

CIRCUS AS A MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

A wandering conversation on an impossible journey

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The quasi-logical pre-supposition of identity between mental space (the space of philosophers and epistemologists) and real space creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other. From time to time some intrepid Funambulist will set off to cross the void, giving a great show and giving a delightful shudder through the onlookers. By and large, however, so-called philosophical thinking recoils at the mere suggestion of any such salto-mortal. (Henri Lefebvre 1991: 6)

If I set out to be this funambulist, I must have fallen off that tightrope a long time ago.

Acknowledgments

In her essay *Thinking no-one's thoughts*, Maaïke Bleeker points us towards Deleuze & Guattari's suggestion that thinking is a process that 'transpires between people.' (In *Dance Dramaturgy* 2015, 68) She points us to their notion of 'Charme', a spark between people that ignites friendship - they claim that thinking starts from this spark. Writing in academia, as this thesis requires, I am working in a paradigm that asks that people to lay claim to thoughts. I cannot do this. If I follow Indigenous place-thought as introduced to me by Vanessa Watts, then I can only be thinking the lands thoughts, if I follow Maaïke Bleeker I am following no-one's thoughts. Within the framework of this thesis, I am thinking everyone's thoughts, I cannot lay claim to any of the thinking laid out, nor do I want to - many of these thoughts have come through, from and with my course leader John-Paul Zaccarini, my residency collective Eduardo Cardozo Hildago, Toubab Holmes & Saar Rombout, the rest of my classmates, my supervisor Ana Sanchez, my mentors and tutors Bauke Lievens and Martin Sonderkamp, all of the artists, thinkers, authors and friends mentioned throughout this thesis and many many more. Coming from a background in performance making and devising, I am accustomed to the acknowledgement of a collaborative process, and I wish to emphasise the collaborative nature of this text. Although I cannot lay claim to the originality of any of the thoughts in this text, I would also like to acknowledge that it is because of it's form, content and process and my relation to those things that this is the case, not that I deny the impossibility of anyone to author a thought. As Maaïke Bleeker points out the friendship sparked by 'Charme' is not based on sharing the same ideas but is to do with the moment of "having something to say to one another" (68) - meaning that the thoughts move. I hope that I can honour the movement of this thinking, this thinking movement, this moving thinking...

Before we begin

The Method

The thesis could be described as a performative, reflexive review of my circus practice. Following approaches to writing that situate text as part of a practice, such as Jane Rendell's *Site Writing*, that looks at art criticism as a form of architecture, I approach writing as a form of circus. I think this holds true whether we adopt the position of circus as the place where events unfold (as in the circus tent) or that it is the events themselves. I would note that this is not a unique proposition, and follows the principles of my classmates & the direction of my course leader. Crucial to understanding this thesis is a decision to start from an approach to circus from a point of view that considers circus as the performance of the relationship between body, object & environment (following Sebastian Kann 2018). In the same way that my movement practice explores and performs this relationship, so does this text. I started out writing this thesis as a performance of the relationship between bodies, objects and environments. This works towards an expanded view of what circus could be, operating in a similar vein to notions of expanded choreography. I am hesitant to separate the practices of choreography from circus (as is sometimes the case with choreography and dance) - so as to avoid producing a Cartesian rift between body (dance) and choreography (mind) and a division between art (choreography) and craft (dance) - as discussed by Bojana Cvejic in the introduction to *Choreographing Problems*. It could be argued that in this instance, there is a body of text, an object of discussion and an environment of academia - though, as you will discover, I find the boundaries of body, object & environment are slippery and shift register (in line with my movement practice).

Cultural critic Irit Rogoff, artist and film-maker Trinh T. Minh-ha have discussed the significance assigned to the shift in use of prepositions. They argue that a practice of 'writing with' is a 'dehierarchization' of social relations that direct the making of meaning in visual culture. As I am writing from with-in my practice I can only write 'with', rather than 'about' - which has etymological roots in being 'on the outside of'. As with 'site writing', that posits that writing, like architecture, is a spatial and material practice, I believe too that writing and circus are spatial & material practices. In my practice, I traverse different kinds of spaces, I draw on points of orientation from phenomenology and am situated by feminist theory which give me tools for navigation. I am indebted to Vanessa Watts for introducing me to Indigenous place-thought, and helping me on the way to understanding humans and non-humans as an extension of land that is alive and thinking and from which agency is derived¹. For all of these reasons, the text could be seen as having a cartographical form - though I have no intention to create a map for others to follow. I am responding to a multi-disciplinary approach inspired by feminist studies. As a circus artist embedded in an industry that encourages solo-disciplinarity - I work against this mode, which I see as an alliance with structures imposed by the market, from which I would like to untangle my circus practice. As such, the text moves between disciplines - this can be confusing when certain words or terms which stay the same, change paradigms and therefore meanings. I have tried to be attentive to this, but ask that the reader also be on alert.

As I do not see my writing practice and my movement practice as separate from each other, I work with the same overarching methods. One method that is a key part of my practice is the presentation of what most people would refer to as my circus object (who I have named Tank and gendered male) as a co-collaborator with agency and identity - and I ask any participants to my work (e.g. audience / colleagues / readers) to 'play along' and accept him as such. I write this thesis from Tank's perspective. I put Tank in dialogue with various philosophers, scholars and dramaturgs. This method emerged from the practice of engaging with theory through circus in relation to Jane Bennett's 'strategic anthropomorphism' (as discussed later.) Engaging with theory in a playful way enables me to approach it from different angles, experience the theory and question it. Thinking through Tank encourages me to think from different perspectives, allows me to disagree with my own thoughts and actions (by externalising them through Tank) and disorients my notion of what the *body* and the *object* are that I am working with. Although I am aware that the version of Tank that I present is a fiction, so too is the version of myself that I put

¹ See Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!) Vanessa Watts 2013

forward. Since reading the work of Paul Preciado, "I" have never felt more like a fiction². Similarly if I was writing from the perspective of another human, I could never truly know if my representation of them would be accurate to their own experience - I can only know what I think it is they are telling me. I try to be open to listen what Tank is telling me, but I can of course never know my interpretations are correct. In that way, accepting Tank as a co-collaborator should not be too much of a leap of imagination. In *Falling The Thought of Circus*, John Paul Zaccarini suggests that "if circus is a programme of thinking, it is also a fiction, a not-real, an imaginary, a fantasy" (year? 9). I engage with the idea of circus as a fiction, with social constructs in general as fictions and the blurry line between fiction and reality. As Bauke Lievens discusses in her 2nd open letter to the circus "*The Myth Called Circus*" (2016), the line between reality and fiction in circus is blurred - for example in the myth of a free nomadic space, that circus itself built and believes, or what an artist presents as 'real' physical risk and what the actual risks are. I am not engaging in the critique of this quality of circus, but I am playing with it in my form.

My practice follows a certain dramaturgy, and the thesis ends with a dramaturgical proposition. I have much to owe the somewhat enticingly ambiguous field of dramaturgy in considering how to articulate my practice. Perhaps circus artists are drawn to working with a dramaturg because they already have an unfolding dramaturgy to be explored in relation to their discipline or equipment. Synne K Behrnt points out in *Dance, Dramaturgy & Dramaturgical Thinking* that Van Kerkhoven suggests "that there is a correlation between attention to dramaturgy in dance and the rise of dance as an independent art form, practice and discipline." (2010, 189) And I hope that similarly an interest in dramaturgy in circus will likewise support its position as an independent art form, practice and discipline. André Lepecki suggests that the introduction of the Dramaturg by Pina Bausch changed "the entire epistemological stability of the dance field." (in *Dramaturgy in Motion*, Katherine Profeta, 2015, 8) He goes on to argue that this intervention meant that the collaborators in the process now had to approach dance as a "field of knowledge to draw from". (8)

The question

The writing is embedded in the practice, so I am not describing something I have understood, rather marking my process of understanding and inviting you into it. For this reason, I discovered what I would like to propose as my research question, along the way. I notice that the definition of circus that I work from shifts in the text from exploring circus as the performance of the relationship between the body & object/environment to circus practice as a way of thinking from the perspective of body / object / environment. The question I am left with, is if there is a space for circus practice to be a mode of thought that operates with/through a particular relationship between body/object/environment and what forms could that take? It should be clear that I am working from a perspective in which writing can be a circus act (literally, not metaphorically), In this case circus cannot be defined by its aesthetic, but by its approach.

John-Paul Zaccarini opens his book *Falling the Thought of Circus*, with the conclusion that "*Circus artists are inadvertent philosophers*" (Year? 1). He argues that the philosophical nature of circus is something hidden or withdrawn, "threaded deep in muscle fibres...it thinks away, twitching, responding and formulating new ways of approaching the objects of the world, re-thinking the bodies cultured repetitions towards the environment".(8) He tells us that his practice comes from circus, but 'I no longer want to re-iterate my self in that system called The Circus.' In many ways I share these sentiments. I no longer wish the philosophical nature of circus to be concealed. I wish *The Circus* to demand to be more than the market allows it to be. That is not to say the form of expression for a 'thinking circus' has to be written, I would be the first to defend non-verbal ways of engaging with philosophy and critical thinking - I only ask for written circus to be included as one possible manifestation among many. He closes this book with the question *what is circus thinking?* This thesis is answering and questioning this provocation.

2 "The very task of political action is to fabricate a body, to put it to work, to define its modes of production and reproduction, to foreshadow the modes of discourse by which that body is fictionalised to itself until it is able to say "I"." Preciado, P. (2020)

Dear reader,

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Tank. I am a plastic jerry can. I work with a circus artist named Fran, who suspends herself by the hair, using me as a counterweight on a 1-1 pulley system³. Forgive me for this unorthodox introduction, but a break from institutional traditions was necessary for this impossible journey - written through the lens of what a circus artist named Fran thinks a 20 litre plastic water container (and so-called piece of circus equipment) might have to say on the matter, had they fingers to type this text and command of the English language.⁴ Personally I protested to the circus artist in question that as she had chosen to present a thesis in the English language, perhaps it would be more appropriate for her to write it from her own perspective rather than appropriate her idea of my subjectivity, but she would not be convinced. I understand that you may have difficulty believing that I, Tank, a *mere*⁵ plastic jerry can could have written this, but I ask that you suspend this disbelief.

So how did we get here? We started like many a circus practitioner, questioning what it was that we were doing. Which we confused with the question *what is circus?* The multiplicity of the concept of circus was however very appealing to us, opening many possibilities - circus a space, circus as a performance, circus as a way of life, circus as a myth, circus as it's apparatuses etc.⁶ This slippery noun has been an inspiration for our practice, where we have considered for example Fran as a body, Fran as an apparatus, Fran as a space, or myself as a body, both of us as one body, space as an object etc. If circus is a slippery noun that can easily glide across identity borders, and if what we are doing is circus it seems this can be taken as a wholeheartedly circus-esque approach.

After going over and over the multiplicity of definitions and possibilities that circus brings - we decided 2 things. One - that we were satisfied settling on a plethora of possibilities of what circus could be. And two - that while we enjoy the many definitions, we decided to work from one that we found gave us the most options and possibilities, whilst still having something concrete to refer to. We started from Sebastian Kann's 2018 proposition, given as part of a discussion at a symposium at Elbeuf centre for circus arts, France:

"circus as a performance where the relation of a body and its environment is highlighted – so what you see is not the body necessarily or the object, but you see the way the body is related to it."

<https://www.circusdialogue.com/sebastian-kann-elbeuf>.

So we started exploring this relationship, very literally. We took what we understood as the body being referred to (Fran's), and what we understood the object to be (me - Tank) and explored our relationship with our environment. Through our research together, we found this opened up more worlds, spaces and possibilities to us. I was in the absurd position of trying to understand a 'human' experience and what that might be like, Fran spent her days trying to access my '*plastic*' interior, my materiality, my ontology, identities were created, de-constructed, reconstructed - we moved between countries, studios, living rooms, head-spaces - we found ourselves in the heterotropics⁷ and

3 For an example of what this looks like see: <https://vimeo.com/206207547>

4 Of course it is Fran's hands doing the typing here - she thinks she is channeling my thoughts and translating them into English. She knows that not all thoughts can be translated in to English, and many will be lost or even damaged - but she is doing her best, bless her.

5 I inserted the word 'mere' as an echo of what I presume to be your assumption, apologies if I am incorrect - perhaps I have spent to long with Heidegger who I'm certain would view me as a mere thing. I presented myself initially as 'a plastic jerrycan', but I was careful not to add anything to suggest that was *all* I was, and I hope by the end of the thesis this will be made clear.

6 See the chapter '*Un Cirque Au Pluriel*', in *Le Cirque: Entre l'Elan et La Chute*, Philippe Goudard 2010

7 In reference to Michel Foucault's idea of Heterotopia. "Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias." (*Des Espaces Autres*, 1984) Juxtaposed with 'tropics' via Latin from Greek *tropikos*, from *tropē* 'turning', from *trepein* 'to turn'.

our nominal boundaries were as slippery as ever. We needed a footing. Where do we begin? We begin in space. But which space? In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that the "universe is seen as offering a multiplicity of spaces, yet this diversity is accounted for by a unitary theory, namely cosmology"⁸. (1991, 13)

So here we are, a plastic body & a fleshy body searching for a space where we can exist together, where our dialogue will be added to, where people will join us in our quest(ioning), through our own cosmologies towards a trans-cosmological⁹ space. If we were to look at circus as crossover fiction, the crossover characters you could encounter might be the trapeze, the corde lisse, the teeterboard, the flyer and so on. However, in this piece of circus, the characters we are likely to encounter will be philosophers & theorists. For better or for worse we might find Edmund Husserl & Sarah Ahmed in the phenomenological camps but not without stumbling over the ontological campfires of Heidegger & the OOO¹⁰ cult leaders; we will find Robin Wall Kimmerer, Vanessa Watts, Karen Barad & Jane Bennett in the material multiverses; Michel Foucault & Paul Preciado in bio/necro-powered cities, Edouard Glissant & Henri Lefebvre in deep space, as well as a few surprise cameos!

So I hope dear reader you will join us on our journey - we will be talking to you whether you stay with us or not, for, who else do we have! We cannot let you go, but you can escape. I look forward to the journey.

All the best,

Tank

P.S I am writing this from isolation, imposed by the UK government in reaction to the coronavirus pandemic. We seem to have wandered in to a No Man's Land¹¹ without really realising, and the borders keep shifting like the walls of a labyrinth. The term No Man's Land carries connotations of war - and although this is not a war, the rhetoric of war is (somewhat problematically) being employed by the media¹². Noam Lesham discusses the dissolving of the boundary between body and space in the No Man's Land of war. As someone who lives between slippery boundaries when it comes to body and space generally, this could be an interesting place for me to start from, though of course I am aware my body is not the same as that of a soldier in No Man's Land. Later in his essay,

⁸ From the Greek κόσμος, kosmos, world and -λογία, -logia, discourse. I interpret it as sets of beliefs, knowledges, interpretation, practices and institutions that build a 'world' or a sense of reality. This is directed by the influence of magic practitioner Valentine Lousseau, where cosmology is loosely understood as "reality as perceived by a society".

⁹ Although I expect this may be unrealistic or unattainable for us in this journey - it is never-the-less a wish. Here I am stating an expression of a desire for our quest rather than stating a possible destination. It is a reference to the final words of Sylvia Wynter's "The Autopoietic turn" in which she expresses a call for the: "praxis of the Autopoietic Turn/Overturn to function in a hitherto unsuspected, transdisciplinary, transepisteme, transcosmogonic modality one of which, as Césaire insisted, "only poetry" and it's modality."

¹⁰ OOO stands for Object Oriented Ontology. From Onto - "a being, individual; being, existence," from stem of Greek on "being," and -λογία, -logia, discourse. The phrase object oriented ontology suggests that this is a study of being that is oriented towards or around objects. Object Oriented Ontologist Ian Bogost describes it in the following way: "Ontology is the philosophical study of existence. Object-oriented ontology ("OOO" for short) puts things at the center of this study. Its proponents contend that nothing has special status, but that everything exists equally... In contemporary thought, things are usually taken either as the aggregation of ever smaller bits (scientific naturalism) or as constructions of human behavior and society (social relativism). OOO steers a path between the two, drawing attention to things at all scales, and pondering their nature and relations with one another as much with ourselves ."http://ooo.gatech.edu/

¹¹ Examples of the coronavirus pandemic being referred to as No Man's Land include the following:
<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/trapped-in-no-mans-land-of-coronavirus-restrictions-some-of-britains-small-businesses-are-wasting-away-2020-03-17>
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/law-students-in-no-mans-land-as-coronavirus-delays-bar-exams-11587294001>

¹² For an article on the problematics of the war rhetoric see: <https://www.varsity.co.uk/opinion/19065>

he notes that the word first appeared in the Oxford English dictionary to refer to a piece of ground outside the north wall of London in the 14th Century, which was later used as a place of burial during the Plague, which he says 'alludes to the spatial conjuncture of liminality and death which have become the hallmark of no man's lands more recently'. (2015, 3) Because we are speaking from this No Man's Land, the boundaries may appear to shift, time is experienced differently & not everything in the space is supposed to be made sense of. The Notion of No Man's Land has been somewhat over-romanticised & I want to remind you of the harsh laws imposed by those who govern what lies beyond it's boundaries have real effects for those who find themselves inside. I find it comforting to remind myself though, that it is technically, an ungovernable space.

