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UCP  
PRESS



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# **Response[ability]**

Edited by

Andrada-Cristina Neacșu, Catarina Lopes Cordeiro,  
Dila Yumurtaci & Marta Gueidão

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*Necropower has become a key concept for understanding the generalized instrumentalization of life and the material destruction of the Earth in the global postcolonial condition that includes the extermination of all biocultural systems.*

- The Society for the end of Necropolitics, n.d.

In a time dominated by necropower (Mbembe, 2003, 2019) — marked by accelerating ecological collapse, violent political regimes, the erosion of collective life, and the destruction of territories, and Earth —, the Second Graduate Conference on Science and Technology of the Arts was convened under the urgent and evocative theme *Response[ability]*. Organised at Universidade Católica Portuguesa by the Research Centre in Science and Technology of the Arts (CITAR), this gathering built upon the discussion initiated in the first edition, bringing together graduate researchers, artists, and thinkers to critically examine destruction, not merely as an end, but as a generative space for resistance, co-creation, and reimagining.

The concept of “Response[ability]” (Albin-Clark *et al.*, 2021; Barad, 2007; —Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023) proposed, as an ethical and political form of resistance rooted in sensitivity, collectivity, and relational care, guided the exploration of topics ranging from ecological destruction and artistic preservation to speculative methodologies, embodied practices, and posthuman imaginaries (Bang & Marin, 2015; Sheridan & Longboat, 2006). Participants were invited to consider how their research and art might offer new ways of living, resisting, and imagining futures in the face of (im)material loss, engaging the interconnection between human and nonhuman worlds, and fostering collaborative and participatory processes in arts, science, and heritage (Barad, 2007).

This edition of the conference was honoured by the presence of two distinguished keynote speakers whose work exemplifies the intersection of critical theory, artistic practice, and institutional transformation.

Defne Ayas (Independent Curators International, n.d.), internationally renowned curator and cultural thinker, gave a keynote that interrogated institutional complicity, epistemic violence, and the politics of curatorial responsibility. Drawing on her experience directing and reconfiguring art institutions across geopolitical contexts, Ayas proposed “response-ability” as an embodied curatorial ethic, one that disrupts linear narratives, activates collective imaginaries, and remains attuned to situated knowledge. Her talk urged us to imagine institutions not as neutral containers but as dynamic, political agents with a duty to unlearn colonial legacies and to host plural futures.

Işıl Eğrikavuk (Eğrikavuk, 2019), artist and scholar known for her feminist and performative engagements with politics, language, and media, shared a

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keynote performance-lecture that centred storytelling as a transformative tool for collective inquiry. Through humour, myth, and poetic deconstruction, Eđrikavuk explored how counter-narratives – especially those told from marginalised and ecologically attuned perspectives – can unsettle dominant frames of history and open up space for healing and co-resistance. Her approach embodied the potential of artistic research to generate affective solidarities and new forms of agency in the face of global fragmentation.

Together, these two voices grounded the conference in lived, intersectional practices of responsibility, inspiring participants to consider how art, research, and institutional action can meaningfully intervene in a world on the brink.

This publication brings together the texts presented during the Second Graduate Conference on Science and Technology of the Arts, divided into four subjects that relate to each other and to the central theme of this publication.

The first subject was *Critical and Speculative Explorations of Human, Non-Human, and Environmental Relationships*, exploring speculative fiction, philosophical ecology, and political dreaming. Laila Algaves's *New Protagonists for the Anthropocene: On Speculative Thinking and More-Than-Human Literature(s)* examined speculative storytelling as a means of decentring human agency, drawing on works by Ursula K. Le Guin and Vinciane Despret. Filippo Deorsola, with *Shared Nightmares and Common Futures at Greenham Commons: On the politics of dreaming an affective practice of resistance*, investigated the politics of dreaming as a form of feminist resistance, focusing on the collective nightmare-sharing practice that preceded the Greenham Commons Peace Camp.

The second subject, *Artistic and Collaborative Practices as Political Resistance and Ecological Reflection*, addressed collective improvisation, ecology, and shared space. Nuno da Luz's *Feral Songbook: Collective Improvisation As An Ecological Survival Technique* proposed participatory sound practices and listening inspired by parakeet territories as eco-political methodologies. Isidora Correa's *Shaped Geographies: Depleting Echoes Of Extraction* bridged bio-art and environmental science by investigating microbial life and lithium extraction in Chile's Atacama Desert as both planetary memory and ecological threat.

The third subject, *Art, Technology, and Cultural Heritage: Questions of Identity, Responsibility, and Resilience*, examined the intersections of art, conflict, and technology. Pedro Andrade's *Ukraine's Urban Heritage, Street Art And Cultural Tourism At Risk: A Mini Encyclopedia For Research On The War Street Art* offered a critical, AI-mediated reflection on the destruction of cultural

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heritage in Ukraine, using media art to raise questions of accountability. Shahriar Khonsari, with *Art, Ecology, And Resistance: Reimagining Cultural Heritage In Iran*, explored community-based ecological resistance in Iran, emphasising grassroots efforts to preserve intangible heritage in the face of censorship and environmental crises.

The fourth subject was *Body Exploration as an Agent of Political Resistance and Social Transformation*, focused on the body as a site of resistance, vulnerability, and imagination. Rita Xavier's *Wound, Writhe, Witch: Ecofeminisms and Dance to Re-enchant Bodies* evoked ecofeminist dance practices as a way to re-enchant the wounded body and confront patriarchal violence. Grécia Paola Matos' *Remaining Body(les): Art, Necropower, and the Aesthetics of Deterioration* examined deterioration and decay in organic and inorganic matter as a form of aesthetic resistance against the culture of perfection and longevity.

More than reflecting on destruction, the texts compiled here enact a call for shared responsibility and attentive care. Through practices of storytelling, movement, sound, image-making, and speculative worldbuilding, these contributions weave a rich and urgent tapestry of how we might live, imagine, and create differently.

Response[ability], then, is not simply the theme of this conference, it is its method, its ethical anchor, and its collective dream. This e-book stands as both a record of this gathering and an open invitation to think and act with greater sensitivity toward the material, immaterial, and more-than-human worlds we inhabit.

The texts gathered in this e-book reflect a shared commitment: to respond. Not through reactionary closure, but through the activation of attention, imagination, and care. As we navigate the crises of our time – ecological, social, epistemological – Response[ability] becomes both a method and a practice of survival. It insists on the value of collective imagination, embodied knowledge, and the cultivation of futures rooted in interdependence.

This publication is not only a record of a conference, but also an invitation to think-with, feel-with, and respond-with. It holds within it a constellation of gestures – scholarly, artistic, poetic, political – that resist isolation and instead reach toward a more just, attentive, and entangled world.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the the directions of the Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts and the School of Arts at School of Arts, Universidade Católica Portuguesa for offering us the opportunity to organise this conference and publication, as well as to UCP Press for the publication and editorial support. We would like to thank all the authors for

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their active participation in the discussions during the conference and for their substantial contributions to this e-book. We are particularly grateful to our keynote speakers Defne Ayas, Işıl Eğrikavuk, and to all the members of our Scientific Committee for their care, dedication, and curatorial sensitivity.

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**GUEST  
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# THE OTHER GARDEN

Artistic Research, Ecology,  
and Belonging in the Academy

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents *the other garden*, a practice-based, research-led artistic initiative launched at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) to create an interdisciplinary, inclusive, and ecological learning space. Motivated by my personal experiences of exclusion within institutional frameworks, the project reclaims visibility for silenced or marginalised voices – human and nonhuman alike – through artistic and collaborative practices. It explores how artistic research can intersect with ecology, care, and diversity to rethink academic environments. The garden acts as both metaphor and method, integrating theory and practice, and positioning alternative pedagogies at the heart of social and environmental change.

**Keywords:** Artistic research; Ecology; Diversity; Community engagement; Performative pedagogy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: LOCATING OTHERNESS IN THE ACADEMY

Since 2017, I have been teaching and researching at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK). When I started working there, I realised I was the only non-European person in my faculty. Despite teaching my classes in English, I encountered several structural barriers to feeling included within my work environment. These included firstly the predominance of German language in all institutional meetings and communications, then a lack of diversity and orientation programs for the non-German staff, and the absence of physical or social spaces that facilitate informal exchange among the students and the teachers. Consequently, I often felt like an outsider within my own workplace. I couldn't experience the feeling of belonging there.

Yet I soon realised that this feeling was shared by many others – students and colleagues who, regardless of geographical origin, experienced similar marginalisation. Inspired by Sara Ahmed's assertion that "the personal is theoretical" (Ahmed, 2017), I began developing a project that would bring these shared experiences into a framework of theoretical reflection and artistic practice. *The other garden* emerged as a spatial and conceptual intervention into the rigid institutional structures of academia – a place where difference, care, and community could be nurtured.

## 2. THE OTHER GARDEN: CONCEPT AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2021, I proposed the creation of *the other garden* – a space integrating ecology, pedagogy, and artistic research – located in an outdoor space at our university. Together with a group of MA students, we conceptualised a garden not only for cultivating plants but also for fostering a critical platform focused on “otherness.”

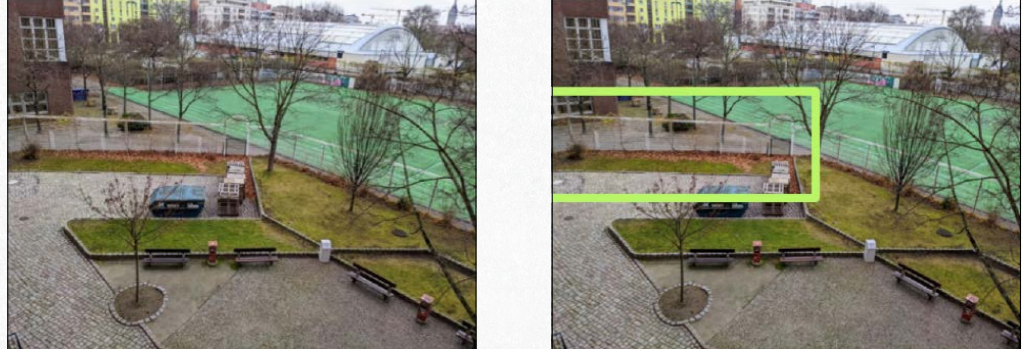
We centred the project around *neophytes* – wild plants introduced into non-native environments through human influence. These plants served as metaphors for migration, displacement, and adaptation. By engaging with neophytes, we challenged dominant narratives in both gardening and academia, positioning them as collaborators in a biodiverse, inclusive ecosystem. The garden began as a pedagogical tool and grew into a site of artistic experimentation, social interaction, and ecological reflection.

Importantly, the garden was not pre-designed but evolved through dialogical processes. The act of co-creating the space with students and collaborators made visible the power of practice-based engagement. Through planting, designing, and rethinking space together, we resisted the dominant logics of institutional hierarchy and instead activated a mode of mutual learning.

## 3. ESTABLISHING A PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

After securing institutional approval, a bureaucratic process which took longer than a semester, the garden was formally established in early 2022. Since then, it has hosted workshops, artist talks, academic discussions, and practical gardening sessions. Events have included presentations by artists working with bio-plastics, researchers collaborating with immigrant communities, and foraging workshops. Students increasingly described the garden as a “safe space” and a “deeply engaging learning platform.”

This practice-based environment resists the traditional classroom format and instead positions learning as emergent, embodied, and collective. The garden both represents and enacts ecological thought. Students learn not through abstraction but through direct interaction with soil, seeds, weather patterns, and unexpected failures. Artistic research in this sense becomes both a methodology and a way of being: attuned, reciprocal, open-ended.



**Fig. 1** - View from my office into the outdoor space, Autumn 2021. © Işıl Eğrikavuk

## 4. ARTISTIC RESEARCH AS METHODOLOGY AND ECOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Artistic research has gained increasing recognition as a critical methodology that unites theory and practice, particularly in contexts where conventional research methods are insufficient. It resists rigid frameworks and opens space for experimentation, affect, and embodied knowledge. In my teaching at UdK since 2017, I have observed how practice-based learning enables students to form deeper, more complex understandings of socio-political and ecological issues.

Drawing from the work of scholars such as Graeme Sullivan (2005), Henk Borgdorff (2012), and Brad Haseman (2006), artistic research is not a lesser form of inquiry – it is performative, generative, and capable of producing knowledge that emerges from creative acts. Haseman in particular argues for a “performative paradigm,” where the act of doing is inseparable from the act of knowing.

In this framework, the *other garden* is both a site and a method. It serves as a research platform where students engage with ecological systems not as external observers, but as co-participants. Their projects – from mapping foraging paths in Berlin to experimenting with bio-degradable materials – demonstrate how practice-based learning fosters both individual insight and communal responsibility. It also reveals how artistic thinking can be mobilised to address issues such as environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and social fragmentation.



**Fig. 2** - Building *the other garden* beds, Spring 2022.  
© Işıl Eğrikavuk

## 5. ECOLOGICAL THINKING AS PEDAGOGY

Drawing from contemporary ecological thinkers, *the other garden* emerges not merely as a physical space, but as a living theory in action. The work of Donna Haraway (2016), Anna Tsing (2015), Val Plumwood (1993), Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), and Timothy Morton (2010) underlines the urgency of reimagining our relationship with both knowledge and nature. Their insights converge in the garden's commitment to relationality, reciprocity, and resistance to hierarchies – whether between species or within academia.

Haraway's concept of "staying with the trouble" encourages remaining present with complexity. Rather than attempting to sanitise or control the unpredictability of an open pedagogical space, the garden thrives on entangled, multispecies interactions. This tentacular thinking shapes our collaborative learning practices.

Anna Tsing's work on precarity and multispecies collaboration supports the idea of the garden as a site of resilience. Just as fungi grow in disturbed landscapes, our project emerged from institutional neglect and turned it into fertile ground for new connections.

Val Plumwood's feminist ecological philosophy critiques the dualisms that uphold systems of domination. The garden, by embracing nonhuman life, feminist pedagogy, and diversity, resists these binaries and reclaims care as an ecological act.

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Robin Wall Kimmerer brings Indigenous knowledge systems into ecological conversations. Her writings emphasise reciprocity and relational learning with the land. In the garden, we honour neophytes and learn *with* them, rather than treating them as subjects of study alone.

Timothy Morton's notion of ecological thought expands our understanding of time, scale, and interconnectedness. In the garden, small actions – growing, foraging, composting – become acts of ecological philosophy that link local practice to planetary crises.



**Fig. 3** - During my class at *the other garden*, Summer 2023.  
© Işıl Eğrikavuk

## 6. ARTISTIC LINEAGES AND COLLABORATIONS

Throughout the development of *the other garden*, I have intentionally drawn on the work of contemporary artists whose practices intersect with ecology, belonging, and collective memory. These artists act as conceptual companions – figures whose work opens possibilities for thinking differently about land, identity, and pedagogy. Their presence in the curriculum is not merely illustrative but dialogical; students engage with their methods, references, and intentions as prompts for their own reflection and creation.

Among them is Agnes Denes, whose *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982) placed a golden field of grain in the heart of Manhattan, drawing

attention to the paradoxes of land use, urbanisation, and food justice. Patricia Johanson offers models for ecological art that serve both environmental and social functions, with her large-scale interventions reimagining the relationship between landscape and public infrastructure.

Through works like *Silueta Series* and *Earth Body*, Ana Mendieta centres the female body in ritualistic connection to land, often engaging with displacement, exile, and ancestry. Her work has prompted deep conversations in the group about embodied belonging and vulnerability.

Andy Goldsworthy brings an aesthetics of impermanence and attentiveness to natural materials, offering models for site-based artmaking that respects ephemerality. We also explored artists working with migration and rootlessness, such as Hiwa K, Tania Bruguera, Emily Jacir, Gülsün Karamustafa, and Do Ho Suh, whose installations and performances offer powerful lenses on displacement, home, and the body in motion.

Most importantly, we turn toward more-than-human kinship and queer ecologies with artists like Cecilia Vicuña, Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, and the collaborative work of Ella von der Haide (*Queer Gardening*), whose practices speculate on multispecies care and post-anthropocentric futures.

Rather than treating these artists as case studies, I frame their work as living texts – fields of inquiry that spark new modes of sensing, moving, and being-with for the participants. They become part of the garden's soil.

## **7. REIMAGINING PEDAGOGY: SPACE-BASED LEARNING AND RELATIONAL TOOLS**

A central premise of *The Other Garden* is the reconsideration of pedagogy not just as a transfer of knowledge, but as a relational and spatial practice. Drawing on theories of space-based pedagogy, I designed the curriculum as a lived experience that unfolds in space – both physical and conceptual – allowing students to move beyond fixed classroom structures and embrace embodied, affective, and site-responsive modes of learning.

Influenced by the works of bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and contemporary thinkers like Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, I frame my approach as one of radical openness. In *The Other Garden*, learning does not follow a top-down hierarchy but evolves horizontally, co-created by the group and shaped by the rhythms of nature, dialogue, and collective reflection. This pedagogical space allows for knowledge to emerge through doing – through planting, walking, writing, performing, and observing.

One example is the use of weekly themes guided by specific plants, which serve not only as metaphors but as epistemological anchors. For instance, the wild arugula guided discussions on otherness and belonging, while goldenrod served as a vehicle to reflect on soil, rootedness, and movement. These plant-based themes prompted site-specific explorations, writing exercises, and movement workshops that encouraged students to experience theory through their senses and bodies.

Another example is student led class structure. Each session is led by one or two students who guide the class on that week's themes, including activities such as visiting Berlin's different gardens, yoga and cooking sessions, and hand based craft activities such as crocheting and plant drawings or card making. These initiations help the students gain responsibility and confidence as well as create a more equal teaching learning environment.

Alternative pedagogical tools were integral to this structure: I integrated somatic exercises, free-writing practices, speculative dialogues, and collaborative scores as part of the curriculum. These tools shifted the emphasis from product to process, from performance to presence, and created opportunities for vulnerability and collective meaning-making. The classroom, thus, became a garden – not just metaphorically but literally – a shared space of becoming.

In this sense, *The Other Garden* is not only a research project or a pedagogical experiment but a situated practice of care grounded in ecological and relational ethics. It seeks to ask: What happens when we learn *with* the world, rather than *about* it? How can pedagogy itself become a form of resistance, rooted in belonging, reciprocity, and multispecies kinship?

## **8. CULTIVATING DIALOGUE: THE OTHER GARDEN ARTIST TALK SERIES**

Since 2022, *The Other Garden* has extended its pedagogical vision beyond the classroom through an annual artist and researcher talk series. These gatherings bring together students, artists, and thinkers in a space of collective listening, conversation, and shared meals, nurturing a deeper sense of belonging, care, and co-creation.

Rooted in the ethos of *The Other Garden*, the talk series embraces embodied, relational, and place-based learning. Each event takes place in an intimate setting where food is prepared and shared after the session. The act of eating together is not just a conclusion but a continuation of the dialogue – a

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ritual that transforms knowledge exchange into community experience.

So far, our invited guests have included:

Luiza Luz, a Berlin-based artist working with ancestral knowledge systems, decolonial ecology, and speculative practices. Her work explores ritual, voice, and plant intelligence, offering participants a multisensory and affective engagement with nonhuman worlds.

Gülşah Mursaloğlu, a Turkish artist whose installations investigate the temporal behaviour of matter, scientific epistemologies, and the material entanglements of the body. Her talk invited students to think through the performativity of materials and the agency of substances often seen as inert.



**Fig. 4 - Fig.**  
4 - Artist talk by  
Gülşah Mursaloğlu  
at *the other garden*,  
Summer 2023.  
© Işıl Eğrikavuk

Shelley Etkin, a dancer, herbalist, and ecological practitioner whose transdisciplinary work weaves together movement, healing, and landscape. In our session with Etkin, she guided participants through somatic and herbal explorations that linked body and place in transformative ways.

Hilal Alkan, a Berlin-based academic and researcher whose work focuses on care, displacement, and feminist approaches to migration. Her talk encouraged students to reflect on the ethics of hospitality and the infrastructures of care in artistic and everyday life.

These sessions fostered intergenerational and interdisciplinary conversations, deepening the pedagogical soil of *The Other Garden*. More than presentations, they became gatherings where listening, eating, and being together created fertile ground for new connections and ideas to emerge.

As the series continues, it grows as a living archive – a space for cultivating critical reflection, sensory knowledge, and embodied solidarity.

## **9. NAVIGATING CONFLICT AND INSTITUTIONAL BORDERS**

While *the other garden* has blossomed as a vibrant community and pedagogical site, its growth has not been without conflict. The initial response from university management was one of hesitation. Concerns ranged from digging into university grounds to what types of plants were permissible. These negotiations were challenging but vital, revealing the ways in which bureaucratic structures often resist spontaneity, informality, and ecological thinking.

Rather than viewing institutional resistance as a barrier, we framed these negotiations as part of the research process itself. These confrontations exposed the university's own ecological and epistemic boundaries. They also offered opportunities to engage in dialogue, practice patience, and extend the principles of collaboration even to those who initially opposed the project.

Through *the other garden*, we also connected with wider communities beyond the university. Our workshops, open days, and social media presence enabled us to reach a broader public interested in ecological practice and artistic collaboration. Students often remarked on how their participation in the garden changed their understanding of research from something abstract and solitary to something lived, relational, and socially engaged.

The space also became a site of informal gathering, something deeply lacking in the institutional architecture of UdK. Here, interdisciplinary exchange flourished. Music students performed, visual artists built installations, and theorists found fertile ground for discussion. These encounters redefined not just what the university could be, but what learning could mean.

## 10. CONCLUSION: PLANTING THE SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION

*The other garden* reimagines academic space as one of openness, co-creation, and interdependence. It demonstrates how inclusive, practice-based research can facilitate not only student learning but institutional transformation.

Artists and researchers play a crucial role in addressing ecological and social crises not just through representation but by modelling alternative futures. In our garden, we practice a form of artistic connectivity grounded in care, creativity, and shared humanity. As our plants grow, so do our capacities for understanding, solidarity, and change.

In an era marked by ecological collapse, institutional rigidity, and social alienation, it is imperative to reclaim research as an act of hope, rooted in the soil of lived experience. *The other garden* shows that another university – and another ecology – is possible and it is our response-ability to the universe.

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# SUBMISSIONS

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# NEW PROTAGONISTS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE

On Speculative Thinking  
and More-Than-Human Literature(s)

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore what is here referred to as “more-than-human literature(s)” as a possible ramification, more or less recent, of literary studies. Drawing on the specific cases of Vinciane Despret's *Autobiographie d'un poulpe et autres récits d'anticipation* (2021) and its original inspiration, Ursula K. Le Guin's short story ‘*The Author of the Acacia Seeds*’ and *Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics* (1974), it analyses how a turn to the speculative and the decentralisation of the human in writing signal ways of renegotiating protagonisms and attributing agency in the Anthropocene. By highlighting these two examples, this article aims to establish the particularities of fictional endeavours that rehearse a radical reinvention of language and storytelling, as well as their strength in conjuring up more viable, just and multivocal futures.

**Keywords:** More-than-human literatures; Speculative thinking; Multispecies storytelling; Vinciane Despret; Ursula K. Le Guin; Donna J. Haraway.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, all quotations from this book are freely translated from its Portuguese version, published by Bazar do Tempo in 2022. The same goes for the quotes in Alexandre Nodari's 2015 article entitled *A Literatura como Antropologia Especulativa* [*Literature as Speculative Anthropology*] and Juliana Fausto's *Terranos e poetas: o 'povo de Gaia' como 'povo que falta'* [*Earthbound people and poets: the 'people of Gaia' as the 'missing people'*] (2013).

<sup>2</sup> It is not without some caution and many doubts that the term "human", or even "Anthropocene", is used here. While it is true that the term has become useful for contemporary debate in the environmental humanities, the choice of "anthropos", as the qualifier of the inaugural and driving force of a new geological era, also gives rise to heated controversy over a series of disputed meanings. After all, who – or what – can indeed be blamed for a time whose order is the catastrophe? How many beings, classes, races or genders fit – or should fit – into this "humanity" of rampant ambition? These and other questions about the semantic conflicts incited by the Anthropocene will be addressed later in this article.

*There's nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns.*

- Octavia Butler

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An idea insists on being welcomed. This is how the character of Ulysses, in Vinciane Despret's *Autobiographie d'un poulpe et autres récits d'anticipation* [Autobiography of an octopus and other anticipation narratives] (2021/2022), announces that something important must be said.<sup>1</sup> Ulysses is the name of a young interpreter, and also of all his counterparts in two sister communities in Italy and Japan: somewhere in a fictionalised future, the children of both populations began to grow up in symbiosis with the common octopuses (*Octopus vulgaris*). After several generations of privileged coexistence with the species – until it was threatened by intensive fishing and the toxicity of the waters – they developed sensory and linguistic familiarity with their nonhuman pair. So, as in octopuses – most of whose neurons are distributed among their eight tentacles – Ulysses' sim-language also knows no significant centre: "the subject is only the passing recipient of a verb that captures it. Every subject is in becoming [...] within a multiplicity of actions that overflow it [...]. Things, like creatures, 'make do'" (Despret, 2021/2022, pp. 106, 107). In the Anthropocene context, faced with the risk and disappearance imposed by human inordinate action<sup>2</sup> on the various planetary existences, there is an urgent need to renegotiate agencies and expand protagonists – this is the idea that insists on being welcomed here.

In literature, the Belgian philosopher of science's first inspiration is also exemplary of this endeavour: Ursula K. Le Guin's short story *The Author of the Acacia Seeds' and Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics* (1982). Originally published in 1974, it offers an earlier, humorous yet powerfully thought-provoking exploration of nonhuman semiotics through thinking with ants. In both narratives, a profound and creative deviation from human language calls for an imaginative exercise in interspecies translation, implying, on the one hand, that we think about the various uses of the symbolic among nonhuman beings, and, on the other, that we deepen a debate about the emergence of other practices of writing and narrating as a political tool. By focusing on these works from Despret and Le Guin and their shared curiosity about language as a site of transformation, I foreground stories that explicitly dissolve human linguistic privilege and interrogate the conditions

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<sup>3</sup> In the article *Speculative Before the Turn: Reinroducing Feminist Materialist Performativity*, for example, Cecilia Åsberg, Kathrin Thiele, and Iris van der Tuin (2015) reassess the central role of speculation within the diverse archive of feminist thought, arguing for its inextricability and its fundamental difference from more recent approaches to speculative realism. It is important to reinforce such a distinction and precursor position, particularly in light of the important legacy of Black and feminist science fiction and, of course, the work of Ursula K. Le Guin – so crucial to the definition of “more-than-human literatures” proposed in this essay – whose career dates back to the early 1960s.

and consequences of engaging with nonhuman modes of being, arguing that such cases constitute a specific literary genre or a new type of fiction – and that they entangle an even broader reflection on speculating as a way of producing knowledge and making alternative ways of life possible.

## 2. THE SPECULATIVE

In the last decade, perhaps in light of the growing uncertainty that has dictated contemporary risk management models (Beck, 1986/1992, 2007/2008) and undermined – or at least irreparably transformed – a collective sense of a possible future, the “speculative” has emerged as a powerful multidisciplinary rubric. While it can be traced back to innumerable endeavours throughout the history of philosophy and literature, long predating the past ten years<sup>3</sup>, contemporary articulations emerge, perhaps, in a distinct register. From the financialisation and digitalisation of the planet to visionary ecological thinking, via new materialisms, posthumanism, and the race to the algorithm, a kind of speculative becoming seems to be underway, bringing different forces of world formation and destruction into constant dispute (Vishmidt, 2023, p. 19). Moving between the sciences, philosophies and the arts, it is the multiplicity and versatility of the concept – a “junction of problems” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 18) and a traveller (Bal, 2022) by nature – that makes it particularly appealing to authors such as Isabelle Stengers, when she proposes the term “speculative cosmology” (Stengers, 2006) or “speculative empiricism”, alongside Didier Debaise (Debaise & Stengers, 2016/2017); Donna J. Haraway (2016), with her *SF* methodology (science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, scientific fact, so far); or even Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (2011), in defence of a “speculative realism” in continental philosophy.

So many approaches, associated with such vast research paths and themes, could not fail to provoke some dissent. Even in the predilection for the words “fiction” or its commonplace opposite “realism” – in the theories developed by Haraway and Harman, respectively – an essential positioning difference is immediately clear. For the former, the stamp of the speculative is linked to a singular attention to semiotic technologies and stories capable of building structures and relationships: “mathematically, visually and *narratively*, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems” (Haraway, 2016, p. 101, emphasis added). For the latter, it is, on the contrary,

about turning to reality “itself”, abandoning the repetitive “focus on texts, discourses [and] social practices” (Bryant *et al.*, 2011, p. 3) that would have marked non-analytical philosophical practice. According to Harman, seminal for the consolidation of an object-oriented ontology (cf. Harman, 2018), the turn to the speculative would serve the challenge of observing reality in a way that is “independent of the human-world correlate” (Bryant *et al.*, 2011, p. 4) – even preserving an apolitical dimension to the realm of the ontological. Again, such a venture would not find an echo in Haraway’s thinking, more committed to the notion of “ontological choreographies” (Haraway, 2003, p. 8) – that is, to the realisation that all beings, human and nonhuman, living and non-living, emerge only *through, within* the various and variable dynamics that constitute our networked reality.

How can a single term encompass such fundamentally different convictions? Indeed, the speculative denotes a gesture common to the two American philosophers highlighted above – and probably to all other scientists, artists, and researchers who carry the term with them: the recognition of the “constructive nature of a process that resists pre-defined research questions and actively formulates and risks asking alternative questions and devising research techniques anew” (Savransky *et al.*, 2017, p. 13). In other words, speculating means opening oneself up to the possibility of surprise, “maximising friction with experience, refusing the right every specialised thought grants itself: to explain, while eliminating anything that cannot be framed by the explanation” (Debaïse & Stengers, 2016/2017, p. 16). Not by chance, the proposition that is recurrently referred to as the matrix of speculative thought – and which justifies Debaïse and Stengers’ (2016/2017) argument in favour of radical empiricism – is Alfred North Whitehead’s, when he writes, in *Modes of Thought*, that “Philosophy can exclude anything” (1938/1968, p. 2).

However, this does not mean that the speculative effort is to project as many abstractions as possible. There is, as stated in the aforementioned passage by the Belgian duo, a relationship of *friction* with experience, which creates and imposes constraints: “speculative thinking calls on us to explore modes of existence in their own setting, in their mode of success, in their immanent demands” (Debaïse & Stengers, 2016/2017, p. 15). In this sense, although Haraway and Harman, for example, differ on the method and even the purpose of their speculations, in both of them, there is an intuition that the human must be decentralised from philosophy, cultivating a new gaze that legitimises the agential power, trajectories and concerns posed by other entities participating in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> A more careful definition of what makes fiction unique, in contrast to other literary enterprises, would make it impossible to continue with this article. That is why I will limit myself to Alexandre Nodari's proposal, drawing on the writings of Juan José Saer: "Fiction is not limited to 'a claim to the false', i.e., to the imaginary elaboration of a subject; nor, obviously, is it constrained by the criterion of veracity: in fiction, 'the critical intertwining of truth and falsehood is present, this intimate and decisive tension'" (2015, p. 80) which – I would add – would always, in fact, be infiltrated in any kind of text.

At this point, it is worth recalling, albeit briefly, the “arts of noticing” of another great speculator, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015). Her reflections on forms of collaborative survival in damaged landscapes extend the speculative gesture into lived ecological and socio-economic entanglements, shedding light on the uneven, contingent conditions of multispecies thriving in fragile yet generative assemblages. With the bodily didactic concept aforementioned, the anthropologist alludes to a large debate about an economy or ecology of attention, demonstrating how “twentieth-century scholarship, advancing the modern human conceit, conspired against our ability to notice the divergent, layered, and conjoined projects that make up worlds” (Tsing, 2015, p. 22). In line with the ideas developed in this article, Tsing calls for a renewed observation of the patterns that stitch together species and lifeways in different scales, rhythms, and, why not, languages – paving the way for new stories of interplay in precariousness to replace our old tales of progress. By claiming renewed attention to the plurality and specificity of these beings and events, the speculative requirement lies precisely in the task of producing importance: identifying and responding to the possible that *insists* on being realised (Debaïse & Stengers, 2016/2017).

### 3. THE SPECULATIVE IN LITERATURE

The affinity with literary practice is therefore evident – innate, even. When Vinciane Despret imagines a language for octopuses, she finds plausibility in the link between the animal's vocation for artifice and the art of fiction, “[placed] at the service of other fabulous powers, such as those that guide the writing of narratives” (2021/2022, p. 94). These narratives, to use the words of Debaïse and Stengers once again, manage to make a certain situation important because they intensify the “sense of possibles it harbours, as expressed by the struggles and claims to another way of making it exist” (2016/2017, p. 17). Writing a story, or thinking empirically and speculatively, therefore requires a leap of imagination; and imagining, in turn, acts as a “catalyst for social dreaming” (Dunne & Raby as cited by Savransky *et al.*, 2017, p. 9), a lure that entices a “feeling ‘something that matters’” (Stengers, 2006, p. 5).

But literature and speculative practice are not only closely related because the former weaves and traverses a possible plot, always to some extent invented – even when the creation in question does not correspond to a fictional genre<sup>4</sup> – and in conjunction with all the other possibilities left behind,

beyond or through the narrative. Perhaps it is this inherently speculative dimension of the “Text” that Roland Barthes points out when he states that it “practices the infinite postponement of the signified, [...] is dilatory; [...] is plural” (Barthes, 1984/1989, Chapter 2, pp. 59, 60), attributing to it the *game* as its modality, a playful and irreducible relationship in principle. Or Milan Kundera (1988 p. 30) when he claims that a “novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities [...]. Novelists draw up the map of existence” – and more, nodding to the responsibility (*response-ability*) that the speculative has towards the experience that Debaise and Stengers (2017) talk about, – “[a] novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral” (Kundera, 1988, p. 9).

With Alexandre Nodari (2015), another imperturbable attraction between the two became clear for this study: the subject that is implied in the literary or the speculative is the one capable of “objectifying itself indefinitely, that is (without ever managing to abolish oneself as a subject), of projecting ever-decreasing fractions of oneself outwards” (Lévi-Strauss as quoted by Nodari, 2015, p. 79). Although the author sews this approach together from the field of anthropology, *specifically* – calling it “speculative anthropology” – I do not think it is wrong to assume that the act of writing, as intimately as speculating *in general*, would awaken this ontological transformation in being by revealing a self that varies its position: in this displacement, one discovers that being is, and always has been,

a being that can be situated in a set of alternatives [...] of itself; or, to put it another way, the *present-self* (subject) is only its relational position in a set of possible *selves* (objects) – by changing this set, the current self is also modified (Nodari, 2015, p. 79, emphasis added).

I therefore conclude that, in the movement towards the possibility of other worlds, the speculative gesture also presupposes the movement towards the possibility of other subjectivities.

These subjectivities may be (still) non-existent, experimental or simply as far away as the dark shores of the imagination. As Elizabeth Costello, the protagonist of J.M. Coetzee’s novel of the same name, states with conviction: a sympathetic imagination – sympoietic, if we want to return to Haraway’s lexicon (Haraway, 2016) – knows no boundaries:

if I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life. (Coetzee, 2004, p. 72)

## 4. THE SPECULATIVE IN MORE-THAN-HUMAN LITERATURES

Nodari (2015) sketches an interesting parallel between literature and perspectivism as articulated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2002) – a comparison that the Brazilian anthropologist ratified, having contributed with comments and revisions to the article *A literatura como antropologia especulativa* [Literature as Speculative Anthropology]. In line with the radical difference of Amerindian ontologies – which, in a very synthetic way, start from humanity as a condition common to humans and animals, that is, assuming that animals also see themselves and the beings of their species as people, in a multinatural and profoundly transformational universe (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, pp. 351–355) – Nodari reflects on the literary potential for the variation and deferral of subjectivities precisely from the notion of perspective; “not a perspective *on* the world (‘world-for-a-subject’), but a perspective *of* a world (‘world-of-a-subject’)” (2015, p. 80, emphasis added). In his reading, he even risks an analogy between the textual body and the shamanic body, attributing to both the special and trans-specific ability to cross worlds to inhabit a territory of kaleidoscopic perspectives, constituted and crossed by multiple positions and views (Nodari, 2015, p. 83).

