links these different texts as exhibited with interfering material thought

³⁰⁸ Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, viii.

worlds, I create a porous compilation, itself a jointed dis/continuous construction, which communicates the facialities and also the refrains that could re-situate the curatorial. The creation moves toward an articulation of new existential territories. With each essay, I undertake a practice of using and thinking through schizoanalytic cartographies. Tracing the expressions in the layered manifestations of a set of contemporary curatorial assemblages of objects, voices and writings (in which I am entangled within assemblages of author/collaborator/bureaucrat) lays bare and illustrates dimensions operative in the construction of colonial modernism. By looking at the regimes of attention, cacophony of voices, and reviewing the thinking-with, the breaks, the gaps in reality as sites of revelation, the schizoid condition is embraced and “detourned,” as a space of productive desire. Assembling fragments of a professionalizing activity and reading them for their inconstancies, failures and fantasies is also a way to account for the constructive and destructive work of the unconscious as it manifests across collective and individual.

Along the way, we can gather some essential qualities of the curatorial that could be lent to curation. A practitioner is encouraged to: understand contexts and attend to affective qualities; take risks of disrupting and changing institutional self-position or of falling back into reterritorialized flows; make space for encounter with the new before giving guidance; yield control and leave interpretation open; follow a logic of disappearance.

The idea of a transversal curating is trying to picture an intra-media of groups. With art being imagined for its conduit for living artistically that may be accessible through transversal curatorial routes. The goal is to escape the three-way mediation of art, audience, curator and to arrive instead at the so-called audience in the world as itself collective enunciation, as itself the creative process once proper to art. Wouldn't the highest aspiration for the professional curator be to succeed its way out of existence?

Within a situation of ordinary psychosis, the curatorial can weave together schizoanalysis and art to reveal and operationalize extra-linguistic forms of expression. It can make a link between neoliberal forms of subjectivity involved in co-creation and processes of subjectivation through refraining. Schizoanalytic floorplanning allow us to begin from a position within the desperate politics of identity (faciality) that characterize the present and prepare a democratized expanded role of the curator with these tools as part of an entropic line of flight between professional and the amateur, the market and the university.

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