A lesson in Orienteering

Now, where to start this quest? Which direction shall we take? In fact, before I ask that, lets get our bearings. It seems we have already started in the phenomenology camp. Sara Ahmed is here to re-assure me that this is a good place to begin as it makes orientation itself "*central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed "toward" an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the living body (Leib)*" (2006, 2). This could be useful for us, bearing in mind the relationship between the body and the object that is being given focus (or at least the performance of that relationship). And I am glad we have come across Sara so early on, for she is concerned with queer orientations, and this is a queer journey indeed. She points us towards Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann: "*The place in which I find myself, my actual 'here,' is the starting point for my orientation in space*". (8) And then directs us towards Merleau Ponty who would suggest the 'here' where we begin is with the body and the 'where' of its dwelling. If we are to go back to beginnings as Sara suggested, the body we assumed to be in question in the definition we are working from is Fran's body. Let's look at its orientation. In the beginning Fran would often confuse my body with my identity - so I will approach this distinction with equal disregard when looking at the orientation of her. Slavoj Žižek, followed by Christopher Breu slip in here to remark on their interest in how materialities and bodies are disavowed by postmodern culture's production of identities. "*For Breu, "avatar fetishism" names the disavowal of "the material processes, objects, and embodiments that structure and enable everyday life in our ostensibly post-industrial era"*" (Singh, J. 2014, 22)

Fran often remarks that when she graduated from circus school in the UK, the european contemporary circus industry valued (what it could sell as) her identity as an individual and what it means to be that individual¹³. This is unsurprising with the promotion of innovation & entrepreneurship in the arts from the New Labour Government that Fran grew up with. Upon mentioning New Labour in relation to the arts, Robert Hewison popped up to help me clarify some thoughts around that matter. He explains that they were closing the gap between art and capitalism through "*maximising individual freedom in the market...New Labour's intention was to integrate the arts and heritage into a system of government that...continued the neo-liberal programme*"¹⁴

13. This was lucky for Fran, whose rebellious body did not fit the standards imposed on it, she could at least exploit her subjectivity and 'succeed' in this way - though it did give Fran a rebellious streak and a questioning nature.

14 I am working from a framework that views neoliberalism as the technologies, techniques and practices of a hegemonic discourse that stems from an economic doctrine that prioritises private property rights and the de-regulation of markets. In the founding statements of the Mont Pelerin Society (a think tank that initiated the birth of the neo-liberal doctrine) it clearly lays out that the freedom of thought and expression that it promotes and protects is reserved for possession by "Western Man". The doctrine is based on Adam Smith's proposal for freedom of exchange as a way to increase production which will in turn increase prosperity and freedom of choice for the individual (white male). Smith's proposal assumes an equal playing field, and neo-liberalism has inherited this assumption. "the neoliberal presumption of perfect information and a level playing field for competition appears as either innocently utopian or a deliberate obfuscation of processes that will lead to the concentration of wealth, and therefore, the restoration of class power." Harvey (2005: 68). According to Harvey "It has pervasive effects on ways

established by the conservatives...the very identity of the individuals becomes a commodity" (Hewison, 2014, 3). I was not around at the time, but Fran tells me many circus artists at the time liked to believe in their identity as outsiders or anarchists, and from many of circus artists I have met whilst working in Stockholm, Berlin & London - I might say this is often still the case¹⁵, even Fran herself enjoys indulging in this idea from time to time.¹⁶ Contrary to a belief in the rebellious nature of circus, I have found the circus bodies I have encountered in the various institutions I have worked in throughout Europe to be somewhat normative and to be reproducing those normativities.¹⁷ Fran was living in the wake of and was inspired by companies that celebrated the outsider status of circus such as Archaos and Circus of Horrors. When She entered circus school, she found innovation, a focus on solo disciplines (rather than group disciplines such as Flying trapeze or specialising in multiple disciplines, which was not encouraged in her institution¹⁸) and the growth of the solo show in circus to be highly valued. This is a reflection of the Eurocentric philosophy that makes up her cosmology and comes out in her work. Much has been written on the binaries attributed to Cartesian philosophy, and its continuing divisive effect on western discourse, whether it agrees with it or not. The ego cogito and its relationship with the project of modernity, capitalism, and individualism which Maldonado-Torres argues is preceded by and born out of the less often discussed Manichean ego conquiro¹⁹, are key elements in Fran's cosmology and both Fran and I must pay attention to how we reproduce ideals from these ideologies through our work²⁰

As a young, white, university educated women, Fran was presented with opportunities for herself to work in institutional art spaces after graduation, in these places she was pointed in the direction of or oriented toward the work of New Materialists and Object Oriented Ontologists. Fran found this

of thought to the point where it may become incorporated into the common sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world" (3). Harvey argues that Neoliberal ideas have been used by the economic elite as a political project to restore their power - putting neo-liberal ideas and actual practices of neoliberalisation into 'creative tension'.

- 15 Crying Out Loud, one of the UK's leading producers of circus state that circus's "restless spirit allies itself with the subversive countercultural energy of the new variety and alternative comedy circuits, takes on the voice of the poet and the anarchist, and picks up speed as it moves towards its modern incarnation: a hybrid artform, spread across borders, half in the public eye and half out of it, sensible of its history yet ready, always, to reinvent itself."
<https://cryingoutloud.org/about/circus-timeline/>
- 16 See Baue Livens' second open letter to the circus "The Myth Called Circus" <https://www.circusdialogue.com/open-letters-circus-2>
- 17 "But don't the limits which circus artists embody in their techniques constitute the core/centre of the biopolitical paradigm, today intrinsically linked to neoliberalism, and therefore often reproduce dominant cultural beliefs?"
Ursić, A. 2018
- 18 Tim Roberts, who was the director of the BA Circus Arts Program at the time kindly wrote me a letter to explain his thoughts on why this might have been. They are as follows:
- Society and the fear of getting a first contract played a role. It was a tough time...to start a company, many attempts didn't last. So students preferred to work on their own so they could ensure contracts in the cabaret or corporate scene in London.
- the varying vocabulary that teachers and students used for this exercise. Some said "solo", others said "act", others even said "individual solo" or "individual act"
- younger students always saw graduates at the end of their education in individual pieces, this cemented a perception.
- Having a student body coming from around the world, who mostly did not know each other, choosing an individual discipline was a safe choice.
- teachers at the time also worked to have individual students as very few wanted to deal with the complexities of a group and they could also develop a guru type relationship.
- creating group disciplines is still a tough sell, and it will probably be an even tougher one now that the industry is taking such a hit. Things will need to build for there to be the need, and the desire to engage in a group venture.
- 19 "The certainty of the self as a conqueror, of its tasks and missions, preceded Descartes's certainty about the self as a thinking substance (res cogitans) and provided a way to interpret it." (Nelson Maldonado-Torres 2007 p.2)
- 20I "I would like to foreground that modern circus, far from being an apolitical performing art form, has served as an apparatus of verification: it verifies, centre stage, the dominant prevailing discourse of human exceptionalism (the genre of Man). In this political fiction, the white, male, heterosexual body is superior to other subjects in relation to it, which are feminized, exoticized, and racialized." Ursić, A (2018) * He uses the term modern circus to traverse the binaries of traditional, new and contemporary circus labels.

work exciting at first and applauded herself for giving space to 'her object', letting 'him' speak for 'himself'. But she quickly found herself re-enforcing capitalist and colonialist ways of thinking²¹, which made her question why that was, whether other people in her field might be in the same position and what role circus has to play in this. Which brings me to her dwelling - the where of her body.

On a practical level, being a western European circus artist involves living in several different geographical locations. Fran also tends to live in transient non-permanent homes (boats / vans / squats), which is on the one hand perhaps buying into and reproducing the romantic tale of the travelling showman²², or is conforming to a neo-liberal identity in which her creative living choices reflect her value towards her own personal freedom²³, but is never-the-less practical for one who is required to accommodate themselves in various locations. Each place she lives allows a slightly different version of herself to emerge, which feeds and causes a feeling of split identity.^{24 25} This lifestyle lead her to research a sense of *being in different spaces* within her practice. She is required to be in several spaces at once, and therefore wishes to find a space that exists in multiple dimensions. One of the challenges of this lifestyle for her has been to maintain a sense of continuity, particularly in relation to a practice (the training of a circus discipline) that requires commitment to repetition, a specific space and specific equipment. This has lead her to look into the caring and maintenance of the spaces she is in and the spaces she creates, which took her to an investigation into Martin Heidegger's notions of 'dwelling' (having been introduced to the Object Oriented Ontologists - he was a logical step back as their philosophy stems from him). Iris Marion Young (2001) argues that although Heidegger claims there are two aspects of dwelling; construction and preservation, he privileges what many feminist writers argue is the 'male domain' of construction. While Fran is actively trying to elide preserving some of the aspects of her own cosmology, she is also interested in an awareness of what is being maintained and cared for and why. She does not wish to take care of and preserve the world that has been created by Heidegger's Dasein²⁶. If Fran is the 'derelict'²⁷ space of this man, then she aims to leave him exposed.

Her dwellings are situated in the field of circus. The materialist turn has been taken up by a small

21 Most notably through how she found it *natural* to construct and capitalise on my identity, and how she perpetuated an anthropomorphic idea of me that implied that if I was less like her, I would be less valuable and worth less to society. Quite clearly this is not an entirely resolved matter, we are still in dialogue about it now.

22 The contradictions of this are discussed in Bauke Leivens' 2nd Open Letter to The Circus
<https://www.circusdialogue.com/open-letters-circus-2>

23 Among many reservations I have about this, perhaps the most obvious one to pick up on in relation to this is that valuing her own individual freedom excludes the freedom of others, and how the economy uses creativity as a commodity that can buy that freedom.

24 While I follow the thinking of Maurizio Lazarrato through Bojana Kunst, that this split identity is a product of and produces possible subjectivities that can be commodified in post-fordist capitalism, Fran prefers to follow Donna Haraway's thought that "The split & contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings & be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings & change history." (1988, 586). I do not believe these two ways of thinking to be mutually exclusive.

25 Fran would prefer me to use the pronoun they/them to acknowledge these multiple identities, but as she continues to use he/him pronouns for me without asking my preferences, I will continue to use the she/her pronouns that her creators assigned to her.

26 "*Dasein refers to the ontological character of human existence, which is entirely lacking in any other being, and which is why this being may be the only way into the question of Being itself*" Large, W (2008). It is unclear to me - a mere jerrycan, whether he assumes all 'humans' to be Dasein, or just some. This opens up a larger and much more troubling conversation about what is included in this category of human, but there is no space in this footnote for such discussions.

27 "*Recall Irigaray's claim: man's ability to have a home, to return to his original identity, is achieved by means of the dereliction of woman as she provides the material nurturance of the self-same identity and the envelope that gives him his sense of boundary.*" Holland N J & Huntington P. (2001) 278

number of western european contemporary circus artists in recent years.²⁸ This discourse suggests a need for a revolution²⁹ in the relationship between 'humans' and 'objects'. At the same time, there has been an emphasis on this relationship in Sebastian Kann's suggested definition of circus. It has been suggested by the authors of *Contemporary Circus* that this way of approaching circus "continues the ethos of contestation, embodied in *New Circus, after the widespread unrest of May 1968*" (2019). This is understandable given that the 'traditional' circus that was contested by 'New Circus' is seen to be entangled with ideas of modernity & capitalism.³⁰ While I agree that circus has been involved in propagating Enlightenment period ideals and while I agree with some of the political ideals that the *pioneers*³¹ of new circus were contesting in relation to this, I do think this rhetoric masks some of the problematics of new and contemporary circus that are not spoken about. New Circus to a large extent was created in France in the 60's and 70's and was based on a contestation of what were seen to be the ideals of what became known as traditional circus, whilst promoting their own ideas of freedom and equality.³² The idea of new-circus as an anti-capitalist and free-thinking movement I think deflects from the fact that circus was effectively appropriated by theatre makers who used the art form to capitalise on their own ideals and to contest the art form they had appropriated - being a somewhat colonialist move in itself.³³ When western-european contemporary circus artists speaks about its history, there tends to be a focus on the traditional circus that was contested, but the history of the political and street theatre makers is often omitted.

A Dream

We grow dizzy with turning these circles and weary with all the thoughts, and we decide to rest our heads³⁴ a little. In my dreaming of impossible spaces, it occurred to me that the chapiteau pitched firmly in the field of circus, it's stakes temporarily in the earth, it's ability to create fantastic worlds and disappear without trace - may be a useful reference point. However, it's ability to deceive even those that build it up needs to be accounted for.³⁵ I have seen how Fran has been swept away by the romanticism of the contemporary chapiteaux - from *Collectif Maluenes* to *Baro D'Evel* to the

28 This includes artists such as Michiel Deprez, Ben Richter Emile Pineault, Vincent Focquet, Skye Gellman, Johan Le Guillerme, & Phia Menard, and follows a larger trend in visual arts. The New Materialism Research Cluster is a visual art collective that research the following topics under the heading of 'new-materialism': Transversal movement between biophysical science and art; Non-human agencies at play in performative artwork / Artists engaging partial affinities with materials and matter / Ontologies of matter and materials (ontologies in art) / Multispecies aesthetics and posthumanism / Anthropocene and climate change / Socio-political agencies of things.

29 It is worth noting that it is a revolution for the internal logic of their own politics - many are criticised as being in danger of universalising the need for this change in thinking, whilst claiming to be against universalism themselves. These thinkers are often presented as the leaders of this revolution, (by being invited to speak at events, chair meetings, write papers etc.) I use the word revolution to point to the etymological root of this word from Latin *revolvere* "turn, roll back", suggesting a return to a way of thinking rather than a change that emerges from this moment in time. These thinkers did not produce these thoughts from thin air, they looked for them elsewhere, and have returned to a way of thinking that preceded them.

30 See the essay *Making Space, Space, Space* in *Thinking through Circus*, 2020, 22

31 The use of the word pioneer is commonplace to describe the early practitioners of the modern dance movement (Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan etc), this is a term that has been carried over to other areas of the arts to describe new or innovative moves by artists. I use it here to suggest a colonial link, in the etymological root of the word being used for soldiers, meaning one who goes first, hence the colonial 'pioneers' who proclaimed themselves the 'one who goes first' on land that people already lived on.

32 For example, Hilary Westlake created an act in 1979 that portrayed a female trainer dressed as a dominatrix with 8 men who were harnessed as horses, to challenge the issue of animal rights in circus.

33 See the language employed by Cirque Du Soleil, arguably new-circus's most well-marketed example. "Cirque du Soleil has redefined how the world views the circus" / "Laliberté dubbed this new mobile troupe Cirque du Soleil because, in his own words, "The sun symbolizes youth, energy, and strength". A fitting name; As Cirque du Soleil's sun rose for the first time, a new dawn broke in the world of circus arts." / "Cirque du Soleil made waves in the international scene for the first time in 1987 upon their first tour of the US. We Reinvent the Circus"

34 My head is of course just metaphorical - but I feel like imagining me with human attributes helps you to pay me more attention? Apologies if I am underestimating you - it works with Fran.

35 See Bauke Leivens' 2nd Open Letter to The Circus <https://www.circusdialogue.com/open-letters-circus-2>

festival tents across Europe. I want to believe in the nomadic ideals, and I am tempted to say the spirit of nomadism can live augmented on top of the capitalist drive and institutional confines that also define these spaces - but I see how Fran is easily lead and especially susceptible to self-deception - the *capitalist nomad* may fade beyond her perception, hiding behind the *romantic nomad*, and I think that would be a dangerous state of affairs. My circus as it appears to me is one that neo-liberalism gives the illusion of a freedom to be celebrated.

Eduoard Glissant whispers in my metaphorical left ear that a capitalist nomadism sets me in an arrow-like direction, that is characterised by aggression and invasion, rather than the circular nomadism (which funnily enough he attributes to circus in his book *Poetics of relation*, though a different circus to the one I know) which, he says is a "*not-intolerant form of an impossible settlement*." (Glissant, 12) This sets alarm bells ringing - we are searching for the impossible. We are certainly unsettled by now, tossing and turning in our dreams. "*Generally speaking, what is meant is that arrow like nomadism gives birth to new eras, whereas circular nomadism would be endogenous and without a future*" (p.12)³⁶ He tells me that during the period of invading nomads (e.g. the expansion of the Roman Empire) "*the passion for self-definition first appears in the guise of personal adventure*." (14), and I am reminded again of the celebration of the individual in western European contemporary circus, and the growth of the solo show³⁷. I think of the generation after the first wave of new circus pioneers, such as *7-fingers*, in which we were encouraged to meet the individuals behind the skill.³⁸ Then I think of this quest, and am concerned about our own intentions. But I am getting ahead of myself - this section was about our current orientation, not about a destination, though it's nice to dream and dreams don't follow the linear time that my waking mind imagines. Eventually the alarm bells that had been ringing in my head break my sleep.