Viveiros de Castro does not shy away from the claim that fiction is the *modus operandi* of anthropological practice. When he describes his work as a “thought experiment” (as quoted by Nodari, 2015, p. 80) – a clear mark of the speculative gesture – he does, however, make an important point: it is not a question of an “imaginary entry into experience through (one’s own) thought, but rather an entry into (another’s) thought through real experience: not [...] imagining an experience, but [...] experiencing an imagination [...]” (Viveiros de Castro as quoted by Nodari, 2015, p. 80). The words of the scholar partly bring me some comfort, although the work of literature and the interpretation of Amerindian perspectivism, in particular, still do not seem to me to be very correctly and convincingly concatenated. Even so, with Viveiros de Castro and Nodari – but also with Donna J. Haraway, Bruno Latour and, of course, Vinciane Despret – I learn not to fear the denunciations (or confessions) of a stubborn anthropocentrism, preferring the “much more interesting [question] of *metamorphosis*, [...] [and the exploration of] the protean nature of what it means to be ‘animated’” (Despret, 2016, pp. vii–xiv, emphasis added). *Shape-changing* is about engaging in speculation while training ourselves to “see *faithfully* from another’s point of view” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583, emphases added), something

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<sup>5</sup> In the two oral presentations that preceded – and undoubtedly enriched – the writing of this article, I was thoughtfully challenged about the choice of this term. In fact, the literary genre that I intend to define here as “more-than-human” could very well be called “other-than-human”, “non-human”, “multi-species storytelling”, or even “sym-literatures”, in a more explicit tribute to Donna J. Haraway’s fabulated stories. Nevertheless, my deliberation in favour of the chosen expression is related to an effort to sustain the importance of human mediation in these texts and narratives. The term “sym-literatures” also seems appropriate for this purpose – and will possibly appear in later works – but, at the moment, it sounds too similar to the group of “zooliterature”, from which I am interested in posing a differentiation.

<sup>6</sup> This narrative was constructed in the context of a writing workshop, part of a colloquium entitled *gestes spéculatifs*, organised in 2013 by Isabelle Stengers. The story was sculpted by six hands, alongside Vinciane Despret and filmmaker Fabrizio Terranova.

Haraway recognises not as “alienating distance [...], [but] a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity”, implemented with “loving care” (1988, p. 583).

To see faithfully from another’s point of view: this is the main premise of what I identify here as “more-than-human literatures”.<sup>5</sup> Three foundational texts, albeit expressly inheriting their bases from several other exquisite speculators, include: *The Author of the Acacia Seeds’ and Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics*, by Ursula K. Le Guin (1982) – an essay that inaugurates, in an almost prophetic tone, the field of expanded linguistics –, *The Camille Stories: Children of Compost*, by Donna J. Haraway (2016, Chapter 8, pp. 134–168) – a short story that launches us into the universe of symbiotic communities,<sup>6</sup> intentional makers of interspecies kinship – and, as we already know, *Autobiographie d’un poulpe et autres récits d’anticipation*, by Vinciane Despret (2021/2022) – a book that combines elements from both of its predecessors to create an even more visionary and subversive world, in which both the *thero* sciences (therolinguistics, theroarchitecture and other integrated knowledges such as cosmophony), from the Greek *thèr* (θήρ), “beast”, and sym-societies are already established ways of thinking and living.

In Despret’s work, we are encouraged to follow a series of documents from an imagined future history (and from a resolutely “proven” present): records and email exchanges between researchers and members of associations linked to *thero* issues. Throughout the reading, invented references are mixed with contemporary studies in biology and ethology, persisting not only in the symbolic and sensitive contamination between humans and animals but also between fictional and scientific accounts. In the first chapter, we learn about the trembling poetry of spiders, discovering them as “silent singers of a song carried by many substrates” (Despret, 2021/2022, p. 34), skilful transmitters of oracular messages and pioneering archivists whose webs have even been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the second section of the book, it is the wombats who surprise us with their vocation for the literary and the religious, revealing, through their walls built voluntarily and creatively with “mysteriously” cubic faeces, their intimate aptitude for sociability. In the final chapter, when it is finally time to unveil the autobiographical letter from an octopus, we learn to read it at the same pace as the narrating character – the therolinguist Sarah Bueno, sent to the symbiotic octopus collective in Naples for a real “thought experiment”, taking up Viveiros de Castro’s expression. It is at this point that Despret allows herself the greatest degree of invention and play – although with rigour – speculating on what a tentacular, improvised and elusive grammar and poetics might be. Even more so, speculating on the arduous and important

commitment of translating and signifying this ephemeral text, made up of short, violent aphorisms – writing that reflects an animal that is afraid, angry and fighting for survival.

In one sense, Despret stretches the very notions of language or literature, essentially described as *produced and productive* traces, something Le Guin had already done when she ventured to interpret the pamphlet messages of a colony of activist ants, constructed “in touch-gland exudation on degerminated acacia seeds laid in rows at the end of a narrow, erratic tunnel [...]” (1982, p. 15). One of the most beautiful theses supported by the author, in the company of Michel Serres (cf. 1992/1995), Didier Debaise (cf. 2021/2022) or David Abram (cf. 1996), is that “we all tell, in the past, in the present and the future, to each other and about each other. Therefore, each narrative constitutes a proposition, a bet on the future, a lure for existence, perhaps for metamorphoses” (Despret, 2021/2022, p. 57).

Every living being [...] is the bearer of a narrative [...]. But this narrative is not simply a trace of the past in the present. Because [...] every living being is guided throughout life by an insatiable creative drive. [...] Thus, at the most elementary level, each entity is, in an inextricable way, a condition of existence for other living beings, who are themselves conditions of their own existence – also by dying and feeding other lives. Every living being is, therefore, [...] the bearer of an *ontological responsibility* that they are obliged to assume [...]. The more a living being takes on this responsibility, the more their existence will be amplified, intensified. [...] Every entity then has a reason to write a story, to leave their creative mark, be it in an architectural form, on their own body, or on that of other beings, be they their descendants, congeners or even those of another species. (Despret, 2021/2022, pp. 55- 56)

In another sense, Despret turns to human syntax to deconstruct it from within, proposing an experimental correspondence capable of bringing us speculatively closer to these other – so very other – ways of acting and intervening in the world. If all living beings tell stories, and if we want to equip ourselves to reach them in their own specificity and otherness, we will have to admit the *sympathising imagination* as the basic, open-access tool that makes such relationships possible. That is why, rather than a new narrator – literature is already full of brilliant examples of animal speakers and subjectivities (cf. Maciel, 2023) – it is important to conjure up a renewed way of narrating. This is the first distinctive aspect of the more-than-human literatures: they do indeed cogitate a new form

of language to account for a new perspective. Two more criteria elucidate the novelty of the genre: the nonhuman entity in question must possess agency, alter the course of its action or the action of others; moreover, it must be in an active relationship with other beings, including humans, demanding the interpretation of its action.

So far, we've stayed within the feral realm, *thèr*, but who is to say that the same endeavour cannot – and will not – be done with plants, fungi, or rocks? How can we invent a mycelial language – fine, disorderedly tangled, and yet perfectly circular? Who will be the first courageous geolinguist who,

ignoring the delicate, transient lyrics of the lichen, will read beneath it the still less communicative, still more passive, wholly atemporal, cold, volcanic poetry of the rocks: each one a word spoken, how long ago, by the earth itself, in the immense solitude [...] of space? (Le Guin, 1982, pp. 22, 23)

## 5. THE SPECULATIVE IN MORE-THAN-HUMAN LITERATURES FROM THE ANTHROPOCENE

The speculative call in favour of unprecedented narratives and characters is undoubtedly one of the urgencies animated by the Anthropocene – a word that was born steeped in conflicts and stories, both in terms of its acceptance as a temporal milestone and in terms of the models of interpretation proposed for a new state of the world. Since it was popularised by chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoerme (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), the concept has constantly called for the revision of many terms and categories that are crucial to Western thought – “*anthropos*”, “*homo*”, “nature” or “culture”, for example – while at the same time being shattered by many other alternative concepts – Anthroscene, Capitalocene, Plantationcene and Eremocene are just some of the various *cenés* in circulation and test.

Due to the spatial and thematic scope of this article, it will not be possible to scrutinise each of these doubts and derivations surrounding the Anthropocene with the attention they deserve. It is important, however, to understand how the foundation of this geological epoch demonstrates a singular narrative vocation, which allows us to confront its discourses, limits and potential. It is no coincidence that much of the contemporary theory on the subject is also articulated in the form of a speculative and sometimes even quite explicitly

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<sup>7</sup> To Latour's emblematic maxim that "we were never modern", Haraway responds, in an interview with Nicholas Gane, with the statement that, first and foremost, "we were never human" (Gane, 2006).

literary exercise. Donna Haraway's proposal in favour of the term Chthulucene (2016), for instance, asserts that storytelling itself can be a practice of worlding-with, placing more-than-human narratives within a broader politics of survival and care. This is also demonstrated by Carolina Correia dos Santos (2024) in her recent article *Teoria das urgências e o presente da literatura: uma prática de leitura especulativa a partir de Autobiografia de um Polvo, de Vinciane Despret* [A Theory of Urgencies and the Present of Literature: a speculative reading practice based on Autobiography of an Octopus, by Vinciane Despret], and Juliana Fausto (2013), in *Terranos e poetas: o 'povo de Gaia' como 'povo que falta'* [Earthbound people and poets: the 'people of Gaia' as the 'missing people'], when they examine Bruno Latour's theoretical building from the narrative of a war between worlds – even evoking the two characters in this clash: Humans, on one side, and Earthbound, the people of Gaia, on the other.

But if it is the *anthropos* that seems to be the focus of the Anthropocene debate, it is also the *anthropos* that announces the insufficiency of the fiction it contains and produces: that of "a universalized agent capable of acting like a single humanity. The advantage of the Anthropocene is that it brings to an end not only anthropocentrism but also any premature unification of the human species" (Latour, 2015/2017, p. 246). Thus, with the demobilisation of the Human,<sup>7</sup> with a capital H, there is a "vertiginous increase in the number of worlds" (Fausto, 2013, p. 168) with which we find ourselves forced to live; now, the protagonists of the story may – and must – be "not only wolf and sheep, but also tuna fish as well as CO<sub>2</sub>, sea levels, plant nodules or algae, in addition to the many different factions of fighting humans" (Latour as quoted by Fausto, 2013, p. 169). In the war of the worlds, there will be no possible victory or survival without their agencies. In the war of the worlds, we cannot learn to live and die well in the desert of the real, in the ruins of capitalism, without imagination. For it is the speculative gesture that, in the face of an unsustainable and inevitable Anthropocene, can still reveal to us "the ecological contingency of today's world (as the only way of inhabiting the cosmos)" (Nodari, 2015, p. 83), pointing "to the only realistic alternative: the demand for the impossible. Not only is another world possible – but another possible is also *world*" (Nodari, 2015, p. 83, emphasis added). With more-than-human literatures, perhaps we can make them closer and more feasible, while also making the Anthropocene a plural, multivocal concept.

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# SHARED NIGHTMARES AND COMMON FUTURES AT GREENHAM COMMONS

On the Politics of Dreaming an  
Affective Practice of Resistance

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## ABSTRACT

The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (UK, 1982–2000) was a feminist anti-nuclear encampment rooted in eco-feminist activism. Within the context of increased tensions in the late Cold War, the article explores how an earlier practice of dream-sharing helped catalyse the movement's emergence. In 1980, Alice Cook publicly shared her recurring nuclear nightmares in *Sparerib* magazine, successfully inviting other women to do the same. Through affect-theory, I argue that this practice supports the claim that affect is transpersonal. Intimate nightmares condense fearful affects but community arises from their public circulation on the magazine, highlighting common images for future worlds. The inability to enact responses to the ecological crisis speaks to the link between the politics of time and those of dreaming. They affect each other insofar as possible futures are dictated by the present yet present terms remain constrained by limited futurities. I argue that dream-sharing practices highlight frameworks that address the question of what and how to do when there is – seemingly – nothing to be done.

**Keywords:** Greenham Commons; Affect-theory; Chronopolitics; Dream practices; Speculative activism

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

What gives a place its atmosphere? Its particular space-time? Before turning to the Greenham Commons Women's Peace Camp – active from February 1982 (Zitouni, 2016, p.18) until either 1987, 1994,<sup>8</sup> or 2000 (Zitouni, 2016, p. 25; Bartley, 2022, p. 241)<sup>9</sup> – and its singular form of activism directed against the Greenham Royal Air Force (US-RAF) Army base and the warmongering logic it embodied, I would like to contextualise the camp against the background of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race.

Doreen Massey argues that space is a “simultaneity of stories so far” and that place is a singular “collection of those stories” (2005, p. 130). We can therefore understand Greenham as an entanglement, where larger – *molar* – geopolitical narratives interweave with “smaller”, personal – *molecular* – experiences of the women who lived on the camp. Out of this entanglement arises a political texture, a singular affective topology on which I will focus my investigation. A story within stories, my narrative is just one amongst many that have formed around that little patch of Common Land.

Through these conjunctures, I aim to engage with the multiple dimensions of Greenham: material, semiotic, and libidinal. I will focus especially on the practice of nightmare circulation initiated by Alice Cook in 1980. Therefore, it is not the scope of this text to engage with widely known and discussed in-situ activist actions led by the Greenham women such as “Embrace the Base” (April 1983) and “Reflect the Base” (December 1983). My interest lies rather with the “right-before”: how the possibility of a collective and non-violent direct militant action led exclusively by women became possible in a climate hostile to this possibility. To the best of my knowledge there is only one paper that directly tackles the practice of collective circulation of nightmares and the political potential of that practice in bringing about the possibility of the Women's Peace Camp (Jolly, 2006). This is rather surprising and, to an extent, concerning. I believe this practice deserves more study because it can highlight emancipatory affective practices that may cross-over into current grassroots political contestations.

## 2. CONTEXTUALISATION: FROM MACRO TO MICRO HISTORIES

The second half of the 20th century was dominated by the Cold War, the confrontational tensions between two opposing ideologies and superpowers – the US and the USSR – and their respective Western and Eastern Blocs.

<sup>8</sup> Sources differ as to the actual lengths of the encampment. Macro-historicising accounts such as those by David Fairhall's *Common Ground: The Story of Greenham* [2006] and Ann Pettitt's *Walking to Greenham: How the Peace Camp Began and the Cold War Ended* [2006] have a tendency to reduce the Greenham women's action and fit them within larger contexts of the Cold War, thereby marking the end of the Greenham Commons camp coincide with the 1987 US-USSR INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) treaty. But there were women living at the camp until at least February 1994. See *Situating the Greenham Archaeology: An Autoethnography of a Feminist Project* [Marshall et.al. 2009, p. 229].

<sup>9</sup> The Army base and the camp was closed in 2000.

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<sup>10</sup>For a general overview  
of the Cold War period  
see Fred Halliday's "Cold  
War" in Krieger (2001) *The  
Oxford Companion to the  
Politics of the World*.

Against the perceived danger of Soviet Communism or American Capitalism, both factions would resort to the same solution: the threat of violence and nuclear war. It is particularly resonant that this logic of nuclear deterrence would come to be known as *mutually assured destruction*, M.A.D. for short. In any case, confrontation was shaped by periodic intensification and détente of the tension between the two factions<sup>10</sup> (Krieger et. al, 2001). The period most relevant to my discussion begins around 1979. Marked by increased hostility, it features events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the election of Tory neoliberal Prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK earlier the same year (Bartley, 2022), and, in 1980, the election of the Republican party's nominee Ronald Reagan (Harold, 1980). A staunch conservative, Reagan built a political platform fuelled by military might, nostalgia, and anti-Soviet rhetoric (Drew, 1980). In 1979, the *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (NATO) implemented a double-track strategy, seeking to re-establish the balance of mutually assured destruction against the perception of a Soviet military build-up.

[The double-track strategy] sought to limit the Soviet military threat. [...] NATO would negotiate for the removal of the SS-20s [Ballistic missiles], but should the Soviets refuse to withdraw them, allies would deploy equivalent missile systems. And so it happened: the Soviets refused to back down and in 1983 NATO began deploying 572 new nuclear and cruise missiles. (NATO, 2019)

That is the setting of our story so far: threads of military buildup, new political leaderships, and diplomatic escalations. Woven together they give us an image of a tense geo-political situation on the global scale.

When threading this story from such a distance however, things and events may appear smaller than they were. They may disappear altogether as completely *in-significant*. Yet meaning always implies an authority to stand by particular perspectives, to differentiate between relevance and irrelevance (Bhabha, 1994). Zoom-in on the textile of a neat white shirt and gaps will start to appear through the fabric.

Shifting angles and zooming positions change what is relevant, what has meaning, what makes the stuff of reality. *Stuff*. I want to emphasise this term and highlight its connotation of entanglement. A quick online search will link the term with the Greek verb of *stuphein* – to draw together – and its more recent import from old French *estoffe*, referring to quilted fabrics. On the one hand, it is unlikely that the word *Stuff* finds its roots in old Greek, given its

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<sup>11</sup> To access this search  
please consult this [link](#).

<sup>12</sup> This definition was taken  
from Collins Dictionary  
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affiliation with Proto-Germanic languages, yet the first result that comes up on Google Search engine when searching “etymology stuff” is precisely this “mistaken” connection<sup>11</sup> – but a mistake in what sense? Can failures and gaps offer new possibilities if considered away from notions of right or wrong? How would we navigate reality if we were to grasp it as a fabric, a drawing-together of events, bodies, experiences? It is less a question of mistakes here than of productive *short-circuit*. The insightful Saidiya Hartman puts it beautifully (2008, p. 100).

Every generation confronts the task of choosing its past. Inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on. The past depends less on ‘what happened then’ than on the desires and discontents of the present. *Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell.*

Etymologies are stories we create about the words we use, a sort of semiotic inheritance that we wield in everyday life, often without giving it much thought. And stories are not a singular unit, but multiple entities that grow and change across continually shifting boundaries of meaning. Understanding reality as manifold layers of material-semiotic fabric offers possibilities for reflection and action. The metaphor of quilt and quilted-ness is useful here, precisely indicating a garment “made of *two layers of fabric* with a *layer of thick material* between them.”<sup>12</sup> Weaving together new strands builds a web of new conjunctures, yet no strand ever starts on its own. Layers join into a continuously emerging fabric, an affective and temporal tapestry where matter and signs come together in partial processes of stitching, binding, mending, and beginning anew. I search for movements in thought that this entanglement may awake in us.

At this point in our narrative it is therefore useful to zoom in slightly, to sew differently and start moving away from the international geopolitical framework of the Cold War towards the national turmoil caused in the UK by the arrival of a new generation of nuclear warheads, by no means an uncontroversial event:

LONDON, Nov. 14 [1983] - American- made cruise missiles arrived today at an air base in England, the British Government announced. They are the first of NATO’s new generation of medium- range missiles to be deployed in Western Europe [...] Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party leader, accused the Government of “reckless cynicism” in permitting deployment while the Soviet Union and the United States are continuing arms negotiations in Geneva. “The installation of cruise weapons

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<sup>13</sup> I am using the French  
edition of Alice Cook's  
and Gwyn Kirk's book  
Greenham Women  
Everywhere, published  
in 2016 by Cambourakis  
Press. All translations into  
English are my own.

makes Britain a more dangerous place today than it was yesterday," Mr. Kinnock said. "It increases the risk for our country without contributing to the defense of the country." Antiwar groups in Britain said tonight that the deployment at Greenham Common would open a new round of protest demonstrations and actions against the missiles. For her part, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher discussed the missiles' arrival in a speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet in London, saying, "*It is our destiny to be living at a time when there exist weapons of war of a dimension hitherto unknown.*" (Nordheimer, 1983)

This article from the New York Times is interesting for two reasons. First, because in it we see stories of different scales and magnitudes meet in a particular place and time. Conjunctures: an encounter is produced in a "deeply divided House of Commons" that learns through Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine that "an unspecified number of cruise missiles would be operational on schedule by the end of the year" (Nordheimer, 1983). We are presented with a conflagration of events. Intercontinental flights of nuclear warheads meet with negotiations in Geneva, thread with Neil Kinnock's accusations. Though remaining unnamed, Antiwar groups also start piercing through the picture. If the first contextual account seemed frozen and immobile, things here start moving around through a variety of actors more precisely situated both in time and space. In between the facts – the treaties allowing US missiles to enter UK territory, the arrival of the missiles and the announcement in the house commons, the responses by party leaders, the Antiwar groups and therefore supposedly also the Women at Greenham Commons protesting the treaty – we can grasp movement *in-between* these images, affecting all the actors involved, creating a moving, common *montage* of events of different scale and time.

Second, Thatcher's statement highlights a sense of unescapable destiny, reflecting a dreadful (and one may say specifically Thatcherite) lack of alternatives. Neoliberal rhetoric is imprinted with this continual tendency to encroach on the notion of alternative, to erase the possibility of a different framework for living, both in present and future terms. What does this mean for us? "The effects of nuclear weapons are as much in our minds than in the nuclear fallouts. The damages are happening now, to people, their vision of the future and their trust in future generations." (Cook et. al, 2016, p. 78).<sup>13</sup> Systemic, the self-strengthening logic of nuclear deterrence perpetuates an endless escalation of nuclear armament. Geo-political, affective, and temporal, this is a system whose defining dynamics are caught in a mutually reinforcing

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<sup>14</sup>I leave here Massumi's full citation for context (2015, p. 200) "Each regime of power in the ecology of powers will have its own logic implicating unique modes of causality and having a singular time signature. The causal and temporal processes involved will endow the objects of each regime of power with an ontological status different from those of any other regime. Correlative to its ontology, each regime will have a dedicated epistemology guiding the constitution of its political 'facts' and guaranteeing their legitimation."

bind. At the heart of this bind, we find the notion of threat and the affect of fear. Though Brian Massumi is preoccupied with affective processes at play in the post-9/11 America, his treatment of threat and fear as onto-genetic (ie. productive of reality) is particularly helpful here (Massumi, 2015, p. 181):

It [Fear] wraps its time-slip so compellingly around experience that it becomes experience's affective surround. Without ceasing to be an emotion, it has become the affective surround of existence; its in-which. *Affective atmosphere* is another way of naming it, emphasizing the aspect of its power of envelopment.

Nuclear destiny is posited as unescapable, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy through interlocked material and semiotic layers of political, affective, economic, social, scientific, and otherwise system-related actions: they hold onto-epistemological value because they shape how worlds are come to be built and to be known. Onto-genetic, they index the forms, processes, modalities, and mediums through which those worlds will bind to one another in a *continually emerging and self-repeating process of appearance*, like a breath weaving through the folds of Neoliberal tapestries.

It seems to me that, implied in Massumi's argument, is the idea that the affective onto-genetic "envelopment" of experience should be understood as a principle of temporal consistency, the way through which a specific and particular lived time or *durée* insists and carries through continuously on its presence. In this sense, Neoliberalism is a particular form of administering time through affective mood, a prehensive chrono-politics that displays its pernicious sensitivity to alternate times through the ability to erase them and posit one absolute rhythm or affective "time signature" (Massumi, 2015, p. 200)<sup>14</sup>, one single Time. Not only are "the terms of futurity [...] already dictated in the present but also the terms of the present are dictated through containment of the terms of the future" (Puar, 2017, p. 148).

### **3. SHARED IMPOSSIBILITIES AND THE CASE OF ALICE COOK**

Against this backdrop, it might seem that any potential for action would be cut-off and made increasingly impossible. How could anything be subject to change within these fearful affective conditions? This is where threading must slow down and become attentive. Intra-active (Barad, 2007, p. 141), the ways

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<sup>15</sup>Through Margareta Jolly  
(2006), *Nuclear Nights:  
The Women's Peace  
Movement and the History  
of Dreaming*.

<sup>16</sup>Own translation.

we weave are as important as the signs and materialities into which we weave. Fear is crucially also the *mood* that permeates the accounts of Women's dreams given by Alice Cook and Gwyn Kirk in the second chapter of their book on the Greenham Commons Women's Peace Camp:

I was walking along a long road, weeping and looking for my husband. The earth was opening up, and the bodies of thousands of screaming naked people were falling into this abyss. *Mrs Smith*.

[...]

One on occasion there was a horrible smell of burning flesh . . . Children were screaming, running with their hands lifted up for help, and their skin was peeling off. There was no blood. In fact there was no liquid, everything was hot and dry. I was somehow watching all this. *Carol*. (Cook et.al, 1987, p. 17)<sup>15</sup>

We are presented with the following question. How does the topology of women's dreams arises out of the debilitating affect that is onto-genetic fear leading to the possibility of Greenham Camp? A new type of collectivity organically develops around the fence of the Greenham army base in the Women's peace camp. From the initial 180km march of *the Women for Life on Earth* from Cardiff (Wales) to Greenham Commons, in August 1981 until 1994 (McDonald, 2017), when most of the last-standing women leave the camp, fear is the initial spark of this movement. "Fear is the starting point of the peace camp, and when we take into account the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, it is reasonable to be scared" (Cook et.al, 2016, p. 58).<sup>16</sup> We must let these experiences, those of women and their dreams, speak for themselves. At this point, the only thing we may conclude is that something must have changed in the way this fear was felt by the Women who partook in communicating their nightmares with each other. *Something moves and new circuits are made*: possibility. If nothing at all had shifted, it is hard to see how the Peace Camp could have emerged in the first place.

It is useful here to return one last time to Massumi, who is particularly insightful on Bush's Presidency:

The Bush administration's fear in-action [the colour-coded terror alert introduced in the US after 9/11] was a tactic as enormously reckless as it was politically powerful. [...] it is likely that it can only be fought on the same *affective, ontopowerful ground upon which it itself operates*. (2015, p. 187)

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<sup>17</sup> The organisation was  
active from 1961 to 1991.

My aim is to create a framework where we can arrive at an affective understanding of Alice Cook's initiative of dream-circulation. Did it indeed create favourable conditions to alternative onto-genetical processes of affect? How does one go from an affect of fear to one of hope in a single movement of fearful nightmares? I believe that this affective understanding can be powerfully instrumental within the contested space of politics – then and now. As Margareta Jolly argues (2006, p. 1) “the notion that we can politicize dreaming or even simply use dreams as historical resources remains controversial.” Then, as general line of action, to stitch open this perceived controversy is to work on opening up the topology of intimate psyche, making it available for circulation within larger socio-political processes.

The story has gradually moved through different historical scales – macro to micro, molar to molecular, -inter to -infra, – none more valid, legitimate, or important than the others since it is together that they sew the fabric of Greenham-as-place. To keep with this intention, the story must now take one step forward (or backwards) towards Greenham by introducing more precisely the context in which the dream circulation took place. Linearity and recursion are deeply ingrained perceptive habits, helping us navigate experiences through memory. Yet, things may change if we dare to look at them sideways. If as Jasbir K. Puar argues (2017, p. 148) “we cannot get out of the present because we are tethered to a desired future [...]” and that “past, present and future feel somewhat futile as descriptions of temporal distinctions”, skipping forward or jumping back in time and scales may enact empowering – and actionable – perspectives.

In around 1980, British anti-nuclear activist Alice Cook posted an advert in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*. The ad reached out to other fellow women reading the magazine, asking them if they, like her, had been having dreams about nuclear war. During the summer of 1980, Alice received “letter after letter” (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p. 60) recounting women's nightmares. She subsequently wrote also in the *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's* (CND<sup>17</sup>) publication *Sanity*. Though it was a journal read by both men and women, “almost all replies came from women” (Jolly, 2006, p. 2). It thus appears that, from the onset of the peace camp “origin story”, the camp was already essentially a women's movement, and a first sign of this is surely to be found in women's intimate nightmares being shared and put into circulation with other women's, with almost no men taking part in this practice. Alice and other women reported being wary of sharing their dreams and anxieties about nuclear warfare with men due to the risk of being ridiculed as hypersensitive or hysterical (Cook *et.al*,

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<sup>18</sup> There were different women's encampments with different characters around the military base, each taking a colour of the rainbow as its name.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from Ann Pettit's letter of 24/09/1981.

2016). This wariness of affectively engaging with men speaks to their inability to display transpersonal empathy, a skill perceived by the women involved as essentially feminine.

This presentation of the Greenham Women as making use of motherhood to protest has been a point of critique for some feminist writers. Sasha Roseneil gives an account of those writers in her brilliant article "Postmodern Feminist Politics: the Art of the (Im)Possible?" (1999). Other authors note there were also hardly any black or Asian women (and black and Asian lesbians) at the camp, and that it was seen by black feminist groups as predominantly white and middle class. On this point, Paula Bartley's insightful chapter on feminist activism under Thatcher, and the new resources of intersectionality that black feminism brought into predominantly white feminist theory is particularly interesting (2022, p. 236-238). I would also like to stress that the image of the Greenham women as "feminine" heterosexual mothers permeates most accounts found in Alice Cook's and Gywn Kirk's book. Going forward, it is important to highlight that the camp also prominently featured Lesbian activists, especially at the encampments of Blue and Violet Gate (Roseneil, 1995).<sup>18</sup>

By dismissing women's fear, men excluded them from the debate over nuclear weapons. After all, politics was a space for well-learned "experts", was it not? No place should be given to affectivity, much less to the affectivity of these "strangely painted women" (Cresswell, 1994, p. 41). And who would "live in the kind of society that these women propose, a society where *emotions rule* [...]" (Cresswell, 1994, p. 51)? Comments like those from pro-nuclear Labour MP Lord Chalfont express disbelief at the idea that "such a political campaign, such a serious subject as that of the nuclear could be engaged by people who spend their time with children and who have nothing better to do than sing nursery rhymes" (Cook et.al, 2016, p. 16).<sup>19</sup> They give us a sense of the deeply entrenched sexism seeping through the UK's political climate of the 80s. Presenting itself as the habitual "call to rationality", it attempts to negate the affective and situated realities of women protesting at Greenham, as well as their many methodologies of unorthodox activism. Furthermore, when considering that some of these women had attempted to be active through traditional channels of indirect political contestation such as those offered within the CND, accounts of the likes of Susan Lamb and Sue Bolton are particularly telling.

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<sup>20</sup> Own translation.

<sup>21</sup> O Note also that  
the notion of *affective  
debilitation* appears also  
within Massumi's and  
Puar's texts.

We cannot delegate everything to committees, we need to take action into our own hands. Women are often apprehensive about organisations like CND. *Susan Lamb, April 1983* (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p.91) [...] Recently a CND meeting was held to discuss direct action. I was very all very theoretical. The discussions were abstract. A hand raised up in the back of the room and a young Scottish woman calmly asked if she could take a baby to prison. She knows she'll go to prison for what she's doing. *Sue Bolton, April 1983*. (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p.99)<sup>20</sup>

In these accounts, we find the strong impression felt by Women that orthodox and sanctioned methods of protests were inconclusive in defusing the nuclear escalation of the late 70s and 80s. Both traditional anti-nuclear activism and the pro-nuclear "government experts" operated within a political space that was hermetic and even hostile to the forms of participation, political vision, and concrete actions that the Greenham Women embodied. This situation appears hopelessly blocked. Top-down hierarchies, endless referral to political action committees of militant leaders, bureaucratised and crystallised indirect processes gave the CND a curiously similar structure to that of any usual political party. No wonder that many women felt unable to partake in those operations. Anne Seller remarks that "we were debilitated by this impersonal conception of politics, partly because of the dissonance between our feelings and the available course of action" (1985, p. 139).<sup>21</sup>

The traditional spaces of socio-political action appear inert, life-less, distant from the lived experience of the women (white, middle-class, mothers) that populate the pages of Cook's and Kirk's *Greenham Women Everywhere*. Concerns are expressed regarding theoretical frameworks that glaringly pass over *crucially practical* questions such as that of a baby's life when their mother is imprisoned. Curiously, it is precisely at this juncture where concrete women's action seems most impossible, where political space seems most impenetrable, that cracks most clearly start to appear in the nicely homogenised space of the White Man's Politics. In these cracks, alternative quilts for reality starts seeping through. Out of exclusion and need, the Greenham Women build their dream-sharing initiative. They develop an original and innovative communicational strategy, attending to a material practice where their fear may be mended together. The intimate and the private of each particular unit in this circuit leaks into a public space. A different logic of binding is offered to us, what happens to the *Stuff* of reality then?

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<sup>22</sup> Own translation. My  
emphasis when not  
specified.

#### 4. AFFECTIVE ISOLATION, AFFECTIVE CIRCULATION, AFFECTIVE EXCESS

To investigate this, we accelerate our trajectory through the place of Greenham. Expanding on the metaphor of leakage and circuitry, my aim is to find loci where private, public and intimate intermingle. These are the places from which to short-circuit and crack through the pipes of warmongering, destructive, and oppressive politics. Because they shift the topology of political visibility and give a voice to silent forms of exclusions and oppression, these are the places from which new collective and social action can be enacted.

It should always be kept in mind that the scope of this story is to elucidate how the same dream-contents *shift in place*, as if quantum-jumping from hopeless to hopeful, making possibility possible again. It is useful here to compare two accounts of nightmares by Sarah and Wendy to better understand how the same type of dream-content can be isolated or circulated, thereby changing its affective charge and its concrete material effects in the form of possible bodily administration.

One of the women I was working with had nightmares about nuclear catastrophe every night. [...] she had broken down under this pressure and they had branded her as crazy and committed her to hospital. Under the pretext of protecting her, they forced-fed her drugs and sidelined her from society. She *knew* [Author's emphasis] reality. She had let herself be *invaded* [by the dream] with devastating effects, because she was *isolated*. [...]. *Sarah*. (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p. 69)

I wake up from these nightmares in a state of shock and they follow me a long time upon waking. I wake up thinking: this is the end of the world. [...] *I wake up and the reality of the dream is much worse than the dream itself*. [...]. *Wendy*. (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p. 71)<sup>22</sup>

What is interesting here is that, in both accounts, the notion of reality invading the dream intimacy of the individual is explicit. Dream and Reality become entangled and threaded together, but the type of weaving and connective modality is radically different. On the one hand, Sarah gives us an account of how another woman's anxieties are cordoned off and made unable to flow through with that of others. Her affective surround is *privatised*. The restriction of affect is done through an action of a sign – a medical category. This internalises affect

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<sup>23</sup> A case of psychotic reaction could also be argued in both the accounts of Sarah and Wendy since what is at stake is precisely the erasure of the border between reality-content and dream-content. It is not within the scope of this article to investigate this, but see Félix Guattari's "Everybody wants to be a Fascist" [1977] and Gilles Deleuze's "Three Group Problems" [1977].

and limits its scope to a physiological or at most psychological terrain. The sign is not an abstract category, it weaves through material consequences. Initial overflow of the fear-threat bind, libidinal blockage through the semiotic action of a category (in this case clinical), the folding back of affect unto the closed circuit of the Individual, neurotic<sup>23</sup> response, medicalisation and institutional "*prise en charge*". Of concern should be the fact that this process is curiously similar to that of circular Thatcherite "inescapable destiny" described earlier on, albeit on a *microscopic level*. On the other hand, Wendy's account is her own, meaning she shared it either through letters or with Cook.

From macro to micro, what is consistently present here is the notion that different conjunctures of the same content lead to different outcomes. Therefore, it matters how bodies, in their most general extension comprising also dreams, are connected. What matters is not so much bodies in themselves, but *how they are affectively stitched together*. This is the first clue to our puzzle. Alice Cook notes that one of the common features across all the women's letters she received was the feeling of being alone in their fears, unaware of other women sharing their emotions (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p. 6). Jolly comments that amongst the "recurring themes of the women's protest was the relief at sharing a hitherto lonely terror. This sharing of emotion was distinctive to the women-led actions, and indeed made a contrast to conventional peace organisations at the time" (Jolly, 2006, p. 16). That the sharing of negative emotions might lead to positive outcomes is coherent with insights from other topics and authors (Sayers, 2000, p. 829). This is the second clue in understanding how nightmares of nuclear annihilation might provide, in their very hopelessness and pessimism, a basis for an alternative, positively productive kind of affective onto-genesis. What happens when women's libidinal pipes get *clogged together* with those other of women, rather than on their own? How do they leak into each other and into Political space? Particularly telling is the following account from Carol.

