Exquisite Methods: Ruminations of Corporeal Becoming in Artistic Research

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filter [ˈfɪltə]

a reduction of information, which could be performed in a productive way or as a distortion (or both). it could help to see something clearer or it could obstruct a view. it could help to extract information and to sort information by different means—and therefore help to make it meaningful. best example, john carpenter's they live and also obey.

"...discomfort I always suffered from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two 'languages, one expressive, the other critical; and at the heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology and of psycho-analysis—but that, by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in me (however naïve it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system... I began to speak differently."

Roland Barthes (1980), Camera Lucida¹

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This rumination takes the form of a method, a ruinous method, the purpose of which can only be the ruination of method itself, for here the author is more soothsayer than truth teller, the son of a 'gifted' woman no less, one Mary Fisher Ferguson, of whom it was said, she had an unrealised capacity for 'second sight', for 'insight' rather than knowledge, or so her friends the travelling folk would say. The soothsayer, like the artist, is in fact an alchemist, a practitioner of divination, one whose proclamations whilst based upon experience can only ever be 'claims to truth', courageous half-truths perhaps with moments of embellishment. Foucault would be proud of us. Forceful, rhetorical, propositional. For even when presented with the most rigorous of arguments; the finality of which could be described as (to use a Scots' word) contramashious and doubly so for is it not equally perverse that the 'work of art'—the labour of art—is by definition rigorously argumentative, an exquisite incitement in which, for the most part, we must agree to differ.2 Without getting ahead of ourselves here, disagreement is perhaps central to our concern, for those who prefer the stilted rigour of the academy—those who refuse to recognise the matter of research, the odour of exquisite practices, the dirt of exquisite ways of doing, those material things so true to their own materiality—yes, for those who will refute the possibilities of matter, leads not to rigour but rather to rigor-mortis, or so Joanna Freuh and Terry Eagleton would have it. Regardless of the now familiar terms of reference: practice-led, practice-based, practice-as ... and Barthes' distant warning that "... The invariable fact is that a piece of work which ceaselessly proclaims its determination for method is ultimately sterile ...," yes, regardless of these refrains—there is

1 Roland Barthes (1993 [1980]), Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, translated by Richard Howard, (New York: Vintage Publishing), 38.

² From the Scots language, meaning counter; adjective: perverse, selfwilled, obstinate, contrary, refractory.

- ³ Roland Barthes (1977), *Image Music Text*, (London: Fontana Press), 201.
- ⁴ Stephen Melville (2001), "Counting/ As/Painting," in P. Armstrong, L. Lisbon, and S. Melville (Eds.), As Painting: Division and Displacement, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press), 19. Cf Susan Sontag (1966), Against Interpretation, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux).
- 5 The etymology of the word exquisite is fascinating. Drawing on its Latin root the ex leads us to an idea of a preposition and an out of, from; whereas the French qui leads us to agency, to who and to whom. whilst the middle English site speaks of location, structure and intention. Preposition signals a double movement, that which comes before or in advance of, and that which indicates a moving out from, perhaps to new formulationsor ways of thinking and doing. Qui holds the agency that puts things into motion, whilst site becomes the loci of thinking and production.

truly something magical, alchemical, philosophical and thoughtprovoking that happens when the arts are true to their own material and immaterial conditions of production.3 What Stephen Melville describes as the "internal thinking or articulacy" of art, and what Susan Sontag proclaimed so long ago as the need to replace hermeneutics with erotics, the sensuous aspects of a given work: the sensorial experience of art.4 But it is the word 'exquisite' that I claim here for artistic research practice; it is the word 'exquisite' that radicalises the mundanity of the word 'method' for it speaks of refinement and excellence, the aesthetic and by extension the ascetic (disciplined) life. It speaks of the delicate and that which is intensely felt. Therefore it speaks of the affectiveness of art, the pleasure and the pain—the exquisite agony of St Teresa... the figure of the dandy, the one who is affectedly concerned with appearance; to the ascetic life of Leigh Bowery perhaps: that self-fashioned fashionista. Perhaps. In French, the word 'exquisite' is most potently understood in cuisine, with regard to the aspiration for perfection, the satiation of the palate, where thought becomes attentive. This is where the tension lies, this is where the torsion comes to be. This is where the work of artistic research begins. This is where the exquisite and the method sweat the real into existence.