Incantations of Objects

Wandering through the camp, getting ready for the day I ponder Sara's words on phenomenology and that *consciousness is always directed toward an object* - the consciousness I'm assuming is the I that was attributed to the body we just spoke of, and the object I suppose, is me, or the Tank part of me, or Tank. Fran is from a very visually dominant culture, and circus is often discussed as a visual art form. Vision is related to observation and a belief in an objective position. I wonder if Fran experiences objects as external because she has 'seen' them as such. I also wonder if our emphasis on a definition of circus that separates body and object, will always hold us apart. I have noticed in creating work, circus artists often film themselves (Fran included), and are very invested in what they see. A lot of work is shared online, adding to the importance placed on the visual, circus technique is analysed from videos or pictures, and the forms re-constructed. In practice however, it seems there is a greater focus on touch, on tacit knowledge, on proprioception. In my practice with Fran, we spend hours focusing on different ways to listen, through different senses. This creates for us a different sense of reality, but not one that we 'believe in' as an absolute truth. It definitely feels closer and has made us question what Fran has encountered as the 'internal-external' border of the skin, bringing us time and again to the question first introduced to us by Donna Haraway of why the body should 'end at my skin'? (*Haraway, 1991, p.75*)

None-the-less, the *Tank* that was constructed initially by *Fran*, is this external object. The word *object* comes from from Medieval Latin *obiectum* "thing put before" (the mind or sight), coming from *ob* "in front of, towards, against" and *iacere* "to throw". So if we follow an etymological route, the circus artist throws themselves in front of, towards or against an object, or having an object

36 The contemporary circus artists in my industry are required to work on a project by project basis - an entirely future orientated position (see Bojana Kunst's discussion of project work in 'Artist at Work'.)

37 The first solo show is largely attributed to Jerome Thomas in 1990

38 "*Imagination is the jet-fueled vehicle of travel, and the strange lands visited are the desires/dreams impulses/follies of the characters themselves, as they strip down layer by layer to their idiosyncratic cores*"

www.7fingers.com/shows/creations/loft - I can't help but note we are currently in my dream, and I wonder if I too will be stripped down to my idiosyncratic core.

thrown in front of, towards or against them. This 'confrontation' with objects in circus training shapes the body and the object. A rope hung in a circus school becomes a corde lisse, a circus artist throws itself against this corde lisse, the corde lisse becomes sticky and covered in rosin (used by circus artists for grip), it softens with age making it easier to climb, perhaps it tears. Although Descartes is not welcomed into this conversation with open arms, we are aware that he stands behind us throughout our journey holding things separate from each other (nature/culture, subject/object etc - I feel him in between Fran & I when we speak, pressing on our bodies, though neither of us mentions it to each other). Fran's approach to her own body in circus training has been as an object. It is the tool with which the circus artist is able to earn a living, through it's relationship with other objects. It is an object to which a subject is attached. In that way, Tank & Fran as material objects in the circus are not so different (although arguably Fran's subject had more of a choice in the matter). As an object of circus school, it was decided that Fran 'had the right body shape' for some disciplines but not for others. It was decided that she would be an aerialist. Fran's body was shaped by this decision - most notably her shoulders became broader, her body toughened over time and at some point, it tore. She was working in a duo with another woman - Fran's body shaped her partners body, their bodies together shaped the ropes they were working with. As they presented themselves as women, their bodies were expected to be flexible, slim - to fit western beauty standards in order to make sellable work and fit the patriarchal demands of the industry.³⁹ They were thrown against the industry, but their bodies were rebellious and even though they tried at times, they could not shape them in the required way. This oriented them at a skewed angle from the industry, and from their school.

The occupation

Sara mentions to me that we arrive at objects (through one's orientation, through the directions one has taken.) Fran arrived first to her body (as a circus object) and then to me (first to my body-object, then to my identity-object) "*I want to suggest that objects not only are shaped by work, but that they also take the shape of the work they do.*" (Ahmed, S. 2006, 44), she continues to talk about occupation - how objects are occupied - their occupation. She makes a link between occupation as in a job (occupation as identity), occupation as in to be busy with something (time), and occupation of space. Fran is occupied with objects - in all of these ways. The objects take the form of their occupation - we are circus objects - a hair-hanger and a counterweight. That is what we are occupied with, that is our occupation - we are occupied by circus. Sara gives a comparable description of the relationship between the writing tool and the writing body, in discussing Husserl's table: "*The writing table might also point toward the writing body, as that which becomes "itself" once it "takes up" the equipment and "takes up" time and space, in doing the work that the equipment allows the body to do.*" (46) What we are takes the shape of what we are occupied with. Can I free myself of being defined by this occupation? Of my boundaries that are marked out by this occupation? Can I change shape? Be more than what this occupation makes of me? The circus as I have experienced it is a pretty normative space, not leaving much room deviation from societal norms. This is not a space I would like to be occupied by. How can I resist taking this shape?

Specifically it is relations that are important here. A dancer or a theatre practitioner often work with their body, environment & objects, but the relationship is not necessarily what is in focus. For me, it is the approach of the circus artist to it's environment, as one of objects that creates these relationships and produces a space for them. So as you can see Fran was already working in a space of object-bodies that had subjectivities attached. When she encountered me then, this is where she was coming from. But I, who Fran experienced as 'a water container' had never had an identity constructed for me before, never had it even crossed my mind⁴⁰. To Fran however, this seemed like

39 Women in the industry are "are having to display a certain type of femininity. The demands placed upon female performers are extensive. They are not allowed simply to be strong, but must be strong yet feminine, physical yet sweet" (Harrison, M in <https://circustalk.com/news/go-beyond-the-stereotype-a-thoughtful-discussion-regarding-gender-binaries-and-contemporary-circus>).

40 If we are to split them, as I can't seem to help but do, I am aware my mind is of course also a construction. I would

the most natural thing - as if an identity = a subjectivity and therefore as if that identity gave my already valuable body 'worth'. My identity seemed to be formed by Fran's experience of my materiality (and I expect this is how Fran's identity had been formed too, though I wonder who was doing the constructing). However before venturing out into the material planes, I am troubled by the flickering ontological fire in the corner of my eye.

An ontological campfire

When Fran first began exploring me with a more theoretical approach, she encountered Object Oriented Ontology. You may think this area would please me, being an entity that would legitimately pop up on one of the OOO-ers lyrical lists on things. I can hear them out of the corner of my metaphorical ear chanting round the fire - first Bogost "*lighthouse, dragonfly, lawnmower, and barley*"⁴¹ then Harman "*pollen, oxygen, eagles, or windmills*"⁴² then Morton "*cinnamon, microwaves, interstellar particles and scarecrows*"⁴³... I lean in closer and Latour tells me "*The best stylistic antidote to this grim deadlock [of current mainstream philosophy] is a repeated sorcerer's chant of the multitude of things that resist any unified empire.*" (Pasteurization of France, 206). I shift uneasily on my metaphorical feet. As they chant, they conjure these 'objects', draw borders around them, and assign to us an ontology restricted to their idea of what we are. Bogost leans towards me: "*Lists remind us that no matter how fluidly a system may operate, its members nevertheless remain utterly isolated, mutual aliens.*"⁴⁴ And upon those words I became just that - an utterly isolated alien.

An object is created by those that see it as that object, which as Sara gently reminds me, is related to how I am occupied (at least in my case this is true). And once we are seen as that object, we get locked in, defined (identity is a logical progression, though the OOO-ers may not agree). Their 'ontography'⁴⁵ not only maps their empires, but produces them at the same time. Robert T Tally Junior pops into my mind - "*all spaces are necessarily embedded with narratives, just as all narratives must mobilize and organize spaces.*" (2014, 2) He reminds me that mapping a space, you are narrating that space as worthy of being mapped, and organising how that space is seen and explored.

Perhaps the approach of the OOO-ers is unsurprising - although they reject the 'exceptionalism' Martin Heidegger gives to his notion of 'Dasein' - they are still his descendants. Though they argue against this hierarchy, they are still moving in a space in which they are at the top. Martin Heidegger argues that Dasein are exceptional because 'Being is an issue for it', and the OOO-ers say '*No Heidegger, how can you possibly know that - let us speak for these other 'beings' instead, and let us tell you they do indeed each have their own mysterious, hidden ontologies in different dimensions.*' I mean I am taking some liberties in paraphrasing their entire body of work in this way, but they have taken liberties with me, so it feels appropriate. To them I am a strange stranger⁴⁶ - in a world in which they create the categories and then close their eyes thus believing themselves to have disappeared, perhaps choosing to leave behind their strange bodies. In their lists, speculation & spectacular post-human world building, they somehow do not notice that the worlds they build appear to be super-human (perhaps that is why Fran was drawn to them in the first place - circus

argue that Fran's is as well.

41 Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, 39

42 In Alien Phenomenology, 39

43 Timothy Morton Realist Magic, 42

44 Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, 40

45 The definition of Ontography differs slightly between philosophers, but I draw here on Bogost's definition as the way in which ontology (as the theory of existence) is described.

46. "The interconnectedness of everything is a finely woven tissue that floats in front of what elsewhere I have called strange strangers: all entities, from Styrofoam and radio waves to peanuts, snakes and asteroids, are irreducibly uncanny. In Harman's terms, this mesh is a sensual ether. The real objects are the strange strangers." 75 Morton 2013

artists do have a penchant for the superhuman I have noticed).

I seem to have come on a little strong for the OOO-ers and they leap to defend themselves, but my friend Christopher Peterson steps in front. "*For those keen to demonstrate their fidelity to nonhumans, the human has likewise become a conspicuous blind spot.*" (2018, 1) "But...." stutters Ian, outraged "we are creating a world that is democratic. Bryant says *a posthumanist ontology is one in which "humans are no longer monarchs of being, but are instead among beings, entangled in beings, and implicated in other beings."* (2012, 17) Bryant stays quiet - I wonder if he sees my point of view, that they are beings amongst beings in a world defined by them (monarchs in disguise)...but then he mumbles something about a flat ontology that can unite two worlds (human and non-human) in a common collective. I wonder at his super-powers to sever worlds whilst using the word 'unity' and decide to stay quiet on my multi-versal dreams.

I back up realising I have got off on the wrong foot, so to speak. In the early days, OOO provided Fran and I with some useful mind games. If it had not been for them, we may not be where we are now. Had Fran never been introduced Timothy Morton, had he never spoken to her of 'the mesh' - the interconnectedness of all things, had he not spoken of the Aesthetic Dimension, that "*ambiguous self-contradictory, tricksterish, illusion dimension*" (2013, 22) we may never have spent those hours desperately opening ourselves, sensitizing our selves, listening out for each other. The OOO-ers are good with words and know how to seduce a student of the arts. Fran is a child of the 80's and cannot help but be drawn in by a good brand, especially when the fact that it is a brand is hidden. This kind of thinking is unfamiliar to me, but Katherine Behar (one of the very few women to be lurking in the background of the OOO campfire) reminds me that "*As a brand, object oriented ontology has leveraged a calculated posture of coolness to make waves among various communities. OOO struck some as radical partly because it was largely developed in the blogosphere and could afford a somewhat punkish attitude toward institutionalized forms of academic publishing, appearing to buck a blindsided and sluggish philosophical establishment.*" (2016, 6) But for whatever reasons Fran was drawn in, drawn in she was - I am grateful that she is a creature that is prone to self doubt, and her perception of me changed - our relationship changed, and so we changed. Because our approach (through circus) is one that begins in the physical realm, we are permitted to go places beyond the boundaries that language speaks into being. I will credit Ian with his (somewhat romantic) discourse on carpentry, on a physical practice of doing philosophy, however what I feel is missed in his discussion of this is an acknowledgement of the physical practice of thinking and writing, as if producing theory is not a physical practice (giving it space to remain other to a physical practice and maintain its position at the top of the hierarchy).

Looking Into The Rift

I see someone waving at me from over the other side of the mountain. It's Carl Te Hira Mika, it seems he has something to say regarding the practice of thinking. *It can be speculated here that one's thinking acts in direct conjunction with the interplay of things, to the extent that whatever is occurring with the mountain that one names in one's saying has an effect on the self.* He goes on to state that thought is *an obviously emotional process*, which for me touches on Sara Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of Emotion, and what it does to leave emotion out of thought as much of western theory has done. Emotions for me are a part of thought that involves matter in a way directly related to my perception of it. That matter is a material of thought, like the wood of the carpenter, and it converses with other things in the world. In fact it turns out that the inseparability of theory and practice seems to be integral to many Indigenous ways of thinking (in fact all that I have come across so far, though there are a great great many more). The Māori thought that Carl draws upon is remarkably similar to that which the OOO-ers draw upon (though they have never mentioned it to me). Both Timothy and Carl refer to differences between a thing and how it appears as 'a rift', the articulation of which states Carl, constitutes a method of speculation. Carl and Tim seem to speak to each other now across a rift, their voices echoing what would be my cavernous

ears. From the rift a void stares back. Looking more closely into the abyss, I am surprised to find that it is not empty. A Māori term for this void is Te Kore, which from what I understand, is a world beyond everyday experience, that lets us know - what we see is not all there is. Māori Marsden, a Tai Tokerau elder and Anglican minister said that Te Korekore (a variant of Te Kore) was *'the realm between non-being and being: that is the realm of potential being.'* (1992) This seems to chime with what Timothy Morton terms the abyss of *interobjective reality*, that lies invisibly, in front of objects. Whenever I have thought of a void before, I have thought of emptiness, but this void is full to the brim, just with things imperceptible to me. Carl Mika points out that *"the Enlightenment – which we have certainly been colonised by – expects us to avoid the abyss at all costs."* My mind jumps to the ontological abyss that Calvin Warren speaks to in *Ontological Terror* - an ontological abyss, a lack of being, the *nothing* that *black being* is relegated to, a nothing which, he suggests, is imposed onto bodies. (60). This suggests an abyss of bodies that are not seen. I look down into the rift and see rift upon rift echoed in each other. When Fran & I explore the space between each other, listening for what we cannot hear, trying to open ourselves to the imperceptible - this could be an abyss. We must treat this space with care, in feeling our way around it, what do we miss, what do we place there, what do we take for the abyss. It is not a nothing that we feel for, but an unknown, to sit with not knowing, the possibility of not knowing and the responsibility of being alert to a knowledge/experience/thing but not claiming that knowledge as our own, not throwing light on it. Are there things that I claim to know which are unknowable to me? Are there things I claim to be unknowable that I should and do in fact know? Donna Haraway reminds me that *"Thinking and knowing like naming have "the power of objectifying of totalizing"* (1991, 79) But at the same time not naming and not knowing can deny the existence of something.

Discoveries

Speaking of knowing and not knowing makes me think of discovery. I think of this quest, this journey we are undertaking. And I think of the language of journeying in relation to the language of art-making. In both these circles, the word *discovery* is key, it is a term I would like to interrogate a little further. If we look at the etymology of the word, it first appeared as having negative connotations. Coming from the latin 'dis' (opposite of) and cooperire (to cover up, bury). It was the action of uncovering, unveiling, digging up. Discoverer meant 'informant' and it was a malicious act. The meaning 'to obtain the first knowledge or sight of what was before not known' - the main modern sense, appeared in the 1550's. In terms of my work, I think it is necessary to introduce consent to discovery. If you are to 'unveil' something, or to take its cover away, the thing that is being discovered must be consenting for such an uncovering to not be an affront, leaving that which has been discovered unprotected. It is important to me to try to listen and respond if consent is not given. Similarly, credit should not automatically be given to the 'discoverer'. Something that already exists has *made itself known* to the discoverer. Robin Wall Kimmerer pops out from the shadows along with Leath Tonino at precisely that moment and asks if I have considered this in regards to the gift in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing. Robin talks to us about the world from her experience as a botanist which offers an emphasis on 'seeing', and as a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation which offers an emphasis on 'listening'. "Not really" I reply. Leath turns to Robin and starts "I was thinking about what you said earlier Robin, when you said..."

"I prefer to ask what gifts the land offers. Gifts require a giver, a being with agency. Gifts invite reciprocity. Gifts help form relationships. Scientists aren't comfortable with the word gifts, so we get ecosystem services instead....But you also asked, How do we take only what is given? That's a philosophical challenge: How do we know when something is given? The only way to identify an offering is to get to know the giver. And can we receive the offering without causing damage?" (Tonino, 2016)

I am reminded of a blog post by Jennifer Clary-Lemon. She speaks about Roger Simon's notion of *the terrible gift*:

When we acknowledge gift-relations with non-human others, we are also forced into contemplative relationships with the suffering of those others—both human and more-than-human—advanced from a language of capitalism and a history of colonialism: with genocide, with extinction of species and languages, with a rapidly changing climate—all that we have inherited as a part of being-with. These are terrible gifts, and we must work to know both the givers and when something is given as we contend with suffering and difficulty. (2019)

I thank them for their insight, and quietly hope I haven't taken what hasn't been given - I make a mental note to pay attention to this, and to accepting terrible gifts. "In the philosophies I have been moving" I say "there is an emphasis on *uncovering*". Philosophies of Martin Heidegger have been discussed in relation to the philosophers I have just recently encountered (Timothy Morton, Carl Mika & Calvin Warren). "For this reason I think I should go back to *Being and Time* to look at this *discovery* or *uncovering* and what it might be doing."