Sometimes, when I'm walking down the street, in contact with its objects and cement, I think all of this will be gone. I fall into disbelief, and after that, I panic. And so I think that there will be no after, that it is *the end*. No language could describe this feeling. *It's like trying to picture infinity*. It is a feeling so big that I become a complete *pessimist*. (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p. 67)

What is interesting here is the affective communality expressed between the sensation of "finite", one of radical and ever-impending nuclear threat, and that of "infinite". It is as if the lack of available course of actions felt by the

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<sup>24</sup> On the logical level, this irrepresentability could also be understood as the affirmation of a negation, thereby opening up logical topology to the affective charge of the infinite in the form of " $\infty-1$ ". A shift in place from is not 'x' to is 'non-x'. The difference between the proposition "This T-shirt is not white" and "This T-shirt is non-white" is the difference between the negation of a determined quality and the affirmation of pure negation as such, which only precludes one option, that of the quality of whiteness, opening itself up virtually but not actually to all other qualitative determinations.

Greenham Women becomes here expressed in the dream-content. However, this blockage or un-flow leaks through immediately, as *non-linguistic*, into that *unrepresentable* sensation opening up itself to the infinite.<sup>24</sup> Possibility becomes a sensation of excess that is felt, real but not actual. This non-linguistic (or extra-linguistic) irrepresentability is coherent with mainstream affect-theory elaborated by authors such as Massumi, who equates affect with unsignifiable excess. Ben Anderson argues that "the ontological equation between affect and excess around the idea of the virtual-actual has subsequently functioned as the a priori foundation, or ground, that guarantees post-rationalist political practices" (2006, p. 739). Entangled women's dreams invaded by reality push back and seep through into the real with a vengeance: a newfound affective charge in excess.

Gaps in the Neoliberal tapestry grow bigger *precisely when its fabrics become most oppressive*: the circulatory practices of women dreaming together de-privatise affect and enact a shift in place of each singular dream by weaving it unto others. The process is one of *resonance*, with each dream being a possible node for additional processes of resonance and entanglement. The circulation of resonating dreams, specifically hopeless nightmares of nuclear warfare, makes them jump into an affective worm-hole and creates the ground appropriate for building a politics of joy and hope, a possibility that becomes real without being actual. In other words, the circulation of *semiotic* dream-content through the *materiality of letters* renders the affect-excess dyad open to use in political operations. This excess materialises in multiple forms and processes: the failed, isolated, and medicalised neurotic response of the woman from Sarah's account but also the nightmares described above, the large number of letters being shared, the overreaching and binding affects flowing through the dreams. The communicational strategy enacted by the Greenham Women operationalises and gives a first body to forms of weaving activism differently. A new possible space-time emerges from these loose strands that mend into each other. Reality radically changes because the sewing points as well as the methods and weaving movements *connect differently*.

I insisted earlier on the tension between an essentially emotionless vision of politics embodied by traditional parties and activist organisations, and the affective politics of the Greenham Women's Peace Camp. This is something that is stressed by the authors of *Greenham Women Everywhere* themselves when they write that "politicians pretend that we shouldn't be afraid, that we should trust a government that has taken into account all options in a rational manner, and which has decreed that disarmament would be a foolish and naïve

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mistake” (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p. 72). This semblance of complete, rational control over the UK’s nuclear policies and its intended deterring effects against Soviet aggression was something promoted by the Thatcherite government itself.

Yet, to be content with a simple opposition of “affective excess” versus “rational overdetermination” runs the risk of passing over a more complex understanding of the opposition between these two factions and their situated entanglement (for better or for worse) at the perimeter around the Greenham Commons USRAF army base. Said otherwise: to deny a politics of affect within the nuclear and warmongering logic passes over its fundamental operations within (affective) spacetime and leaves us therefore open to its deleterious effects, severely impeding our capacity for response. Neoliberal pro-nuclear rhetoric in the 80s is therefore a specific type of weaving, a particular quilt that gives the impression of spatial and temporal overdetermination, in circular and ‘feedback-feedforward’ fashion, of the present(s) and the future(s) that could be available as places of contestation. But affect cannot simply be neutralised: the ‘Threat-Fear’ duality is the ground upon which nuclear policies are justified and validated at the microscopic level of the individual and the macroscopic level of social, economic, and political decisions. If traditional (modernist) Political spaces during the anti-nuclear struggle of the 80s and 90s seem overtly rationalist, it is because they relegate the affect they produce to the intimate, familial, and private sphere of the individual: I refer back to the woman committed in the mental health institution. The issue is thus not one of a simple affect-reason opposition; rather, the question concerns more crucially two different types of weaving with semiotic-material layers. Fear binds with something else than threat here. And if the activism of the women at Greenham consistently revolves around diminishing the consistency of the border between public and private, then neoliberal operations run precisely in the opposite direction. They attempt to fence off the public from the private, cutting off possible forms of intersectional activism between multiple marginalised groups. They influence how visibilities are to be enacted, who and what should be seen and under which light. They exclude potentially radical ways of engaging own lived experiences in political debate and contested spatio-temporal political spaces, because these offer modes of visibility and examples of community that are truly capable of contesting the terms under which our futures are to be imagined. I have tried to show here how the practice of dream circulation, which is presented by Alice Cook as the ‘starting point’ of the Peace Camp, is one that wilfully negates the fencing of individual psyche. Some lines should then be spent elucidating why Freudian psychoanalysis is not an appropriate method in circumventing the

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<sup>25</sup> Sayer's article offers a pseudo-scientific survey of Teenage dreams in which an opposition is created between "being the savior" and "being saved", those coincide with the Symbolic position of having, or being the Phallus. For a more coherent take, and in this case Lacanian, see Patricia Gherovici [2014] "Where have the Hysterics gone?: Lacan's Reinvention of Hysteria".

<sup>26</sup> A connection should be here highlighted between three processes of subdivision that reach beyond the scope of psychoanalysis and in my view are valid today more than ever. Beyond that of psyche, there is that of labour, and that of political subjectivities which would benefit from intersectional awareness and a more organised form of social struggle. All these processes are *analyses* in the chemical-literal sense of the term and severely limit how we may envision common sociopolitical struggles.

political potential of dreaming. Teresa Brennan (2004, p. 24) argues that:

In theories of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the healthy person is a self-contained person. This healthy has established 'boundaries' in early childhood [...] This being now realizes where he or she ends and the other begins. He or she has boundaries. Yet most non-Western and nonmodern theories of mental illness posit the transmission of affect, meaning that the emotions and energies of the one can cross over into another. It is primarily modern and Western approaches to mental illness that assume that the individual is an energetically self-contained or bound entity, whose affects are his or hers alone.

The privatisation of affect is a distinctively modernist take on subjectivity. As Brennan and other authors note (Anderson, 2006, p. 735), affect is *transpersonal*. It is this *trans-* quality that enables affect to be tied to excess in post rationalist political practices. Psychoanalysis as a clinical-political practice closes off a priori the circulation of libidinal investment to recurring and transhistorical structures, for example in the form of the Oedipus Complex. Libidinal production is fenced off by "primary and secondary repressions" that, much like the bureaucratized and fenced off flows of traditional political spaces, endlessly refer desire and libidinal processes through stable and inert circulatory forms (the Oedipal triad, the public-private State) that *give off an appearance of trans-temporality and trans-historicity*. Individual psyche is reduced to having or being the Phallus (Sayers, 2000, p. 836).<sup>25</sup> In the last instance, everything is already lost from the start when one assumes a "correspondence, traceable down to the last detail, between the phenomena of censorship and dream-distortion" (Freud, 2008, p. 113). This is because this position assumes the dream-content to be *fundamentally other and separated* from the affect that generates it. Fences, borders, closures multiply impeding our ability to reach beyond ourselves.<sup>26</sup> Neurotic isolation is inevitable because the individual is *always already confined within a semiotic institution of the psyche*. It is here very interesting to compare a passage from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* with Jayne's account from Cook's and Kirk's text:

The assumption is that release of affect and content of imagined ideas do not form the indissoluble organic unity we usually treat them as being; rather, that both parts have been soldered onto each other in such a way that they can be separated by analysis. Dream-interpretation shows that this in fact the case. (Freud, 2008, p.300)

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<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that what Freud deplors as the basis for physical manifestations of hysteria – “hyper” empathy and affective identification – is precisely the ground enabling the Peace Camp’s development.

From primary school, we are taught what is right. Little by little, our thoughts are fenced in different paths until the point where each child specialises itself [...] by fencing off our feelings, we adopt a mode of thought which leads to neurosis. (Cook *et.al*, 2016, p.70)

Though I have kept on using the singular to engage with the concept of *Stuff*, it is now time to start speaking in pluralities. At hand is not one reality but realities, each with its own intricate weaving that will diminish some bodies and augment some others. The “hysterical”<sup>27</sup> women meet the ‘rational’ State on the site of the fence. Worlds and space-times collide, generating additional and unplanned release of affective excess. In this sense, what perhaps most materialised this encounter at Greenham Commons was the fence separating the Women’s camp from the USRAF Army base and before closing off, I would like to shortly cover one singular type of intervention on the fence by the Women at Greenham which further advances the oppositional weaving I have suggested earlier. Tim Cresswell notes that in the journalistic coverage of their actions, a particularly recurring theme was “the image of malodorous waste – particularly defecation and *menstrual blood*” (Cresswell, 1994, p. 45). What is of interest to me here is not so much the notion of smell but that of the practice developed by the women at the camp to hang used tampons on the fence of the base: “soiled sanitary towels are used to ‘decorate’ the fences and surrounding areas” (Cresswell, 1994, p. 46). Menstrual blood, a distinctively “private affair” in the 80s, is made public. An internal biological process that *rhythmicises women’s lives* and disrupts the time-signature and spatial administration imposed by Neoliberal fencing of the base. At the fence, rhythmical disruption is introduced and alternative space-times can bloom by turning one’s bodily processes inside out. This notion of rhythmical (temporal) disruption of spatial coordinates was instrumental in contesting neoliberal affective tactics of fencing and de-futuring. I wonder what this may mean for us now. How it may offer us with a kinetic understanding of politics, how it may form a useful tool in navigating, supporting, and further strengthening contemporary strategies for collective action in all current struggles and oppressions, especially the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza perpetrated by the standing Israeli Government and facilitated by the lack of international action from global institutional and state powers.

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<sup>28</sup> The exhibition ran in 2023, and is no longer present at the Barbican Center. For more information that can be found in the Barbican website, please access [this link](#).

## 5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE NOTION OF CONATUS

As implied earlier in the text, efforts should be made to always keep in mind that inert neoliberal perpetuation of its structures is not monolithic, but rather gives the impression of being so by continual processes of re-emergence. This sense of inevitability, of lack of alternatives and de-futuring, gives the *impression* of inertia, much in the same way that when car wheels move fast enough they seem to stop moving altogether. Against this semblance of frozen and absolute power over reality's determination, it is instead more fruitful to understand this inertia as a specific *projection* that emanates from a capitalist "conatus" whose effect of de-futuring is as materially real as it is affective, yet as phenomenally evanescent and projective as it is affective. These two sides of affectivity are not and should not be treated as mutually exclusive. Ben Anderson gives an insightful definition of the conatus in his paper *Becoming and Being Hopeful*, where it is understood not as the "property or essence of a thing", but as a "characteristic way of *connecting and disconnecting* enabling finite bodies to repeat across processes of emergence" (2006, p. 743).

This allows for a serious engagement with the onto-genetic potential of affect whilst also recognising that in a situation of affective totalisation such as the one of fear that permeates the Greenham Women's dream, there is always something *affectively in excess*, a possibility or chance encounter that can be "politically operationalised" (Massumi, 2015, p. 174). Place as a collection of stories-so-far highlights the care that should be put into operationalising conjunctures, place says less about points on maps than about spatio-temporal events. Surfaces seem static, but they are always a "conjunction in movement" (Massey, 2005, p. 137) and Greenham Commons strongly materialises this insight. Consumption of place necessarily implies production of new conjunctures and simultaneities of place as such.

In the summer of 2023, I had the chance to visit "Re/Sisters"<sup>28</sup> at the Barbican in London. Amongst feminist and activist artworks, the story of the Greenham Women's Peace Camp was featured prominently, as were the other women's peace camps that settled around army bases in Europe in the 80s. It was odd to see these sorts of practices being highlighted and housed in one of the major Modernist and Brutalist building projects of the City. Loose tongues will talk of neoliberal recuperation, whereas I prefer to see an encounter between monolithic cement and feminism as one more "story-so-far" in the place we call Greenham, a new surface to be explored.

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Ecological destruction, wars, inconsiderate and inhumane violence: these things impose on us new global responsibilities, both as citizens and witnesses, and signal a new type of dynamic taking hold of our space-time. This shift addresses us with a need to multiply our responses to devastation, both in the stories we tell and in the actions we make ours. Responsibility is not voiced. It is enacted through innovative communicational strategies, material practices, forms of activism, and modes of political action. Things change, processes and circuits appear stronger than they are. But whether we, as citizens, decide to take an active role in questioning and renegotiating the terms of these dynamics is only up to us.

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# FERAL SONGBOOK

Collective Improvisation as an  
Ecological Survival Technique

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## ABSTRACT

This article argues for a deeper understanding of how collective and participatory improvisation rehearses modes of political and ecological resistance to the manifold forms of violence and dispossession felt today. Taking cues from previous research conducted on populations of feral parakeets in Europe, the project Feral Songbook compiles a series of scores for collective and participatory improvisations that take these parakeets' "territories of chant" as modes for polyphonic cooperation. For philosopher Vinciane Despret, "[bird] territories draw networks of sonic territorialities." Such territorialities propose alternative, affective cartographies that counter Modernity's bird's eye-view with the relationality of being within bird's earshot. Indebted to collective and participatory improvisations such as those proposed by composer Cornelius Cardew and the freeform collective Scratch Orchestra (1969–1974), this article describes how such practices may help restore our relationship with the nature culture continuum via rites of attention and mutual responsibility.

**Keywords:** Affect; Relationality; Listening; Participatory practice; Collective improvisation.

## 1. PREAMBLE: ON FERILITY

For the past four years I have devoted special attention to observing, listening, recording, playing back, and processing the sounds of two species of birds: Ring-necked parakeets *Psittacula Krameri*, and Monk parakeets *Myopsitta monachus*. Endemic to South Asia and South America, respectively, specimens from these two species were first brought to Europe to be commercialised as pets. Although commercialisation lasted roughly two hundred years, from the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of the twenty-first century, their popularity as pets rose immensely in the 1980s and 90s, and whether willingly or unwillingly, they found ways out of captivity either by escaping or being purposefully released by their previous owners. Once breeding pairs were able to establish themselves in the (urban) wild, numbers grew, albeit slowly at first – a latency period that usually accompanies acclimatisation (Berthier *et al.*, 2017, p. 410). But in tandem with the rise of yearly average temperatures, courtesy of current global warming and climate change, exponential population increase has been observed over the past ten years, with around 10,000 parakeets in cities such as London (BTO, 2023) and Madrid (Torres, 2024), around 9,000 in Brussels as of 2016 (Aves Natagora, 2024), 8,000 in Paris (LPO, 2022), 6,000 in Barcelona (Borray-Escalante *et al.*, 2024), and 5,000 in Amsterdam (Sovon, 2022), to cite just a few cases. Acclimatised and naturalised, these birds are still considered exotic given their endemic regions, and have, in some cases, been classified as Invasive Alien Species (IAS). Both Monk parakeets and Ring-necked parakeets are considered IAS in Spain, but in France only Ring-necked parakeets are so listed. This has led to interdictions at European level regarding their commercialisation, in an attempt to curb their further dissemination. The IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature (2025) working definition of Invasive Alien Species states:

An alien species is an animal, plant, or other organism that is introduced by humans, either intentionally or unintentionally, into places outside its natural range. Globalisation has increased the movement of people and goods around the world, leading to a rise in the number of species introduced to areas outside their natural ranges.

The IUCN (2025) also directly addresses the impact of climate change when it cites a study that “found that over one-third of all introductions in the past 200 years occurred after 1970, and the rate of new introductions is showing

no sign of slowing down.” For the IUCN, this is a clear indication that “IAS are compounded by climate change, which facilitates the establishment and spread of many alien species and creates new opportunities for them to become invasive” (IUCN, 2025). But there is a third criteria that has been a recent point of contention between specialists regarding whether or not these species of parakeets actually meet it: they must have had economic impacts (on crops or livestock in particular), ecological impacts (direct predation or competition with local species for resources or habitat), or health impacts (IUCN, 2000). A study in France by Deguines *et al.* (2020) argues there is not enough data to support either that Ring-necked parakeets have had a clear and continued economic impact on crops outside their natural ranges, or even enter in direct predation or competition with local species. Their study was based on garden bird feeders, “using the nation-wide citizen science scheme BirdLab, in which volunteers record in real-time bird attendance on a pair of bird feeders during five minute sessions” (Deguines *et al.*, 2020). Since most European populations of exotic parakeets are found in cities, impacts on crops have not been regularly observed. And if the results from Deguines *et al.* study (2020), do not corroborate the hypothesis these exotic birds would compete and drive away other local bird species, there must be some other reason for their classification. According to philosopher Joëlle Zask (2020, p. 48), this may be related to the fact that:

For most people, the installation of [so-called] wild animals in the city evokes less an incomprehensible disturbance of the functioning of nature (...), than a complete perversion of the ideal of the wild. [...] These impressions are based on a dichotomous conception of the domestic and the wild.

This would manifest, in Zask’s words, in “the inadequacy of our dominant conception of the city as a place of excellence for purely human life (...), to the exclusion of all other forms of life” (2020, p. 78). Cities have never been completely devoid of animal solidarities other than those mediated by human societies. There are those of species such as mice, rats, sparrows, and pigeons, whose own territories are completely indissociable of human settlements and modern urban development, even if they escape a strict notion of domesticity. But other nonhuman city dwellers, such as parakeets, would constitute a whole other, much more problematic category. Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011) use the expression “liminal animals” to designate those that, neither

domestic nor wild, have adapted to spaces inhabited and transformed by humans: permanent residents that nevertheless desire to live at a distance from us. Parakeets would, then, occupy a specific and paradoxical position as a resident, liminal species, predicated on a special form of ferality: no longer domesticated, but not rewilded either. Here, appropriating Zask's terminology, "ferality' is situated somewhere between a post-domestication and a reverse domestication" (2020, p. 92). It entails "an unpredictable evolution that has nothing to do with the return to a hypothetical original state, contrary to the reversal suggested in the notion of rewilding" (Zask, 2020, p. 92). Feral, then, is any plant or animal formerly domesticated which has become untamed again, after escaping captivity and domestication. Neither domesticated nor wild, feral are those that have adapted and proliferated in infrastructures of human disturbance and which, while inhabiting those same environments of contemporary human societies, wish to live apart from us.

## 2. INTRODUCTION: OF SONIC TERRITORIALITIES

Feral parakeets exist in a liminal space between co-dependency and autonomy. They benefit from an independent food chain, albeit courtesy of the botanical cosmopolitanism that characterises European cities' landscape management: cities tend to feature several different tree species that share these parakeets' natural ranges. Ferality has thus come to symbolise an ambivalent response to various forms of dispossession and domestication: anthropocentric, colonial, but also ecological, since parakeets have come to occupy ecological niches left empty by the great loss in numbers of other species, like sparrows and other passerine birds. Coupling climate change, ease of access to different sources of food throughout the whole year (even in winter), and a lack of predators (although there have been documented cases of predation by birds of prey, such as falcons, or owls, in Mori *et al.*, 2020), the growing populations of feral parakeets in European cities today marks a clear resurgence in the face of environmental disturbance. Today, feral parakeet colonies make it loud and clear what spaces they occupy and how they occupy them.



**Fig. 12** - Ring-necked parakeet *Psittacula krameri* feeding on the berries of a Chinaberry Tree *Melia azedarach*, Paris, February 2024. Endemic to South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australasia, this tree's common name in English derives from the fact its natural range includes, obviously, Southern China. This biogeographical region is coincident at points with that of Ring-necked parakeets' endemic range in South Asia.

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Monk parakeets are extremely gregarious birds: although they live in couples, they establish multi-couple nests that can hold around 30 to 40 birds in total. Nests that are actual common or community dormitories, multi-family arrangements, that hold whole flocks. They are extremely vocal birds, with an extensive vocabulary, and tend to vocalise near the nest. Their vocal communication is very important for the group's cohesion. Individuals try to be in constant and close proximity to one another. Their contact and greeting calls, for example, are known for not holding one single unequivocal meaning, but are mainly used in order to maintain active communication channels between the members of each colony.

#### MONK PARAKEET

Endemic to South America, from the plains east of the Andes, from Bolivia through southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina to Patagonia. Introduced to Europe as pets, Monk parakeets have adapted and rewilded from birds escaped from captivity. Today, there are sizeable populations throughout Western Europe (in Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and the UK).

Monk parakeets are gregarious birds: they live in pairs or flocks of 30 to 50 birds, establishing common nests and sleeping quarters. They are highly vocal birds with an extensive vocabulary, but sing almost exclusively in the vicinity of communal roosts. Vocal communication is very important in maintaining coordination and cohesion between colony members, who are in constant, close association. Their contact calls have no single clear meaning, but serve above all to maintain active communication channels. The *perriche* has a vocal imprint that enables each individual to recognize and be recognized by their congeners.

MONK PARAKEET  
*Myopsitta monachus*



With a height of around 29cm, a wingspan between 32 and 48cm and an average lifespan of 20 years, the Monk parakeet has a pale ash-gray forehead, front half of the cap, bill, cheeks, throat and upper chest. The lower chest is pale yellow. The rump and back of the cap are green, blending into the coat. Coat when young is blue, and later green.

**Fig. 2** - Pages from the fold-out libretto “Feral Songbook #2: Monk Parakeet *Myopsitta Monachus* (for any number of untrained voices),” produced for Prix COAL Art et écologie Se transformer, Paris, 20 November 2024. © *Nuno da Luz*.

Ring-necked parakeets, on the other hand, make their nests in pre-existing cavities in trees or artificially built structures (such as buildings, for example). And although their “fundamental year-round social unit is the mated pair” (Baker, 2000, p. 906), they can be generally found in groups while feeding:

Commonly consort[ing] with small numbers of conspecifics in loose and fluid groupings during the day. In the non-breeding season, Ring-neck parakeets usually assembled in traditional roosting areas in the late afternoon. (Baker, 2000, p. 906)

Their feeding grounds are usually far away from the nests, and they are easily spotted during their flights between nests and feeding grounds as they emit a series of cries while flying:

The most common call recorded was termed the flight call because it was produced mainly when one bird of a pair took flight and emitted this call while the other bird followed, itself often calling as well. (...) My observations suggested that this call is a within-pair signal employed in coordinating movements and indicating location if separated. (Baker, 2000, p. 906)

## RING-NECKED PARAKEET

Endemic to sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian subcontinent. One of the few parakeet species to have successfully adapted to life in disturbed habitats, it has withstood the onslaught of urbanization and deforestation. Introduced to Europe as pets, they have adapted and rewilded from birds escaped from captivity or purposefully released.

Feral populations exist throughout Western Europe, notably in the UK, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and France where, since 2018, it is considered an Invasive Alien Species. Today, their population in France is estimated at several thousand individuals, mainly in the Île-de-France region and cities along the Mediterranean coast.

Ring-necked Parakeets nest in pre-existing cavities in tree or artificial structures such as buildings. Very noisy, they are generally found in restless flocks, uttering small, repetitive calls. They are gregarious birds during their feeding and breeding periods. Their flight is rapid and direct, associated with calls when flying in pairs or in group.

RING-NECKED PARAKEET  
*Psittacula krameri*

With a height of around 38cm, a wingspan of between 38 and 42cm, and an average lifespan of 30 years, the Ring-necked parakeet has bright green plumage, a long, tapering tail, slender wings and a round head with a red beak. The male has a black bib that extends to the nape of the neck. The female has no such pattern.

**Fig. 3** - Pages from the fold-out libretto "Feral Songbook #1: Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (for any number of untrained voices)," produced for Prix COAL Art et écologie Se transformer, Paris, 20 November 2024. © Nuno da Luz.

Whether speaking of the contact calls of Monk parakeets or the flight calls of Ring-necked parakeets, vocalisations are intrinsic and essential to the functioning of these societies. Whereas birdsong has been ascribed historically to males as a form of asserting domination over a territory, parakeets of both sexes vocalise often, together, and roughly at the same time. Male dominance through birdsong has been historically characterised as intended to keep possible intruders/trespassers/competitors at bay, but philosopher Vinciane Despret recalls the studies and hypothesis of ornithologist James Fisher that actually posit the opposite: that "songbirds often establish territories in clusters and have relationships with their neighbors that are not strictly competitive." (Fisher, 1954). Or more importantly even, "territories are social activities that foster cooperation" (Despret, 2019, p. 142). Fisher's hypothesis goes against the grain of his contemporaries, like the ethologist Konrad Lorenz who, according to Despret, hypothesised that "the territory is determined by aggression, it is aggression that causes territorial behaviors" (2019, p. 140). Fisher postulates instead that "birds are fundamentally social animals," leading Despret (2019, p. 143) to further understand bird territories as the loci where certain stimulations are intensified. Reading through the findings of ornithologist Frank Fraser Darling, Despret reclaims the following proposition:

The territory is a place composed, on one hand, of one or two focal points – the nest and the singing post – and on another hand, a periphery. The term periphery underlines a crucial dimension of any territory: they are always adjacent. (...) They are always concomitant with other territories,

there are always neighbors. (2019, p. 160)

What the author calls “territories of chant” (Despret, 2019, p. 158) are not predicated on dominance being asserted from an epicentre that radiates outwards concentrically, but on the elastic triangulation between the two foci – from where emissions radiate – and the vibrational boundary layer constituted by the vicinity, the adjacency with other singers’ territories: the interface where things actually take place. Birds’ “territories of chant” thus present a triple dimension that is expressive (territories are constituted by and through chanting, what Despret calls “territories as compositions and melodic arrangements” (2019, p. 168)), geopolitical (territories are predicated on the existence and recognition of their neighbours), and social (what Fraser Darling calls “reciprocal responsiveness” (1952, p. 183)).

My hypothesis here is that we may take cues from such nonhuman forms of polyphonic territorialisation as modes for cooperation. I seek to propose alternative, affective cartographies that counter modernity’s obsession with the so-called bird’s-eye-view – the ubiquitous view-from-above that ties cartography and colonialism since the advent of European expansionism – replacing this naturalised two-dimensional perspective with a spherical notion of being within a bird’s-earshot. This entails replacing the aerial perspective of a bird flying alone, high in the sky, looking down, with the intensification and elastic triangulation that makes up the adjacent boundary layers of their sonic territorialities – hopping up and down between the ground and the canopy of trees, perching on branches, flying from nest to feeding grounds and back again. Movements that are not only sonic but affective. Vocalisations are sent out in coordination with their relative motions: choreographies where sound, movement, and responses together describe forms of belonging. Forms of affiliation that blur space and sound, individual and collective, through the capabilities of affecting and being affected by other bodies in proximity.

Departing from the territorialisation/socialisation processes observed in feral parakeets, a series of formal or structural traits can be distinguished and inferred from their vocalisations and calls: rhythms, cadences, variations, modulations, and especially call-and-response patterns – what Baker calls “signal employed in coordinating movements and indicating location” (2000, p. 906) in relation to one another. In other words, vocalisation follows listening and vice-versa in a feedback loop that recalls the words of musician Don Cherry when speaking about free improvisation in conversation with Amiri Baraka: “‘Listen’ is a word I think about as much as ‘music’” (Baraka, 1967, p. 169).

Monk parakeets' contact calls are, for example:

The most common vocalization given by the Monk parakeet. Adults of both sexes use the contact call in a wide variety of situations; for example, members of a group call to each other when flying long distances; while foraging; while feeding their young; and (often combined with the greeting call) when birds approach each other at a nest. (Martella & Bucher, 1990, p. 103)

They are further characterised by researchers as “tonal calls with at least three peaks in their frequency modulation” (Smeele & Tyndal *et al.*, 2024, p. 3) that can be further broken down into the following six main variants:

Typical (call with at least four frequency modulated components), four triangle (stereotyped call with four triangular shaped frequency modulated components), ladder start (call with low frequency harmonic in the first component), ladder middle (call with low frequency harmonic in the middle of the call), ladder multiple (call with multiple low frequency harmonic components), and mix alarm (call with frequency modulated components mixed with amplitude modulated components). (Smeele & Tyndal *et al.*, 2024, p. 3)

These recurrent motifs resemble those of themes as the bases for improvisation in music: predetermined patterns that allow for a wide range of individual expression, and can vary according to context without losing their value. Smeele and Tyndal *et al.*'s study on the geographic differences in Monk parakeets' vocalisations, in their European invasive range, “demonstrates the existence of distinct dialects in European populations of monk parakeets, lending support to the cultural drift hypothesis” (2024, p. 1). The study “proposes that vocal variation is the result of passive cultural processes, with either copying errors or innovations combined with neutral or directional cultural evolution that allows for groups to diverge (Smeele & Tyndal *et al.*, 2024, p. 2). Dialects as idiomatic forms of expression that are elastic, prone to change and transformation through continued use.

In practice, Feral Songbook takes on and compiles some of these principles to devise a series of guidelines, prescriptions, instructions and invitations that do away with traditional forms of musical notation. Instead, such “feral” songs feature patterns and structures observed in the vocalisations of

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<sup>29</sup> "Ecological Survival Technique" is a term I borrow from poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder, first used in his article "Poetry and the Primitive: Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival Technique" (1969), and appears in his collection of poems and essays titled *Earth House Hold* – itself a play on words on the etymological root of ecology (from the greek *oikos*, meaning household). In no part of the article does Snyder define what an "ecological survival technique" is. Instead, Snyder threads together the importance of poetry as oral tradition and its intrinsic, core value as an ecological technology. Meaning, Snyder finds a continuum in lyrical tradition, that, in his view, stems from the lived-in experience of the world in. Poetry as such would always have constituted, historically, an *ecopoetics*, and hence a low-impact technology of apprehending and understanding, being affected by and affecting the world in which we occur.

feral parakeets as inspiration for scores to be performed by groups of humans, within bird's-earshot of each other. It is conceived as a practical manual to be used in group workshops where participants – that do not necessarily know each other beforehand nor need any previous musical training – are invited to engage in collective and participatory improvisations that follow the directions therein. Each song imagines different "sonic territorialities as networks" (Despret, 2019, p. 169). In order to partake in such reterritorialisations of the self and the collective, the songs/scores in *Feral Songbook* take cues from the parakeets' flight paths, feeding habits, and especially their patterns of noise-making – without the need to resort to imitation or mimicry. It is not about sounding like feral parakeets, but to "feral" our human soundings, "feral" ourselves in relation to one other, to other creatures, and to our surroundings – no longer domesticated nor rewilded either. To restore relationships of mutual awareness and respect within multispecies compositions through improvised vocalisation. Or in other words, to use such prescriptions, instructions and invitations as a stepping stone to tether bodies in arrangements of affect that evade predictable outcomes, even when rooted in specific protocols. For one, as a form of resistance against ecological dispossession and human exceptionalism. And hence, as a slim offer towards what may constitute a technique for survival of both humans and parakeets in a world that has been rendered increasingly unliveable.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. IN PRAISE OF THE UNPREDICTABLE

*Wild is what is not foreseen.*

- Zask, 2020, p. 97.

By assembling a group of hitherto strangers as a temporary "flock," the scores in *Feral Songbook* invite participants to create community through collective effort. One that is nevertheless rooted in each individual lending their voice and presence to a composite whole, since humans also have individual voice prints that, like parakeets, allow individuals to recognise each other and be recognisable among the general cacophony:

Humans have complex and flexible vocal repertoires, but we can still recognize each other by voice alone. This is because humans have a voice print: our vocal tract leaves a unique signature in the tone of our

voice across everything that we say. [...] To date, almost no evidence exists for animals having unique signatures that underly all calls made by an individual. In other words, almost no animals are known to have a voice print. (Avolio & Smeele, 2023)

According to researcher Simeon Smeele from the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior:

[An] underlying voice print, (...) is an elegant solution for a bird that dynamically changes its calls but still needs to be known in a very noisy flock. [...] There could be tens of birds vocalizing at the same time, (...). They need a way of keeping track of which individual is making what sound. (Avolio & Smeele, 2023)

Dispensing with preconceived formal notions of how a choir or chorus may be constituted and takes shape – through the use of harmony, scales, keys, or tuning – this set of scores or invitations are belied in a “reciprocal responsiveness,” where each individual’s responsibility towards the group is rooted not in unison but in dissonance; rooted in each participant’s unwavering commitment to expressing themselves while part of a collective; listening and making noise with others. More than polyphony, polyvocality: composition as cooperation as sonic territoriality. Or in the words of Fraser Darling:

There seems to be in animal life a reciprocal responsiveness which in itself leads to a development of variability of behavior – and there can be no evolution without variability. It would be unscientific to say that this generic need for the awareness of other selves is designed to lead towards cooperative behavior, but cooperation undoubtedly develops. That inherent, unconscious, reciprocal responsiveness is, in fact, cooperation in its simplest sense. (Darling, 1952, p. 183)

Feral Songbook is proposed as an experimental methodology that takes the productive, collective embracing of improvisation as an alternative starting point for cooperation and composition. One that is grounded in the variability precluded in a “reciprocal responsiveness,” as defended by Fraser Darling, under the assumption that:

[It] is not that there is one correct way of doing things, one score, one

right set of notes to play, one order, but rather that we can collaboratively create through the interaction of constraints and possibilities rather than either order or disorder. (Montuori, 2003, p. 246)

Improvisation is literally that which is unforeseen, “at its core a practice of play with structures: with contextual, socio-technical information” (Sauer & Bonelli, 2020). This information provides a context for collective improvisation: “a form of musical dialogue, requiring constant attention, negotiation, listening” where “both the process and the result are an emergent property of the interaction” (both Montuori, 2003). Its long history wholly indebted to the incredibly vast range of traditional musical forms, outside of the canons of Classical Western music, that make regular use of improvisation and variability in their own canons. Poet Amiri Baraka (1967, p. 194) mentions exactly that when referring to musician Albert Ayler talking “about his music as a contemporary form of collective improvisation (...). Which is where our music was when we arrived on these shores, a collective expression,” arching back to the space allotted to improvisation in West African musical tradition. No matter how radical Free Jazz was in re-conceiving the importance of collective improvisation from the 1960s onwards, Baraka mention its indebtedness to “the old collective improvisation that was supposed to come out of New Orleans (...), a form as old as Black religious gatherings in the forests of the West ... and connects straight on into Black free-Africa.” Something that poet Stanley Crouch (1976) also refers in the liner notes to violinist Leroy Jenkins and drummer Rashied Ali’s album *Swift Are the Winds of Life*:

In the music that has developed within the last two decades, improvisation serves another purpose, and that purpose is the same as it served in the days of the collectively improvising New Orleans ensemble: clearing the air.