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Pre-writing rituals take time: a walk in the park with one's dog, takes time; brushing one's teeth to remove the residual (raw) calcifying sensation of sleep, takes time; masturbation in its singular form, may take some time, although for those who are brimming with the energy of youth, or those who are chemically enhanced—aged with crystal clear memories of past encounters and defiant to the bitter end—may indeed lead one to a discussion of duration rather than time. The time one takes, is a matter of commitment particularly with regard to walking, to maintaining good hygienic practices and, of course, to masturbation. Reading this paragraph again, it is clear that it is already a matter of address, a form of address, an address to matter, to the corporeal concerns that will be the subject-matter or the mattered-subject of this discussion.

Walking with one's dog is a bodily act, a physical gesture, a time for thought but more importantly still a time for play, a time for sniffing the cold air of each autumnal morning, a time to catch the scent of the now invisible (indivisible) other: the fox (the thought-fox), the other who has passed us by, not long before: the deer (nimbly thought), just long enough for the scent to incite excitement. In such moments sniffing becomes somewhat frenzied, intense one might say; for time—if recognised by the dog at all—has stopped, until the scent-message is received and understood, or more importantly until she has pissed all over it to make herself known to those unseen others who also walk in the park—now in absentia, a daily ritual, a necessary call of the wild, a palimpsestueous spatialised act no less as she reiterates her existence in the world.6 Some dogs are truly narcissistic.

The neologism, palimpsestuous, was created by Jakub Ceglarz (2018), Materialising Palimpsest: An investigation into palimpsest tuousness as a queer enactment, unpublished PhD thesis, (Birmingham School of Art: Birmingham City University).

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Brushing one's teeth leads us to another consideration, that of a most sensitive part of the body, that exterior interior space of transition from ingress to egress, and vice versa, that site of mastication—or the ugly pleasure-act of vomiting—so close to the machination of ideas as they transmogrify along the neuro-pathways, so close to the wet fluid space of saliva, a membrane or a bone away, in which energy becomes possible and reflection takes form, a locale from which the speech act comes by word of mouth, from insolence to poetic utterance, where the mouthing of concepts find their formality, where ideas once spoken, are given up to the world. The foul mouth is always antagonistic.

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Masturbation may well be another form of articulation, for masturbation can be individual or collective, singular or multiple, tidy or messy, very messy (at least when one is young). However, when one is self-inflicting joy, masturbation is not only a matter of release: the intense pleasure of the orgasmic in the early morning light, no not simply one's 'morning glory', a jolt from too little sleep, but rather it is both a matter of cultural codification and a fixing of the body in relation / relationship to representational norms. Sensuous acts of the sensuous body rendered sinful.

fork [fo:k]

a technical term in programming, somewhat akin to 'mutation' in say, a biological genome. in a repository for the programmer (and also in cyber/blockchain development), if there are two different approaches to solve a problem, a 'fork' can be added so that one can simultaneously assess two (or more) different paths that might be taken. benign version: see which one works out best and work to programme the change. less benign version/malignant: 'forking' the problem so that one group follows, say, an alt-right set of propositions, whilst simultaneously a set of possibilities can be given to induce another direction.

Nevertheless, we might postulate that all three acts can also be understood to challenge both cultural codes and representational norms, especially if we consider them from a more creatively critical perspective in which "creativity is a form of [sensual] criticality." Something that is understood when in the artist's hands, the hands that make without fully knowing that which may well become known or that which may simply 'become'. Perhaps this is because there is a time delay between thought and action, or indeed action before thought, that infinitesimal split perhaps, prior to the comprehension of the queerness of action-as-thought-as-action-as: a queer move, an exquisite move, something that has been continually denied by binary logic, the logic of imprisonment.

7 Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (2009), 'Introduction,' in Deleuze and Queer Theory, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 1.

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What is important here is our recognition of the trap of binary logic for any discussion of gueerness, especially when one realises that the here and now of queer—what we may describe as the 'normative queer version of queer' with its emphasis on representation and visibility: the polity of being in the social space, lacks the agility to move beyond such rudimentary logic. Indeed, it may well be fantastical to suggest, but suggest I will, and if you will permit this call to arms, that we must break free of the logic of the prison. And on this occasion, perhaps we must do so, in favour of the logic of the prism. For is it not through the prism that we encounter the singular becoming multiple: the rainbow, a materialised spectrum, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's sheerness of difference? This is a question to hold on to. The prism is an exquisite object, is it not? One that has an exquisite 'thingness' for it is not only a manufactured object, something instrumental (and as such mass produced), but also a specific technology, something perhaps beyond the Heideggerian use of 'techne' alone.