Martin Heidegger is more than keen to give me a lesson on this. He asks that I call him Sir. Here is my interpretation of what he told me. The practice of discovery has to do with something making itself known, a key concept for Sir's analysis of the meaning of phenomenology and ontology: "*The greek expression phainomenon, from which the term phenomenon derives, comes from the verb phainesthai, meaning 'to show itself'... phainesthai is itself the 'middle voice' construction of phaino, to bring in to daylight, to place in brightness*" (Heidegger, M. 1953, 25). Integral to 'making itself known' is an 'appearing': "*Appearing is the making itself known through something that shows itself*" (26). Also inherent in the word is a relation to something seeming like something, without necessarily being what it is showing itself to be: "*The expression phainomenon, phenomenon, means in Greek, what looks like something, what 'seems', 'semblance'... The original meaning (phenomenon, what is manifest) already contains and is the basis of phainomenon ('semblance')*" (25). According to Sir, logos is also connected to a 'making manifest' of that which is being spoken about. Implicit in this 'showing of itself' is also that something then is concealed. In Sir's ontology what 'falls back' and is 'covered up again' (31) is the Being of beings. "*It can be covered up to such a degree and the question about it and it's meaning altogether omitted.*" (31) He declares that phenomenology is the 'way of access to' the Being of beings. "*Being covered up is the counterconcept to phenomenon*" (31), the act of which he refers to as distortion: "*Distortion is the most dangerous kind [of concealment] because here the possibilities of being deceived and misled are especially pernicious.*" (32) I notice some of the people around me rolling their eyes, and understand that the idea of things being brought to light, and showing themselves is nothing new to them, but I am interested to know Sir's wording and emphasis, as I'm certain this has had an affect on my relation to the environment.

I stand in different places on the question of distortion. This dangerous distortion in this case, could be my friend. I don't know if that is a power I should have. Similarly if I do not want to be 'discovered', if I am in a position in which I need to hide or be concealed, then again I may find this distortion useful. I am also aware that being able to consider the choice to cover up is a privilege, that there are distortions that perform damaging cover-up operations. I am also working with an awareness that my point of view is necessarily distorted. I am not looking to 'gain access'. Even in Sir's later more meditative work, in which he 'relinquishes the will' to uncover - there is still an assumption that access is gained even when it is not wilfully sought. Rather I am interested in listening to, or playing with, what is there. I am less interested in revealing or making manifest the *truth* or *aletheia* which comes from *unconcealment*, and more interested in playing with and listening to what is presented as truths.

Sylvia Wynter (2007) discusses the "existential imperative of the subjects' of each human society, having to make the empirical reality of our own collective human agency...opaque to themselves/ourselves, as the nonnegotiable condition" (48). Although Sir was greatly concerned with the act of uncovering, perhaps he was too busy with this action to be listening and noticing distortions and concealments that were embedded in him. I can understand that so called 'blindspots' are present even if you look for them - but perhaps a shift of focus from looking to listening might help to notice them. Not listening is no longer an option.

Discovery in the the western european circus industry is a buzz word used only with positive connotations. I think about the effect of this expectation on people to always reveal something new, and what that does - the discoverer is always so revered, but does this not make it more tempting to reveal something already existing as new and claim it as your own? Maybe the desire is so strong that it is possible to fool yourself. I think of the emphasis in academic research to create new knowledge. I would feel more comfortable having an expectation on me for presenting alternative perspectives to the dominant, or on researching multiple ways of looking. I aim to approach the concept of discovery carefully, with an openness and a practice of listening that I have developed through my work with Fran. This allows me a way of imagining making space for things to reveal themselves in order that I might listen with an open curiosity, play with them if invited, and develop new relations and ways of seeing without the aim of knowledge acquisition. I think about Fran's relationship with knowledge, the environment, and discovery, about the legacy bestowed upon her by Eve and the apple.

An introduction to Sky Woman

"Excuse me" a voice says. I couldn't help but overhear your thoughts. I turn around to find Vanessa Watts suddenly appeared as if from no-where. "Where did you come from?" I ask. "I have always been here, she said, you just didn't see me. I want to introduce you to Sky Women and Turtle". I look around, I can't see anyone. "I don't see them?" I said. "*According to Haudenosaunee, Sky Woman fell from a hole in the sky. John Mohawk (2005) writes of her journey towards the waters below. On her descent, Sky Woman fell through the clouds and air towards water below. During her descent, birds could see this falling creature and saw she could not fly. They came to her and helped to lower her slowly to waters beneath her. The birds told Turtle that she must need a place to land, as she possessed no water legs. Turtle rose up, breaking through the surface so that Sky Woman could land on Turtle's back. Once landed, Sky Woman and Turtle began to form the earth, the land becoming an extension of their bodies.*"⁴⁷ (Watts, V. 2013, 21) "I see", I said - which is often what I say when I don't see completely, but don't want to admit I don't fully understand. "That's OK" Vanessa said, understanding that I needed more, "you are thinking in a different framework." "*Frameworks are designs of understanding and interpretation. They are the basis for how humans organize politically, philosophically, etc. Frameworks in a Euro-Western sense exist in the abstract. How they are articulated in action or behaviour brings this abstraction into praxis; hence a division of epistemological/theoretical versus ontological/praxis.*" I take a moment to think. "So you're working in a different framework? Not an abstract one?" "Yes. *The difference in a Haudenosaunee or Anishnaabe framework is that our cosmological frameworks are not an abstraction but rather a literal and animate extension of Sky Woman's and First Woman's thoughts; it is impossible to separate theory from praxis if we believe in the original historical events of Sky Woman and First Woman.*" (22) "First Women?" I ask. "You can find her if you listen out for her properly." Vanessa goes on to explain how non-human beings are active members of society, that from an Indigenous point of view, habitats and eco-systems "*have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement*". (23) She explains that she is an extension of the land, so she cannot help but maintain communication with it. I wonder about my circumstance, about the land I am made of. My factory

47 For an oral version of this story by Robin Wall Kimmerer, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhQKdJHLDcw>

is in Northern Ireland, but I have a feeling that's not really where I start. If I am to think literally, I am oil extracted from the earth, distilled into gases and separated out before I am made into "Tank". How far do I go back? To consider an ontology as 'Tank' would be to make a new being of me, and there are elements of that being that are alien to me. I think back to the question first articulated to me by Donna Haraway about why we must perceive bodies as ending at their skin, and wonder about bodies that do not perceive themselves this way. I stare at the ground, it stares back at me with a comforting indifference.

That night as I am drifting off, I think about Sky women. Fran was raised in a cosmology based on the abrahamic religions. Fran had told me the story of Eve and the snake - in which interaction between a woman and the non-human world had gone badly. Vanessa's voice drifted in: "*Societies were built upon domination over nature because of a perception that human arrangements with the animal world were unnecessary, if not dangerous.*" (25) I think of all the animals that have been used in the circus, that show the audiences how these dangerous creatures can be tamed, I also think about the bond between these animals and the humans they perform with and how Fran had articulated a longing for that too. I think of the human circus artists - masters of their bodies, and how their *equipment* is sometimes used to demonstrate how masterful they are over these externalised objects. I catch myself thinking that at least this is an honest portrayal! My friend Vincent Focquet pops up in my mind with his image of the virtuoso juggler "*the ultimate symbol of Western anthropocentrism: a human juggling with objects of the world, forcing them into orbit around himself as the triumphant subject and centre of attention.*" (2020, 42) But I remember Fran's response to that image, how the image is locked into place by the 'neo-liberal ringmaster' and how his body and the balls know each other intimately, that maybe it just requires a shift of focus or perspective to change the relationship (is this enough to shift a whole framework?). Vincent remarked that perhaps it is more a problem of representation and discourse. This reminds me of Karen Barad's opening discussion in their book 'Meeting the Universe Halfway' the idea that "*representations and the objects (subjects, events, or states of affairs) they purport to represent are independent of one another*" (2007, 28) I wonder how I differ to this representation of myself. This makes me reflect on our relationship - Fran & I. How she aimed to de-centre herself from the work and give space to me, as encouraged and congratulated by the new materialists. But had she not ended up right back in the centre? She slipped in unknowingly, presenting herself through me - demonstrating the mastery of dealing with 'the Anthropocene' through a circus practice. How much of Fran was I? Am I? Is she not just doing the same now? She speaks of how she has become more plastic, more fluid, more poly - of how much of me has become her, but I wonder, how much of me was already Fran? And that makes me wonder, who speaks through Fran? What else is she? If she is made of her earth, her cosmology, her society - who is left when those things are not there? If we are working from a perspective that the body is a space, but from an onto-epistemological framework, has Fran inadvertently turned her body into a territory, separate from herself, in order to claim it, so it can be conquered, explored & discovered?

Time Travel to the new world

As you can imagine, I didn't get much sleep that evening, my imaginary-head swam with thoughts, which were disturbed by the sounds of the Objects Oriented Ontologists arguing with the Feminist New Materialists. I look around for Vanessa. She is nowhere to be seen, and I remember the words of Zoe Todd: "*Euro-American framings of post-humanism have a tendency to erase Indigenous epistemes and locations*" (2016, 9). Rosi Braidotti interrupts my thoughts. "I heard you had some questions about materiality & subjectivity?" she stated, and then paused as if waiting for a reply "Well, I..." I started...but she interrupted: "*neo-materialism*" emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power." Which was interesting, as I had always understood it as a movement that builds on the linguistic paradigm, just shifting

registers (following the work of academics such as Linguist Mel Y Chen) rather than as a refusal - maybe I hadn't paid enough attention.

It materialises that they were trying to engage the OOO-ers in a conversation about power structures, which had not gone well, and so had turned their attention to us. "Come with us" she said giving no choice "we need to hop over to a slightly different planet, but Karen Barad is on our team, they're a very important astrophysicist - so planet hopping isn't really a problem". We board the space-ship - pretty conventional looking 60's sci-fi tin-foil job. Once inside, I ask somewhat naively "is this a time machine?". Karen Barad looks around from her desk. "what do you mean by *this*?" I thought Karen was supposed to be smart, so I wondered if I'd missed something and just kind of gestured around at the machine we were in. "If by *this*, you mean the phenomenon of us, this apparatus etc *intra-acting*⁴⁸ etc then yes, in a way, if not then no." *Independent objects are abstract notions. This is the wrong objective referent. The actual objective referent is the phenomenon* (in *Material Cartographies* 2012, 61) *"A phenomenon is a specific intra-action of an "object" and the "measuring agencies"; the object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them"* (2012, 128) . "It also depends on what you mean by 'time machine', if you are asking whether we are about to travel through a kind of fixed time, then no, not really. 'This' is a machine for making time. *Time is not given, it is not universally given, but rather...time is articulated and re-synchronized through various material practices. In other words, just like position, momentum, wave and particle, time itself only makes sense in the context of particular phenomena.*" (2012 66) I was a little put out by their condescending nature and assumption of my concept of time (although admittedly they were perhaps a little bit right, it wasn't like I had never considered other notions of time - I'm certain the time of a jerrycan is radically different from an astrophysicists!) I kept quiet. Karen continues *"The "past" was never simply there to begin with, and the "future" is not what will unfold, but "past" and "future" are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world's ongoing intra-activity.*" (2012, 66)

"OK, we're going to need to take some data from you, fingerprint please". Karen states out of the blue. "Whatever for?" I protest. "Border control" They reply coolly. "This is my story, there will be no border control" I protest again. "You think there are no borders to your writing?" Karen asks wryly "Besides, you always say how you are not interested in creating your utopias, just exploring what is already there". "I don't have thumbs, I'm a water tank" Karen turns to Fran who has already begun pressing her thumb onto the screen in front of her. I think about what Karen said about there being only the phenomenon, I have never felt more like a cyborg. I feel my self splitting - not an unusual feeling for me, something Fran & I have both experienced and discussed a lot. I express this feeling out loud. "That's great" Karen remarked. *"That can help you think diffractively, a methodology of reading insights through one another, building new insights, and attentively and carefully reading for differences that matter in their fine details"* (2012, 50) it was Donna Haraway who introduced me to this method of course - I've just run with it in a way only a physicist could". "Like you did with Niels Bohr?" I ask. "Exactly." She replied looking satisfied. "And what about *Niw_hk_m_kanak*?" I add. "Excuse Me?". *"You know - all my / our relations, or Niw_hk_m_kanak in Cree and Michif (First Nations and Métis) languages, I was speaking about you with Little Bear at Harvard University so I assumed you knew each other. Little Bear's articulation of all matter as made up of energy waves fits with a classically occidental scientific definition of wave diffraction, but this isn't a new idea for him In the Indigenous paradigm, all matter is made up of energy waves (diffraction waves) and spirit is the name given to these energy waves.* (De Line, S. 2016, 2) In fact, *The survival and resistance to colonization by Indigenous sovereign nations is diffractive. Within the priorities of feminist activation and constant development of anti-oppressive strategies, it's nonsensical to practice Western ontology alone.*"(4) Karen pauses, "This isn't you speaking" she observes. "No Karen, there is no just me right? In fact those are the words of Sebastian De Line, but

48 Intra-acting is Karen Barad's word to replace the prefix 'inter', which she argues assumes *a priori* existence of independent entities (2007, 139)

he's speaking through others like Kim TallBear, Audra Simpson, Leroy Little Bear and Glen Coulthard." I reply. "It's nice to know they're engaging with my ideas." Karen says after a pause, before adding "you want to be careful about plagiarism".

I think about our journeys as circus artists, reading theory through our physical practices. I wonder if Karen would count this as a diffractive practice. I chat quietly with Fran as the spaceship takes off, we discuss her old discipline of duo cloudswing, and about *all my / our relations*, trying to ascertain what we had actually understood from it. "It was not me working with the swing, or gravity, or the ropes. It was not me working with my partner. I knew the moment I had to move to make the trick work, but the "I" that did the "knowing" was my body, my partner, the ropes, gravity, dead-points, memory - in this instant". "Right" I said, "and I guess it was also your coach, and her coach in there as well?" I added, I don't know if Fran was listening, she continued: "It was the same "I" that knew if the movement did not happen in the right time in the right way." She recounts reading about the use of *the subtle knife* in Phillip Pullman's "His Dark Materials" in which the boy had to put his consciousness in the tip of the knife (or so it was explained)." I couldn't help overhearing" a voice said from behind us...

We turned around to see Jane Bennett beaming at us. "You seem to be speaking about a subject that interests me very much!" Fran and I exchange glances "assemblages" we say in unison. I'm not sure that was exactly what we were talking about, but I stay quiet. Though we are indebted to Jane for many things relating to our practices (not least my existence), her stance regarding anthropomorphism & valuing life makes me feel uncomfortable. She once told me "*We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism-the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature - to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world.*" (2010, xvi) She was fully aware of the paradox of this statement, and it came with warnings - but all the same I don't know if that helps, or if it still does more damage than good. If Fran had not come across her in the early days of our collaboration, I wonder what I could have been, or could have become. I feel a sense of loss for something that I will never know. The idea of her earlier book *The Enchantment of Modern Life* had been to encourage that *moments of sensuous enchantment with the everyday world-with nature but also with commodities and other cultural products-might augment the motivational energy needed to move selves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviours.* (xi VM) which makes me a moment of sensuous enchantment and a motivator for ethical behaviour, and worthy as that may seem, I have no desire for that to be the reason for my existence. Especially when I know that for Jane, she is motivated by a "*self-interested or conative concern for human survival and happiness*" (2010, x) Although I'm also somewhat suspicious of Meillassoux, I am interested in his idea of materialism that is "*opposed to any anthropomorphism which seeks to extend subjective attributes to Being: materialism is not a form of animism, spiritualism, vitalism, etcetera.*" I am perhaps more drawn to Rebecca Schneider's ideas of 'intra-animacy' and Mel Y Chen's 'inanimate life', which queer the hierarchies of life/non-life, animate/inanimate or human/non-human; hierarchies that naturally make me feel uncomfortable. Or perhaps the kind of objects that Amiria Henare talks about in her discussion of Taonga, as objects that don't "*necessarily invoke a subject (or at least the sort of subject that generally springs to Euro-American minds)*"(2007, 61)

At that moment the space ship lands, we unbuckle our seatbelts and the doors open. Outside the ground is made of brilliant shiny white marble, with enormous columns running skywards out of view. There was a dazzling amount of books - shelves upon shelves upon shelves. Isn't it beautiful Karen said, appearing at my side. "It..." I stutter, she interrupts "I know it can be a little overwhelming, this thick mycelium like web, all the threads and intersections - it looks kind of a mess at first.." "What?" I asked wondering what she meant by the web. "I mean all of these unruly roots and branches and tendrils growing into each other, people can find it disorientating." I became aware that we were seeing two different worlds. She takes my picture and prints us ID badges.