To “clear the air” is an idiomatic expression meaning “to defuse or clarify an angry, tense, or confused situation by frank discussion” but also to literally change the air conditions of a given space by making it cooler, fresher, less humid, more comfortable. Crouch’s mention of New Orleans ensembles as fulfilling the purpose of “clearing the air” is intimately related to their ritual function during funeral processions, where jazz ensembles accompany the congregation from service to burial, shifting between funeral dirges and uptempo songs: “The jazz funeral is deeply symbolic (...). Sound elicits joy and lament, generating the

atmosphere of mutual aid” (Sakakeeny, 2024). For Sakakeeny (2024), “mutual aid” is manifested and actualised in sound as “both a model for and an outcome of collectivity that strains against practices of fragmentation and enclosure,” with “memorializing, fellowshipping, joymaking – rambling – affirm[ing] social life through sound.” All these are ritualistic expressions connecting the social and spiritual fabric of a community, symbolised in the cathartic atonement of grief through ecstatic states of communion, that do not so much negate death as acknowledge it through a celebration of life. If for Sakakeeny (2024), “The music on the street dictates the mood and the atmosphere of what goes on in the street,” then “[the] complex interweaving of melodies heard in the jazz funeral procession – sometimes antiphonal, sometimes heterophonic, sometimes polyphonic, never in strict unison or synchrony,” (Sakakeeny, 2024) is telling of its “shared goal of synergetic cohesion” (Coleman, 2021, p. 279). According to both authors, “the dominant texture of the New Orleans style is heterophony, what Kwami Coleman defines as ‘multiple autonomous improvising musical voices’” (Sakakeeny, 2024).

Interesting to note, then, that Monk parakeet societies display a high level of what researchers call “fission-fusion” foraging dynamics, meaning individuals in pairs or smaller groups tend to forage in smaller units (fission), regrouping later around their nests (fusion). For Monk parakeets, but as well as for Ring-necked parakeets, “contact calls [are] often made during group fusion events, or when individuals are isolated” (Smeele & Senar *et al.*, 2023).

Earlier work on Monk parakeet vocalisations has described eleven distinct call types but only the contact call has been extensively studied. These investigations suggest that their contact calls are individually distinct but with high within-individual variability, and that unlike other studied parrot species, there is no evidence for active convergence on group-level vocal signatures (Smeele & Senar *et al.*, 2024). A clear case of interweaving melodies, “sometimes antiphonal, sometimes heterophonic, sometimes polyphonic, never in strict unison or synchrony” straining for “synergetic cohesion” (Sakakeeny, 2024). Which is similarly allowed in the score for “Feral Songbook #2: Monk parakeet *Myopsitta monachus* (for any number of untrained voices)” by using a simple call-and-response pattern that, as it gathers momentum by being intoned by an increasingly larger number of participants, starts to equate the antiphony, heterophony, and poliphony of the “collectively improvising New Orleans ensemble” (Crouch, 1976) and the “individually distinct but with high within-individual variability” and no “active convergence on group-level vocal signatures” (Smeele & Senar, 2024, p. 3) of parakeet vocalisations.

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Found in chapter 8 of Kurt Vonnegut's sci-fi novel *The Sirens of Titan* (1954), the score for "Feral Songbook #2: Monk parakeet *Myopsitta monachus* (for any number of untrained voices)" takes a simple description of the call-and-response pattern of the fictionalised sole inhabitants of the planet Mercury in Vonnegut's tale. Sentient creatures living in caves deep in Mercury, called harmoniums, would feed on sonic vibrations arising from the tension between its perpetually white-hot, sunlit hemisphere and its dark-cold, penumbral one. Harmoniums "cling to the singing walls of their caves" (Vonnegut, 1958, p. 320), "nourished by vibrations" (p. 320) their bodies so thin that these "life-giving vibrations can make all their cells tingle without intermediaries" (p. 322). Harmoniums "have only two possible messages. The first is an automatic reply to the second, and the second is an automatic reply to the first. The first is 'Here I am.' The second is 'So glad you are'" (p. 323). The simple A↔B pattern standing in for the similarly self-reproducing feedback loop found in Monk parakeets' contact calls, where different individuals will feed the ongoing chatter, especially around the nest during group fusion events, as detailed above.

MONK PARAKEET  
*Myopsitta monachus*  
(for any number of untrained voices)



**Fig. 4** - Score from the fold-out libretto to "Feral Songbook #2: Monk Parakeet *Myopsitta Monachus* (for any number of untrained voices)," produced for Prix COAL Se transforme, Paris, November 2024.  
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If the score for “Feral Songbook #2: Monk parakeet *Myopsitta monachus*” makes use of a call-and-response literary reference, the score for “Feral Songbook #1: Ring-necked parakeet *Psittacula krameri*” adapts an oft-performed score in the history of free improvisation, first devised by composer Cornelius Cardew. One that, nevertheless, understands above all that collective improvisation is rooted in ritual practice. Just like traditional practices that predate the “collectively improvising New Orleans ensemble,” where spaces of communion and congregation would either be ceremoniously “cleared” by smudging and other rites, Cardew approached collective improvisation as a way to open and expand space for collective and participatory improvisation as a form of rehearsing political agency. That open-ended, freeforms of aesthetic expression can become an expression of a political subjectivity: independent yet interdependent. Especially within the freeform, loose membership and variable geometries of the Scratch Orchestra – “a large number of enthusiasts pooling their resources (not primarily material resources) and assembling for action (music-making, performance, edification)” (Cardew, 1969, p. 617) – this composer, together with a large number of associates, devised scores as invitations for improvisation that were defined under the heading of improvisation rites: “An improvisation rite is not a musical composition; it does not attempt to influence the music that will be played; at most it may establish a community of feeling, or a communal starting point, through ritual” (Cardew, 1969, p. 619).

Cardew tried to expand what music and musicianship may mean as collective-decision making; beyond western classical music, beyond forms of idiomatic improvisation rooted in Black American music such as blues or jazz, or even beyond the strictures of western avant-garde composition after the Second World War. His work as a composer using graphical notation, instructions and many other experiments in conveying ideas for different forms of collective improvisation, have been crucial in creating and compiling a “Feral Songbook.”

The Great Learning, paragraph 7

→ sing 8 IF  
sing 5 THE ROOT  
sing 13(f3) BE IN CONFUSION  
sing 6 NOTHING  
sing 5 (f1) WILL  
sing 8 BE  
sing 8 WELL  
sing 7 GOVERNED  
hum 7

→ sing 8 THE SOLID  
sing 8 CANNOT BE  
sing 9(f2) SWEEP AWAY  
sing 8 AS  
sing 17(f1) TRIVIAL  
sing 6 AND  
sing 8 NOR  
sing 8 CAN  
sing 17(f1) TRASH  
sing 8 BE ESTABLISHED AS  
sing 9 (f2) SOLID  
sing 5 (f1) IT JUST  
sing 4 DOES NOT  
sing 6 (f1) HAPPEN  
hum 3 (f2)

→ speak 1 MISTAKE NOT CLIFF FOR  
MORASS AND TREACHEROUS BRAMBLE

**NOTATION**  
→ The leader gives a signal and all enter concertedly at the same moment. The second of these signals is optional; those wishing to observe it should gather to the leader and choose a new note and enter just as at the beginning (see below).  
sing 9 (f2) SWEEP AWAY means: sing the words "SWEEP AWAY" on a length-of-a-breath note (syllables freely disposed) nine times; the same note each time; of the nine notes two (any two) should be loud, the rest soft. After each note raise or lower the pitch and amplitude.  
Hum 7 means: hum a length-of-a-breath note seven times; the same note each time; all soft.  
"Speak 1" means: speak the given words in steady tempo all together, as a low voice, once (follow the leader).

**PROCEDURE**  
Each chorus member chooses his own note (sustainably) for the first line (if eight lines). All enter together on the leader's signal. For each subsequent line choose a note that you can hear being sung by a colleague. It may be necessary to move to within earshot of certain voices. The note, once chosen, must be carefully retained. Time may be taken, over the course. If there is no note for any line note you have just been singing, merely 2 note or notes that you are unable to sing, choose your note for the next line freely. Do not sing the same note on two consecutive lines.  
Each singer progresses through the text at his own speed. Remains stationary for the duration of a line; moves forward only between lines.  
All must have completed "Hum 3 (f2)" before the signal for the last line is given. At the leader's discretion this last line may be omitted.

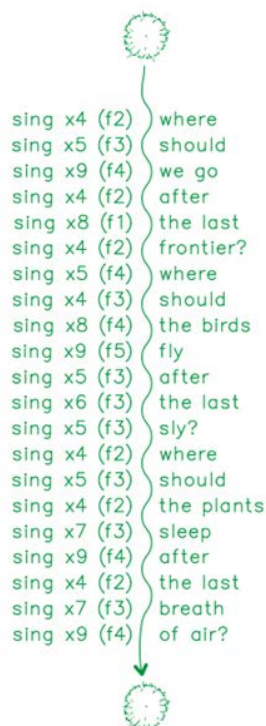
**Fig. 5** - Score for "The Great Learning: Paragraph 7" (1969) by Cornelius Cardew. © Cornelius Cardew Committee.

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"Feral Songbook #1: Ring-necked Parakeet Psittacula Krameri (for any number of untrained voices)" adapts "The Great Learning: Paragraph 7" (1969), a piece I had the chance to perform in various different occasions throughout the past fifteen years. Having first gone through it as a performer, I understand this piece as a tool for empowerment, since it enables any person that may have come to experience it by participating in one of its activations, to further pass it along to others. Its formal simplicity and openness to interpretation make it extremely effective when communicating with groups of people who may have never had either contact with musical training or previous experience as performers. Here, the linear progression through successive lines of text first suggested by Cardew is thought of as different points on a flight path, asking to replace the original text (taken from Confucius's The Great Learning classic treatise) with lines that may more easily resonate with the fission-fusion dynamics that are observed in feral parakeets. Acclimatised and naturalised but nevertheless exotic and alien, they are victims of unsolicited displacements, effectively amounting to bird communities in Diaspora. Fittingly, Confucius's words have then been replaced by those of diasporic Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, taken from his poem "The Earth is Closing in On Us" (1984):

Where should we go after the last frontier?  
Where should the birds fly, after the last sky?  
Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air?

RING-NECKED PARAKEET  
*Psittacula krameri*  
 (for any number of untrained voices)



**Fig. 6** - Score from the fold-out libretto to “Feral Songbook #1: Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (for any number of untrained voices),” produced for Prix COAL. Se transformer, Paris, November 2024. © Nuno da Luz.

**FERAL  
 SONGBOOK**  
 Collective Improvisation  
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Darwish’s words on the nature of uprootedness, displacement, and dispossession are reflective of the traumatic experience of exile and Diaspora. Case in point: the continued negation of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, and the compounded mass violence they have suffered since the 1948 Nakhba, “the catastrophe in which 80% of the population was displaced” (Syed, 2024). Since then, poetry has been a space for the “rejection of de-Palestinisation,” (Abu Duhou, 1993) as “they continued stubbornly to cling to their reason and identity. They refused to forget.” (Abu Duhou, 1993). Darwish’s own *Memory for Forgetfulness* (1987) book title alludes to that same resolve, resilience, and resistance. “Despite the lack of institutional stability afforded to Palestinians through Israeli occupation – and the continued destruction of schools and universities in Gaza – Palestinians maintain a national literacy rate of 97.7%,” as of 2023 (Syed, 2024), which given the sheer volume of violence and oppression by the settler-colonial state that is occupying Palestinian territories since 1948, attests in manifold ways language and poetry as homeland to a people that have been stripped of their territories, but not their capacity to engender it through song, chant, and vocalisation. “If we can’t imagine a free liberated world in language, how can we build one?” says Palestinian-American poet George Abraham to Armani Syed (2024). The flight path imagined in “Feral Songbook #1” then collapses together the quick, successive repetitions that characterise Ring-necked parakeets flight calls with the unfaltering reiteration by Darwish

that, even against all the impossibles, even when faced with every “ultimate” limit, life’s irreducible character breaks through in survival. So-called Invasive Alien Parakeets have not been reduced to silence any more than Palestinian people have, no matter how many attempts to quell them.

The principle of relentless repetition employed first by Cardew in “The Great Learning: Paragraph 7,” is appropriated and actualised in “Feral Songbook #1,” as yet another case of “sometimes antiphonal, sometimes heterophonic, sometimes polyphonic, never in strict unison or synchrony” interweaving melodies straining for “synergetic cohesion” (both Sakakeeny, 2024). The temporary flock assembled through intertwining straight-line motion paths and ululating song lines, resists its underlying forced displacement by reiterating its affiliation and affective bonds. If in 1969, collective and participatory improvisation, such as the one advanced by Cardew’s “The Great Learning: Paragraph 7,” seemed dedicated to the emancipation of class struggle through social and expressive radicality – with such promise remaining yet unfulfilled by virtue of its innate avoidance of unanimity or normalisation – it still holds many other promises besides those of class struggle. By taking on at its core the creation of more egalitarian and less discriminatory communities, collective, and participatory improvisation rehearses how to build free liberated worlds, in language and in practice. A commonality/community that is not predicated on what is identical and uniform, but arises from, in and of difference: a necessary hiatus or gap that organises the possibility for something other to emerge, something that changes the vibrational spheres of each participant through friction and dissonance, or through sympathetic resonance. The mutuality inherent to sympathy – whereby a body responds to external vibrations to which it has a harmonic likeness – as the fundamental keystone that joins bodies in affect and grants them the possibility of being transformed by such encounters. Ian Biddle has characterised it as “affective transmission” whereby sound is “used to create a particular ambience or atmosphere, via the induction, modulation and circulation of moods, feelings and intensities, which were felt but, at the same time, belonged to nobody in particular” (Biddle, 2013, p. 5). Once it is emitted, it no longer belongs to a particular individual, but it threads together the agency of both emitter and receiver, in a specific affective cartography that reverberates atmospherically, and can be further picked up by whoever is in earshot of such an affective atmosphere.

## 4. CONCLUSION: OF SONGBOOKS



**Fig. 7** - Fold-out libretto for “Feral Songbook #1: Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula Krameri* (for any number of untrained voices)”, Musée de la chasse et de la nature, Paris, November 2024. © Nuno da Luz



**Fig. 8** - Performance of “Feral Songbook #1: Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula Krameri* (for any number of untrained voices),” produced for Prix COAL Se transformer, Paris, 20 November 2024. © Andrea Mantovani.



**Fig. 9** - Fold-out libretto for “Feral Songbook #2: Monk Parakeet *Myopsitta Monachus* (for any number of untrained voices)”, Musée de la chasse et de la nature, Paris, November 2024. © Nuno da Luz.



**Fig. 10** - Performance of “Feral Songbook #2: Monk Parakeet *Myopsitta Monachus* (for any number of untrained voices),” produced for Prix COAL Se transformer, Paris, 20 November 2024. © Andrea Mantovani.

The different scores in Feral Songbook have been conceived as individual sets of instructions, prompts and invitations to build on and reimagine human sonic worlds turned feral. Scores to be performed as collective and participatory improvisations where each participant follows the same protocol, according to their own response-abilities and capabilities, regardless of keeping pace, pulse, beat, and measure together. Just like in traditional ensembles, the score is made available on paper, with copies being shared with every participant, so that each may read, study, analyse, and adapt their own fold-out according to their needs and desires. Each score is laid out as an A3 (420×297mm when open) whose long-side centrefold is cut open, thus allowing it to be folded down to A6 (148×105mm) for ease of access and circulation. Fitting easily into a jacket or back pocket, scores can be kept at hand and accessed at will or filed away, according to each participant's preferred mode of activation. After being presented and discussed collectively, participants are invited to memorise scores to a certain point, but the fold-out can always be consulted during the performances themselves. Besides the score itself with accompanying notes on the protocol and notation used, each fold-out libretto contains a summarised description of the different parakeets biomorphology and ethology, as well as illustrations of their silhouettes and physiognomy.

As performed at the Musée de la chasse et de la nature, in Paris, 20 November 2024, the two scores mentioned above were activated by a group of twenty people, including myself, responding to an open call released by the Museum, myself and the association COAL Art et écologie, that detailed the following:

Through a sonic pedagogy manual designed by the artist, this vocal workshop based on collective improvisation exercises and somatic practices, explores the “territories of chant” of green parakeets as a mode par excellence of polyphonic collaboration and cooperation. Like a flock of birds, participants' voices will map out a common space. The Feral Songbook aims to restore our relationship with the urban environment through attentive, eco-sensitive methodologies. This is a collective practice for which there is no need for prior musical training or education. All you need to do is listen, and use your voice as a form of spatial and social reference.

Prior to the performance, two workshop sessions were held to introduce the chosen scores to the group, acquaint them with the suggested protocol and procedure, discuss together processes, methods, and concepts, share

information and personal experiences, as well as rehearse possible solutions and outcomes. Both sessions started with a round-table introduction and discussion between all participants in order to acquaint with one another, a collective reading of the scores with further discussion on the texts and informations therein, a folding session of the libretti, somatic “tuning” and listening exercises to allow participants to “change” their perceptual modes for the performance, and rehearsals around the scores in order to embody them as much as possible.

Ranging from art students in their early twenties to practising artists in their thirties, forties, and fifties, to a small contingent of sixty-year-olds who worked on ecological transition policies and sustainability management, the group assembled for these two performances was, in its majority, white, female, economically stable, and regular visitors to the Museum with a keen interest in participating of its public programming, workshops, and other outreach activities. But there were also cases where economic precarity (in the case of students and artists) and non-European ascendancy made clear that the methods employed and objectives set out by the Feral Songbook speak differently to different participants, while engaging each participant to recreate them as their own – based on their own lived experience, especially as amateur, urban bird watchers/listeners. Regardless of education, occupation, or background, participants already arrived with previous personal experience on the topic of feral parakeets, as they are part and parcel of our shared urban environments. Whether through acknowledging their presence via sound or vision or both, participants arrived with both curiosity, excitement, and a willingness to challenge themselves, be it socially as well as ecologically – by becoming acquainted and aware of the parakeets’ ethology, their naturalised habitats and their relationship with the ecosystem at large – through a duality of sound-making and listening, in collective and participatory improvisation.

It is not simply a question of paying attention to the role of sound phenomena in societal dynamics, but of understanding that the entire universe is in motion and vibrates, that other species also quiver and communicate, that this relationship concerns the multiplicity of earthlings and their modes of existence. ... Listening to the world has taught us that we cannot understand ourselves, if we do not take into consideration our own becoming alongside the other beings that populate it. (Barbanti, 2023, p. 27)

Considered as an ever-ongoing, in-progress-compilation, the Feral Songbook will hold as many different scores as there may be at any given moment, always mindful of the “individually distinct but with high within-individual variability” that parakeet calls possess. As contact, group, flight, alarm/threat, and isolation calls take on various local and divergent accents (or dialects, according to Smeele and Tyndal *et al.*, 2024), their modalities will always insist on the shared notion that both birdcalls and improvisation scores do not tend towards an “active convergence on group-level vocal signatures” – to use, yet again, the term employed by Smeele and Tyndal *et al.* when recognising the heterophony of parakeet vocalisations. Given the parakeets’ disregard for synchrony and unison – or its irrelevance for their communication purposes –, the feral songs collated here as book and manual drawn on principles such as those of a possible parakeet “heterophony” (Sakakeeny *apud* Coleman, 2024) and those of a “collectively improvising polyphony” (Crouch, 1976), that would field the same purpose they served for human communities enjoined in music-making: to clear the air. Finding room to breathe together in an increasingly strained world, through listening and vocalising with each other.

Through the scores, workshops, and performances, what is being tested is not the particular musical acumen of the written piece, but how we can engender collective modes of being that rely on self-sufficient, low-impact technologies that can be shared by a certain group of co-actants. Finding strength in Gary Snyder’s defence of “poetry as an ecological survival technique” – one that for millennia has inextricably linked the human and the nonhuman in affective cartographies (Snyder claims it goes all the way back to the Palaeolithic and the first human societies) – here the lyrical is portrayed through ever-changing possibilities of its vocalisation as a tool of unpredictability, and hence escape from the normativity of conventional modes of address and communication. Improvisation as a tool for engendering more, many “communities of feeling.” Communities that may organise the possibility for something other to emerge; something that changes the vibrational spheres of one another and lets us imagine free liberated worlds within our shared one.

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# HAPED GEOGRAPHIES: DEPLETING ECHOES OF EXTRACTION

Sculpting, Video Archiving,  
and Multispecies Knowledge in  
Peldehue's Extractive Landscapes

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## ABSTRACT

Extractive capitalism has long shaped economic and geopolitical structures, particularly in the Global South, relying on large-scale resource extraction that reinforces dependency and environmental degradation. This system perpetuates power imbalances, concentrating wealth in industrialised nations while centralising digital-technological production in urban centres. This article examines the material entanglement of mineral exploitation and digital capitalism by analysing the political and legal frameworks that uphold resource management power structures. Through a case study of Peldehue, a rural town in central Chile marked by colonialism, extractivism, political violence, and environmental decline, it explores how artistic practice and decolonial frameworks can generate counter-narratives to territorial dispossession and ecological collapse. By revealing the spectral traces of depletion and resistance, the study highlights the persistence of multispecies interactions and socio-ecological knowledge under the ongoing pressures of extractivism.

**Keywords:** Extractive capitalism; Environmental impact; Decolonial perspectives; Artistic research; Installation art.

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## 1. PLANETARY PERSPECTIVES IN EXTRACTIVE CAPITALISM

The examination of extractivism and regional commodities has become a significant and recurring focus for decolonial studies. For the Global South, this revision is intimately linked not only to material exchange but also to the symbolic and cultural assets of communities and environments that have been degraded due to the impact of mono-production industries. The direct removal of resources from nature, raw materials extracted without any significant aggregated value and exported to be processed elsewhere, has proven to be a structural feature of capitalism, which might be characterised as a global net of power that is not purely an economic scheme, but which in its structure integrates geopolitical and geo-cultural processes.

Since the origins of the capitalist system, vast amounts of capital have been accumulated through mechanisms of Colonial and Neo-Colonial appropriation. The exploitation of land, bodies, and matter as forms of capital has generated altered territories through an unequal division, extraction, migration, and exchange between hemispheres. The imposition of a legal frame that exhausts land and affects communities of diverse realms: vegetal, animal, human, and other agencies, has consequently enriched a minority and depleted a majority with its exclusions and expropriations.

Petra Gūmplová (2021) has investigated how territorial sovereignty established a form of power and domination over nature, outlining the dominant legal-political-technology as a principle that creates the settings for resource accumulation and exploitation. The Colonial era became the most paradigmatic example of the absolute sovereignty claimed by the Spanish empire after the conquest of territories in North and South America, generating distributive injustice stemming from land usurpation (Gūmplová, 2021).

Justified by the expansion of Christianity, the war of conquest over foreign territories was legitimised as a colonial religious mission, but ultimately served to assure and increase wealth mainly through mineral extraction: gold, silver, and copper. With Colonisation, the pre-alignments of the modern territorial grab over natural space were established, rooting a territorial monistic hold (Gūmplová, 2021) over natural resources. With this configuration, the logic of unlimited accumulation in the shape of exclusion was already settled. That is “an exclusive benefit of the sovereign, within an arbitrary political space that claims an exclusively proprietary to natural space for the sake of the maximal benefit of individual agents” (Gūmplová, 2021, p. 37).

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The exploitation and profits generated from the appropriation of natural resources and labour in colonised territories permitted a new planetary system, a World system (Wallerstein, 1974) managed within a centre-periphery scheme. According to Enrique Dussel (2003), this geopolitical fact allows us to explore the roots of Modernity, placing it beyond the Eurocentric paradigm as an autonomous process. Spain became the first modern state by means of the domination and hegemony of an imposed globalised culture, introducing a new language, religion, flora, and fauna species, and a political-economic system over its colonised territories (Dussel, 2003). The primitive accumulation (Marx, 1890) as a precondition for the development of the capital system can therefore be traced back to the colonial period, and has since continued through a process of exploitation and depletion.

The imperatives of growth and profit of Global Capitalism sustain its continuity through relations to nature as an object of exploitation and as a mere means of production. As Gudynas (2018) argues within the context of extractivism, “a utilitarian perspective predominates where these resources are understood as merchandise with an economic value” (Gudynas, 2018, p. 67). This approach creates a spill-over effect that obstructs more organic understandings of nature and prevents a recognition of non-utilitarian values. The intricacies inherent in natural environments are methodically structured, categorised, and quantified within a positivist perspective, where all species and constituents within them are perceived as appropriated resources to be utilised, extracted, manipulated, separated, and exploited. This systematic approach, driven by scientific and technological paradigms of modern, industrialised countries, has become the role model for the pursuit of progress and development globally.

Profitable private transnational companies operating between North and South are a feature of Global Capitalism, a financial and production system integrated worldwide through the internet, which is shaped as a management tool in which the stocks and flows of natural capital are transacted. The internet, which originated from the convergence of global finance and digital technologies, now serves as a monopolistic construction of temporality (Hope, 2006), operating through the notion of real-time, where power systems are reconstructed and accelerated in a virtual space functioning globally.

Extractivism, under this analysis, has shifted from a global lens to a planetary perspective. While the global referred primarily to relations between nation-states and transnational trade flows, the planetary foregrounds the infrastructures, technologies, and socio-spatial processes that knit the planet into

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a single but profoundly unequal terrain (Aroboleda, 2020). The expansion of the world market under this planetary vision reveals a contradictory phenomenon: while late capitalism operates at a planetary scale, liberal states have become “increasingly militaristic, interventionist, and coercive” (Aroboleda, 2020, p. 30), producing a “convoluted terrain where fences, walls, and militarized borders coexist with sprawling supply chains and infrastructures of connectivity” (Aroboleda, 2020, p. 27). Planetary-scale visual apparatuses – systems for mapping the earth resources – emerged first through militarised technologies of geospatial data collection, such as remote sensing and satellite infrastructures. These tools, now largely instrumentalised by extractive corporations, enable new forms of control. The planetary interconnection is shaped by paradoxes of flow and blockage: the militarisation of borders, the expansion of security apparatuses, the hardening of immigration control and human mobility – all of which reproduce systemic exclusion, displacement, and violence.

With the entire planet operating as an extended mine, with processes of extraction, transportation, and transformations distributed across multiple scales and territories, the periphery becomes ubiquitous. In this sense, the planetary expands the global, revealing how capitalism organises the production of space beyond state borders, absorbing the entire planet as a manageable resource. By tracing the journey of copper, Arboleda (2020) provides an example of a transnational network. From its extraction site in Chile’s Andean mountain range, where it is refined into cathodes and shipped from ports in the Atacama Desert to its final destination in China’s advanced manufacturing hubs, the world’s largest manufacturer of electronic products, where it is transformed into multiple devices such as smartphones, laptops, batteries, cables, microchips, solar panels, and displays. This journey reveals a highly automated supply chain that manifests with relative autonomy through technological systems and algorithms. These products are then distributed and accumulated in cities as urban mines, far removed from geological reserves across the Global South. Here, the notion of the planetary mine developed by Mazen Labban (2014) becomes critical. Labban argues:

is not simply the sum of urban mines actualized and localized in cities. It is an emergent object in a continuous process of becoming that arises from the production, circulation, and wasting of materials in planetary space. It is the outcome of multiple processes that fundamentally rearrange, if not altogether supersede, spatial oppositions such as city–mine, consumption–production, and waste–resource. (Labban, 2014, p. 564)

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The circulation of e-waste after consumption is not only piling up as an inverted mine in urban cities, but is also externalised to poorer countries in the Global South. The Global E-Waste Monitor reports that in 2022, 16 billion kg of e-waste was collected in high-income countries, mainly in Europe and the United States. Without a formal management system, this waste risks being processed without proper de-pollution measures, recycled under unsafe conditions, or exported as uncontrolled e-waste to low-income countries, severely impacting human health and the environment. Unregulated and illegal shipments of e-waste are estimated at 3.3 billion kg across borders. Despite the Basel Convention signed by 187 countries, no binding obligation exists to report hazardous e-waste, and less than half of the signatory countries have provided reports, making it difficult to monitor toxic e-waste movements (The Global E-Waste Monitor, 2024). The circulation of e-waste, therefore, takes part in a deliberate strategy of externalisation that allows wealthy nations to maintain and increase consumption levels while shifting risks and harms to vulnerable populations.

## **2. THE SOUTHERN CURSE: FROM RESOURCE APPROPRIATION TO DIGITAL EXPLOITATION, ACCUMULATING PERMANENT TRACES**

Extractive natural resource dynamics have been persistently moulded into countries from the Southern Hemisphere, and can be characterised by inequitable appropriation and intensive exploitation subordinated to external demand. Alberto Acosta discusses how the hidden social and environmental costs of extractive economies in developing countries of the Global South are not taken into account when assessing the profitability of mining industries. Caught in the resource curse (Acosta, 2013), these countries operate with an extractive approach mindset inherited from the colonial period. They maintain a favourable regulatory framework for transnational industries by de-territorialising the state and de-nationalising the economy, without investing in local technology development, and therefore showing very low levels of industrialisation. Stuck in a series of paradoxes, like being rich in natural resources but ultimately poor, or in the best case with high rates of inequality, these countries are condemned to serve the fluctuating demands of a globalised market, fluctuations that in the end, tend to fragilise employment.

This market relies on interconnectivity for transmitting data, which is carried through intercontinental cables laid on the depths of the ocean floor,

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<sup>30</sup> "Very high amounts of water and energy consumption is used in data centres worldwide. Just in Europe, the water consumption in data centres is projected to increase from the 2020 estimate of 145.2 to 546.7 million cubic meters by 2030. In per capita values the amount of water usage will be more in internet activities than the water used by human consumption (Farfan & Lohrmann, 2023).

partially made of copper, a crucial mineral for technological development in telecommunication. Digital capitalism, tied to natural resources exploitation, considers not only the functionality and management tools of the internet but also the materials needed for the production of digital devices, computational equipment, and power networks, sustained by extractive activities in the same region where these unequal relations persist.

Jonathan Crary (2022) argues that in post-techno-capitalism, "the internet complex, as the new modality of planetary administration, is an indispensable part of the defensive strategy to maintain the world system, to resist decolonization and de-Westernization." (Crary, 2022, p. 25). Crary critically examines the posited immutability of this network, questioning and dismantling how and why it has been rooted as an integral, unquestionable, and fundamental ruling aspect of our daily lives. Although initially installed in a context of narratives of the digital age and promoted as a democratic, liberating, and autonomous tool in the late 1990s, Crary states that the internet originated from military technology and research centres, and was ultimately conceived to reorganise capital flows, serving mainly as a controlled finance network for consumers, and creating monetised and addictive behaviours that foster the dissolution of social cohesion and cooperation.

The materiality and environmental impacts of this network, with all the interconnective systems, computing, objects, and artifacts like phone devices and e-waste products attached to it, are constantly veiled in an aesthetic apparatus of immateriality, efficiency, and innovation. For Crary, "...the falsifications of 'the digital age' have been so successfully inculcated" that "there is a pervasive imaginary of the dematerialized status of digital technology" (Crary, 2022, p. 25). The devices of these technologies tend to become flatter and lighter, with wireless connectivity, but generate vast amounts of information bits and data stored in a virtual space known as the cloud. A name of a seemingly ethereal nature, a euphemism that masks an intricate, heavyweight material infrastructure of tubes, cabled networks, wires, and huge data centres for powering and storing a water-cooled virtual realm.<sup>30</sup>

The relationship between digital technology development and extractivism is knotted. Jussi Parikka (2015) coined the term Medianatures to express the "double bind of media and nature as co-constituting spheres, where the ties are intensively connected in material nonhuman realities as much as in relations of power, economy, and work" (Parikka, 2015, p. 14). The digital realm is very much part of a material culture with countless after-effects, the most permanent ones being digital waste exported and toxic tailings growing in

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secluded landscapes of undeveloped countries from the Southern Hemisphere, material residues that reveal the violent asymmetries of digital capitalism. Not only mining profits, but new stratigraphic marks are accumulating and layering underground the earth's surface as eventual sediments. Residues that are gradually layered by industrial society into what Jan Zalasiewicz (2014) terms a technostratigraphy. Over time, these deposits interact with subterranean chemical and physical processes, in the very depths where the mineral sources that sustain technological productions are extracted. This cycle of extraction and contamination not only reveals the asymmetry in which digital capitalism's functions operate but also the planetary scale of its footprint: the ground that provides the resources for digital industries is simultaneously being contaminated and remade by their residues. Ultimately, as Peter Half (2013) suggests, these processes are producing a new category of geological remains: technofossils, persisting remnants of the technosphere. The traces left by extractivism enter a recurrent and perverse cycle, leaving deep voids in the earth's surface while simultaneously returning processed materials in the form of waste and contamination. Far from ephemeral, digital devices and their wastes constitute material inscriptions of our present, acting as the new social and technological stratigraphy of the earth, permanent traces that embed the logic of disposability into planetary time.

### **3. THE CHILEAN CASE, A DESERT OF INTERESTS**

Chile has been one of the most emblematic examples of a natural resource-based economy in South America, depending since the 19th century on the export of commodities such as nitrate and copper (Meller, 1998). After deciding to liberalise the economy during the late 1970s, and to provide the conditions necessary to secure investments in the exploitation of copper, fruit, salmon, and wine (Collier & Sater, 2004), during the early 1980s Chile tailored its legal system to the requirements of the productive sector, creating constitutionally protected perpetual private use rights over natural elements, including water and minerals. In 1981, the Water Code was established in Chile, which enabled a free-market approach to resource management of water, with private perpetual use rights protected by the Constitution, allowing freedom to buy, sell, and lease water rights for its reallocation from low-value use to high-value use (Bauer, 2015). Private water rights are traded through DGA, the General Directorate of Water under the Ministry of Public Works, the government agency that grants,

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free of charge in auctions, the rights awarded to the highest bidder. These policies incentivise extractive industries to acquire and accumulate water rights, ensuring large-scale volumes needed for resource exploitation.

The neoliberal project installed in Chile in alliance with the support of the United States through the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte from 1973 to 1989 required the commoditisation of the territory by regions, which were defined by the potential exploitation of natural resources to serve the global economy, emphasising private property over natural resources (Bustos, 2019) and centralising the profits outside the regions that generate them. Consequently, the allocation and management of these elements of nature were left to the sole designs of the market, leading to an abrupt process of commodification and accumulation of *capital by dispossession* (Harvey, 2004), which was especially noteworthy for the case of human communities and nonhuman ecosystems that lived near mining projects in northern and central Chile. Yet another consequence of this privatisation, which enables the separation of water from land, was rapid environmental degradation, with intense pollution, which became more evident in those areas surrounding mining projects, with the drying of the rivers and lakes (Hervé & Pérez, 2011).

These impacts consist of the intensive use of surface and groundwater, the intervention on natural water flows, the construction of tailings dams to deposit waste near where communities live, mainly from agriculture, and the accumulation of minerals that generate dust by the activation of winds, accelerating glacier melt (Barandum *et al.*, 2022) and generating health problems. For more than four decades of intensive extraction, these impacts have contributed to the mega-drought faced in Chile since 2010, which has seen severely decertified regions advance at the pace of 1 metre per year from north to south. Chile officially holds 757 mining tailing deposits within its territory, ranking third globally in this type of toxic infrastructure after China and the United States. In the Chilean context, there is a clear socio-territorial link between poverty and the location of these toxic deposits, producing environmental injustices where the presence of heavy metals generates severe health risks, including cancer, as well as the contamination of soil and watercourses (Ojeda *et al.*, 2023).