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But if we care to recall, even momentarily, Heidegger's 1954 lecture, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger moves from instrumentality to causality and on to the conceptualisation of *poeisis*, the 'bringing-forth' that which is concealed, and the realisation that

techne is said to be a necessary part of poeisis. As Mark Blitz explains,

"Drawing on Aristotle's account of formal, final, material, and efficient causes, Heidegger argues that both nature (physis) and art (poeisis) are ways of 'bringing-forth'—of unconcealing that which is concealed. What is natural is self-producing, self-arising, self-illuminating, not what can be calculated in order to become a formless resource."

Heidegger emphasises the importance of the relationship between techne and poeisis when he asserts that in the sense of "technique," techne refers to both manufacturing (the techniques of shoemakers and printers, for example) and to the arts (the techniques of poets and graphic designers, for example). Techne is part of poeisis. Furthermore, we will do well to remember that for Heidegger, "poetry also brings things to presence," and that, "the Greek word techne, from which 'technology' derives, at one time also means the 'bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful' and 'the poeisis of the fine arts."9 If techne is indeed a part of poeisis, it is with their conjoining / embedding poeisis-techne-poeisis that constitutes the 'bringing-forth' in the arts of that which cannot be reduced to technique; that although we may now understand it as 'expertise', is no more knowing of the whole. Technique alone is partial, nothing more than enabling the instrumental production of goods. Philosophically, poeisis is revelatory: that which 'brings-forth', that which reveals 'something' that is in the 'realm of truth', the act of bringing into being that which has never existed before: the artwork perhaps. And so the story goes...

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Of course, the move articulated here also finds its routes more in the work of Gilles Deleuze and to some extent Felix Guattari, for what is being *interro-imagined* (interrogated/imagined/explored) here is a move from representational to non-representational thinking: from the prioritisation of signification to a consideration of intrinsic qualities, of sensuality, of erotics, the body-knowledge materiality of thought, the materiality of art. What is demanded here is that we move beyond the designation of queer as the technology of politics to an exploration of the vitality of queerness as a cogent force to affect and effect changes in our habits of theorising, at the very least it allows us to consider more deviant lines of flight (Fig. 1), lines that

Mark Blitz, 'Understanding Heidegger on Technology', *The New Atlantis*, Number 41, Winter 2014, 63–80.

9 Cf Martin Heidegger (1977), "The Question Concerning Technology," in David Farrell Krell (Ed.), Martin Heideager: Basic Writings, translated by William Lovitt. (New York: Harper & Row), 3-45. Etymologically, poeisis is derived from the ancient Greek woieĩv, which means 'to make.' Heidegger, embedding techne with poeisis and, latterly with the logic of how one comes to know (epistemology), enables a practicalconceptual move where what is called thinking is the skilled knowledgepractice of inhabiting the how. This know-how is vital. Heidegger concludes, "What is decisive in techne does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the revealing mentioned before." Ibid, 12-13.

Fig. 1: I can't even draw straight... lines! (pen on paper, 210 × 296 mm × 4 panels, 2019)¹⁰
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I can't even draw straight... lines!, playfully refers to the queer slogan of the 1990s 'we can't even walk straight' or 'we can't even march straight' but in this context, it is also a work playing with the Deleuzean

immense amount of concentration.

idea of lines of flight. In the first instance each panel of the work is approached with the sincere intention that the line drawn freehand will be straight. This involves an

10 Within this

context the work



multiply, lines that are rarely straight, lines that rise up and challenge those drawn by a contracted 'draftsman' to reinforce the straightness of thought and of being in the world: being on, to deploy a *cliché*, the straight and narrow. With this in mind, does not the straightening of lines beget a narrowness of thought, perhaps as the calcification of the arteries compromises the oxygenated blood flow that replenishes the neurological conditions of thought itself?

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Interestingly, in considering the question of the essence of technology, Heidegger proposes that technology is itself a kind of *poeisis* and therefore, if we consider his conceptualisation of 'bringing-forth' as 'revealing' we must also acknowledge that such an alignment occurs, unbound to instrumentality, perhaps in the way that the line of the straight (and narrow) veers off in a multitude of directions for there is no stopping the hand that moves: "My hand," says Heidegger, "is not a piece of me. I myself am entirely in each gesture of the hand, every single time." A queer statement for sure.