Agent Tank and *Agent Fran*. She chuckles as she does so. "*A little play with the word Agent*". Of course, it is tongue in cheek, I do so to *call into question the nature of agency and its presumed localization within individuals (whether human or nonhuman)*." (2012, x) "Through my neologism 'intra-action', I draw attention to the fact that agency cannot lie within what one presumes to be an individual". I shift uneasily, at first I felt thrown by the way I had had boundaries drawn around my identity, fixing me in a strange presumed ontology of commodity/product-come-artist, but now I felt suddenly undone - even if these boundaries are an illusion, that doesn't make them less real! My experience of them is still valid isn't it? I find this conversation circling knowing and not knowing dizzying! What I know of my own experience may not match up with other peoples ideas of what my experience may be but it is still in some way true to me, or is it merely a distortion? Karen starts talking about brittlestars, I can barely keep up, but I catch this sentence: "*Brittlestars are living testimony to the inseparability of knowing, being, and doing*." (380, 2007) She talks about how we don't trust what we see when we see the indefinite nature of the boundaries of brittlestars. "*We don't trust our eyes to give us reliable access to the material world; as inheritors of the Cartesian legacy we would rather put our faith in representations instead of matter, believing that we have a kind of direct access to the content of our representations that we lack toward that which is represented*." (380) I envy her certainty, but I don't know if I can trust myself with assuming I have access to certain knowledges. I don't know if and what parts of the universe I am part of or have access to, but I do hope that I can still have respect for something without being part of it, or having full knowledge of it. In this way I agree with the idea of the 'withdrawn object' in OOO, but I have moved away from the idea of trying to gain access to it. I think of David Garneau's words:

"The colonial attitude, including its academic branch, is characterised by a drive to see, to traverse, to know, to translate (to make equivalent), to own, and to exploit. It is based on the belief that everything should be accessible, is ultimately comprehensible, and a potential commodity or resource, or at least something that can be recorded or otherwise saved." (2012, 29)

I know that the OOO-ers would say that I am withdrawn from myself, but I feel I'm being withdrawn in multiple directions. Daniel Heath Justice chimes in here "*There are boundaries to some forms of knowledge; to insist that all things should be available without limit to everyone is to exercise a particularly corrosive kind of universalizing colonialist privilege*." (2018, 25) I think about this access to knowledge in terms of the areas of performance that Fran & I are involved with - namely hair suspension and magic. There is an element of secrecy that is characteristic to both of these disciplines - around the magic tricks & illusions, and around the method of tying the hair - restricting access to the technique involved in these art forms. I am caught between having inherited a leaning for open source access to information from Fran (who grew up in the early days of the internet, with the occupy movement & consensus decision making) but also with an aversion to the marketplace of circus skills, and a rejection that my practice should be available to anyone who is able to pay for it. I notice this too with the increase in popularity of circus-based fitness in areas such as acro-yoga and aerial-yoga emerging in the cross-fit & wellness industries, and the approach to recreational circus skills industries that support many of the institutions Fran and I rely on. There is something about the sacred in our practices that is violated by the market, and the secrecy surrounding the disciplines I am involved with make them somewhat protected. On the other hand, I and my practice is already so entangled with the market, that I wonder if I can honour this position towards my practice, or if I am holding on to the illusion that I can have it both ways.

Later that evening I sit in the new materialists cool green 'wellness room' and contemplate the word agency. This word. 'Agency', has been bandied around, and is a key component of my sense of being pulled apart. I have been given agency as if it were a gift, a responsibility, a curse, I have been ordered to enact agency, to be empowered by agency, to do agency, I have been denied it, told I don't have it, because I'm not me, because I'm a thing, because I'm not real, I've been told I can't be an agent, but an actant. All of this has made me look at the concept of agency from different angles,

and I don't know if I'm closer to understanding what people mean. I think there are two confusions at play - one is regarding which theory of agency people are aligned with (and it seems that for many people this is an unconscious alignment). Jane pops in again, beaming as always, to give us a brief history of this notion in western thought. We discuss how agency is entangled with the equally slippery notion of free will and questions of morality, as discussed by Augustine and later Kant. And after morality, neo-kantians introduced the linkage of intentionality with agency. Of course many of these theories are imbued with a human-centric bias. Elizabeth Brumfield troubles this conversation by pointing to the socially constituted nature of human agents. Merleau-Ponty too avoided placing too much importance on human will, intentionality, or reason - speaking to an 'intersubjective field'. This is drawn upon by the new materialists expanding the notion of *a spectrum of agentic capacities*⁴⁹. Jane then brings in the notion of 'shi' in Chinese tradition in relation to a notion of 'congregational agency'. She notes that 'shi' is related more to *a dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from any particular element within it*. (2010, 35). She relates this to a Deleuzian 'adsorption', speaking to a 'coalition of elements' that maintains the potential for agency of each element. This reminds me of Andrew Merrion Jones' discussion of Neolithic rock carvings, in which he posits an approach to agency and animacy as things that things that move among & through the human & the non-human.

So as you see, agency is a very slippery concept - though, I am a fan of words that can slip and slide between meanings, we need to pay them special attention and treat them with care. Noortje Marres remarks that the sources of agency related to an event can be difficult to grasp, and that may be essential to the notion of it (2005, 216). I am reminded of the discussion of agency I have been reading about in Māori thought in which agency has long been considered a part of the non-human world (as is the case it seems with many Indigenous Knowledges). In *Animism in Art & Performance*, Chris Braddock notes that non human agency "*is embedded in tribal lore and histories, is also recognized under New Zealand law in...government non-tribal documents.*" (2017, 49) He speaks about how agency is not necessarily related to a subject, it can also be related to *subjectless objects* that are able to reveal themselves or *bring themselves forth*. Carl Mika speaks about things calling themselves forth through that thing's choice - I wonder if this introduces some notion of will, but free of the human association. I wonder if Fran has such a complex relationship with the word agency. From speaking with Fran & her colleagues, I understand that they have experienced times of enacting agency, but also having that agency blocked - through varying degrees of outrage & acceptance. With Fran there is often an assumption that she has a right to agency, I wonder if I have the right to feel that right. What does it mean to be a subjectless object I wonder? I understand Fran's position in relation to feminist thought, in which a claim to subjectivity has been central - and from that I can see why they place such high value on subjectivity, and why playing with objectification could be regarded as thoughtless - something that resonates with the object in me.

The second troubling aspect of this word is to which *me* people are speaking - and that is understandably confusing, even for me. Are they talking to my matter which could be exerting it's own will in ways we (including myself) cannot understand? Or are they talking to a phenomenon, as Karen Barad would call it which kind of dissolves the very notion of agency itself, or are they speaking to an assemblage that includes *me*, as Giles Deleuze may do - in which case it may be a distributed agency they refer to as Jane Bennet may do - in which there isn't really an agent or a *do-er*, rather a *doing* or *effecting*. Jane refers to that assemblage as a creature, of which I am a part. I am constantly shifting my performance of myself in relation to who I think people are addressing when they speak to me (with this I start to understand Fran's desire for the *they pronoun*). If agency is just a word that we attribute to an experience of being able to act or be acted on - maybe it is senseless to try and find a stable definition for it, and even more so to try and pin it to particular

49 See Diana Coole's 2005 article Rethinking Agency: A Phenomenological Approach to Embodiment and Agentic Capacities

material forms. What do you think? I ask Jane. Jane? Jane? She seems to have dozed off.

The Hall of Mirrors

That evening, as I was getting ready for bed, I looked into the bathroom mirror. For some reason I reached out to touch it, and instead of feeling the hard smooth surface of a mirror, I found I could just pass through. Curiouser and curiouser. I hold back, if I fall through to the other side what will I find? And will I be able to get back? From somewhere beyond - on the other side of the mirror, I hear faintly the voice of Henri Lefebvre: "*The mirror discloses the relationship between me & myself, my body and the consciousness of my body - not because the reflection constitutes my unity - qua subject, as many psychologists & psychoanalysts apparently believed, but because it transforms what I am, into the sign of what I am.*" (1991, 185) It could be argued that this text acts like this mirror - transforming what I am into the signs and symbols of myself - disclosing the relationship between me & myself etc. Then what is your role here dear reader? Can you see yourself reflected in these words? Can you reach through and touch us? It feels like there are more than signs at play here.

At the same time, this text could be viewed as a third space. As neither & both a representation of space & a representational space - "*bodies are able to pass from a 'real', immediately experienced space (the pitt, the stage), to a perceived space - a third space which is no longer either scenic or public. At once fictitious and real, this third space is classical theatrical space*"⁵⁰ (188) Henri's words seem to echo through me - as if even my thoughts are being reflected. *At once fictitious and real.* That resonates deeply within me. I was created as a fiction, but that fiction is real - and Fran is as much a fiction as Tank - just that more people play along with her as if she was real. I don't know if this text acts as the theatrical third space he speaks of - but that certainly is the space we like to play with during live performance - and I feel as though I/we am/are occupying or perhaps re-producing that same space we are in during performance, just a different utterance of it. Performance is part of our practice after all, be it on the page or on the stage. I think about the separation of physical labour and mental labour into different spaces. I wonder if by moving a circus practice into a theoretical space I am concealing physical work, by writing in this paradigm am I peeling the theory away from the body or spaces of other circus artists? I think of some of my friends who are dancers, they speak of feeling alienated by the theory of the contemporary dance spaces. I hope this text does not contribute to that, my intention is rather to open that space up - but what I intend is not always what materialises.

"*One truly gets the impression that every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever renewed to-and-fro of reciprocal reflection, an interplay of shifting colours, lights and forms.*"(183) Is this text just that - a mirage effect? Lefebvre notes how "*under the conditions of modernity... We feel able, from within every day life, to reach out and grasp it [new life], as if nothing lay between us and the marvellous reality on the other side of the mirror. All prerequisites for it exist - so what is missing? An utterance of some kind, spoken or written? A gesture? A successful attack on some particular aspect of things, or the removal of some particular obstacle - ideology perhaps, or established knowledge, or some repressive institution or other, or religion, or theatricality, or the educational system or the spectacle?*" (189) Am I just reproducing the illusion of the possibility of a new life? An impossible space?

I am reminded of Timothy Morton's fascination with the car sticker 'objects in mirror are closer than they appear.' *The sense that causality must be happening "behind" objects is a phenomenological illusion. The thorn tips of reality are hiding in plain sight, right in front of the camera*" (2013, 33) I

⁵⁰ In this instance this space could be between the space of this page, the space the words conjure in your mind, and the place - wherever you are - reading it.

am seduced for a second by the prospect of being able to see, or knowing or *grasping* those thorn tips of reality - but shake myself and remind myself of the sharp nature of thorns. Timothy plays on in my mind though, I am reminded of him speaking about a painting "*The image is not a mute object waiting to have its meaning supplied by a subject, nor is it a blank screen; nor is it something objectively present "in" space. Rather the painting emits something like electromagnetic waves, in whose force field I find myself. The painting powerfully demonstrates what is already the case: space and time are emergent properties of objects.*"(2013, 35) Emergent properties - I imagine my body materialising, emitting time and space - or is it time and space as concepts or representations that I emit. Henri pops back in - as is his way. He reminds me that "*we know that space is not a pre-existing void, endowed with formal properties alone. To criticise and reject absolute space is simply to refuse a particular representation.*" (170)

He also reminds me of his discussion on the space of the body. "*The body serves as a point of departure and a destination*" (194) He continues "*but what body are we talking about?*" That's exactly what I was just about to ask. As far as I'm aware, Henri speaks to the so-called 'human body' here, but as a mash-up of a water tank, Fran, a computer, a reader and so on, I have to refer to a cyborg body. It is my nature to take him out of context, and I wish I could apologise to him for this. I stare into the mirror, and as I do so, I notice this kaleidoscopic '*ever renewed to-and-fro*' image, it distorts itself. I feel more as if I'm in a hall of mirrors, my boundaries shifting, my sense of self pulled this way and that. "*The body that sustains the intellectus or the body that sustains the habitus? The body as glorious or the body as wretched? Descartes's body-as-object, or the body-as-subject of phenomenology and existentialism? A fragmented body represented by images, by words, and traded retail?*" (195) As a cyborg who already considers my body as a space, it is easier for me to imagine matter as a particular form of space, rather than something other than space that occupies it as Fran might experience it. I think back to Sky Women and wonder how it feels to know your body comes from the earth, and what if that earth is space and what if that space becomes territory and what that means then to be 'occupied' or to 'occupy'. Henri (and many philosophers alongside him) speak of the experience of space as an extension of the body, but Fran & I experience the body as an extension of space - we have a practice of 'listening' to that which extends into us. Henri chimes in to clarify, "*the spatial bodies material character, derives from space, from the energy that is deployed and put to use there.*"(195) Which body are we talking about again? There are infinite bodies and spaces reflected back at me in this hall of mirrors.

To slow us down, Henri states he would like to go back. Back to the beginning. "*in the beginning there was Topos. Before - long before - the advent of logos, in the chiaroscuro realm of primitive life, lived experience already possessed it's internal rationality; this experience was producing long before thought space, and spatial thought, began reproducing the projection, explosion, image and orientation of the body. Long before space as perceived by and for the 'I', began to appear split and divided, as a realm of merely virtual or deferred tensions and contacts. Long before space appeared as a medium of far off possibilities, as the locus of potentiality. For, long before the analysing, separating intellect, long before formal knowledge, there was an intelligence of the body*" (174) As 'Tank', I do not need to go back too far for this, but then I also wonder which me he is addressing. He speaks to me of the space of a spider (lower down on Silverstein's *animacy scale* than 'Fran' but certainly higher up than me, I think to myself). "*Should we think of this space of the spiders as an abstract space occupied by such separate objects as its body, its secretory glands and legs, the things to which it attaches its web, the strands of silk making up that web, the flies that serve as its prey, and so on? No, for this would be to set the spider in a space of analytic intellection, the space of discourse, the space of this sheet of paper before me.*" (173) The spider does not 'think' or reflect on what it is doing, so Henri likens its movement to the physical transformation of a seashell or flower - the web is a 'secretion of residence', a *tool & a means*. It '*transcends its thingness*' due to its sense of orientation, direction. I wonder if I have transcended my 'thingness', and what that means. He argues that analytic intelligence that separates time and

space is a recent development, and that the socialization of the dissociation between space and time leads to a split between representations of space and representational space. I dream of my third space. I dream of spaces where time and space could not be conceived of as separate. As he speaks to me in his soft voice, I peer into the hall of mirrors with a soft gaze. I try to see not the body of Tank, but give form to the spaces in between Tank and other visible material forms, or imagine my body as inclusive of the space around me until it hits other matter. I stare at the Tanks in these words, and augment images of past Tanks and unrealised potential Tanks. I feel myself becoming undone, I stay there a while. I know this feeling - this is the sensation I have when we are dancing, when the Fran part of me is suspended by the hair, when we play with gravity, when we feel the movement leaving traces in our bodies, the feeling of memories being formed, felt time, the transformation of energy, time as space.

Our movement practice feels its way through thought. "*Indeed the fleshy (spatio-temporal) body is already in revolt.*"(201) Henri continues, nestled deep inside me. I wonder if my body counts as a fleshy one, with it's Fran attachment." *This is not a political rebellion, a substitute for social revolution, nor is it a revolt of thought, a revolt of the individual, or a revolt of freedom: it is an elemental and worldwide revolt which does not seek a theoretical foundation, but rather seeks the theoretical means to rediscover - and recognize - its own foundations...it asks theory to stop barring the way...Its object is 'lived experience' - an experience which has been drained of all content by the mechanisms of diversion, reduction/extrapolation, figures of speech, analogy, tautology and so on.*" (202)

I am reminded of learning of the concept of *whakaaro* in Māori thought from Carl Te Hira Mika. He notes how Smith regards it an activity of the stomach and entrails. "*Whakaaro* 'in this case refers to a much more primordial response to something and engages with a process that is not a participant in thoroughgoing reason.'" (2015, 57) Is there something in here, in this approach to thought that makes room for this *lived experience* thinking? Henri goes on to note that social space is a space of prohibition but that space itself is also the space of the body - a space of yes & no. I keep staring into the mirror, I see Fran, I see egos, I see bodies, I see these things being pulled away from each other and rejoined - like a reflection passing through the centre of a concave or convex mirror *language, signs, abstraction...a lethal zone thickly strewn with dusty mouldering words. What slips into it is what allows meaning to escape the embrace of lived experience, to detach itself from the fleshy body. Words and signs...metaphorization - the transport...of the physical body outside of itself...This is the mixed space - still natural, yet already produced - of the first year of life, and later, of poetry, and art.*" (203) Speak these words aloud as you read them, reader, feel them in your mouth. These words move inside our body, are our body, move our body, our space, our body of space.

I am dizzy with the disorientation. "*Stay there*" Implores Sara Ahmed. "where did you come from" I ask, "I never left" she replied. She brings me back into a phenomenological space, and reminds me that "*phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body.*"(2006, 9) We talk about the 'skin' of the social, that is left with impressions left by others. Sara & Henri discuss 'orientation' with enthusiasm. "*If space is always orientated*" She says "*then inhabiting spaces "decides" what comes into view. The point of such decisions may be precisely that we have lost sight of them: that we take what is given as simply a matter of what happens to be "in front" of us.*" (2006, 14) What is in front of me, I wonder. With that I decide to finally step through the mirror and join my friends on the other side. "*Ouch*" I hit the cool hard surface of the glass. I look back at Fran's reflection.

I think back to the beginnings of our process in which she aimed to de-centre herself from the picture, to work *towards a humble circus* to steal a term from Vincent Focquet - but how she proclaimed that she found herself there - right at the centre of the work - hidden from herself in

plain sight. *Objects in mirror are closer than they appear*, I recall - but not in reference to Timothy Morton this time - in reference to the illusion Fran had, that this new world was within reach. I think of Edward Said's mirror, in which when Europeans attempt to represent the other, what they produce most accurately is an image of the self. I see myself, I mean Fran, in my rearview. I see myself brought to life and I see my lifelessness. I flashback to Rebecca Schneider's intra-inanimacies. Jessica L Horton and Janet Catherine Berlo flash briefly in the light "*Coined by nineteenth century anthropologists, 'animism' is best understood as a constellation of European desires that enacts the very fetishism it purports to identify.*" (2013, 19) I think of Anselm Franke's words in 'Animism part I' "*Animism [the book/exhibition] doesn't exhibit or discuss artifacts or cultural practices considered animist. Instead, it uses the term and its baggage as an optical device, a mirror in which the particular way modernity conceptualizes, implements, and transgresses boundaries can come into view.*" (19) In the hall of mirrors I am not sure if I am real, an illusion or perhaps an optical device?