The political constitution promulgated in 1980 served as an instrument through which the state promoted a singular national identity linked to the mining industry. Since the return of democracy in 1990, there have been several attempts to resist and change this reality by altering the regulatory framework to protect nature and communities from the devastating effects of

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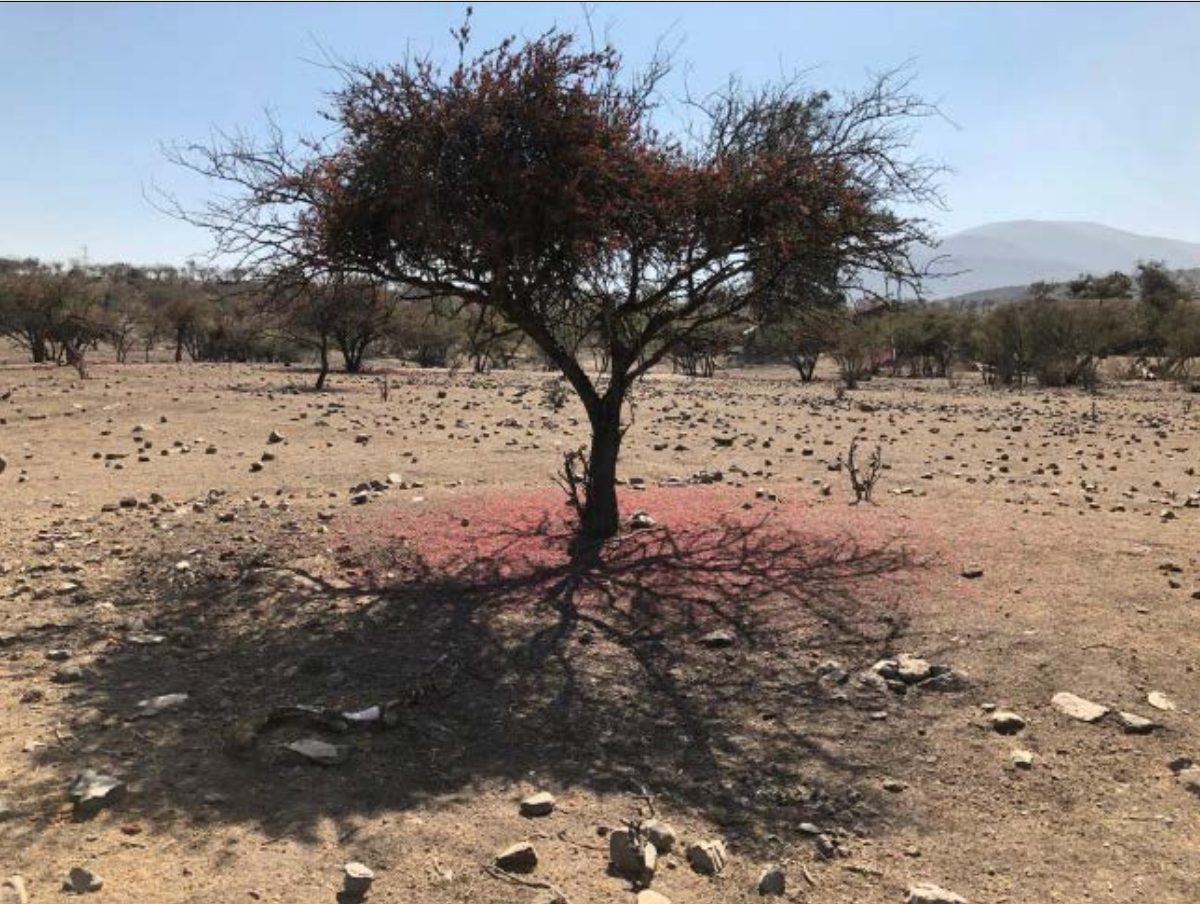
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<sup>31</sup> SQM and Abalmarle, two private mining companies operating in Chile, have been involved in corruption cases of illegal payments to politicians. Investigations and convictions have been resolved through the payment of fees.

this market approach, like the Indigenous Law written in 1993 and the Reform to the Constitution in 2005. However, as most of them have been ultimately unsuccessful, the protection of nature's elements has become quite a salient issue for civilians in promoting new constitutional processes to reshape the relationship between humans and nature, explicitly recognising nature as a subject with rights and creating an affirmative duty in the government to protect common resources. Ultimately, political corruption<sup>31</sup> (Office of Public Affairs, 2025) has allowed the maintenance of favourable policies that privilege the profit of extractive private enterprises over natural depletion.

Within the context of the global warming crisis, Neo-extractivism continues apace. The transition towards so-called clean, green, and renewable energy infrastructure, being developed in the interest of economic growth, ultimately increases demand for copper and lithium extraction, bringing the impacts that already exist to a major scale, especially considering the large amounts of water required by these operations for the processing of the minerals. New solar and wind power plants, rechargeable batteries for electric mobility, and recharging networks in response to the newer challenge of freeing society from fossil fuels, as well as the growing digital industry with its accelerating obsolescence, are big market forces demanding new mineral extraction. Ultimately, the development of these new technologies by industries in the Global North perpetuates the overexploitation of territories, leading to water depletion, biodiversity loss, and toxic waste contamination affecting both human and nonhuman communities in peripheral zones outside the centres of power.

### 3. PELDEHUE: INTO MUDFLATS, DESERTS, BURIALS, AND EXHUMATIONS



**Fig. 1** - Peldehue's Army terrain, Colina, Chile.  
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*In the mountain range close to the east and adjacent to the hill of Colocalán a rich gold mine was discovered in the middle of the previous century, which was called Peldehue and which prepared the erection of the convent, but after a long and productive work it had to be abandoned because it was completely watered down. The name, which comes from pelde, the mud, and hue, means place of mud or mudflats.*

– Francisco Solano Asta-Buruaga y Cienfuegos, 1899, p. 530.

Peldehue, a rural town situated along the banks of the *Colina River* on the fringes of Chile's Metropolitan area, currently stands as one of the driest regions of the country. Only the strong native trees resist the advance of desertification in a

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community primarily sustained by agriculture and farming. However, the land's historical significance extends beyond its present environmental condition. In the eighteenth century, the property known as *Hacendado de Peldehue* was owned by the Dominican Order, a religious order that played a significant role in the expansion of Catholicism in the Americas.

The property was later sold to the state and transferred to the National Army in 1943 for profitable management. The land, still owned by the Army, leases both surface and underground water rights from the Colina River for intensive agriculture and mining. Additionally, part of the land has been granted free of charge to the Anglo-American Group, a multinational mining company headquartered in London. This company exploits copper in the area, transporting minerals and waste from the Los Bronces open-pit copper mine located in the Andes Mountain Range to a processing plant in Peldehue. Extracted ore is crushed and transported to the Las Tórtolas flotation plant, where copper concentrate and cathodes are produced. Approximately 2,400 tons of copper slurry per hour enter the plant through pipelines, yet only 1% of that volume contains usable material. The remaining waste is deposited in the Las Tórtolas tailings dam, posing a high environmental risk to the nearby communities dependent on agriculture and livestock (Calabrán, 2009).



**Fig. 2 -** Las Tórtolas Tailings Dam of the Los Bronces Copper Mine Flotation Plant, Colina, Chile. [Digital Photograph] © Isidora Correa, 2024

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Despite signs prohibiting trespassing along the perimeter fence, the local community continues to use the area for grazing animals and as a leisure park on weekends. This stratified territory, with its evolving dynamics of transitioning from wetlands to desertified lands, is shaped by a complex history marked by the interaction of indigenous ritual sites and colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of natural resources, juxtaposing industrial extraction and traditional land use.

In 1999, a funerary archaeological site was accidentally discovered through excavations during the construction of an electrical power line (Decreto 645, 1998), intended to supply electricity to the mining operations, now under the control of Anglo American. Pottery fragments, along with human skeletal remains dating back to 1465, were unearthed, revealing a site linked to ancient funerary rituals and offerings (Hermosilla *et al.*, 2002). Among the artifacts found was a *pakcha*, a camelid-shaped zoomorphic vessel associated with the Inka cult of water and fertility, designed for ceremonial use. The discovery of this ceremonial object, consistent with the Indigenous name of the town, meaning mudflat, is the furthest south *pakcha* found in the Kollasuyu (Hermosilla, *et al.*, 2002), the southernmost region of the Inka Empire. These findings confirm the presence of the Tawantinsuyu empire, explained by the site's connection to the Inka Road, which linked the upper course of the Aconcagua River with various Inka sites along the banks of the Mapocho River. The Indigenous tradition associated with the site as a relevant agricultural area is deeply connected to transhumant pastoral practices. Seasonal migration plays a symbiotic relationship with the land, one that depends on climate changes in *veranadas*, summer pastures, and *invernadas*, winter pastures. During the *veranadas*, animals and communities moved uphill into the mountain range looking for better grazing areas, following water courses fed by melting snow. These practices, integrating ecological knowledge and biodiversity, reflect a biocultural construct shaped by nature's flux.

Within the context of hegemonic extractivism and commoditised territories in the overexploited Peldehue, a rich entanglement of traces emerges where ritual Indigenous traditions intersect with political, geological, and commercial interests. Movements of the soil during mining activities reveal layerings containing historical remnants, with a material culture emerging as a spectral presence of opposition and recalling a once-fertile landscape, forming a counter-image to the current reality of completely dried out soil where only the most resilient flora manage to survive. With each enunciation of the name of the town, we designate what once was, enacting a collision of temporalities that stand in stark contrast with the mineralised landscape. Yet, just a few

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metres away from the desertified soil, vast mono-crop fields of table grapes are produced, turning the dried earth into an evergreen oasis with the reallocation of natural flows to sustain the productivity of 85 hectares of grapes. Harvesting 3,000 boxes per hectare for export to the global market (Red Agrícola, 2021), relying on water rights held by the Army from the Colina River, under a contract valid until 2047 (Ejército de Chile vs Agrícola Chacabuco, 2016).

The military history of Peldehue is deeply tied to death. In 2021, following a dialogue between a Human Rights Investigative Commission and the Army under democratic governance, it was established that the northern area of the Peldehue terrain might contain the bodies of members of the GAP (*Grupo de Amigos Personales*), President Salvador Allende's personal security group, as well as his close advisors and associates. Referred to as the Moneda prisoners because they were first arrested at *Palacio de La Moneda*, the presidential seat of government, on the day of the military coup in 1973, they were tortured following Allende's death and taken to the *Fuerte Arteaga* in Peldehue. There, they were executed by machine-gun fire and their bodies were blown up with grenades before burial. Forty-eight years later, five hundred bone fragments were recovered, and only twelve of the twenty-one captured victims were successfully identified (Museo de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos, 2021). In the early years of the dictatorship, when the regime still denied the existence of disappeared detainees, systematic efforts were made to erase evidence of these crimes. The dialogue between the Army and the Human Rights Investigative Commission revealed that between 1978 and 1982, under the code name *Operation Television Removal*, the Army carried out a plan to exhume bodies from clandestine graves in military land and dispose of them by dropping the remains into the sea from air planes, condemning the victim's families to a painful and unresolved search that has lasted nearly half a century (Memoria Viva, 2024).

The Chilean road to socialism, as envisioned by Allende, came to an end with the military coup. His government implemented revolutionary changes, including the nationalisation of natural resources such as copper, which had previously been owned by US corporations like Anaconda Copper Company and Kennecott Utah Copper, and were expropriated under his administration. In contrast, the post-coup period prioritised the privatisation of these natural resources, implementing neoliberal policies, and opening to foreign investments. Pinochet's government enacted Decree Laws providing benefits to foreign companies to invest, developing full concessions that allowed transnational corporations to exploit and export copper without state control over their profits.

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Foreign mining between 1980 and 1990 entered the country with companies such as Anglo American Group, BHP, and Antofagasta Minerals, purchasing exploitation rights over deposits. Although the nationalisation of copper was not completely reversed, as Codelco (Corporación Nacional del Cobre) remains a state-owned company, a significant portion of its revenues was allocated to funding the Armed Forces through the Reserved Copper Law.

Earth movements at Peldehue respond not only to political shifts and the imposition of laws that reallocate and exploit natural resources for the global market. By physically reshaping the earth's surface to provide energy for mining purposes and by unearthing the bodies of political prisoners who disappeared during the dictatorship, these excavations resist the forces that seek to erase memory. The violent traces of the past and the buried ritual artifacts of a once-fertile landscape cannot be erased, standing as active testimonies to the transformation of the land of human-shaped geographies.

#### 4. SHAPES OF DISAPPEARANCE

Practice-based research in the creative arts often employs embodied methodologies, including material and situated encounters generated through field work as a means of producing knowledge that cannot be accessed through purely discursive analysis. Within this framework, artistic practice unfolds as a generative process, revealing insights into the experiential relations among bodies, matter, and environments where new narratives and epistemologies take form.

This chapter extends such a practice-based approach into the terrains of Peldehue, Chile, a site shaped by overlapping histories of colonial displacement, ecological devastation, and extractive industry. The conceptual lens guiding this work is a geological metaphor that emphasises how contradictions and oppositions coexist in these terrains, drawing on the *ch'ixi* epistemology described by the Bolivian sociologist and activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2015). Derived from the Aymara word *ch'ixi*, this concept refers to a colour space – most commonly grey – as seen in andesite, a fine-grained volcanic rock abundant in the Andes, formed by the juxtaposition of two opposing colours: fragments of black and white. From a distance, these appear as a single tone, yet upon a closer view, the fragments remain distinct, never fully fused, retaining their particular substance. *Ch'ixi* therefore offers a mode of apprehending coexistence without synthesis, a condition in which antagonistic

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forces are not resolved or erased but held together.

Attending to *ch'ixi* as a metaphor for epistemic and material coexistence opens dialogue with other decolonial perspectives. Walter D. Mignolo (2011) develops the notion of *border thinking* emerging from difference and operating at the fissures of what is suppressed or subordinated, “in the borders of local histories” and “confronting global designs” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 277). Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014), drawing on *Amerindian perspectivism*, as an Indigenous worldview, describes how humans and nonhumans inhabit and perceive the world from distinct corporeal-affective standpoints, with each body constituting a unique perspective of the world it expresses. Similarly, Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017) advances a method attentive to submerged perspectives beneath extractive logics. Her notion of the *extractive zone* describes the reduction of life into capitalist processes of resource conversion in biodiversity-rich Indigenous territories. Yet forms of life, memory, and creation that persist beneath extractivism – those that “cannot be easily reduced, divided, or representationally conquered or evacuated” (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. 4) – constitute a decolonial positioning enacted through multiplicity, relationality, and resisting ecologies.

Together, these frameworks challenge the homogenising forces of Western modernity by foregrounding decolonial perspectives that involve local knowledge and the coexistence of heterogeneous worlds. Within Peldehue, focusing on forces that resist the monocultural logics of extractivism can be pursued both materially and metaphorically, revealing how life and death, memory and depletion coexist. By engaging directly with substances drawn from the land, it becomes possible to articulate forms of knowledge that emerge from the contradictions embedded in its material conditions. In this sense, artmaking can act as a critical mode of inquiry capable of reframing sites of extraction and loss into spaces of imagination, ecological resistance, and counter-memory.

This positioning resonates with contemporary artists in Latin America who articulate decolonial and ecological methodologies through interdisciplinary material practices related to mineral extractivism. *Fuel to fire* (2023), a single-channel video of Carolina Caycedo's recent work, foregrounds indigenous ecological protocols as critical counter-narratives to extractive capitalism. The work documents a *pagamento* – a ritual offering of gold to a body of water – performed for the conservation of the Páramo de Santurbán in Colombia, a fragile ecosystem that holds vast deposits of gold currently threatened by mining. The work seeks to redefine the concept of wealth in terms of interdependence and reciprocity, in which the cinematic gesture

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resituates gold into a relational economy of care and ecological continuity. The works *Testigos IV* (2022) and *Telurian Signils N.1-4* (2023) by Elena Damiani interrogate geological representation by recomposing sedimentary structures and subsurface fractures, making visible the epistemic violence of extractive knowledge systems. Her work destabilised geology as a purely scientific framework, rearticulating it as a cultural and political field. In parallel, Ximena Garrido-Leca, in *Reverse Demarcations* (2025), examines the entanglement of artisanal traditions such as weaving with extractive economies in the Andean context through copper-based sculptures that interlace natural and industrial materials. By weaving extraction's raw material into forms that recall Andean bamboo-woven panels used by displaced migrants and embedding patterns referencing rivers and water systems, Garrido Leca layers ancestral motifs with the displacements produced by open-pit copper mining.

In what follows, these conceptual, methodological, and artistic frameworks are brought into dialogue with the art project *Shapes of Disappearance* (2022), tracing how fieldwork encounters with bones and living lifeforms in copper-mining extractive terrains are translated into artistic processes. The project connects colonial histories with socio-cultural and environmental knowledge, highlighting interspecies and symbiotic relations within the resisting landscape. In April 2022 I entered the Army's terrain at Peldehue through an open gate in the fence, ignoring the warning signs. It was a hot day, and as I walked over the arid soil for several metres passing between some *Algarrobos* and *Espinós* – native trees capable of enduring severe water stress – I noticed in the distance what seemed like a mirage of bright white stones. As I approached, I realised they were bones scattered across the landscape, completely devoid of organic tissue and bleached by the intense sun. Nearby, a wide duct crossed the land, transporting mining waste from the Los Bronces mine to the Las Tórtolas tailings dam. A man on horseback, moving between large trucks from Anglo American, while herding some sheep, came near, and when both of us were looking at the bones, he said, pointing to his animals, "These are the only animals I have left. More than half died because there was no water or forage to sustain them. The rivers have completely dried up." When I asked about the origin of the bones, he replied, "Cattle, horses, sheep, and goats." These introduced animals, brought during colonial times, have become vital to the community's livelihood. The arrival of European livestock displaced native camelids, particularly guanacos. Well-adapted to the region's condition, guanacos played a natural grazing role, influencing vegetation patterns, promoting ecological balance, and symbolising fertility to Indigenous Communities. Now they are scarcely seen in the high

Andean mountains.



**Fig. 3** - Registration process of the collected bones of dead animals, Peldehue. [Digital Photograph]  
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Since 2010, a megadrought has dried up the primarily fluvial rivers, and spontaneous animal cemeteries of these introduced species have become increasingly common around Colina, leading to the loss of the community's main sustenance (Chile Visión Noticias, 2019). The lack of forage has also eroded local ecological knowledge of pastures, including transhumant practices, which have been replaced by employment in mining and intensive monoculture industries.

The scene of scattered bones evoked a type of ceramic made from bone, characteristic of the colonial period. Originally developed in England to reduce dependency on Chinese imports, this porcelain combined white china stone and bone ash to create the thinnest and whitest porcelain of the late eighteenth century. Exported globally, it became a luxury material largely produced from cattle bones obtained from England's colonies, and was widely used by aristocratic and colonial households across the Global South.

I began collecting the bones (Figure 3), transforming them into ashes as

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part of a burial ritual, and then mixing them with porcelain to create a bone-ash mixture. Using a process of casting moulds, I replicate the forms of stones and branches from the terrain, filling them with the bone-ash mixture, to transform these landscape elements into bone china sculptures. Each mould was reproduced by subtracting a portion of the mixture from the prepared recipe, resulting in copies that gradually decrease in size until they disappear (Figure 4). By emphasising these progressively diminishing sections, the process reflects the neo-extractive histories of the present, where the vanishing forms of nature mirror the depletion of natural resources.



**Fig. 4 - *Shapes of Disappearance***, exhibited at Patricia Ready Gallery, Santiago, Chile. [Bone china sculptures made with ash of dead animals, video projections, variable dimensions] © Isidora Correa, 2022

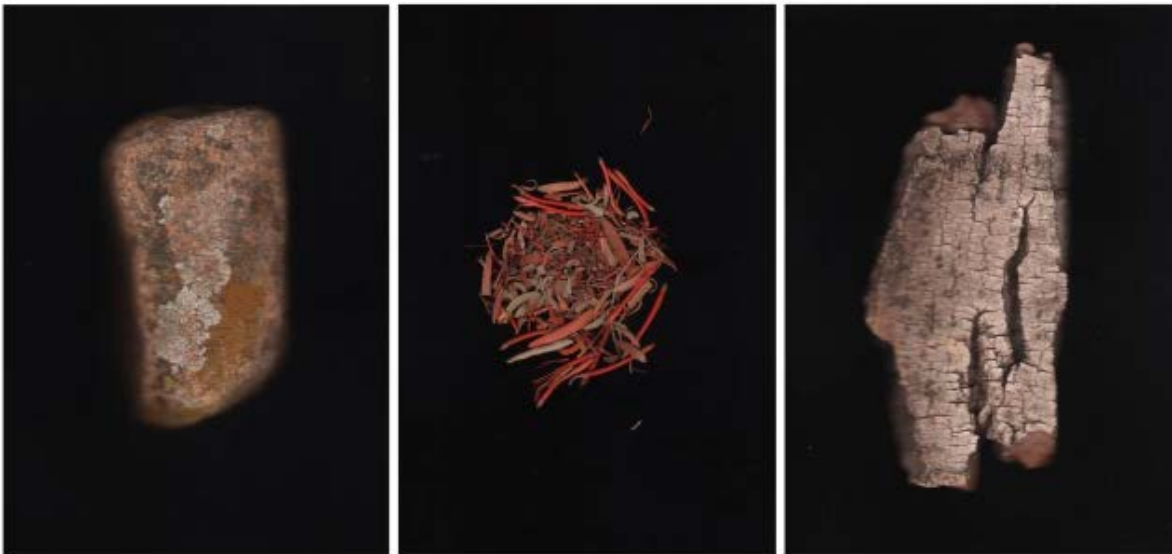
When exposed to high temperatures, the minerals in bone ash melt at about 1230°C, along with the porcelain, producing a luminous whiteness reminiscent of seashells. As De Landa (1997) observes, bone is “the living material that most easily petrifies, that most readily crosses the threshold back into the world of rocks. For that reason, much of the geological record is written with fossil bone” (Landa, 1997, p. 27). Once vital and rigid organs, bones lose all capacity for growth and regeneration in death, becoming mineral memories embedded in the soil. In the stillness of rocks, these layers of death inscribe traces of colonial migrations within Peldehue’s strata.

*Shapes of Disappearance* (2022) (Figures 4 and 7) was conceived as a video and sculpture installation created primarily with the ash of the dead animals from Peldehue, together with an archive of surviving life forms. The

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petrified bones of these animals, transformed into stone- and branch-like forms, fossilise the memory of a reshaped landscape, inscribing the colonisation of territory into mineral layers.



**Fig. 5** - Digital image of scanned living forms resisting environmental degradation in Peldehue: lichens, Quintral flowers, and Espino tree bark. [Digital Image]  
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Through the artistic process, the bones are reconfigured into reflective screens that project a visual archive of Peldehue's ecologies. Fallen flowers, the rough texture of a tree bark, and lichens – life forms that persist in resistance to extractive and climate pressures (Figure 5) – were gathered, scanned, resized, and converted into moving images. Projected onto the monochromatic bone replicas, these elements infuse mineral remains with chromatic vitality, producing a dialogue between fossilisation and life. To create the videos, the enlarged scanned images (Figure 6) were examined while the eye and the hand made deliberate, non-automated movements across them to identify the focus areas, with these movements recorded on the screen. The contrast between blurred and sharply focused regions reveals the volumetry of the elements, presenting them as three-dimensional bodies only partially captured.

Lichens found between bones and flowers include *Policauliona candelaria* and *Hiperphyscia adglutinata*, which grows on rocks in Peldehue, tolerating the lack of shade and high sun exposure. The latter species is common

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in habitats near metropolitan or anthropised areas. Lichens are mutualistic associations of two or more species between a fungus host, the mycobiont that protects the association against dissection and solar radiation, and algae or cyanobacteria, the photobiont, which surrounds the host, performing photosynthesis and providing nutrients while fixing carbon. Highly resilient to harsh conditions, lichens act as a “sensitive and accumulative biomonitoring tool” (Thakur *et al*, 2024, p. 1), absorbing environmental elements such as gases, minerals, and water across their surface. Lichens can perform the role of biological markers of “long-term accumulation” (Thakur *et al*, 2024, p. 2) and sensitive indicators of pollution, showing physiological changes in response to contamination, affecting their vital processes.



**Fig. 6** - Screenshot portraying lichens from the video *Shapes of Disappearance*. [Video, 4:37 minutes] © Isidora Correa, 2022

The bright red fallen flowers collected belong to the *Quintral*, the common name for *Tristerix corymbosus*, a plant species widespread in the Andes. As a hemiparasite, it attaches to host trees such as *Espino* (Figure 1), using haustoria – specialised fungal-modified roots that extract water and nutrients from the host, while still allowing photosynthesis in its leaves. Reproductively, the *Quintral* depends entirely on interspecies interactions: pollination is carried out by hummingbirds, and seed dispersal is mediated by other bird species. The survival of *Tristerix* is closely tied to these ecological partners, reflecting

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co-evolutionary histories that span millions of years (Núñez, 2022). Beyond its unique biological interactions, this plant holds social and cultural value. Indigenous communities attribute protective powers to the plant, using it in rites and ceremonies to promote health and prosperity. The properties of its flowers and fruit vary depending on the host species, acting as an anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and immune-strengthening agent (Núñez, 2022).

The collected tree bark came from *Espino* (Figure 1), *Acacia caven*, likely introduced naturally to Chile by llamas or guanacos crossing the Andes from the Gran Chaco region around 3000 years ago (Root-Berstein & Jaksic, 2016). As a nurse plant, it colonises open degraded areas, creating favourable conditions for other native trees to emerge by providing shade, cooler temperatures, and higher humidity (Hernández et al. 2015), generating ecological restoration and reverting the impacts of anthropogenic degradation. As a legume, it fixes nitrogen through root symbiosis, enriching poor soils and supporting wildlife that feed on its seeds (Root-Berstein & Jaksic 2016). In the Metropolitan Area, where it was collected, this species is approaching critical endangerment due to urban expansion, real estate development, and intensive agriculture.

*Shapes of Disappearance* situates itself within decolonial ecologies, reframing death and petrification not as endings, but as processes through which suppressed histories and nonhuman agencies articulate an alternative archive of coexistence and resistance. This living archive mediates ecological and cultural memory with each species embodying distinct modes of resilience and interdependence, becoming repositories of biological intelligence that record long-term processes of accumulation, adaptation, and symbiosis.

By revealing the entanglements of human and nonhuman bodies in shaping the landscape, *Shapes of Disappearance* emphasises the regenerative potential of nonhuman forces. The bone sculptures entangle cycles of loss, displacement, and survival, with the depleting echoes of extraction, acting as reflecting forces that shape memory, materiality, and resistance. They are not static remnants but intra-acting agents (Barad, 2007), with the land, mirroring the resilience of life forms and testifying to the endurance of multispecies interactions and socio-ecological knowledges under the pressures of extractivism.

As Donna Haraway (2016) states in *Staying with the Trouble*:

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 knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway, 2016, p. 12)



**Fig. 7 - Shapes of Disappearance**, exhibited at Patricia Ready Gallery, Santiago, Chile. [Art Installation: Bone china sculptures made with ash of dead animals, video projections, and sensors, Variable dimensions]  
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# ART, ECOLOGY, AND RESISTANCE

Reimagining Cultural Heritage in Iran

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## ABSTRACT

The Iranian context is subject not only to ecological but also to socio-political problems that the article presents as a touchstone for thinking about the intersections of destruction, (im)materiality, and collective responsibility. This paper probes into the theme that Response(ability) presents in Iran's art and cultural segments, even while the nation's ruling elite exploits human and natural destruction. In line with current movements focusing on solidarity and community building, the grassroots effort addressing water scarcity and pollution has sought to highlight the role of artists/makers in creating and preserving cultural heritage. The paper dwells on art and heritage as keys to the creation of resilience and resistance and analyses the body experiences of people actively engaged in art practices, becoming part of the environment through such practices of care and intimacy.

**Keywords:** Iran; Cultural heritage; Art; Activism; Resistance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: FRAMING ART, ECOLOGY, AND RESISTANCE IN IRAN

The combination of art, ecology, and resistance is a fundamental paradigm that allows an understanding of the social and political dynamics of the current world, especially those in authoritarian states. Within Iran's particular cultural and political context, these three domains have become tightly linked. Their interconnection offers the only viable way to address the country's escalating environmental disasters and entrenched political restrictions. In this context, ecology has ceased to function merely as a biological concern; it is heavily politicised and tied directly to the government's handling of (or failure to handle) the country's resources (Karimi, 2022). As a result, resistance is frequently depicted in the form of art, a powerful tool of expressing anger at power and breaking away from the domination of the state-sanctioned narratives.

Understanding the current environment of artistic resistance requires understanding the huge differences between contemporary Iran and the Pahlavi era. The state, through the Ministry of Art and Culture and other agencies, was the main sponsor of the arts, thereby raising the level of modernisation and the cultural exchange during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979). This support was, however, usually conditional, with government supervision and suppression of those who were more outspoken and directly challenged the regime's political authority. Iranian art encompasses a wide range of unique cultural productions that deeply explore how modernity and modernisation have been adopted in the country. For instance, art production and criticism played a crucial role in presenting the discourse on *gharbzadegi* ("Westoxification"), serving as a critical discourse on Iran's engagement with Western modernity. Ultimately, this involvement presented fresh possibilities for negotiating an anti-colonial concept of Iranian artistic modernity, which artists and critics envisioned as a significant alternative to Western colonial modernity (Nahidi, 2023).

The current theocratic regime, characterised by near-total state control and extensive censorship of cultural and artistic production, has transformed the nature of creative dissent. While art under the Pahlavi dealt with the limitations of a secular, nationalist authority, contemporary Iranian art must deal with the strict ideological and moral regulations set by the Islamic Republic. This situation requires that resistance change from condemning the institutions to a more profound, widespread, grassroots, and symbolic overthrow of the government's power, that is more often found in the less regulated areas of digital space, street art, or ecological activism.

While exports of Iranian art were very profitable prior to the Islamic Revolution, the viability and freedom for self-expression of artists, collectors, art galleries, and museums became severely restricted after 1979. The political realm of artists encompassed aesthetics, materiality, subject matter, and exposure. Artists found themselves isolated from the global art scene, limited to working within established moral codes and geographical boundaries. The art market became an underground and unregulated one where the sale of art, money laundering, and illegal exchange merged (Rizk, 2024).

Iran thus represents a compelling case study of digital authoritarianism and artistic resistance, shaped by the convergence of extreme environmental stressors, such as drought and pollution (WHO, n.d.), a recent past of deeply authoritarian rule, and a strong artistic community that is often confronted with repression. The relationship between art, ecology, and resistance is non-static: the autocratic system leads artistic reaction and sets very tight limits for the performance of such reactions in public (Bruun & Rubin, 2022). In such a *milieu*, artists often resort to using indirect, symbolic, or allegorical language to discuss taboo subjects, such as the government policies that contribute to ecological decline. Additionally, the actions of artists become revolutionary acts of resistance that expand the boundaries of permissible discourse and create new areas for critical thinking (Karimi, 2022).

This article examines how communities can act to reimagine their cultural heritage as new and vibrant and play a significant role in resistance against the regime that destroys their natural environment and exercises political control over it. Such reimagination extends beyond preservation, moving towards the critical recontextualisation of both material and immaterial traditions, including collective memory and shared identity, in direct response to contemporary socio-ecological crises (Lewis-Simpson, 2024). Through the use of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and past connections with nature, a community not only bonds socially but also becomes a driving force of ecologically friendly behaviour, thus creating a socially and ecologically sustainable community, while at the same time presenting an alternative narrative to the official, government-guided version of history and heritage (Mojab, 2020).

This article first addresses the use of environmental degradation as a tool of power within the Iranian authoritarian context. We claim that the ruling elite of Iran intentionally and methodically use the environment as one of their ways to control the situation, making a culture-based counteraction indispensable. Secondly, it identifies the different ways Iranian art of resilience and imaginative dissent is expressed through such channels as symbolic

language and cooperation with the local community. Thirdly, it presents ideas about re-conceptualising the human-environment relationship, which arise from both the struggle for survival in nature and the ecological and cultural revival in Iran, supported by artists – both modern and those rooted in traditional nature practices.

## **2. ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AS A TOOL OF POWER IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES AND THE IRANIAN CONTEXT**

Authoritarian regimes across the globe have been found to make use of environmental damage as an instrument in the exercise of control and in the establishment of power either directly or indirectly. Under certain circumstances, those in charge of a nation prioritise economic growth or the extraction of natural resources, with little regard for the potential environmental consequences. As a result, they often choose the quickest route to achieve their goals, which frequently entail significant environmental, economic, and social costs (Bruun & Rubin, 2022). Autocrats can even intentionally use environmental disasters, whether nature or human-made, as excuses to further their control and to suppress political dissent (Curators, 2024).

Iran suffers from a series of serious environmental issues, including extensive periods of drought, water shortage, pollution in the air and water, and desertification (WHO, n.d.). The Iranian government has been criticized for the escalation of these problems through incompetence in resource management, inefficient organisational structures, and a preference for short-term objectives (Hibrawi, 2019). A clear example of this is the extensive construction of dams, particularly by the engineering section of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), which has been recognised as a significant factor contributing to the worsening of drought conditions in several regions across the country (Daniels, 2019). Over the last 30 years, the IRGC has been a major player in the water infrastructure projects of Iran, mainly via its engineering arm, Khatam-al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters, as well as its dam-building offshoot, Sepasad Engineering Company. The best-documented instances of this are large hydropower and irrigation dams like Karkheh in Khuzestan, Karun-4 in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Upper Gotvand on the Karun River, Rudbar-e Lorestan on a tributary of the Dez, and the Sardasht Dam in West Azerbaijan.

In authoritarian regimes, ecological degradation, control of natural

resources, and restrictions on public scrutiny are closely intertwined. When environmental harm is linked to state policies, authoritarian governments often respond not with transparency but with efforts to prevent oversight, restrict public debate, and neutralise those who challenge official narratives. It is within this broader context that the targeting of environmental activists in Iran must be understood.

The persecution of environmental activists shows the regime's sensitivity to environmental matters and perceived threats to its authority. Arrests, imprisonment, and even suspicious deaths have been reported, with charges ranging from espionage to acting against national security (Hibrawi, 2019). During 2018, at least eight members of the Persian Heritage Wildlife Foundation (PHWF) were arrested, including Kavous Seyed-Emami, Niloufar Bayani, and Morad Tahbaz ("Center for Human Rights in Iran, 2018"). These actions display the state's considerable effort to intimidate parties who could uncover ecologically harmful activities undertaken by the government or advocate for policies that might infringe upon the regime's priorities and control over resources (Hibrawi, 2019).

Iran's environmental situation has also been significantly affected by factors such as US sanction, which have led the government to use low-quality fuel with higher pollutants, becoming a major cause of dangerous air pollution in most of the country's cities (Hibrawi, 2019). External pressure of sanctions and the way they affect the government of Iran and the public health and the environment is a perfect illustration of the interdependence of the interior policies and exterior impacts. An example of this is the Iranian regime's practice of attributing environmental damage to termites in the wood. This approach has led to external actors like bordering countries and Israel consistently focusing on water issues, while ignoring internal criticism. This approach creates a sense of victimisation among the people and garners support by assigning blame for domestic issues to foreign enemies. The Iranian government's environmental policy, characterised by denial of other opinions and of responsibility, takes its roots in the essential feature of authoritarian environmentalism, in which ecological concerns are subordinated to regime stability and political survival.

<b>Environmental Issue</b>	<b>Alleged Causes</b>	<b>Government Response</b>
Water Scarcity	Resource mismanagement, unnecessary dam building, and climate change	The issue of dam construction (which in some regions can be said to be making the situation worse), accusing external enemies (Israel), and the arrest of environmentalists.
Air Pollution	Low-quality fuel generation (an important reason for which are the sanctions), industrial discharges, traffic	Government response does not seem to suggest any substantial long-term solution to the closures of schools and offices
Drying of Lakes/Wetlands	Building dams, water consumption not in compliance with the regulations, climate change	Protesters arrested (e.g., Lake Urmia activists)
Persecution of Activists	Environmental activists that are empowered by a country are seen as a threat to national security	Detention, prosecution, allegations of spying, and undermining national security, deaths in custody, prohibition of travel, cessation of work

### **3. THE ROLE OF ART AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE IN IRAN**

Iranian art has been one of the most effective ways to communicate social dissent, to establish one's cultural identity, and to promote wildlife conservation, especially in the face of ecological and socio-political issues. Artists in many societies have used their works to express social and political concerns for centuries, and thus art has long functioned as a key instrument of social engagement, helping to vent their frustrations, question the status quo, and create a bond between them with various manifestations (The Healing Power of Art to Build Resilience and Social-Emotional Learning | IES, 2023). Iranian artists have long been the architects of social change in Iran, using a range of media as tools of social action, such as mural art, music, performing arts, and film (Sheridan, 2024).