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But, this is less a matter of what Crysanthi Nigianni and Mel Storr describe as "the becoming-DeluezoGuattarian of Queer Theory [or] the becoming-queer of Deleuze's and Guattari's theory."12 Nor is it a stammering linked to some form of transit/transitional move, which, regardless of its stammering ways, remains directional. Nor is it a thinking through of the two-fold or the excluded middle or the binary (none of which can never be enough). Rather what we must be attentive to here is thought that, as Cixous so eloquently stated over four decades ago, glistens like the glistening of the sea and the thinking through of the threefold (at the very least the threefold) towards the spatio-temporality of the multiple/of the many-fold, towards that which exposes the shame of binary logic, its hypermasculinised structural privilege, the monster in her ground-breaking novel, Angst.¹³ A kind of mobilisation of the prism, of colour, always already rainbowed, always-already bent. Perhaps we cannot ignore the fact that the prism is itself a technology of the scientific revolution, and as such somewhat concurrent with the development of capitalist economics. Perhaps what this demonstrates is the need

Martin Heidegger (2010), Being and Truth, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Press), 36-7.

¹² Nigianni and Storr, Deleuze and Queer Theory, Op cit, 1–10.

¹³ Hélène Cixous (1985), Angst, translated by J. Levy, (Edmonton: Calder Publications, Ltd).

¹⁴ Paul B. Preciado (2020), An Apartment on Uranus, (Fitzcarraldo Editions) at ica.art/learning/ paul-b-preciado-jack-halberstam

15 Sue (Johnny) Golding (1997), "Poeisis and Politics as Ecstatic Fetish: Foucault's Ethical Demand," in Filozofski Vestnik, Ljubljana: Slovenian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy, Vol 18, no. 2, 17–31.

¹⁶ Ibid, 22.

17 Karen Barad (2007), Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning, (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press) 141. for a transformation from within material practice at the very level of its constitution, somewhere from within the sheerness of difference and variance of being that demands once and for all that Preciado's description of "the limits of techno-scientific capitalism" can indeed be smashed and reconfigured, can indeed be rethought and reimagined in the 21st century. In his text, *An Apartment on Uranus* (2020), Preciado is emphatic:

"I am not a man I am not a woman I am not heterosexual I am not homosexual I am not bisexual. I am a dissident of the sexgender system. I am the multiplicity of the cosmos trapped in a binary political and epistemological system, shouting in front of you. I am a Uranian confined inside the limits of techno-scientific capitalism." Interestingly enough, Preciado's demand for the body politic now echoes Johnny Golding's demand of the late 1990s in her essay, Poeisis and Politics as Ecstatic Fetish: Foucault's Ethical Demand. Here re-staging Foucault's discursive move, Golding demands one step into the world of radically singular-multiplicity and radically multiple-singularity. She writes:

"Self/identity self becomes simply, the expression of

multi-particled selfnesses, made meaningful, made into a something 'else'—a kind of gaseous 'nodal point' of self-due precisely to its having been attracted/seduced, and therewith, sutured, into a oneness (of sorts) not because of beauty (per se) or desire (per se) or even magnetism (per se) but precisely because it can be—and must be—used. Techne. [...] Cohesive relations, processes, wanderings, traditions, fleeting nodal points, dreams, even the sweat (or especially the sweat) of the body loins, are all grist for the mill, all 'props' for establishing the multiple-as-a-singular-unity, establishing, in other words, the that which lies around us, the elsewhere or otherness, as us; but an 'us' as 'selfhood' quite distinct from the wholly formed Truth of the Cartesian ego-I, self-reflexive sense of self."16 Let us push this further, joining the prismatic imagined here and the ethical demand of ecstatic fetish with the radicalised material demand of quantum physics. One turns to Barad, who in her groundbreaking work Meeting the Universe Halfway, develops a new form of agency, one born of diffraction and intra-action; one that, as Barad

puts it, "understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces."

A moment to pause.

friendship ['frendsip]

names the raw, sensuous, delicate, multi-dimensional and secret intelligence shared by sentient beings at the moment of their extended encounter. it requires nothing of identity politics, selfhood, social agency, though its very expression enables and indeed solidifies, all this and more.