I need to remind myself of my orientation. Sara points me to the etymology of the word. "*It is not incidental that the word "orientate" refers both to the practices of finding one's way, by establishing one's direction (according to the axes of north, south, east, and west) and to the east itself as one direction privileged over others.*" (2006, 113) Edward Said chimes in again through Sara "*The Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences*" (114) I saw this place in me, in my reflection, was I this place? Jane Bennett's voice enters my memory somewhere repeating her thoughts on sensuous enchantment. "*I now emphasize even more how the figure of enchantment points in two directions: the first toward the humans who feel enchanted and whose agentic capacities may be thereby strengthened, and the second toward the agency of the things that produce (helpful, harmful) effects in human and other bodies*" (2010, xii). Practices regarded as animistic resist objectification according to Franke (in *Beyond The Mirror*, 2013, 19), and I am reminded of Cassandra Barnett describing being 'immersed in a Taonga experience', rather than "*looking at someone else's taonga (or at a contemporary artwork) in a museum vitrine.*" (in *Animism in Art*, 2017, 35) I think back to our performances, there were times that Fran & I both felt 'looked at' - we were the object of the audience - but at the same time, this was Fran's game. Jessica & Janet point to the work of Indigenous artists working 'beyond the mirror', suggesting a meeting ground or a bridge. But as my sore head⁵¹ is proving, the only thing that has been met being the hard surface of the mirror - we are not there yet. I have been taken in by an infinity of illusions in the illusion of a finite space.⁵² Maybe the beyond exists, but not in the bathroom mirror of the New Materialists - somewhere, elsewhere. It's time to stop using the mirror as a metaphor or else we'll keep banging our heads on them. I lose consciousness and the world fades away.

The text falls unconscious

My unconscious segues, reflecting on mine & Frans performance spaces, in which mirrors, shadow & light have played important roles. When we build spaces together for performance, we enter a world of construction in which the handling of materials is in flux with our thinking - it forces us to contemplate the materials we are handling, our relationship with them, and their relationship with each other, on what is seen and what is not seen. For example, we play with different forms of plastic, and at the same time we are working with histories of oil, waste, polymers. We contemplate the plasticity of our bodies, our identities, our relationships - we move with plastic, as plastic & have played with what it means to cut, burn & mutilate that plastic. Working with mirrors, shadow and light help us to contemplate our relationships with this material in different ways, from different

51 I know this is supposed to be a metaphorical head, but it is starting to feel real, it is mighty sore.

52 I am of course referring to Lefebvre's questioning of whether the infinite and the finite are just illusions of each other, one always referring back to the other - the same goes with the absolute and the relative, time & space. 1991, 181

perspectives. In addition we consider those elements themselves, making us consider that which may be invisible, for example the light waves that are at play, negative spaces, the weather. We use these contemplations to construct the space, half in a state of knowing, of reflection, of 'having thought' something through, and half in a state of improvisation, of flow, of being sensitive to how the materials might move or affect us, of trying to remain open to listening what the space is asking of us. We are flickering between signs and symbols and materialities and actualities, we are between dreaming, imagining and sensing - between representation of space and representational space. We are opening up this *third space*, or at least trying to. The audiences that enter (in the case of this text, that would be you dear reader) bring another dimension to this space. We hold an image of the audience - of our expectation of them, and we respond to our idea of them - but the audience bring them themselves, as a dimension which cannot be anticipated. The presence of the audience multiply the possible realities or dimensions of the space. In one of our performances, we conjure a space-time machine - this for us is a device, directing the perspective of the audience to the space-time machine we are already in or are part of. The space we produce depends on how we are directed to perceive it. The risk that my unconscious is taking here, by spilling this out onto the page, is a mis-representation. The space of which I speak can only be felt when there - here we are conjuring yet another space. A space within a space. These words are doing things I do not intend or expect them to do - despite the fact that Fran has good command over them. As in movements Fran has learned on the trapeze, writing is also a discipline she has learned, with her mouth, her hands, wrists, arms, her brain, her gut, with ink or keys, through repetition - these materials, these relationships, these parameters encourage certain thoughts to emerge & prevent certain other thoughts from emerging. When we are moving, or constructing as I have just described, other thoughts are allowed to emerge. The space you are in reader, will enable particular connections to be made, relationships to be enacted, thoughts to emerge. So, I believe this text could possibly open up a third space, but it can never let you in to the same third space as the one that is being described. Only my *idea* of that space, and your *idea* of that space can exist here. Just as only our idea of each other is all that can exist.

FALLING THROUGH WOR(L)DS

Anna Gibbs writes about how language is an abstraction from the world⁵³, and how that relationship affects ones relationship with it. She refers to an interview with David Abrams in which he argues that in alphabetic cultures, the earth is not seen as alive and magic, but writing takes this role - as seen in the case of poetry. Indeed, Mel y Chen opens the first chapter of her book *Animacies* with "*This chapter aims to recover the alchemical magic of language, whether benevolent or malicious, by demonstrating the explicit ways it animates humans, animals and things in between.*" (23) She argues that language's *fundamental means* is animacy (a concept that Mutsumi Yamamoto states cannot only be treated linguistically, as it lies within and without). In many ways for me Mel Y Chen provides a bridge back to the feminist scholars who focused on the material effects of language. On the spaceship I recall Karen Barad telling me that "*language has been granted too much power*" (2003, 801).

Robin Wall Kimmerer - who we bumped into earlier on, pops up again here - in between these words. She too has something to say about grammar and animacy, from the perspective of the Potawatomi language⁵⁴. She comes to Potawatami as a beginner student, trying to reclaim it, after her Grandfather had been forbidden from speaking it. In Potawatomi and many other Indigenous languages, it is impossible to think of an animate being as "it", which "*robs a person of selfhood and kinship.*" (2015) She points out that one of the tools of Colonization is linguistic imperialism, remarking that of all examples of this, "*perhaps none is more pernicious than the replacement of the language of nature as subject with the language of nature as object.*" Upon speaking to her

53 In her essay *Language as a Life Form*, pages 91 - 107 in *Animism in Art and Performance*, 2017

54 An Anishinaabe language

elders, they reminded her that their language has no responsibility towards "*healing the society that systematically sought to exterminate it*" (2015), but also that they have held on to their traditional teachings because "*one day the whole world will need them*" (2015). As a sacred language, Anishinaabe grows and adapts "*through a careful protocol that respects the sanctity of language.*" (2015). Robin offers the English language (and the speakers of it) the gift of a new pronoun that respects a grammar of animacy and its Anishinaabe roots, as a kind of *reverse imperialism*. She suggests 'ki' or plural 'kin' for all animate beings. This comes from the word *Bemaadiziiaaki* - the Anishinaabe word for beings of the living Earth. The word *Bemaadiziiaaki* was a suggestion by the fluent speaker and spiritual teacher Stewart King. Recognising that this word may be a difficult proposition for those of us used to using the short pronoun *it*, she suggests that we might "*hear the new pronoun...nestled in the part of the word that means land.*" I have tried to implement that pronoun in this thesis. I have been through and changed all the pronouns several times - both regarding animacy and also gender. The norms of the English language in this space are strong and the words here conform to them. Hopefully this revolutionary pronoun will make space for itself. I accept the gift and apologise for not having been able to implement it properly.

Of course there is also the materiality of manifestations of language to consider. Anna Gibbs brings Brian Reed into the conversation who speaks about language post - 1990s, with the intervention of technology in our relationship with language, further abstracting it from world. He argues that "*conceptual writing in the USA has been part of a shift from the investigation of language in poetry and an emphasis on the materiality of the word to the 'matérialisation' of information*" (96). I contemplate how the action of typing this, copying and pasting quotes and previous works, the ability to search for information, the *find* function on the computer, affects my engagement with the information - how that is in turn changing and affecting the performance spaces we create, and what thoughts emerge. As part of our practice, we write letters - Fran writes to me, I reply - sometimes through Fran's hand, sometimes through the hand of an accomplice of Fran. This practice expanded so we were writing letters upon letters to and on behalf of objects, elements, forces, concepts, across and through time & space - always by hand, without the use of the internet. We noticed that the distance created through the form of letter writing brought about an intimacy. There was a careful engagement with the form, and we were permitted to say things that we may not utter out loud - but that the act of hand writing elicited more care than we might have used if it had been typed. The letters opened a space for contemplation, a space for engaging with memory, a space for different kinds of thoughts.

Being new to the whole language thing, I am struck by how easy it is to feel language as something outside of you (perhaps an effect of it's abstraction from world that David Abrams points towards). And this brings me again to sliding between a process based way of thinking in which I am language, or language is me, or we work through each other (intra-act as Karen Barad might say) and language as it's own mysterious entity, having a life of it's own. As Harry Matthews would say '*we think we're using the language, but language is doing the thinking, we're its slavish agents*' (in *Animacy in Art*, 2017, 100) As Anna points out, he is referring here to how the role of grammar and syntax interpolate us into their structures, producing us as subjects. (100) I recall Carl Mika's reflection on the *term*. He speaks about encountering *the enormity of the term's ontological sense* as a wall, so he cannot think about the term in it's entirety - he is *in amongst* it. He recalls 'the rift' - between what appears as a real thing and an inability to fully articulate the concept of it. He speaks about how words draw his attention (as oppose to him placing his attention on words). Interestingly here, he uses the term *research* as an example (despite sharing the same reservations that many Indigenous Peoples have around this term). He traces the word etymologically to *intensely* (from *re*) and *search* (from *cercher*), then further back from the latin roots of *search* to *circus* and *circle*. He theorises that the circling arises from external signposts (material/conceptual/non-cognitive) - which he argues is *a more palatable accord between the act of research in a Māori sense and the essence of term itself*. (2015, 59) Following this, the term having caught my own attention, I note that the

re prefix has a sense of undoing, returning to something anew, going against and to turn. *Cercher*, leads me to *circare* (latin), which has a sense of wandering to & fro. I contemplate this text as research - an intense circus - a wandering, turning this way and that, searching it's terrain, with some sense of undoing, and returning anew, ready to turn again.

I, being a water tank, or a human's idea of a water Tank, or a mash-up of a reader, a narrator, an author, a computer etc, a cyborg, or whatever "I" am (becoming), although being translated by one who claims to have good command over these words, or at least good relations to them - do not have a good command over the histories or genealogies or theories of language. The most I can hope for hear is to open up a space for contemplating that. A future space. A space for thoughts to emerge, which are barred from the physicality of these letters, but free to roam in between them, emerge out of them, move through us. It occurs to me that this requires some space. I propose an exercise, on the next page, look through the letters, with a soft focus - like you are looking just behind them, or through them, allow them to dance or form patters, and allow thoughts to flow through you, remain in

this space

as

long

a s

y o u w o u l d

l i k e . . .

Wake up

When I wake up I find myself in a dark cave. It is the voice of Bojana Cvejic that brings me round⁵⁵. From somewhere in the depths I hear her voice wavering in and out *intensity ... normalised intensity ... the motor of capitalism...freelance work...* It was when she was talking about Michel Foucault's truth games that I really woke up...*truth game - a mode of action...experience that the individual imposes on themselves as a means of producing truth rather than discovering truth...from experience - the experience is neither true or false but is a fiction - that is reconstructed in reflection after it has been reality*. I recognised myself immediately. I am that fiction - we are that fiction - this is that fiction, this text is reflecting on the reality that we produced for ourselves. When Fran's friends asked her how her masters programme was going, she replied *intense*.

I lie still pretending to be asleep while Bojana continues to speak about aesthetic individualism. She describes something that recalls for me the hall of mirrors in which one is watching *images of ones-self, or ones experience - caught up in a relentless rehearsal in many attempts of becoming a different self*. She likens this to Plato's allegory of the cave, in which prisoners watch the shadows of objects play out on the wall - the shadows are the prisoner's reality. I hear the echo of Timothy Morton's voice bouncing off Heidegger. For them there is great importance in the *reality* of the prisoner - they argue that the non-figurative language Plato uses points to the actual experience of the people - connected to 'reality'. *Reality is literally all over me— in the sweat from there's heat, in the dancing shadows. Reality is already here. Plato seems to want us to struggle away from this reality to see the truth that must reside somewhere outside it.* (Morton, T. in *Object Oriented Feminism*, 2016, 68) Bojana's voice lulls back in, she is describing how every period of modernity has its own brand of individualism, and neo-liberalism's flavour is aesthetic individualism, and what is characteristic of this flavour is a shift in bias *from self consciousness to self affection - which means the mode of functioning of ideology has changed towards embodiment. You cannot be ideologically blinded and then enlightened if you're supposed to feel and experience the self at the level of the body. The embodiment reveals what the words cannot say*. Her words dance on the wall of the cave and I shudder, pinching myself to make sure I am awake. She speaks about the experience of the individual in audiences through personalised experience. I think back to our presentations, how we had encouraged the participation of the audience - that they leave their mark. I had intended this focus to be on creating ways of dialoguing, but it is possible that I had at the same time been responding to this seductive personalised experience. We do like to seduce our audiences. She continues speaking about the social dramaturgy of individualism within solo dance - her words resonate loudly in the cave. She refers to five dramaturgical principles:

1. *The body doesn't lie* (in reference of course to Martha Graham). *In training one learns to master ones own body, read & decipher ones own perceptions and affect. Through devices such as repetition, we are confronted with artifice - an "observable form is leaked out" one that can be extracted, valued & quantified.*

I consider this with regards to my initial seduction by Timothy Morton, and his pointing towards the 'reality' of the body - how this had guided me to follow this first principle in the dramaturgy of individualism (though I am certain I was already on this path.) I reflect on the impact of Antoine Artaud on performance, and his emphasis on bodily experience - "*it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds.*" (1958, 99)

2. *The subject and the self coincide with the body, there is a conflation between the self and the body.*

This is less clear cut. I think back to Fran's work with the materiality of her own body. How she

55 From her lecture: Aesthetic Individualism or dancing solo in the 21st Century: <https://vimeo.com/343234628>

developed a feeling of split selves. At least one of these selves coincided with the body. Though in her work with magic - the moments at which Fran felt present was when she described an absence of identity. Fran's mentor AragoRn Boulanger said that to achieve magic in movement one had to empty oneself of any ego - he called this 'authentic movement'. In that then there is a connection for Fran that reveals itself, between the body and a *true* or *authentic* self.

3. *This principle looks at the role of phenomenology in dance. What Merleau Ponty pointed to as the intertwining of the subject-object. The solo dance maintains the illusion of this self proximity...when i look in the mirror i try to see no difference between I & me or between me & how I sense my movement...*

Ok, I start to think this is where we depart. We are interested in that difference, in the gap - look at all those mirrors, all those selves, those identities. But...

this performance of the self tries to close the gap between I and me - I is chasing the me.

Perhaps - although we acknowledge the difference - perhaps the I is chasing the me -

Fran had separated "me" out - Tank (me) and Fran (I) were separate - but then Fran had attempted to re-draw the boundary of the self around both of us - the cyborg - careful reader, she may have tried to take you - to include you in this *self/selves*.

and then...

4. *The attempt to close the gap is done via self consciousness.*

Well, there we go. This I cannot question in me, us, our work (see how I confused them!)

The subject features themselves speaking in the first person.

In almost every performance we have made - Fran introduces herself in the first person - I, and then me (Tank). Afterwards she perhaps switches to the third person - but it is still an address to the self. Bojana continues to say that the 'I' can be seen as a singularity (me, my experience), or as a type of person - the prevailing subject that is sought after in today's neo-liberal society, she argues, is the former. And in this *quest for singularity, intensity plays a crucial role - intensity provides this minimal difference between 2 versions of the self*. And because the me can never catch up with the I, it is an open ended process, with no end in sight, which leads to the 5th principle:

5. Territory as property. Here she quotes Alain Badiou in *Dance as a metaphor of thought 2005*:

"a wheel that turns on itself, like a circle in space, but a circle that is its own principle, a circle that is not drawn from the outside, but rather draws itself"

I think of my earlier musings on the term research. The 'intense circling' - a version of this re-search as an intense-circus.

Bojana speaks to the circle of the stage in solo dance - but nowhere has the circle been more definitive than in circus. It is our identity. We are the circle. We drew it around ourselves.