Artists often pursue these activities either mutedly or through highly symbolic forms, as a kind of silent protest reflecting their desire to live free

from censorship. Many artists, particularly from younger generations, tend to challenge compulsory frameworks designed to regulate belief systems and social behaviour. As a result, this action of resistance can lead to the production of artworks representing iconography of socio-political and moral contravention. Cultural counter-reactions can therefore be identified through new interpretations of national culture and counter-narratives that coexist with the state's hegemonic discourse. In this process, artists seek to redefine individuality by creating discursive strategies through which they can critically review their practices and the state's politically formulated history and cultural past (Keshmirshakan, 2023).

Another sign of the state's ideological crisis is their effort to take back their own cultural space (Keshmirshakan, 2023). In the districts of Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz, artists have been subject to harassment, arrest, and even physical assault. In this context, street graffiti, where artists have portrayed the current deplorable conditions of women in Iran, has become one of the mainstays. Iranian artists from various locations have thus taken to the streets for round-the-clock expressions, mostly without the permission of the government (Lim, 2019).

The Women, Life, Freedom movement, which sprang up after the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, is a typical example of growth in arts activism across Iran. With this spectacular show, one becomes aware that art played a leading role in both the genesis and acceleration of such social movements, reinforced oppressed voices, and sought to deliver a compelling message using visual and performative language. Iran was known for promoting discord and non-violence long before the uprising through their exhibitions, performances, and works in virtually every art form (Sheridan, 2024). However, there was a breakthrough when underground movies and music were used as a weapon of determined resistance in Iran by artists who were instrumental in portraying the social grievances and defying those who determined the set rules (Kolbjørnsen, 2025).

Despite the dangers of expressing dissent in Iran, art continues to function as a crucial vehicle for public expression and as an effective means of challenging entrenched power structures. The restrictions placed on artistic expression often give rise to new and highly creative works that not only defy imposed limitations but also closely mirror and relate to the everyday lives of Iranian people.

Cultural heritage can be considered a primary cornerstone of resilience, insofar as it encompasses historical events, common values, and a deep and

strong sense of one's identity that helps people to resist and navigate difficult times (Lewis-Simpson, 2024). Iran has a strong inherited cultural identity tied to an abundant heritage that has, over the years, depicted the aura of resilience against various invasions, deaths, and natural calamities. The structures and designs of typical houses and public buildings in the Iranian tradition often demonstrate the principles of both sustainability and adaptability, demonstrating historically embedded responses to environmental constraints (The Legacy of the Iranian Resilience Home: A Model of Cultural Adaptability, 2024). The people of Iran are always united and solidified by their common presence and the many social interactions that form the typical community, which provides the social unit with the ability to withstand hard times and crises, alongside the large number of cultural and religious observances they practice. Iran's long-standing culture and dynamic heritage stand as a deep reservoir of resilience that offers continuity, a strong sense of shared identity, and a treasure trove of traditional wisdom, enabling communities to effectively deal with numerous contemporary problems, such as environmental issues and social pressures, even if they are complex and multifaceted.

#### **4. ARTISTIC RESPONSES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN IRAN: COLLECTIVE ACTION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

Environmental art has become a significant and growing movement in Iran, striking a chord mainly with the younger generation of artists who are increasingly environmentally focused. Since 2004, a series of independent festivals involving environmental art have taken place in different cities of Iran, inviting artists to use different media. These festivals have served as key platforms for artistic engagement with environmental issues (Maktabi, 2012).

These initiatives have also facilitated connections between Iranian artists and their international counterparts, addressing both local and global environmental challenges through transnational collaboration (Nadalian, 2011). Collective art exhibitions have been critical in raising awareness about the “triple planetary crisis,” which is the loss of nature and biodiversity, climate change, and the problem of pollution and waste (iran.un.org, 2024). These exhibitions usually display the works of Iranian artists that address these environmental challenges, encourage public reflection and civic engagement while stimulating creative responses. Examples of these matters are the “Tehran Monoxide

Project,” an initiative that has changed the city’s art by using public installations and attractive posters called Themes & Variations. (The Tehran Monoxide Project: Bringing Eco Awareness to Iran, 2012).

Additionally, most environmental art projects in Iran are a cooperative effort with the local community and university students, who are included in the team to co-create the site-responsive art, which is an art that directly connects with the local environment and issues (Maktabi, 2012).

Iranian artists are actively involved in educating, engaging, and devising innovative, eco-friendly methods of environmental stewardship, taking the lead in environmental responsibility. Through artistic practice, they translate complex ecological issues into accessible and emotionally resonant forms, enabling broader public understanding. Beyond scientific interpretation, people’s emotions can also be recognised as a unique kind of knowledge that can evoke the emergence and unleashing of the more aggressive and active responses to ecological problems (Esgandari & Royan, 2024).

Other authors prefer to deduce the problems linked to the destruction of the biosphere caused by humans and the factors that are vital to the human body and the environment (Maktabi, 2012). The artistic use of natural and recycled materials in the process of environmental art is more than just emphasising the connection with the earth. It also helps promote and implement sustainability in art and life (Maktabi, 2012). Emerging artistic practices increasingly foreground environmental issues, contributing to the formation of a more environmentally conscious society.

## **5. NAVIGATING CENSORSHIP AND GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCES ON IRANIAN ART AND CULTURE**

The Iranian government has a global reputation for the strictest of censorship, cross a wide range of artistic forms, such as cinema, literature, music, and visual arts, thus regulating and censoring the nation’s cultural and artistic expression.

Artists working in Iran face constant pressure to mould their new forms with state dogmas and the dominant ideological mindset. Very often, this results in a widespread practice such as self-censorship as the most effective tool to avoid any negative impact of their activities (Cinema Iranica, 2025). Iranian artists must devise innovative ways to convey their ideas and creativity to overcome these persistent obstacles. For example, film makers have found indirect ways to convey their messages, referred to as “art of allusion,” which

includes using metaphors, symbols, and subtle communication tools in order to address controversial social and political issues but still not break broadcasting guidelines (Cinema Iranica, 2025). Some artists operate away from recognised public establishments, such as through underground units, or even in isolation, in order to communicate without state control (Mimeta, 2025).

The Iranian authorities have repeatedly resorted to repressive measures such as arrests, prosecutions, and bans on against artists whose works have threatened or criticised its authority (Alan, 2023). Despite the significant challenges, the Iranian art community continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability in developing their own artistic voices and their understanding of key social and environmental issues.

## **6. EMPOWERING YOUTH AND FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ART AND DIGITAL PRESERVATION**

Collaborative art projects are now a significant trend for involving all kinds of people in Iran, especially young people, in the creative process and sharing, establishing a sense of community and common purpose. The more miraculous the process, the less isolated the people are, and in the end, the more vibrant the society feels (Karimi, 2022). These activities can bridge the cultural gap in the Iranian community and promote better understanding and dialogue among people of different nations in the globalised world. The “AZAD Collaborative Design Project”, for example, demonstrates not only the potential of collaborative design practices but also the capacity of Iranian youth to engage in meaningful and socially embedded creative activities (Hinterlnd, 2019).

Participatory art practices and digital platforms allow Iranian youth not only to express their views but also to connect with one another and engage in cultural activities. They support both traditional modes of interpersonal communication and semi-virtual modes that accommodate current constraints, such as distancing. Far from being irrelevant to young people, these projects foster a sense of empowerment and help overcome the barriers of a fragmented society by creating shared experiences and offering spaces where different generations can communicate more openly and interact in new ways.

Digital technology has begun to penetrate Iran, with some institutions and individuals now using photogrammetry to systematically document and preserve valuable artifacts and historical sites (Asadpour, 2023). To further the

cause of the preservation of national heritage, the website “Simurgh Nameh” has been developed to create virtual, unified archives that are easily accessible and hold diverse sources of culture and art for the researchers, artists, and the public across the globe (Maleki, 2025). Gerami *et al.* (2022) have emphasised the need to save endangered Iranian cultural heritage against environmental degradation and human intervention.

Virtual space has, in many respects, partially substituted physical cultural spaces, a development previously considered unfeasible. Through this alternative, Iran has been more connected to the world, and the cultural community was thriving again, Aliakbari declared (Aliakbari, 2023). Iran’s cultural heritage is being saved for the future through these digital preservation plans. In addition, they are increasing accessibility to a wider public, including the youth, who, as a result, feel themselves to be part of a common national identity and cultural continuity through the various age brackets.

## **7. REIMAGINING HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIPS: THE VISION OF IRANIAN VISUAL ARTISTS**

Contemporary Iranian visual artists are increasingly engaging with environmental and ecological themes in their artistic projects, representing the global interest and concern for the earth’s precarious future (Maktabi, 2012). A good example is Ahmad Nadalian, who is known internationally for his immense environmental art projects, which are grounded in the promotion of respect for the natural world and all living beings (Maktabi, 2012). His “River Art” project, where he symbolically designs images on natural rocks, rivers, and other beautiful sites, is part of a cultural continuum with ancient Persian symbols and reveals a profound and timeless link to the land. The “Habitat” event, taking place in Tehran, offered the artists a stage where they could produce their paintings and sculptures to address critical environmental issues such as global warming, various forms of pollution, and the far-reaching impacts of climate change (Rezapoor, 2018). Lately, events like “Beyond a Canvas: Eyes on the Work of Nature” have had a special focus on the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, displaying the works of numerous Iranian artists who have responded to these pressing ecological challenges with great effect (iran.un.org, 2024).

The exhibition was able to attract a varied group of local visual artists,

who showed their paintings and sculptures on specific environmental issues, such as global warming, various forms of pollution, and the far-reaching impacts of climate change. These works underline both severe and potentially irreversible consequences of the ongoing environmental crisis and the urgent need for the international community and especially those responsible for leading the developed states to commence immediately with the practice of sustainable development (UN.org, 2019).

In the past few years, the number of Iranian artists who have chosen to employ their creativity to shed light on the ongoing destruction of natural habitats and to critically address human-driven environmental degradation (Maktabi, 2012). After the exhibition, the many artists who also discussed the future of clean energy and environmental protection, indicating a growing ecological awareness across different social groups. People from all walks of life, rich or poor, felt this concern at the same time. The exhibition also clarified that the projects covering many aspects, and not those dealing with a specific issue, are more likely to get financial support from the relevant bodies. This sustainability issue is not only an environmental one but also a social matter.

Visual artists have succeeded in creating a safe platform for environmental discourses. These vivid forms of art no longer perceive environmental elements as separate from humanity. The awareness of the invisible connection between humans and nature is growing, and the world is aware that the environmental issue is as much a social issue as it is an economic or political one. Such creations, if well implemented, will impact society profoundly, creating positive change and participating in social construction if they can make a difference and create.

More than merely portraying the environmental issues of Iran and the world, the activism of these artists includes the reshaping of the fundamental link between human nature and the environment. Their art combines themes like care, connection, and unity between humanity and the environment through respect (Maktabi, 2014). Iranian environmental artists are mostly motivated by the knowledge they get from old mythologies and their commitment to ancient spiritual traditions, through which they have managed to integrate current socio-ecological issues with the past understandings of human-nature interactions (Maktabi, 2012).

Iranian artists have begun making ecofeminist art, which reflects a growing awareness of the link between women and nature. This awareness is crucial and focuses on the role of women in addressing the current ecological problems (Darabi, 2023). Among them, Tara Goudarzi and Atefeh Khas

have gained visibility through temporary, site-specific installations in natural environments, establishing dialogical relationships between the artist, the landscape, and the viewer and thereby foregrounding ethical dimensions of human–nature interaction (Keyghobadi, 2023). The selection of local raw materials and the design of the works that are effectively part of the location merge the natural world, the landscape, and the artists as the co-creators of the work (Maktabi, 2012). The textual meaning of the concept of environment has been completely reshaped by the recognition, intervention, and responsibility of the artists for the environmental changes. Iranian visual artists are thus leveraging the power of art not only to represent but also to produce ideas, redefining the nature-culture relation to become more intersubjective and caring and regenerating their emotional and affective bond with the environment.

## **8. RECONCEPTUALISING HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONS FOR ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL IN IRAN**

Citizens, environmental activists, and the academic community of Iran recognise that a range of interrelated environmental challenges is threatening the country's ecosystems. Iran's rich ecology and ancient culture are facing significant challenges (WHO, n.d.). Stabilising the ecological and cultural situation in this context requires a new conception of the human-environment relationship, a new perspective that can take humanity away from exploiting nature profit and place it back within nature, in a relationship of harmony, respect, and mutual interdependence.

The traditional ecological culture of Iran, which has endured over time and is founded on the profound interconnection of humans and nature, serves as a model of sustainability, inspiring effective solutions to the current environmental crises (Jomehpour, 2023). The environmentally vital issue of sustainable development adds cultural and historical identities to the land, which must be dealt with cautiously and carefully. It is necessary to use traditional architectural principles and technologies in harmony with nature and to establish an effective and compatible environmental ethic rooted in the values of that culture (De Burca, 2024).

If Iran is to pursue a sustainable and socially cohesive future, it is imperative to mobilize both traditional ecological knowledge and the innovative practices articulated by contemporary artists. The traditional water

management systems of Iran, e.g., the intricate *qanat system* of the pre-industrial era, are the solutions to the water scarcity of the region (Karagiannis, 2024). The fundamentals of unity, the dominance of nature's law, and order through wholeness, as embedded in the deep religious and philosophical conventions of Iran, constitute the very soul of a new and real environmental ethic with vitality and energy (Jomehpour, 2023). We already find modern-day Iranian artists totally committed to the redefinition of humanity-environment relationships, aiming at ways associated with harmony, sustainability, and equality through their multifaceted artistic activities, namely advocating themes of caring, intimacy, and profound interconnection (Maktabi, 2012).

The harmonisation of nature and culture in Iran can be achieved by melding traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific and technological innovations, the reduction of environmental illiteracy, and popularising comprehensive environmental education projects, facilitating the practice of environmentally aware art that assumes the responsibility for the environment and strongly recognises and accepts the deep connection between human society and nature (Jomehpour, 2023).

## 9. CONCLUSION

In Iran, art, ecology, resistance, and cultural heritage form a deeply interconnected network shaped by shifting socio-political and environmental conditions. Despite the crisis of repression by the authoritarian government and the challenges posed by geopolitics, artists and the communities of Iran, with their art, are still showing a lot of courage to use it as a powerful tool for social critique and the expression of discontent and environmental awareness. It is through cultural heritage that resilience is nurtured and sustained, as it conveys enduring values and shared stories to face the current disaster. The transition to collective engagement and digital usage, specifically among the young generation, is a signal of global consciousness and commitment to the prospects of change.

A significant shift in the relationship between humans and nature, which transcends mere exploitation and fosters mutual care, is crucial for the continued survival of both ecological and cultural aspects in Iran. Such a turnaround is obviously visible through the numerous projects that have been referred to in this paper. The non-profitable environmental projects such as the "Tehran Monoxide Project," along with international festivals, are a demonstration of

citizen initiatives to deal with issues of pollution and climate change, thus turning public spaces into areas of participation. The contribution of visual artists such as Ahmad Nadalian, whose “River Art” venture reintegrates the old Persian signs into nature, has the effect of reviving the people’s connection with the earth. Lastly, the application of digital technology for conservation, as in the case of the “Simurgh Nameh” platform, has the effect of broadening access to Iranian cultural heritage, which, in turn, promotes a feeling of a common national identity and ensures continuity during times of physical and political vulnerability. The promotion of this culture of mutual care, closeness, and interconnectedness is the way Iran can strive towards a sustainable future, where not only the natural world but also the cultural continuity are safeguarded.

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# WOUND, WRITHE, WITCH

Ecofeminisms and Dance  
to Re-enchant My Body

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## ABSTRACT

This essay unfolds as an eco-somatic-feminist autoethnography through three interwoven movements: WOUND, WRITHE, and WITCH. It traces how centuries of patriarchy, colonisation, and capitalist systems have fragmented, silenced, and exploited both women's bodies and the body of nature. WOUND attends to intimate and collective symptoms of exhaustion and disconnection. WRITHE enacts gestures of disobedience and reconnection through somatic practices, rituals, and micropolitical movements that restore sensitivity and belonging. WITCH invokes a figure of embodied knowledge, resistance, and creation – a body that feels, thinks, and acts in a pulse of desire, entangled in the cycle of the Earth. It interlaces personal narrative, embodied writing, and theoretical reflection, drawing on feminist perspectives (Maria Mies, Silvia Federici, Hélène Cixous) while learning from Latin American and erased epistemologies (Danilo Patzdorf, Suely Rolnik, Morena Cardoso, Ailton Krenak). Rather than presenting fixed hypotheses, it performs writing as embodied inquiry, the body as source of knowledge sovereignty, and witchcraft as a practice of re-enchantment and reweaving bonds with a world in becoming.

**Keywords:** Body; Movement; Ecofeminism; Witch.

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This essay unfolds in three movements – WOUND, WRITHE, WITCH – in a form of eco-somatic-feminist writing and sensibility. It traces a passage from recognising bodily and cultural symptoms, through their visceral contortions, to the emergence of a fully activated subject of knowledge.

The body as an object of investigation must be perceived as more than a passive object: it is a living, pulsating entity, a body that inhabits and moves through natural and cultural places of desire. This essay traces a trajectory from diagnosis to embodied gestures, and finally to the body's full activation as a knowing and feeling subject – a territory with epistemic authority where feeling and thought are inseparable. Rather than a conventional research article with hypothesis and methodology, this essay assumes an eco-somatic-feminist form of inquiry, interweaving personal narrative, theoretical reflection, and embodied writing.

Each writing movement translates a different dimension of this process, which are in fact entangled like a web woven in sensitive articulation with life movement and cycles. WOUND analyses intimate and collective causes of distress and pain, reading the body's tensions and closures like a diagnosis, while also perceiving the whispers of desire, memory, and possibility. WRITHE enacts gestures of disobedience and reconnection, allowing the body to respond, twist, and reweave its bonds with itself, others, and the more-than-human world. WITCH manifests the body as subject, creator, and agent of transformation: not a static object of study, but a pulsating, dreaming, moving presence, fully engaged in sensing, thinking, and composing within the world.

## **1. THE WOUND: FROM DISENCHANTMENT TO EXHAUSTION**

Feeling the WOUND is the first movement. It opens the essay's embodied inquiry, introducing the symptoms and causes of the contemporary body, consumed, exhausted, and immersed in a deep crisis of sensitivity. This wound has been anaesthetised and medicalised. It is shaped by individualistic logics of well-being and outsourced consumption and by the rupture of natural, cultural, and spiritual bonds between all living beings for a shared and good life. As Danilo Patzdorf aptly asks "How to rest the restless?" (2022, pp. 95-97); collective and individual bodies find themselves now in a state where food, sleep, or entertainment no longer provide healing.

To recognise the wound, we must sound the body, auscultating from within. Somatic signals then appear, embodying unrest, tension, and closures

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– but also spaces of possibility, desire, balance, and pleasure. Today, I consider it ethically impossible to talk about the body without a profound implication of the self in this writing process, for an embodied experience of writing itself. As Hélène Cixous (1976, p. 888) said “for once she blazes *her* trail in the symbolic, she cannot fail to make of it the *chaosmos* of the ‘personal’ – in her pronouns, nouns and her clique of referents.” Along with Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Michèle Montrelay, Cixous belongs to this post-structuralist and linguistic French feminism. This approach uses feminine writing to overcome “phallogocentrism”: a patriarchal model that privileges logos (reason, word) and the phallus (the masculine principle) as ultimate judges of truth, shaping symbolic expressions and social authority (Macedo & Amaral, 2005, pp. 64-65).

To this principle, we can add anthropocentrism and egocentrism, as articulated by the psychoanalyst and thinker Suely Rolnik, who expands the critique into what she calls “anthropo-phallo-ego-logocentrism” – a reactive politics of thought, governed by the colonial-capitalist unconscious, which reduces the subject as a living entity (2019, p. 92). This formulation resonates not only with decolonial perspectives but also with ecocriticism, as it exposes the entanglement of patriarchal, anthropocentric, and egocentric logics that sever the subject from both collective and more-than-human life.

After a period during my master’s (Xavier, 2011), in which I studied the relationship between the body in the arts and the arts in the body, I tentatively felt my way through that inquiry, which created a gap between theory and embodied experience. Years working as a cultural agent later made me realise how deeply disconnected I had become from listening to my own woman-body. On one hand, my context and point of view were shaped by authors contributing to a historiography of the body, from classical Greek antiquity to the late twentieth century. This Westernised tradition, dominated by white, privileged men, established rationalism, mechanistic science, and binary reductionism. These structures continue to shape cultural, educational, social, political, economic, and ethical spheres, while also capturing sensory, psycho-emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. The power perspective has long neglected other views that were marginalised or rendered invisible that are now reclaiming their rightful place. Within the scope of feminist authors, I claim to ground a *herstory*, a neologism coined by Robin Morgan in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (1970) which has been used to overcome a *history*, ill-spoken by hegemonic discourse, aiming to rewrite it from the perspective of women.

On the other hand, in everyday life, I felt numb and disconnected, as if my woman-body had been anaesthetised, distant from its own voice. In the

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<sup>32</sup> The notion of a “place of speech” refers to the idea that the legitimacy and authority of one’s voice are shaped by social position and power structures. It originates with Gayatri Spivak (*Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 1988), questioning whether marginalised voices can be heard, and is adopted in Afro-Brazilian feminism by Djamila Ribeiro (*Lugar de fala*, 2017), emphasising ethical recognition of speakers’ positions.

larger cultural institution where I worked, which fortunately had solid funding, the artistic works we presented – though increasingly critical of the patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems that sustain us – had little impact on my own life. My experience was stifled by the fear of failure, and by the insecurity of not belonging or knowing where or how to speak: from which voice, from which position, from which “place of speech”.<sup>32</sup>

Any tool outside the regime of work initially served merely as an escape. I came to see this as a symptom of neoliberal perversion: life was being neatly compartmentalised into functional fragments, separating labour from free time. In search of reconnection, I explored movement classes, yoga, somatic tools, breathwork immersions, retreats, and other trainings that I now call as strategies of witchcraft. These practices restored mental rest and redirected my attention to the body, fostering a sensitive, present awareness in potency. By “strategies of witchcraft” I mean practices that cultivate the body as a site of feminist, artisanal, pluriversal epistemology – recognising the body as a territory of authority and attuning to nature as a guide.

Exhausted by neoliberal capitalism, which suppresses boredom, emptiness, and rest, privileged urban bodies are filled with illusions of small powers and fleeting pleasures. These feed larger appetites while promoting individualism, utilitarianism, and ceaseless productivity. Byung-Chul Han (2014) offers insight into this shift: from Foucault’s disciplinary society, where control relied on negativity and obedience, to a society of exhaustion, where power is driven by the positivity of endless doing, urging us constantly to push beyond our limits – the *yes, you can!* mentality we now impose on ourselves.

It is therefore unsurprising that coaches, spiritual guides, and self-proclaimed healers proliferate across social media, offering promises of healing that often reflect the very systems they claim to resist. These practices – commercialised spiritualities and appropriated rituals, stripped of ancestral memory and severed from political and geographical roots – are co-opted by the capitalist system. Gestures are rebranded as commodities, floating, detached, soothing or empowering, yet devoid of critical awareness.

The term “somatopolitics” – or the reduction of the body to a set of functional parts – was developed by the Brazilian body artist and researcher Danilo Patzdorf (2022), who highlights the shaping of the body as machine and the resulting sensibility crisis in capitalist modernity. A somatopolitical landscape unfolds in distinct historical phases. Up until the 18th century, colonisation and genocide of Indigenous peoples and their cosmologies marked the beginning of a process of disenchantment, severing ties with the other and with nature

as a shared, interdependent territory. During the industrial era workers were moulded to serve economic productivity, relocated to cities, and increasingly alienated from the full process of production, generating value that was never theirs to keep. Today, we inhabit the phase of financialisation, which began in the 20th century and has intensified since. Rather than disciplining bodies externally, this phase works through internalised strategies of exhaustion, self-monitoring, and self-exploitation. If earlier resistance took the form of collective struggle, the neoliberal model turns that aggression inward: “it doesn’t turn the exploited into revolutionaries, but into depressives.”

In Patzdorf’s view, one must place the role of patriarchy at the root of humanity’s arrogance towards nature: a war against its autonomy, which authors like Silvia Federici (2020) and Maria Mies have identified as essential to the process of primitive accumulation and the establishment of the capitalist regime:

Just as it happened with witches, in order for rationality, science, technology, and modern economics to be established, all wild, untamed, magical thinking that considered the past had to be violently eliminated. Today, it is no different: violence is necessary to ‘civilise,’ ‘improve’ the ‘underdeveloped world’ and ‘wild nature.’ Violence is still, therefore, the secret of modern capitalist-patriarchal civilisation. (Mies, 2014, p. 34, my translation)

These intimate and historical violences reverberate. My body closed itself in pain.

From an ecofeminist perspective, a clear parallel can be drawn between women’s bodies and nature. Both have been historically violated and subjugated by patriarchal and capitalist forces. The fragmentation and control of the body reflect the systemic exploitation of the natural world – both reduced to resources to be managed, extracted, and dominated. This connection became central to ecofeminist thought in the 1970s, emerging alongside the environmental movement during the Cold War and the rise of nuclear armament. Françoise d’Eaubonne first coined the term in her 1972 work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, but it was in the 1990s that ecofeminist debate deepened and diversified. However, by the early 2000s the term had fallen out of favour in some academic and activist circles, partly due to critiques of essentialism directed at certain radical strands of the movement. Despite this, ecofeminism has experienced a powerful resurgence in recent years, revitalised by contemporary struggles for

climate justice, decolonial thinking, and intersectional feminism, which reaffirm its relevance in addressing the complex entanglements of gender, ecology, and systemic violence.

In both cases, domination is exercised through logics of commodification and dispossession: women's bodies – especially racialised, enslaved, or non-normative bodies – are objectified and exploited, while nature is transformed into a marketable asset, stripped of its cycles and limits in favour of endless growth. Ecofeminism challenges this shared history of violence, calling for a reimagining of our relationship to the Earth and to one another, grounded in care, diversity, and reciprocity.

It is interesting to consider the diversity of nature's body when discussing the woman's body. Because since my/our body is also part of nature, it is naturally diverse. It is thus also curious to compare the standardisation imposed by monocultures with the standardisation of cisgender norms on bio-diversity. An interesting author in this context is Asmae Ourkiya, who finds in queer ecofeminism a new lens for studying the relationship between climate justice and social justice, deepening her anti-essentialist work. According to Ourkiya (2020).

if you are a white, cisgender, straight male there is a high chance you are on top of that pyramid. This pyramid defines a person's rights, freedom of movement, and access to resources. This translates into how natural spaces are accessed and exploited. (...) Those that exploit nature for profit assume nature to be heteronormative.

Following thinkers like Greta Gaard and Catriona Sandilands, Ourkiya calls for an ecofeminism that breaks with essentialist ideas of womanhood, normativity, and racial hierarchy. In a world where far-right politics increasingly endanger vulnerable communities, she argues for a queer re-reading of ecofeminism – one that challenges the idealisation of gender roles and the myths that sustain neo-nationalist ideologies. We all desire and have the right to be in a body that belongs to this common home, now in collapse, within this *oikos*, which means *home* in Greek, the root of the word *ecology*.

As nature was fragmented through private property and monoculture, so too was the body – divided, automated, medicalised, patched up, or discarded. This fragmentation reflects not only geopolitical interests that divide natural territories and organise cities but also the choreography of human movement, confined within these boundaries. The body, fragile and mortal, seeks to extend

its youth beyond its natural limits, pushing against the borders of both territory and self, in a futile attempt to defy the very fragility and mortality that defines it.

Women's bodies were colonised like property or territory. The objectification of the body in scientific study, exemplified by Foucault's *biopolitics*, dehumanises and de-sensualises the individual. This disembodiment is echoed in colonial practices that saw the bodies of enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples treated as subjects of scientific inquiry and exploitation. In the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon, often called the father of modern science, argued that both the body and nature should be subjugated for domination and improvement. As ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant critiques, Bacon used imagery from witch hunts to describe his scientific method as power:

the interrogation of witches as symbol of the interrogation of nature, the courtroom as model for its inquisition, and torture through mechanical devices as a tool of the subjugation of disorder" were the tools to harass nature because, as he said, "a man should have no scruples about entering and penetrating these holes and corners when the inquiry into truth is his aim. (Merchant, 1988, p. 172)

Another example is the case of Black women in Alabama, whose bodies were viewed as territories for analysis and subjected to painful experiments at the hands of white male doctors who violated their bodies in the name of science in the belief that these bodies were more resistant. This mentality saw Marion Sims develop seventy medical instruments and become a founding father of modern gynaecology. Under this medical examination, parts of the female body were ascribed functions and names by men: the Bartholin and Skene glands, the Fallopian tubes.

The human presumption of superiority over other species, and the desire to control ecosystems, often hides behind empty buzzwords like *sustainability*, frequently used in political and corporate discourse. To speak of *planetary sustainability* is misleading – the planet has its own rhythms and regenerative capacities. What is truly at stake is the sustainability of human life, as Yayo Herrero points out. According to Herrero, we must recognise ourselves as ecodependent and also as interdependent beings, living in fragile bodies that require care. The point is not to "save the planet," but to restructure society in a way that allows human lives to thrive with dignity. This requires placing care – for bodies, relationships, and territories – at the centre, acknowledging that no life sustains itself alone. As she states: "we must speak of the sustainability of

life: of the possibility for human lives to persist over time. Not just any life, but a life worth living, enjoyable, meaningful” (2019).

In other hand, Mies (1998, pp. 22-23) also make an important critique of cultural relativism, which considers all cultures equally valid. This view can justify practices, such as dowries or female genital mutilation, simply because they are seen as legitimate cultural expressions. This relativism impedes dialogue and the construction of alternatives to this violence and exploitation. Instead of accepting it, it is necessary to seek the diversities and interconnections between cultures to promote real change.

The paradox is a wound that neither opens nor heals. Perhaps only the movement of creation can take care of our pain, reconnect what with it is essential, to heal what remains. My body writhes.

## **2. THE WRITHE: GESTURES OF DISOBEDIENCE AND REUNION**

The second movement, WRITHE, evokes a visceral contortion, reaction to discomfort and pain. Grounded in ecofeminist thought, I research acts of disobedience against the neoliberal capitalist patriarchy. The body’s revolt becomes an opening to vital reconnection and reintegration with nature, resisting systemic fragmentation. Writhing should appear, be noticed, be registered, be written, as Cixous (1974, pp. 886-887) also stated:

More body, hence more writing. For a long time it has been in body that women have responded to persecution, to the familial-conjugal enterprise of domestication, to the repeated attempts at castrating them. Those who have turned their tongues 10,000 times seven times before not speaking are either dead from it or more familiar with their tongues and their mouths than anyone else. (...) If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this “within,” to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.

Through my personal journey, I have come to two main realisations: yes, my work was always *about* the body, but not *from* the body. It was the body in my

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<sup>33</sup> The concept and practice of *sentipensar* also resonates the work of AND Lab, led by Fernanda Eugénio, which develops MO\_AND, a methodology for ethical-aesthetic, somatic-political, and experiential investigation of relations and reciprocity, grounded in the commitment to “repair the irreparable.” Activities span research-creation, transmission, and care, transforming concepts into practical, situated tools.

head! From the legitimacy of my own intimate history, and in a very intuitive way, I began to feel a deeper connection to nature. We are animals, mammals, but also rational, emotional, and spiritual beings. Recognising myself as being intertwined and embodied with animistic nature, I understand that there is no *going to nature* as a refuge, for nature is us. I/we are nature – interdependent, relational, and cyclical. I have included somatic practices in my research, beyond reading, such as small rituals, movement practices, meditations, and automatic writing and somatic residencies.

Knowledge becomes integrative and relational, a *sentipensar* (*thinking-feeling*) episteme. The concept of *sentipensar* emerged in the 1970s in the oral practices of Afro-Colombian fishing communities, who spoke of *thinking with the heart*. Later, Fals Borda adopted and integrated it into his Participatory Action Research methodology.<sup>33</sup> The term was consolidated in print only later, in *Una sociología sentipensante para América Latina* (2009), an anthology organised by Víctor Manuel Moncayo. In this framework, thinking and feeling appear as inseparable in the weaving of relationships with the world. Knowledge becomes integrative and relational, surpassing the dualisms that have shaped Western white thought.

Recognising the body as cyclical, I observe menstruation not as a handicap but as a vital, living signal. Its hormonal rhythms, emotional fluctuations, and sexual power resist the constraints of language, yet carry essential knowledge of health and embodiment – a form of bodily and sexual literacy too often neglected, obscured by what Lemos (2021) calls the “menstrual paradox.” While Beauvoir (1970) frames the cyclical body as a prison – “the woman, like the man, is her body, but her body is not her, it is something else” (p. 49) – I diverge: I experience the cycle as force, form, and affection, a rhythm that links me to the earth, the cosmos, and more-than-human life.

I am a woman, therefore oppressed. I am white, therefore privileged. I live in a colonising, war-free country. I am a researcher; I write from and about the body. I am an ecofeminist.



Fig. 1 - *Cocoon*  
(2024). © Odoya  
Photography

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In *Ecofeminism* (1998), originally published in 1993, Vandana Shiva, a theoretical physicist and activist in the environmental movement, and Maria Mies, a social scientist and feminist activist, come together to critically analyse the global system, observing it from the perspectives of the exploited peoples and the nature of the Global South. The authors propose alternative global processes that are becoming increasingly invisible, functioning as forms of resistance to the dominant power, “which interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality” (p.10). Mies and Shiva (1998) suggest the recovery of ancestral practices and the strengthening of local communities, which render ecofeminism “a new term for an ancient knowledge” in this effort to “re-weave the world” (Diamond & Orenstein as cited in Mies & Shiva, 1998, p. 15), reflecting the need to restore healthy relationships between humans and the natural world and to “heal wounds” (Plant, as cited in Mies & Shiva, 1998, p. 15).

It is about proposing a new cosmology and holistic anthropology, recognising that life in nature, including human beings, is sustained through cooperation, care, and love. Only in this way will it be possible to respect and preserve the diversity of all forms of life and their cultural expressions, recognising them as true sources of happiness.

And move, move, move against the anaesthesia of the sensitive, against the metaphysical catastrophe, against the blocking of symbolic and spiritual forces of knowledge, action, and dreams that once animated cosmic self and other bodies and self and other natures. Movements that are acts of disobedience in both a political and performative or somatic practices. As paradigmatic examples, the Chipko Movement, founded by Gaura Devi in India

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in the 1970s, where women literally hugged trees to protect them from loggers. The action spread across India and caught the attention of the United Nations. Or even the Green Belt Movement, founded by Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (2004), that embraces the idea of tree planting, a grassroots environmental and women's empowerment initiative that combats deforestation while promoting social justice and community resilience.

Similarly, figures like Diane Wilson, a fisherwoman from Texas, embody the fusion of ecofeminism and embodied resistance. Through her activism against plastic pollution and her founding of feminist groups dedicated to the interconnection of water, the ocean, and the body, Wilson exemplifies how ecological concerns and bodily experiences are intimately linked.

In other fields, these principles manifest in the work of therapists like Morena Cardoso, a nomad exploring ancestral cultures who founded *Danza Medicina* in Brazil – a project she describes as a clinical-political tool. Her approach is empirical, much like the witch's, rooted in dance practices that centre on four main pillars: educational, therapeutic, deep ecological, and anthropological. She organises retreats and courses to foster reflection, somatic awareness, and creative sharing among women, while remaining critical of the commercialisation of the sacred feminine.

To deepen her therapeutic care for both the woman's body and the body of the earth, Cardoso pursued a master's in clinical psychology under the guidance of Rolnik. This was not for validation, but, as she puts it, "to build bridges, to temper the pasteurized and dried-out institutions with the bittersweetness of cervical mucus" (2023).