Concomitantly, we must acknowledge that 'Queer' is also in many ways neurotic as a strategy defined by negation: by the 'non', the 'anti' and the 'contra' it is beset with fear, the fear of being defined 'as such'. the fear of being immobilised, caught in the cycle of a binaric contrast, a polarity that is simply reinforced through repetition, reproduction and (similarity if not) sameness. Following Claire Colebrook's guery, "does the concept of gueerness [by necessity] change the ways in which we theorise?" [a yes/no question for sure], the answer is of course yes, for it forces us to think and think and think again and again and again, to render queerness queerer—at least —threefold, to queer material experience, to understand the queerness of the material world, to experience queerness-becoming. We, those of us who think queerly, are always on the cusp. This, needless to say, has implications for the 'self' as a material constellation, of matter and fluids, of electrical impulses and neurological networks: the Baradian 'dynamism of forces', the energised transference of matter into thought. Damn it NO: thinkingmatter-matterthought! For, this is arguably the very reverse of the grandiose idea in which matter in the making when becoming does indeed become (in the hands of the novelist) Frankensteinian.

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But for now, let us reaffirm the seductive power and potency of 'queer': its material potential, its ideality. The twofold as described by Nigianni and Storr is problematic here and always has been, at least since the mid 90s, for the doubling or double movement described by many (whether sporadic or not) has never been enough. We would do well to recall Sedgwick's assertion that while addressing the body politic one is simultaneously offering a less habitual way of thinking, pointing us beyond the ever present to an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning (my emphasis) when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made... to signify monolithically."18 Or indeed, to David Halperin's proclamation that,

"Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it [Queer] necessarily refers [...] 'Queer' then, demarcates not a

¹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994), Tendencies, (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press), 7. positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. [... Queer] describes a horizon of possibility." Whilst both Sedgwick and Halperin were deeply concerned with representation and the representational politics of the time it is clear that within this concern, a more cogent line of enquiry is also put to work, a shift that signals a move beyond representation into a more abstracted and nuanced enquiry, for as José Esteban Muñoz tells us more recently,

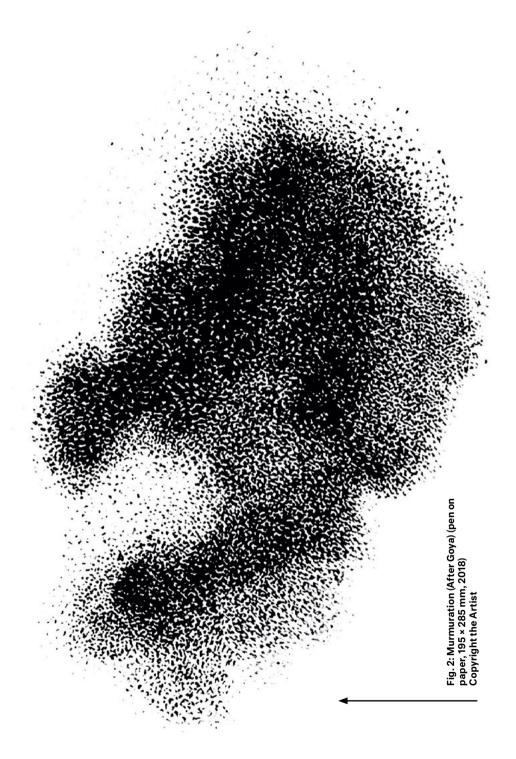
"QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."²⁰

Whilst also deeply political, Muñoz's commentary hints at the potentiality of queer and the mobilisation of queerness. Queer may always be out of reach, yet tantalisingly close, exquisitely so—the exquisite multiplicity of thoughtful mattering that testifies to our continuing ability to do. Following Muñoz, queerness may well be an illumination. an illumination of a horizon, but this should not be reduced to a normative gueer representation; an image of a gueer utopia. No, for this exquisite multiplicity is so much more, something of a different order akin to the infused tinting of a violent disagreement whilst, simultaneously, the pallor of guerelle: an exquisite guarrelsome queerness of practice (as praxis) set in motion (the meat-ing of an argument infused by gueerness). "There is no stopping the mind that moves," Joanna Freuh writes; it is the "soul-and-mind-inseparablefrom-the-body."21 It is an embeddedness with all of its intellectually and materially visceral moments of brilliance, desires, vagaries, slippages and mess that informs what Freuh describes as critically erotic scholarship: scholarship on the move.²² One might say that much of gueer artistic scholarship is rooted/routed in an exquisite multidimensionality, something with a more complex logic, something more supple, in which the mobility and agility of thought is imbued with a 'glistening' gueerness, a gueerness as materialised quality: lubricant and moist. A flux of radical jouissance, as Jonathan Kemp would say.23

David Halperin, Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 62.