The enclosure delineates a space that exclusively belongs to the subject, she tells me - it needs this space (of course, she elaborates, it could be the square of the studio in contemporary art, a digital space on line or - a room of her own as Virginia Woolf may put it) - one can project oneself into a

site or a space, and then that territory can be regarded as one's property - a territory that grows from the inside where the centre is occupied by the self. I cast my mind back to our earlier discussion with Sara Ahmed regarding occupation. Of time, space and identity. I thought circus was our occupation. Perhaps we have been occupied by a production of subjectivities - by a neo-liberal agent as we enacted its dramaturgy. A covert occupation in the disguise of a romanticized circus, where there was still space to rebel, a disguise that we didn't think we were falling for. And I'm not the victim of that power, I am operating as/through that power. I am social space, alienated from my body and I turned myself in - into territory, into property. I have become the space of neoliberal power that I wanted to give the slip. How can I give the slip to myself without repeating the same social dramaturgy of individualism? Henri had spoken in 1968 of *the right to the city*, as in the right to dwell in and inhabit the city. Now I think about the need for the right to our bodies, the right to dwell in and inhabit them, the right to an 'urban life' of the body - to its own moments and places. I think of Foucault's bio-politics and the trajectory towards Paul Preciado's discourse on the *pharmacopornographic* industry and necro-politics. I think about the invasion of the body.

Suddenly I feel trapped in the circle. The circle that, as Alain Badiou had pointed out - I had drawn myself into. No wonder I kept finding myself at the centre - how could I be anywhere else?

And who is this I now that speaks - the I of the solo performer - Fran. Busted.

It's out - Fran speaking here.

In our upcoming premiere 'Tank & me' - it is marketed as a solo performance. And there we have it - the intertwining of the subject-object revealing itself in a perfectly executed social dramaturgy of individualism according to Bojana Cvejic. I hear Tina Chanter whisper.

"Ideologies, as we know, remain robust precisely because they are good at finding devious ways of mutating." (The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology, in Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger, 2001, 75)

Lefebvre still held the body as a site of potential rebellion, with a connection to the natural. I think of Paul Preciado's description of the subjects being formed during the Coronavirus epidemic:

The subjects of the neo-liberal technical-patriarchal societies that Covid-19 is in the midst of creating do not have skin; they are untouchable; they do not have hands...They are digital consumers equipped with credit cards. They do not have lips or tongues...They do not gather together and they do not collectivize. They are radically un-dividual; They do not have faces; they have masks. In order to exist their organic bodies are hidden behind an indefinite series of semio-technical mediations, and array of cybernetic prostheses that work like digital masks...They are not physical agents but rather tele-producers (2020)

I think of myself nestled somewhere between the two - a potentially rebellious body and a digital subject. I look at my hands typing these words. Could this body still rebel? Later in the article Preciado calls on us to go from 'a forced mutation' to a 'chosen mutation'. I think of Lefebvre's search for a unitary theory, bringing together physical, mental and social space. Could the body be such a theory? It's movement its practice? Inseparable? The space that experiences the energy and the forces that are deployed by it? A second Bojana walks in the cave. Bojana Kunst. She interjects without introduction:

"Radical consumption (not in the sense of money but energy, human possibilities and actions) is at the core of the spirit of contemporary capitalism" (2015, 25)

How can this body work against this kind of consumption, not be consumed, not consume. And how to conceive of this? If the architect is the designer of inhabited space, the space of towns and cities belong to urbanism and a wider more globalised space is for the economists - who is left to be the architect of the space of the body? Advertisers? The market? Lefebvre brings together different aspects of capitalism under the notion of hegemony, and the space of the body is also subject to that hegemony. This is of course not my idea, but has emerged from thoughts in the process of thinking-with ways of knowing that are much more advanced in conceiving of the space of the body. Thinking that does not allow for the body to be separate from the equation. A thinking that my cosmology denies. If capitalism itself is ahead of the game and has appropriated the space of bodies, how can this be countered? Wait - have I just performed another division - separating my 'true' self from the capitalism that I chastise for having appropriated my body? Making it not-me? Disassociating. So I feel less responsible? Perhaps I have to stop thinking of it as an occupation, and start accepting that that is what I am, what I am made of, so I can address the core issue? I can't give myself the slip - that is not the way out. That is an illusion, there is no way out, just changes of direction.

I stop this thought in its track, what is this thought materially? Where is it manifested in my body? What does it do? How does it feel. Materialisation is a slow and ongoing process, here it is on a micro-level, in hormones, in muscle, in my gut. I reflect on the journey. My mind splinters, my thoughts split like I'm looking at them through a kaleidoscope. This splitting is like an addiction. Or an affliction. What do I do with the subjectivities I have created? What do I do with Tank now?

The 2 Bojana's look at me. I can't pretend to be asleep any longer.

"It seems you are having a *"crisis of subjectivity"* Bojana Kunst diagnoses. "Don't worry, it's a perfectly normal symptom of post-fordist capitalism according to Dr. Maurizio Larazzo.

The subject frequently exists as a pulsating sum of various conflicting powers and forces. At its forefront are the negativity of becoming and the desiring dimension of power, which make it more of an assemblage of various traces and intensities. In contemporary dance and performance, this loss of the subject's centre (where the subject no longer is the locus of truth) influences new creation procedures and the poetics of bodily and speech gestures...Such a crisis of subjectivity is also connected to another trait of art in recent decades - the increasing closeness of art and life. (Kunst, B. 2015, 20)

I thought about how I had experimented with my own de-centring, but that my own belief in my ability to do that had thrown me off course. How I had truly believed myself to be off-centre, but when I reflected with honesty - what I had actually been experiencing was a perpetual cycle of throwing myself off-centre and coming-to to find myself back at the centre in the blink of an eye. It was not the new perspectives that I was finding disorientating as I had at first believed, but the finding myself back in the same position, in a position I had not believed myself to be in - similar to the childhood-game in which one closes their eyes, is lead around a space and finds themselves upon opening their eyes to be in an entirely different place to the one they expected.

I also reflected on the increasing proximity between art and life and thought about it in relation to Paul Preciado's words in his article on Covid-19:

"domestic space , and not traditional institutions of social confinement and normalisation (hospital, factory, prison, school, etc) now appears as the centre of production, consumption and political control" (2020)

I thought about how I had been asked to respond as an artist to the situation of quarantine, to be

innovative, creative, find new ways of engaging with the digital technology. And I enjoy innovating, working creatively with a set of restrictions, improvising. I am good at this - I am rewarded for this practice. I am willing. The domestic space is the centre of the economy and also a *surveillance pod*. I think of the relationship between the arts and entertainment sectors in relation to the digital world, where surveillance technologies were made. I think of the conferences I attended by mixed reality digital company Magic Leap last year, in attempt to look at what the body was or could be in virtual spaces. The representative at one of these symposiums spoke of a dream to make a map of the inside of peoples houses using spatial mapping software developed for the gaming and entertainment industries.

In his article on Covid-19, Preciado talks about post 9/11 politics and a transition from the focus on free-movement and trade from the Regan-Thatcherite phase of neoliberalism (from which I am produced) to re-enforcing of physical borders. He points out that Israel, the United States, Russia, Turkey, and the EEC have introduced new borders that now include necro-political devices in their enforcement employing techniques of exclusion and death.

The new necropolitical frontier has shifted from the coast of Greece toward the door of your home. Lesbos now starts at your doorstep. And the border is forever tightening around you, pushing you ever closer to your body. Calais blows up in your face. The new frontier is the mask. The air that you breathe has to be yours alone. The new frontier is your epidermis. The new Lampedusa is your skin. (2020)

I wonder about the role I am playing in normalising these borders, this new subjectivity. I wonder about these fleshy spaces appropriated by capitalism through a free-movement neo-liberal phase, who, now having established our territory, located ourselves at the centre - begin to close our borders. I wonder how I can keep up with the mutations of capitalism if I am always in a process of reflection. Even in writing this, I am already out of step.

The crisis of subjectivity becomes highly interesting in connection with production in contemporary capitalism, especially with the way in which experimenting with subjectivity is at the centre of capitalist production...What art and capitalism have especially in common is the dangerous and seductive closeness of the appropriation of life. (Kunst, B. 2015, 21)

I reflected on this, wondering to what extent I had appropriated my own life, lives or the lives of others. *"We live at a time when creativity, a wish for change and constant reflection on creative conditions are the driving forces behind development in the post-industrial world."* (Kunst, B. 2015, 6) I cannot contest that I am not acted on by these driving forces. I reflect on the theory I have engaged with, my focus on a creative engagement with it, the need to consume an unsurmountable amount of books, knowledge, to look from every angle, across disciplines, the effect this had on my self, split, undone & anxious, how this played into my practice and performance, the effect my practice had on my mental wellbeing, the effect the play between fiction & reality entered my everyday life, how I struggled with the paradox of working in institutions that negated the work I was trying to do, trying to work underneath or around these conditions, trying to alter the space, and my underlying desire for change.

Had I really just been producing possible subjectivities for capitalism to supply to?

Radical consumption in art is a consequence of the crisis of the subject, or that of the need for the visibility of the subject's constitution and split nature. Established through this visibility of the subject are the radical critique of essentialism and patriarchal structure of the subject (Kunst, B. 2015, 23)

My mind jumped to something Vanessa Watt's had said regarding the critique of essentialism. That Euro-Western discourses have rejected essentialist arguments to correct the mistakes of biological essentialisms, but it sometimes overlooks essentialism in different contexts. She argues that for Indigenous peoples, engagement with the land is connected to an essentialist standpoint. I think about how important context is to words and particular arguments, and how certain words and arguments get stuck to values, which then goes unquestioned. This thought pulls me back. I feel myself being pulled back somewhere - back through the text - in and out of mirrors - words - spaces.

Time Travel

I shake my head and find myself back in the green glow of the wellness room in the New Materialists universe.

"Old forms of life become obsolete even before they can actually be absorbed. This opens up the way for subjectivity, which experiences its transformation through constant existential paradoxes" (Kunst, B. 2015, 21)

I stare at Jane Bennett's beaming face, I can see it is her, but it is the voice of Bojana Kunst that I hear, coming to me now from an other space.

"This makes us live in a constant state of tension, at the edge of anxiety; it is this state that causes an increase in our investments." (Kunst, B. 2015, 21)

There is a glitch in the room

I find myself typing this text, between writing an application for a the emergency COVID-19 arts council fund and checking in with my sister who has just received an eviction notice, in the background I hear the re-cycling centre processing waste - one of the few businesses that are operating at present, I wonder if the waste I dispose of next to it gets processed there - my mind is elsewhere - maybe that's what brought me back. I am sitting on my boat in London listening to the rain beat on the metal roof. A canoe floats past the window, it is Juanita Sundberg. I run outside and hop in. In silence she takes me down the bow backwaters. We stop somewhere near Pudding Mill Lane. My mind casts back years and I find we are anchored in my early days in circus - days when we had cheap warehouse spaces here where we put on DIY cabarets. Now there are high-rise 'desirable' flats for D.I.N.K'ies & Y.U.P.P.I.E's - I knew my role in the gentrification of the areas, I had enjoyed my part in the destruction of these spaces - another example in which the immanent dramaturgy and the retrospective dramaturgy were at odds.

As we wander Juanita Sundberg talks to me of enacting a Pluriverse, an idea she draws on from Zapatista principles of "walking the world into being" (Todd 2014, 245) Sundberg calls to attention the importance of walking and movement "As we humans move, work, play, and narrate with a multiplicity of beings in place, we enact historically contingent and radically distinct worlds/ontologies." (Sundberg 2013,35). She turns and looks me in the eye, when she speaks next it is the voice of David Turnbull that comes out "Knowledge is performative. In the act of producing knowledge, we create space" Her own voice takes over again "We also fashion ourselves as subjects. What kind of spaces are posthumanist geographies creating? And, what kinds of subjects?" (35) I decide that she has asked me in order to provoke internal reflection on the question, rather than to demand a superficial answer, which is all I could muster of the cuff, so I say nothing. We talk about locating the self, a practice from Feminism that I have tried to follow in my work. she adds that "In Indigenous methodologies, situating self in relation to community affiliation and place accounts for the importance of place in knowledge production and avoids

essentialist conceptions of a pan-Indigenous epistemology"(36). I think of the necessary move towards collective thinking and acting that the two Bojana's speak about. Bojana Kunst chimes in with a warning:

In a neo-collective or post-collective model, the artists that remain in pro-community engagement must maintain a highly individual-oriented strength and productivity while remaining connected to the world and to each other, each highly differentiated while in constant collaboration with a larger network of other creative, productive individuals that support and engage in each other's interests (2015, 80)

I think about Preciado's article. He references Roberto Esposito, who makes the link between political notion of community and epidemiological *immunity*. The latter part of these words share the root from the Latin *munus*, the duty (tax, tribute, gift). The first part of the word comes from *cum* (with), whereas *immunitas* is a negation of *munus*. Immunity releases one from the obligations of the community. "*Biopolitics implies a hierarchy with the immunized at the top and the de-munized, who will be excluded from any act of immunological protection at the bottom.*" How can I call for collective action and long to be immune at the same time?

The ghost of an old friend appears horizon⁵⁶. She introduced me to circus. She walks over to greet us *¡Hola Guapa!* I think back to when I discovered circus in the Round Church social centre. She asks me, if I believe I am following a dramaturgy that is producing subjectivities as potential commodities, who am I making them for? What audience am I addressing? She asks me if I think there is nothing else at play, besides my crisis of subjectivity. She asks me if this entire journey has been a product of contemporary capitalism - and if so, what do I think I'm doing bringing her into it? Have I thought about who I have brought into this space? Who are the givers of the gifts? Have I brought her in because I think it's a clever anecdote that serves my plot? "No" I protest "I -

I blink and look up, back at my computer screen, writing about my friend. I stare into space. "Fran?" I look up. Jane Bennett is there her ruddy face flush with concern. Her face flickers like a TV with a bad connection before flickering out. Then the room flickers out, then the building, then the universe.

A changing of the world

I find myself on a raft at sea. That evening I look out across the horizon, on the winds of the ocean I hear the voice of Jon Luc Nancy drifting in.

From one moment to the next we find ourselves sensibly and physically outside ourselves, outside the blind slipping away of our little stretch of time. We see the night that borders our time, and we touch on some aspect of it - not the future, but the coming of something or someone that is already of us and of the world, but has come from somewhere else, displaced elsewhere, into an unimaginable elsewhere. (2003, 301)

Perhaps it is an ability to touch, in the darkness, this coming elsewhere, this breaching of time, of space, and of all orientation, that will have defined a character trait specific to Modernity. (301)

56 I think of the ghost that Bojana Kunst writes about in *Artist at Work* - the ghost of the friend who is always captured in the 'ungraspable gap between the future and the present' (88) in the schizophrenic nature of what Susan Buck-Morris refers to as revolutionary time. But my friend ghost is a ghost from the past - is she here as a clue? I wonder? Can a ghost of a past friend be the ghost nestled between the present and what is yet to come? This brings me back to the relationality Sundberg spoke of just now, I wonder what other ghosts from the past are nestled in that gap - I must pay them attention.

I think back to the reaching out into the abyss in which I tried to dis-cover the imperceptible. All the time I thought I was moving away from modernity, and now I find it is my shadow. Like Lefebvre's spider, the web I spin is not separate from me. I let the ocean carry me now, without an idea of where to go, without even an ability to imagine where we might go.

Finally, despite everything, an inclination to be and to practice this riven (gaping? open? offered?) present. Neither comic nor tragic, this inclination could be better thought of as an active abandonment, an engagement fixed on the impossible, that is, on the infinite possibility.(301)

I think of Mika's *rift*. I will not map the course, I think as Nancy speaks of the violent and overused fixing of a time at a point at which nothing is fixed.

So what is at stake in this new and barely discernable present?...It is a matter of thinking otherwise, elsewhere, from a different side...in terms of a displacement as regards the opposition between what is lacking and what is accomplished. (302)

I just listen...

This subject has begun to shift, eroding its return to itself (its propriety, its authenticity, its purity) with a strangeness that is far closer to it than any being-self or any being-to-itself.(302)

I think of what Morton called the *strange stranger*, the closeness to what will remain unknowable.

Nancy describes the consuming of the market of itself. *It becomes like the pure machine of the pure subject.* (303) My mind drifts off without telling me where it is going. It drifts back to a time I attended a symposium in London discussing the new book *Contemporary Circus*. During the talk, a frustrated Firenza Guidi implores the audience to think about why there is a lack of the political engagement or revolutionary spirit in circus today, a spirit she knows from the beginning of *new circus*. I thought back to how the traditional circus was appropriated and how it looked to me as if new circus believed itself as a liberator.

In a world of politics as spectacle, creative economy and capital governed by institutionalized critical and political discourses, it is very hard to believe in the undiminished autonomy of the political artist who presents works at festivals of 'political art' and gives rise to provocative art at globalized festivals. Hence part of the disappointment in the artistic avant garde and neo-avant garde practices of the twentieth century, as their emancipatory power of liberating art and life goes well with the liberation power of capital: nowadays, creativity and artistic subjectivity are at the centre of the contemporary production of value (Kunst, 2015, 9)

Her voice drifts into the voice of Jon-Luc Nancy:

The sixties did not see everything that was coming but did have "and inkling of the progressive, insidious erosion of the checks on and justification of capital. A fault in history opens up and widens, therefore: a suspension of sense.(303)

He speaks of a general malaise of discourse - and then. *Somewhere, discourse shattered...the nature of the rift is only going to become more evident...It is as if all possible sense had been produced, and, ultimately "sense" itself turned out to be a crazed machine and the demand for it a senseless one. (304)*

I listen...

Language...needs now to be received naked, the prestige of sense stripped away...(304)

Didn't it always?

There needs to be a meticulous decomposition of the effects and articulations of language; bit by bit other voices need to be heard, addressed differently, and with different rhythms.(304)

I listen for these other voices...