**Fig. 2** - Danza Medicina Immersion Retreat in Algarve, Portugal. (2023)  
© Teresa Pacheco Miranda

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Her personal story intertwines with her research, grounded in sensitivity. These bodies do not create alternative choreographies; rather, they inhabit fissured spaces and rehearse gestures of disobedience and womanhoods – their wounds and metamorphoses: “The blood flowed when they told me that, finally, I was a master, Suely Rolnik said. Who would have thought... This doesn’t make me any less of a witch. But it makes it a bit harder if they want to throw me into the fire” (2023).

I start to feel myself as a witch in construction, attuning to cyclical, living pulses.

### **3. THE WITCH PRACTICES: MOVEMENT AND CREATION**

The final movement is a search to re-enchant the body. I strive to decant and nurture my fertile spaces through movement and rest, from political consciousness to intimate empathy, and through contemplative attention to micropolitical gestures.

Within this scope, daily life acquires ritualised moments of body awareness. I awaken vital energy through multiple techniques – from handcrafts to introspective and meditative practices such as forest walks or breathwork. I access states of physical exhaustion and altered consciousness, opening space to the unexpected through ritual. Special attention is given to Celtiberian traditions of the Iberian Peninsula and syncretised Afro-Brazilian spiritualities from who my own ancestralism calls, while creating and engaging communities for sharing and care.

Sleep and dreams are allowed to occupy spaces of reflection, mirroring unconscious feelings and expectations, cultivating an intimate understanding of the body as a source of pleasure, joy, and sensitive awareness in deep respect with other more-than-human lives.

My body accompanies the cycles of birth and death in the surrounding nature, between action and pause, flourishing, maturation, and decay, reflecting the cycles of the Earth. In this cyclical care, I analyse what singularly needs to be nurtured to grow, and what needs to wilt and be released, perceiving the same for the micro and macro-collectives. I find in ecofeminism a theoretical shelf to restore sensitivity and a profound connection to the cosmos.

My body opens. My heart opens. My senses shine. I stand grounded on the earth, yet rise in a verticality that reaches comfortably toward the sky. A

continuous process of naming allows me to rupture structures that fragment the body, curating and cultivating gestures of sensitive care.

As Suely Rolnik writes, thinking and insurgency are inseparable when reactivated in an ethical mode of thought:

Thinking consists of *listening* to affects, to the effects that the forces of the surrounding atmosphere produce in the body, to the turbulences they provoke, and to the pulsation of larval worlds that, generated in this fertilisation, announce themselves to the living-knowledge; to *involve* oneself in the movement of deterritorialisation that such seeds of worlds unleash; and, guided by this listening and involvement, to *create* an expression for that which demands passage, so that it gains a concrete body. (2019, p. 91)<sup>34</sup>

Writing in my research is the incarnated movement. It twists words into counter-narratives and intimate disobediences, weaving relations between writing and dance, word and movement, creation and care. A spiral, metamorphic process of eternal becoming. Residencies of embodied writing, somatic movement retreats, and performance reviews become experimental territories where witchcraft manifests in daily gestures, work, and personal and institutional relationships.

In the face of the abyss of our global present, I inhabit the figure of the witch also to claim a subjective position in academic writing, a gesture that Mies already recognised as fundamental to prevent feminist studies from hardening into a “sterile femealogy” (1998, p. 61). Dance, in this context, becomes a radical, somatic practice for re-enchanting the body. As Morena Cardoso emphasises, “No resistance is possible without dance. Without dance, in sorcerous gestures, bones break” (2023, p. 171).<sup>35</sup> These gestures, and even their refusal, allow memories and impulses to overflow, sustaining the potency of what is yet unnamed, traversing the inexpressible dimensions of dance, the radicality of *(po)etics*, and the power of eroticism and love, shaping both art and life.

Historically, the witch has always been an artist of herself, and perhaps for that reason has been both persecuted and erased. Between the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, tens of thousands of women in Europe were brutally tortured and executed. In the colonies, Obeah women were accused of poisoning oppressors and inciting rebellions, as Irene Silverblatt notes: “Colonial gender ideologies turned women into witches – and Latin American

<sup>34</sup> My translation.

<sup>35</sup> My translation.

<sup>36</sup> My translation.

women turned witchcraft into a form of resistance” (1987, p. 171). Silvia Federici (2020) further demonstrates that the witch hunts were a deliberate war on women’s autonomy, crucial to the transition to capitalism and the control of reproductive labour. What was suppressed was not just magic but an entire repertoire of embodied knowledge and communal power: women who practised contraception or abortion, who healed with herbs, tended animals, revered springs, stones, and trees, who embraced their sexuality, lived alone, were widowed or childless, elderly, or outspoken – all framed as threats to the emerging order and punished for their refusal to conform. The witch, then, is not only a metaphor but a memory of a body that resisted, and a call to reawaken what was burned.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, drawing on phenomenology and performance theory, distinguishes between “having a body” and “being a body.” In performance, she argues, this oscillation reveals the body not merely as material but as a living, affective presence. In autoethnographic writing methodology like mine, the researcher’s body can similarly perform not as a medium for representation, but as a site of transformation and meaning-making: “The body of the performer ceases to be a medium for representing something else and becomes itself the site and source of meaning” (2008, p. 95). “We must stop developing and start involving ourselves” (2020, p. 7), states Ailton Krenak. The art of the body can invent something beyond the “religion of civilisation” which, as he writes, “may change the repertoire, but repeats the choreography: a heavy stamping on the earth” (2020, p. 55).<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately, this is an essay. I do not offer fixed answers, nor final choreographies for these movements, or precise words for these *thinking-feelings*. I am a witch-in-training, essaying gestures and micropolitics. In contrast to civilisation’s “heavy stamping” on the earth, I choose gentle touches, resonant with human and more-than-human life, tracing paths of re-enchantment. As Isadora Duncan whispers across time: *You were once wild. Don’t let them tame you!*

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# REMAINING BODY(IES)

Deterioration as Method –  
Ruin, Necropolitics and Care  
in Contemporary Practice

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## ABSTRACT

*Remaining Body(ies)* examines deterioration-as-method in contemporary art, positioning ruination, decomposition, and fragility not as failure but as a procedural method. The focus of this article is to understand the dimension of necropower. Drawing on my own artistic production and through case studies of Mathieu Pernot, Teresa Margolles, and Urs Fischer, alongside two of my practice-led works (*Mãos Vanitas* and *Amor en Llamas*), the article argues that deterioration structures artistic production, reception, and conservation, while simultaneously intervening in the necropolitical dynamics of visibility and erasure. The study defines the ruin-body as a material and figurative configuration where decay becomes testimony and care. Case studies show how destructive gestures (combustion, oxidation, fragmentation, programmed collapse) function as designed processes, reframing disappearance as resistance and memory. Conservation theory is mobilised to demonstrate how protocols of acceptable change and documentation align with artistic intent, challenging the modern obsession with preservation and optimisation. Methodologically, the article integrates comparative analysis with auto-ethnographic reflection, proposing a four-part grid for deterioration-as-method: material programme, temporal script, ethical horizon, and conservation protocol. Conceptually, it advances the ruin-body as a category that unites aesthetics, politics, and conservation. The conclusion argues that by affirming impermanence, artists reposition vulnerability as a site of resistance, memory, and ethical care in contemporary practice.

**Keywords:** Ruin-body; Deterioration-as-method; Necropolitics; Conservation; Impermanence.

## 1. ART, DECAY, AND THE BODY: DETERIORATION-AS-METHOD

Death is inevitable, an integral part of human experience, but it can also be used as a form of control over individuals and groups. Extermination may serve as a justification for ideological projects. For Mbembe (2003), necropower dictates who may be exposed to death, who must live under conditions of mere survival, and who is abandoned to violence and precariousness.

The presence of unwanted bodies can be neutralised, excluded, erased, or even eliminated according to discourses that legitimise such actions. Their protection is not guaranteed, and stigmatisation generates enmity. These processes occur both in totalitarian regimes and in democracies, not only on a large scale but also in everyday life, through practices of exclusion, racism, homophobia, and surveillance. They involve economic dependency, instability, and mechanisms of control that place people in contexts where life becomes a struggle against death, and where dehumanisation often outweighs humanisation. In such conditions, the opportunities to live and to die are distributed in profoundly unequal ways.

Contemporary power therefore does not merely manage life, as in Foucault's notion of biopower, but decides who may live and who must die. States and economic systems not only benefit from these processes of selection but also reproduce inequality and precariousness through governance. Precarity in health, education, and labour drives bodies toward exhaustion, fatigue, and slow death, an insidious expression of contemporary necropolitics.

Exposure to death and precariousness, characteristic of necropower, reveals the material vulnerability of bodies and the spaces they inhabit, reflected in contemporary crises and unequal access to healthcare. These conditions show how certain bodies live under constant threat and in situations of limited survival, transforming precariousness into a method of governance. As in contemporary art, deterioration is not a celebration of death but a method that explores the resistance of bodies and materials that wear down or fragment. This focus on the ongoing struggle for survival establishes a bridge between political reflection on life and death and artistic practices that materialise this vulnerability.

This tension between vulnerability and resistance is echoed in contemporary artistic practices. We live amid a paradox: while techno-cultures promise optimisation and longevity, daily crises expose the fragility of bodies and spaces. Contemporary artistic practice not only represents this contradiction

but materialises it. Works that burn, oxidise, fragment, or collapse bring deterioration to the centre of form-making. This article argues that deterioration functions not as motif but as method, one that structures artistic production, reception, and conservation. Here emerges the guiding question: How does the ruin-body challenge optimisation logic?

My artistic practice is shaped by my condition as a person with type 1 diabetes. Since the onset of the disease, I have been confronted with medical advances in terms of medication and diabetes management devices. I have also observed how access to these resources has been gradually achieved over time. Although I currently have free access to insulin and an insulin pump, I recognise that access to technologies that empower people and improve quality of life is unequal, depending on individual economic conditions. Furthermore, each country, through its policies and social protection systems, provides different levels of support that can both promote the body's quality of life and influence its deterioration due to complications associated with this chronic disease.

Living with type 1 diabetes allows for the observation, on an individual scale, of the dynamics of vulnerability and inequality that Mbembe describes as necropower. Just as certain bodies are exposed to slow death and structural precariousness, the daily management of diabetes imposes constant vigilance, physical wear, and dependence on medical technologies, access to which varies according to economic conditions and social protection policies. The way the body is subjected to these conditions thus reflects a micro-scale of unequal exposure to life and death, highlighting how the struggle for survival is not only a biological issue but also a political one, traversed by systems that structure opportunities, autonomy, and quality of life.

I define *deterioration-as-method* through a four-part grid: (i) material programme (combustion, oxidation, fragmentation, programmed loss); (ii) temporal script (anticipated phases of change and thresholds of identity); (iii) ethical horizon (whose fragility is made visible, and how harm is avoided); and (iv) conservation protocol (acceptable loss, refabrication limits, and documentation practices). Read in this way, deterioration becomes a designed strategy that contests necropolitical erasure (Mbembe, 2003), foregrounds impermanence, and repositions vulnerability as care.

This inquiry proceeds comparatively, analysing works by Mathieu Pernot, Teresa Margolles, and Urs Fischer alongside two of my own projects (*Mãos Vanitas and Amor en Llamas*). The selection follows four criteria: (1) explicit engagement with material transformation; (2) connection to social

disappearance or erasure; (3) documented process and intent; and (4) relevance to conservation debates on variable media and programmed change (Hölling, 2017; Laurenson, 2006; van Saaze, 2013).

The objectives are threefold: (1) to specify how destructive processes function as method, not motif; (2) to show how such methods reframe bodies and spaces targeted by erasure; and (3) to argue for deterioration as an ethics of temporal care within practice and display. In pursuing these aims, the article proposes the *ruin-body* as a conceptual category that unites aesthetics, politics, and conservation, positioning deterioration as both testimony and resistance. *Ruin-body* is thus a material/figurative configuration where bodily finitude and material decay are inseparable and legible as form.

Following Mbembe, necropolitics names modern regimes that not only govern life but also allocate exposure to death and invisibility. In art, deterioration-as-method counters that logic: instead of concealing fragility, it makes residue, breakage, and loss materially legible as testimony.

## CASE SCOPE AND COMPARANDA

The cases of Salcedo, Attia, Parker, and Villar Rojas help delineate the contours of what I term the *ruin-body*. In Salcedo, the suturing of torn materials operates as a gesture of repair and mourning, where violence is acknowledged but partially closed. Attia proposes an aesthetic of the wound, affirming that every repair leaves a scar that becomes a visible memory of fracture. Parker, by contrast, crystallises the instant of an explosion, suspending violence in a single moment, while Villar Rojas embraces the continuous entropy of his installations, conceived from the outset as bodies destined for exhaustion. In contrast, Pernot, Margolles, and Fischer radicalise the processual dimension of deterioration: there is no repair or freezing, but rather a prolonged inscription of collapse as method. This distinction renders the notion of the *ruin-body* less allegorical and more operative, anchored in material protocols of wear and transformation. This sharper distinction not only maps divergent aesthetics of destruction; it also clarifies how conservation must respond differently to repair, suspension, entropy, and programmed collapse.

## 2. NECROPOLITICS, RUIN, AND AESTHETICS OF DESTRUCTION

If the introduction defined deterioration as method, this section situates its political horizon. Achille Mbembe (2003) has described necropolitics as the modern capacity to govern not only who may live and who must die, but also whose lives are rendered disposable, invisible, or ungrievable. This regime does not operate only through violence but also through concealment and neglect, determining which bodies are allowed to remain visible and which are erased from collective memory.

Such dynamics are sharpened in late modernity by cultures of optimisation. Across history, societies sought to delay or ritualise decline through philosophy, medicine, or religion, but today the struggle is technologically intensified. The body is increasingly treated as a machine to be repaired, controlled, and enhanced. Biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, diets, surgeries, and biohacking renew the ancient dream of immortality, while illness, ageing, and death are hidden away, medicalised, or fought as enemies to be conquered. In this context, health, productivity, and performance harden into moral imperatives. Bodies that fail to meet these ideals, fragile, ageing, or unproductive, disrupt the dominant values of youth and efficiency. They are pushed to the margins, confined to hospitals, care homes, and other institutions where they become invisible. Here, necropolitics manifests not only as the governance of life and death but also as the production of social death. The surplus body is tolerated but denied recognition, present yet unacknowledged.

Artistic practice can intervene in this field. By mobilising deterioration, fragmentation, and ephemerality, artists invert necropolitical logic. Processes such as burning, grinding, oxidation, or programmed collapse do not reproduce violence but render its conditions visible. Fragility, residue, and absence become testimony. What power conceals, art materialises. This is the horizon in which the concept of the *ruin-body* emerges: a figure where deterioration functions not as accident but as method, staging visibility for what necropolitics would otherwise discard.

To understand this figure, ruin must be reframed not simply as archaeological remainder but as operative field where time, body, and power converge. Ruin is simultaneously matter and metaphor: destruction and reinscription, absence and persistence. By staging deterioration, artists transform fragments into language, memory, and resistance, reinscribing into the present what dominant powers seek to erase. This logic resonates with

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natural cycles. Slash-and-burn agriculture, for example, destroys vegetation to regenerate soil with ashes; destruction becomes a condition for renewal. Similarly, artistic ruination is not terminal but generative: oxidation, combustion, and fragmentation reorganise meaning rather than annihilating it.

This generative dimension has long been recognised. At the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS, London, 1966), Gustav Metzger defined *auto-destructive* art as corrosion and denunciation rather than erasure. Kristine Stiles (1987) argued that destructive gestures reveal new layers of meaning (pp. 22-31). Piero Manzoni's *Fiato d'Artista* (1961), sealing his breath in balloons destined to deflate, and Pier Paolo Calzolari's *Mangiafuoco* (1979), employing fire as activation rather than annihilation, extend this lineage. As John Boyd (2018) observed, creation often requires the dissolution of rigid structures so that novelty can emerge. Applied to aesthetics, destruction becomes not negation but a condition of invention, a procedural method rather than an accidental collapse (Mbembe, 2003, pp. 11-40). The analogy with natural cycles of destruction and regeneration, such as slash-and-burn agriculture (*Ecycle*, n.d.), finds an echo in artistic practices of combustion and deterioration.

This logic also resonates with urban and natural processes. As de Solà-Morales (1995/2002) observes in his notion of the *terrain vague*, abandoned and marginal spaces become fields of poetic and political potential, where destruction and regeneration coexist. Yet deterioration is not ethically neutral. When mobilised in contexts marked by war, violence, or loss, destructive aesthetics risk banality trauma or reducing suffering to spectacle. The challenge is to stage fragility without neutralising it, to mark absence without consuming it as image. A central risk is the anaesthetisation of violence, turning real suffering into a consumable image. Both artists and curators are aware of this trap. In Margolles's case, the ethics of presentation rely on strategies of formal sobriety: the raw materiality of blood or dust is displayed in minimal devices that refuse ornamentation or spectacle. Curatorial frameworks often accompany these works with contextual documentation, testimonies, or mediation protocols that emphasise their testimonial rather than purely aesthetic dimension. This aligns with Butler's warning that public mourning should sustain shared vulnerability rather than neutralise pain (Butler, 2006). In this sense, the ethics of deterioration in Margolles lies not only in the choice of materials but also in how the work is framed to uphold memory and responsibility rather than consumption or voyeurism. Here the *ruin-body* provides a productive tension: neither mourning as closure nor spectacle as consumption, but a practice of listening through matter. Fragments, residues, and scars become inscriptions of persistence,

refusing to let disappearance be total.

By attending to what has been marginalised, abandoned, or deemed remnant, Pernot proposes another narrative of ruin: not as end, but as site of resistance, care, and creation. Pernot is the first case study in this article because his work foregrounds architectural ruination tied to conflict and state neglect. As Didi-Huberman (2012) reminds us, images survive their own destruction: in them, the trace becomes a form of resistance. This perspective reinforces the idea that ruin, far from signifying an end, is also a mode of permanence in time. Where necropolitics produces abandonment and invisibility, Pernot renders those conditions legible. His ruins speak both of structural collapse and of the human bodies once sheltered there. In this sense, his practice crystallises how the *ruin-body* operates at the intersection of politics, memory, and matter, offering a concrete entry point into the aesthetics of deterioration.

At this threshold between destruction and reinscription, Mathieu Pernot's work becomes exemplary. If the previous section established the political horizon of deterioration-as-method, Pernot shows how this counter-protocol unfolds in images and materials, rendering abandonment legible and absence visible. His photographs and installations approach ruins not merely as material remnants but as bodies of memory, where disappearance and fragility reveal new layers of existence.

### **3. TESTIMONIES OF ABSENCE AND RESISTANCE: MATHIEU PERNOT AND THE RUIN-BODY**

Applying the proposed methodological grid: (i) material programme: architectural ruins, fragments, rubble; (ii) temporal script: gradual collapse, suspended between sudden destruction and slow erosion; (iii) ethical horizon: making the fragility of erased lives visible; (iv) conservation protocol: photography functions not as restoration but as inscription, allowing ruin to remain in process. This framework demonstrates how deterioration is not simply an effect but a designed and documented method.

If deterioration-as-method counters necropolitical erasure in theory, Pernot demonstrates it in practice. His photographs and installations show how architectural ruination can operate as a material programme that reveals the social disappearance of bodies, translating collapse into testimony where matter becomes proxy for absent lives.

Declined into vestiges, rubble, and remains, the ruin provides a multitude of signs, material traces to be questioned.

There is therefore an urgency to think about the ruin, and it is without doubt the role of the archaeologist and the artist to interpret it, to prolong its history which tends to fade or be denied: for these vestiges, whether humble or spectacular, speak of the people who are absent from them. (Jasmin & Norcia, 2024, p. 20)

This quote highlights how ruins, as fragments of the past, are not just physical leftovers, but carriers of meaning. They hold traces of lives, stories, and histories that risk being forgotten or erased. In this sense, both the archaeologist and the artist play a crucial role in giving voice to what remains. By engaging with ruins, artists can reflect on absence, memory, and loss, bringing attention to those who have been made invisible, whether by time, conflict, or systems of power. This act of interpreting ruins becomes a way of resisting forgetting, and of connecting the past to the present through artistic practice. When artists burn, grind, or let materials decay, they invert necropolitics' logic: instead of hiding fragile lives, they render fragility present as testimony.

In Mathieu Pernot's work, ruins take on a deep human dimension. Buildings collapse like exhausted bodies, their fractured walls resembling wounded skin, etched with cracks, scars, and the silent imprints of time, violence, and neglect. In *La ruina de su morada*, part of his *Documento/ Monumento* exhibition at Fundación MAPFRE in Madrid (2023), vulnerability extends beyond the visual, transforming into a political language, a gesture of resistance (Fundación MAPFRE, n.d.a, n.d.b). These are not mere relics of the past but spaces that continue to breathe, bearing witness to histories of suffering and survival.

Ruins in Pernot's images are not inert remnants; they are living matter imbued with ethical, emotional, and social tensions. Each fragment carries layered memories: the intimate traces of those who once inhabited these spaces, the scars of violence inflicted by war and exclusionary policies, and the enduring imprint of abandonment by the state and its institutions. Through these layers, the ruins become more than sites of loss, they emerge as silent testimonies that refuse erasure, urging us to confront the histories they hold.

Ruins are no longer just remnants of the distant past, like ancient temples or historic monuments, but have become part of our present reality. We now live surrounded by ruins of all kinds: from famous archaeological sites like Palmyra that were deliberately destroyed, to the everyday rubble left behind by war, displacement, environmental disasters, and social neglect.

In other words, the ruin is no longer just a symbol of what once was, it is

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a contemporary condition, present in many forms and linked to current political, social, and ecological crises. It invites us to see decay and destruction not only as historical, but as active and ongoing elements of our world today (Jasmin & Norcia, 2024, p. 20).

Through *Beirut* (2000, Figure 1) and *Palmyra* (2021, Figure 2), Pernot reflects on the tension between the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of ruin, revealing how destroyed spaces summon silenced narratives, challenge forgetting, and act as critical devices. His work explores the dialectic between memory, erosion, and the impact of time, constructing an aesthetic rooted in the marks of historical violence. Pernot transforms ruins into silent protagonists, fragmented witnesses of interrupted stories. His lens captures spaces corroded by decades of war, neglect, and oblivion, not to romanticise destruction, but to invite listening, and responsibility.



**Fig. 1** - Mathieu Pernot,  
*Beirut*, 2000. 55 x 55 cm.  
Dye injection copy mounted  
on aluminium. [Courtesy  
of the artist]. © *Mathieu  
Pernot*, Photographic  
reproduction by *Grécia  
Paola*, 2023



**Fig. 2** - Mathieu Pernot, *Palmyra*, 2021. [Courtesy of the artist]. © Mathieu Pernot  
Photographic reproduction by Grécia Paola, 2023

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Though human bodies are absent from the artist's images, their presence is not diminished but rendered more powerful. The traces of destruction become signs of resistance, fragility, and decay. The ruins gain a new "skin", marked by the accumulated wounds of time, conflict, and abandonment. The fragmented materiality of these spaces make reference to a war-torn past while also denouncing an ongoing present of violence and neglect. Every crack, pierced wall, or forgotten object preserves the memory of bodies that, though invisible, continue to symbolically inhabit these images. Torn architecture mimics wounded flesh; concrete and brick take on the traits of human trauma. Structural collapse goes beyond physical damage, inscribing vulnerability into the very fabric of space.

*Beirut* and *Palmyra* become wounded bodies that speak, surfaces where the absence of those who lived, suffered, and died reverberates. A shattered wall, a utensil left behind, a thick layer of dust: all become inscriptions of the passage of time and the violence that shaped it.

Pernot does not photograph to preserve what remains intact but to listen to what resists within that which is disintegrating. What we are shown are not dead landscapes but fields of presence, screaming absences, inscriptions of pain, layers of exclusion. Each space is a devastated dwelling, not only physically, but also in terms of its primary function: to shelter, welcome, and sustain life.

In *La ruina de su morada*, the ruin takes on a deeply bodily dimension. Buildings collapse like bodies; their walls, like skin, tear open; their voids

become open wounds. The exhibition inscribes a poetics of fragility that is not only aesthetic but deeply political. It is not about mourning what was lost but about making visible that which insists on remaining, even in fragments.

Far from being dead entities, ruins emerge as living organisms charged with ethical, historical, and emotional resonances. The aesthetic proposed by Pernot invites a gaze that does not consume but contemplates, one that does not aestheticise but listens. As in Pompeii, where objects remained frozen in the moment of catastrophe, here too the elements hold an unsettling stillness, suspending the instant of collapse.

The artist challenges us to read destruction not as an end but as a continuation of human experience. Ruins do not just tell the history of their structures; above all, they evoke the lives that once existed there. In so doing, they reveal that every ruin is also body-absent, vulnerable, but still inhabited by memory. The exhibition does not merely explore the aesthetics of destruction but its ethical depth, as an expression of power, exclusion, and collective wounding. The abandoned remnants summon the memory of violence: a gunshot, a fleeing body, silent objects covered in dust and marks.

The relationship between ruin and body is both symbolic and literal. The concept of the *ruin-body* draws an analogy between architectural degradation and human finitude. Just as structures collapse, so too do bodies fall ill, age, and exhaust themselves. Ruin is experienced in the flesh, in the bones, in silence. This reflection takes on existential and political dimensions when it confronts a society that rejects impermanence and manufactures ideals of immutable and optimised bodies.

The experience of pain, exhaustion, and loss, everything that is most deeply human, finds in art a space of visibility and dignity. In Pernot's work, this awareness is clear: ruins are not merely destroyed spaces, but absent bodies that continue to speak. They are fragments of stories that refuse to be forgotten.

Pernot photographs as one might listen to a wounded body. The image, in this context, becomes an act of listening, of memory, and of responsibility. Each photo attempts to reembody what has been discarded. This approach resonates with Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics: power no longer needs to kill directly, it simply lets die. It denies care, institutionalises forgetting, and naturalises exclusion.

These ruins speak. And what they say goes far beyond fallen stones: they speak of power, of absence, of those who lost their right to remain. Their memory is collective, political, and embodied, and remains alive in the matter that resists time and silence.

Compared to Salcedo's sutures of rent materials (repair as mourning), Pernot withholds repair to keep absence legible. Against Attia's aesthetics of repair, Margolles refuses closure, maintaining open traces (blood/fat/dust) as evidence. Where Parker crystallises a single explosive event, Fischer distributes authorship to time and viewers, allowing form to slump and melt. These contrasts sharpen how *ruin-body* is not metaphor alone but a procedural commitment to material change.

In this sense, Pernot makes ruins into social bodies: architectures that carry absence as testimony. Teresa Margolles pushes this logic further, from wounded buildings to wounded flesh by working with the forensic residues of actual bodies. Where Pernot listens to structures, Margolles listens to traces of life and death.

#### **4. TRACES AND FORENSICS: TERESA MARGOLLES AND DETERIORATION AS TESTIMONY**

In Margolles's case: (i) *material programme*: forensic residues of blood, fat, dust; (ii) temporal script: organic decay and oxidation as ongoing transformation; (iii) ethical horizon: confronting structural violence without neutralising trauma; (iv) conservation protocol: works resist stabilisation, emphasising documentation of process as identity.

If Pernot transforms architecture into a proxy for absent lives, Margolles radicalises deterioration-as-method by working with the residues of the body itself. Margolles's practice has been widely discussed in both academic and institutional contexts, as well as in the media. Recent curatorial records from James Cohan Gallery (n.d.), MAC Montréal, (n.d.) and MUAC UNAM (n.d.) document her international exhibitions, highlight the political and social reach of her work in denouncing violence and femicide. Trained in forensic medicine, she incorporates blood, fat, sweat, and dust not as symbols but as literal materials of testimony. Here, deterioration is not represented from a distance but made present through the forensic trace, where what has been discarded reappears as aesthetic and political evidence.

Here, the *ruin-body* takes on its most visceral form. Margolles mobilises bodily residues to confront structural violence: femicide, drug-related killings, and the precarisation of life across Latin America. Decay is not hidden or neutralised; it becomes a language of resistance. Each trace, whether soaked into fabric or dispersed as dust, marks the absent body while refusing its

erasure. In this way, Margolles extends the counter-protocol of deterioration: where necropolitics lets die and institutionalises forgetting, her works insist on memory, presence, and care through matter itself.

These materials, marked by oxidation, organic decay, and architectural ruins, challenge conventional aesthetics, demonstrating how deterioration itself can become a powerful conceptual and artistic tool. This notion of the *ruin-body* finds theoretical grounding in the reflections of thinkers such as Han (2016) and Cornado (2023), but it takes on a visceral presence in the artistic work of Teresa Margolles. While Han (2016) advocates for a body that resists the pressures of measured time through care and presence, Margolles restores memory and dignity to the dead body, often one that has been rendered invisible by social or political violence. In her work, decay becomes a form of resistance. Dried blood, decomposition, and fabric soaked in bodily residues serve as tangible markers of lived time, refusing erasure and compelling viewers to confront what is often ignored.

Cornado (2023), in turn, highlights the fragment as a key to understanding these artistic practices. The trace of an absent body, such as in Margolles's *La Huella* (2019), does not simply signal loss; it becomes an active presence, a rupture that resists forgetting. Rather than completing an image, the fragment expands its meaning. It insists that absence also speaks. The dismembered body is not less of a body; rather, it intensifies our awareness of both violence and memory, affirming that even in destruction, something endures.

#### **4.1 LA HUELLE: TRACES OF ABSENCE, VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE**

*La Huella* transforms the material traces of violence, blood, sweat, and fat into a visceral testimony of loss and resistance. The artwork depicts stories of violence, disappearance, and displacement along the Colombia–Venezuela border, a region marked by unrest, inequality, and neglect.

Teresa Margolles, trained in forensic medicine and with professional experience in morgues in Mexico City, incorporates the decomposing body into her artworks, using materials such as blood, fat, sweat, and other bodily fluids. These elements are not merely traces of the lost bodies' physical presence; they serve as a denunciation of the mechanisms of exclusion, marginalisation, and structural violence. Her work addresses contexts such as femicide, drug-related violence, and the precarisation of urban life. The dead and forgotten

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bodies become, through her artistic practice, both material and symbol of political and ethical denunciation.

The deep brown tone of the fabric in *La Huella* comes from the dried blood of a young Venezuelan man who was murdered. His blood does not merely recall his physical presence, it bears witness to the violence suffered by thousands of displaced individuals (Venezuelan migrants during their crossing). The remaining traces, sweat, fat, blood, evoke the Shroud of Turin, where bodily imprints become sacred traces of suffering. As Chevitarese, Direito and Justi (2023) note, crucifixion in ancient times was meant to erase bodies, discarding them in mass graves, stripping them of memory (Chevitarese *et al.*, 2023). Here, Margolles reverses that erasure.

During the autopsy, Margolles placed a cloth over the victim's body, allowing the blood to soak into the fabric. The cloth becomes a map, a document, a testimony. It evokes ancestral rituals, such as the use of shrouds to wrap the dead in a gesture of farewell and respect. But here, the shroud is also an act of denunciation: it registers both absence and presence, becoming an imprinted memory of a life cut short.

Mortality, in this context, is not merely a theme, it is a material. *La Huella* presents itself as visual evidence of suffering and resistance. Bodily residues mark surfaces, the boundaries of the body blur. Just as Yves Klein employed live bodies to leave blue imprints on surfaces in his *Anthropometries* series, Margolles uses actual blood as both form and material. Trained in forensic science, she blurs the boundaries between laboratory and museum, transforming death into an aesthetic experience.

The work functions as an expanded forensic report: the materials do not only evoke the body, but they also carry traces that can be scientifically analysed. The absent body leaves traces behind. *La Huella* thus becomes a silent testimony, a textile archive, intimate and political, that does not ask for passive contemplation, but demands recognition, remembrance, and justice.

## **4.2 FORENSIC DUST: LA PROMESA AND THE MATERIALITY OF ABSENCE**

*La Promesa* interrogates the fragile possibility of establishing roots in Ciudad Juárez, a border city shaped by migration, precarity, and violence. For decades, Juárez lured workers with the promise of employment in maquiladoras, but economic collapse and the expansion of drug cartels transformed it into a space of abandonment and displacement.

Teresa Margolles selected an empty house in Juárez, carefully dismantling it and transporting its remains to Mexico City. There, the debris was ground into fine dust, which was ritualistically spread across the gallery floor over six months. Each day, collaborators engaged in the same repetitive act: slowly sifting the dust, moving it, rearranging it, in an intimate, meditative process of confronting destruction through slow, affective reconstruction.

Here, the ruin is not merely an object; it becomes performance, memory, and embodied testimony. The disassembled house ceases to function as a shelter, yet its dust retains its history. Each fragment carries traces of a vanished life, a broken promise. In this way, Margolles transforms destruction into presence, silence into an insistence on remembrance.

As Raura Oblitas (2018, pp. 148-151) observes, Margolles's work exposes how power decides who may live and who is left behind. She operates within what Giorgio Agamben (1998, pp. 47-50) describes as the "state of exception", a condition in which sovereignty asserts itself through the suspension of rights, producing disposable lives. The house, ground to dust, becomes a symbol of what Agamben (1998, pp. 47-50) calls "bare life": an existence stripped of protection, reduced to mere survival.

Gaston Bachelard (1994, pp. 5-6) defines the house as a space of memory and shelter. But here, the home does not protect; it collapses, disintegrates, and is reduced to residue. The domestic space becomes a testimonial ruin, a material body that refuses to disappear entirely.

And yet, desire remains. The desire for the other, which Emmanuel Levinas (1961, p. 33) identifies as the ethical impulse toward alterity, is invoked through the gestures of *La Promesa*. Each movement, each dispersion of dust, is an act of listening, an acknowledgment of loss. The house, now pulverised, is not just a ruin, it is a material archive of memory, fragility, and responsibility.

In Margolles's practice, deterioration confronts us with the most visceral residues of violence, insisting that absence be made present through forensic trace. If her works make the body speak through what remains, Urs Fischer shifts the focus from testimony of the past to decomposition in the present. Where Margolles mobilises residues as evidence of social disappearance, Urs Fischer shifts the focus from testimony of the past to decomposition in the present, building decay directly into sculptural process and treating time as collaborator.

## 5. TIME AS SCULPTOR: URS FISCHER AND DECOMPOSITION AS METHOD

For Fischer: (i) material programme: wax, clay, unfired matter; (ii) temporal script: programmed melting, burning, and collapse; (iii) ethical horizon: challenging ideals of permanence and control; (iv) conservation protocol: accepting loss as constitutive, with photography and video functioning as archival traces.

Where Margolles compels us to confront residues of disappearance, Fischer shifts deterioration toward material process and temporal unfolding. His sculptures are conceived not as stable objects but as organisms in flux, collapsing, melting, or burning over time. By choosing fragile, ephemeral substances such as wax, clay, and unfired matter, he embeds decomposition into the very grammar of sculpture and designs gradual disintegration as form. For Fischer, decomposition is not an endpoint but a method. His sculptures embody cycles of formation and disintegration, insisting that impermanence is integral to the experience of art. Ephemeral matter resists the expectation of permanence in museums and markets, while audiences are invited to witness decay as it unfolds. In this way, Fischer pushes viewers to reconsider beauty, not in the perfected or intact, but in the unstable, fragmentary, and incomplete.

### 5.1 YES: SCULPTING DECAY AND TRANSFORMATION

This approach is exemplified in *YES* (2011–), a collective project in which Fischer invited hundreds of participants to shape unfired clay into temporary sculptures. Constructed from a material inherently unstable and vulnerable to air, water, and touch, the works were destined to dry, crack, and collapse over time. Rather than preserving the forms, Fischer embraced their inevitable deterioration as the very foundation of the piece.

Spectators were not passive observers: they touched, reshaped, and even destroyed the clay sculptures, leaving their imprints in the work. Time and bodies became co-authors, transforming what began as solid form into ruins-in-progress. As the material slumped, fragmented, and collapsed, the sculptures mirrored the human body, equally subject to manipulation, control, and decay.

Here, time acts as an active sculptor, shaping outcomes in ways neither artist nor audience can predict. *YES* suspends its objects between presence and disappearance, offering a meditation on transformation as both process

and form. The work resists the impulse to preserve, instead foregrounding fragility as an aesthetic force and impermanence as a condition of existence.