- José E. Muñoz (2009), Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity, (New York: New York University Press), 1.
- ²¹ Joanna Freuh (1996), *Erotic Faculties*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 3.
- ²² Joanna Freuh (2013) as quoted in Henry Rogers, *Queertexturealities*, (London and Birmingham: Article Press), 16.
- ²³ Jonathan Kemp (2103), "Chapter 9. Schreber and the Penetrated Male," as quoted in Deleuze and Queer Theory, 150.

Another moment to pause.



Walking in the park each morning, one becomes aware of the incremental shifts towards winter for most of the trees have lost their leaves and stand bereft in the morning sun. Sometimes I think the dog can sense their sorrow, their weeping for she herself looks forlorn, but as we turn the corner on the path and down the slope we are confronted by the most intense of colours: YELLOW, A colour of the rainbow, for the sycamore is holding on, a defiant gesture of a day or two against this seasonal infraction, it holds tightly to its now bright yellow canopy against those colours that have fallen in the stillness of the night: against the orange, and ochre, sienna and umber that now lie beneath its boughs. In the shallow warmth of the morning one might be mistaken that these are the early mornings of spring, the resurgence of the life force but there is a recto to this verso, in which at first glance there is a moment of misrecognition, for this wishful ode to newness, this force for life is nothing more than a stalled imagining, a stilled image (a photographic moment) of the death throes of yet another day. The tree holds on, holds on tight for as long as it can until with the heavy breeze from The North arrives, in the night, and it bears its foliage like the rest. Tomorrow it will no doubt stand as the others stand.

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We, the dog and I, could see that the roads and paths were covered in frost as we stepped from the door (the threshold) out into the world. It was bright and clear and cold. Her breath rose up and mingled with mine as, yet again, we walked across the park. When it is frosty like this, when the grass is a grayish green with long stems of dew she rolls in it, her pleasure is to roll on her back in a snake like motion before jumping back to her feet to survey the immediate locale. I often speak to her but she never really hears what is being said, she perhaps recognises the sounds that indicate satisfaction, pleasure or reproach. But, identifying specific vowels and consonants is more challenging. Therefore, when trying to explain a possible 'modus operandi' for such thought walks, she does not seem to understand the purpose of walking 'two steps forward and one step back', for despite my attempt at introducing such a historical point of reference—a channeling of David Hume, for her it is not so easy when

game/gaming [geɪm/ˈgeɪmɪŋ]

navigational strategy and tactics brought to the eye-hand-fingertips of the players, no longer driven by individual (human or otherwise) 'perception'.



Fig. 3: Parasequence no. 2: Sticky, sticky, sticky... sticky! (420 \times 520 mm \times 4 panels, 2019) Copyright the Artist.

one is—as she might say if she were actually able to speak: quadrupedal. Mind you, when caught in such intense moments of thinking, when building up to all those eureka moments of thought, one must be careful not to fall into the marshy ground beneath our feet for if such ground gives way one may never regain one's footing and those who pass us by, as experienced by Hume himself, may never come to help. She stands there looking up through our shared mingling breath as if she too is party to such meandering thoughts, but as we walk across the bright yellow carpet of sycamore leaves, all grounded now, she suddenly stops in the posture of alertness, tail straightened and pointing to the sky, head up sniffing intently, the front left paw lifted. Hers is a state of readiness.

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It is slippery underfoot but later in the day we walk across the field again toward the place where the starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris* to give them their Latin name) gather, sit and chatter before they roost. They look down at us as we pass by, whispering to each other just how small the human is (from their perspective high in the trees), and as for that dog, they say... (the tone is that of derision) inflexible, they say, without talent, they say, for they, the starlings, have the talent of mimicry. They are renowned for mimicking the whistle of referees at football matches. They are mischievously intelligent birds.