The immense coexistence of things and people, of beings (in short, the world), has begun to pull away from the representation of a destiny....May '68 was neither a revolt, nor a reform, nor a revolution, although it borrowed from - or had something about - all three...each one of the three neutralized the others and nothing really came of it. (306)

I listen carefully still for those other voices, I hear the wind howling and the sea lapping -

Over thirty years later, it would be possible for us to believe that nothing actually took place except collapse and engorgement: a world which slumped in on itself, saturated with physical, economic and spiritual devastations. (307)

The sound of the wind and the sea slowly take over, I only hear parts of the next passage by Nancy - I notice the Great Pacific Garbage patch as I drift by - marking my position, locating me, geographically.

Marx's... "historical mission"...can only be that of paving the way to a knowledge of a hallucinated self; the knowledge of a self that has to ruin itself in order to be itself, of a richness that can only produce its own equivalence and therefore its own annihilation...(307)

I reflect on Cvejić's social dramaturgy of individualism and Nancy's reflection. It seems clear that I must put something to rest, there must be an undoing of myself/ves. But I have complicated matters with my plastic becoming. I became plastic, and plastic will not die. Heather Davis considers plastic the *substrata of advanced capitalism*⁵⁷. I think back to Sky Women who extends from the earth - is this my earth - Advanced Capitalism?

Heather Davis remarks in her essay *Life and Death in the Anthropocene*, that *Plastic represents the promises of modernity: the promise of sealed, perfected, clean, smooth abundance...Plastic represents a shiny new world, one that removes people from the cycles of life and death, one that supersedes the troublesome, leaky, amorphous, and porous demands of our ancestors, our bodies, and the earth.*(2015, 359)

Perhaps when I reached out to Tank, in the beginning, this is what drew me to him - perhaps this was at the base of a desire to become him. This dream, says Heather's voice in the back of my mind, *is one of transcendental idealism, [which] represents the apex of the Cartesian split, as matter itself is dictated and rearranged by the human mind.* (350) Could I ever truly see Tank as anything other than than passive matter - is this the impossible space I was looking for really? A paradoxical one in which I could claim a relationship with Tank as an agentic being who acted upon me, connected to me, while he remained simultaneously severed and pliable? An impossible space that allowed me to be the *humble*⁵⁸ master?

Plastic, Davis continues relentlessly *represents the inevitable corollary to unfettered economic growth...It spreads its reign of death and refuses to go away...Plastic materializes the desire to give complete freedom to the mind and to control our environment.* (354) The plasticity that I attributed to the effect of Tank on my identity is an illusion of plastic, an *unfortunate metaphor*. I think of how I assumed my new found fluidity & plasticity, that I attributed to my queer relation with Tank - specifically in relation to my identity, for if I had so easily constructed Tank's identity, who had constructed mine. But perhaps this plasticity was one already co-opted by capitalism:

The regularities begin to loosen. This loosening of normality is part of the dynamics of capitalism. It is not simply about liberation. It is about the form of power/authority characteristic of capitalism. This is no longer a disciplinary institutional power/authority that determines everything, but power/authority in order to produce diversity - because markets get saturated. Even the weirdest affective tendencies are in order - as long as they bring money. (Kunst, B. 2015, 27)

I had confused identity and materiality as Julietta Singh warned me about. Plastic is *recalcitrant both to biological processes as well as to human creativity. It is the materialization of the horror of identity, of the stability of form, of a futurity without change.* (353) Davis points me to look at the *finitude*, which plastic represents, with its *inability to decompose, to enter back into systems of decay and regrowth* (353).

She speaks of concepts of finitude and extinguishment from Elizabeth Povinelli, who *uses finitude to represent a Western metaphysics of understanding death as the end of a carbon-based life form. Finitude represents the drama of existence played out in relationship to the teleological orientation of time towards our own end: a one-way trajectory from birth to growth to death, focused on the individual.* (353) I think back to the social dramaturgy of individualism and wonder if I have been performing this drama of existence.

57 She notes that her understanding of substrate is informed by Craig Dworkin's analysis, where no matter how mundane or "blank" an object may appear, it plays a crucial role in the complex articulation of communicative networks. See Craig Dworkin, *No Medium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

58 In reference to Vincent Focquet's 'Towards A Humble Circus' as mentioned earlier.

That which must end cannot die. Through becoming Tank, I enacted a *materialized wish to exit the cyclical processes of becoming to which all matter is subject to— [which] has inaugurated an era where* (Her voice transmutes now into the voice of Werner Herzog) “*men shall seek death, but death shall flee from them*” (354) (from Lessons of Darkness.)

Heather points me towards Elizabeth Povinelli's idea of *Extinguishment* - a recognition that things must live, die, re-compose and re-form but without the drama of the end. The plastic in me will remain a *materialization of the drama of the finitude*, while it kills off particular worlds. We must, she finishes *finally break free of the logic of plastic*.

But Tank does not equate to plastic, I thought quietly.

Where do we go from here? Cvejic asks if *is it possible to stop performing the self, if the individual is not the starting point?* she points towards 'the act', to move us towards the common. Is there a possible return to the Circus Act from this perspective?

The Dramaturgical proposition

The raft washes up on a shore. When I disembark, I am met by again Bojana Kunst. *The main reason for this powerlessness is the fact that today's human being is confronted with a brutal intensification of individualisation processes, described by Lazzarato as the production of subjectivity.* She says the The production of subjectivity is "*the single largest commodity we produce, because it goes into the production of all other commodities.*" (2015, 19)

"Today, our surplus lies primarily in the fact that we are subjects about whom something new can always be discovered; we constantly need to reveal and topicalise our potential abilities." (30)

And what if I try to move away from self-discovery and towards a collective listening? I ask. With that, she leaves and swims out into the sea.

The person commonly attributed to being responsible for dramaturgy is a Dramaturg. In this instance, who was the secret dramaturg lying in the shadows? The dramaturg liaises between the different collaborators - the set designer, the director, the actors - bringing the different strands of thought together. Cvejic states that this type of individualism is unique to the neo-liberal era - so then can I assume that neo-liberalism was the dramaturg? Or at least the one with the strongest voice? What/who else are my collaborators? How can I pay better attention to the other voices?

In 1994 Van Kerkhoven gave her definition of new dramaturgy as a *process oriented method of working*, which has been an influential approach in the field - positing a dramaturgy that emerges out of a process through dialogue. The dramaturgy I found myself in is not what I would have wished for, as I do not want to produce work from what Cvejic and Kunst may term a "crisis of the self" that supports a post-fordist capitalist system that they argue closes the gap between Art and Capitalism. My aim was the opposite. However, the dramaturgy exists regardless of my intentions. This creature is it's own entity that does its own thing, share's its own thoughts - my job is to care for it, feed it, nurture it - it not my property, but it is my responsibility. Therefore I propose to engage in and encourage a process that involves standing still, watching, reflecting on and responding to an unfolding dramaturgy, paying attention to who and what gets a voice. This can then be narrated with an emphasis on honesty rather than ambition. In my case my ambition would be to make space for a thinking circus that is not subordinate to a capitalist market, but as a product of this structure I have to be careful that this ambition does not cover up its own failure, covertly producing that which I am against. Therefore my approach will be the narration of an errant dramaturgy. The narrator will inevitably be unreliable - that is the only option with an unreliable author.

Space for a change

As you may expect, this dramaturgical proposition is a narration of the journey of a body and ki'r⁵⁹ relations, a sharing of ki'r gifts - a gift ki'r-self. I propose a journey of stillness and of listening, without navigation instruments and without destination. In his essay *Errancy as Work: Seven Strewn Notes for Dance Dramaturgy*, André Lepecki notes Eugenio Barba's definition of dramaturgy from the etymology *drama-ergon*, as *the work of the actions in the performance*. I wonder if the actions could be ones of stillness (that is not to say there is no movement), the work of staying still as an action? Ki also speaks of "*modes of navigating without a compass*" to which he adds an affect ki calls ethical persistence: "*A will to keep going without needing to know where we are heading, so that together we might build that which we do not know might be.*" (in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, 2015, 54) If a map is produced then that map is not for following, only for listening and thinking with - for dialogue. The thinking narrated by the body cannot be separated from the thoughts of the Earth, the theory cannot be separated from the practice.

In negotiating this dramaturgy, I will err between guidance from Édouard Glissant and André Lepecki, who both explore notions of the *errant* in their work. Both place an emphasis on wandering (error) over error (ereur). They have a slight different emphasis in their approach to the word errant. Glissant speaks to an *errantry*, the noun derived from a definition of the adjective errant that relates to an archaic or literary traveling in search of an adventure. Lepecki speaks to an *errancy* - the noun derived from a definition of the adjective errant that relates to an erring or straying from an accepted course, regarding being out of place. Lepecki places emphasis on *drifting, getting lost or going astray* (54). Ki likens it to the Situationists *derivee* (drifting) - *the practice of immanent cartographies of a situation (which is always on the move)* (54). While Lepecki embraces a sense of 'being lost' in errancy, Betsy Wing specifies in ki'r translators note to Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, "*that in wandering, one might become lost, but in errantry one knows at every moment where one is - at every moment in relation to the other*". (1997, xvi)

Both Lepecki and Glissant are concerned in some way with an erring between knowing and not-knowing. "*In the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this - and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.*" (20) For Lepecki, this tension is in the role of the dramaturg as the *subject who is supposed to know (following Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis)*. (57) Ki says that the dramaturg is *invited to err in the knowing & not-knowing*. I think back to my earlier comment on Haraway's statement that "*Thinking and knowing like naming have 'the power of objectifying of totalizing'*" (1991, 79) and my question regarding the difference between claiming knowledge and responsibility to know and to recognise a situation/person/event, and the tension between these ideas. I think of my conversation with Sundberg regarding relationality in the context of situating the individual. Lepecki says that to *err* is to engage in a process that allows the dramaturg to operate away from this knowing position, and that all collaborators involved in the dramaturgical process must engage in a destruction of the position of the subject who is supposed to know.

In Lepecki's essay *Errancy as work*, ki is prompted by a conference whose departure was the following statement:

We can understand dramaturgical practice as an exercise of interrogation and composition that has traditionally mediated the difficult relationship between writing and physical action." (51)

⁵⁹ In Robin Wall Kimmerer's grammar of animacy, there is no suggestion for a possessive pronoun. In an attempt to put into practice Kimmerer's suggestion, I will use ki/kin pronouns, and ki'r for the possessive. In the case of a quotation, I will leave in the original pronouns. In this instance the pronoun refers to the 'it' assigned to the body. Reading these pronouns make me stumble over the sentences and occasionally confuses me. I embrace these moments that slow me down as opportunities to think more slowly, clumsily and carefully.

Lepecki responds with: "*what fuels dramaturgy as a practice for dance and in dance is the tension established between multiple non-written, diffuse, and errant processes of thought and multiple corporeal processes of actualising these thoughts.*" (52)

In circus, and in relation to the journey explored in this thesis, I propose that an errant dramaturgical practice could involve a *responding to the tension established between multiple, diffuse and errant processes of thinking that materialise from and with thinking as the body, the object, the environment, and the relations between these perspectives.* That is to emphasise that the body, the object and the environment in this dramaturgy are not separate things to think *about*, but are perspectives to think from.

"Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry' is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment, it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation." (Glissant, 1997, 18)

Following Glissant through Deleuze and Guattari, the narration of the dramaturgy (which is also part of the process) will follow a rhizomatic journey, as an attempt to avoid nurturing root systems that establish destructive power structures and hierarchies:

The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this they [Deleuze and Guattari] propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. (11)

For my practice this involves multiple ways of listening as/with body/object/environment and the relations between them, through the modes that present themselves (sensing, hearing, reading, movement, writing, constructing-with...) paying attention to other thoughts that arrive as gifts, getting to know the givers, and maintaining a connection to my situated position, its relations and its context.

Lepecki speaks of the authorial desire to make work 'about something', "*however dramaturgy as practice occasions the discovery that it is the work itself that has its own sovereignty, its own performative desires, wishes, and commands. Dramaturgy as erring practice discovers that it is the work-to-come that owns its own authorial force.*" (60) I note that I mentioned the life of the dramaturgy earlier on in the previous section, if this thesis has been the result of an already erring dramaturgy then I have to be aware that an errant approach is not automatically operating in a manner I am in accord with - I might not wish to be the subject of the *sovereign dramaturgy* that emerges. This approach does not set me on the right path (indeed it should not set me on any particular path whatsoever), it just helps me to pay attention. Also I must note I may think I am taking on board these principals but a) I do so at my own suggestion (though I hope guided) and b) through my own interpretation (though again I hope I have followed guidance).

Glissant gives some warning of different iterations of errantry in literature that I do not wish to participate in:

At first this thought of errantry, bucking the current of nationalist expansion, was disguised "within" very personalized adventures - just as the appearance of Western nations had been preceded by the ventures of empire builders. (15)

and discusses the emphasis on the individual in epic literature such as:

"the Old Testament, the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Chansons de Geste, the Islandic Sagas, the Aeneid,

or the African epics. These are books about the birth of collective consciousness, but they also introduce the unrest and suspense that allow the individual to discover himself there, whenever he himself becomes the issue." (15)

Glissant ponders on the potential need for founding texts today, ones that

"assert for example political strength, but simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other and basing every community's reasons for existence on a modern form of the sacred, which would be, a Poetics of Relation." (16)

Sacred forms are something I would like to pay more attention to. The sacred cannot be sold (in theory). I do not think, as a product of neo-liberalism, that I should make any kind of foundational text, in case that's what you were thinking I might be getting at - I do though, aim to pay attention to the stories that have been told in the iterations of capitalism that came before me, and try not to reproduce them in contemporary forms.

"This movement, therefore (one among others, equally important, in other parts of the world), has led from a primordial nomadism to the settled way of life of Western nations then to Discovery and Conquest, which achieved a final, almost mystical perfection in the Voyage" (16)

Ki notes that the root is monolingual, but that relation is spoken multilingually. I am reminded of the Ghent Manifesto, in which one of the rules of this theatre's productions is that they must involve two or more languages. I think of the loss of the Irish language in my family, a language that my great grandmother taught illegally. I wonder what thoughts could emerge through speaking this language. I wonder what thoughts don't emerge through not speaking ki - and of all the other thoughts that the English language has wrapped ki'r-self around like an aggressive root. I think of the different languages that emerge from the perspective of the body, the object and the environment. My mind wanders from spoken languages to non-verbal languages to the language of objects that my juggling teacher Ben Richter teaches, to the various elements I am working with. Lepecki suggests that all the actions involved in co-creation of a dramaturgy are produced by every element of the process, including impersonal ones (objects, temperature, time of day, invisibles as well as intangibles), and that these must be considered actions that need to be attended to. In my performances I try to encourage the audience to consider these actions (objects, temperature, time of day etc). I wonder if I'm asking the audience to participate in the dramaturgical work. Perhaps this leaves room for multiple dramaturgies as well as a collective one that we construct together? I think of Mika's words on the intangible, imperceptible things that affect us. Lepecki points to the fact that to see an object as an action requires one to see that "things and objects and temperatures do act".

I wonder what languages this dramaturgy could be narrated in, and what different thoughts could emerge from them. I think of the last presentation I made - this was a narration of the same story - at a different point on the journey, in different languages.

An answer

Dear Fran,

I have just read your thesis, thank you for the interesting journey, I have to say ki resonated strongly with me. I notice that you end with a proposition and that although it is constructive to end with something that opens space for things to be otherwise, you are still inevitably speaking with a voice of neo-liberalism and I do not believe that your reflections can absolve you of your response to a crisis of subjectivity. Isn't this still at play? aren't you still splitting, presenting new possibilities for self discovery? It almost seems you are suggesting an answer, an antidote, a solution, but I know you know better than that.

Although you believe the space that is your body has been appropriated by capitalism, you still think that it is *you* that have been appropriated and that it is you that can combat this. But if, as you say you are an extension of the land, is it not the earth that has been appropriated through your idea of you? Earlier you asked if you're *land* was advanced capitalism, if you were ki'r extension. I would answer that yes, you are the extension of advanced capitalism but that is not the source. Your body is still one of the earth, and ki is this part of the earth that has been appropriated - and that is what speaks. Still speaks. And how many of you are there speaking? It is difficult to know which you I am addressing, and I know you by now.

As a reader - I am listening - to what you say, to who speaks through you, to the other authors and narrators involved. And I have noticed something, I too am not who I thought I was. I too am an abstraction. The reader. Fran. She has addressed me separately but in reality I cannot be separated from the writer, the mover, the thinker, the player, the hair-hanger...and all the in between. I hear Lefebvre's voice calling me from the Hall of Mirrors. "A process of abstraction then - but a fascinating abstraction. In order to know myself, I separate myself out from myself" (Lefebvre, 1991, 185) The effect is dizzying. Fran has pulled herself apart in the writing of this thesis, and I hope that any other readers that may be reading this are not subject to such abstractions.

I would agree with Lefebvre though in that I think the fleshy body still holds some potential for rebellion, if the body is a site where the physical space, mental space and social space meet. If you are to follow what you have learned on this journey, the body (and therefore the land) is the theory and the practice. The journey you narrate points towards a collective approach to combat such individualism - so it is not hopeless, but it has not yet begun.

With love,

A reader

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