## 5.2 *UNTITLED*: THE BODY IN FLAMES

Where *YES* stages collapse through drying clay and human interaction, *Untitled* (2011) enacts decomposition through fire. Fischer presents monumental wax sculptures, often modelled after classical or iconic forms, that are fitted with wicks and set alight at the exhibition's opening. Over days and weeks, the works burn slowly, their once-solid bodies melting into formless pools of wax.

This slow disintegration mirrors the fundamental condition of human flesh: unstable, porous, and vulnerable to time. As David Le Breton (2002, p. 31) reminds us, the body is not a sealed system; its textures, odours, and substances fluctuate, and without preservation it inevitably decays. Fischer translates this truth into sculptural matter, making combustion a collaborator rather than an adversary. The process does not simply destroy; it reconfigures, turning absence into presence and form into residue.

By melting icons of classical art, Fischer does more than alter material shape: he critiques ideals of permanence, immortality, and perfection historically tied to these figures. The fire consumes but also transforms, exposing the fragility of cultural symbols and releasing them into cycles of creation and dissolution. In this sense, *Untitled* does not stage an ending, but a passage, destruction as renewal.

Audience experience is central. Viewers do not encounter a finished object but a body in transition, its transformation visible, audible, and olfactory. Wax drips, smoke lingers, and the sculptures change from one visit to the next. Time itself becomes a decisive political element in the work, as Fernando José Pereira argues, a resistance to the speed and standardisation of contemporary life (Pereira, 2023, p. 5). By insisting on slowness and impermanence, Fischer's burning bodies resist the logic of planned obsolescence, persisting even in fragments.

In *Untitled*, the *ruin-body* becomes a metaphor for art itself. Rather than aspiring to immortality, Fischer's sculptures align with Byung-Chul Han's call for an "ethics of temporal care": an aesthetics that values transformation and disappearance on their own terms (Han, 2016). As Cornado (2023) suggests, the fragment is not merely a remnant but a spark of renewal. Through fire, Fischer insists that even collapse can be generative, a site where presence endures through change.

Together, *YES* and *Untitled* show how Fischer builds decomposition into the very grammar of sculpture. Clay collapses, wax melts, and time takes authorship, dismantling ideals of permanence and control. By treating deterioration as method rather than failure, Fischer demonstrates that the *ruin-body* is not only metaphor but material practice. This conclusion opens directly to my own artistic investigations, where fragility, perishable matter, and fire similarly become strategies of resistance and remembrance.

## 6. FRAGILITY IN PRACTICE: AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC EXTENSIONS OF THE RUIN-BODY

In my practice: (i) material programme: soap, sugar, saffron, serviettes, fragile supports; (ii) temporal script: slow cracking or fiery transfiguration; (iii) ethical horizon: fragility as ritual of care and remembrance; (iv) conservation protocol: controlled loss, pre/post-combustion documentation, residue sampling.

If Fischer demonstrates deterioration as monumental process, my own practice turns this logic inward, focusing on fragility at the intimate scale. Across sculpture, performance, and drawing, I work with soap, sugar, saffron, and café serviettes, substances marked by time and destined to disintegrate. These principles find continuity in my works *Mãos Vanitas* (Paola, 2018–2021) and *Amor en Llamas* (Paola, 2025), where fragility and combustion are assumed as processes of care and resistance. The documentation of these pieces is part of the same methodological horizon of deterioration-as-method. Rather than concealing instability, I design for it: cracks, crystallisations, stains, and collapse are integral gestures that transform disappearance into testimony. In this sense, *Mãos Vanitas* (2018–2021) and *Amor en Llamas* (2025) extend deterioration-as-method into a personal poetics of decomposition, where fragility and ritual operate as forms of care.

Where Pernot reveals ruins as social bodies, and Margolles confronts us with forensic traces, and Fischer programmes decay into sculptural form, my projects explore fragility as ritual and as care. Each work tests how the *ruin-body* can also be intimate: small, ephemeral, and carried by everyday matter, yet no less resistant in its insistence on visibility, memory, and persistence.

Building on these reflections, my own practice turns to the body as ruin and explores fragility as both method and subject. Working across sculpture, video performance, and drawing, I engage perishable materials whose deterioration is not hidden but staged, each carrying traces of time and use. These materials function as votive offerings to loss and transformation, resisting erasure through their very instability.

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Rather than beginning from permanence, I approach the fragment and the ephemeral as sites of meaning. The question that guides this work is not how to preserve, but how to let matter speak through its decline. In this way, my projects such as *Mãos Vanitas* and *Amor en Llamas* align with artists like Margolles and Fischer, while insisting on a personal poetics of decomposition rooted in ritual, memory, and resistance.

### 6.1 MÃOS VANITAS: THE RUIN-BODY AS RESISTANCE



**Fig. 3** - Grécia Paola, *Mãos Vanitas*, 2018–2021. [Sculpture in soap, pigment and saffron, nail, screws and sugar, variable dimensions]. © Grécia Paola

*Mãos Vanitas* (2018–2021, Figure 3) exemplifies what this article defines as the *ruin-body*: an entity in decomposition that resists utility, permanence, and perfection. Composed of soap, sugar, saffron, nails, and screws, the work is designed for transformation. Soap shrinks and cracks, sugar crystallises, saffron fades, and the structure gradually collapses. These processes are not

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accidents of material weakness but intentional gestures that foreground fragility as language.

The materials themselves criticise the contemporary illusion of the eternal, optimisable body. Nails and screws do not preserve the form but reveal the futility of preservation, echoing Byung-Chul Han's critique of acceleration and productivity (Han, 2016) and Francesc Cornado's insight that the fragment paradoxically contains potential for renewal (Cornado, 2023). The gradual deformation of the work transforms disappearance into testimony, insisting that what is lost continues to speak.

This strategy resonates with Kristine Stiles's argument that destructive gestures can reveal new layers of meaning (Stiles, 1987) and with John Boyd's claim that creation requires the dissolution of existing structures (Boyd, 2018). In conservation discourse, scholars such as Pip Laurenson (2006) and Hanna Hölling (2017) have similarly noted that change, variability, and programmed decay are not failures but integral to certain works of contemporary art. Read in this light, *Mãos Vanitas* situates deterioration not as a problem to be managed but as a central aesthetic condition.

By reworking the baroque vanitas tradition, the piece refuses to treat death as static lament but rather affirms ephemerality as power, aligning with Urs Fischer's temporal sculptures and Teresa Margolles's forensic residues, while insisting on fragility as its own critical strategy. *Mãos Vanitas* thus becomes a votive body, one whose perishable matter critiques ideals of productivity, youth, and perfection. In its collapse, the work proposes an alternative logic of value, grounded in presence, vulnerability, and care.

Read through contemporary conservation frameworks (Variable Media in Depocas *et al.*, 2003; Matters in Media Art in Hölling, 2017; Laurenson, 2006; van Saaze, 2013), *Mãos Vanitas* is not a problem to be stabilised but a work whose programmed change is part of its identity. Display and documentation therefore focus on protocols rather than premature stabilisation, aligning method with intent.

## 6.2 AMOR EN LLAMAS: FIRE, RUIN AND RENEWAL

*Amor en Llamas* (2025, Figures 4-8) emerges from the following proposition: two bodies that once offered warmth to each other have been cooled by the passage of time. The house, both womb and shelter, was consumed by flames. Fire devoured its walls and dreams, leaving only charred remnants, ash,

and absence. Yet, even when all is reduced to fragments, the earth opens in promise. The ashes, carried by the wind, fertilise new possibilities. The red flower, symbolising flame, desire, and ruin, reblooms in a new soil, rekindling the temple of the body, where fire never ceases to burn.

If *Mãos Vanitas* stages slow disintegration, *Amor en Llamas* turns to fire as both destructive and regenerative force. The work begins with fragile café serviettes: porous, disposable, yet saturated with memory. On them remain traces of encounters: hurried phone numbers, lipstick stains, coffee rings, fleeting words. Individually insignificant, together they form a precarious archive of intimacy. Their fragility echoes the impermanence of human bonds, where affection and disaffection, presence and silence, construction and collapse coexist.

The eventual burning of these serviettes transforms fragility into ritual. Fire devours but also fertilises: ashes scatter as testimony, smoke inscribes absence into presence. As Georges Bataille (1997, pp. 59-65) affirms, there is a sacred dimension in transgression, where destruction and desire coexist. Combustion in *Amor en Llamas* enacts this paradox: annihilation as renewal. The red flower that reblooms in ashes recalls both eros and ruin, affirming that desire survives even when its material supports collapse.

This gesture resonates with Georges Didi-Huberman's claim that ruin is not absence but survival, persisting as image in what remains (Didi-Huberman, 2012). Ashes do not erase; they conserve memory in another form. Judith Butler (2006, pp. 14-20) similarly argues that mourning exposes our shared bodily precarity and opens space for renewed forms of life. In this sense, the charred remnants of *Amor en Llamas* embody an ethics of remembrance: they insist that even what burns continues to speak.

The work also takes up Suely Rolnik's insight that memory is not solely mental but inscribed in the body as affect and latency (Rolnik, 2006). The serviettes absorb encounters into their fibres, and fire activates these intensities, releasing them as smoke, ash, and scent. Memory here is visceral, not archival: a survival of presence in transformation.

Politically, this aesthetic of fire parallels Teresa Margolles's use of forensic residues. Where Margolles exposes social erasure through blood and fabric, I use fragile, overlooked supports of intimacy. In both cases, what seems insignificant, the cloth of the morgue, the café serviette, becomes material testimony. This recalls Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life", where lives are stripped of protection and rendered disposable (Agamben, 1998, pp. 47-50). The serviette, a trivial object of consumption, mirrors this condition of

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disposability; burning it becomes a denunciation of the logics that discard both objects and people.

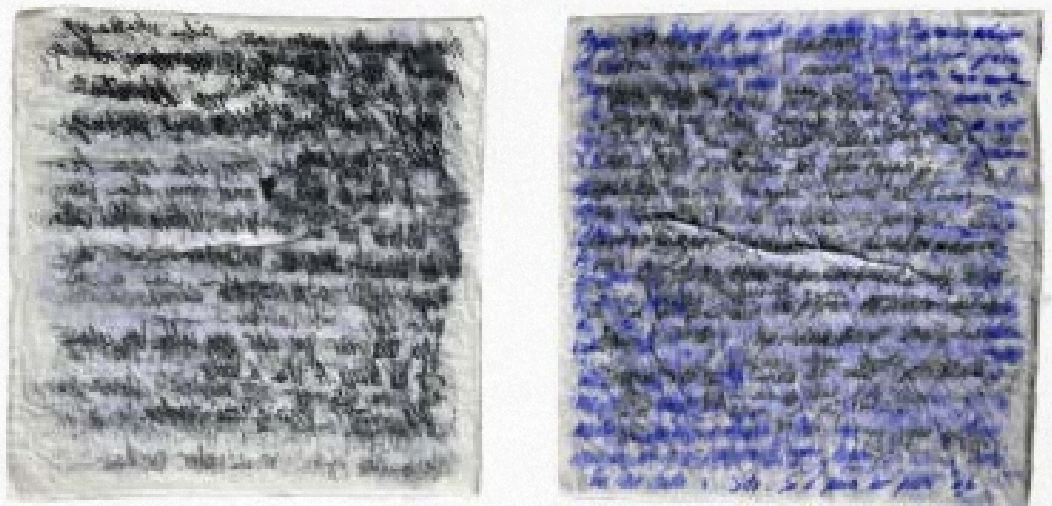
Finally, *Amor en Llamas* aligns with Boris Groys's observation that contemporary art archives its own destruction as resistance to cultural erasure (Groys, 2014). By incorporating combustion into its very method, the work refuses preservation as stasis and instead transforms disappearance into visibility. Destruction becomes inscription; ashes become survival.

In dialogue with Fischer, the piece deploys fire as aesthetic method but shifts its scope. Fischer melts monumental wax figures, critiquing ideals of permanence in cultural symbols; *Amor en Llamas* (Figures 4-8) burns fragile serviettes, honouring transient intimacies. His spectacle of entropy addresses the monumental; mine addresses the everyday. Both reveal that fire is not an end but a gesture of survival, where ruin insists on remaining.



**Fig. 4** - Grécia Paola, *Amor en Llamas*, 2025. [Carbonised paper and burned serviettes, variable dimensions]. © Grécia Paola

**Fig. 5** - Fig. 5 - Grécia Paola, *Amor en Llamas*, 2025. [Serviettes] © Grécia Paola





**Fig. 6** - Grécia Paola, *Amor en Llamas*, 2025. [Atelier process].  
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**Fig. 7** - Grécia Paola, *Amor en Llamas*, 2025. [Video-still].  
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**Fig. 8** - Grécia Paola, *Amor en Llamas*, 2025. [Video-still].  
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Both works affirm Byung-Chul Han's call for temporal care against the acceleration of late capitalism (Han, 2016) and echo Cornado's vision of the fragment as a spark of renewal (Cornado, 2023). At the same time, they enact Bataille's sacred logic of excess (Bataille, 1997), Didi-Huberman's survival of the ruin (Hernández, 2023, pp. 5-29), Butler's ethics of mourning (Butler, 2006), and Groys's notion of destruction as archive (Groys, 2014). In these works, deterioration is not mere loss but a poetics of persistence. Fragility becomes

testimony, and what is destined to vanish insists on remaining. For exhibition, *Amor en Llamas* is documented with pre/post-combustion imaging and residue sampling notes; the work's identity includes controlled loss, which determines when intervention is not undertaken. As with *Mãos Vanitas*, conservation here means accompanying controlled change rather than preventing it; documentation replaces stabilisation.

Taken together, *Mãos Vanitas* and *Amor en Llamas* extend the notion of the *ruin-body* into two complementary registers: slow disintegration and fiery transfiguration. By staging fragility as testimony, they align with Pernot's architectural ruins, Margolles's forensic traces, and Fischer's programmed decompositions, while also articulating a personal poetics of care and resistance. Across these different scales: architectural, bodily, monumental, and intimate deterioration emerges consistently not as failure but as method, a counter-protocol to necropolitical erasure. It is from this shared horizon that the conclusion now draws together the aesthetic, political, and ethical stakes of deterioration in contemporary practice.

Across architectural, bodily, monumental, and intimate scales, deterioration appears consistently not as failure but as method, a counter-protocol to necropolitical erasure. From this shared horizon, the conclusion gathers the aesthetic, political, and ethical stakes of deterioration in contemporary practice.

## 7. WHAT REMAINS: IMPERMANENCE AND THE POETICS OF DECOMPOSITION IN ART

This article has traced deterioration not as accident or failure but as method that resists necropolitical erasure. Beginning with Mbembe's account of necropolitics as the governance of life, death, and invisibility, we saw how late modernity intensifies the concealment of fragility through optimisation and preservation (Mbembe, 2003). Against this backdrop, deterioration foregrounds vulnerability, absence, and decline as forms of testimony. The *ruin-body* thus emerges as both figure and practice: an aesthetic configuration that refuses erasure by inscribing fragility into matter, memory, and form.

Through the case studies, this argument unfolded across different registers. Pernot's architectural ruins demonstrated how built structures can function as social bodies, carrying absences as inscriptions of collective memory. Margolles radicalised this approach by working with forensic residues as blood, fat, and dust, transforming bodily deterioration into evidence that resists

invisibility. Fischer, in turn, programmed decomposition directly into sculptural practice, showing how time itself can become co-author of form. Finally, in my own works *Mãos Vanitas* and *Amor en Llamas*, fragility and perishable matter were staged as rituals of resistance and care, extending deterioration into a personal poetics of intimacy.

Across these practices, deterioration appears not only as aesthetic strategy but also as ethical stance. It transforms ruins, residues, and fragments into what Hölling (2017) calls temporal materials: entities whose variability and decline are intrinsic to their identity. From a conservation perspective, this aligns with Laurenson's recognition that loss and change must often be embraced rather than resisted in time-based and variable media art (Laurenson, 2006). Deterioration-as-method therefore resists necropolitical logics of disappearance while also challenging the institutional desire to stabilise, preserve, and fix the work of art.

At stake is not merely an artistic vocabulary but a politics of visibility. As Mbembe (2003) reminds us, necropolitics decides not only who must die but also who may be seen, remembered, or mourned. By insisting on fragility as form, artists reallocate value from permanence to presence, from optimisation to vulnerability. They propose an alternative ethics of temporal care (Han, 2016), where impermanence is not deficiency but the very condition of life itself. In this light, the aesthetics of deterioration consecrate the imperfect, the fragmented, and the ephemeral as resistant forms. Worn textures, residues, and scars do not signify collapse alone; they mark persistence, testimony, and renewal. Whether in ruins that breathe of absent lives, residues that denounce social violence, sculptures that melt into fragments, or fragile materials that slowly disintegrate, deterioration becomes an active inscription of time.

Ultimately, what remains is not only matter but relation: between body and ruin, absence and presence, memory and care. By embracing erosion, residue, and disintegration, contemporary art challenges normative paradigms of productivity, perfection, and immortality. It reminds us that life resides not in stasis but in transformation, and that the body, architectural, social, or fleshly, gains its force precisely through vulnerability. The *ruin-body*, in this sense, is not a sign of defeat but a site of resistance, insisting that fragility itself has the capacity to remain.

Breaking becomes care when deterioration is staged as testimony rather than erasure. Pernot's ruins keep absence visible, Margolles's residues denounce violence without closure, and Fischer's melting figures redistribute authorship to time and matter. In each case, material loss is not neglect but a

protocol of attention, a way of sustaining what power discards. This aligns with Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics, where the refusal of care produces social death (Mbembe, 2003); artistic practice reverses this by making vulnerability present and visible.

Ephemerality holds memory through residues and protocols: Pernot's fractured walls, Margolles's stained fabrics and ground dust, Fischer's ashes and drips, and my own collapsing soap and burning serviettes. These fragments endure not because they resist change but because they register it, carrying memory in transformed matter and in the conservation practices that accompany controlled change. Conservation theorists such as Laurenson (2006) and Hölling (2017) stress that variability, loss, and programmed transformation are not failures but integral to contemporary works' identities.

How does the *ruin-body* challenge optimisation logic? The *ruin-body* challenges optimisation by reallocating value away from permanence, smoothness, and productivity. By foregrounding fragility, variability, and programmed decay, these works reject the late-modern imperative to conceal weakness or extend durability at all costs. Instead, they propose an ethics of temporal care (Han, 2016), allowing things to alter, fade, and persist in their vulnerability.

## THE AESTHETICS OF DETERIORATION

The aesthetics of deterioration offer a counterpoint to modern ideals of preservation and longevity. By foregrounding decay and ruination, artists challenge hegemonic narratives of bodily and material perfection. In so doing, they advocate for an acceptance of impermanence as an integral aspect of existence, repositioning vulnerability as a space for artistic and philosophical inquiry.

The art of deterioration thus proposes an aesthetic of impermanence that radically contests the contemporary logic of conservation, perfection, and immortality. Rather than glorifying the end, these practices value what survives it: a refusal of erasure and an affirmation of what remains and resists. Degradation is not simply an evocation of death but an active testimony of time. As an aesthetic gesture, it consecrates the imperfect, the fragmented, and the ephemeral.

Destruction, therefore, does not signify definitive collapse but continuous reinvention. The marks of time become signs of resistance. Fragility is elevated

to expressive material, and the ruin is no longer an endpoint but a site of possibility. The body that breaks down, that bends to time, becomes language, and it is precisely through its vulnerability that it gains potency.

Preservation, in this sense, does not mean freezing but activating memory critically. Architectural ruins, broken objects, and marked bodies become living archives, resistant to oblivion. By placing deterioration at the core of the creative process, these works rescue peripheral narratives and inscribe into the present those histories that dominant powers sought to erase (Hölling, 2017; Laurenson, 2006; van Saaze, 2013).

The *ruin-body*, as a figure of impermanence, not only defies aesthetic norms but also questions the mechanisms of exclusion that define which bodies are seen, valued, or erased. The ageing body, the failing body, the one that no longer serves productivity, is pushed to the margins, far from the clean, efficient, optimised ideal of late capitalism. But what if those margins invaded the centre? What if vulnerable bodies and decaying forms were not only visible but protagonist? When art turns to human ruins, historical residues, and the marks of time, it opens a space of transgression, what Rebecca Solnit has described as *terrains vagues*: ambiguous, abandoned spaces full of potential for symbolic, poetic, and political reconfiguration.

Degradation, as an inevitable process, exposes the tension between destruction and preservation. Our attempts to conserve bodies and objects often deny their very nature as transient. The body is not a monument: it is flux, change, vulnerability. The effort to fix it in time, whether technologically or symbolically, is paradoxical. Life resides in transformation. Artistic practices that embrace erosion, residue, and disintegration propose another mode of existence, one that recognises beauty in decay, presence in absence, and healing in dwelling with time, not against it. In this gesture, the fragment becomes resistance, and what seemed lost returns as residual memory.

## TOWARD A BROADER SYNTHESIS

Taken together, these responses demonstrate that deterioration functions as artistic method and procedural method, not merely a motif. It structures the making, reception, and conservation of artworks while staging political interventions in relation to necropolitics, exclusion, and disappearance. The *ruin-body* crystallises this insight: a figure where fragility is neither hidden nor romanticised but mobilised as testimony, resistance, and care.

This approach unsettles the cultural obsession with wholeness, longevity, and optimisation. By shifting value from permanence to process, from intact surfaces to fragmented residues, the artists examined here articulate an ethics of impermanence that resonates across both aesthetic and conservation fields. In doing so, they propose an alternative mode of remembrance, one that listens through material change rather than stabilises against it.

## CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article has contributed (1) a conceptual category, the *ruin-body*, that integrates aesthetics, politics, and conservation; (2) a comparative mapping of artistic practices of deterioration (Pernot, Margolles, Fischer, and others) that highlights their divergent strategies of care; and (3) a methodological grid for analysing deterioration-as-method, with implications for curatorial and conservation practice (Depocas *et al.*, 2003; Hölling, 2017; Laurenson, 2006; Scholte & Wharton, 2011; van Saaze, 2013). From an artistic standpoint, the practice-led sections demonstrate how auto-ethnographic work can extend and test these propositions in lived material processes.

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### ANDRADA-CRISTINA NEACȘU

Andrada-Cristina Neacșu is a researcher, film director, and editor specialised in documentary film. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Film Arts from the "I.L.Caragiale" National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, Romania, where she studied in the department of Multimedia (Film Editing and Sound Design) and specialised in film montage. She continued her education through a Master's of Fine Art in Film Directing at the College of Art of the University of Edinburgh, with a focus in creative documentary. She has collaborated on non-fiction projects and possesses an intimate understanding of experimental approaches to film form, particularly in re-contextualising personal stories to uncover political structures. She is a researcher within the Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Escola das Artes, and a PhD candidate in the doctoral programme of Science and Technology of the Arts. She is currently developing her doctoral project regarding the political and poetic implications of film curatorial practices within documentary film festivals.

### CATARINA LOPES CORDEIRO

Catarina Cordeiro holds a Bachelor's degree in Conservation and Restoration (2018) from the NOVA School of Science and Technology and completed her Master's degree in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage (2021) at the School of Arts, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. During this period, she was awarded a Merit Scholarship by Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto. Her dissertation, entitled "*Inventorying, Conditioning and Treatment of the Numismatic Collection of the Museu da Misericórdia do Porto*" focused on the documentation and preservation of the museum's numismatic collection. She also studied Artistic Production with a specialisation in Goldsmithing, acquiring fundamental techniques in the production of silver jewellery. For three years she worked as a Conservator-Restorer at the Maritime Museum of Esposende, where she carried out multidisciplinary work in the conservation, restoration, and exhibition of museum collections. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Her research project, "*Portuguese Goldsmithery from the 16th Century: A Multidisciplinary Study of Religious Silverware*" explores the intersection of material analysis, history, and conservation practices. In parallel,

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she has participated in congresses, conferences, and workshops focused on conservation and restoration, particularly of metals, which is her main area of interest.

**DILA YUMURTACI**

Dila Yumurtacı is a Turkish performance artist, choreographer, and researcher based in Porto. Her practice centres on participatory works at the intersection of dance, ecology, and consciousness. Through collective creation, she explores alternative modes of being and relating within a more-than-human world. She is currently a researcher at CITAR and a doctoral candidate in the *Science and Technology of the Arts* programme at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, with an FCT doctoral scholarship (2024–ongoing). She holds a Bachelor's degree in Communication and Cinema from Galatasaray University (2013), and a Master's degree in Visual Arts from Sabancı University (2018), where she received a full scholarship. Her master's research explored human–nonhuman relationality and culminated in the solo exhibition *Human Animal* (2017). Her performance video work *Dough* (2018) and participatory performance *Transcending the Senses* (2017–2019) reflect her ongoing interest in sensory perception and embodied knowledge. Her dance film *Small Talk* was screened at the Turkish Pavilion of Berlinale (2011), and she acted as a second leading woman, in the movie *The Pillar of Salt* (Berlinale, 2018). With a background in classical dance training through the Royal Academy of Dance (1996–2008), and a founding member of the dance collective dadans (2008), she is known for its interdisciplinary, research-based works such as *Be Water My Friend* (Istanbul Biennales 2019 & 2021) and *On Relativity* (2015–2019), a site-specific performance involving multiple performers. Dadans' work was featured in the exhibition *Maybe We Will Benefit From Our Neighbour's Fortune* and was invited to the UK by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (2017). Her artistic research investigates new forms of resilience and relationality, inviting participants to inhabit uncertainty and engage in embodied awareness. Her recent performance project, *Becoming With*, was presented at the Serralves Museum (Porto, June 2025) and the Sabancı Museum (Istanbul, September 2025). The work integrates local performers and applies the ecosomatic method she is currently developing, cultivating deep listening, presence, and attention through movement-based practice.

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AUTHORS**FILIPPO DEORSOLA**

Filippo is an Italian pianist, composer and doctoral researcher based between Brussels and Paris. Their work crosses disciplines and geographies, exploring sound as a form of thinking and moving well with others. Hybrid, their practice spans solo and ensemble work, writing, and intercultural collaborations with setups ranging from chamber groups and Javanese gamelan to electroacoustic formats. Their trio Anaphora – alongside Marco Luparia and Jonathan Ho – centres on rhythmical experimentation, blending jazz, influences from Balinese gamelan, and groove-oriented music. After a 2022 debut with Auand Records (IT), their latest album *[Bloom]* was recently released in January Loumi Records, coming to be “one of the first good surprises of 2025” (Falcão, 2025). Filippo co-leads EMBAT, a transcultural project in collaboration with Yogyakarta-based Sandikala Ensemble, merging re-tuned gamelan with Western instruments, and is a founding member of Brussels-based Balinese ensemble *Gamelan Mudrasvara*. A multi-awarded artist (Tremplin Jazz 2024, Burghausen JazzPreis 2025, Keep an Eye The Records 2024), Filippo regularly undertakes residencies across Europe and beyond – including Banff Centre for Arts (CA), Institut Français Yogyakarta, and Cité Internationale des Arts (Paris, 2026) – creating spaces where music becomes a way to relate, unlearn, and begin anew.

**GRÉCIA PAOLA MATOS**

Grécia Paola is a Luso-Venezuelan artist and researcher whose work explores the intersections between bodily vulnerability, finitude, time, and materiality through multidisciplinary processes. Her practice transforms the body’s fragility into votive gestures of resistance, offering, and survival, engaging with themes of contemporary sculpture, corporeal aesthetics, necropolitics, and pedagogical art practices. She is finishing a PhD in Fine Arts at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto (FBAUP) as a fellow of Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), where she develops the thesis *The Archaeometric Body as an Artistic Project: The Votive Condition of Durational Practice*, and at the Complutense University of Madrid with the research *Surviving Forms: The Fragment, the Trace, and the Aesthetics of the Deteriorated in Sculpture*. She is also an Assistant Professor in Sculpture at FBAUP. Since 2013, her work has been exhibited in Portugal and abroad, including the Contextile Biennial (Guimarães), Palazzo Albrizzi-Capello (Venice), and the Carrousel du Louvre (Paris). She has participated in residencies in Portugal and Spain (AADK

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Centro Negra) and in programmes such as YES – Young European Sculpture (Erasmus+). Her distinctions include the Best Oral Communication Award at IJUP (2019) and the PortoCartoon Grand Prize in Sculpture (2019).

**ISIDORA CORREA ALLAMAND**

Isidora Correa is a Chilean visual artist and researcher based in Porto, working across installation, video, sound, and bio-art. Her work focuses on the ecological and geopolitical dimensions of territorial contexts. Through fieldwork and situated research, she examines material traces of anthropogenic impact to question systems of domination through extractivism, proposing alternative narratives of ecological responsibility and interspecies coexistence. She is currently a researcher at CITAR, and a Doctoral candidate in the Science and Technology of the Arts programme at Universidade Católica Portuguesa (2023-ongoing). She holds a Master's degree in Visual Arts from the University of Chile (2018), and a Bachelor's in Visual Arts from the Catholic University of Chile (2000). She has participated in artistic creation residencies at Isla, Antofagasta Chile, (2024), Zeitgeist, Buenos Aires, Argentina, (2021); WCS Karukinka Park, Tierra del Fuego, Chile, (2019); Urra, Buenos Aires, Argentina, (2015); AIR Glenfiddich, Highlands, Scotland, (2014); and Flora Ars Natura, Bogotá, Colombia, (2014). Her latest projects have been exhibited at the Semibreve Festival (2025), Portugal; the Saco Biennial, Chile (2025); National Museum of Fine Arts, Chile, (2025,); National Centre for Contemporary Art Cerrillos, Chile (2025); Patricia Ready Gallery (2022); Cultural Centre of Spain, Chile (2021).

**IŞIL EĞRIKAVUK**

Dr. Işıl Eğrikavuk is a Turkish-born international performance artist and academic based in Berlin, Germany. She received her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and a PhD in Communication from Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey. Eğrikavuk lives in Berlin and works as a faculty member at Berlin University of Arts (UdK), Media and Communication Department since 2017. Her work utilises storytelling, journalism, and dialogue-based practices and examines critical themes including protest, feminism, identity politics, nature, and universal interconnectedness. These works take the form of temporary and permanent installations, interactive events and performances, photographic and video documentation, and text-based work.

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She earned her PhD in 2021 from Istanbul Bilgi University with her thesis titled *"From A Political Protest To An Art Exhibition: Building Interconnectedness Through Dialogue-Based Art"*. Eđrikavuk is the co-winner of Turkey's first contemporary art prize, Full Art Prize in 2012. She also received the 2022 Borderless Book Fund for publishing her PhD research. Eđrikavuk has participated in numerous international exhibitions, residencies, and her work has been published in both local and international journals.

**LAILA ALGAVES**

Laila Algaves Nuñez (Rio de Janeiro, 1997) is a researcher, writer, and cultural worker, particularly interested in future studies developed in philosophy and the arts, as well as in transfeminist contributions to imagination and social and ecological thought. With a Bachelor's degree in Social Communication majoring in Cinema (PUC-Rio, Brazil), and a Master's degree in Aesthetics and Artistic Studies (NOVA FCSH, Portugal), with the dissertation *"Intimacy without proximity: journeys of touch and desire from Emmanuel Levinas and Donna J. Haraway"*, she is a PhD candidate in Artistic Studies – Art and Mediation (NOVA FCSH, Portugal) with an FCT scholarship. Her current research, a project provisionally entitled *"More-than-human literatures: weaving stories and reclaiming agencies in the Anthropocene"*, moves through the field of feminist material ecocriticism, considering the potential of writing and fiction as tools for safeguarding the Rights of Nature. At the same time, she has also nurtured a long-standing collaboration with the Terra Batida [Earthways] platform, coordinated by Ritó Natálio, with whom she tests and develops her theoretical and artistic research, proposing and participating in creation and training projects that traverse the intersections between words, performance, and ecological activism.

**MARTA GUEIDÃO**

Marta Gueidão holds a Master's degree in Conservation and Restoration from the School of Arts, Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP/EA), with a specialisation in plaster and cement-based sculpture. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the same institution, supported by FCT – *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, I.P.*, through a doctoral grant [Ref. UI/BD/153522/2022] with the DOI identifier <https://doi.org/10.54499/UI/BD/153522/2022>. Her doctoral research focuses

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on the preservation and valorisation of 20th- and 21st-century cementitious public sculpture in the context of contemporary societal challenges. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, her work combines historical study and material analysis with concrete conservation methodologies and participatory approaches to heritage management. She has coordinated and participated in several conservation projects, including the restoration of plaster sculptures from the *Museu e Gabinete de Exposições da FBAUP* for the exhibition *A partir do Antigo* (2019), and conservation interventions at *Palacete S. Carlos and Livraria Lello* (2017) through a voluntary internship. She also took part in a conservation campaign organised by UCP/EA in partnership with *ACRA – Atelier de Conservação e Restauro do Azulejo* in Ovar (2016). She is currently an integrated researcher at the Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts (CITAR).

**NUNO DA LUZ**

Nuno da Luz (Lisbon, 1984) is an artist and researcher whose work is grounded in attentive listening as an eco-sensible methodology. His practice undulates between ecologies of noise-making and book-making through the publishing collective ATLAS (Lisbon). He completed the Master's programme in Experimentation in Arts and Politics at SciencesPo Paris in 2015, and is currently a PhD candidate at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa School of Arts (Porto). Recent projects include the group show 'Enredos II: Nuno da Luz' (Centro Botín, Santander, 2025), the solo show 'Airs' (Galeria Vera Cortês, Lisbon, 2024); the monograph 'Poetry as an ecological survival' (Lisbon/Porto: Documenta/UCPress, 2022); and the double LP 'Beasts of Gravity' in collaboration with Joana Escoval (The Vinyl Factory, 2019). He was a resident of Fondation Carasso's IN SITU programme (Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, 2023–24), and a recipient of the Locus Sonus Locus Vitae Creative Research Grant (ESAAIX, Aix-en-Provence, 2022). In 2024, he was awarded the Transformative Territories Mention by Prix COAL, Paris.

**RITA XAVIER**

Rita Xavier is an intense and curious researcher who finds belonging in cocoon-places and web-places. She writes to twist words, glimpse beyond the visible horizon, and embody the tempests that move and transform. A PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of Minho, her project is funded

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by the Foundation for Science and Technology (Portugal) in collaboration with the Department of Performing Arts of Ágora – Porto Municipal Company. She works as a cultural consultant, writes performance criticism for *Público* newspaper, and identifies as a witch. Since 2010, she has explored the body's place in art and the arts of the body as cultural and political disciplines, in a cyclical pilgrimage. With a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy (FLUP, 2008) and a Master's degree in Artistic Studies (FBAUP, 2011), her thinking unfolds through somatic movement, symbolic, and mythopoetic language. She curates reading programmes and body-based ritual practices and has worked in curatorship and communications for Portuguese arts institutions, including Teatro Municipal do Porto, DDD Dias da Dança, the Museum, and Porto Book Fair. Senior officer at the Department of Culture and Heritage of Porto, she has collaborated on research with the Institute of Art History (UNL), Serralves Foundation, and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

**SHAHRIAR KHONSARI**

Shahriar Khonsari is a highly accomplished academic and professional in the fields of photography, art, and communication for development. He holds multiple Master's degrees, including one in Photography from the University of Art, Tehran, and in Communication for Development from Malmo University, Sweden. His academic pursuits reflect a deep commitment to the use of visual media as a tool for social change and development. Throughout his career, Shahriar has held several significant roles, including as a Research Assistant to Dr. Agnes Devictor at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, focusing on the visual documentation of conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war and the Syrian civil war. Shahriar's scholarly contributions are notable, having authored several books on photography, including "Photojournalism." He has presented at conferences from Helsinki to Paris, addressing topics in media. His articles have been published in respected journals, reflecting his ongoing engagement with academic and professional communities. At the moment he is based in Iran and works as a freelance researcher. Shahriar's work demonstrates a commitment to exploring the intersections of communication, social media, and societal impact.

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