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Since the late 1980s scientists have used computational modelling to unravel the secrets of their aerial displays and while they can tell us how such murmurations (Fig. 2) come to be, it is less clear why these spectacles occur.²⁴ In the early 1900s, Edmund Selous (a leading ornithologist of the time), suggested that "the birds have psychic powers that [help] them to avoid collision but it is hard to deduce the truth of the matter, for the starlings themselves refuse to explain their rationale (psychically or otherwise)."²⁵ Sometimes though, I wonder if Selous was a theosophist, a scientific spiritualist, a friend of Madame Blavatsky, Hilma af Klint or indeed our very own Conan Doyle. Of course, it may simply be a matter of predation, the more birds there are in the flock the more likely they are to survive, with those at the edges moving position into the middle to avoid being

he gave to his computer-generated creatures.

24 Cf Craig Reyn-

olds (1987),

Simulation of 'boids' at red3d.

com/cwr/boids.

'Boids' is the name

²⁵ Cf Edmund Selous (2015 [1901)], *Bird Watching*, (London: J.M. Dent), or gutenberg.org/ files/50175/50175h/50175-h.htm

Fig. 4: Becoming Figure, becoming ground no. 2 (oil on canvas, 400 \times 500 mm, 2018) Copyright the Artist



specifically targeted as prey. The elegance of folding in. It may also simply be a raucous gathering that takes place when other flocks arrive from more northerly locations, for in the depth of the murmuration—often of ten thousand birds or more—these complex entangled (yet apparently coordinated) lines of flight, there is said to be the generation of bodily warmth. Small pockets of bodily warmth as if each bird is itself an electrical source of transmission, some corporeal expression of the becoming of thought, for here we might say that thought is looming indeed loaming like so many particles of dust in the air beneath their wings.

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Starlings are, of course, exhibitionists, skillful show offs of the highest degree, 'experts' some might say, perhaps in the Heideggerian sense, and after much preening and stretching of their silver speckled wings they rise up into the air. They decide to rise above them, the human and the dog, into the sky on masse into a glimmering glistening shimmering silver flashing sight that cuts across the evening sun: they turn, they swoop, they tumble in all directions, shape-shifting in the air, across the sky, down and down and down and up and up and up and up and in and in and in and out and out and out and across the expanded visual field, for theirs is a time of 'murmuration', and murmuration is indeed the exquisite praxis of starlings: the exquisite collective murmuring lines of flight in which lines become nodes, singular points, insightful bodies of an expanded agency in near perfect synchronicity.

Latin roots leads us to the Greek term, paralogismos, (from paralogos) meaning unreasonable. With this in mind should not all artistic research be unreasonable, unruly, challenging and curious? Unreasonable in the sense—less of

building an

argument—but perpetuating the

argumentative as a *loci* of resistance.

²⁶ The etymology of

paraology, with its middle French, late

the word

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Do not be alarmed: all this 'creative speculation' is not simply intended to be a metaphorical turn. No, for what I am trying to imagine here is a mobilisation of exquisiteness, an attempt to imagine an exquisite methodology: something structurally multidimensional, something aesthetically intense, something sensuous, indeed an intensification of practice in the making, a radical *jouissance* in which paraology, a paralogical-methodology, acts as a mode of deterritorialised *poeisis*.²⁶

And more: in which the epistemic object (or epistemic matter, for that matter) is that which is predicated on the contradiction of logical rules or formulas, something that contravenes the value placed on knowledge production, something that is other-intuitive. Not counter-intuitive, something less about knowledge acquisition than sensation—the intense surging of the corporeal perhaps—the phenomena of actually experiencing being in the moment of knowing, of forethought, of anticipation, of putting into play an aesthetics of déjà vu: some-queer-thing-ness: exquisitely 'generative' as Åsa Johannesson would say.27 Something in which the not-yet-there, the emerging form, the pre-state (Fig. 3) gives rise to a kind of aesthetic rendering of genetic parasequences—the fleeting mesh of asymmetrical cycles, finite the multiplying data loams.²⁸ It speaks tactically and tactilely to a form of transpositionality or perhaps a para- aesthetico-epistemic-transpositionality that holds things at an elevated distance. As Michael Schwab explores in his Transpositions:

"If an identity does not underlie a difference but may emerge from it, a new non-reresentational, transpositional logic is required in which something at its previous position is not easily reconciled with what appears at its new position, altered as it is by the move. We may also express this by saying that the logic of representation is singular, remaining the same across different instances, while the logic of transposition is multiple, needing to be transposed from instance to instance. The positional specificity that is part of trans-positionality—whether in space, time or otherwise determined—thus explains why it has been so difficult to approach transpositional operations philosophically, and why artistic research, which is sensitive to the specifics of what is at hand, may present new options not only for a bottom-up rather than top-down approach but also for an approach for which there is no 'up', only positions that result from movement."29 The ground is no longer ground, it is a terra infirma—a Venetian flood land in which there are no definable edges, a marshland in which one must wade and dive and perhaps, just perhaps, instinctively emerge in the realm of imaginary/imagined/invented meshes. This is nothing less than the exquisite methods of artistic research-practice itself, the realm of close making, the ex-qui-site multiplicity of a logic of sensation, of an insightful radical material practice and its groundless logics of cohesion (Fig. 4).30

²⁷ Åsa Johannesson (2020), Material-Ontology: Reconsidering the Measure of Queer in Photography, (unpublished PhD Thesis, London: Royal College of Art).

- In Marine biology. parasequences are defined as "relatively conformable successions of genetically related beds or bedsets bounded by marine flooding surfaces and their correlative surfaces." Cf **UGA Stratigraphy** Lab: The Data is in the Strata (Parasequences) at strata.uga.edu/ sequence/parasequence.html. In the data loam, it is in-formed by the mesh.
- ²⁹ Michael Schwab (2018), Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research, (Leuven: Leuven University Press), 1.
- 30 Insight here, and with regard to the second definition of paraology, may well be conceived as a 'reasoning disorder' in which questions are met with what appear to be inappropriate answers or delusional speech, whilst attempting to make sense: the tacit realm of the arts.

- I imagine this is something the Canadian queer linguist, Henry Rogers (another Henry Rogers) might attest to in his exploration of phonetics and sexual orientation. Cf Ron Smyth. Greg Jacobs and Henry Rogers (2003), Male Voices and Perceived Sexual Orientation: An experimental and theoretical approach, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Face by composer Thomas Adès, performed by Jill Comez, Valdine Anderson, Niall Morris, Roger Bryson, published on EMI classics, 1999. The resulting vocal performance is no doubt one that Joanna Freuh would relish.

Historically (1565) the word paralogism leads us to the conceptualisation of a fallacious argument, an interesting conjunction in which the word fallacious that deemed to be mistaken, misleading. erroneous, untrue and mythical, is bound to that of argument in which reason, contention and claim are met by disagreement, dispute and squabble. Perhaps the word fallacious is in need of some rehabilitation, not purely because of its 'uousness' that may lead us to the sensuous, but because arguably in artistic research all such apparently treacherous words may be mobilised in the service of the project as it emerges. Indeed, one must be attentive to such things, to the corporeality of errors; for one sibilant slip of the tongue and we might well be in the realm of the fellatio, the fellat-ious argument perhaps, in which the murmuring of words and sounds pulsate.31 The murmuring of the opiate laced castrato, perhaps, whose pink milk bathing induces becoming. A moment of such Proustian intensity that one begins to sweat profusely, for this transgressive corporeal twist prompts yet another recollection, on this occasion the recollection of the serial seductions of the Duchess of Argyll as portrayed by the composer, Thomas Adès in his 1995 chamber opera, Powder Her Face. 32 For, the coloratura soprano playing the lead role of the Duchess must expand her vocal performance, to one of superhuman agility, for she has the difficult task of maintaining perfect pitch whilst giving head: of singing with her mouth full. There is no doubt that the resulting vocal performance is one that all of the protagonists here would approve of, I suspect, with the exception of the more prudish of the starlings. Indeed, an exquisite moment of Foucauldian selffashioning, an ethical practice if ever there was one. It is perhaps with such a conceptualisation of 'exquisiteness' that artistic researchers must be at their most attentive. We too are the dissidents of the normative sex-gender system, we too are the dissidents of the academy, we too are the multiplicity of the cosmos, and we too are shouting in front of you.

Oh! The proximity of distant thoughts.33

In the zoomiverse of my studio (March 2020).

ghosting [ˈgəʊstɪŋ]

ghosting names a corporeal trace that is 'left' when the main event evaporates or is destroyed but still manages to produce an offset. freud famously clarified this via the role of the unconscious and the trace effect of trauma left on it by the experiences in everyday life. freud's simple example: take a wax block and paper. write something on the paper; pull the paper off the block—the paper has 'no trace' of the work, but the wax still have a corporeal impression. now shift this to computing wave functions: an offset may be produced when suddenly an interference pattern (like peaks and troughs destroying each other depending on whether they are in phase) are out of sync. the ghosting is born.